RPOS 399: The Politics of South Asia

Professor: Niloufer Siddiqui
Location: SS0133
Time: TTh 10:15-11:35am
Office hours: Tuesdays 11:45am-1:45pm (Uptown Campus, Humanities B-16 Contact Office)
By appointment (Downtown Campus, Milne 210)
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This seminar course explores contemporary politics in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. While these countries have much in common, including a shared history of British colonial involvement, they have followed divergent political trajectories since independence. Today, India is the world’s largest democracy and has emerged into a global economic powerhouse. Pakistan has oscillated between military rule and democracy, and, over the last decade, has fallen victim to alarming rates of internal violence. After 15 years of U.S. presence, Afghanistan remains war-torn and its population vulnerable. Bangladesh, which appeared to be a democratic success story, has recently seen an increase in politically-motivated killings and brazen attacks against minorities.

We cover such issues as the management of ethnic and religious conflicts, secularism versus Islamism and Hindu nationalism, secessionist movements, the tension between economic growth and equity, and problems of governance. In addition, we explore the place of these countries in the international system: India as a growing world power; Pakistan and Afghanistan as the focal points of foreign aid and foreign intervention; and Bangladesh as the nation most vulnerable to climate change.

Finally, this course encourages students to tackle difficult policy questions pertaining to the region and take an informed stand. Are drone strikes in Pakistan and Afghanistan an ethical and/or effective way of protecting U.S. borders? What should India do to confront rampant poverty within its borders? How can these countries tackle terrorism while simultaneously protecting the rights of political opponents?

Assignments and Grading:

Participation: 15%
As a discussion-based course, active participation is a crucial component of the grade. This includes regular attendance in class and contribution to class discussion. Think about the key questions the reading is addressing and the answers that it provides. Then assess whether you find the answers compelling. Come prepared to discuss the readings. The PowerPoint lectures will be posted on Blackboard after each class. If you miss a class, you are responsible for making sure that you are caught up on topics that may have been discussed but were not in the PowerPoint.

Quizzes: 25%
There will be six 15-minute in-class quizzes which will test your understanding of the material covered in class. If you have done the readings and paid attention in class, you will be fine. The quiz with the lowest grade will be dropped, so only 5 quizzes will count towards your final grade.
Midterm: 25%
The closed book in-class midterm will be held on March 8th. It will cover all the material covered in class up till that date, including both topics covered in readings and in class.

Research Proposal: 5%
This 2-page (double-spaced) proposal should outline the research question you will be answering in your final paper and the resources that you intend to use to do so.

Research Paper: 30%
This 10-12 page research paper (double-spaced, 12-size font, Times New Roman, regular margins) can be on any topic related to the politics of South Asia. The papers must include (1) a brief literature review, (2) a clearly stated argument or hypothesis (derived from the readings, another source, or an original argument), (3) a description of how the argument/hypothesis will be evaluated empirically, and (4) an evaluation of the argument using evidence from at least one historical case. Examples of possible research topics are:

- Which factors explain the BJP and Modi’s victory in the 2014 national elections in India?
- What explains the divergent political trajectories of India and Pakistan?
- What factors caused the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan?

Accommodations:
Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning, and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please go here http://www.albany.edu/disability/current.shtml and arrange for an academic accommodation letter to be sent to me. If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this course, please also inform me as soon as possible.

Plagiarism:
Please familiarize yourself with the description in the undergraduate bulletin http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html. If you are involved in plagiarism the penalty will be failure in the course and you will be reported to judicial affairs. If you are not sure if something violates standards: ask. If you are not sure whether to cite or not to cite: cite. Every student is expected to go through the following tutorial: http://library.albany.edu/usered/plagiarism/index.html

Late Policy:
For every day that an assignment is late, you will be penalized one letter grade. For example, if you turn in an A- paper 1 day late, you will receive a B+. There will be no extra credit to make up for late or missing assignments.

Class attendance:
You will be expected to attend class. Each student is permitted to miss two days of class per term with no questions asked and no penalties or reductions in his or her class participation grade. Any classes missed beyond those two will be taken into account in determining your class participation grade, regardless of the reason.

Re-grading of materials:
You may request re-grading of materials. If you wish to make such a request, contact the professor for a copy of the re-grading policy. You will be asked to provide a written explanation of why you wish to have the assignment re-graded.

Course Schedule:

**Jan 23**  
Overview of course, readings, assignments, and introductions  
No assigned readings

**Jan 25**  
Introduction  
What is South Asia? Why should we care?


**Jan 30**  
Partition  
Why did Partition occur? What was the Two Nation Theory? What explains the divergent trajectories of Pakistan and India after Partition?


**Feb 1**  
Pakistan’s Early Years: Identity and Nationhood  
What problems did Pakistan face upon independence? Who was Ayub?


**Feb 6**  
Pakistan’s Army and Civil-Military Relations  
What role has the Pakistan Army played in politics? What is the ideology of the Pakistan Army? What role does Islam play in its ideology?


Feb 8  Pakistan’s Party Politics
What are the main political parties in Pakistan? What is the source of their power?


Feb 13  Pakistan & Ethnicity
What are the main ethnic groups in Pakistan? What sorts of challenges has the country faced with regards to its multiethnic nature?


Feb 15  Pakistan’s Islamism & Sectarianism
What are the origins of the Sunni-Shia conflict in Pakistan? Who are the main actors involved?


Feb 20  Pakistan After 9/11
What role has Pakistan played in the War against Terrorism? What is the Tehreek-e-Taliban?

Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan’s Drift into Extremism* (2005), chapter 9, 201-216.


Feb 22  India: The World's Largest Democracy
What legacies did India inherit from British colonialism? What is the Indian National Congress?

Steven Wilkinson “India” chapter in David Samuels, *Comparative Politics* (Prentice Hall 2013), 194-234.

Feb 27  Identity in India: Caste, Religion, and Regional Politics
What is the caste system in India? What types of challenges has the Indian state faced from regional, linguistic, and nativist movements? How has the state responded?


| March 1 | Party Politics in India  
What kind of party system does India have? What are its advantages and disadvantages?  
Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi*, “Rulers,” 651-681 |
| March 6 | Modi’s India  
Who is Modi? How did he get elected? What does this mean for the future of India’s democracy?  
| March 8 | MIDTERM |
| March 20 | Secularism and Hindu Nationalism in India  
What is Hindu nationalism? What are its causes?  
| March 22 | India: Development, Governance, and Economy  
What are some of the shortcomings of India’s economic rise? How do its human development indicators compare to other countries?  
| March 27 | India-Pakistan: the Kashmir Conflict  
How would you categorize the relationship between India and Pakistan? Why have they fought so many wars? What are the causes of the Kashmir conflict? |

**March 29**

**India-Pakistan: Nuclear Warfare**

Guest lecture: Prof. Christopher Clary


**April 3**

**Bangladesh and Democracy**

When and how did Bangladesh gain independence? Has democracy succeeded?


**April 5**

**NO CLASS**

**April 10**

**Islamism, Extremism, and Political Conflict**

Are Islamist parties influential in Bangladesh? Why or why not?


**April 12**

**Bangladesh’s Present-Day Challenges**

What are some of the contemporary challenges being faced by Bangladesh today? What are solutions to these problems?


April 17  Afghanistan: A Brief History

April 19  The Rise of the Taliban
Who are the Taliban? How did they come to power?

April 24  International Involvement in Afghanistan
In what ways did U.S. involvement in Afghanistan succeed? In what ways did it fail?
Ahmed Rashid. Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, pp 3-44.

April 26  Explaining Radicalization
What is radicalization? Why do people join militant groups?

May 1  Policy Towards South Asia I
Special Topics: Drones
What are drones? Why are they used? Are they ethical? Why or why not?
Steve Coll, The Unblinking Stare, The New Yorker, November 24, 2014

May 3  Policy Towards South Asia II
Special Topics: Development Aid
In what ways has development aid been helpful? In what has it failed?
Ashraf Ghani & Claire Lockhart. Fixing Failed States, Preface and Introduction.

May 8  Conclusion, wrap-up
No assigned readings