Contemporary African Politics: POL-UA 584
Spring 2015 Syllabus

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Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30-10:50 pm
Class location: GCASL, Room 279
Office hours: Wednesdays, 11:00 am-12:30 pm
(or by appointment)

Course Description:

This course offers an introduction to contemporary African politics. Our goal is to introduce students to the most pressing problems African countries have faced since independence. Questions motivating the course include: (1) What are the legacies of colonial rule? (2) Why is the capacity of African states so weak? (3) What can be done to improve political accountability in the region? (4) What explains Africa's slow economic growth? (5) Why have some African countries been plagued by high levels of political violence while others have not?

In the first part of the course, we will review Africa's recent political history, concentrating on the impacts of colonialism and the types of states created in the wake of African independence movements. Then we turn to the challenges post-colonial governments face as they attempt to manage the interests of ethnically diverse societies and reform their economies and political institutions. We end the course with an in-depth look at patterns of violent conflict across Africa, and the daunting tasks that many African countries face as they attempt to recover from conflict.

As we address the core themes of the course, we will study events in particular African countries, but we will also examine broad patterns across countries and use social science concepts and methods to try to explain them.

Requirements and Prerequisites:

This is an undergraduate lecture course geared toward students with at least some background in political science. To enroll in the course, students must have already completed either International Politics [V53.0700] or Comparative Politics [V53.0500].

Students will be evaluated on the following:

(1) Class Participation (15%)
You are expected to attend all lectures and to read the required readings in advance of each lecture. Since the course is capped at 30 students, it is designed to encourage participation in class discussions. Emphasis will be placed on quality of participation, including responses to the instructor’s questions about the readings and reactions to other students’ comments.

(2) Map Quiz (5%)  
The map quiz will be held on Wednesday, February 11. Students will be expected to know the name, location and capital city of all African countries, as well as identify major bodies of water. This background information will help you understand the material presented in the lectures, and will help you with the readings.

(3) Short in-class Presentation (10%)  
Presentation topics will be assigned by the instructor during the second week of class. The student presentations will take place at the beginning of each class. They should be approximately 10 minutes in length and each presentation should describe the facts and the context of the event as it relates to the substantive theme of that day’s lecture. The presentation topics will be posted on the course’s NYU Classes page under “Resources.”

Students will be assigned to a topic by the instructor. They will need to research the event or topic, prepare a presentation that will be engaging for the class (power-point is not necessary), and each presenter is required to produce a one-page handout for the class summarizing the presentation. The handout should include a list of sources consulted. Handouts must be sent by email to the instructor by 9 am the morning of class (that is, BEFORE the day’s class).

(4) In-class Midterm Exam (20%)  
The midterm exam will take place on Wednesday, March 11, and will include a combination of identification questions and short essay answers. It will include material presented both in the required readings and in the lectures.

(5) Short paper (25%)  
The main written requirement for the course is a short paper of approximately 6 pages, due on Wednesday, April 15. Students will choose from a set of topics handed out in class on March 30. Essays will include: (i) a clear argument linked with one of the main themes of the course, and (ii) evidence in support of the argument, drawn from materials from the course and your own research.

(6) In-class Final Exam (25%)
The final exam will be a closed-book exam covering only material from the second half of the semester. It will include several short essay questions related to core themes of the course. The exam will be held on the last day of lecture, on **Monday, May 11**.

**Readings:**

Students are expected to read each of the required readings carefully *before* coming to class. Students should come to class with a sense of the strengths and weaknesses of each reading on its own terms, and in relation to the other readings for the week.

When you read an article, you should consider the following questions: What is the paper’s main claim or argument? Is it convincing? What are the strengths and limitations of the evidence offered? Is there additional evidence you would like to see before you accept the paper's claims?

We will be reading large portions of the following three books. They have been ordered for purchase at the NYU Bookstore. I would recommend purchasing these books, but copies of each will also be made available on reserve at Bobst Library.


The following books are highly recommended (and have also been ordered to the NYU bookstore):


Other required readings, such as articles or book chapters, will be available online through the course's NYU Classes page or through the library’s website.
Syllabus:

Part I: Historical Legacies

Session 1 [January 26]: Introduction to African Politics


Session 2 [January 28]: Pre-Colonial Politics


Session 3 [February 2]: The Slave Trade and Europe's Impact on Africa


Recommended:


Sessions 4-5 [Feb. 4, 9]: Colonial Rule and its Legacies


Recommended:


Session 6 [Feb. 11]: Nationalism and Independence

*Note: Map quiz in class on February 11.


Recommended:


Part II: Building Blocks for Analysis of African Politics

*Note: No Class on Monday, February 16 – President’s Day

Sessions 7-8 [Feb. 18, 23]: The State in Contemporary Africa


Recommended:


Sessions 9-10 [Feb. 25, March 2]: Salient Social Identities – Race, Ethnicity and Politics


Recommended:


Session 11: [March 4]: Salient Social Identities – Religion and Politics


Recommended:


Session 12: [March 9]: Midterm Review Session

Session 13 [March 11]: In-class Midterm

*Note: March 16-20: SPRING BREAK and class CANCELLED Monday, March 23

Part III: Political Regimes and Political Change

Session 14 [March 30]: Why did African Regimes de-Democratize in the 1960s?


Recommended:


Sessions 15-16 [April 1, 6]: Why did so many African Regimes Democratize in the 1990s?


Recommended:


Session 17 [April 8]: Patronage Politics and the African Voter


Recommended:


Part IV: Explaining Africa’s “Growth Tragedy”

Sessions 18-19 [April 13, 15]: African Development - Structural Conditions and Policy Choices

* Note: Short essays due at 5 pm on Wednesday, April 15


*Recommended:*


**Session 20 [April 20]: The Politics and Economics of Foreign Aid**


*Recommended:*

Easterly, William. “Can the West Save Africa?” *Journal of Economic Literature* 47:2, sections 1 and 2, pp. 373-391.


Part V: Political Violence and Post-Conflict Recovery

Session 21 [April 22]: Explaining Political Violence in Africa


Recommended:


Session 22 [April 27]: Why do Ordinary People Participate in Conflict?


Recommended


**Session 23 [April 29]: Case Study: Sudan’s Civil Wars**

For this class, I have selected two civil wars in post-independence Sudan (now two countries) that we will discuss in depth. As always, students are expected to have done the reading before class.


*Recommended:*


**Session 24 [May 4]: Recovering from Conflict**


*Recommended:*


Session 25 [May 6]: Final Exam Review

Session 26 [May 11]: In-Class Final Exam