UCLA
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

POLITICAL SCIENCE 241: AFRICAN POLITICS FIELD SEMINAR

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Fall 2026
Weds, 2-4:50pm
Student Hours: Mon, 1-3pm

This course has two purposes: to introduce you to some of the major arguments, hypotheses and debates in the literature on African politics and development, and to help you develop the skills to become both more intelligent consumers and more effective producers of this literature. To accomplish these goals, the course combines intense discussions of an extensive set of readings with a series of written assignments designed to help you develop research strategies to evaluate the hypotheses you encounter in the literature or that are inspired by it. Throughout these exercises, and in our seminar discussions, we will pay special attention to the particular challenges and opportunities of doing research in 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. They emphasize either key foundational issues (e.g., colonialism and its impact; the weakness of political institutions and the implications of this weakness; the linkages between voters and politicians; the role of ethnicity; the role of traditional institutions; the impact of urbanization), areas of particularly interesting current research, or novel approaches to studying the politics and society of the continent. 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 Global South. 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

The course is taught in a single meeting each week on Wednesdays from 2-4:50pm. Given the seminar format of the course and the necessity for intensive discussion of the course materials, attendance at the weekly class meetings is mandatory. You are required not just to attend the weekly seminar meetings but to have read and thought about the assigned materials for the week, and to participate actively in class discussions.

Because we will miss two sessions during the quarter due to travel and Veterans Day, we will hold our final meeting during exam week.

In addition to participation in seminar discussions, you will prepare two 1-2 page research design memos (one during the first half of the quarter; one during the second). The memos will take a theory or hypothesis introduced in, or related to, the week's readings and describe how you might collect the appropriate evidence to test it. 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 5pm each Tuesday (the day before the seminar), with copies posted to the class website. You are expected to come to class having read your colleagues' memos alongside the assigned readings for the week.

You will also complete a short assignment in week 10 using data from the Afrobarometer. Further details of the assignment will be distributed closer to the date.

Finally, you will write 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 5pm on Monday, December 14. This assignment should be thought of as a substantive research proposal rather than a data collection and analysis project, although your proposals may include a data analytic component in demonstrating the variation you 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 assignments will be as follows: participation in seminar discussions (40%), research design memos (20%), Afrobarometer assignment (10%), and finished research paper (30%).

READINGS

The readings for each week are extensive. I selected them because they are considered classic, because they develop useful analytical concepts or engage in important theoretical debates, because they represent particularly good examples of recent social science research on the topic in question, or because they make a point that I think is pedagogically important. Some of them will require a very careful reading; others can be consumed more quickly. 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. The readings during our final week are a selection of very recent work in African political economy, to provide a sense of the field's current frontier.

Copies of all seminar readings are posted to the course website

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, fabrication, plagiarism, multiple submissions, or 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 immediately to the Dean of Students*, who will carry out an investigation. Guidelines regarding academic dishonesty at UCLA are available at: deanofstudents.ucla.edu/academic-integrity.

I encourage you to use AI tools like ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and others for getting help understanding concepts and readings, delving deeper into course material, brainstorming, outlining your thoughts, and even conducting simple statistical analyses. *However, any and all use of AI tools on any of your written assignments must be disclosed in a written statement accompanying the assignment.*

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.

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. Please do not come to class if you are ill and potentially contagious.

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 I can make the appropriate 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.

- 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.
- 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.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Sept 30: Logistics and Overview of the Course; History and Historiography

Michalopoulos, Stelios and Elias Papaioannou. 2020. "Historical Legacies and African Development." *Journal of Economic Literature* 58(1): 53-128.
Briggs, Ryan C. 2017. "Explaining Case Selection in African Politics Research." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 35(4): 565-572.

Oct 7: NO CLASS

Oct 14: Colonialism and its Legacy

Herbst, Jeffrey. 2000. "The Europeans and the African Problem." In *States and Power in Africa.* Princeton: Princeton University Press: 58-96.
Ekeh, Peter. 1975. "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17: 91-112.
Posner, Daniel N. 2005. "Part I: Accounting for the Ethnic Cleavage Structure." In Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press: 21-88.
Ricart-Huguet, Joan. 2021. "Colonial Education, Political Elites, and Regional Political Inequality in Africa." *Comparative Political Studies*.
Lowes Sara and Eduardo Montero. 2021. "Concessions, Violence and Indirect Rule: Evidence from the Congo Free State." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 136(4): 2047-2091.
Paine, Jack, Xiaoyan Qui and Joan Ricart-Huguet. 2025. "Endogenous Colonial Borders: Precolonial States and Geography in the Partition of Africa." *American Political Science Review* 119(1): 1-20.

Oct 21: Personalism and Patrimonialism

Chabal, Patrick and Jean-Pascal Daloz. 1999. "W(h)ither the State?" and "Recycled Elites." In Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*. Oxford: James Currey: 1-16 and 31-44.

van de Walle, Nicolas. 2001. "Decision Making in Postcolonial Africa." In van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979-1999*. New York: Cambridge University Press: 113-151.

Cheeseman, Nic. 2021. "Why We Should Be More Understanding of African Political Leaders." *The Africa Report*, 21 October.

Nel, Philip. 2021. "Why Africans Tolerate Income Inequality." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 59(3): 343-365.

Posner, Daniel N. and Daniel Young. 2018. "Term Limits, Political Competition and the Transfer of Power." In Nicholas Cheeseman, *Institutions and Democracy in Africa: How the Rules of the Game Shape Political Developments.* New York: Cambridge University Press: 260-277.

Oct 28: Ethnic Politics

Posner, Daniel N. 2005. "Ethnicity and Ethnic Politics in Zambia." In Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press: 91-129.

Carlson, Elizabeth. 2015. "Ethnic Voting and Accountability in Africa: A Choice Experiment in Uganda." *World Politics* 67(2): 353-385.

Ferree, Karen. 2022. "Choice and Choice Set in African Elections." *Journal of Politics* 84(4): 2261-2265.

Hassan, Mai. 2017. "The Strategic Shuffle: Ethnic Geography, the Internal Security Apparatus, and Elections in Kenya." *American Journal of Political Science* 61(2): 382-395.

Robinson, Amanda Lea. 2024. "Ethnic Visibility." *American Journal of Political Science* 68(4): 1234-1251.

Eifert, Benn, Edward Miguel and Daniel N. Posner. 2010. "Political Competition and Ethnic Identification in Africa." *American Journal of Political Science* 54(2): 495-510.

Nov 4: Voter-Politician Linkages

Ofosu, George Kwaku. 2024. "What Do Voters Want from Their Legislators? Evidence from Ghana." *African Affairs* 123(491): 165-192.

Klaus, Kathleen, Jeffrey W. Paller and Martha Wilfahrt. 2023. "Demanding Recognition: A New Framework for the Study of Political Clientelism." *African Affairs* 122(487): 185-203.

Burgess, Robin, Remi Jedwab, Edward Miguel, Ameet Morjaria, and Gerard Padro i Miquel. 2015. "The Value of Democracy: Evidence from Road Building in Kenya." *American Economic Review* 105(6): 1817-1851.

Grossman, Guy and Kristen Michelitch. 2018. "Information Dissemination, Competitive Pressure, and Politician Performance Between Elections: A Field Experiment in Uganda." *American Political Science Review* 112(2): 280-301.
Brierley, Sarah and Noah L. Nathan. 2021. "The Connections of Party Brokers: Which Brokers do Parties Select?" *Journal of Politics* 83(3): 884-901.

Nov 11: NO CLASS: VETERANS' DAY

Nov 18: Traditional Authority

Baldwin, Kate. 2016. *The Paradox of Traditional Chiefs in Democratic Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press: chs. 1-4.
Acemogu, Daron, Tristan Reed and James A. Robinson. 2014. "Chiefs: Economic Development and Elite Control of Civil Society in Sierra Leone." *Journal of Political Economy* 122(2): 319-368.
de Kadt, Daniel and Horacio Larreguy. 2018. "Agents of the Regime? Traditional Leaders and Electoral Politics in South Africa." *Journal of Politics* 80(2): 382-399.
Kramon, Eric. 2017. "Ethnic Group Institutions and Electoral Clientelism." *Party Politics* 25(3): 435-447.
Baldwin, Kate and Joan Ricart-Huguet. 2023. "Does Land Quality Increase the Power of Traditional Leaders in Contemporary Africa?" *Journal of Politics* 85(1): 334-339.

Nov 25: Urbanization and its Implications

Gugler, Josef. 2002. "The Son of the Hawk Does Not Remain Abroad: The Urban-Rural Connection in Africa." *African Studies Review* 45(1): 21-41.
Nathan, Noah. 2019. "Does Participation Reinforce Patronage? Policy Preferences, Turnout and Class in Urban Ghana." *British Journal of Political Science* 49(1): 229-255.
Koter, Dominika. 2013. "Urban and Rural Voting Patterns in Senegal: The Spatial Aspects of Incumbency, c.1978-2012." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 51(4): 653-679.
Baseler, Travis. 2023. "Hidden Income and the Perceived Returns to Migration." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 15(4): 321-352.
Kramon, Eric, Joan Hamory, Sarah Baird, and Edward Miguel. 2021. "Deepening or Diminishing Ethnic Divides? The Impact of Urban Migration in Kenya." *American Journal of Political Science*.
Hoelscher, Kristian, Nick Dorward, Sean Fox, Taibat Lawanson, Jeffrer W. Paller, and Melanie L. Phhillips. 2023. "Urbanization and Political Change in Africa." *African Affairs* 122(488): 353-376.

Dec 2: Exploiting the Afrobarometer

Afrobarometer sampling: https://www.afrobarometer.org/surveys-and-methods/sampling/
Afrobarometer, Round 10 Questionnaire for Sierra Leone (2024). [*for reference*]
Adida, Claire, Karen E. Ferree, Daniel N. Posner, and Amanda Robinson. 2016. "Who's Asking? Interviewer Coethnicity Effects in African Survey Data." *Comparative Political Studies* 49(12): 1630-1660.
Kasara, Kimuli. 2013. "Separate and Suspicious: Local Social and Political Context and Ethnic Tolerance in Kenya." *Journal of Politics* 75(4): 921-936.
Depetris-Chauvin, Emilio, Reuben Durante and Filipe Campante. 2020. "Building Nations through Shared Experiences: Evidence from African Football." *American Economic Review* 110(5): 1572-1602.
Cage, Julia and Valeria Rueda. 2016. "The Long-Term Effects of the Printing Press in Sub-Saharan Africa." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 8(3): 69-99.

Dec 9: New Papers in African Political Economy

Ribar, Matthew K. 2026. "Land, Power and Property Rights: The Political Economy of Land Titling in Sub-Saharan Africa." *American Political Science Review* 120(2): 399-418.
Muller-Crepon, Carl. 2023. "State Reach and Development in Africa Since the 1960s: New Data and Analysis." *Political Science Research and Methods* 11(3):663-672.
Yeandle, Alex. 2026. "The Political Consequences of Africa's Mobile Revolution." *American Journal of Political Science* 70(3): 1042-1061.
Henn, Soren J. and James A. Robinson. 2026. "Africa as a Success Story: Political Organization in Precolonial Africa." *Annual Review of Economics* 18:447-471.
Nathan, Noah L. 2025. "Do Grids Demobilize? How Street Networks, Social Networks, and Political Networks Intersect." *American Journal of Political Science* 69(4): 1282-1299.