

INTL 4370- Middle East Politics

Fall 2026

Wednesday/Friday

9:55 am-11:15 am

The Dining/Learning/Well-Being Center 124

Instructor: Dr. Salam Alsaadi

Office Hours: Friday 12pm-2pm, by appointment.

Course Overview

This course introduces students to major political science debates on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). It examines historical state formation, the variety of authoritarian regimes, the institutions and strategies through which rulers maintain power, and the social and political forces that challenge them. The course also explores key regional issues, including the Israel–Palestine conflict, the Iranian Revolution, the Arab uprisings, sectarianism, political economy, rentierism, civil wars, and international intervention. Throughout, it asks how the politics of the Middle East can be understood through comparative analysis rather than treated as uniquely exceptional. By the end of the semester, students should be able to analyze major political developments in the region, connect contemporary events to their historical context and to broader theories in comparative politics and international relations, and compare political trajectories across MENA cases.

Requirements and Grading

Your grade in the course will be based on attendance and participation, a quiz, a film review, a research paper, and two exams. More detailed instructions, prompts, and deadlines will be provided later in the semester.

Assignment	Weight
Attendance and participation	10%
In-Class Quiz: Historical and contemporary events in MENA (Week 3)	5%
Film Review (Week 5)	15%
In-class Midterm exam (Week 8).	25%
Short Research paper (Week 13, November 14)	20%
Final exam	25%

Class Attendance and Participation (10%): Regular attendance and active participation are expected in every class. You should come prepared to contribute thoughtful questions, comments, and reflections on the day's readings. Because discussion depends on shared preparation, completing the required readings before class is essential.

In-Class Quiz (5%): Students will complete a short in-class quiz on major historical and contemporary events in the Middle East and North Africa. A list of events will be circulated in advance to help students prepare.

Film/documentary Review (15%): Students will write a 750 word review of a film or documentary related to the Middle East and North Africa. A list of approved films and documentaries will be shared in advance, and students may choose one from that list.

Short Research Paper (20%): Students will write a 2500 word research paper on a topic related to the course. The assignment asks students to formulate a clear argument, use evidence effectively, and engage critically with relevant course themes. Additional guidelines and deadlines will be shared later.

Exams (50%): Students will complete an in-class midterm exam and a final exam, each worth 25% of the final grade. Exams will draw on both the assigned readings and our class lectures. Think of the lectures as a guide to the big themes and key debates, not as a substitute for the readings. That means keeping up with the readings is essential: exam questions may include ideas, arguments, or details from the assigned material even if we do not go over them directly in class.

Grade Scale			
A	94–100	C	74–76
A -	90–93	C-	70–73
B+	87–89	D+	67–69
B	84–86	D	64–66
B-	80–83	D-	60–63
C+	77–79	F	0–59

Course Rules and Policies

Exams and Make-up Work: Students are expected to complete quizzes and exams on the scheduled dates. Make-up work will be permitted only in documented circumstances.

Academic Honesty: As a University of Georgia student, you are expected to abide by the University's academic honesty policy, "A Culture of Honesty," and the Student Honor Code, found at: <http://www.uga.edu/honesty>. Cheating and plagiarism are serious academic offences and will be penalized harshly. You are certain to receive a mark of zero for the assignment and, depending on the offense and the assignment, may also fail the class and be referred to Judicial Affairs for further sanctions. Running out of time and being under stress will not justify plagiarism. If extension is not possible, you are much better off turning in a late assignment than a plagiarized one.

Use of AI Tools: If you use AI for any assignment, you must clearly acknowledge that use in a brief note attached to the assignment. Generative AI tools may be used in this course only in limited and

transparent ways. They can be helpful for brainstorming, refining wording, checking grammar, or helping you think through a question, but they may not substitute for your own reading, analysis, argument, or writing. Please also remember that AI tools are not always reliable. They can generate inaccurate summaries, misleading claims, biased responses, and fake citations. That means you are fully responsible for checking anything you use and for ensuring that everything you submit is accurate and honest. Submitting work that contains false or fabricated AI-generated material is a violation of academic integrity and may result in harsh academic sanctions.

Grade Appeal: If you believe your grade does not accurately reflect your work and wish to appeal, you should send me an email with clear reference to the instructions for the assignment. It is your responsibility to demonstrate that your work merits a higher grade. Grade appeals must be raised within seven (7) days of the assignment being returned to you.

Late penalty: The penalty for late submissions is 2% per day for all assignments. Extensions will be granted for valid and documented reasons only. You should ask for extension with a valid and documented excuse before the deadline.

Office Hours and Email Policy: I hold office hours once a week. Office hours provide you with an opportunity to discuss assignments, ask for reading suggestions, or request further guidance on issues of the course. They also allow for a useful one-to-one conversation, so don't hesitate to make the most of this opportunity. If you are unable to attend my regular office hours due to conflicting schedule/classes, please email me to request an alternative appointment. You are also welcome to email me if you have questions or if you're looking for further reading suggestions. I typically respond to emails the same day but please allow 48 hours for a response.

Prohibition on Recording Lectures/Discussions: In the absence of written authorization from the UGA Disability Resource Center, students may not make a visual or audio recording of any aspect of this course. Students who have a recording accommodation agree in writing that they:

- Will use the records only for personal academic use during the specific course.
- Understand that faculty members have copyright interest in their class lectures and that they agree not to infringe on this right in any way.
- Understand that the faculty member and students in the class have privacy rights and agree not to violate those rights by using recordings for any reason other than their own personal study.
- Will not release, digitally upload, broadcast, transcribe, or otherwise share all or any part of the recordings. They also agree that they will not profit financially and will not allow others to benefit personally or financially from lecture recordings or other course materials.
- Will erase/delete all recordings at the end of the semester.
- Understand that violation of these terms may subject them to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct or subject them to liability under copyright laws.

Accessibility and Accommodations: If you need accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center, located in 114 Clark Howell Hall, as early as possible to begin the accommodation process. For more information, visit the DRC website (www.drc.uga.edu). Students are also encouraged to communicate with the instructor early in the semester so that appropriate arrangements can be made in a timely manner.

Well-being Resources: UGA provides academic and personal support resources, including Student Care and Outreach, the University Health Center, Counseling and Psychiatric Services, and other well-being services. Students are encouraged to use these resources when needed.

Disclaimer: The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

If any of these policies are not clear or if there are other relevant details for your situation, please don't hesitate to contact me as soon as possible.

Schedule and Readings

Week 1: August 19–21, 2026

Wednesday, August 19 — Introduction to the Class

No reading assigned.

Friday, August 21 — Is the Middle East Unique, or Especially More Complex?

- Halliday, Fred. 2003. *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East*. Chapter 1, “The Middle East and International Politics,” pp. 11–36.

Week 2: August 26–28, 2026

Wednesday, August 26 — Historical State Formation I

- Owen, Roger. 2004. “The End of Empires: The Emergence of the Modern Middle Eastern States.” In *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, pp. 1–22.

Friday, August 28 — Historical State Formation II

- Hinnebusch, Raymond. “Historical Context of State Formation in the Middle East: Structure and Agency.” In *The Routledge Handbook to the Middle East and North African State and States System*, pp. 21–39.

Week 3: September 2–4, 2026

Wednesday, September 2 — Israel–Palestine I (In-Class Quiz 1)

- Tessler, Mark. “The Israel-Palestinian Conflict,” in Lust-Okar, pp. 63–78 and 87–89.

Friday, September 4 — Israel–Palestine II

- Tessler, Mark. “The Israel-Palestinian Conflict,” in Lust-Okar. Read from “The Intifada” to the end.

Week 4: September 9–11, 2026

Wednesday, September 9 — The State in the MENA

- Lust-Okar. “States and Institutions,” in *The Middle East*. CQ Press, 2019.

Friday, September 11 — Varieties of Regimes

- Lust-Okar. “States and Institutions,” in *The Middle East*. CQ Press, 2019.

Week 5: September 16–18, 2026

Wednesday, September 16 — State Repression I

- Bellin, Eva. 2004. “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective.” *Comparative Politics*.

Friday, September 18 — State Repression II

- Sassoon, Joseph. 2016. *Anatomy of Authoritarianism in the Arab Republics*. Chapter 4, “The Role of Security Services in the Arab Republics,” pp. 113–154.

Week 6: September 23–25, 2026

Wednesday, September 23 — Elite Management I: The Military

- Sassoon, Joseph. 2016. *Anatomy of Authoritarianism in the Arab Republics*. Chapter 3, “The military”. Pp.73-pp.85 + p.94- p.100.
- Sayigh, Yezid. Egypt’s Military Now Controls Much of Its Economy. Is This Wise? Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 2019.
<https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2019/11/egypts-military-now-controls-much-of-its-economy-is-this-wise>

Friday, September 25 — Elite Management II

- Blaydes, Lisa. “Elections and Elite Management.” In *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak’s Egypt*, pp. 48–64.

Week 7: September 30–October 2, 2026

Wednesday, September 30 — Incorporating the Masses I

- Eibl, Ferdinand. 2020. *Social Dictatorships: The Political Economy of the Welfare State in the Middle East and North Africa*. Skim Chapter 2 and read Chapter 3.

Friday, October 2 — Incorporating the Masses II

- Continue with Eibl, *Social Dictatorships*.

Week 8: October 7–9, 2026

Wednesday, October 7 — Midterm Exam

No reading assigned.

Friday, October 9 — The Iranian Revolution

- Kamrava, Mehran. 2013. *The Modern Middle East: A Political History Since the First World War*. Chapter 5, “The Iranian Revolution.”

Week 9: October 14–16, 2026

Wednesday, October 14 — The Iranian Revolution and Its Impact on the Regional System

- Darwich, May. *Threats and Alliances in the Middle East: Saudi and Syrian Policies in a Turbulent Region*. Chapter 3, “The Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988).”

Friday, October 16 — The Arab Spring I

- Lynch, Marc. "Introduction." In **The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East**, pp. 1–12.
- Leenders, Reinoud. 2013. "Social Movement Theory and the Onset of the Popular Uprising in Syria." **Arab Studies Quarterly** 35(3): 273–289.

Week 10: October 21–23, 2026

Wednesday, October 21 — Divergent Outcomes of the Arab Spring I

- Bellin, Eva. 2012. "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring." **Comparative Politics** 44(2): 127–149.
- *Listen*: Sharan Grewal's discussion of his book "Soldiers of Democracy: Military Legacies and the Arab Spring" with the Project on Middle East Political Science (34 minutes).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccHcjy0epeo>

Friday, October 23 — Divergent Outcomes of the Arab Spring II

- Brumberg, Daniel. "Theories of Transition." In **The Arab Uprisings Explained**, pp. 29–54.
- Stepan, Alfred, and Juan Linz. 2013. "Democratization Theory and the 'Arab Spring.'" **Journal of Democracy** 24(2): 15–30.

Week 11: October 28–30, 2026

Wednesday, October 28 — Writing Research Paper

This session is devoted to helping students prepare their comparative research paper. We will discuss how to formulate a clear research question, select appropriate country case(s), and use course readings and outside scholarly sources effectively. The session will also cover expectations for argumentation, organization, evidence, citation, and common mistakes to avoid.

Friday, October 30 — Fall Break — No Class

No reading assigned.

Week 12: November 4–6, 2026

Wednesday, November 4 — Ethnic Identity and Sectarianism

- Bishara, Azmi. *Sectarianism without sects*. Oxford University Press, 2022. Chapter 1

Friday, November 6 — Ethnic power-sharing

- Marsin Alshamary, "The Iraq Invasion at Twenty: Iraq's Struggle for Democracy," pp. 1-12

Week 13: November 11–13, 2026

Wednesday, November 11 — Political Economy and Dependency

- Cammett, Melani, and Ishac Diwan. "The Political Economy of Development in the Middle East." In Ellen Lust (ed.), **The Middle East**. Read from "Development Paths in the Middle East" to "Oil and the Resource Curse."

Friday, November 13 — Oil and Rentier States in the Middle East

- Richter, Thomas. 2020. "Oil and Rentier State in the Middle East." In **The Routledge Handbook to the Middle East and North African State and States System**, pp. 225–237.

Week 14: November 18–20, 2026

Wednesday, November 18 — International Intervention and Democracy Promotion

- Jamal, Amaney A. 2012. **Of Empires and Citizens: Pro-American Democracy or No Democracy at All?** Chapter 1.

Recommended: Yerkes, Sarah. "US Influence on Arab Regimes: From Reluctant Democracy Supporter to Authoritarian Enabler." 2022. 326-350.

Recommended: Yom, Sean L. 2015. **From Resilience to Revolution: How Foreign Interventions Destabilize the Middle East**, pp. 1–20.

Friday, November 20 — Regional Competition

- Salloukh, Bassel F. "The Arab uprisings and the geopolitics of the Middle East." *The international spectator* 48.2 (2013): 32-46.
- *Recommended:* Lynch, Marc. 2016. **The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East**. Chapter 1, pp. 1–46.
- *Recommended:* Hinnebusch, Raymond. "The Arab Uprising and Regional Power Struggle." In Akbarzadeh, S. (ed.). 2019. **Routledge Handbook of International Relations in the Middle East**.

Week 15: November 30, 2026

Monday, November 23–Friday, November 27 — Thanksgiving Holiday — No Classes

No reading assigned.

Monday, November 30 — Conclusion: Current Affairs in the MENA Region

- Short current-affairs readings to be assigned.