Politics of Iran – Syllabus Draft

This course aims to provide a historical and theoretical understanding of modern Iranian politics and society from the late nineteenth century to the present. Students will learn about Iran's cultural ambiance and heritage, ethnic/class/religious cleavages, foreign policy, the causes and consequences of the 1979 revolution, and the nature of the post-revolutionary political system through reading some of the most seminal scholarly essays on these subjects.

Required texts:


1 – Introduction: From Pre-Islamic Era to 1800: A Bird's Eye View

- Bernard Lewis, "Iran in History," Lecture, Mortimer and Raymond Sackler Institute of Advanced Studies, Tel Aviv University, 18 Jan 1999

2 - Iran in the Nineteenth Century

- Abrahamian, pp. 1-62.

3 - Reza Shah and the Formation of the Modern Bureaucratic State

- Abrahamian, pp. 63-96.

4 - Iranian Nationalism

- Abrahamian, pp. 97-122.

5 - Political Elite, Parties, Elections under Mohammad Reza Shah

• Abrahamian, pp. 123-154.

6 - Theoretical Approaches on the 1979 Revolution

• Amir Arjomand, pp. 16-35.
• Abrahamian, pp. 155-169.
• Theda Skocpol, "Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution," Theory and Society 11, no. 3 (May 1982): 265-283.

7 - Ayatollah Khomeini and Charismatic Politics

• Abrahamian, pp. 169-182.
• Amir Arjomand, pp. 36-55.

8 - Iran’s Political Institutions

• Wright, pp. 1-30.
• Anthony Gill and Arang Keshavarzian, "State Building and Religious Resources: An Institutional Theory of Church-State Relations in Iran and
Mexico,” *Politics & Society* 27, no. 3 (September 1999): 431-465.

9 - Iran’s Economy and the social consequences of the revolution

- Wright, pp. 95-126.
- Amir Arjomand, pp. 112-132.

10 - Understanding Iranian Foreign Policy


11 - American-Iranian Relations

- History: (videosift.com/video/History-of-Iran-US-political-relations)

12 - The Iranian Nuclear Controversy

- Amir Arjomand, pp. 192-211

13 - Paradoxes of a Modern Day Theocratic State


14 - Youths and Dissidents
• John Kelly and Bruce Etling, Mapping Iran’s Online Public: Politics and Culture in the Persian Blogosphere (Harvard University: Berkman Center for Internet & Society, 2008).
• Video: Persepolis

15 - Women and Politics