

POP88034: Middle East politics

HT 2021, First Half, 5-Week Module

DATE TIME

The module will follow a flipped classroom approach, with a recorded lecture of 30-45 minutes made available prior to class on Blackboard, and an in-person seminar session, date and time TBD.

LOCATION

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DRAFT – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

The purpose of this module is to provide students with an introduction to the politics of the MENA region, broadly understood as including the Middle East, North Africa, Turkey and Iran. This is a large and diverse area, and the course will briefly examine the historical context which has shaped it, before exploring the various facets which currently define it politically. These will include: authoritarianism as an enduring system of government; Islam as a political phenomenon; the Arab Spring and (failed) democratisation; the political economy of resource wealth; and the internal and external relations of the region. Upon completing the course students should have a clear grasp of these main dynamics, as well as an understanding of the considerable diversity which exists within the region. The course will also provide students with some of the comparative tools necessary to study and analyse nations and regions beyond Europe.

Suggested preliminary reading:

No prior reading is necessary, but students are advised to prepare for the module by consulting the following introductory text: Contemporary Politics in the Middle East, by Beverley Milton-Edwards (Polity, 2018; 4th ed.) Relevant chapters will be made available on Blackboard.

Other readings:

All readings for the module (required and recommended/optional) can be found on the module reading list on MyReadingList@TCD, which can be accessed via the module's Blackboard page.

Required readings

There are a number of required readings for each week's class, clearly labelled as such in the MyReadingList@TCD page for the module. Where required readings relate to chapters of books for which the library does not have access to an electronic version, a pdf of the chapter will be made available on the Blackboard page for the relevant week's class. Required journal articles can be directly accessed via the MyReadingList@TCD page.

Recommended/Optional readings

Alongside the required readings, there are a number of recommended/optional readings featured in the MyReadingList@TCD page. In general, these readings represent important or new scholarship in the area, which you may wish to consult and engage with if you intend to write your final paper on a subject relating to that week's discussion. These additional readings are not to be considered exhaustive, neither should students feel they need to read all such readings for a subject on which they are writing a final paper. Rather, the readings are merely intended as both an example of current scholarship and a guide to help students orientate their research efforts.

Turnitin information for this module

Class ID: CHECK

Password: CHECK

Course Requirements:

- ☐ Seminar attendance and participation, demonstrating knowledge of required readings for each week's discussion. As part of this component students will be divided into four study groups during the first class, with each group required to give a short presentation of the readings for **one** subsequent week of the course. (15%) *Note: any unarranged or unexplained absence from class will result in the forfeit of this portion of the module grade.*
- ☐ Weekly position paper (3 in total): a **600 word maximum** (one side A4) position paper on **one** of that week's required or optional readings. Position papers are due **prior** to that week's class, and should be uploaded to Blackboard via Turnitin. Students are not required to upload a position paper the week their study group is presenting, but must submit no fewer than three in total. The position paper should:
 - ☐ briefly summarise the main argument of the article or chapter you have chosen;
 - ☐ briefly position the argument in relation to other scholarship (as found, for example, in that week's other required readings);
 - ☐ briefly state your own position/thoughts in relation to that argument. (35%)*Note: the position paper should **not** be on the Milton-Edwards chapter, which is assigned to provide an overview only.*
- ☐ Final paper (3,000 words including footnotes but excluding bibliography): an essay on a subject of your choice (to be agreed with the module instructor in advance), on one of the issues featured in the module. Papers should:
 - ☐ demonstrate good knowledge of the chosen subject area;
 - ☐ be comparative (where possible, you should make reference to at least two countries in the region as examples/cases to support your argument);
 - ☐ engage critically with existing academic literature on the subject;
 - ☐ develop and sustain an original argument or interpretation. (50%)

The deadline for the final paper is **11am, Monday March 13** (the Monday following reading week). You must submit a topic for your paper no later than **Friday, February 24**, though you are encouraged to think about a potential subject as early as possible, and are encouraged to discuss possible subjects with the module instructor. Friday, February 24 is also the deadline for putting forward any questions regarding the final paper. Late submissions will be penalized at the rate of 5 points per day, excused lateness will only be permitted with the provision of a medical certificate. You are encouraged to submit your paper well in advance to avoid last minute computer difficulties which may result in late submission. You are also reminded of your obligation to avoid plagiarism and to provide sources of any materials consulted in the course of writing your paper. Referenced works should be primarily of an academic nature where not referring to primary sources.

Week 1:

Understanding the MENA region: history; geography; destiny?

In the first class we will discuss the MENA region as a historical and geographical entity. How do we define this region? How has its current configuration been shaped by historical processes, including imperialism, capitalism, nationalism and religious revival? How can these processes help us place the current Middle East in context? Where is the Middle East heading, and what effect will this have on its neighbours and the world in general? This week's class will help set the general context for the module, as well as the scope for future discussion in the coming weeks.

Note: you should write your position paper for this week's class on Hinnebusch (2010) "Toward a Historical Sociology of State Formation in the Middle East." Middle East Critique, 19:3 (201-216).

Week 2:

Oil – A blessing or a curse?

In week two we will examine the political economy (and ecology) of the region, and especially the role of extractive industries. What effect has resource wealth had on the politics of the region? Do resource rich countries follow a particular path of development? What kind of state emerges without the need for taxation, and what kind of citizen? We will also consider other fundamental issues relating to water scarcity and population pressure. How will governments provide sufficient food and water for their populations into the twenty-first century? And what of the large populations of migrant workers who have made their home in the region?

Week 3:

Islam and politics

In week three we will examine the role of Islam in the politics of the region. What is political Islam, and how do we define it as a political project? Is it compatible with democracy? What are the different kinds of political Islam, and how do they differ in their approach to politics? Has political Islam failed, or is its time still to come? The class will also consider the role of religion more generally in the region. How are religious minorities treated? Is it correct to speak of a "Shia Crescent"? Are Saudi Arabia and Iran now the region's main power brokers? And will their rivalry lead to open conflict? We will also discuss religiously-motivated violence, including the emergence of globalised jihadism and the phenomenon of ISIS.

Week 4:

The Arab Spring – democracy denied, or postponed?

In week four we will look at the different systems of government in the region, and how these responded to the challenge of the Arab Spring. Is authoritarianism inevitable in the Middle East? What are the factors holding back democracy? Why is monarchy so resilient as a regime type? We will consider in particular the political, social and economic preconditions for democratic transition, and the extent to which these are met in the MENA region. We will also analyse the Arab Spring itself, what caused it, and why it failed, as well as looking at how events such as the World Cup in Qatar and COP27 in Egypt have affected perceptions of the region.

Week 5:

The Middle East in the world

In the final week we will examine the internal and external relations of the Middle East, and its wider role in the world. Why have organisations like the Arab League failed to create a coherent bloc? What comes next after Pax Americana? We will also examine the politics of migration, including the region's role as both a point of origin and a transit route into Europe. What is the EU's model for dealing with the Middle East, and is it working? How has the war in Ukraine affected the foreign relations of MENA states?