

Introducing

Gabriel Koehler-Derrick

Assistant Professor of Political Science at NYU Abu Dhabi

Gabriel Koehler-Derrick is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at NYU Abu Dhabi. He holds a PhD from Harvard University, an MA from Columbia University, and a BA from Tufts University. Gabriel's research focuses on economic and political development, state building, and the politics of religion with a regional focus on the Middle East and North Africa. We spoke to Gabriel about his current book project, his experience from working at West Point, and what life is like in Abu Dhabi.



Hello Gabriel! In your current book project, *The Colonial Origins of Local Inequality*, you explore why local variations in governance are particularly stark in former colonies across the Middle East and North Africa. Could you tell us more about this project and what colonial origins can teach us about the MENA region's social welfare inequality today?

My book project explains why local variations in governance are particularly stark in former colonies, where it is common to encounter administrative regions with relatively high levels of development adjacent to areas where administration and development are limited. I argue that local variation in social development is shaped by the expansiveness of state building and the formal institutions that provide and administer public goods like education and healthcare. Where separate institutions were created to administer different ethnic groups, inequalities in public goods provision and social welfare outcomes were likely to be higher and more likely to

persist. Where state building was inclusive, meaning that different ethnic groups enjoyed access to the same institutions, inequality in public goods provision and social welfare outcomes were likely to be lower and less likely to persist.

Much of my work is focused on these long-term local economic and political development outcomes, particularly in North Africa. However, I am also currently working on projects that focus on 17th-century Ireland and local administration in France. Eventually, I hope to bring some of these main themes into a book, but that's probably a few years off at his point.

"I would never have pursued a PhD in Political Science without my experience at West Point. I was fortunate to have amazing colleagues who not only encouraged me to apply to grad school, but also helped me begin to develop basic skills in research design, data management, and theory."

Between 2010-2014, you taught in the Social Sciences Department at the United States Military Academy and worked in the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. What did you work on during your time at West Point, and did that experience influence your research focus in any way?

I would never have pursued a PhD in Political Science without my experience at West Point. I was fortunate to have amazing colleagues who not only encouraged me to apply to grad school, but also helped me begin to develop basic skills in research design, data management, and theory. I also got the opportunity to teach an amazing group of cadets. It turns out, if you can teach International Relations theory at 7:30 in the morning, you can teach almost anything.

Finally, I would like to ask you about your current life at NYU Abu Dhabi! What is your favorite part of working and living in Abu Dhabi?

This is my first year in Abu Dhabi, so there's still a lot for me to discover!. So far, I've enjoyed NYUAD's beautiful campus, and living next to students and colleagues. Abu Dhabi has a lot of wonderful features, from amazing stargazing trips in the desert to some of the most beautiful beaches anywhere in the region.



"Muslim School for Boys" in Rabat, cité Yacoub el Mansour.
Photo Credit: French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Make sure to subscribe to the [GLD Newsletter](#) to keep receiving news about the 2023 Fellows, and other events from GLD.

