Introduction

Africa is by many measures the most diverse continent in the world. There are more ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups in Africa than in any region of the world. Africa has more countries than any other continent on earth, most of which emerged from colonization as modern, independent nation-states during the second half of the twentieth century. Studying African politics thus combines longstanding indigenous traditions and cultures with young political institutions, making Africa among the most politically vibrant and turbulent regions of the world.

This course examines the countries of Africa in comparative perspective. Instead of merely focusing on the various problems facing the continent, this course looks at examples of both the successes and failures of African states in addressing the challenges they face. Through a combination of case studies, academic scholarship and journalism, the course analyzes the independent and colonial histories of African nations; explores the development of modern African states, societies and economies; and examines the impacts of current international influences on African states.

The course is organized into five sections. Section 1 examines the histories of African states and societies. This section looks at both indigenous African states and colonial territories as precursors to contemporary African state. Section 2 examines modern African states, highlighting various trends in politics and governance. Section 3 explores various categories of social identity that influence African politics and society. Section 4 examines the political economy of Africa, including issues of economic development, trade and aid. Section 5 concludes the course by examining the impacts of current international influences on African states.

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to attend all class meetings in person. Students are additionally expected to compete all required reading for each week before class, and come prepared to discuss the material in class. Beyond generally reading the course material, students will be assigned to research a particular country to research during the semester, culminating in a final paper focused on that country. Students should read news and other sources about their assigned country and be able to relate each week’s material to that country.
Absences from class meetings or failure to actively participate in class discussions can negatively impact your class participation grade. If you anticipate missing a class meeting due to an acceptable reason (such as illness or bereavement, religious holiday or observance, or approved university-sponsored activity or event), please inform instructor in advance and, when applicable, complete a written assignment to be given in lieu of attendance for that meeting. If you are absent for an unexpected reason, please contact your professor as soon as you can after the meeting to discuss the missed material and possible make-up assignment.

A note on class discussions and inclusion: Nothing in the course is intended to shock or offend, but we will be reading and discussing ideas, policies and practices that may contain shocking or offensive content. There will presumably be disagreements and divergent viewpoints within the class, which are key parts of academic discourse. I ask that you approach readings and discussions with an open mind and heart, and that you show yourselves and your classmates respect and grace as you engage with one another. Please reach out to me (or if you are uncomfortable doing so, speak with a resident advisor) if at any point you become uncomfortable or distressed by class material or discussion.

Readings
Readings are drawn from academic journals, scholarly books and news sources and can be accessed through the course website. Some readings may change to reflect current events – changes will be announced and posted to course website. Readings present a variety of perspectives, some of which may qualify, contradict or oppose perspectives from other readings. Documents on this list have been chosen for a variety of reasons. The inclusion of a reading on this syllabus should not be considered an endorsement of the content or viewpoints expressed in that reading. All readings should be approached critically.

A note on “how” to read for this class: There are a number of assigned readings for this course. Most of them are required, and you are expected to have completed these before each meeting. When reading, generally read first and foremost for main ideas, points and motivations of each article. What are the authors trying to say, and why are they trying to make these points? Additionally, the texts are rich in details and examples that you can think about and even explore based on what you are reading. Don’t get bogged down trying to read footnotes (though they are there if you want to explore a particular point from the reading in greater depth), and don’t worry if some of the articles contain technical details (quantitative analysis, game theory, etc.) that might be unfamiliar. If you understand these analytical tools, great! If not, try to focus on the main substantive points the author is trying to make.
The Harvard College Honor Code

All students are expected to abide by the Harvard College Honor Code, which states:

“Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one’s own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.”¹

For more information on the Honor Code, see: https://honor.fas.harvard.edu/about

Course Policy on Collaboration

You are allowed and encouraged to discuss course material with your classmates and others outside of class. However, there are no collaborative written assignments for this course, and all graded assignments are intended to be completed individually. All written work submitted by a student for this class should consist of that student’s own individual ideas, that student’s research and be in that student’s own words. All quotations, paraphrases and additional uses of others’ ideas and work should be clearly and properly identified and referenced. See honor code above for class expectations.

Assignments

The final grade for this class will be based on the following assignments:
- Class participation (10% of final grade)
  - Includes attendance, general participation during in-class discussions and discussions of specific assigned readings.
- In-class presentation (10%)
  - Students will give in-class presentations related to the country they have been researching prior to submitting the final paper.
- Three short (5 page) papers (16% each, 48% total)
- Final 10 page paper (32%)
  - Paper prompts will all be distributed early in the semester, as will a grading rubric. Papers should be submitted by the due date and time; late papers will subject to a grading penalty, as specified on the prompt. Contact your professor as soon as possible if you anticipate that you may not be able to submit a paper by the date and time when it is due.

Course Preview Period Meeting

Introduction to Gov 94GD: “African Successes and Struggles”

There will be a special Zoom Preview Session for this class on Wednesday, August 18 at 12pm (noon) EST. You can log in using the following link:

https://harvard.zoom.us/j/98338327540?pwd=NDFobS9FTkhSeGlvOHR3L01RUUIZ0z09

Zoom Meeting ID: 983 3832 7540        Passcode (if prompted): 876984

For a flavor of the topics covered in the course, feel free to read or skim any of the following passages, which are posted on the course website. (Enrolled students will be expected to read these passages in addition to the week 1 material below.)

Ero, Comfort and Alan Boswell “South Sudan's Dismal Tenth Birthday” Foreign Affairs. July 9, 2021


SECTION I: HISTORY OF AFRICAN POLITICS

September 1
Week 1: (no class, but please complete assigned readings above)

September 8
Week 2: Historical African Politics

Required readings:
Read Sections I and II. (pages 761-784) only (we will read more of this article later in the semester).

Read Section II. (pages 331-334) only.


**Read pages 1, 7-18 and 31-33; you can skim the rest**


Recommended but not required:

September 15  
Week 3: Colonialism and the Independence Struggle  

**Required readings:**  


Smith, Tony. "A comparative study of French and British decolonization." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20.01 (1978): Read Pages 82-92 only (focused on decolonization in Cote d'Ivoire/Ivory Coast)


Mayersen, Deborah, and Stephen McLoughlin. "Risk and resilience to mass atrocities in Africa: a comparison of Rwanda and Botswana." *Journal of Genocide Research* 13.3 (2011): Read Pages 249-251 only ("Politics and ethnicity during the decolonization process"). *We will read the full article later in the semester.*

**Recommended but not required:**  
SECTION II: STATES, REGIMES AND GOVERNMENTS

September 22
Week 4: The African State

**Required readings:**


**Recommended but not required**
Monday, September 27 PAPER 1 DUE BY 5PM EST VIA EMAIL

September 29
Week 5: Politics and Democracy

Required readings:


Recommended but not required:

SECTION III: SOCIETY AND POLITICS

October 6
Week 6: Ethnicity, Race and Gender

Required readings:


Recommended but not Required


October 13
Week 7: Religion and Civil Society

**Required readings:**


Rhodes, Christopher. “(Un)locking the Church Doors: Regime Legitimacy and Political (De)Mobilisation of Churches in Ethiopia.” *Religion, State and Society* 2020.


October 20  
**Week 8: Civil Conflict and State Violence**

**Required readings:**


Straus, Scott. *The order of genocide: Race, power, and war in Rwanda*. Cornell University Press, 2013. Ch. 8


**Recommended but not required:**


SECTION IV: AFRICA AND THE WORLD

October 27
Week 9: Economic Development and Underdevelopment


Recommended but not required:
November 3
Week 10: Trade and Aid


Moyo, Dambisa. *Dead Aid: Why Aid is not Working and How There is a Better Way for Africa*. Macmillan, 2009. (Selected passages)


**Recommended but not required:**


November 10
Week 11: International Influences


Monday, November 15 PAPER 3 DUE BY 5PM EST VIA EMAIL

November 17
Week 12: Intra-Africa Relations


November 24
Week 13: Student Presentations Part 1

December 1
Week 14: Student Presentations Part 2

Final Papers Due Date TBD