Description  This is a graduate-level course in the comparative politics of the Middle East. We will study the Arab states, Israel, and Iran using the framework of several major issues in the region – democracy, religion, women’s rights, and oil – as a basis for analyzing the forces at work in the various political systems.

Materials  There is one required text:


A second textbook may be required later, depending on the publisher’s release date. Information will be provided in class. Additional required readings will be available on Blackboard.

Requirements  This course meets once per week, so it is essential that students attend every session and participate in discussions. You are expected to have completed the readings before each session and to come to class with questions and comments for discussion. I will select students at each session to contribute a discussion point, but everyone should offer questions, comments, and disagreements in every class.

If you miss a class session, you must submit a two-page written discussion of the readings covered that day. That essay is due the following session.

Participation (20 points)  
News coverage assessments (40 points)  4-5 pages. For a two-week period, analyze a set of news sources (print and broadcast) and compare their coverage. Detailed instructions will be given in class.

Op-ed (50 points)  Write a short opinion piece on one of the issues raised in the course. This piece must conform to strict rules of style and length, which will be provided in class.

Research paper (90 points)

All written work will be graded on the basis of its accuracy, quality of analysis, and quality of writing. It is extremely important that your writing be of the highest standard; your ability to communicate your ideas and to explain complex subjects depends greatly on how well you write. If all else is equal, better-written papers will always receive higher grades. Poor writing or
evidence of carelessness (such as failing to proofread or spell-check your work) will be penalized. I am happy to help you with any writing difficulties you have. I also recommend that you take advantage of the services of the Writing Center.

**Academic honesty** is of great importance. All work must comply with the requirements of Villanova University’s Academic Integrity Code. Violations of this code will result in disciplinary action. If you commit plagiarism or other academic dishonesty, you will receive a failing grade and possibly additional punishment from the university. If you have questions about these matters, please see me.

**Schedule of topics and readings**

Readings for each session are to be completed before coming to class. Readings from sources other than the required texts are on Blackboard. This schedule may change over the course of the semester, depending on our progress.

**25 August**  *The ‘Middle East’ as a region*


**1 September**  *The democracy deficit Elements and causes of authoritarianism*


Marsha Pripstein Posusney, “The Middle East’s Democracy Deficit in Comparative Perspective,” Chapter 1 in Posusney and Angrist (hereafter PA).


Jason Brownlee, “Political Crisis and Restabilization: Iraq, Libya, Syria and Tunisia,” PA Chapter 3

**8 September**  *Elements and causes of liberalization: Elections*


Michele Penner Angrist, “Party Systems and Regime Formation: Turkish Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective,” PA Chapter 6.

**15 September**  *Elements and causes of liberalization: Economic crises*


**22 September**  *Elements and causes of liberalization: Civil society*


29 September  
*Islam and the secular authoritarian state*


Constitutions of Arab states


6 October  
*“Islamic states” – Iran, Saudi Arabia*

pp. 70-77 in Arang Keshavarzian, “Contestation Without Democracy: Elite Fragmentation in Iran,” PA Chapter 4 (entire chapter recommended).


Additional readings TBA

20 October  
*Israel: Judaism, the state and society*


27 October  
*Religious minorities in the Middle East*


“Freedom for Egyptian Copt jailed for religion mix-up,” Agence France Presse, 13 January 2008

*The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, part 1: history and events*


3 November  
*The Arab-Israeli conflict, part 2: policies and solutions*

Gershom Gorenberg, “Barack the Zionist: Why President Obama’s approach to settlements is better for Israel than Benjamin Netanyahu’s is.” *Slate*, 17 June 2009.


Additional readings TBA

10 November  
*Gender and feminism in the Middle East*

Ellen L. Fleischmann, “The Other ‘Awakening’: the Emergence of Women’s Movements in the Modern Middle East, 1900-1940,” in Meriwether and Tucker,


Additional readings TBA

17 November  *Oil as a blessing and a curse*


1 December  *Drawing conclusions*

Michele Penner Angrist, “The Outlook for Authoritarians,” PA Chapter 10.


8 December  *Presentation and discussion of papers*