Seminar participants will study aspects of how religion and politics interact in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), with a focus on the period from the First World War to the present. Each week or pair of weeks will address a new theme. Participants should look for connections between assigned texts across as well as within themes, building understanding cumulatively. Following Parvez,\(^1\) the seminar will: look for the interconnectedness of the local and the global; seek to overcome methodological nationalism, i.e. “the tendency to treat nation-states as coherent entities that contain all social processes” (Parvez 2017, 2); and help participants to develop skills to assess critically how we create knowledge about other peoples and cultures.

It is not necessary to have prior knowledge of the study of religions or of the region under study. Participants who read attentively and raise questions in class on anything that remains unclear should be able to achieve the seminar’s learning goals.

**Learning Goals**

1. **Substantive Knowledge of Political Science:** Students should be able to identify, use, and independently apply political science concepts and theories, as well as concepts from adjacent disciplines, relevant to analyzing the most significant ways in which religion and politics interact in MENA. Students will demonstrate this mainly by researching and writing a paper of 15-20 pages (POSC) or 18-25 pages (MEST).

2. **Critical Analysis:** Students should be able to critically analyze the readings assigned, meaning assess not only the content but aspects such as assumptions embedded and methods used in developing those texts. Students will demonstrate this through weekly commentaries and in-class discussion.

3. **Formulation and Defense of an Argument:** Students should be able to formulate clear oral and written arguments that address issues in dispute in the political science literature relevant to religion and politics in MENA. Students should also be able to defend their arguments with adequate evidence. Students will demonstrate this in part through the research paper, in addition to in-class discussion.

4. **Application of Area Knowledge (MEST Majors only):** Students should be able to apply additional contextual information, including historical and cultural, to their discussion of assigned texts and their research project.

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Required Course Materials


All are available via the bookstore. The Hashemi & Postel and Ruthven books may be purchased through the bookstore as a bundle, by arrangement with OUP, which will make the Ruthven book free. All other texts will be available via the course wiki: https://eduwebb.pbworks.com/

Requirements

1. Read. Read all the assigned texts critically and actively. Take notes, and prepare questions and comments to bring up in the seminar. The seminar cannot work if you don’t. Also, be sure to read your colleagues’ commentaries on the wiki before each class meeting.
2. Discuss. Attend every session of the seminar (unless there are exceptional circumstances and you have discussed your absence with the instructor in advance), well-prepared to participate in discussion and debate. Participation in class, including giving feedback to fellow students in the research paper roundtable in week 14, will make up 25% of the final grade.
3. Write.
   3.1. Students must read George Orwell’s brief essay “Politics and the English Language” (available online—link on the course wiki), at the start of the semester, and apply its lessons thereafter.
   3.2. To help participants prepare for class discussion, each student is required to post a commentary on the class wiki every week from week 2 to 13 inclusive, no later than 8pm on the day before class meets. The commentary should reflect on the week’s assigned readings, including discussing how they relate to other course themes and materials and, once individual research paper topics are agreed, what aspects of the readings might inform the research paper. It is essential, therefore, that participants plan ahead: it will not be possible to do the reading at the last minute each week. Three commentaries will be graded—students will choose one to be graded in each of February, March, and April by emailing the instructor upon posting a commentary if it is to be one of the graded pieces. Missing or late commentaries will incur a grade penalty. These commentaries will collectively make up 30% of the final grade.
   3.3. Apart from the weekly responses, the main writing requirement is a research paper examining one or more of the course themes in more depth. Students must agree their topics with the instructor no later than week 4, submit an annotated
bibliography by week 7 and a first draft by week 12. The paper makes up 40% of the final grade. All citations must be in Chicago in-text (author/date) format. Study the citation guide on the library website and consult the Chicago Manual of Style 16th edition.

3.4. Occasional quizzes or other brief in-class assessment exercises will make up the remaining 5% of the grade. There may also be ungraded pop quizzes as quick exercises to check or consolidate learning.

How to get help with the course

If you have difficulty understanding any aspect of the course—the readings, concepts discussed in class, assignments, what is expected of you—please contact the instructor as soon as possible. A meeting during office hours or, if necessary, at another time will be most successful. Emails sent during normal working hours (9:00-17:00) will get the most rapid response. Other resources include the librarians and your fellow students. The library liaison is Anna Kozlowska (kozlowsa@dickinson.edu), who will be an essential resource for research papers.

A very useful resource for both research papers and for following contemporary developments on all aspects of religion and politics in MENA and beyond is the Diigo group managed by the instructor. Most of the content is freely searchable at https://groups.diigo.com/group/ed-webb-religion-politics-seminars. Those who set up a free Diigo account and join the group will get alerts whenever new content is added and can also add new content and comment on existing content. Information about how to use Diigo is at https://www.diigo.com/index

Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Dickinson values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded an equal opportunity to participate in all learning experiences. If you have (or think you may have) a learning difference or a disability—including a mental health, medical, or physical impairment—that would affect your educational experience in this class, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to schedule a meeting with Director Marni Jones. She will confidentially discuss your needs, review your documentation, and determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn more about available supports, go to www.dickinson.edu/ODS, email DisabilityServices@dickinson.edu, call (717) 245-1734, or go to ODS in 106 Dana Hall.

If you’ve already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please let the instructor know as soon as possible so that we can meet to review your Accommodation Letter and complete your “Blue Form” Implementation Plan.
Weekly themes and assigned readings

Week 1—studying religions in comparative perspective; definitions; religions in MENA


Ayoob chapter 1

Week 2—Islam

**Ruthven**, entire


Week 3—state regulation, suppression, and appropriation of religion


**Ayoob** chapters 3, 5


Week 4-5—religions and political identities; sectarianism and minorities

Week 4:


**Theodor Herzl** The Jewish State ("Introduction" and "The Jewish Question")


**Hashemi & Postel** Introduction
Week 5:

**Hashemi & Postel** chapters 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 14

Week 6-7—religious political parties and movements

Week 6:

**Ayoob** chapters 4, 6


Week 7:

Euben and Zaman 2009, Chapter 16, *Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah.*


**Hashemi & Postel** chapters 10, 12, 13


Week 8—religions and violence


Week 9—religions and the economy


Week 10—religions and gender


Euben and Zaman 2009, Chapter 12, Nadia Yassine


Week 11—religions and education


Week 12-13—religions and international relations

Week 12:


Ayoob chapter 7


Week 13: (inter-faith dialogue in international politics)

Abu-Nimer, Welty, and Khoury, chapters 2-6, pp. 7-206

Week 14—research paper roundtable

Students will briefly present the main arguments and findings of their research papers, having posted two-page summaries to the wiki no later than the Friday before the seminar meeting. Other seminar participants will offer constructive criticism.

Week 15—Review and conclusions

Final Papers Due Via Email to webbe@dickinson.edu no later than 5pm on Friday, May 11. This deadline is set by the Registrar: there is no flexibility.