

Political Science
[semester]
[course time]

Nate Grubman
[office]
[office hours]

Comparative Revolutions: The Arab Spring and Its Aftershocks

Overview: The Arab world was long considered uniquely fertile soil for dictatorship. That seemed to change in 2010–11 when a set of popular uprisings toppled the strongmen who had ruled Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen for decades and challenged the grip of many others. Observers at the time proclaimed that the protests would usher in a new wave of democratization, but that initial euphoria was dashed by authoritarian retrenchment and civil war in much of the region.

These disappointments should not be mistaken for a return to the status quo ante, however. Today, new protest movements challenge regimes in Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, and Sudan. A new regime is reinventing authoritarian rule in Egypt. A troubled but hopeful democratic transition proceeds in Tunisia. And multifaceted, international efforts to build new political orders continue to reshape Libya, Syria, and Yemen. The aftermath of the Arab Spring continues to raise questions about the past and future of dictatorship, democratization, and political contestation in the Arab world and beyond it.

In this course, we will use the close study of the Arab Spring and its aftershocks to address a set of questions central to comparative politics:

- *Why do popular uprisings sometimes emerge in seemingly stable dictatorships?*
- *Why do some people participate in these movements—while others stay home or even protests against them?*
- *Why do some popular uprisings succeed in toppling dictators, while others are crushed?*
- *Why is the ouster of a dictator by popular uprising sometimes followed by a transition to democracy?*
- *Why is the ouster of a dictator sometimes followed by a new dictatorship?*
- *Why is it sometimes followed by civil war?*
- *How can we use the uprisings of the past to shape our understanding of those of the future?*

Goals: In this course, each of you will answer one of these questions through a semester-long assignment that will take you through the steps social scientists commonly take in addressing big questions. This assignment will allow you to develop a writing sample that may be useful to you in future research or in applying for jobs in the future. More broadly, by learning how to build a theory based on a case, how to test it using other cases, and how to address alternative hypotheses, you will sharpen your ability to use the comparative method to understand big social questions.

Requirements:

- *Participation* (15 percent): Through studying this material together, we have the opportunity to each learn more than we might have on our own. This requires that each of us do what we can to make this an optimal learning environment for each other. At a minimum, this means preparing the course materials before class, coming to class ready to discuss them, listening to each other, and respecting each other.
- *Building a Theory* (3 pages, due [date], 20 percent): In the first paper, you are asked to propose a theoretical answer to a question regarding comparative revolutions and their aftermath. You may choose one of the questions outlined above or you can choose your own question. If you choose your own question, you must discuss it with me by week 4 at the latest. To provide some support for the plausibility of your theory, you will discuss a historical case. For example, you may address the question of why popular uprisings sometimes emerge by explaining why one emerged in Egypt in January 2011. Or you may answer the question of why the removal of a dictator sometimes leads to democratization by explaining why it did in the case of Tunisia in 2011.
- *Testing a Theory* (5 pages, due [date], 25 percent): In the second paper, you will begin to test your theory by discussing whether it can be generalized to explain another case. For example, if in your first paper you addressed the question of why uprisings emerge by discussing why one emerged in Egypt, you may now test your idea to see whether it also explains why one also emerged at around the same time in Bahrain. If your theory does not hold after consideration of this second case, you should propose a plausible alternative that does explain both cases.
- *Final Paper* (12 pages, due [date], 40 percent): In your final paper, you will test your theory using negative cases. For example, if you are explaining why uprisings emerge by considering why they emerged in Egypt and Bahrain, in the final paper you will also consider why they did not emerge in two other countries. You will also evaluate a plausible alternative hypothesis. We will discuss the requirements of these papers prior to their due dates but for now, the most important takeaway is that this is a writing-intensive course that should yield a quality paper that builds upon steady progress made throughout the semester.

Inclusivity: My goal is to create an inclusive environment in which students of all identities and backgrounds feel empowered to participate. Scholarship is a social enterprise that is enriched by mutual respect, a spirit of constructive criticism, and an embrace of diverse perspectives. If you have ideas for how I can better meet your needs or those of your classmates, please let me know by approaching me, sending me an email, or using the anonymous feedback form on the section website.

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity requires that you properly document the ways in which your work draws upon other works. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty have serious consequences. Please consult the college's policies on

academic misconduct: [link]. And if you are ever unsure about how to make sure that you are adhering to them, please reach out!

Schedule:

With the exception of week 1, please make sure to read the required reading before each class.

Week 1: Introduction

In this week, I will provide a very brief overview of the Arab Spring and the social science questions that have arisen from it. I will also provide an overview of the course

Read:

- “Part III: Arab Spring” in Scott Anderson, “Fractured Lands: How the Arab World Came Apart,” *New York Times* 10 August 2016.

Week 2: Durable Authoritarianism: The Arab World Before 2011

Why was dictatorship so widespread in the Arab world prior to 2011? This week we will take stock of the pervasiveness of dictatorship in the Arab world prior to 2011, as well as the explanations that have been offered to account for it.

Read:

- Larry Diamond, “Why Are There No Arab Democracies?” *Journal of Democracy* 21 (January 2010): 93–104.
- Ellen Lust, “Missing the Third Wave: Islam, Institutions, and Democracy in the Middle East” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 46 (April 2011): 163–190.

Recommended Readings:

- Lisa Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak’s Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 48–63.
- Abdellah Hammoudi, *Master and Disciple: The Cultural Foundations of Moroccan Authoritarianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 10–32.
- Beatrice Hibou, *The Force of Obedience: The Political Economy of Repression in Tunisia* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2011), 81–110.
- Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1–34.

Week 3: Uprisings: Egypt and Tunisia Rise Up

Why did uprisings break out in Egypt and Tunisia in late 2010 and early 2011? In this week we will consider why unrest emerged in Egypt and Tunisia before it emerged in the rest of the region.

Read:

- Amin Allal, “Becoming Revolutionary in Tunisia, 2007–2011” in Joel Beinin and Frederic Vairel, eds, *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, 2nd ed (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).
- David Kirkpatrick, *Into the Hands of the Soldiers: Freedom and Chaos in Egypt and the Middle East* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 24–52.

Recommended Films:

- Murad Ben Cheikh, *There Is No Fear After Today*
- Fredrik Stanton, *Uprising*
- Frontline, *Revolution in Cairo*

Week 4: Uprisings: Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Bahrain

Why did uprisings break out in Syria and Yemen? In this week, we will consider why uprisings emerged in several of the region’s most brutally repressive regimes.

Read:

- Rania Abouzeid, *Life, Loss, and Hope in Wartime Syria* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018), 1–94.

Watch (Required):

- Sara Ishaq, *Karama Has No Walls*

Due: Paper 1: Build a Theory from a Case

Week 5: Protesters and Stay-at-Homers

Why did some people protest and other stay at home? Why were some people the first to the street and others joined later? In this lesson, we will use survey data to understand the dynamics of protest in Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia.

Read:

- Mark Beissinger, Amaney Jamal, and Kevin Mazur, “Explaining Divergent Revolutionary Coalitions: Regime Strategies and the Structuring of Participation in the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions,” *Comparative Politics* 48 (1): 1–24.
- Adria Lawrence, “Repression and Activism Among the Arab’s Spring’s First Movers: Evidence from Morocco’s February 20th Movement,” *British Journal of Political Science* 47 (3, 2017): 699–718.

Recommended:

- Michael Hoffman and Amaney Jamal, “Religion in the Arab Spring: Between Two Competing Narratives,” *Journal of Politics* 76 (May 2014): 593–606.

Week 6: A Second Wave?

This week, we will talk about the second wave of the Arab uprisings, which began in Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, and Sudan in 2018 and 2019.

Read: TO BE DETERMINED

Week 7: Outcomes of Uprisings

Why did the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings succeed in removing longstanding dictators, while the Bahraini and Syrian ones failed?

Read:

- Holger Albrecht and Dorothy Ohl, “Exit, Resistance, Loyalty: Military Behavior during Unrest in Authoritarian Regimes,” *Perspectives on Politics* 14 (March 2016): 38–52.
- Wendy Pearlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017), 97–142.

Week 8: Democratic Transition

Why did Tunisia succeed in establishing regular elections and Egypt revert to authoritarianism?

Read:

- Shadi Hamid, *Temptations of Power: Islamists & Illiberal Democracy in a New Arab World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 167–89.
- Tarek Masoud, *Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 155–82.
- Robert Worth, *A Rage for Order: The Middle East in Turmoil* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016), 196–222.

Watch (Required):

- Jehane Noujaim, *The Square*

Recommended:

- Elizabeth R. Nugent, “The Psychology of Repression and Polarization in Authoritarian Regimes,” *World Politics* (Forthcoming).

Due: Paper 2: Testing a Theory Using Multiple Cases

Week 9: Diffusion

Why do protests seem to come in waves? The protest wave that rocked the Arab world in 2011 was not the first time in history in which a series of protests broke out in different countries at the same time. In this lesson, we will consider why protests—in 1848, 1968, 1989, and 2011—often seem to come in waves.

Read:

- David Patel, Valerie Bunce, and Sharon Wolchik, “Diffusion and Demonstration” in Marc Lynch, ed, *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 57–75.

Week 10: International Pressures

What have been the international politics surrounding the Arab Spring? What role did the US, EU, and GCC play? This week, we will consider the role played by the US and EU in encouraging (or discouraging) protests and transitions to democracy. We will also consider the role of Gulf Monarchies in the organization of counterrevolutions.

Read:

- David Kirkpatrick, *Into the Hands of the Soldiers: Freedom and Chaos in Egypt and the Middle East* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 206–244.
- Marc Lynch, *The New Arab Wars* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), 1–46.

Week 11: Social Media

Did social media facilitate protests but complicate transitions? In this lesson, we will consider the ways in which the emergence of new media allowed protesters to organize in repressive environments. We will also consider whether this same technology ultimately fostered the type of polarization and disinformation that made it difficult to transition to democracy.

Read:

- Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, “Upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia: The Role of Digital Media,” *Journal of Democracy* 22 (July 2011): 35–48.
- Marc Lynch, Dean Freelon, and Sean Aday, “Online clustering, fear and uncertainty in Egypt’s transition,” *Democratization* 24 (6, 2017): 1159–77.
- Lisa Wedeen, *Authoritarian Apprehensions: Ideology, Judgment, and Mourning in Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 77–106.

Recommended:

- Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People Is Greater Than the People in Power* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2012), 58–187.

Week 12: Neoliberal Reform

How did the region’s changing political economy contribute to the emergence of unrest? In this week, we will discuss the ways that authoritarian regimes in the region reneged on social contracts in the years prior to the uprisings—and the social movements that seemed to emerge as a result.

Read:

- Lisa Anderson, “Bread, Dignity, and Social Justice: Populism in the Arab World,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 44 (4): 478–90.

- Asef Bayat, “Plebeians of the Arab Spring,” *Current Anthropology* 56 (October 2015): 33–43.
- Joel Beinin, *Workers and Thieves: Labor Movements and Popular Uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 97–135.

Week 13: Negative Cases

What can we learn from the places where uprisings did not break out or did not succeed? This week we will discuss the comparative method and the way it has been used to derive lessons explaining uprisings and democratization in the Arab world.

Read:

- Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, “Why the Modest Harvest?” *Journal of Democracy* 24 (October 2013): 29–44.
- Eva Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring,” *Comparative Politics* 44 (January 2012): 127–149.
- Gregory Gause and Sean Yom, “Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On,” *Journal of Democracy* 23 (October 2012): 74–88.

Week 14: Arab Spring II?

In this lesson, we will consider the outcomes of the second wave of uprisings in Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, and Sudan.

Read:

- TO BE DETERMINED

Due: Final Paper