

POL 364/NES 322: Politics of the Middle East

Spring 2025

Professor Elizabeth Nugent

Instructor: Professor Elizabeth Nugent
Email: enugent@princeton.edu
Office: 415 Robertson

Lectures: TTh 10-10:50am
001 Robertson
Drop-In Office Hours: T 3-5pm

Course Overview

This course provides an overview of politics of the contemporary Middle East and we interrogate the main debates surrounding the democratic deficit in the region. We explore whether and how a variety of factors such as foreign intervention, oil, culture and religion have contributed to persistent authoritarianism in the Middle East and consider different aspects of domestic authoritarian politics, including redistribution, gender politics, political mobilization, and public opinion. The course combines academic and popular writing, twice-weekly lectures, and weekly precept meetings.

Contact Information

Instructor

Elizabeth Nugent, Assistant Professor in Princeton's Department of Politics: enugent@princeton.edu
Office Hours: Drop in to 415 Robertson (email for additional meeting times)

- Tuesday, February 11, 2024 3-5pm
- Tuesday, February 25, 2025 3-5pm
- Tuesday, March 18, 2025 3-5pm
- Tuesday, April 1, 2025 2-4pm
- Tuesday, April 15, 2025 2-4pm
- Tuesday, April 29, 2025 3-5pm

Precept: Thursday 11-11:50am

Preceptors

If you are assigned to Greg or Emre's precepts, they should be your first point of contact for any questions.

Greg Amusu, PhD Candidate in Princeton's Department of Politics: gamusu@princeton.edu
Precepts: Thursday 12:30-1:20pm, 1:30-2:20pm, 2:30-3:20pm

Hüseyin Emre Ceyhun, PhD Candidate in Princeton's Department of Politics:
heceyhun@princeton.edu
Precept: Thursday, 12:30-1:20pm

Course Information*Format*

Course meetings consist of in-person lectures Tuesday and Thursday from 10-10:50am. You are also required to attend the precept you registered for at the beginning of the semester. I will assign an average of 100 pages of reading per week. Complete assignments *before* the lecture for which it is listed.

Grading

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

- 20 points of your grade will be determined by attendance and participation in lectures and precepts throughout the semester.
- 40 points of your grade will be determined by response papers (more below).
- 40 points of your grade will be determined by a final paper (more below).

I use the following scale for assigning letter grades:

Letter Grade	Numeric Grade
A+	97-100
A	94-96.99
A-	90-93.99
B+	87-89.99
B	84-86.99
B-	80-83.99
C+	77-79.99
C	74-76.99
C-	70-73.99
D	60-69.99
F	0-59.99

Per university policy, I will only give a grade of A+ in exceptional circumstances.

Reading Responses

40 percent of your grade will come from three response papers written over the course of the semester. For each due date, you can choose which week you want to write about and may want to respond to weeks that are relevant to your final paper (see below). Each response should be 5 pages in regular 12-point font, double spaced. The reading response should synthesize and critically engage all reading, from both assignments, in one given week (excluding week 1). For full credit, the reading response will not only summarize the but also express your opinion about the validity of the argument and/or evidence; suggest additional questions; and make theoretical and empirical links across weeks.

Response papers are due through Canvas on the following dates:

- **Reading Response # 1: Due Friday, February 14, 5pm (choose weeks 2 or 3)**
- **Reading Response # 2: Due Friday, March 7, 5pm (choose weeks 4, 5, or 6)**
- **Reading Response # 1: Due Friday, April 11, 5pm (choose weeks 7, 8, 9, or 10)**

Final Paper

For the final assignment for this course, you will write an essay of 10 (required minimum) to 15 (maximum) pages answering the question: "What is the most convincing explanation for the continued lack of democracy in the Middle East following the Arab Spring?"

In the readings we will cover in this class, we will address a number of explanations for the democratic deficit in the Middle East. For example, relational explanations, in which intervention by foreign powers -- first colonial states with specific economic and security interests, then western democracies with interests related to the global economy, national security, and the spreading of "democratic" ideals, and more recently regional powers on different side of ideological and security conflicts -- argues that this keeps the Middle East undemocratic by undermining processes of meaningful political reform. Economic explanations rely on rentierism, the theory that rentier (resource-rich) states and groups of states within economic systems defined by oil and other non-taxed sources of wealth can fend off any democratization through a number of defensive, distributive, and repressive behaviors. Other explanations focus on culture, arguing that there is something inherently undemocratic about Arab and/or Muslim culture in the way it tolerates pluralism and gender rights, which then precludes citizens from demanding democracy.

In writing the paper, you must engage in a critical conversation with the articles we have read and the conversations we have had in class. You will necessarily draw upon the ideas of other authors in making your argument and should cite them correctly. You must show how you are building upon, altering, or working in opposition to their ideas and definitions through your quotation and analysis of their concepts and evidence. After your introduction, you should define democracy and discuss how the authoritarian regimes of the region differ from this ideal type. Next, outline the explanations we have discussed in class in your own words. Then make a convincing argument for one, and be sure to discuss where and how competing explanations fall short in your essay. You should refer to specific empirical examples and point to variation across or within cases to help explain your argument. You should explain a clear mechanism, or *how* your explanation results in a lack of democratization through institutional or behavioral means.

Keep in mind that there is not necessarily one correct answer to this essay prompt. Rather, I am interested in how the material we have covered in this course informs your thoughts in making an argument, and how you evaluate evidence in support or in contradiction to it.

The final paper will include two graded components:

1. Two pages consisting of a one-page outline and an annotated bibliography of 10 sources is due through Canvas on **Friday, March 28, by 5pm** (10 points).
2. The final paper (10-15 pages) is due through Canvas on **Dean's Date, May 6, 2025 by 5pm** (30 points).

Course Policies*Attendance Policy*

Attendance is expected in all sections and precepts. You will lose points from your participation grades for each unexcused absence. Please communicate absences ahead of class when possible.

E-mail Policy

If you have a quick (i.e. non-substantive) question, email is the best way to contact me. While I typically respond to emails quickly, please allow 48 hours for a response. If you do not receive a response within 48 hours, follow up with a reminder. This article is recommended reading about how to draft an effective email: Laura Portwood-Stacer, "[How to Email Your Professor.](#)"

If you email me or your preceptor the night before a deadline with a last-minute request, please do not expect a response. It is important that you look at the assignments early to ensure we can answer any questions you may have in a timeframe that is useful to you. Longer questions -- for example, those dealing with your performance in the course or substantive questions about the course material -- are better asked in person. I will hold regular office hours on Tuesday from 3-5pm (see page 1 for dates) throughout the semester, and appointments can also be made on an individual basis. Your preceptor will also hold regular office hours.

Policies on Incomplete Grades and Late Assignments

For every day a written assignment is late, you will lose one point from the total number of points available. No final papers will be accepted after May 6, 2025 without prior permission. Familiarize yourself with [Princeton University's policy on incomplete grades](#).

Academic Integrity

Familiarize yourself with Princeton University's [policies on academic integrity](#). In short, don't turn in the same paper for two classes, don't plagiarize someone else's work, and don't cheat on the in-class exam or other assignments. When in doubt, come talk to me. The in-class midterm will be held under Princeton's honor system.

All submitted work (short papers and final essay) should be your own thinking and writing. You may not use artificial intelligence to draft your submitted written work – including for spell- and grammar-check. Additionally, all references and sources should be cited in your written work, as is common academic practice.

Commitment to Diversity

Your experience in this class is very important to me. If you have already established accommodations with the [Office of Disability of Services](#), please communicate these to me as early as possible and notify me via ODS' [ACCOMMODATE](#) system so we can discuss your needs in this course. If you have not yet established services through ODS, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations

(conditions include but are not limited to: mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), please contact ODS.

Book to Purchase

Please purchase *The Middle East* edited by Ellen Lust (16th edition, Sage, 2023). The book is available in electronic and paper form through Labyrinth Books and online retailers. It is important that you purchase the 16th edition; there are a number of editions of the textbook and I cannot guarantee the required reading appears in others. There are also two hard copies available in the library and reserved for this course. All other readings are available online and linked through Canvas.

Schedule of Assigned Readings, Lectures, and Precepts

WEEK 1: Introduction

NO PRECEPT THIS WEEK

Tuesday, January 28, 2025

Read before Lecture

Jason Brownlee, Tarek E. Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform*. Chapter 3: “Breakdowns and Crackdowns” (pages 64-97).

Topics Covered in Lecture

Introduction to the Course, Instructors, and the Middle East

Thursday, January 30, 2025

Read before Lecture

Lust Chapter 1 (Making of Modern Middle East, pages 11-31)

Abbas Amanat, “Introduction” in *Is there a Middle East? The Evolution of Geopolitical Concept*. Stanford University Press, 2012. 1-8.

Recommended: Zachary Lockman, “Said’s Orientalism: A Book and its Aftermath” in *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*. Cambridge University Press, 2009. Chapter 6, 183-191 only.

Topics Covered in Lecture

Introduction to Middle East Politics (varieties of authoritarianism and why study the region comparatively)

WEEK 2: Colonialism, Independence, and State-Building

PRECEPT #1

Tuesday, February 4, 2025

Read before Lecture

Lust Chapter 1 (Making of Modern Middle East, pages 31-76).

Adria Lawrence, "Autocracy and Colonial Rule" in Anne Wolf (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Authoritarian Politics*. 2024.

Recommended: Alexander de Juan and Jan Henryk Pierskalla. "The comparative politics of colonialism and its legacies: An introduction." *Politics & Society* 45.2 (2017): 159-172.

Topics Covered in Lecture

Colonialism, Independence, and State-building

Thursday, February 6, 2025

Read before Lecture

Ellen Lust-Okar and Amaney Ahmad Jamal. "Rulers and rules: Reassessing the influence of regime type on electoral law formation." *Comparative Political Studies* 35.3 (2002): 337-366.

Staci Strobl. "From colonial policing to community policing in Bahrain: The historical persistence of sectarianism." *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice* 35.1 (2011): 19-37.

Jacob Gerner Hariri. "A contribution to the understanding of Middle Eastern and Muslim exceptionalism." *The Journal of Politics* 77.2 (2015): 477-490.

Topics Covered in Lecture

The Effects of State/Regime Origins on Contemporary Politics

WEEK 3: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

PRECEPT #2

Tuesday, February 11, 2025

Read before Lecture

Lust Chapter 2 (The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, pages 77-153)

Topics Covered in Lecture

Politics of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Thursday, February 13, 2025

Read before Lecture

Dana El Kurd. "Gateway to dissent: the role of pro-Palestine activism in opposition to authoritarianism." *Democratization* 29.7 (2022): 1230-1248.

Mark Tessler and Marilyn Grobshmidt. "Democracy in the Arab world and the Arab-Israeli conflict." *Democracy, War, and Peace in the Middle East* (1995): 135-169.

Recommended: Jamal, Amaney A. Jamal. *Of Empires and Citizens: Pro-American Democracy or No Democracy at All?* Princeton University Press, 2012. Chapter 1, "Introduction: Pro-American Democracy or No Democracy at all?" (Pp. 1-37).

Topics Covered in Lecture

Effects of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict on Domestic Politics in the Middle East

WEEK 4: Political Economy of the Middle East: Rentierism, Corruption, and Development

PRECEPT #3

Tuesday, February 18, 2025

Read before Lecture

Barbara Geddes. "What Causes Democratization?" in *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, edited by Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes. Oxford University Press: 2009, 317-339.

Lust Chapter 7 (The Political Economy of Development in the Middle East, Pp. 301-343).

Topics Covered in Lecture

Political Economy of the Middle East

Thursday, February 20, 2025

Read before Lecture

Recommended: Hazem Beblawi. "The Rentier State in the Arab World." *Arab Studies Quarterly*. 9.4 (1987): 383-398.

Michael L. Ross. "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53.3 (2001): 325-361. Pages 329-337 only.

J. Craig Jenkins, et al. "International Rentierism in the Middle East Africa, 1971–2008." *International Area Studies Review* 14.3 (2011): 3-31.

Saha, Shrabani, and Mohamed Sami Ben Ali. "Corruption and Economic Development: New Evidence from the Middle Eastern and North African Countries." *Economic Analysis and Policy* 54 (2017): 83-95.

Topics Covered in Lecture

Development and Democracy in the Middle East

WEEK 5: Islamism

PRECEPT #4

Tuesday, February 25, 2025

Read before Lecture

Lust Chapter 4 (Religion, Society, and Politics in the Middle East, Pp. 197-231).

Carrie Rosefsky Wickham. *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 2, pages 20-45 (recommended: chapter 3, pages 46-75).

Topics Covered in Lecture

The Islamic Revival and the Rise of Islamism

Thursday, February 27, 2025

Read before Lecture

Melani Cammett and Pauline Jones Luong. "Is there an Islamist political advantage?" *Annual review of political science* 17.1 (2014): 187-206.

Sharan Grewal, Amaney A. Jamal, Tarek Masoud, and Elizabeth R. Nugent. "Poverty and Divine Rewards: The Electoral Advantage of Islamist Political Parties." *American Journal of Political Science* 63, no. 4 (2019): 859-874.

Tarek Masoud. *Counting Islam: Religion, class, and elections in Egypt*. Cambridge University Press, 2014. Chapter 2, "Clientelism and Class: The Tragedy of Leftist Opposition in Mubarak's Egypt." 45-73.

Topics Covered in Lecture

Islamism and Democracy in the Middle East

WEEK 6: Gender and Politics

NO PRECEPT THIS WEEK

Tuesday, March 4, 2025

Read before Lecture

Lust Chapter 6 (Social Change in the Middle East, Pp. 263-300).

Christian Welzel, Pippa Norris, and Ronald Inglehart. "Gender equality and democracy." *Comparative Sociology* 1.3-4 (2002): 321-345.

Topics Covered in Lecture

Gender in the Middle East

Thursday, March 6, 2025

Read before Lecture

Recommended: Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris. "The true clash of civilizations." *Foreign Policy* 135 (2003), 62-70.

Sarah Sunn Bush and Eleanor Gao. "Small Tribes, Big Gains: The Strategic Uses of Gender Quotas in the Middle East." *Comparative Politics* 49.2 (2017): 149-167.

Tarek Masoud, Amaney Jamal, and Elizabeth Nugent. "Using the Qur'an to empower Arab women? Theory and experimental evidence from Egypt." *Comparative Political Studies* 49.12 (2016): 1555-1598.

Topics Covered in Lecture

Gender and Politics in the Middle East

WEEK 7: Authoritarianism

PRECEPT #5

March 18

Read before Lecture

Juan Linz. "Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes," in Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby, eds. *Handbook of Political Science*. Vol 3. (Reading MS: Addison-Wesley Pub Co. 1975). Pp. 187-196, 264-277.

Milan W. Svoblik. 2013. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1, "Introduction: The Anatomy of Dictatorship," pages 1-18.

Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set." *Perspectives on Politics* 12.2 (2014): 313-331. Pages 314-320 only.

Topics Covered in Lecture

Defining and Theorizing Authoritarianism

March 20

Read before Lecture

Lust Chapter 3 (States and Institutions, Pp. 155-183).

Barbara Geddes. "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2.1 (1999): 115-144.

Recommended: Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, and Paul Noble, eds. *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World*. Vol. 1. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995. Introduction, "Introduction: Theoretical Perspectives on Arab Liberalization and Democratization," pages 3-28

Topics Covered in Lecture

Types of Authoritarianism in the Middle East

WEEK 8: Authoritarian Power-Sharing

PRECEPT #6

Tuesday, March 25, 2025

Read before Lecture

Review Lust Chapter 3 (pages 180-183).

Beatriz Magaloni. "Credible Power-Sharing and the Longevity of Authoritarian Rule." *Comparative Political Studies* 41.4-5 (2008): 715-741.

Adria Lawrence. "Why Monarchies Still Reign." *Journal of Democracy* 34.2 (2023): 47-61.

Roger Owen. "The Political Economy of Arab Presidents for Life—And After." *Middle East Development Journal* 5.01 (2013).

Topics Covered in Lecture

Power-sharing in Monarchies

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Read before Lecture

Scott Williams, *The King Can Do No Wrong: Blame Games and Power-sharing in Authoritarian Regimes*. Cambridge University Press, 2024. Chapter 4, "The Jordanian Monarchy's Strategic Blame Games," pages 114-145.

Eman Alhussein. "Saudi Arabia's Centralized Political Structure: Prospects and Challenges." *Handbook of Middle East Politics* (2023): 144-157.

Topics Covered in Lecture

Power-sharing in Monarchies in the Middle East

WEEK 9: Authoritarian Elections and Opposition

PRECEPT #7

Tuesday, April 1, 2025

Read before Lecture

Jennifer Gandhi and Ellen Lust-Okar (2009). "Elections under Authoritarianism." *Annual Review of Political Science* 12, 403-422.

Holger Albrecht. *Raging against the machine: Political Opposition under Authoritarianism in Egypt*. Syracuse University Press, 2013. Chapter 1, "Regime and Opposition," Pages 1-37.

Topics Covered in Lecture

Elections and Opposition in Authoritarian Regimes

Thursday, April 3, 2025

Read before Lecture

Lisa Blaydes (2018). *State of Repression, Iraq under Saddam Hussein*. Chapter 7, "Political Orientation and Ba'th Party Participation," pages 163-195.

Ellen Lust. "Democratization by Elections? Competitive Clientelism in the Middle East." *Journal of Democracy* 20.3 (2009): 122-135.

Recommended: Lisa Blaydes (2011). *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*. Chapter 3: Elections and Elite Management, pages 48-63.

Topics Covered in Lecture

Elections and Opposition in Authoritarian Regimes in the Middle East

WEEK 10: Mass Participation and Public Opinion

PRECEPT #8

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Read before Lecture

Lust Chapter 5 (233-262)

Recommended: Robert D. Putnam (1994). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Chapter 6, "Social Capital and Institutional Success," pages 163-185.

Amaney A. Jamal. *Barriers to Democracy: The Other Side of Social Capital in Palestine and the Arab World*. Princeton University Press, 2009. Chapter 1, Introduction: Democratic Outcomes and Associational Life (pages 1-20).

Topics Covered in Lecture

Political Participation, Civil Society and Democracy in the Middle East

Thursday, April 10, 2025

Read before Lecture

Recommended: Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba. *The Civic Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963, chapter 1, "An Approach to Political Culture," pages 3-42.

Amaney Jamal and Mark Tessler. "The Democracy Barometers (Part II): Attitudes in the Arab World." *Journal of Democracy* 19.1 (2008): 97-111.

Amaney Jamal and Irfan Nooruddin. "The Democratic Utility of Trust: A Cross-National Analysis." *The Journal of Politics* 72.1 (2010): 45-59.

Hannah Ridge. "Democratic Commitment in the Middle East: A Conjoint Analysis." *Political Science Research and Methods* 12.2 (2024): 285-300.

Samuel Dunham, C. Christine Fair, Rebecca Littman, Elizabeth R. Nugent, and Michael Robbins. "Comparative *Shari'a*: Measuring Support for Islamism Cross-nationally." *Working paper* (2025).

Topics Covered in Lecture

Public Opinion, Political Preferences, and Democracy in the Middle East

WEEK 11: Authoritarian Control

PRECEPT #9

Tuesday, April 15, 2025

Read before Lecture

Christian Davenport (2007). "State Repression and Political Order." *Annual Review of Political Science* 10, 1-23.

Wendy Pearlman. "Emotions and the Microfoundations of the Arab Uprisings." *Perspectives on Politics* 11.2 (2013): 387-409.

Elizabeth R. Nugent. "The Psychology of Repression and Polarization." *World Politics* 72.2 (2020): 291-334. Pages 297-302; 315-323.

Topics Covered in Lecture

Repression and its Political Behavioral Effects in the Middle East

Thursday, April 17, 2025

Read before Lecture

Milan W. Svobik. "Contracting on Violence: the Moral Hazard in Authoritarian Repression and Military Intervention in Politics." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57.5 (2012), 765-794.

Hicham Bou Nassif. *Endgames: Military response to protest in Arab autocracies*. Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pages 4-15 recommended, 22-57 required.

Topics Covered in Lecture

Repression and its Institutional Effects in the Middle East

WEEK 12: Conclusion and Prospects for Democratization in the Middle East

PRECEPT #10

Tuesday, April 22, 2025

Read before Lecture

TBD

Topics Covered in Lecture

TBD

Thursday, April 24, 2025

Read before Lecture

TBD

Topics Covered in Lecture

TBD