

# International Relations of the Middle East and North Africa

Instructor: Prof. Raffaella A. Del Sarto, Joint Mediterranean Chair

Monday, 17:00-19:00

## Course description

The aim of this seminar is to study the international relations and politics of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) by applying concepts and theories from International Relations scholarship. While the study of the international relations of the MENA was traditionally dominated by realist and neo-realist approaches, a rather stark divide used to mark the relationship between IR and Middle East studies until recently — perhaps surprisingly so. Indeed, questions of regional security, war and peace, alliances, foreign interventions, and the role of non-state actors (to name but a few) are central issues in both IR and the study of Middle East politics. More recent scholarship has not only applied a wide range of different approaches to study specific phenomena in the Middle East. It has also highlighted the important contributions – and potential contributions – that one field of study can make to the respective other. While IR concepts and theories may thus help explain events and developments in the Middle East and North Africa, the region also provides crucial case studies for a critical engagement with, and development of, IR concepts and theories.

Starting with an exploration of the reasons why IR and Middle East studies were disconnected from each other for quite some time, the seminar will focus on the usefulness of different approaches in IR to understand and explain political characteristics and developments in the MENA region. It will discuss questions of regional order, alliance formation, interests and identity politics, and domestic (and economic) determinants of foreign policy from different theoretical perspectives while also paying attention to the region's relationship with the US and Europe.

## Learning objectives and outcomes

Researchers who have successfully completed this seminar should be able to:

- Understand the major contributions of IR theory to the study of political developments in the Middle East and North Africa

- Analyze political developments in the MENA through different theoretical and conceptual lenses
- Identify the major empirical questions in the study of the international politics of the Middle East and North Africa
- Identify the major debates and developments in the specialized literature
- Write well-structured essays / response papers on pertinent questions in the study of MENA's international relations by employing conceptual insights from IR

### **Format and requirements**

Researchers are expected to do the assigned reading prior to each session and come prepared to class. Active participation in class discussions is a requirement. Researchers will introduce and guide the seminar debates in sessions 3-10. In addition, researchers taking the seminar as elective are required to prepare 2 response papers / analytical essays (between 600 to 1,200 words, notes and bibliography included) over the course of the seminar. To receive credit for this seminar, researchers need to pass these three requirements (active participation, introducing and guiding seminar debates, 2 response papers / analytical essays).

The seminar is open to all researchers but some familiarity with the history and politics of the Middle East is expected. (A seminar on the history and politics of the Middle East is offered in the first term).