UCLA
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

POLITICAL SCIENCE 151A: GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS OF AFRICA

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Fall 2026
Mon/Weds: 9:30am-10:45am
Royce 190
Student Hours: Mon 1-3pm

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to some of the major issues, themes and theories in the politics of Sub-Saharan Africa. The course begins by reviewing the nature and legacies of colonial rule and the politics of independence. From there, we move to the character of the African state as it emerged in the years after independence, highlighting its personalism, its clientelism, and its simultaneous weakness and strength. Then, the course turns to the roles of gender and ethnicity in politics and society. From there, we explore the challenges of economic reform and the political changes that swept across the continent in the 1990s. We then turn to Africa's present and future, addressing the state of democracy, the problem of conflict and instability, the debates surrounding foreign aid, the region's development trajectory, and the challenges and opportunities offered by new technologies, urbanization, and the continent's extreme youth.

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this course is for you to gain familiarity with and to be able to apply theoretical concepts in the study of African politics and in the study of political and economic development more generally. By the end of the course, you are expected to understand the prevailing answers to the course's central question and to be familiar with the prevailing methods that social scientists use to try to answer them. You will also develop an appreciation for why these answers are sometimes unsatisfying. In addition, you will be exposed—through film, interviews, and descriptive written accounts—to aspects of African history and life in Africa today.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

The course is taught in two lectures each week, on Monday and Wednesday from 9:30am to 10:45am in Royce 190. Lectures are a critical component of the course, and will contain material that goes beyond what is contained in the readings. Attendance and attention is essential for succeeding in the course.

You are required to take an in-class midterm and a final exam, and to attend and participate in weekly discussion sections. In addition, you will read Chinua Achebe's novel *A Man of the People: A Novel of Political Unrest in a New Nation* and take an in-class test on the book. You will also be required to take a map test during the quarter's second week. The relative weights accorded to these requirements are as follows: Achebe book test (20%), midterm (25%), final exam (30%), section participation (20%), and map test (5%).

- The map quiz will be administered at the beginning of class on Monday, October 5.
- The in-class test on the Achebe novel will be on Monday, November 2.
- The midterm will be taken in class on Monday, November 16.
- The final exam will be on Friday, December 11 from 8-11am. *If you know that you have a conflict with this date/time, then you should not enroll in the course.*

The course involves a fairly heavy reading load, the completion of which (ideally before the lecture for which each set of readings is assigned, and certainly before your weekly section meetings) is essential to understanding the issues and controversies addressed in the lectures. The readings are a mix of scholarly works, journalistic accounts, and excerpts from novels. Many are quite short. Many are by African authors. In addition to the readings, the course also includes several online assignments (TED Talks, YouTube videos, recorded interviews, etc). With the exception of the Achebe novel, which is available at Amazon.com and other booksellers, including in used form, all of the readings are posted on the course web page (UCLA login required) and are available to be downloaded for your own use.

I will hold student hours (what are usually referred to as "office hours") on Mondays from 1-3pm in my office, 3248 Bunche Hall. This is an opportunity for you to stop by to chat about the course material, your career objectives, political science more generally, or anything else. It is *your* time.

OTHER NOTES AND RESOURCES

Academic integrity: As a student and member of the UCLA community, you are expected to demonstrate integrity in all of your academic endeavors. Accordingly, all work you do will be held to the highest ethical and professional standards. Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to: cheating, plagiarism, and facilitating academic dishonesty. If you are unsure of what any of these entail, please consult the university guidelines below or ask me. *If you are even suspected of violating these standards, I am obliged to refer your case to the Dean of Students*, who will carry out an investigation. Guidelines on academic dishonesty at UCLA are available at: https://deanofstudents.ucla.edu/academic-integrity.

The use of generative AI tools (i.e., ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, etc.): Generative AI can serve as powerful tool for learning and for increasing productivity. But AI tools can also impede learning, in part because they have built-in biases and in part because they serve as a crutch that can replace the kind of deep reflection and effort that generates real understanding. Because AI tools are likely to become central parts of our lives and careers in the not too distant future, it is important that you learn how to use them effectively. But because their availability risks compromising learning, it is important to limit their education-undermining potential. This Janus-faced character puts educators in a bind. In this course, I encourage you to use AI tools like ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and others for getting help understanding concepts and readings, studying for tests, brainstorming, and outlining your thoughts. However, you will not be able to use these tools on any of the graded components in the class, as I have designed the course with no take-home written assignments. So, while AI tools may be useful in helping you prepare for your exams and in-class tests, you will not have access to computers or phones during these assessments (excepting students with documented accommodations). You will thus be evaluated based on your own absorption and mastery of the course material covered in the readings, lectures, and section discussions. If you have any questions about permissible and impermissible use of AI tools, please ask me.

Students with disabilities: If you need an academic accommodation based on a disability, please contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) at cae.ucla.edu, *if possible within the first two weeks of the term, as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations.*

Illness: If you get sick or have to care for someone who is sick, let me know as soon as you are able to. I will work with you to make up the work.

Religious observances: In the event of a religious holiday or any other form of observance, please contact me regarding your absence as soon as possible so we can make accommodations for you.

Your wellbeing: I want you to succeed here at UCLA. The university has many resources available to help you, should you need them. Here are some:

- UCLA Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provides confidential counseling to support your mental health needs as you pursue your academic goals. Counselors available 24 hours a day by phone at (310) 825-0768. Further information is available at www.counseling.ucla.edu.
- UCLA CalFresh Initiative helps provide food security for students in need. Visit basicneeds.ucla.edu/services/calfresh for more information.
- The Economic Crisis Response Team provides support to UCLA students facing financial hardship. Visit basicneeds.ucla.edu/services/economic-crisis-response-team.
- UCLA Student Legal Services provides confidential legal counseling and assistance regarding a wide range of legal issues. Visit studentlegal.ucla.edu for more information.
- UCLA Care Advocate provides confidential services for survivors of sexual or gender-based violence. Visit careprogram.ucla.edu for more information.
- UCLA Title IX Office: For reporting gender-based discrimination, including sexual harassment or sexual violence. Visit sexualharassment.ucla.edu for more information.

LECTURE AND READING SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

Sept 28: *Introduction*

Binyavanga Wainaina. 2005. "How to Write About Africa." *Granta*.
Laura Seay. 2012. "How Not to Write About Africa." *Foreign Policy.*
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. 2009. "The Danger of a Single Story." TED Talk.
Leslie Dodson. 2011. "Don't Misrepresent Africa." TED Talk.

Sept 30: *The "Scramble for Africa" and the Nature of Colonial Rule*

Thomas Pakenham. 1991. "Introduction." In *The Scramble for Africa, 1876-1912*. Random House: xxi-xxiii.
Jeffrey Herbst. 2000. "The Europeans and the African Problem." In *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*. Princeton University Press: ch. 3.

WEEK 2

Oct 5: *The Legacy of Colonialism*

Peter Ekeh. 1975. "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17(1): 91-112.
Wangari Maathai. 2009. "A Legacy of Woes." In *The Challenge for Africa.* Anchor Books: ch. 2.
MAP QUIZ

Oct 7: NO CLASS

WEEK 3

Oct 12: *National Independence Movements*

Darin Christensen and David D. Laitin. 2019. "The Charismatic Founders and Their Dreams." In *African States Since Independence*. Yale University Press: ch. 1.
Martin Meredith. 2005. "*L'Afrique Noir*" and "Winds of Change." In *The Fate of Africa*. Public Affairs: chs. 4-5.
"Uganda Wins Independence (1962)" YouTube video

Oct 14: *The Centralization of Authority and the Rise of Personal Rule*

Todd Moss. 2007. "Big Men, Personal Rule and Patronage Politics." In *African Development: Making Sense of the Issues and Actors*. Lynne Rienner: ch. 3.
Crawford Young and Thomas Turner. 1985. "The Patrimonial State and Personal Rule." In *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State.* University of Wisconsin Press: ch. 6.

WEEK 4

Oct 19: *The Lost Decades*

Martin Meredith. 2005. "The Slippery Slope" and "The Lost Decade." In *The Fate of Africa*. Public Affairs: chs. 16 and 22.
Teju Cole. 2015. *Every Day is for the Thief*. Random House: chs. 1-3, 18, 23.

Oct 21: *Ethnicity (part 1)*

Robert Bates. 1983. "Modernization, Ethnic Competition and the Rationality of Politics in Contemporary Africa." In Donald S. Rothchild and Victor A. Olorunsola, eds. *State versus Ethnic Claims: African Policy Dilemmas*. Westview Press: 152-171.

Daniel Posner. 2004. "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi." *American Political Science Review* 98(4): 529-545.

Daniel Posner. 2005. "Ethnicity and Ethnic Politics in Zambia." In *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*. Cambridge University Press: ch. 4.

WEEK 5

Oct 26: *Ethnicity (part 2)*

[readings are from Oct 21]

Oct 28: *Gender*

Kevin C. Dunn and Pierre Englebert. 2019. "Gender Inequality and Women's Participation." In *Inside African Politics*. Lynne Rienner: 124-131.

Gretchen Bauer. 2013. "Gender Quotas and Women's Representation in African Parliaments." d*emocracyinafrica.org*, December 13.

Anne Marie Goetz. 2022. "No Shortcuts to Power: Constraints on Women's Political Effectiveness in Uganda." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 49(4): 549-575.

WEEK 6

Nov 2: *In-class Achebe book test*

Nov 4: *The Challenge of Economic Reform*

Belinda Archibong, Brahima Coulibaly and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. 2021. "Washington Consensus Reforms and Lessons for Economic Performance in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 35(3): 133-156.

WEEK 7

Nov 9: *Political Change in the 1990s*

Martin Meredith. 2005. "The Struggle for Democracy." In *The Fate of Africa*. Public Affairs: ch. 23.

Todd Moss. 2007. "Political Change and Democratization." In *African Development: Making Sense of the Issues and Actors*. Lynne Rienner: pp. 71-75.

Nov 11: NO CLASS: VETERANS' DAY

WEEK 8

Nov 16: *In-Class Midterm Exam*

Nov 18: *"Democracy" in Africa Today*

Staffan Lindberg. 2010. "What Accountability Pressures do MPs in Africa Face and How Do They Respond? Evidence from Ghana." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 48(1): 117-142.

E. Gyimah-Boadi. 2015. "Africa's Waning Democratic Commitment." *Journal of Democracy* 26(1): 101-113.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. 2016. "Nigeria's Failed Promises." *New York Times*, 18 October.

The Economist. 2020. "Why Young, Urban, or Rich Africans are Less Likely to Vote." February 20.

WEEK 9

Nov 23: *Conflict and Instability*

Martin Meredith. 2005. "Blood Diamonds." In *The Fate of Africa*. Public Affairs: ch. 29.

Declan Walsh. 2024. "The Gold Rush at the Heart of a Civil War." *New York Times*, December 11.

Olusola Isola. 2018. "Election Violence and the Future of Democracy in Africa." *Africa Up Close*, 30 May.

Mark Green. 2023. "The Sahel Now Accounts for 43% of Global Terrorism Deaths." *Stubborn Things*, 16 May.

Ken Ochieng' Opalo. 2024. "The Truth About Africa's Coups." *Journal of Democracy* 53(3): 93-107.

BBC Africa. 2024. "Where Climate Change Meets Conflict." YouTube video.

Nov 25: *Foreign Aid*

Dayo Olopade. 2014. "Stuff We Don't Want: Doing Bad in Africa." In *The Bright Continent: Breaking Rules and Making Change in Modern Africa.* Mariner Books: ch 4.

Andrew Mwenda. 2007. "Aid for Africa? No Thanks." TED Talk.

Dambisa Moyo. 2009. "Why Foreign Aid is Hurting Africa." *Wall Street Journal*, March 21.

Jeffrey Sachs. 2009. "Aid Ironies: Rich People Have an Uncanny Ability to Oppose Aid for Everybody but Themselves." *Huffington Post*, 24 June.

Dambisa Moyo. 2009. "Aid Ironies: A Response to Jeffrey Sachs." *Huffington Post*, June 26.

Nicholas Kristof. 2026. "USAID Cuts Killed People. That's the Truth." *New York Times*, July 1.

"What Really Happened When USAID Was Cut?" Propublica. Instagram video.

The Economist. 2026. "Why Some Africans See Opportunity in Foreign Aid Cuts." March 6.

The Economist. 2026. "American Aid to Africa Comes With More Strings Attached." February 5.

WEEK 10

Nov 30: *Human and Economic Development*

Thandika Mkandawire interview. 2014. YouTube.

"How a Road Could Change West Africa's Urban Future." 2026. NPR Photo Essay, August 12.

The Economist. 2025. "Call Centres Could Be a Gold Mine for Africa." June 26.

The Economist. 2026. "Forget Gold and Copper. Africa's Latest Boom is in Fruit." August 2.

The Economist. 2026. "Kenya's Ailing Sugar Sector is a Test Case for Reform." March 12.

Brook Larmer. 2017. "Is China the World's New Colonial Power?" *New York Times Magazine*, May 2.

The Economist. 2025. "The Changing Shape of Chinese Aid to Africa." November 27.

Dec 2: *Technology, Urbanization, and Youth*

Dayo Olopade. 2014. "The Technology Map." In *The Bright Continent: Breaking Rules and Making Change in Modern Africa.* Mariner Books: ch. 6.

The Economist. 2024. "YouTube in Africa Offers a New Kind of News." August 22.

The Economist. 2026. "Africans are Turning to Starlink." July 2.

The Economist. 2026. "Africa's New Middle Class is Putting Down Roots in the Suburbs." July 2.

Declan Walsh. 2023. "The World is Becoming More African." *New York Times*, October 28.

The Economist. 2025. "Africa's Young 'Generation Hustle' Hits the Big Time." February 20.


AFRICA
UNITED NATIONS
Geospatial
Mediterranean Sea
Red Sea
Persian Gulf
Gulf of Aden
ATLANTIC OCEAN
INDIAN OCEAN
Algiers
Tunis
Tarābulus (Tripoli)
Rabat
Madeira Islands (Port.)
Canary Islands (Sp.)
Laayoune
Western Sahara *
Al Qāhirah (Cairo)
MOROCCO
TUNISIA
ALGERIA
LIBYA
EGYPT
MAURITANIA
Nouakchott
MALI
NIGER
SUDAN
Khartoum
ERITREA
Asmera (Asmara)
CABO VERDE
Praia
SENEGAL
Dakar
Banjul
GAMBIA
Bissau
GUINEA-BISSAU
GUINEA
Conakry
Freetown
SIERRA LEONE
Monrovia
LIBERIA
Abidjan
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
Bamako
Ouagadougou
Niamey
N'Djaména
Lake Chad
BURKINA FASO
BENIN
NIGERIA
Abuja
GHANA
TOGO
Yamoussoukro
Accra
Porto-Novo
Lomé
CHAD
Djibouti
DJIBOUTI
Ādīs Ābeba
SOMALIA
ETHIOPIA
Lake Tana
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
SOUTH SUDAN
Juba
Bangui
Yaoundé
Malabo
CAMEROON
EQUATORIAL GUINEA
SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE
São Tomé
Libreville
GABON
CONGO
DEMOCRATIC REP. OF THE CONGO
Lake Albert
UGANDA
Lake Turkana
Kampala
Muqdisho (Mogadishu)
Lake Victoria
Nairobi
KENYA
Kigali
RWANDA
Bujumbura
Gitega
BURUNDI
Brazzaville
Kinshasa
ANGOLA (Cabinda)
Lake Tanganyika
Dodoma
Victoria
SEYCHELLES
UNITED REP. OF TANZANIA
Luanda
Lake Malawi
Lake Nyasa
COMOROS
Moroni
Mayotte
Agalega Is. (Mauritius)
ANGOLA
Lilongwe
Lusaka
ZAMBIA
MALAWI
Jamestown
St. Helena *
Harare
ZIMBABWE
MOZAMBIQUE
Antananarivo
MAURITIUS
Port Louis
NAMIBIA
Windhoek
BOTSWANA
MADAGASCAR
Réunion (Fr.)
Gaborone
Pretoria
Maputo
Mbabane
ESWATINI
Bloemfontein
Maseru
LESOTHO
SOUTH AFRICA
Cape Town
0 500 1,000 km
0 300 600 mi
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.
* Non-Self-Governing Territory
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