Boston University
Pardee School of Global Studies

Government and Politics of Contemporary Africa

Instructor: Prof. Michael Woldemariam
Office Hours: 3:30-5pm, Tues and Thurs
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Course Description

This course is designed as an upper-level seminar on post-colonial African politics. Background topics, which occupy the first three weeks of class, include Africa before and during the period of European rule. Core themes, covered in the remainder of the course, include colonial legacies, patterns of political and economic development, and violent conflict. The class concludes with a careful consideration of the African continent's political, economic, and social prospects.

A primary objective of the course is to interrogate popular perceptions about the uniformity of African politics, and identify the ways in which African politics have varied across space and time on several meaningful dimensions. At the same time, course material will speak to several important ways in which there is a single coherent "African" politics.

Beyond the course's descriptive goals, an important emphasis is placed on the problem explanation. Students should not only develop an understanding of what patterns of politics in post-colonial Africa look like, but engage the full-range of academic theories designed to explain these patterns. Thus, the course pays careful attention to competing theoretical claims designed to explain particular aspects of African politics, and encourages students to critically weigh available evidence in developing their own original understandings.

Books (available for purchase in BU bookstore)


Course Assignments

It is essential that students complete the weekly readings prior to class. While the instructor may lecture from time to time, this course is a seminar, and depends on student's careful consideration of assigned reading material and class room contributions. Readings not contained in the three course texts for purchase (see above) will be posted to Blackboard.
Students will also be asked to write two papers, roughly 8 pages in length (paper topics will be assigned in class). These papers will be due weeks 5 and 10.

There is no final exam for this class, but students will submit a final 15-page research paper, due on the assigned exam day for this course. Students will have some discretion in final paper topics, although they will be asked to consult with the professor in developing paper topics.

Late papers will be accepted, but students will lose one letter grade for every day that a paper is late.

**Grading**

Participation: 30%

Analytic Papers: 40%

Final Paper: 30%

**Absences**

Students are expected to attend ALL classes. Absences will be excused for official, medical, religious and personal reasons, as long as appropriate documentation is provided. Students who miss class are encouraged to visit the instructor’s office hours in order to discuss course material.

**Plagiarism and Academic Honesty**

You are expected to provide citations in papers for all quotations, paraphrases, and ideas taken from any source other than your own original thoughts. Boston University has very strict standards for intellectual integrity, and punishment for plagiarism is severe, and can include permanent expulsion from the university. For more on the definition of plagiarism and the standards to which you will be held, see the Academic Conduct Code, available at http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/

**Course Schedule (subject to change)**

**Week 1: Introduction and the Diversity of African Politics**

Young, Chapters 1 and 2 (browse the intro of the book)


**Week 2: Pre-Colonial Africa**

Herbst, chapters 1 and 2


**Weeks 3: Colonialism**

Herbst, Chapter 3


**Week 4: Africa’s Inheritance**

Herbst, chapter 5


Peter Ekeh, “Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa,” Comparative Studies of Society and History (Vol 17, No. 1, 1975)


**Week 5: Post-Independence Leaders and Policy Choice**

Herbst, chapter 4


Young, chapter 3

**Week 6: Political Breakdown and Authoritarianism**


Young, chapter 4

**Week 7: State Pathologies and Economic Decline**

Bates, All chapters

Young, chapter 5
Week 8: Identity Politics and Civil Conflict

Young, chapters 7 and 8


Week 9: The Politics of Economic Reform (readings in this section likely to change)


Week 10: Democratic Transitions and Peace Building


Young, chapter 6

Week 11: Failed States and New Civil Wars


Week 12: The Aids Crisis


Week 13: Africa’s “New” Arrivals: China, India, and the rise of the Global South

Kenneth King. 2013. *China’s Aid & Soft Power in Africa: The Case of Education and Training*. Suffolk: James Currey (pages to be assigned)


**Week 14: An African Renaissance?**


Young, chapter 9