

**PolS 349**

**Seminar in Comparative Politics:  
“Change in the Middle East: Arab Spring and Iran”  
Spring 2012**

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**Office Hours: Tues. 2-3 and by appointment**

**Course Description**

Perhaps no other region has been perceived as one-dimensionally as the Middle East. Among dominant sections of public opinion, media, policy makers, and even academic scholarship, the region has been regarded as an ahistorical exception to the social and political transformations shaping other parts of the world: dominated by religion (essentially fundamentalist), backward in terms of social relations (essentially misogynist, tribal, and traditional), fundamentally undemocratic (essentially authoritarian, sectarian, and hostile to modernity), captive to its own petroleum resources (essentially a hostage to the “oil curse” of state corruption, misdirected welfare distribution, and inefficient economic development). Yet recent events have demonstrated that Middle East societies are much more complex and dynamic than these stereotypes have acknowledged. Beginning in Summer 2009 with the massive Iranian popular uprisings in the name of “Where is my vote” against election fraud in the Presidential election, and continuing through the “Arab Spring” revolutions and revolts of 2011 and into 2012, Middle East populations have surprised observers around the world by publicly demanding democratic rights, social justice, and institutional accountability. While no one could have predicted the sudden mobilizations last year in Tunisia, it is still noteworthy that these events took so many academics so completely by surprise. In particular, Political Science, which as a discipline emphasizes the study of formal politics and state institutions, was not well positioned to recognize the ongoing social transformations that provided the foundation for the unexpected emergence of national political protests. Thus, in order to study these recent substantial changes in Middle East politics and societies, this course will take an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating work by historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists, in order to provide a multi-faceted analysis of recent and continuing change in the Middle East. Although the required course readings will focus mainly on Egypt and Iran, you are encouraged to include other states in the region as possible topics for your research paper.

**Course Requirements**

This course is a research seminar. The required readings and classroom discussions are intended to provide you with a background knowledge of key issues that have effected local social and political changes in the region. But much of your grade will depend on independent research you do in relation to your own research project. All the course requirements are intended to help you build your own knowledge and structure your own

learning, and are required, including the library visit. You will choose a research project, write a proposal, compile an initial annotated bibliography, and write a final paper about a question relevant to the topics covered in the course (for example the changing regional political dynamics, the politics of gender, political economy and national development issues, social and cultural dynamics of civil society, etc.) or the current political transformations in a selected country (for example the Arab Spring in Tunisia or Egypt, war and state overthrow in Libya, Syria's civil conflict, political turmoil in Bahrain or Yemen, reformism/post-Islamism in Iran and the Green Movement after the 2009 presidential elections; Turkey's changing model of politics, etc.). The choice of the research question is yours, but it must be precise and analytical, not vague and general. You are encouraged to consult with the instructor throughout the process, including focusing on a topic, finding sources, writing drafts, etc.

**ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION** (10%) are required: more than two unexcused absences will lower your grade, since they will interfere with your ability to synthesize material presented in class and participate in class discussions. Participation means careful reading of the assigned material before class, regularly following the news and events relevant to the topic, meaningful and constructive participation in class discussions, and individual consultation with the instructor if you have questions.

**WEEKLY SHORT ESSAYS** (30%) on the week's reading are a major component of your grade. These essays should be approximately 500 words/2-3 pages, and provide a focused analysis of the themes and issues raised in that week's readings. They are due by midnight on Sunday before class on Tuesday. Late papers will not be accepted. If you have a particular problem with the Sunday deadline (lack of access to a computer, etc.), see me to make alternative arrangements. Note: these essays are too short for you to write a comprehensive analysis of everything covered in the reading, but should be long enough for you to provide some substantive discussion. Use them as reflection papers to summarize for yourself the major emphasis of the text, and/or to discuss a specific aspect or problem in it that catches your attention.

**A RESEARCH PROPOSAL WITH ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY** (10%) is required. The proposal must include a title to describe your project, and a one page description/abstract of your proposed project, including what you are investigating, why it is significant, and how it relates to the course. The bibliography must include six primary or secondary sources, not counting course readings, newspaper articles, or media reports, although these can be included. All sources must be annotated (meaning you must include a 1-2 sentence description of the content/methodology of the source, and its relevance to your project).

**CLASSROOM PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH PROJECTS** (20%) will be scheduled for after Spring Break. Students will be organized into small groups according to similarities of research topic, and will work together to organize small group classroom presentations that incorporate aspects of each individual student's research into a collective presentation. At the time of each group's presentation, all the students in that

group must also have posted a revised proposal/abstract and annotated bibliography to the course Blackboard site.

FINAL RESEARCH PAPER (30%) due on the last day of class. The paper should be 3,000-3,500 words/12-14 pages, excluding the bibliography. The bibliography included in the final paper does not need to be annotated, but must include at least ten primary and secondary sources, not counting included course readings, newspaper articles, or media reports. Keep in mind that the title, precise topic, and bibliographical sources you present in your final paper may be slightly different from your proposal; this is part of the normal revising process in any extended research project.

You are expected to behave with academic integrity: you can check the university policy on this at: <http://www.uic.edu/ucat/catalog/GR.shtml#qa>

Students with disabilities who require accommodations for access and participation in this course must be registered with the Office of Disability Services. Please call 312/413-2103 (voice) or 312/413-0123 (TTY).

Students must notify the instructor within the first ten days of the semester of the specific dates on which they are requesting an absence for religious observance.

### **Required Readings**

**(Books: available through the UIC bookstore and university libraries, etc.)**

James Gelvin, *the Modern Middle East*, Oxford University Press, 2011

Farha Ghannam, *Remaking the Modern*, University of California, 2002

Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics*, Stanford University Press, 2010

Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution*, Yale University Press, 2011

**(Articles and Chapters: those marked BB are book chapters available on our course Blackboard site; journal articles are available through the Daley library)**

Timothy Mitchell, “The Invention and Reinvention of the Peasant” in Mitchell, *Rule of Experts* (2002), pp. 123-52 [BB]

Gregory Gause, “The Middle East Academic Community and the ‘Winter of Arab Discontent’: Why Did We Miss It?” in *Seismic Shift: Understanding Change in the Middle East* (Stimson Center, May 2011), pp. 11-28,  
<http://www.stimson.org/books-reports/seismic-shift/>

Norma Claire Moruzzi & Fatemeh Sadeghi, “Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire: Young Iranian Women Today” *Middle East Report* 241 (Winter 2006), pp. 22-28

Deniz Kandiyotti, “Islam and Patriarchy: A Comparative Perspective” in Keddie & Baron, eds., *Women in Middle Eastern History* (1991), pp. 23-42 [BB]

Norma Claire Moruzzi, “Trying to Look Different: *Hijab* as the Self-Presentation of Social Distinctions,” *CSSAAME* Vol. 28, No. 2, 2008. pp. 225-34

Masserat Amir-Ebrahimi, “Blogging from Qom, Behind Walls and Veils,” *CSSAAME* Vol. 28 No. 2, 2008, 235-49

Fatemeh Sadeghi, “Negotiating with Modernity: Young Women and Sexuality in Iran,” *CSSAAME* Vol. 28, No. 2, 2008. pp. 250-59

Diane Singerman, “The Family and Community as Politics: The Popular Sector in Cairo” in Singerman & Hoodfar, *Development, Change, and Gender in Cairo* (1996), pp. 145-89 [BB]

Arlene MacLeod, “Transforming Women’s Identity: The Intersection of Household and Workplace in Cairo” in Singerman & Hoodfar, eds., *Development, Change, and Gender in Cairo: A View from the Household* (1996), 27-50 [BB]

Kaveh Ehsani, “The Urban Provincial Periphery in Iran: Revolution and War in Ramhormoz” in Gheissari, ed., *Contemporary Iran: Economy, Society, Politics* (2009), pp. 38-76 [BB]

Azam Khatam, “The Islamic Republic’s Failed Quest for the Spotless City,” *Middle East Report* 250, (Spring 2009), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer250>

### **Follow the News (Media)**

Regular discussion of current issues and events is part of this course. Follow the news through globally recognized sources with good international coverage, including newspapers such as the *International Herald Tribune* or the *Guardian*, and online media such as:

BBC (UK) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/>

Al-Ahram Weekly (Egypt) <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/>

AlJazeera (Qatar) <http://www.aljazeera.com/>

### **Resources for Final Projects**

Sources for your final research project should include scholarly books and journals, as well as analysis from some of the serious online forums that are essential for background about very recent events as well as current updates. The most important scholarly journals include *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*); *Middle East Report* (*MERIP*); *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* (*CSSAAME*); *Middle East Politics*; etc. Some of the most insightful online forums include:

Foreign Policy <http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/>

This is a good mainstream US journal of foreign policy analysis that has developed an excellent online forum of discussion and analysis about the region.

*International Crisis Group (ICG)*

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa.aspx>

Analysis by field researchers on regional conflicts followed by policy proposals (look up entries for selected countries and regions).

*Jadaliyya* <http://www.jadaliyya.com/>

This online journal is an outstanding source of scholarly and political analysis, primarily of the Arab world, by activists and academics, based in the region and in the West.

*Middle East Report Online (MERIP/MERO)* <http://www.merip.org/>

Outstanding quarterly journal and online information network of academics and journalists. There is a print journal (MERIP) as well as online articles (MERO). Note: not all the print articles are available online; you actually have to go read the print copy in the library!

### **Course Schedule**

Tuesday, 1/10 Course Introduction

Studying the Middle East: Analytical Perspective, Historical Background

1/17 Mitchell

1/24 Gelvin LIBRARY VISIT

1/31 Gelvin, Gause

Women, Gender, and Unexpected Agency

2/7 Kandiyotti, Moruzzi & Sadeghi, FILM

2/14 Moruzzi, Amir-Ebrahimi, Sadeghi,

2/21 RESEARCH TOPIC DISCUSSION (proposals due Sun. 2/19)

Urban Identities: Economic Pressures (Private Households), Politics & Religion (Public Spaces)

2/28 Ghannam

3/6 Macleod, Singerman

3/13 Ehsani, Khatam

3/20 SPRING BREAK

The Politics of Daily Life

3/27 Bayat PRESENTATIONS

4/3 Bayat PRESENTATIONS

4/10 Ahmed PRESENTATIONS

4/17 Ahmed PRESENTATIONS

4/24 Course Conclusion FINAL RESEARCH PAPERS DUE