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

University of Central Florida
School of Politics, Security, and International Affairs
Fall 2020

Professor Güneş Murat Tezcür (Dr. T)
Jalal Talabani Endowed Chair and Professor
Teaching Assistant Sara Belligoni

MW 9:30 – 10:20 AM (with virtual/online F)
MSB 0260
3 credit hours

Office Hours @ HPH 302F
MW 10:35 am–12:05 pm
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I. Description and Goals

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. UCF is home to the nation's first and only academic entity dedicated to the study of Kurdish issues. Originally developed as a part of this program, this unique course offers a comprehensive introduction to Kurdish politics, one of the most intractable issues in the contemporary world. It 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 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.

A Note about Sara: Sara is a PhD Candidate in Security Studies at UCF. She was born and raised in Rome, Italy, where she earned my BA in Political Science for Cooperation and Development and MA cum laude in International Relations both at Università degli Studi Roma Tre. She first moved to the US in 2015 and obtained a Certificate in Global Affairs at NYU. She joined UCF in 2018. Her research focuses on the role of institutions when responding to complex emergencies.

II. Requirements

All assignments are to be completed or submitted via webcourses@UCF.

Assignment	Weight (in %)	Date
Map Exercise	10	August 31
Short Exam I	10	September 11
Discussion Board I	5	September 18
Short Question I	5	September 30
Short Exam II	10	October 9
Discussion Board II	5	October 16
Short Question II	5	October 21
Short Exam III	10	November 6
Discussion Board III	5	November 18
Short Question III	5	November 23
Discussion Board IV	5	December 4
Short Exam IV	10	December 4
Debate paper	20	December 7

*Note that total is 105% because you are required to contribute to three out of four discussion boards. There will be several extra credit opportunities throughout the semester.

- 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 or contemporary map that purports to show Kurds/Kurdistan from online or printed sources. Write a paragraph (around 300 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 11:59 pm on Monday, August 31. Each student will then present her/his map in class on a Friday session starting on September 4 (submission worth 5%, presentation worth 5%).

- Four short exams are composed of multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blanks, and short answers. They are not cumulative. Questions come from both the lectures and required readings. All exams are due 11:59 pm on Fridays. See the table above for specific dates.

- Three Short questions are based on specific topics we cover throughout the semester. Each response (around 250 words) is worth 5 percent of your grade.

- 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, due December 7, is provided in Section VII at the end of this syllabus.

- Discussion Boards: There are four online discussion boards. Each student is expected to contribute to three of these boards. Contributions will involve reflections informed by two readings for each topic as well as reactions to other student comments. Each contribution is worth 5% of the final grade.

Students must notify their instructor in advance if they intend to miss class for a *religious observance*. For more information, see the UCF policy.

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. Statement Regarding COVID-19

To protect members of our community, everyone is required to wear a facial covering inside all common spaces including classrooms. Students who choose not to wear facial coverings will be asked to leave the classroom by the instructor. If they refuse to leave the classroom or put on a facial covering, they may be considered disruptive (please see the Golden Rule for student behavior expectations). Faculty have the right to cancel class if the safety and well-being of class members are in jeopardy. Students will be responsible for the material that would have been covered in class as provided by the instructor.

Depending on the course of the pandemic during the semester, the university may make changes to the way classes are offered. If that happens, please look for announcements or messages in Webcourses@UCF or Knights email about changes specific to this course.

COVID-19 and Illness Notification – Students who believe they may have a COVID-19 diagnosis should contact UCF Student Health Services (407-823-2509) so proper contact tracing procedures can take place.

Students should not come to campus if they are ill, are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, have tested positive for COVID, or if anyone living in their residence has tested positive or is sick with COVID-19 symptoms. See CDC guidance for COVID-19 symptoms.

Students should contact their instructor(s) as soon as possible if they miss class for any illness reason to discuss reasonable adjustments that might need to be made. When possible, students should contact their instructor(s) before missing class.

In Case of Faculty Illness – If the instructor falls ill during the semester, there may be changes to this course, including having a backup instructor take over the course. Please look for announcements or mail in Webcourses@UCF or Knights email for any alterations to this course.

Course Accessibility and Disability COVID-19 Supplemental Statement – Accommodations may need to be added or adjusted should this course shift from an on-campus to a remote format. Students with disabilities should speak with their instructor and should contact sas@ucf.edu to discuss specific accommodations for this or other courses.

IV. 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 academic dishonesty while doing your research, you should consult me at once.

V. 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.

VI. Course Schedule & Readings

The following textbook is used in this class in addition to the other readings listed under each week. Additional Sources are not required but will be helpful for discussion boards and debate papers. News reports about contemporary events will be made available during the semester. There may be some changes in required readings throughout the semester.

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

Week I (August 24-28)

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

McDowall, *MHK*, Introduction & Book I (skim chps. 2-3 & 5, read chps. 1, 4 & 6 closely).

Additional Sources:

Michael Eppel. *A People without a State: The Kurds From the Rise of Islam to the Dawn of Nationalism*. University of Texas Press, 2016.
Gareth Stansfield and Mohammed Shareef. *The Kurdish Question Revisited*. Hurst, 2017.
Council on Foreign Relations - The Time of the Kurds

Week II (August 31- September 4)

- *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.

Additional Sources:

Andreas Wimmer. *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict: Shadows of Modernity*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
Güneş Murat Tezcür and Mehmet Gurses. "Ethnic exclusion and mobilization: the Kurdish conflict in Turkey." *Comparative Politics* 49 (2017): 213-234.

Week III (September 7 - 11)

- *From Empires to Nation-States: The Kurdish Predicament*

McDowall, *MHK*, Book II (chps. 7-10).
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.

Additional Sources:

Martin Van Bruinessen. *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*. Zed Books, 2002.
Hakan Özoğlu. *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries*. SUNY Press, 2004.
Senem Aslan. *Nation Building in Turkey and Morocco.* Cambridge University Press, 2014.
Michael Gunter. "The Kurdish question in perspective." World Affairs 166 (2004): 197-205.
Kazım Öz's *Zer* (2017).
Güneş Murat Tezcür. "A century of the Kurdish question." Ethnopolitics 18 (2019): 1-12.

Week IV (September 14 - 18)

- *The Rise of Kurdish Nationalism: The Kurdish Revolts and a Republic*

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

Additional Sources:

William Eagleton, *The Kurdish Republic of 1946*. Oxford UP, 1963.

Week V (September 21 - 25)

- *From Tribal Resistance to Popular Mobilization: The Kurds in Iraq*

McDowall, *MHK,* chapters 14-16.

Additional Sources:

Dana Adams Schmidt. *Journey among Brave Men*. Little, Brown, and Co., 1964.
Turtles Can Fly (*Kûsî Jî Dikarin Bifirin*)
The Kurdistan Memory Programme

Week VI (September 28 - October 2)

- *From Contentious Mobilization to Violent Insurgency: 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. Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 333-56.

Additional Sources:

David Romano. *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity*. Cambridge UP, 2006.
Aliza Marcus. *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*. New York University Press, 2009.
Güneş Murat Tezcür, "Violence and nationalist mobilization: The onset of the Kurdish insurgency in Turkey." *Nationalities Papers* 43 (2015): 248-66.
Güneş Murat Tezcür, "Ordinary people, extraordinary risks: Participation in an ethnic rebellion." *American Political Science Review* 110 (2016): 247-264.

Week VII (October 5 - 9)

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

Michiel Leezenberg. "The ambiguities of democratic autonomy: the Kurdish movement in Turkey and Rojava." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16 (2016): 671-6
Bülent Küçük and Ceren Özselçuk. "The Rojava experience: possibilities and challenges of building a democratic life." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115 (2016): 184-196.
Rojava: Syria's Secret Revolution.

Additional Sources:

Jordi Tejel. *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society*. Routledge, 2009.
Harriet Allsopp and Wladimir van Wilgenburg. *The Kurds of Northern Syria*. IB Tauris, 2019.
Nazan Üstündağ. "Self-defense as a revolutionary practice in Rojava, or how to unmake the state." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115 (2016): 197-210.

Week VIII (October 12 - 16)

- *All Quiet on the Eastern Front? The Kurds in Iran*

McDowall, *MHK*, chapters 12 and 13.
Güneş Murat Tezcür, and Peyman Asadzade. "Ethnic nationalism versus religious loyalty: The case of Kurds in Iran." *Nations and Nationalism* 25, no. 2 (2019): 652-672.
Kamal Soleimani and Ahmad Mohammadpour. "The securitisation of life: Eastern Kurdistan under the rule of a Perso-Shi'i state." *Third World Quarterly* 41 (2020): 663-682

Additional Sources:

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

Olivier Grojean. "Identities and Ethnic Hierarchy: The Kurdish Question in Iran since 1979" in *The Kurdish Question Revisited*. Eds. Gareth Stansfield and Mohammed Shareef. Hurst, 2017.

Shahram Akbarzadeh, Zahid Shahab Ahmed, Costas Laoutides, and William Gourlay. "The Kurds in Iran: balancing national and ethnic identity in a securitised environment." *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 6 (2019): 1145-1162

Abbas Vali. *Forgotten Years of Kurdish Nationalism in Iran.* Palgrave, 2020.

Week IX (October 19 - 23)

- *Nonviolent Contentious Kurdish Politics in Turkey*

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

Kelda Jamison, "Hefty dictionaries in incomprehensible tongues: commensurating code and language community in Turkey." *Anthropological Quarterly* 89 (2016): 31-62.

Additional Sources:

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

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

Serra Hakyemez, "Margins of the Archive: Torture, Heroism, and the Ordinary Prison No. 5 in Turkey." *Anthropological Quarterly* 90 (2017): 107-38.

Zeki Sarigil and Ekrem Karakoc. "Inter-ethnic (in) tolerance between Turks and Kurds: implications for Turkish democratisation." *South European society and politics* 22 (2017): 197-216.

Deniz Yonucu. "The absent present law: An ethnographic study of legal violence in Turkey." *Social & Legal Studies* 27 (2018): 716-733.

Week X (October 26 - 30)

- *Mass Murder and Genocide: From Anfal to Sinjar*

McDowall, *MHK,* chapter 17.

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

Payam Akhavan, Sareta Ashraph, Barzan Barzani, and David Matyas. "What Justice for the Yazidi Genocide?: Voices from Below." *Human Rights Quarterly* 42 (2020): 1-47.

Al-Jazeera Documentary on the Anfal

Additional Sources:

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

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

Week XI (November 2 - 6)

- *The KRG: 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.

Morgan L. Kaplan. "Foreign support, miscalculation, and conflict escalation: Iraqi Kurdish self-determination in perspective." *Ethnopolitics* 18 (2019): 29-45.

Additional Sources:

Gareth Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy*. Routledge, 2003.

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

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.

Week XII (November 9 - 13)

- *Politics of Religion: Islam and Minorities*

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

Gülay Türkmen. "Negotiating symbolic boundaries in conflict resolution: religion and ethnicity in Turkey's Kurdish conflict." *Qualitative Sociology* 41 (2018): 569-591.

Additional Sources:

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

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

Edith Szanto. "Zoroaster was a Kurd!": Neo-Zoroastrianism among the Iraqi Kurds." *Iran and the Caucasus* 22 (2018): 96-110

Güneş Murat Tezcür. *Kurds and Yezidis in the Middle East: Shifting Identities, Borders, and the Experience of Minority Communities*. I.B. Tauris, 2021.

Week XIII (November 16 - 20)

- *Politics of Gender: Kurdish Women Fighters and Activists*

Bahar Şimşek Joost Jongerden. "Gender revolution in Rojava: The voices beyond tabloid geopolitics." *Geopolitics* (2018): 1-23.

Güneş Murat Tezcür. "A path out of patriarchy? Political agency and social identity of women fighters." *Perspectives on Politics* (2019): 1-18.

Additional Sources:

Shahrzad Mojab, ed. *Women of a Non-State Nation: The Kurds*. Mazda Publishers, 2001.

Ozlem Goner. "A collective memory in production: gender politics of 1938 in Turkey." *Dialectical Anthropology* 43 (2019): 207-231.

Handan Çağlayan. *Women in the Kurdish Movement*. Palgrave, 2020.

The Virtual Kurdish Forum on Friday, November 20.

*Week XIV (November 23 & November 30 - December 2)**

- *A 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. 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.

- November 30 and December 2 sessions will be held via Zoom.

Additional Sources:

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

VII. 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 11:59 pm on **December 7**. 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 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. Since then, the Kurdish question in Turkey has been securitized with waves of repression targeting pro-Kurdish activists and politicians. 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, originally established by the PKK, 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. While the PYD established its control over large parts of northeastern and northern Syria by 2017, Turkish incursions in January 2018 and October 2019 resulted in significant territorial losses for the PYD. 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 has 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?