

CSS 330: Junior Government Tutorial

Uprisings and Revolutions in the Middle East: The Arab Spring in Context

Spring 2025
Fridays, 2:00-4:00 pm
Location: PAC 107

Prof. Emy Matesan
Office: 228 PAC
Email: imatesan@wesleyan.edu
Office hours sign-up:
<https://calendly.com/prof-matesan/15min>

Course Description

The course examines the dynamics of uprisings and revolutions in the Middle East, with a primary focus on the 2011 protests that became collectively known as “the Arab Spring,” and on their historical antecedents. Drawing from theories of revolutions, contentious politics and democratization, the readings examine both general patterns across the region and the political dynamics of individual cases. We will start with a review of what revolutions are, and a discussion of the nationalist uprisings of the 1950s and the 1979 Iranian Revolution. We will then examine the deep roots and major explanations of the so-called Arab Spring uprisings. We will consider what explains the variation in protests and in government responses, what role different actors played during the uprisings, and what effects historical legacies had on the dynamics of the uprising. We will attempt to understand what factors led to the militarization of the protests and the descent into civil war in Syria. The course concludes with a discussion of the aftermath, exploring what factors led to the entrenchment of authoritarianism in Egypt and the democratic breakdown in Tunisia a decade after the uprising.

The course is designed to accommodate both students with no previous knowledge of the Middle East, and those with an in-depth knowledge of the region. The goal of the course is to help you gain a deeper understanding of the social, economic and political dynamics of the contemporary Middle East, while also engaging with major theoretical debates in the study of protests and revolutions. The readings, discussions and assignments are meant to help you critically engage with the scholarship, media and policy discourse on the region, and to enhance your speaking, research and analytical skills. The sequence of assignments also has the more narrow goal of familiarizing you with the elements of research design in Political Science, and teaching you how to write a research proposal for a Political Science project.

Class Format

This course will be primarily focused on classroom discussions, which will be occasionally complemented by short lectures. You are expected to do all the assigned readings for the day, submit two discussion questions before every class, and come prepared to engage with the material.

Readings

We will read several chapters from the following books, which will also be on Reserve at the library.

- Daweesha, Adid. 2013. *The Second Arab Awakening* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.)
- Kamrava, Mehran. 2014. *Beyond the Arab Spring: The Evolving Ruling Bargain in the Middle East*. (New York: Oxford University Press).

All other readings will be posted on Moodle, or be available through the library.

Assignments and Grades

The grades for this class will be based on a total of 100 possible points, broken down as follows:

- Attendance: 5 points
- Participation: 8 points
- Weekly discussion questions: 7 points
- Papers: 40 points
 - Two 5-page papers, 20 points each
- Research proposal: 30 points
- Presentation of research proposal: 10 points

Attendance & Participation

For this class to be successful, everybody must come to class prepared and ready to engage in meaningful discussions and intellectual debates with one another. Therefore, attendance is mandatory, and part of your grade will be based on your active participation in the course. You should come to class prepared to discuss the readings and to engage with both the course material and with your colleagues. Meaningful participation requires that you treat everybody with respect, regardless of whether you agree or disagree with their views. It is never appropriate for critiques to degenerate into personal attacks, and it is crucial that debates are civil, respectful and grounded in intellectual arguments. Rude and inappropriate comments or disruptive behavior (arriving late, leaving early, using cell phones, surfing the web, etc) can result in a reduced grade. Please note that you may use your laptops, but *solely* for the purpose of taking notes or accessing the readings. The use of other electronics including cell phones is prohibited, except for emergencies.

Weekly Discussion Questions

Before every class, you should submit 2 discussion questions on the readings in the discussion forum on Moodle by 9 am the day of class. The questions may critique particular claims or question underlying assumptions, draw connections to other topics or texts discussed, relate the readings to current events, raise questions about theoretical or policy implications, or draw attention to problematic concepts and arguments that we should clarify or discuss in greater detail in class. You may also ask clarifying questions, or post comments on an assigned text. In order to receive full credit, your questions/comments have to be submitted on time and reflect a serious engagement with the readings. You are also encouraged to read and engage with the questions submitted by your colleagues.

Paper 1: Response paper

The first assignment is a response paper on any of the readings from the first two weeks of class. The paper is due by the beginning of class on week 2, and it should be a five-page double-spaced essay (12 font, 1 inch margins). You will not receive any specific prompts, but rather are expected to identify theoretically relevant questions and topics of discussion on your own. You may focus on one or one multiple readings from either week. You may critically engage with the overall argument, unpack the underlying assumptions, comment on the empirical evidence, or discuss broader theoretical or policy implications. You can integrate readings from both weeks, and compare and contrast the main arguments of different authors.

Paper 2: Reverse Research Design

The second paper is in the form of a five-page reverse research design (excluding references), and it is due by the beginning of class on week 3. This assignment requires you to retrace the research process of a published article and write what would have been the research proposal for the project. More specifically, take the Massoud, Doces and Magee article “Protests and the Arab Spring,” and imagine what the initial research proposal for this article would look like if the authors were to start this project today. Your proposal should include the following elements: 1) research question, 2) theoretical puzzle and significance based on the existing literature and theoretical debates, 3) hypotheses and main arguments, and 4) proposed data collection and methodology. All of these elements are already in the article, but you are required to use your own words, and you should also engage other readings from the class when discussing the significance. For data collection and methodology, you may copy and paste statements from the article, but place them in quotation marks nonetheless, so that I know what you took directly from the article.

Research Proposal & Presentation

- Research question and initial sources (not graded, opportunity for feedback)
- Research proposal – 10-12 pages double spaced, plus references (30 points)
- Project presentation at the end of the semester (10 points)

In addition to the issues and cases covered in class, you will also write a substantive research proposal on a topic of your choice. This can be on any topic that is related to the themes of the class. The proposal will be developed in stages, so you have a chance to receive feedback and develop your ideas.

As a first step towards developing your research proposal, you will turn in your proposed research question and brief justification, along with five preliminary academic sources that are relevant. This does not need to be more than a paragraph, and it is due via email by the beginning of class on week 4.

Next you will give a brief presentation of your proposal at the end of the semester, either in week 6 or in week 7. Students will be randomly assigned to the two weeks. This presentation will be a succinct 5-7 elevator pitch of your proposed project.

The final proposal, which is due a week after the last class via TurnItIn, is a 10-12 page research proposal. Similar to the reverse research design assignment, this proposal should include the following elements:

- Clear research question
- A literature review that situates this project in the broader scholarship, identifies main debates and tensions, and discusses the theoretical puzzle addressed and significance of your project
- Brief outline of proposed methodology (data collection & analysis)
- Conclusion and implications

In short, your proposal should identify an interesting question, tell the reader why it's important, how it relates to existing scholarship, and how you will answer the question (What evidence will you use? Where will you get it from? How will you analyze it? Are you planning to use quantitative analysis or resort to case studies or other qualitative methods? Etc.).

Other Policies

Unless you have a documented emergency or we make arrangements in advance, late assignments will be penalized, and you will lose 3% of the grade for each 24 hour period that it is late. If you think you need flexibility with a deadline, please contact me as early as possible *before* the due date.

If you need to miss class because of a religious observance, please notify me as early as possible so we can make arrangements in advance on how to keep you up to speed. Questions about the holidays may be directed to the Director of the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life, Rabbi David Teva dleipziger@wesleyan.edu and or to the Dean for Academic Equity, Inclusion and Success, April Ruiz, aruiz@wesleyan.edu.

Please note that I reserve the right to make changes and adjustments to the syllabus throughout the semester. Should such changes happen, you will be notified in class and via Moodle.

Academic Honesty

Please note that in this course, no form of academic dishonesty will be tolerated. Infractions can result in you failing the entire course. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please visit:

<http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/standardsregulations/plagiarism.html>

If you want to learn more about how to properly use citations, you can read the guidelines offered by the Wesleyan library at: <http://libguides.wesleyan.edu/citing>

The use of AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Bing, Elicit, etc.) is prohibited for any part of this class including, but not limited to, the generation of ideas, writing of text, or rewriting your own work. If you have any questions about a particular AI tool or use, please consult with me before using. Unauthorized use of AI tools in this class will be considered a violation of Wesleyan's Honor Code.

All Wesleyan students are responsible for knowing and upholding [the Honor Code](#). Feel free to contact me about any questions related to course expectations. If you have a question related specifically to the honor code, please contact Assistant Dean of Student/Director of Community Standards Kevin Butler - (kbutler@wesleyan.edu).

Accommodations

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a disability as defined by the ADA. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible. If you have a disability, or think that you might have a disability, please contact [Accessibility Services](#) in order to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. Accessibility Services is located in North College, rooms 021/218 or can be reached by email (accessibility@wesleyan.edu) or phone (860-685-2332).

Health Accommodations

If you feel ill, please stay home and test for covid. If positive, isolate per the Wesleyan Covid Policies. If you have very mild symptoms (and are covid-negative) or are healthy but are concerned that you may have been exposed to someone who was ill, please consider wearing a mask until your symptoms have resolved. Students who are unable to come to class due to illness are expected to connect with classmates to find out what they have missed and contact me to schedule make up work if necessary. See the university's current covid-19 policies [here](#).

Wellness & Title IX Resources

Students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being. These stressors may include academic pressures, sleep problems, relationship and social concerns, and challenges associated with adjusting to school, mental health, alcohol or other drugs, identities, finances, life events or something not listed here. If you or a friend are experiencing concerns, remember that we all benefit from assistance and guidance at times. Reach out to [CAPS](#), [WesWell](#), visit the [Resource Room](#) to support your mental health and well-being.

If trauma inhibits your ability to fully participate in class, please contact Debbie Colucci, Title IX Coordinator, at dcolucci@wesleyan.edu, or your class dean.

Other Services

You are encouraged to take advantage of the many services available to you at Wesleyan. Writing workshop tutors are available to help you with your papers. For more information, visit wesleyan.edu/writing/workshop or call 860-685-2440. For assistance with your research on your country, you may also want to schedule an appointment with a librarian. You can do so online at:

<http://www.wesleyan.edu/library/howdoi/makeanappointment.html>

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1. Studying Revolutions & The Nationalist Revolutions of the 1950s and 1960s

- Keddie, Nikki. 1995. "Introduction" in *Debating Revolutions*. Available online through library website.
- Beck et al. 2022. "Introduction" in *On Revolutions*, available online through library website, also <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197638354.003.0001>
- Daweesha, Adid. 2013. *The Second Arab Awakening*, chapters 2 & 3

Week 2. The Iranian Revolution of 1979

Paper 1 due via TurnItIn by the beginning of class.

- Keddie, Nikki. 1983. "Iranian Revolutions in Comparative Perspective." *The American Historical Review*, 88(3): 579-598.
- Skocpol, Theda. 1982. "Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution." *Theory and Society*, 11(3): 265-283.
- Keddie, Nikki. 1995. "Can Revolutions Be Predicted; Can Their Causes be Understood?" in *Debating Revolutions*, available as EBook through Library.
- Beck et al. 2022. "The Domestic-International Dichotomy" in *On Revolutions*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197638354.003.0006>

Week 3. Deep causes and outbreak of Arab Spring

Reverse Research Design paper due via TurnItIn by the beginning of class.

- Kamrava, Mehran. 2014. "The Rise and Fall of Ruling Bargains in the Middle East." Chapter 1 in *Beyond the Arab Spring*.
- Sika, Nadine. 2014. "The Arab State and Social Contestation." Chapter 3 in *Beyond the Arab Spring*.
- Khatib, Lina and Ellen Lust. 2014. "Reconsidering Activism in the Arab World: Arab Uprisings and Beyond." In *Taking to the Streets*, edited by Lina Khatib and Ellen Lust. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Massoud, Tansa et al. 2019. "Protests and the Arab Spring: An Empirical Investigation." *Polity*, 51(3): 429-465.
- Beck et al.. 2022. "The Agency-Structure Dichotomy." Ch. 2 in *On Revolutions*, available through library website and online <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197638354.003.0003>

Week 4. Actors and protest dynamics

Proposed research question & initial sources due via email by the beginning of class.

- Korany, Bahgat. 2014. "A Microcosm of the Arab Spring: Sociology of Tahrir Square." Chapter 9 in *Beyond the Arab Spring*.
- Grewal, Sharan. 2023. "[When do militaries undermine democratization?](#)" *Brookings Institute*, Nov. 3, 2023.

- Grewal, Sharan. 2023. “Egypt: Repression and Revolution”, ch. 2 in *Soldiers of Democracy? Military Legacies and the Arab Spring* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Lynch, Marc. 2015. “How the Media Trashed the Transitions.” *Journal of Democracy*, 26(4): 90-99.
- FILM: The Square (2013, UK, 95 min.) Available for online streaming via EReserves

RECOMMENDED: Al-Anani, Khalil. 2015. “Upended Path: The Rise and Fall of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood.” *Middle East Journal*, 69(4).

Week 5. Legacies of the past: Libya and Yemen

- Hilsum, Lindsey. 2012. *Sandstorm: Libya in the Time of Revolution*, Prologue and Chapter 1: The People Demand the Fall of the Regime.” New York: Penguin Books.
- Vandewalle, Dirk. 2014. “Beyond the Civil War in Libya: Toward a New Ruling Bargain.” Chapter 15 in *Beyond the Arab Spring*.
- Juneau, Thomas. 2014. “Yemen and the Arab Spring.” Chapter 13 in *Beyond the Arab Spring*.
- Laub, Zachary. 2023. “[Yemen’s Tragedy](#).” CFR Backgrounder.

Week 6. Descent into civil war: Syria

Student presentations – round 1.

- Daweasha, Adid. 2013. *The Second Arab Awakening*, Chapter 6, “Lions and Savages.” New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Phillips, Christopher. 2015. “Sectarianism and conflict in Syria.” *Third World Quarterly*, 36(2).
- Heydemann, Steven. 2013. “Syria and the Future of Authoritarianism.” *Journal of Democracy*, 24(4): 59 -73.
- Abboud, Samer. 2022. “Syria’s Repressive Peace.” Ch. 5 in *Struggles for Political Change in the Arab World*.

Week 7. Aftermath and Counter-revolutions

Student presentations – round 2.

- Sallam, Hesham. 2024. “The Autocrat-in-Training: The Sisi Regime at 10.” *Journal of Democracy*, 35(1): 87-101.
- Masoud, Tarek. 2021. “The Arab Spring at 10: Kings or People?” *Journal of Democracy*, 32(1): 139-154.
- Matthiesen, Toby. 2022. “The Arab Counter-Revolution: The Formation of a Regional Alliance to Undermine the Arab Spring” Ch. 16 in *Struggles for Political Change in the Arab World*.

RECOMMENDED:

- Grewal, *Soldiers of Democracy*, ch. 7 “Egypt: A Coup Against Democracy” & ch. 11 “Tunisia: Facilitating the Takeover”

Final research proposal due one week after the last class via TurnItIn.