

INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN POLITICS (PS 1352)

Professor Aala Abdelgadir
Spring 2024

Class Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 11:00AM - 12:15PM

Classroom: B60 Mervis Hall

Office Hours: Thursday 1 – 4 p.m. or by appointment

Office Hour Sign-up: <https://calendly.com/aabdelg>

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COURSE SUMMARY

This course introduces students to the study of contemporary African politics. It is intended to provide a survey of questions that are of general theoretical interest to social scientists in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa. The core questions that motivate the course are: How did authoritarian regimes arise in most countries after independence? Why have some countries become democratic, while others have remained authoritarian? What factors account for patterns of conflict and civil war across countries? During the semester, we will see that there is large variation within Africa in the strength of states, the levels of economic growth and respect for democratic institutions. We will aim to explain these variations by using social science concepts and methods. In our exploration, we will mostly build on the work of political scientists but also draw heavily on writing from journalists, anthropologists, psychologists, economists, and historians.

The course is organized in three sections. The first section provides a brief overview of the colonial period and its impact on subsequent political trends in the region. The second section examines the emergence of authoritarian forms of governance and democratic transitions. The third section is devoted to the role of identity (ethnicity, gender, and nationality) in politics, including issues of representation, collective action, and violent conflict.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this course is for students to gain familiarity with and be able to apply theoretical concepts in the comparative study of African politics. Students will also leave this course able to name, describe, and compare major theories and approaches to the study of African politics, including historical-institutional perspectives, rational choice theories, and structural views. This course also aims to develop student skills of clear and cogent articulation and critical thinking with an emphasis on empirically based argumentation and reasoning skills. An exam, independent research, quizzes, and in-class discussions will all be used to evaluate student progress in developing these skills.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Class participation (10%)

You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and be an active contributor to class discussions. If you struggle with speaking up in class, please reach out to me within the first two weeks of the semester. This course will involve a substantial amount of reading. I do not expect you to read and remember every word in every assigned reading. However, I do expect you to discern the main argument and evidence for each of the readings.

In-class “pop” quizzes (10%)

Over the course of the semester, you will be given an undisclosed number of in-class “pop” quizzes. Quizzes will be given at the beginning of class and consist of a few basic questions about the day’s readings (main argument, evidence, results, etc.) that will be easily answered if you have done the day’s reading. Filling in your name will count as one question so you will get some credit for simply showing up. Your lowest three quiz scores will be automatically dropped, and your overall in-class quiz grade will be an average of the remaining quizzes. Because the three lowest scores are dropped, there will be no make-ups for missed quizzes, even for excused absences.

Map quiz (10%, January 18)

This course surveys a region with many countries, so it is important that students develop basic knowledge of African political geography. A map quiz will be administered in class that asks students to locate countries on a blank map and identify their capitals. You will have 30 minutes at the beginning of the fourth class session (Session 4, January 18) to complete the map quiz. Any students who have formal accommodations for additional time in tests and quizzes should inform me as soon as possible with the required documentation.

Country expertise exercises (30%)

Over the course of the semester, you will become the class expert on one African country. You will follow the news in that country, complete assignments relating to issues in your country and course themes, and conduct research into your country’s political history and institutions. Countries will be assigned by the instructor on the second day of class; students who have a home or family connection to a particular country will be required to study a country other than their home country to ensure that everyone learns something new over the course of the semester. Students will be asked to write two analytical memos focusing on the following topics for their assigned countries:

1. Political parties and party systems (15%, Due: February 13)
2. Human rights (15%, Due: April 4)

Detailed instructions on the format of these memos will be distributed by the instructor prior to the assignment due dates. Each memo should be 5-6 pages (double-spaced, one-inch margins) and be uploaded to both Canvas by 9 a.m. on the due date.

Midterm exam (20%, March 7)

A timed, in-class midterm exam will be administered. The exam will be based on material covered in lecture and readings prior to the midterm exam date. The exam will be a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and short essay questions.

Country briefing presentations (20%, April 16 and 18)

You will be randomly assigned to a group to prepare one class presentation. You will pick the most stellar country assigned to members of the group and compare it to the other countries. Your presentation should focus on the performance of the stellar country, in terms of democracy and economic development. The group will explain whether and why the country has been able to outperform the other countries assigned to other group members (e.g., reforms it introduced; far-sighted leadership it is “lucky” to have, etc.).

COURSE POLICIES

Office hours sign-up

Please sign up to office hours using <https://calendly.com/aabdelg>. I recommend you make use of office hours to get clarification about course materials and support on class assignments.

Communication

I will primarily communicate with the class via Canvas. In general, if you have questions about assignments or reading, try to use Canvas so your classmates can benefit from the question. If you have personal questions, email me privately. I respond to emails during normal university work hours, and students can expect my response within 1-2 working days.

Reading materials

There is no course reader for this class. Assigned readings are available electronically through the class website on Canvas under the Files tab. Significant portions of the following books are assigned, however, so you may wish to purchase them. Note that both the Herbst book and Christensen and Laitin’s book will be uploaded to Canvas as a PDF. Do not share these books with anyone who is not taking the course.

Herbst, Jeffrey. (2020). *States and power in Africa: Comparative lessons in authority and control*. Princeton University Press.

Christensen, Darin, and David D. Laitin (2019). *African states since independence: Order, development, and democracy*. Yale University Press.

Grade policy

Your grade in this course is determined as per the following scale. Grades will be weighted according to the course expectations laid out above.

97-100=A+	94-96=A	90-93=A-	87-89=B+	84-86=B
80-83=B-	77-79=C+	74-76=C	70-73=C-	67-69=D+
64-66=D	60-63=D-	59 and below=F		

Assignment submission

Please submit the assignments as PDFs on the Canvas page, using the following naming practice: “Lastname.pdf”. Do not include your name or identifying details on the written assignments.

Late assignments

Late assignments will be penalized 10% for every day beyond the designated due date and time. Assignments more than 3 days late will not be accepted. Late presentations will not be accepted. If you do not present on the day you are assigned, you will receive no credit for that assignment.

Regrading requests

Grades will be based on student performance. Grades are not negotiable. Every effort will be made to grade your work fairly. If you have a **serious reservation** about how you have been graded, submit a comprehensive description of the mistake. Such requests will only be accepted within a week after graded work has been returned to students.

Absences

You are expected to attend class and I will be keeping track of attendance. You are allowed two absences during the semester. You do not need to tell me why you will be absent or bring any sort of documentation to justify your absence. To have any additional absence excused, you will need to provide documentation within one week of your absence. For any excused absence, you must submit a 2-page response paper (double-spaced, one-inch margins) that discusses your thoughts on the assigned texts of the week you missed. This response paper be submitted within one week of the missed seminar. Separately, Pitt accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance. Please inform me in Week 1 if you will require any such accommodation. Each unexcused attendance will generate a 2% reduction in your participation grade.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890 as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course. For more information, please see <https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/drs/>.

Academic integrity

Students in this course are expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, and other acts of dishonesty (including using words or ideas produced by ChatGPT) will not be tolerated. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated by the instructor, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. More information and the complete policy can be found at <http://www.provost.pitt.edu/info/ai1.html>.

Collaboration

Collaboration is a key part of academic research, and you are encouraged to help each other develop your ideas and improve your writing. However, all written work you submit must be your own.

Technology

Laptops or tablets will only be allowed to take notes and review class materials. If you are using technology for another purpose, I may not allow you to continue using it. Use of cellphones in class will not be accepted; please turn off your cellphone while in class.

COURSE SCHEDULE

January 9: Introduction

Learning objectives:

- Review course expectations and syllabus
- Why study African politics? How to write and not write about Africa?

Readings:

- Binyavanga Wainaina. 2005. "How to Write About Africa." *Granta* 92.
- Laura Seay. 2012. "How Not to Write About Africa." *Foreign Policy*.
- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. 2009. "[The Danger of a Single Story](#)." TED Talk.
- Leslie Dodson. 2011. "[Don't Misrepresent Africa](#)." TED Talk.

January 11: From Great Expectations to Unfulfilled Dreams

Learning objectives:

- What was the starting point of most African countries at independence?
- How do African countries fare relative to other regions with respect to human development, democracy, and conflict levels?

Readings:

- Christensen & Laitin (2019): chapters 2–4 (pages 31–111).
- Ajayi, J.F. Ade. 1982. "Expectations of Independence." *Daedalus* 11(2): 1–9.

January 16: Politics and Institutions in Pre-colonial Africa

Learning objectives:

- How have different parts of Africa governed before the Europeans' arrival?
- How were pre-colonial African political institutions similar to and different from Westphalian states in other world regions?

Readings:

- Herbst, Chapter 2 – Power and Space in Precolonial Africa.
- Bates, Robert H. 1983. Chapter 1 – The Preservation of Order in Stateless Societies: A Reinterpretation of Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer*. *Essays on the Political Economy of Rural Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

January 18: The Implications of Pre-Colonial Politics

*** Map Quiz ***

Learning objectives:

- How and why pre-colonial political structures still matter today?

Readings:

- Michalopoulos, Stelios, and Elias Papaioannou. 2013. "Pre-Colonial Ethnic Institutions and Contemporary African Development." *Econometrica* 81(1): 113-152.
- Wilfahrt, Martha. 2018. "Precolonial Legacies and Institutional Congruence in Public Goods Delivery: Evidence from Decentralized West Africa." *World Politics* 70(2): 239-274.

January 23: The Slave Trade and Colonialism

Learning objectives:

- What were the long-term consequences of Africa's slave trade?
- How did European colonizers establish dominance over most of sub-Saharan Africa?

Readings:

- Nunn, Nathan. 2008. "The Long Term Effects of Africa's Slave Trades". *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123 (1): 139-176.
- Young, Crawford. 1994. Chapter 4 – "Constructing Bula Matari." *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Ricart-Huguet, Joan. (2022). The origins of colonial investments in former British and French Africa. *British Journal of Political Science*, 52(2), 736-757. **(Optional)**

January 25: Colonial Rule

Learning objectives:

- How effective were different types of colonial governance structures?
- What new institutions did the colonizers introduce and what did they maintain?

Readings:

- Crowder, Michael. 1964. Indirect Rule: French and British Style. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 34 (3): 197-205.
- Ekeh, Peter P. 1975. "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17(1): 91-112.

January 30: Colonial Legacies – Institutions

Learning objectives:

- How does the mode of colonial rule impact present-day political institutions?
- What is the empirical evidence regarding the long-term effect of direct versus indirect rule?

Readings:

- Jackson, Robert and Carl Rosberg. 1982. "Why Africa's Weak States Persist: The Empirical and Juridical in Statehood." *World Politics* 35(1): 1–24.
- Michalopoulos, Stelios and Elias Papaioannou. 2016. "The Long-Run Effects of the Scramble for Africa," *The American Economic Review* 106(7): 1802–1848.

February 1: Colonial Legacies – Political Geography

Learning objectives:

- How does the size and shape of countries affect governance and economic outcomes?

- How did colonial investments help pick long-term winners and losers?

Readings:

- Herbst, Chapter 5 – “National Design and Broadcasting Power”.
- Green, Elliot. 2012. “On the size and shape of African states.” *International Studies Quarterly* 56(2): 229–244.
- **(Optional)** Roessler et al. 2020. “The Cash Crop Revolution, Colonialism and Legacies of Spatial Inequality: Evidence from Africa.” Centre for the Study of African Economies.

February 6: Colonial Legacies – Traditional Leaders

Learning objectives:

- What are the effects of colonization on the power of traditional authorities in contemporary African countries?
- What are the effects of colonization on legal systems?

Readings:

- Herbst, Chapter 6 – “Chiefs, States and the Land”.
- Nathan, Noah. 2019. “Electoral Consequences of Colonial Invention: Brokers, Chiefs, and Distribution in Northern Ghana.” *World Politics*, 71(3): 417–456.

February 8: Nationalism and Independence

Learning objectives:

- How did movements toward independence emerge across the African continent?
- What was the nature of these movements? Where did they emerge? Who participated?

Readings:

- Bates, Robert H. 1983. “Chapter 4 – The Commercialization of Agriculture and the Rise of Rural Political Protest.” *Essays on the Political Economy of Rural Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schmidt, Elizabeth. 2005. “Top Down or Bottom Up? Nationalist Mobilization Reconsidered, with Special Reference to Guinea.” *American Historical Review* 110 (4): 975-1014.

February 13: Authoritarian Rule

First expert memo due

Learning objectives:

- What are the main challenges that newly independent states of Africa faced in the early years of independence?
- What regime types and political systems did African states adopt following independence?

Readings:

- Collier, Ruth Berins. 1982. *Regimes in Tropical Africa: Changing Forms of Supremacy, 1945-1975*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Read chapters 4-5.

February 15: Strategies for Authoritarian Survival

Learning objectives:

- How did post-independence autocratic regimes attempt to stay in power?

Readings:

- Arriola, Leonardo R. 2009. "Patronage and Political Stability in Africa." *Comparative Political Studies* 42 (10): 1339-1362.
- Shen-Bayh, Fiona. 2018. "Strategies of Repression: Judicial and Extrajudicial Methods of Autocratic Survival." *World Politics* 70(3): 321-357.
- (Skim) Jackson, Robert H., and Carl G. Rosberg. 1984. "Personal Rule: Theory and Practice in Africa." *Comparative Politics* 16 (4): 421-442.

February 20: Democratization – part 1

Learning objectives:

- How did the end of the Cold War affect African political development?
- How similar and different were the paths to democratization across Africa?

Readings:

- Bratton, Michael, and Nicolas van de Walle. 1997. *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Read chapters 1 and 3.

February 22: Democratization – part 2

Learning objectives:

- What does the term "democracy" mean in African countries?

Readings:

- Posner, Daniel N., and Daniel J. Young. 2007. "The Institutionalization of Political Power in Africa." *Journal of Democracy* 18(3): 126-140.
- Opalo, Kennedy O. 2012. "African Elections: Two Divergent Trends." *Journal of Democracy* 23(3): 80-93.

February 27: Party Systems

Learning objectives:

- What are the nature and characteristics of party systems across African democracies?
- What factors determine why party systems take the form they do?

Readings:

- van de Walle, Nicolas. 2003. "Presidentialism and Clientelism in Africa's Emerging Party Systems." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 41(2): 297-321.
- Mozaffar, Shaheen, and James R. Scarritt. 2005. "The Puzzle of African Party Systems." *Party Politics* 11(4): 399-421.

February 29: Political Parties

Learning objectives:

- What are the nature and characteristics of political parties in sub-Saharan Africa?
- What factors contribute to party strength and weakness?

Readings:

- Arriola, Leonardo R. 2012. "Capital and Opposition in Africa: Coalition Building in Multi-ethnic Societies." *World Politics* 65(2): 233-272.
- Rakner, Lise, and Nicholas van de Walle. 2009. "Democratization by Elections? Opposition Weakness in Africa." *Journal of Democracy* 20(3): 108-121.

March 5: Midterm Review

March 7: Midterm Exam

March 12: No class – spring break

March 14: No class – spring break

March 19: Elections and Voting Behavior

Learning objectives:

- What factors shape how citizens exercise their vote in African elections?

Readings:

- Harding, Robin E. 2015. "Attribution and Accountability: Voting for Roads in Ghana." *World Politics* 67(4): 656-689.
- Dunning, Thad, et al. (2019). Voter information campaigns and political accountability: Cumulative findings from a preregistered meta-analysis of coordinated trials. *Science advances*, 5(7), eaaw2612.

March 21: Identity Politics – Ethnicity part 1

Learning objectives:

- How does ethnicity structure politics?
- Why did ethnic cleavages become politicized?
- Why is ethnicity politicized in some countries but not others?

Readings:

- Posner, Daniel S. 2003. "The Colonial Origins of Ethnic Cleavages: The Case of Linguistic Divisions in Zambia." *Comparative Politics* 35(2): 127-146.
- Miguel, Edward. 2003. "Tribe or Nation? Nation Building and Public Goods in Kenya versus Tanzania." *World Politics* 56(3): 328-362.

March 26: Identity Politics – Ethnicity part 2

Learning objectives:

- What are the distributional consequences of politicized ethnicity?
- How does the salience of ethnicity affect electoral outcomes?

Readings:

- Kramon, Eric, and Daniel S. Posner. 2013. "Who Benefits from Distributive Politics? How the Outcome One Studies Affects the Answer One Gets." *Perspectives on Politics* 11(2): 461-474.
- Ferree, Karen E. 2006. *Framing the Race in South Africa: The Political Origins of Racial Census*. Cambridge University Press. Read Chapters 1-2.

March 28: Identity Politics – Ethnic Conflict

Learning objectives:

- What role does ethnicity play in conflict?

Readings:

- Blanton, Robert, T. David Mason, and Brian Athow. 2001. "Colonial Style and Post-Colonial Ethnic Conflict." *Journal of Peace Research* 38(4): 473-491.
- Lieberman, Evan S. and Prerna Singh. 2012. "The Institutional Origins of Ethnic Violence." *Comparative Politics* 45(1): 1-24.

April 2: Identity Politics – Ethnicity and Governance

Learning objectives:

- What are the varied ways that ethnicity affects governance?

Readings:

- Ichino, Nahomi, and Nathan, Noah. 2013. "Crossing the line: Local ethnic geography and voting in Ghana." *American Political Science Review*, 107(2), 344-361.
- Dunning, Thad S., and Lauren Harrison. 2010. "Cross-cutting Cleavages and Ethnic Voting: An Experimental Study of Cousinage in Mali." *American Political Science Review* 104(1): 21-39.

April 4: Identity Politics – Gender

Second expert memo due

Learning objectives:

- Are there gender gaps in political preferences and participation?
- What are promising ways to reduce gender gaps in representation?

Readings:

- Arriola, Leonardo R, and Martha C Johnson. 2014. "Ethnic Politics and Women's Empowerment in Africa: Ministerial Appointments to Executive Cabinets." *American Journal of Political Science* 58 (2):495-510.
- Clayton, Amanda, Cecilia Josefsson, Robert Mattes and Shaheen Mozaffar. 2019. "In Whose Interest? Gender and Mass-Elite Priority Congruence in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Comparative Political Studies*. 52(1), 69-101.

April 9: Identity Politics – Migrants

Learning objectives:

- What explains immigrant social inclusion in sub-Saharan Africa?

- What explains persistent ties to home countries among emigrants?

Readings:

- Adida, Claire L. 2011. "Too Close for Comfort? Immigrant Exclusion in Africa." *Comparative Political Studies* 44 (10): 1370-1396.
- Wellman, Elizabeth I. (2021). "Emigrant inclusion in home country elections: Theory and evidence from sub-Saharan Africa." *American Political Science Review*, 115(1), 82-96.

April 11: Civil Wars and Coups

Learning objectives:

- What are the trends in political conflict across African countries?
- What factors contribute to political upheaval?

Readings:

- Roessler, Philip. 2011. "The Enemy Within: Personal Rule, Coups, and Civil War in Africa." *World Politics* 63(2): 300-346.
- Clark, John F. 2007. "The Decline of the African Military Coup." *Journal of Democracy* 18(3): 141-155.

April 16: Conclusion and Final Presentations

April 18: Final Presentations