African Politics
(Political Science 359, African Studies 390)
Winter, 2012, Tuesdays & Thursdays, 15:30 to 16:50
Annenberg G15
William Reno
TAs: Valerie Freeland, Moses Khisa

“I've always thought that underpopulated countries in Africa are vastly underpolluted.’

-- Lawrence Summers, economist, former President of Harvard University & former US Treasury Secretary.

“If the United States of America or Britain is having elections, they don't ask for observers from Africa or from Asia. But when we have elections, they want observers.”

-- Nelson Mandela, 1993 Nobel Prize for Peace, first democratically elected President of South Africa.

Course Description:

This course surveys core issues in the evolution of African politics since the colonial era. The geographic focus is sub-Saharan Africa. While North Africa will enter into some of the discussions, the bulk of the course will concentrate on the historical experiences and contemporary legacies of the politics of the vast region to the south of the Sahara Desert.

This course focuses on explanations for what many perceive to be a crisis in African politics. In an oft-cited comparison, when Ghana became independent in 1957 its’ citizens enjoyed a higher income and standard of living than South Koreans. The United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Report 2010 noted that South Korea has a per capita income (converted for purchasing parity) of $22,029, compared to Ghana’s $2,480. South Koreans live an average of 80.6 years, which is 16.4 years longer than the average for Ghana. Of the 177 countries that this report rates across a range of social indicators, all but one of the bottom 25 states are located in Africa. This latter figure indicates Africa’s subordinate position in a global hierarchy of development, an outcome that would have surprised many observers in the 1950s and 1960s.

The bulk of this course will trace developments that have shaped the internal politics of Africa’s states. The first part of the course focuses on colonial legacies, Pan-African visions of a post-colonial future, struggles for national liberation, the role of ethnicity in political life, the military coups d’états that begin soon after the wave of national independence, and the rise of “big man politics” and patronage-based political networks. The second part takes stock of dramatic developments since the 1980s. The first section
concerns economic reforms. Though a few have been of indigenous origin, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank shaped and oversaw the implementation of the great majority of these economic programs. The second concerns the replacement of authoritarian regimes with electoral multi-party civilian regimes through the combined pressures of indigenous and external forces. The last part of the course considers contemporary African political trajectories. These include the problem of “failed states” and internal conflict, a condition that has directly affected about a dozen of Africa’s 52 states since 2000. While the focus of many media reports, this is not the continent’s only trajectory. The course explores other politics, including political movements that look beyond states as primary legitimate units for politics. We finish the class with a view to detecting new trends in African politics.

Course Requirements:

Students must complete all required assignments to have the opportunity to receive a passing grade in this course. The relative weight of each assignment is as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation / attendance</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A map quiz</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A midterm exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>A final exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A paper of no more than 10 pages</td>
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Participation / attendance can be satisfied with regular attendance and observable evidence of having read assignments, etc. The contrary, such as the failure to show up for class, will have a measurable negative impact on evaluation. The map quiz will require filling in the names of countries and capital cities on an unlabeled map. The readings contain a map with necessary labels and one with outlines of countries. You also can practice at [http://www.lizardpoint.com/fun/geoquiz/afrquiz.html](http://www.lizardpoint.com/fun/geoquiz/afrquiz.html). The midterm exam will be short answer and essay format administered in class. I will provide further details about the exam in due course. The final exam will be comprehensive, with a focus on material from the second half of the course. This will be administered during the regular two hour final exam period noted at the end of the class calendar below.

The paper is due at the end of the last class on the 3rd of March. This paper should be limited to ten pages. The topic of the paper should address the last heading of the class calendar: “Which Direction Now?” One could propose a pan-African solution to contemporary problems. Others may argue for further market reforms. Others find answers in electoral democracy. There is no single “correct answer” that is required for this paper. Evaluation will be based upon the coherence of argument and presentation of evidence against at least one other reasonable alternative. Readings from class may be used to provide data and other information for an argument. Students are free to consult work outside of the assigned readings. As length is limited, this writing assignment should not evolve into a major research project. Writers will, however, benefit from incorporating African based debates and data into their arguments. The Herskovits
Library, located on floor five of the Main Library’s East Tower (and of which we will have a tour) houses the world’s largest collection of these materials.

**Booklist**

There are five required texts for this course. A reading packet provides students with the writings of African social scientists directed to wider audiences, primary documents, media commentaries and related material [mostly] from the African continent. Assigned items from this packet are denoted as “*” in the class calendar. The reading packet is available at Blackboard and Quartet. Books, possibly including used copies, are available at Beck’s at 716 Clark. Denzer’s book be available at the first class meetings and will cost $22. This Nigerian publication is hard to find in the US in any other way.


**Class Calendar**

**Jan 3: Introduction**: What is so special about studying African politics at Northwestern University? The Program of African Studies and the Herskovitz Library of African Studies (the largest collection of its kind on the planet) Opportunities for undergraduates who wish to conduct research about Africa, including on the African continent; what our undergraduate students have done in the past.

To be mashed with….

**Jan 5: Colonial Legacies in African Politics**: Are African colonies that become independent states somehow “artificial” and thus difficult to maintain? Are patterns of colonial administration responsible for setting Africa on a particular political trajectory?


Nugent, “African Independence” and A Profile of Africa at Independence,” in his *Africa since 1940*, 7-70.


- “The Rhodes Colossus” *Punch* [London], 10 Dec 1892
- Petroleum Department, Colonial Office [London] “Concession to prospect for Oil,” 26 Feb 1932.
- District Commissioner, Kailahun District [Sierra Leone], “Confidential,” 12 Oct 1949.

**Liberation and After**

**Jan 10: Nationalism:** Why were some colonial rulers more willing to depart than others? Did differences in the process of decolonization have a lasting impact on politics? What is identifiably “post-colonial” about politics in Africa today?


**Jan 12: The Politics of Liberation:** Why was socialism a particularly attractive ideology for those seeking liberation from colonial and apartheid rule? What were the interests of

Denzer, “Not too Obedient Servant,” 105-35.


**Jan 17: Ethnicity and Politics, Women in Politics:** To what extent is ethnicity an artifact of administrative institutions and the politics of recent decades? Does Africa produce a distinctive politics of gender?


- Ka’ro Ooji’re Youth Council, [Yoruba ethnic association pamphlet], no date.

The issue of women in politics appears in ABANTU for Development, “A Women’s Manifesto for Ghana,” 2004. There are huge numbers of ethnic association web sites. One example includes Asantahene Otumfu O Nana Osei Tutu II Fund.

*** Map quiz at the start of class ***

**Jan 19: State Administration in Africa:** Why does corruption appear to be a particularly tenacious problem? Is corruption related to culture or to legacies of colonial and post-colonial administration?

Robert Bates, first four chapters in *When Things Fell Apart*, 3-74. [continue to read this for your 16 April assignment]

- Government of Sierra Leone, “Application for an Alluvial Diamond Mining License”
- “Sierra Leone Exchange Control Form M”, 1989.

**Jan 24: Military Interventions in Politics** Is the era of military coups at an end? What is the fate of those who try to launch coups in the 21st century?
Denzer. “Permanent Secretary,” 137-70.


- “Want to Get Ahead Faster?” *Punch* [London], 3 Feb 1971.

**Jan 26: Personal Rule – The Rise of Big Men and the Politics of Patronage**  
Was patronage politics inevitable? What role does culture play alongside circumstance?


- “Suspension of Paramount Chief…,” [Sierra Leone], 18 Oct 1982.
- “Suspension of Paramount Chief…,” [Sierra Leone], 17 Jan 1983.
- “Petition against Paramount Chief…,” [Sierra Leone], 19 Nov 1982.

**The Vicissitudes of Reform**

**Jan 31: Debt Crises and the Collapse of Economic Nationalism**  
To what extent can one say that Africa adopted “incorrect policies,” versus “correct policies” but at the wrong time (or wrong place)? There will be a closer examination of Africa’s export of human capital to the US and elsewhere—“Africa’s foreign aid program”.


Feb 2: Economic Reform: Structural Adjustment How has economic reform changed Africa’s societies and Africa’s politics?


Feb 7: Democratization: First Elections What explains the sudden onset of pressures for political reform? To what extent were these pressures internal and to what extent were they external to African states?


Thomson, “Democracy: Re-legitimising the African State?” 243-74”


There is a great African elections database that is available at africanelections.tripod.com/. Of interest is the 2010 African Union report, Election-Related Disputes and Political Violence.
Feb 9: Midterm Exam in class [Graded exams will be returned in class on Thursday, 16 Feb]

Which Direction Now?

Feb 14: The Consolidation of Electoral Civilian Regimes Should democratic consolidation eradicate old practices of politics or should it seek to incorporate them?


- Sierra Leone ballot, 2007.


Feb 16: The Internal Politics of Violence and the Collapse of Order: The financing of rebellion. Is the “criminalization of the state” [or of insurgency] sustainable?


• “Blueprint to Stop Drug and Airport Menace,” *For di People* [Sierra Leone], 13 July 2008.

One also might want to visit the website of the UN Office on Drug and Crime to read their Oct 2011 report, *Organized Crime and Instability in Central Africa: A Threat Assessment* or *Drug Trafficking as a Security Threat in West Africa* on the problem of “narco-states”.

**Feb 21: Global Responses to the Collapse of Order:** How effective is external intervention? Are international tribunals a viable and sustainable solution?


• Special Court for Sierra Leone, “The Prosecutor against Charles Ghankay Taylor,” 7 March 2003.


**Feb 23: The Politics of Security:** How viable is the project of reform of Africa’s militaries? What is the impact of the Global War on Terror on African militaries’ relationships with their own societies?


• “United States Military / Not on Parade”, *Africa Confidential*, 28 Feb 2008, 9 [on US area command for Africa]

*AFRICOM* maintains a web site. The UK Ministry of Defense posts an interesting document that explains how the UK military—civilian *Africa Conflict Prevention Pool* plans to work with NGOs and local authorities in “state-building” projects. The US equivalent is found in the Department of Defense Directive 3000.05 of 2005 (reissued in 2009) on the joint role of humanitarian organizations and the US military in training local militaries
Feb 28: Alternatives to State Politics as Usual? What are the limits of politics? Where should one look for new kinds of political engagement? Societal formulations of politics.

Harbeson & Rothchild, chapter by Denis Tull, “China’s Engagement in Africa,” 323-44.


March 1: Pan-African Alternatives (or Addition?) to State Politics Is the African Union a Pan-African alternative, or just politics as usual?


*** 1 March: Papers should be written soon! ***

*** Papers are due (via email to your TA) by noon on Saturday, 3 March ***

March 3: African Politics and the NU Student “So you want to work for an NGO in Africa?” We’re looking at the politics of that too.


The final exam will be administered on WEDNESDAY, 14 March from 19:00 to 21:00 in Annenberg G15, which also serves as the classroom throughout the term.

What do we not study adequately during this term? Religion in politics (such as the evolving role of Islam and evangelical Christianity in political change), the varieties of youth politics, and a myriad of issues related to the Africa’s place in global society have been given short-shrift. We have to work within the constraints of the term system, and if you want more courses on these topics, one suggestion is to lobby for them.

9:39 AM, 1/7/2012