Kurdish Politics:
Violence, Identity, and Democracy
(CPO 4400)

University of Central Florida
Spring 2018

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TTh 4:30 – 5:45 PM
BIO O209
3 credit hours

Office Hours @ HPH 302F
TThu noon–13:30 and 16-16:30

I. Description and Goals

This unique course offers a comprehensive introduction to Kurdish politics, one of the most intractable issues in contemporary world. The Kurdish people are one of the largest ethnic groups in the Middle East forming large minorities in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. They are also one of the largest ethnic groups without a state of their own in the world. While they have faced various forms of discrimination and violence since the early 20th century, Kurdish political movements have achieved significant gains since the late 20th century. They have established self-rule in Iraq, and more recently in Syria, and currently play crucial roles in internationalized civil wars in these two countries. Kurdish nationalism is also a major political movement in Turkey. The course combines a chronologic approach with a thematic one and has three objectives:

- Develop students' ability to understand the relationship between social identity, democratic rule, and violence in a comparative perspective
- Help students follow current Kurdish affairs in the Middle East and politics through a more critical and engaging lens.
- Provide students with an enriched and sophisticated understanding of politics of a region and people central to American foreign policy

On completing this course students will be able to:

- Identify different characteristics and aspects of Kurdish and Middle Eastern politics.
- Evaluate the causes and dynamics of political violence in a comparative perspective.
- Analyze the relevance of Kurdish politics for the US.

A Note about Dr. T: Güneş Murat Tezcür (PhD. University of Michigan, 2005) has joined UCF in 2015. He is the inaugural holder of the Jalal Talabani Kurdish Political Studies, the first and only such academic position dedicated to the study of Kurdish issues in the United States. He also directs the Kurdish Political Studies Program at UCF, the first and only academic unit dedicated to the study of Kurdish issues in the United States. His scholarship exploring political violence, democratization, and identity politics have appeared in many leading scholarly outlets. He has also traveled widely for research purposes in the region and gives talks about Middle East politics in many different avenues across the globe.

II. Requirements

The requirements for this course are:

1) 4%: Map Exercise
2) 36%: Four scheduled short exams (9 % each)
3) 10 % Short paper
4) 20%: Debate paper
5) 20 % Final Exam
6) 10%: Class participation

1) Short Exams: There are four of these exams that are composed of multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blanks, and short answer questions. They are not cumulative. Questions come from both the lectures and required readings. See the table below for the exam dates.

2) Map Exercise: Kurdistan is not a sovereign country lacking internationally recognized borders. For this reason, many different maps have been produced to depict the Kurdish political and demographic geography since the early 20th century. Identify a historical and contemporary map that purports to show Kurds/Kurdistan from online or printed sources. Write a paragraph (300-500 words) discussing its credibility and how this map informs/obstructs your understanding of the Kurdish geography. The map and discussion will be electronically submitted in WORD format via webcourses@UCF by 2:30 pm on **January 23**. Each student will then present her/his map in class on the same day.

3) Short Paper: Students will be asked to write a short paper (between 800 and 1,000 words) by answering the question below. The reports will be electronically submitted in WORD format via webcourses@UCF by 5 pm on **February 5.**

What is the Kurdish question?

As a rule, students should rely on sources that can legitimately claim some expertise on Kurdish politics. Sources that are usually considered legitimate include academic scholarship, well-established media outlets, information centers (e.g. NGOs), and primary documents. A paper should refer to **at least five such sources**.

4) Debate Paper: Each student will also write a research paper on one of the topics listed at the end of this syllabus. Detailed information about the papers is provided in Section VI (pp. 9-10).

5) Final Exam: The final exam will cover all the assigned material in this course. It will take place at class during the UCF assigned time and date: 4-5:30 pm on April 26.

6) Participation: Class participation grade will reflect physical attendance as well as contribution to class discussions. Bonus point opportunities will be offered throughout the semester.

Assignment	Weight (in %)	Date
Map Exercise	4	Jan 23
Short Exam I	9	Jan 25
Short Paper	10	Feb 5
Short Exam II	9	Feb 22
Short Exam III	9	March 22
Debate paper	20	April 9
Short Exam IV	9	April 19
Participation	10	Entire semester
Final Exam	20	April 26

Grade and Make-Up Policy

Due dates are absolutely non-negotiable. Students who fail to complete Map Exercise, Short Paper, and Debate Paper assignments on time automatically receive **0 points for the assignment**. Students who miss exams are given make-ups only if they are able to provide **proper documentation** for their unforeseen emergencies and subject to approval. Make-ups must be taken only within four days of the original short exam date. No more than one make-up for each student is given throughout the semester.

The following grade scale is applicable in this class: A: 100-94, A-: 93-90, B+: 89-87, B: 86-84, B-: 83-80, C+: 79-77, C: 76-74, C-: 73-70, D+: 69-67, D: 66-60, F: 59-0. Grades are rounded to the nearest integer (e.g., 79.4=79, 79.6=80).

III. Academic Honesty

As reflected in the UCF creed, integrity and scholarship are core values that should guide our conduct and decisions as members of the UCF community. Plagiarism and cheating contradict these values, and so are very serious academic offenses. UCF's Golden Rule defines plagiarism as follows: "**whereby another's work is used or appropriated without any indication of the source, thereby attempting to convey the impression that such work is the student's own.**"

All acts of academic dishonesty including plagiarism, cheating, submitting false documents, and copying another student's work will be penalized by **an F for the course** without any

exception and leniency. If you are not sure what constitutes as academic dishonesty while doing your research, you should consult me at once.

IV. Accessibility

The UCF is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. This syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must contact the professor at the beginning of the semester to discuss needed accommodations. No accommodations will be provided until the student has met with the professor to request accommodations. Students who need accommodations must be registered with Student Disability Services, Student Resource Center Room 132, phone (407) 823-2371, TTY/TDD only phone (407) 823-2116, before requesting accommodations from Dr. T.

V. Course Schedule & Readings

The following textbook is used in this class. All other required (not but suggested books) readings will be made available at webcourses@UCF. Additional news reports about contemporary events will be made available during the semester.

David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds.* 3rd ed. London: I. B. Tauris, 2004 (Hereafter MHK).

Week I (January 9 & 11)

- An Introduction to Kurds and Kurdistan: Society, Culture, History, and Politics

McDowall, *MHK*, Introduction & Book I.

Suggested Book:

Michael Eppel, *A People without a State: The Kurds From the Rise of Islam to the Dawn of Nationalism* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2016).

Week II (January 16 & January 18)

- Ethnic Conflict & Nationalism in Comparative Perspective

Gidon A. G. Gottlieb, "Nations without States," *Foreign Affairs* (May 1994): 100-12.
Andreas Wimmer, "Who Owns the State? Understanding Ethnic Conflict in Post-Colonial Societies," *Nations and Nationalism* 3 (December 1997): 631-66.

Suggested Book:

Andreas Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict: Shadows of Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Week III (January 23 & 25)

- From Empires to Nation-States: The Predicament of Kurdish Minorities

McDowall, *MHK*, Book II.
Wendelmoet Hamelink and Hanifi Barış, "Dengbêjs on Borderlands: Borders and the State as Seen Through the Eyes of Kurdish Singer-Poets," *Kurdish Studies* 2 (2014): 34-60.

Short Exam I on January 26.

Suggested Books:

Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 2002).
Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004).
Senem Aslan, *Nation Building in Turkey and Morocco* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Week IV (January 30 & February 1)

- The Rise of Kurdish Nationalism: The Republic of Mahabad of 1946

Archie Roosevelt Jr, "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad," The Middle East Journal 1 (1947): 247-69.
McDowall, MHK chapter. 11.

Attend Tezcür Lecture at UCF Art Gallery at 4:30 pm on January 30
http://events.ucf.edu/event/612140/the-orient-in-the-west-and-beyond-reflections-on-contemporary-refugee-politics/

Suggested Book:

William Eagleton, *The Kurdish Republic of 1946* (London: Oxford UP, 1963).

Week V (February 6 & 8)

- From Tribal Resistance to Popular Mobilization: The Barzani Revolt in Iraq (1961-1975)

McDowall, *MHK,* chapters, 14-6.

Short Paper due February 5.
Watching *Turtles Can Fly* (*Kûsî Jî Dikarin Bifirin*)

Suggested Book:

Dana Adams Schmidt, *Journey among Brave Men* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1964).

Week VI (February 13 & 15)

- From Contentious Mobilization to Violent Insurgency: The Emergence and Rise of the PKK in Turkey

McDowall, *MHK,* chapters 19-20.
Hamit Bozarslan, "Kurds and the Turkish State," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey,* ed. Reşat Kasaba, Vol 4. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 333-56.
Güneş Murat Tezcür, "Violence and Nationalist Mobilization: The Onset of the Kurdish Insurgency in Turkey," *Nationalities Papers* 43 (2015): 248-66.

Suggested Books:

David Romano *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006).
Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

Week VII (February 20 & 22)

- From Uncitizen to *Rojava* Revolution: The Kurdish Revival in Syria

Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2009), chps 2-3.
Michael Knapp and Joost Jongerden, "Communal Democracy: The Social Contract and Confederalism in Rojava," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 10 (2016): 87-109.

Watching *Rojava: Syria's Secret Revolution*.
Short Exam II on February 22.

Suggested Book:

Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2009)

Week VIII (February 27 & March 1)

- From Republic to Republic: The Kurdish "Silence" in Iran

McDowall, *MHK*, chapters 12 and 13.

Hashem Ahmadzadeh and Gareth Stansfield, "The Political, Cultural, and Military Re-Awakening of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement," *Middle East Journal* 64 (2010): 11-27.

Suggested Book:

Abbas Vali, *Kurds and the State in Iran: The Making of Kurdish Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

Week IX (March 6 & 8)

- Nonviolent Contentious Political Participation: Kurdish Parliamentary Politics in Turkey

Nicole F. Watts, "Activists in Office: Pro-Kurdish Contentious Politics in Turkey," *Ethnopolitics* 5 (2006): 125-44.

Cuma Çiçek, "Kurdish Identity and Political Islam under AKP Rule," *Research and Policy on Turkey* 1 (2016): 147-63.

Suggested Books:

Nicole F. Watts, *Activists in Office: Kurdish Politics and Protest in Turkey* (Seattle: Washington UP, 2010).

Cuma Çiçek, *The Kurds of Turkey: National, Religious and Economic Identities*)New York: I. B. Tauris, 2016).

Week X (March 20 & 22)

- Mass Murder and Genocide: The Anfal campaign

David McDowall, *MHK,* chapters 16-7.

Choman Hardi, *Gendered Experiences of Genocide: Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq* (New York: Routledge, 2011), chp. 6.

Short Exam III on March 22.

Suggested Books:

Joost R. Hiltermann, *A Poisonous Affair: America, Iraq, and the Gassing of Halabja* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007).

Choman Hardi, *Gendered Experiences of Genocide: Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

Week XI (March 27 & 29)

- The Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq: A Rentier State without Statehood

McDowall, *MHK*, chapter 18.

Gareth Stansfield, "The Unraveling of the post-First World War State System? The Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the Transformation of the Middle East," *International Affairs* 89 (2013): 259-82.

Erlend Paasche, "The Role of Corruption in Reintegration: Experiences of Iraqi Kurds upon Return from Europe," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42 (2016): 1076-93.

Suggested Books:

Gareth Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

Denise Natali, *Kurdish Quasi-State: Development and Dependency in Post-Gulf War Iraq* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2010).

Week XII (April 3 & 5)

- Politics of Religion: Kurdish Nationalism, Jihadism, and the Yazidi Genocide

Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Ranj Alaaldin, "The Kurds of ISIS: Why Some Join the Terrorist Group," *Foreign Affairs Online*, August 8, 2016.

Michael Leezenberg, "Religion among the Kurds: Between Naqshbandi Sufism and IS Salafism," in *The Kurdish Question Revisited.* Eds. Gareth Stansfield and Mohammed Shareef (London: Hurst, 2017).

Suggested Books:

Cathy Otten, *With Ash on their Faces: Yezidi Women and the Islamic State* (New York: OR Books, 2017).

Nadia Murad, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight against the Islamic State* (New York: Tim Duggan Book, 2017).

Week XIII (April 10 & 12)

- Politics of Gender: Kurdish Women Fighters and Activists

Nerina Weiss, "Falling from Grace: Gender Norms and Gender Strategies in Eastern Turkey," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 42 (2010): 55-76.

Güneş Murat Tezcür, "Kurdish Women Fighters: A Path of Patriarchy?," Paper presented at the London School of Economics, UCF, February 2017.

Watching short clips on Kurdish women fighters.
Debate Papers due April 9.

Suggested Book:

Shahrzad Mojab, editor. *Women of a Non-State Nation: The Kurds* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2001).

Week XIV (April 17 & 19)

- Class and Identity in Comparative Perspective: African Americans and Kurds:

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. 4th ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009, chps. 1 & 4.

Cenk Saraçoğlu, "The Changing Image of the Kurds in Turkish Cities: Middle-Class Perceptions of Kurdish Migrants in Izmir," *Patterns of Prejudice* 44 (2010): 239-60.

Short Exam IV on April 20.
Final Exam on April 26.

Suggested Book:

Cenk Saraçoğlu, *Kurds of Modern Turkey: Migration, Neoliberalism and Exclusion in Turkish Society* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010).

VI. Debate Papers

Students are required to write a debate paper by choosing one of the topics listed below. The papers should be electronically submitted in WORD format via webcourses@UCF by 5 pm on **April 9**. Turnitin.com, an automated system which instructors can use to quickly and easily compare each student's assignment with billions of web sites, as well as an enormous database of student papers that grows with each submission, will process papers. Late submissions are not accepted under any condition.

Papers should be **conceptual** and **analytical** (rather than purely descriptive) meaning they identify competing/opposing perspectives, demonstrate familiarity with the differences and similarities between rival points of view, and offer a compelling argument. They should also discuss other plausible arguments and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses in a fair manner.

Papers are evaluated according to five criteria: a) the quality and scope of research, b) the quality of writing and organization, c) the accuracy of knowledge, d) the coherence and consistency of argumentation, and e) grammar, style and format. All conventional citation styles are acceptable. Students are most welcome to consult me whenever they need guidance and suggestions.

UCF Library's website provides access to numerous search engines that will enable students to locate relevant sources in a time efficient manner. Search engines such as LexisNexis, Google Scholar, JSTOR, WorldCat, and Web of Science are valuable tools for

doing research. Electronic sources edited by anonymous users are not accepted as reliable sources. Papers should not rely on Wikipedia entries. Debate papers should be **around 2,000** including a **separate bibliography that should include at least 8 reliable sources.**

Paper Topics

1. Kurdish Independence in Iraq

The Kurdish resistance against central rule in Iraq has a long history. After the Saddam's failed invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the collapse of his regime following the US invasion in 2003, the Kurdish regions of Iraq have become de facto independent. The Kurdish government in Iraq organized an independence referendum in September 2017. An overwhelming majority of participants voted yes. However, internal Kurdish divisions and lack of international support ultimately led to a swift Iraqi victory that resulted in the loss of oil-rich Kirkuk region and other disputed territories. Write a paper assessing the feasibility of Kurdish independence. What factors prevent/facilitate it?

2. Democratization and the Kurdish Question in Turkey

The PKK, a violent Kurdish insurgency, has been fighting against the Turkish state since 1984. Turkey has been unable to defeat the PKK militarily, while the PKK has failed to achieve its strategic goals of liberated areas. A peace process, initiated in early 2013, failed and violence returned with greater intensity in summer 2015. Write a paper assessing the prospects for a peaceful resolution of this armed conflict. Relatedly, what institutional designs (power-sharing, democratic autonomy, federalism, etc.) could best address the demands of the opposing sides and ensure the sustainability of peace?

3. Rojava: The Kurdish Self-Rule in Syria

Taking advantage of the dismantling of the central state, The PYD, affiliated with the PKK, has declared three autonomous regions in northern Syria across the Turkey border in 2012. Two of these regions came under intense attacks by the self-declared Islamic State (IS) that were ultimately defeated by the PYD armed wing, the YPG and heavy US air strikes. The PYD aims to have its autonomous regions linked to each other, while Turkey strongly opposes this goal. Write a paper assessing the prospects of Kurdish self-rule in Syria. In particular, is it in the strategic interests of the US to support Kurdish self-rule?

4. Kurds of Iran

Iran has a large minority of Kurds characterized by sectarian and linguistic divisions. Kurdish demand for autonomy in Iran fueled by widespread socioeconomic and political grievances has been a potent force throughout the 20th century. At the same time, Kurdish political activism in the Islamic Republic have been less mobilized and visible than other countries. Write a paper assessing the saliency of the Kurdish question in Iran. What factors contribute to relative political silence among the Kurds in Iran?