This course has two purposes: to introduce students to some of the major arguments, hypotheses and debates in the literature on African politics and development, and to help students develop the skills to become both more intelligent consumers and more effective producers of this literature. To accomplish these goals, intense discussions of an extensive set of readings will be combined with a series of written assignments designed to help students develop research strategies to evaluate the hypotheses they encounter in (or are inspired by) the literature. Throughout these exercises, and in our seminar discussions, we will pay special attention to the particular difficulties—and opportunities—of doing research in a developing country setting such as Africa.

The readings for the seminar take up a set of key issues in African politics, economy, and society. The topics covered are not intended to be exhaustive but to emphasize either key foundational issues (e.g., colonialism and its impact; the weakness of political institutions and the implications of this weakness for policymaking; distributive politics; the role of ethnicity; the nature of African “democracy;” the impact of urbanization) or areas of particularly interesting current research. To this end, the readings are a mix of “classic” articles and very recent work that exemplifies the methodological and theoretical “cutting edge.”

The course is designed principally for UCLA Political Science PhD students who focus their research on Africa and/or other parts of the developing world. PhD and MA students from other social science departments are also welcome if space permits. Non-social science MA students should consult with the instructor before enrolling in the course.

REQUIREMENTS

There are three requirements for the course. First, students are required to attend all class meetings, come to seminar having read and thought about the assigned materials for the week, and participate actively in class discussions.

Second, all students are required to prepare three 1-2 page research design memos (one during weeks 2-4; one during weeks 5-7; and one during weeks 8-10). The memos will take a theory or hypothesis introduced in (or related to) the week’s readings and describe how one might go about collecting the appropriate evidence to test it, or one of its central observable implications. A detailed set of instructions for the research design memos will be distributed and discussed during the first seminar meeting. The memos will be due at noon each Tuesday (the day before the seminar), with copies posted to the class website. All students are expected come to class having read the memos of their colleagues, as well as the assigned readings.

The third requirement is a 15-20-page research paper that identifies variation in an important outcome of interest in Africa (not necessarily one that we have focused on in the course, although
it may be), proposes a hypothesis/argument to account for that variation, and outlines a research strategy that would provide an empirical test of that hypothesis/argument. The paper is due at 3pm on Friday, December 9. This assignment should be thought of as a substantive research proposal rather than a data collection and analysis project, although proposals must include a data analytic component in demonstrating the variation they wish to explain. All students will meet with the instructor at some point before week 7 to discuss their paper topics.

The weight accorded these three assignments will be as follows: participation in seminar discussions (25%), research memos (45%), and finished research paper (30%).

READINGS

The readings for each week are extensive. They were selected because they are considered classic, because they develop useful analytical concepts or engage in important theoretical debates, or because they represent particularly good examples of recent social science research on the topic in question. Taken together, they constitute a useful, though far from complete or comprehensive, introduction to some of the theories and issues that make up the “canonical” literature on African political and economic development, and some of the approaches that scholars have adopted in recent years to study them.

Copies of all seminar readings have been posted to the course website with the exception of James Ferguson’s *The Anti-Politics Machine* (which we read more than half of). This book is readily available from Amazon.com and other online and local booksellers.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

If this is your first Africa course, you might want to read Martin Meredith’s book, *The Fate of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005) as a way of bringing yourself up to speed. The book offers an excellent introductory overview of Africa and its history and provides a useful contextual background for the more theoretically-and methodologically-oriented readings that we will engage in the seminar.
COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

September 28: Logistics and Overview of the Course; the Biogeographic and Historical Context


October 5: Colonialism and its Legacy


October 12: No Class

October 19: The State in Africa: Personalism and Patrimonialism

October 26: Elections, Legislatures, and “Democracy” in Africa


November 2: Ethnic Voting in Africa


November 9: Ethnic Diversity in Africa


November 16: Distributive Politics in Kenya


November 23: Development Assistance in Africa


November 30: “Africa’s Unfulfilled Promise and the Path to the Future”

Christensen, Darin and David Laitin. ND. *Africa’s Unfulfilled Promise and the Path to the Future*. Book manuscript.
Dec 7: Urbanization and its Implications


