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

University of Central Florida School of Politics, Security, and International Affairs
Fall 2023

Instructor: Miroslav Shapovalov, PhD

Course Modality: online (W)
3 credit hours

Office Hours (zoom):
MW 11:00am-12:30pm
Contact via Webcorses messages

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 in the world without a state of their own. Since the early 20th century, they have faced various forms of discrimination and violence. However, in the time since, Kurdish political movements have also achieved significant progress. They have established self-rule in Iraq, and more, recently in Syria. Currently, they 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 academic entity dedicated to the study of these issues. Originally developed as a part of this program, this unique course offers a comprehensive introduction to Kurdish politics, one of the most complex issues in the contemporary world. It has three objectives:

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

Upon 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 from a comparative perspective.
- Analyze the relevance of Kurdish politics for the United States.

II. Course Requirements

All assignments are to be completed and submitted via Webcourses@UCF.

Assignment	Weight (in %)	Date
Map Exercise	10	August 30
Short Exam I	10	September 8
Discussion Board I	5	September 15
Short Question I	5	September 22
Short Exam II	10	October 6
Discussion Board II	5	October 13
Short Question II	5	October 20
Short Exam III	10	October 27
Discussion Board III	5	November 10
Short Question III	5	November 17
Short Exam IV	10	November 19
Discussion Board IV	5	December 3
Debate paper	20	December 5

**Note that the 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: Since Kurdistan is not a sovereign country with internationally recognized borders, numerous maps have been created to depict the political and demographic geography of the Kurdish people since the early 20th century. Your task is to identify a historical or contemporary map that claims to show Kurds/Kurdistan from online or printed sources. Write a paragraph (around 300 words) discussing the map's credibility and how it informs or obstructs your understanding of Kurdish geography. The map and your discussion should be submitted electronically in Word format via Webcourses@ucf by 11:59 pm on Monday, January 19.

- Four short exams are composed of multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blanks, and short answer questions. The exams are not cumulative and will cover both the lectures and required readings. All exams are due by 11:59 pm on Fridays. Please refer to 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 on April 29, is provided in Section VII at the end of this syllabus.

- Discussion Boards: There are four online discussion boards, and each student is expected to contribute to at least three of them. 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. For detailed instructions, please see the Discussion Board Assignment Description in Canvas.

Grade and Make-Up Policy

Short questions, map exercises, debate paper: students may submit their assignments up to two days late, incurring a penalty of 10% of the assignment's grade per 24 hours. Students who fail to submit the Map Exercise, Short Paper, and Debate Paper assignments will automatically receive **0 points for those assignment**s.

Discussion boards: due to the nature of the assignments, late submissions are not accepted.

Short exams: students who miss short exams are given make-ups only if they can provide **proper documentation** for their acceptable absence. Make-ups must be taken within four days of the original short exam date.

Per the Undergraduate Catalog, "reasons for acceptable absences may include illness, serious family emergencies, special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences), military obligations, severe weather conditions, and religious holidays." If a student is experiencing any of these events, they should promptly notify the instructor and request to submit the assignment at a later date. If notification is provided post-factum, reasonable proof of the emergency will be required. The instructor reserves the right to select the content and format of the make-up assignment based on the material covered in the course.

The following grade scale applies to 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 Integrity

Students should familiarize themselves with UCF's Rules of Conduct. According to Section 1, "Academic Misconduct," students are prohibited from engaging in:

- *Unauthorized assistance*: Using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information or study aids in any academic exercise unless specifically authorized by the instructor of record. The unauthorized possession of examination or course-related material also constitutes cheating.
- *Communication to another through written, visual, electronic, or oral means*: presenting material which has not been studied or learned, but rather was obtained through someone else's efforts and used as part of an examination, course assignment, or project.
- *Commercial Use of Academic Material*: Selling of course material to another person, student, and/or uploading course material to a third-party vendor without authorization or without the express written permission of the university and the instructor. Course materials include but are not limited to class notes, Instructor's PowerPoints, course syllabi, tests, quizzes, labs, instruction sheets, homework, study guides, handouts, etc.
- *Falsifying or misrepresenting* the student's own academic work.
- *Plagiarism*: Using or appropriating another's work without any indication of the source, thereby attempting to convey the impression that such work is the student's own.

- *Multiple Submissions*: Submitting the same academic work for credit more than once without the express written permission of the instructor.
- *Helping another violate* academic behavior standards.

For more information about Academic Integrity, students may consult The Center for Academic Integrity.
For more information about plagiarism and misuse of sources, see "Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices".

Responses to Academic Dishonesty, Plagiarism, or Cheating

All acts of academic dishonesty including plagiarism, cheating, submitting false documents, and copying another student's work will be strictly penalized with an F for the course without any exceptions or leniency. If you are uncertain about what constitutes academic dishonesty while conducting your research, it is imperative that you promptly consult Dr. Shapovalov.

IV. Accessibility

UCF is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Students with disabilities who require accommodations in this course must contact the professor at the beginning of the semester to discuss their needs. Accommodations will not be provided until the student has met with the professor to formally request them.

Students who need accommodations must also be registered with Student Accessibility Services, before requesting accommodations from Dr. Shapovalov.

V. Safety Statement

Though most emergency situations are primarily relevant to courses that meet in person, such incidents can also impact online students, either when they are on or near campus to participate in other courses or activities or when their course work is affected by off-campus emergencies. The following policies apply to courses in online modalities.

- To stay informed about emergency situations, you can sign up to receive UCF text alerts by going to <https://my.ucf.edu.> and logging in. Click on "Student Self Service" located on the left side of the screen in the toolbar, scroll down to the blue "Personal Information" heading on the Student Center screen, click on "UCF Alert", fill out the information, including e-mail address, cell phone number, and cell phone provider, click "Apply" to save the changes, and then click "OK."
- Students with special needs related to emergency situations should speak with their instructors outside of class.

VI. Accommodations for Active-Duty Military Students

Students who are deployed active duty military and/or National Guard personnel and require accommodation should contact Dr. Shapovalov as soon as possible after the

semester begins and/or after they receive notification of deployment to make related arrangements.

VII. Title IX

Title IX prohibits sex discrimination, including sexual misconduct, sexual violence, sexual harassment, and retaliation. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find resources available to support the victim, including confidential resources and information concerning reporting options at https://letsbeclear.ucf.edu and http://cares.sdes.ucf.edu/.

For more information on diversity and inclusion, Title IX, accessibility, or UCF's complaint processes contact:
- Title IX – OIE - askanadvocate@ucf.edu
- Disability Accommodation – sas@ucf.edu
- Diversity and Inclusion Training and Events
- UCF Compliance and Ethics Office - complianceandethics@ucf.edu
- Ombuds Office

VIII. Course Schedule & Readings

In addition to the readings assigned for each week, the following textbook is used in this class:

David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*.4th ed. London: I. B. Tauris, 2021 (Hereafter MHK).

While additional sources are not required, they may prove helpful for discussion boards and debate papers. News reports about contemporary events will also be provided during the semester. Please note that there may be some changes in the required readings throughout the semester.

Week I (August 21-27)

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

1. 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 28- September 3)

Ethnic Conflict & Nationalism in Comparative Perspective

1. Gidon A. G. Gottlieb. "Nations without States." *Foreign Affairs* (May 1994): 100-12.
2. 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 4 - 10)

From Empires to Nation-States: The Kurdish Predicament

1. McDowall, *MHK*, Book II (chps. 7-10).
2. 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.
Güneş Murat Tezcür. "A century of the Kurdish question." Ethnopolitics 18 (2019): 1-12.

Week IV (September 11 – September 17)

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

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

Additional Sources:

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

Week V (September 18 - 24)

From Tribal Resistance to Popular Mobilization: The Kurds in Iraq

1. 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 25 - October 1)

From Contentious Mobilization to Violent Insurgency: The PKK in Turkey

1. McDowall, *MHK,*chapters 19-20.
2. 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 2 - 8)

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

1. Michiel Leezenberg. "The ambiguities of democratic autonomy: the Kurdish movement in Turkey and Rojava." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*16 (2016): 671-6
2. Bülent Küçük and Ceren Özselçuk. "The Rojava experience: possibilities and challenges of building a democratic life." *South Atlantic Quarterly*115 (2016): 184-196.
3. *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 9 – October 15)

All Quiet on the Eastern Front? The Kurds in Iran

1. McDowall, *MHK*, chapters 12 and 13.
2. 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.
3. 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 16 - 22)

Nonviolent Contentious Kurdish Politics in Turkey

1. Nicole F. Watts, "Activists in Office: Pro-Kurdish Contentious Politics in Turkey."
2. *Ethnopolitics* 5 (2006): 125-44.
3. 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.
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 23 - 29)

Mass Murder and Genocide: From Anfal to Sinjar

1. McDowall, *MHK,*chapter 17.
2. Choman Hardi, *Gendered Experiences of Genocide: Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq*.
3. Routledge, 2011, ch. 6.
4. 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.

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 (October 30 – November 5)

The KRG: A Rentier State without Statehood

1. McDowall, *MHK*, chapter 18.
2. 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.
3. Morgan L. Kaplan. "Foreign support, miscalculation, and conflict escalation: Iraqi
4. 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 6 - 12)

Politics of Religion: Islam and Minorities

1. 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.

2. 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 13 - 19)

Politics of Gender: Kurdish Women Fighters and Activists

1. Bahar Şimşek Joost Jongerden. "Gender revolution in Rojava: The voices beyond tabloid geopolitics." *Geopolitics* (2018): 1-23.
2. 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 20 – 21; November 26 - December 1)

A Comparative Perspective: African Americans and Kurds

1. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*.4thed. MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009, chps. 1 & 4.
2. 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.

IX. 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**. Late submissions are not accepted except under extreme circumstances outlined above.

Papers should be **conceptual** and **analytical**, going beyond mere description and retelling of the course material. This means they should 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 an impartial 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, and students are encouraged to seek guidance and suggestions from the instructor whenever needed.

The UCF Library's website provides access to various search engines that can help students efficiently locate relevant sources. Search engines such as LexisNexis, Google Scholar, JSTOR, WorldCat, and Web of Science are valuable research tools. Electronic sources edited by anonymous users are not accepted as reliable sources (that includes Wikipedia too). Debate papers should be **around 2,000** including a **separate bibliography that should consist of at least 8 reliable sources.**

Paper Topics

1. *Kurdish Independence in Iraq*

The Kurdish resistance against centralized rule in Iraq has a long history. Following Saddam's failed invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the subsequent collapse of his regime after the US invasion in 2003, the Kurdish regions of Iraq have effectively gained de facto independence. In September 2017, the Kurdish government in Iraq organized an independence referendum, with an overwhelming majority of participants voting in favor of independence. However, due to internal divisions within the Kurdish factions and a lack of international support, the Iraqi government swiftly reclaimed control, resulting in the loss of the 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. Despite Turkey's prolonged efforts, it has been unable to militarily defeat the PKK, while the PKK itself has not achieved its strategic goals of establishing liberated areas. In early 2013, a peace process was initiated, but it ultimately failed, leading to a resurgence of violence with greater intensity in the summer of 2015. Since then, the Kurdish question in Turkey has become highly securitized, resulting in waves of repression targeting pro-Kurdish activists and politicians. Write a paper assessing the prospects for a peaceful resolution of this armed conflict. 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*

Capitalizing on the weakening of the central state, the PYD, originally established by the PKK, proclaimed three autonomous regions in northern Syria along the Turkish border in 2012. Two of these regions faced severe attacks by the self-declared Islamic State (IS), which was ultimately defeated by the PYD's armed wing, the YPG, with significant support from US airstrikes. By 2017, the PYD had established control over substantial parts of northern and northeastern Syria. However, Turkish military interventions in January 2018 and October 2019 led to significant territorial losses for the PYD. Write a paper assessing the prospects of Kurdish self-rule in Syria. Is it in the strategic interests of the United States to support Kurdish self-rule in the country?

4. *Kurds of Iran*

Iran is home to a significant Kurdish minority, marked by sectarian and linguistic divisions. The Kurdish demand for autonomy in Iran, driven by widespread socioeconomic and political grievances, has been a potent force throughout the 20th century. However, in comparison to other countries, Kurdish political activism within the Islamic Republic has been relatively subdued and less visible. Write a paper assessing the significance of the Kurdish question in Iran. What factors contribute to its significance?