

Introduction to African Politics

CPO 3204
Fall 2025

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Class Meeting Time:
10:40 AM - 11:30 AM T
10:40 AM - 12:35 PM R
ROG 0110

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Goals

Differentiate between the myths and the realities of African politics

Understand the key drivers and challenges in culturally diverse post-colonial societies

Introduce, understand, and apply key social science concepts

Contextualize and analyze key events in African politics

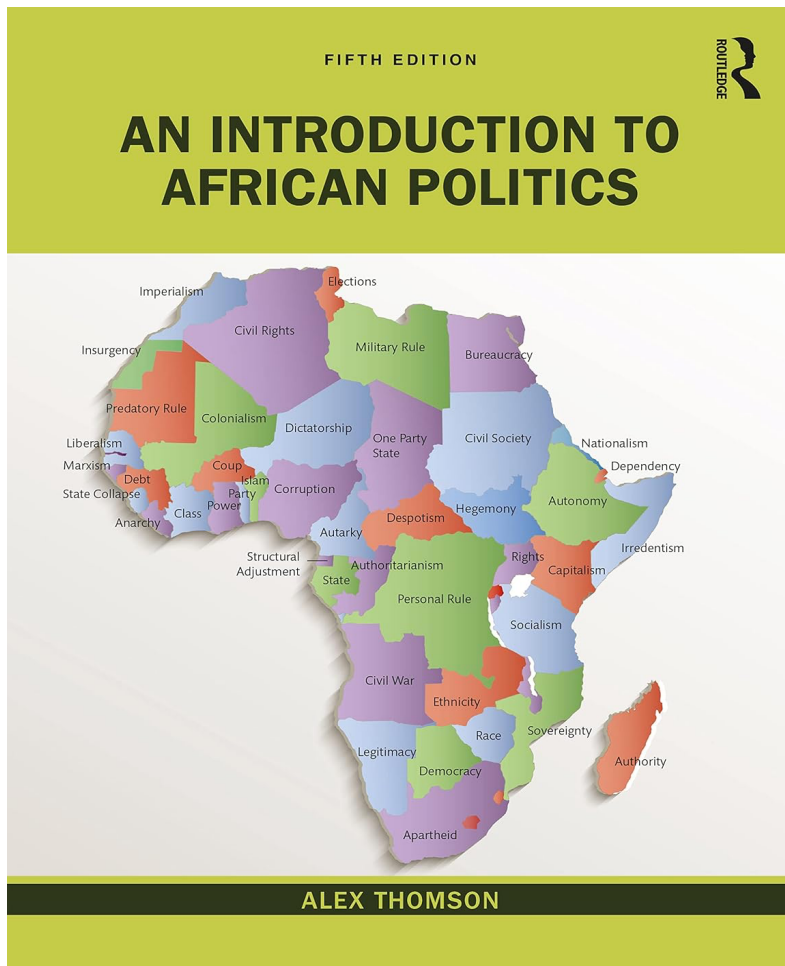
Engage with empirical data in a constructive and problem-oriented manner

Prepare for advanced academic studies, careers in government, international organizations, and advocacy

Course Overview

Sub-Saharan Africa is an evolving, diverse, young, and frequently misrepresented part of the world. Over the last two decades the continent has undergone far reaching political, social, and economic upheavals challenging its conventional image as a failed continent. The course is designed as a survey class exploring the changing dynamics of African politics since independence from European colonial domination. Key topics include the long-term legacies of European colonialism; the emergence and the modus operandi of autocratic rule; the struggle for democratization and the outcome of that struggle; the origins, causes, and manifestations of violent conflict; the impact of ethnic identities on political contestation; and the different forms of political engagement shaping contemporary Africa. The course combines in-depth regional knowledge with comparative theory thereby addressing central questions about the notion of African exceptionalism, democracy, and political culture.

During Week 1 - 4, we analyze the rationale behind European colonialism, discuss their implications for post-colonial period, debate the historical processes of state formation in Africa, and critically examine why African states are considered so-called "weak states". The first four weeks thus provide the historical foundation on which contemporary African politics is unfolding. During Week 5 - 9 we discern the causes behind the formation of one-party states and military dictatorships in the 1960s and 1970s, take a close look at African democratization attempts from the early 1990s onward, and discuss the evolution of different political regimes (democratic/autocratic/hybrid) thereafter. We also discuss the nature of public service delivery and why so many African governments fail to live up to the aspirations of their citizens. During Week 10 - 14 we debate a variety of pertinent and timely themes in African politics including ethnic relations, violence and conflict, the role of women in African politics, and the recent surge of military coups on the continent.



Weekly Pattern

This course includes lectures on Tuesdays and Thursdays that will introduce material, and discussion sections on Thursdays that provide opportunities for students to engage synchronously in scholarly debates and the ability to synthesize information.

The Tuesday meetings will consist of the introduction of new material. The longer Thursday meetings will feature student discussion sections, various forms of interactive learning, and student presentations. **Please prepare the required readings by the time we meet on Tuesday.**

I encourage thoughtful participation in lectures. We will use technology to enable snap polling, stimulate discussion, and track lecture participation and attendance. I also make time for additional free-form discussion about contemporary political events on the African continent.

Students should be prepared to read, evaluate, and discuss different points of view in discussion sections and in their research papers.

GO to class. Lectures explain important concepts, theories, and events that go way beyond the required reading. Discussion sections provide opportunities to debate related topics. **I will share my PowerPoints slides on Canvas and I encourage students to use them as a study guide for the assignments. However, slides do not replace notetaking and critical thinking.**

In addition to the required textbook, we will read academic articles and blogs. I will upload the readings on Canvas. **Students need to purchase the required reading (4th or 5th edition) by Thompson.**

Visit me during office hours if necessary.

Students must complete all assignments on time. **There is no extra credit in this class.**



Assignments and Dates

*The details of each assignment may be subject to change.
Please regularly check the Canvas course page.*

Attendance and Participation: Attendance is mandatory and is taken on Canvas/iClicker every time we meet in class. I expect students to actively participate in class. During Week 2 all students will pick a country of choice. Each week students have the opportunity to discuss contemporary political events in that country. This is a great chance to boost your participation grade. You are allowed to miss two classes without a reasonable excuse. **UF policies apply.**

Map Quiz: The quiz will test student's ability to locate all African countries on a map. **The map quiz takes place on September 16 in class.**

Oral Presentation: The presentation (in a group of up to three people) covers the topic that we are discussing that week. I expect the presenters to do considerable research going beyond the required reading. **I encourage all presenters to discuss their group presentation with me during office hours.**

Midterm Research Paper: A 3 000-word memo summarizing the political and security challenges of one African country in depth. **The paper outline (500-word summary) is due on September 12 at 23:59 ET. All students need to discuss their midterm research paper with me during the first week of September 30 during additional office hours. The memo is due on October 20 at 23:59 pm ET.** Format: Microsoft Word, Times New Roman 12, single-spaced, 3000 words excluding bibliography.

Final Exam: A multiple-choice exam on Canvas covering the content of the course including all student presentations. The date of the final exam is yet to be determined.

We will discuss the details of all assignments in class. A full understanding of the requirements of the assignments requires regular class attendance.

Grade Composition

Attendance: 10%

Participation: 10%

Map Quiz: 10%

Midterm Paper: 25% (5% outline; 20% memo)

Oral presentation: 20%

Final Exam: 25%

GRADING SCALE

A	93.0 -100%
A-	90.0-92.9%
B+	87.0-89.9%
B	83.0-86.9%
B-	80.0-82.9%
C+	77.0-79.9%
C	73.0-76.9%
C-	70.0-72.9%
D+	67.0-69.9%
D	63.0-66.9%
D-	60.0-62.9%
F	below 60.0%

Course Schedule

To follow the lectures and the discussions, you need to do the required reading prior to our meeting on Tuesday. At the end of each week, students can access my slides on Canvas. **The required reading and the course schedule may be subject to change.** Please ensure that you follow the course page on Canvas. I will post announcements should I make any changes to the required reading. With the exception of the textbook by Thompson, I will post the required readings on Canvas.

Week/Date	Topic	Required Reading
Week 1: August 21	Getting Started	Sit back, relax, and pay attention.
Week 2: August 26 and 28	European Colonialism	Thompson Chapter 1 and 2 Conklin, Alice (1998): Colonialism and Human Rights, A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa, 1895-1914. <i>The American Historical Review</i> 103 (2): 419-442
Week 3: September 2 and 4	The Legacies of Colonial State Making	Thompson Chapter 3 Mamdani (1996). Citizen and Subject. Introduction: Thinking Through Africa's Impasse. Available: https://ufl-flvc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01FALSC_UFL/175ga98/alma990375532270306597
Week 4: September 9 and 11	Study time for the map quiz next week. Research time to compile the outline for the midterm research paper. The outline is due on September 12 at 11:59 PM ET. Please submit to selischer@ufl.edu <i>Further details provided in class</i>	None
Week 5: September 16 and 18	Map Quiz (September 16) Governance and Rulership after Independence	Thompson Chapter 7. Anyang'Nyong'o, Peter (1992). <i>Africa: The Failure of One-Party Rule</i> . <i>Journal of Democracy</i> 3(1): 90-96. McGowan, Patrick (2005). Coups and Conflicts in West Africa, 1955-2004. Part I: Theoretical Perspectives. <i>Armed Forces & Society</i> 32.

Week 6: September 23 and 25	Public Service Provision	<p>Thompson Chapter 6.</p> <p>Bratton, Michael (2007). Formal versus Informal Institutions in Africa. <i>Journal of Democracy</i> 18 (3): 96-110.</p> <p>Ellis, Stephen, and Mark Shaw. "Does organized crime exist in Africa?." <i>African Affairs</i> 114, no. 457 (2015): 505-528.</p>
Week 7: September 30 and October 2	<p>Additional office hours to discuss your midterm research paper. Attendance during additional office hours is mandatory.</p> <p>Study time to plan and prepare group presentations</p> <p><i>Further details provided in class.</i></p>	None
Student presentations start on October 9		
Week 8: October 7 and 9	Democratization: Africa's Second Liberation?	<p>Thompson Chapter 11</p> <p>Lynch, Gabrielle and Gordon Crawford (2011). Democratization in Africa 1990-2010: An Assessment. <i>Democratization</i> 18 (2): 275-310.</p>
Week 9: October 14 and 16	Contemporary Regime Trajectories	<p>Albaugh, Erika (2011). An autocrat's toolkit: adaptation and manipulation in 'democratic' Cameroon. <i>Democratization</i> 18 (2): 388-414.</p> <p>Van de Walle, Nic (2002). Africa's Range of Regimes. <i>Journal of Democracy</i> 13(2): 66-80.</p> <p>Riedl, Rachel (2022). Africa's Democratic Outliers; Success amid Challenges in Benin and South Africa, in: <i>Democracy in Hard Places</i> edited by Mainwaring and Masoud, p.94-127.</p>
The midterm research paper is due on October 20 at 23:59 ET.		
Week 10: October 21 and 23	Ethnicity and Political Contestation	<p>Ake, Claude. "What is the Problem of Ethnicity in Africa?." <i>Transformation</i> 22 (1993).</p> <p>Lindberg, Staffan and Minion Morrison (2008). Are African Voters Really Ethnic or Clientelistic? Survey</p>

		<p>Evidence from Ghana. <i>Political Science Quarterly</i> 123 (1): 95-122.</p> <p>Green, Elliott. "Ethnicity, national identity and the state: Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa." <i>British Journal of Political Science</i> 50, no. 2 (2020): 757-779.</p>
Week 11: October 28 and 30	Violence and Conflict	<p>Thomson Chapter 10</p> <p>Ismail, Olawale, and 'Funmi Olonisakin. "Why do youth participate in violence in Africa? A review of evidence." <i>Conflict, Security & Development</i> 21, no. 3 (2021): 371-399.</p> <p>Reyntjens, Filip (2011). Constructing the Truth, Dealing with Dissent, Domesticating the World: Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda. <i>African Affairs</i> 110 (438): 1-34.</p>
Week 12: November 4 and 6	Development and Foreign Aid	<p>Lancaster, Carol. "Sixty Years of Foreign Aid: What Have We Learned?" <i>International Journal</i> 64, no. 3 (2009): 799-810.</p> <p>Nic Cheeseman, Haley J. Swedlund, Cleo O'Brien-Udry, Foreign aid withdrawals and suspensions: Why, when and are they effective?, <i>World Development</i>, Volume 178, 2024.</p> <p>Easterly, William (2013). <i>The Tyranny of Experts</i>. Chapter 1 and 2.</p>
Week 13: November 13 No class on November 11(Veterans Day)	Women and Power	<p>Tripp, Aili (2015). <i>Women and Power in Postconflict Africa</i>. Introduction.</p> <p>Tøraasen, Marianne and Tøraasen, Marianne, <i>Gender Parity in Senegal - A Continuing Struggle</i> (2017). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3648097 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3648097</p>

		Alozie, Nicholas O., and Patience Akpan-Obong. "The digital gender divide: Confronting obstacles to women's development in Africa." <i>Development Policy Review</i> 35, no. 2 (2017): 137-160.
Week 14: November 18 and 20	The Coup Surge: Back to the Past?	<p>Elischer, Sebastian, and Benjamin N. Lawrance. "Reassessing Africa's new post-coup landscape." <i>African Studies Review</i> 65, no. 1 (2022): 1-7.</p> <p>Singh, Naunihal. "The myth of the coup contagion." <i>Journal of Democracy</i> 33, no. 4 (2022): 74-88.</p> <p>Ochieng'Opalo, Ken. "The Truth About Africa's Coups." <i>Journal of Democracy</i> 35, no. 2 (2024): 93-107.</p>
Week 15: November 25 and 27	Thanksgiving Break	None
Week 16: December 2	Review of everything we covered	Notes and Slides
<i>The final exam takes place on tba</i>		

Contacting Prof. Elischer

Please contact me if you need to discuss matters related to class. To protect your federal privacy rights, we cannot discuss your grade(s) over the phone, in front of the class, or via non-official email. *Always email from Canvas or your UFL email.*

Prof. Sebastian Elischer

320 Anderson Hall
selischer@ufl.edu
Regular Office Hours:
T 12:30 AM – 2:30 PM
R 1:30 PM – 2:30 PM
or via appointment

The Fine Print: Course, Department, and University Policy in Brief

Attendance: Attendance is required. Students failing to attend class during the first week may be dropped from the course; excessive absences could result in a failing grade. Requirements for class attendance, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>). Please contact me if you will miss lecture. Documentation for excused absences must be received within one week of absence.

COVID-19 (and other illnesses): If you are not vaccinated, get vaccinated. Vaccines are readily available and have been demonstrated to be safe and effective against the COVID-19 virus. Visit [one.ufl.edu](https://one.ufl.edu/vaccination) for vaccination opportunities.

Late Work/Make up Exams: If you have an emergency on exam day, please email me immediately. Makeup assignments are allowed with documentation, within seven calendar days. **No one will be permitted to take any exam/assignment early.**

Course Evaluations: Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback is available at gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students/. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals or via Canvas. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/public-results/.

Disability Services: Students who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. Please share your accommodation letter (and discuss your needs) with Dr. Robbins as early as possible.

Plagiarism/Cheating: Cheating/plagiarism will result in zero for the assignment and will be reported to the SCCR. Students are bound by the UF Honor Pledge: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>. AI (e.g., ChatGPT) is not permitted in this course.

Current UF Grading Policies/Grade Points: Information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points is here: catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/.

Recording lectures/discussion: Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

Extra-Credit: I do not offer extra credit.