

IAS 3793: African Politics & Society

Department of International and Area Studies
University of Oklahoma
Spring 2023

Instructor: Professor Natalie Letsa

Class Schedule: T/Th 10:30 – 11:45am; Farzaneh Hall 150

Office: Farzaneh Hall, Room 315

Office Hours: Schedule a meeting at: <https://calendly.com/nwletsa>

Email: nwletsa@ou.edu

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to the history, politics and social processes of sub-Saharan Africa. The first part of the course provides historical context for understanding the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods on the continent. The second part of the course focuses on contemporary politics: democracy, authoritarianism, and election. The third section considers societal issues in Africa, including ethnicity, religion, customary authority and public opinion. The last part of the course focuses on Africa's position in the modern world, focusing on topics such as natural resources, aid, and conflict. In addition to learning about the histories and trajectories of individual countries, the course will also focus on sub-regional and cross-national similarities and differences, as well as contextualize African politics in a larger global history.

Course Goals

The first goal of the course is for students to acquire a working knowledge of African geography and history. By the end of the semester, students will have a basic understanding of politics of most countries in Africa, and in-depth knowledge of at least one country. Second, students will acquire the historical knowledge necessary to understand contemporary politics in sub-Saharan Africa. They will be able to read beyond news headlines to understand the more complex processes underlying contemporary events. Finally, students will be able to articulate the key puzzles and challenges that African countries face today.

Required Books

Wilson, Lindy, Bereket Habte Selassie, Georges-Nzongola-Ntalaja, and Ernest Harsch. 2015. *African Leaders of the Twentieth Century: Biko, Selassie, Lumumba, Sankara* (Ohio Short Histories of Africa)

Achebe, Chinua. 1958. *Things Fall Apart*. Penguin Books

Assignments and Grading

Assignments in this course are designed for students to learn more about special topics in African history and politics, practice analytical writing, and demonstrate knowledge of the course material. The calendar of assignments is below:

Reading Quizzes: Six total (15%); I will drop your lowest score

Two Vignettes: Date TBD (15%)

Reading Response Paper: Thursday, March 9 (25%)

*Each student will read one of the biographies in **African Leaders of the Twentieth Century: Biko, Selassie, Lumumba, Sankara**. The response paper will discuss how the person's life reflects broader trends on the continent from the colonial and post-colonial periods.*

Country Report: Thursday, March 30 (10%)

Research Paper:

Rough Draft: Thursday, April 20

Peer Review: Thursday, April 27 (5%)

Final Draft: Wednesday, May 10 (30%)

Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1: The Politics of Talking about African Politics

Tuesday, January 17

Readings: NONE

Thursday, January 19

Readings:

Hatcher, Jessica. 2013. "Africa's Drinking Problem: Alcoholism on the Rise as Beverage Multinationals Circle" *Time*. <http://world.time.com/2013/08/09/africas-drinking-problem-alcoholism-on-the-rise-as-beverage-multinationals-circle/#ixzz2dNU8d1Oc>

Arit, John. 2013. "Confusing a Country for a Continent: How We Talk About Africa." *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/08/confusing-country-continent-how-we-talk-about-africa/311621/>

Wainaina, B. 2005. "How to Write about Africa. Some Tips: Sunsets and Starvation are Good." *Granta* 92: p. 91-97. <https://granta.com/how-to-write-about-africa/>

PART I: A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CONTINENT

Week 2: Precolonial African Politics & Society

Tuesday, January 24

Readings:

French, Howard. 2021. *Born in Blackness: Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World, 1471 to the Second World War*. Liveright. Chapters 1-3: p. 17-47.

Achebe, Chinua. 1958. *Things Fall Apart*. Penguin Books (start reading).

Thursday, January 26

Readings:

Boahen, A.A. 1987. "The Eve of the Colonial Conquest and Occupation." *In African Perspectives on Colonialism*. New York, NY: Diasporic Press. p. 1-26.

Achebe, Chinua. 1958. *Things Fall Apart*. Penguin Books (keep reading).

**Quiz #1 today (map quiz)

Week 3: Colonialism

Tuesday, January 31

Readings:

Achebe, Chinua. 1958. *Things Fall Apart*. Penguin Books (finish reading).

Vignette: Von Trotha's Proclamation

Thursday, February 2

Readings:

Rodney, Walter. 1972. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Verso Books. Chapter 6: 245-290.

***Note: Howard French (Columbia University, New York Times) will be visiting to give a talk today on his book, *Born in Blackness*, at 6-7:30pm. You are expected to attend; we will discuss his talk next week.

Week 4: Independence!

Tuesday, February 7

Readings:

Ade Ajayi, J.F. 1982. "Expectations of Independence," *Daedalus*. 111(2), p. 1-9.

Vignette: Baasskap and the 1948 Election

Thursday, February 9

Readings:

Look at all the photos and read at least three of the essays:

"Reflections on 1960, the Year of Africa" *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/02/06/world/africa/africa-independence-year.html>

Vignette: March 6, 1957

Week 5: The Postcolonial State and Patrimonial Rule

Tuesday, February 14

Readings:

Englebert, Pierre and Kevin C. Dunn, 2013. "Neopatrimonial Rule" in *Inside African Politics*, p. 129-143.

Vignette: Zombie and the Kalakuta Republic

Thursday, February 16

Readings:

“The Road to Hell Is Unpaved.” *The Economist*. December 21, 2002.

Lancaster, Carol. 1983. “Africa’s Economic Crisis.” *Foreign Policy*. No 52: p. 149-166.

Vignette: The African Versailles

**Reading Quiz #2 today

Week 6: The Wave of Democratization

Tuesday, February 21

Readings:

Bleck, Jaimie and Nicolas van de Walle. 2019. *Electoral Politics in Africa Since 1990*.
Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2: 31-61.

Vignette: Villes Mortes

**Reading Quiz #3 today

Thursday, February 23

Readings:

Bleck, Jaimie and Nicolas van de Walle. 2019. *Electoral Politics in Africa Since 1990*.
Cambridge University Press. Chapter 3: 62-100.

PART II: CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN POLITICS

Week 7: Democracy and Authoritarianism

Tuesday, February 28

Readings:

Bleck, Jaimie and Nicolas van de Walle. 2019. *Electoral Politics in Africa Since 1990*.
Cambridge University Press. Chapter 8: 261-283.

Thursday, March 2

Readings:

Gyimah-Boadi, E. 2015. “Africa’s Waning Democratic Commitment.” *Journal of Democracy* 26(1), p. 101-113.

**Reading Quiz #4 today

Vignette: Ma Waxoon Waxeet

Week 8: Voters & Elections

Tuesday, March 7

Readings:

Olanyin, Azeez. 2020. "Election sophistication and the changing contours of vote buying in Nigeria's 2019 general elections." *The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 109 (4), 386-395.

Letsa, Natalie Wenzell. 2020. "Expressive Voting in Autocracies: A Theory of Non-Economic Participation with Evidence from Cameroon." *Perspectives on Politics*, 18 (2), 439-453.

Thursday, March 9

Readings: NO READING

*** Reading response paper due today

SPRING BREAK

PART III: CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN SOCIETY

Week 9: Identity: Ethnicity & Religion

Tuesday, March 21

Readings:

Kasfir, Nelson. 1976. *The Shrinking Political Arena*. University of California Press. Chapter 2: 28 – 46.

Thursday, March 23

Readings:

Englebert, Pierre and Kevin C. Dunn, 2013. "Religion" in *Inside African Politics*, p. 92-109.

Vignette: The Return from Exile of Cheikh Amadou Bamba

**Reading Quiz #5 today

Week 10: Customary Authority

Tuesday, March 28

Readings:

Baldwin, Kate. 2016. *The Paradox of Traditional Chiefs in Democratic Africa*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2: p. 20 – 52.

Vignette: Mswati III

Thursday, March 30

Readings:

Letsa, Natalie Wenzell and Martha Wilfahrt, "Judge, Landlord, Broker, Watchman: Assessing Variation in Chiefly Duties in the Ghana-Togo Borderlands." *Working Paper*.

***Country report due today

Week 11: Public Opinion

Tuesday, April 4

Readings:

Familiarize yourself with the Afrobarometer mission and data:

<http://afrobarometer.org/about>

Read through the Round 6 Questionnaire: <http://afrobarometer.org/data/merged-round-6-codebook-36-countries-2016>

Thursday, April 6

Readings:

NONE

PART IV: AFRICA IN THE WORLD

Week 12: Natural Resources, Aid, and Development

Tuesday, April 11

Readings:

Mkandawire, Thandika, 2010. "Aid, Accountability, and Democracy in Africa." *Social Research*. 77(4) pp. 1149-1182.

Ferguson, James and I. Lohmann, 1994. "The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development' and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho." *The Ecologist*, 24(5): 176-81.

Vignette: The Lake Turkana Fish Processing Plant

Thursday, April 13

Readings:

Keefe, P.R. (2013). "Buried Secrets." *The New Yorker* (July 8, 2013), p. 50. Available online at: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/07/08/buried-secrets>

**Reading Quiz #6 today

Vignette: ELF in Congo Brazzaville

Week 13: Violence and War

Tuesday, April 18

Readings:

Sawyer, Amos. 2004. "Violent Conflicts and Governance Challenges in West Africa: The Case of the Mano River Basin Area." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. 42(3): 437-463.

Thursday, April 20

Readings:

French, Howard W. "Kagame's Hidden War in the Congo." *New York Times Review of Books*. September 24, 2009.
<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2009/09/24/kagames-hidden-war-in-the-congo/>
Severine Autesserre. October 2015. "Trouble in Peaceland." *Foreign Policy*.

****Rough draft of research paper due today*

Week 14: Africa Rising?

Tuesday, April 25

Readings:

"Emerging Africa: A Hopeful Continent." *The Economist*. 406(8825): March 2, 2013.
Frankema, Ewout and Marlous van Waijenburg. "Africa Rising? A Historical Perspective." *Africa is a Country*. October 17, 2018.
<https://africasacountry.com/2018/10/africa-rising-a-historical-perspective>

Thursday, April 27

Readings:

French, Howard. "Megalopolis: how coastal west Africa will shape the coming century." *The Guardian*. October 27, 2022.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/27/megalopolis-how-coastal-west-africa-will-shape-the-coming-century?s=03>
E. Gyimah-Boadi. "West Africa's Authoritarian Turn: Democratic Backsliding, Youth Resistance, and the Case for American Help," *Foreign Affairs*. July 11, 2022.
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/west-africa/2022-07-11/west-africas-authoritarian-turn>

****Peer Review due today*

Week 15: READING WEEK

Tuesday, May 3 & Thursday, May 5

NO CLASS THIS WEEK! WORK ON YOUR RESEARCH PAPERS!

****Final draft of research paper due Wednesday, May 10 at 8am in my mailbox (Farzaneh 314) or uploaded to Canvas*

Class Policies: I do not take attendance or base your grade on participation. However, if you choose to be present in class, I expect you to respect the classroom. Your phone should be kept in your bag, and you should use your laptop exclusively for the class; e.g. taking notes, researching an idea or topic we are discussing. I will not accept late assignments unless you have a medical or personal emergency.

Covid-19 Policies: I *emphatically, passionately, and enthusiastically* encourage students to wear face masks at all times—especially in class—and to maintain social distancing. [Current CDC guidance](#) advises all individuals, *even those who are fully vaccinated*, to wear a mask indoors in public if in an area of substantial transmission. Even though masking isn't required by law, we will hold it as a community expectation of one another to keep us safe and together. Students who are feeling ill or who have been exposed to an individual who tested positive for Covid-19 are asked to isolate and to notify the University through the [Healthy Together app](#). Accommodations will be provided for those who need to quarantine. *Revisions in the course content and design may be needed in case the instructor needs to be away from classes due to Covid-19.*

Academic Integrity: Students are expected to meet university standards for academic honesty on all course assignments. General information about these standards can be found at <http://integrity.ou.edu/>. You may also wish to consult the Student's Guide to Academic Integrity, which is available at http://integrity.ou.edu/students_guide.html. If you have questions about how to avoid plagiarism, or about any other aspect of the university's policy on academic integrity, please contact me as soon as possible.

Note for Students with Disabilities: The University of Oklahoma is committed to the goal of achieving equal educational opportunity and full participation for students with disabilities. Consistent with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, The University of Oklahoma ensures that no “qualified individual with a disability” will be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination solely on the basis of disability under any program or activity offered by The University of Oklahoma. Accommodations on the basis of disability are available by contacting the Disability Resource Center in Room 166, Goddard Center [\(405\) 325-4173](tel:(405)325-4173)/TDD or [\(405\) 325-3852](tel:(405)325-3852) Voice. More information is also available at: <http://www.ou.edu/content/drc.html> . The University of Oklahoma will reasonably accommodate otherwise qualified individuals with a disability unless such accommodation would pose an undue hardship, would result in a fundamental alteration in the nature of the service, program, or activity or in undue financial or administrative burdens.

Religious Observance: It is the policy of the University to excuse the absences of students that result from religious observances and to reschedule examinations and additional required classwork that may fall on religious holidays, without penalty.

Title IX Resources: For any concerns regarding gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, stalking, or intimate partner violence, the University

offers a variety of resources, including advocates on-call 24.7, counseling services, mutual no contact orders, scheduling adjustments and disciplinary sanctions against the perpetrator. Please contact the Sexual Misconduct Office [405-325-2215](tel:405-325-2215) (8-5) or the Sexual Assault Response Team [405-615-0013](tel:405-615-0013) (24.7) to learn more or to report an incident.

Adjustments for Pregnancy/Childbirth Related Issues: Should you need modifications or adjustments to your course requirements because of documented pregnancy-related or childbirth-related issues, please contact your professor or the Disability Resource Center at 405/325-3852 as soon as possible. Also, see <http://www.ou.edu/eoo/faqs/pregnancy-faqs.html> for answers to commonly asked questions.

Mental Health Support Services: If you are experiencing any mental health issues that are impacting your academic performance, counseling is available at the University Counseling Center (UCC). The Center is located on the second floor of the Goddard Health Center, at 620 Elm Rm. 201, Norman, OK 73019. To schedule an appointment call (405) 325-2911. For more information please visit <http://www.ou.edu/ucc>.