Politics of Conflict in Africa
Political Science 395 & African Studies 395
Winter Quarter 2014

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:30 to 1:50pm
Annenberg G-28

Taught by Will Reno
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Overview

This class is about the politics of large-scale political violence (i.e., lethal contention among social groups and political factions, governmental repression, insurgencies, etc.) in the African context. It focuses on recent and contemporary developments. Civil wars constitute a major category of political violence in Africa. But one premise of the approach in this class is that political violence in contemporary Africa challenges conventional uses of this category. This is because some "civil wars" actually may reflect violent struggles for position within incumbent elite networks. Challengers in this context fit less easily in the "rebel" category. Violence associated with "crime" might be better understood as outgrowths of power struggles over patronage resources that are vital to the exercise of political authority in some political systems. "Criminal gangs" might occupy dual positions as self-aggrandizing predators and as political muscle for contending political factions. Or they could merge with real political outsiders, with millenarian pretensions and radical ideas. This approach to conflict in Africa implicitly assumes that data bases that count "civil wars" understate this intensity and diversity of conflicts.

A second premise guiding the approach in this course is that the nature of political violence in Africa (as elsewhere) reflects the character of state power. For example, armed opponents to bureaucratically strong and cohesive states tend to be organizationally distinct from these states and often try to mobilize people around an agenda to reform or refurbish the state. State authority that is built upon networks of political patronage and that taps the realm of illicit commercial transactions generates armed groups with distinct motivations and goals. These armed actors differ in how they construct their relations with civilian populations, with foreign governments, business organizations and others. This context of patronage networks and the violent conflicts that it generates will be a major focus of the inquiry in this course.

He first part of this class defines the nature of political violence in Africa and how some African and non-African observers react to it. The second section explores in more depth the relationship between the strategies that regimes use to exercise authority and the political violence that appears in these political systems. This section will focus on the role that the politics of

patronage and personal rule play in shaping political violence. The third section considers the prospects for reform; whether reform mitigates or exacerbates political violence in the short and long-term. Some of the reading in his section tackles the controversial argument that democratic competition and administrative reform in these contexts may exacerbate political violence and increase political instability, at least in the short-term. The fourth section considers contemporary strategies for conflict management. This section explores the rationales and aims of external (multilateral and unilateral) intervention in conflicts. This section will include consideration of the ideas and effects of African and non-African governments to promote regional peacekeeping forces. This section also will consider more localized conflict management strategies.

Information and analyses of specific conflicts and incidences of large-scale political violence will appear in course material across these sections. Students will have an opportunity to explore some of these cases in greater depth in the assignments detailed below.

Course Requirements

Your final grade will be based upon the following course components:

Situation Reports: (25%) You will choose one contemporary African conflict upon which to report. The first report will present a survey of the intensity of the conflict and a brief outline of the major groups that participate in this conflict. This first report is due by class-time on Thursday, 23 January. Your second report will consider the same conflict, with an updated situation report, but this time you will discuss how specific approaches in the readings and class discussions were particularly helpful or unhelpful) in building your understanding of the conflict. Each paper is to be 6-8 pages in length.

Midterm exam: (25%) This exam will require students to identify and explain the significance of key terms encountered in this course. Students will then address essay questions. The exam will be administered in class on Thursday, 6 February.

Final Paper: (40%) This paper of about 15 pages can be used to explore a significant topic that is related to this class.

Participation: (10%) Showing up for class plays a big part of success in this category. Participation also includes active engagement in class discussions, whether in the classroom, on blogs or other venues that we devise in our discussions.

Required Textbooks

The following textbooks should be ordered on line in advance of the start of the course.

> Mats Utas, ed. 2012. *African Conflicts and Informal Power: Big Men and Networks*. London: Zed.

Paul Williams. 2011. *War & Conflict in Africa.* Cambridge: Polity.

Robert Bates. 2008. *When Things Fell Apart: State Failure in Late-Century Africa.* New York: Cambridge.
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Additional readings are available on Blackboard. Class readings and discussions will be supplemented with "occasional material" such as handouts from journals that cover current affairs such as *Africa Confidential,* and other sources to provide background information and updates on particular instances of political violence.

Class Calendar

I. The Contours of Violence

Tuesday, 7 January: Framing violence in Africa an previewing key issues related to this course

> Kony 2012 video and reactions from Ugandan citizens and more Ugandan reactions

> US military's AFRICOM coordination with the Uganda People's Defense Force

Thursday, 9 January: Framing Violence in Africa, II. How does framing influence local and international interpretations of causes and possible responses to violence? The "Coming Anarchy," twenty years on.

> Robert Kaplan. 1994. "The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, and Disease Are Rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of Our Planet." *Atlantic Monthly*. (Feb), 44-76.

> Séverine Autesserre. 2012. "Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and their Unintended Consequences." *African Affairs*, 111:442, (Spring), 202-22.

Tuesday, 14 January: The Extent of Conflict: Are wars ending sooner and with less carnage than in the recent past? What global and local factors are responsible for changing characters of conflict in Africa? Is this a sign that causes of conflict are disappearing or just that political actors (local and global) are getting better at managing conflicts?

> Williams. 2011. "Counting Africa's Conflicts." And "The Terrain of Struggle," 15-52.

> Scott Straus. 2012. "Wars Do End! Changing Patterns of Violence in sub-Saharan Africa," *African Affairs*, 111: 443 (April) 179-201.

Visit to the Herskovits Library [Tuesday, 14 Feb]

II. The Relationship Between Political Development and Violence

Thursday, 16 January: Deep politics and the relationship between violence, accumulation and the exercise of authority.

> Williams. 2011. "Neopatrimonialism," 55-71.
>
> Bates. 2008. "Introduction", "From Fable to Fact" and "Political Legacies," 3-53.

Tuesday, 21 January: The politics of resources and violence. Do particular kinds of resources increase probabilities of violence? How do the specific political contexts in some African states make some resources a more salient feature in the development of violent politics?

> Williams. 2011. "Resources," 72-93.
>
> Bates. 2008. "Policy Choices" and "Subnational Tensions," 55-93.

Thursday, 23 January: Exploring the relationship between regime insecurity, coups, and protracted conflict. Why do some coup attempts lead to protracted conflict? Has this outcome become more prominent in recent practice? Is political violence in 2013 in South Sudan and the Central Africa Republic a result of "coups d'états" or something else?

> Bates. 2008. "Things Fall Apart" and "Conclusion," 97-139.
>
> Phil Roessler. 2011. "The Enemy Within: Personal Rule, Coups and Civil War in Africa," *World Politics*, 63: 2 (April), 300-46

Tuesday, 28 January: International structural dimensions: Is Africa's place in the global order of things a contributor to violent politics?

> Williams. 2011. "Sovereignty," 94-112.
>
> Jeffrey Herbst. 2004. "Let Them Fail: State Failure in Theory and Practice," Robert Rotberg, ed., *When States Fail,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 3-2-18.

Thursday, 30 January: International and regional influences on conflict from the illicit and criminal realms. What is "criminal" versus legitimate gain or provision of opportunities to one's community from various political contexts?

Henrik Vigh in Utas, ed. 2012. "Critical States and Cocaine Connections," 137-57.

Koen Vlassenroot & Sandine Perrot in Utas, ed. 2012. "Ugandan Military Entrepreneurialism on the Congo Border," 35-59.

David Brown. 2013. *The Challenge of Drug Trafficking to Democratic Governance and Human Security in West Africa*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College. [skim]

III. Violence and the Politics of Reform

Tuesday, 4 February: Democratization and the politics of (violent?) competition, I: Why do elections seem to bring out the worst in some politicians? Why are elections in Africa more likely to be violent than elections in other parts of the world?

Paul Collier. 2009. "Votes and Violence," in his *War, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places,* (NY: HarperCollins), 15-50.

Dorina Bekoe, *Trends in Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa,* Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, 2010.

Morten Bøås in Utas, ed. 2012. "Castles in the Sand: Informal Networks and Power Brokers in the Northern Mali Periphery," 119-34.

Thursday, 6 February: Big day for exams.

Midterm Exam (in class)

Tuesday, 11 February: Democratization and the politics of (violent?) competition, II. What are the specific mechanisms that lead to violence during election campaigns? Would targeting particular actors bring violence to a halt?

Johan de Smedt. 2009. "'No Raila, No Peace!' Big Man Politics and Election Violence at the Kibera Grassroots," *African Affairs*, 108: 443 (July), 581-98.

Andreas Mehler. 2011. "Rebels and Parties in the Central African Republic," *Journal of Modern African Studies,* 49: 1 (March), 115-39.

Thursday, 13 February: Self-fixing (?) conflicts, I: Are externally generated efforts to promote peace futile? How do peace-builders enable or inhibit their success?

> Pierre Englebert & Denis Tull. 2008. "Postconflict Reconstruction in Africa: Flawed Ideas about Failed States," *International Security,* 32:4 (Spring), 106-39.

> Maa Mynster Christensen (in Utas, ed.). 2012. "Big Man Business in the Borderland of Sierra Leone," 60-77.

Tuesday, 18 February: Self-fixing (?) conflicts, II

> Mariam Persson (in Utas, ed.). 2012. "Demobilized or Remobilized? Lingering Rebel Structures in Post-war Liberia," 101-18.

> Anders Thermnér (in Utas, ed.). 2012. "Former Mid-level Commanders in Big Man Networks," 205-23.

IV. The Politics of Conflict Management

Thursday, 20 February: International Peacekeeping

> Williams. 2011. "Organization-Building," "Peacemaking," and "Peacekeeping," 149-204.

Tuesday, 25 February: International Justice

> Gerhard Anders (in Utas, ed.). 2012. "Bigmanity and International Criminal Justice in Sierra Leone," 158-80.

> Special Court for Sierra Leone. 2003. *The Prosecutor Against Charles Ghankay Taylor, also known as Charles MacArthur Dapkpana Taylor,* Case SCSL—03—1.

> United Nations Security Council. 2000. *Resolution 1315*, 14 August.

Thursday, 27 February: The politics of aid

> Williams. 2011. "Aid," 205-228.

Sarah K Lischer. 2003. "Collateral Damage: Humanitarian Assistance as a Cause of Conflict." *International Security*, 28:1, 79-109.

Marc Le Pape. 2011. "In the Name of Emergency: How MSF Adapts and Justifies Its Choices," in Claire Magione, Michael Neuman and Fabrice Weissman, eds. *Humanitarian Negotiations Revealed: The MSF Experience.* New York: Columbia University Press, 237-49.

Tuesday, 4 March: New tactics of intervention in the post-911 strategic context. Are new strategies for intervention really about state-building?

Will Reno. 2013. "The International Factor in African Warfare," in John Harbeson & Donald Rothchild, eds. *Africa in World Politics: Engaging a Changing Global Order*. NY: Westview, 150-72.

William F.S. Miles. 2012. "Deploying Development to Counter Terrorism: Post-9/11 Transformation of U.S. Foreign Aid to Africa," *African Studies Review*, 55: 3 (Dec), 27-60.

Thursday, 6 March: The debate about the changing nature of political violence in Africa. Is the intensity and incidence of political violence declining?

Will Reno. 2011. "Conclusion: The Past and Future of Warfare in Africa, in my *Warfare in Independent Africa*. NY: Cambridge University Press, 242-55.

David Kilcullen. 2013. "Future Cities, Future Threats," in his *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla.* NY: Oxford University Press, 52-115.

WCAS Reading Period begins on Tuesday, 11 March. Exams begin on Monday, 17 March.