

University of Toronto,
Faculty of Arts and Science,
Department of Political Science,

Winter 2026

Contemporary African Politics: Dynamics and Challenges **POL 309H1 S, LEC0101**

Instructor: Prof. Ato Kwamena Onoma

Office: 3079 Sydney Smith Hall

Email: ato.onoma@utoronto.ca

Class time: Wednesday 1-3pm

Office Hours:

THEMES: This course explores the main drivers of political organization and change in contemporary Africa, focusing on how national, regional, and international factors shape institutions, patterns of participation and political change. It considers major scholarly debates in the study of African politics and political economy and helps students develop analytical skills for the comparative study of this diverse continent.

FORMAT AND REQUIREMENTS: This is a lecture with a significant discussion segment. This course will be in-person.

PREREQUISITES: 1.0 credit in POL/ JPA/ JPF/ JPI/ JPR/ JPS/ JRA courses

ASSESSMENT

- *Class attendance and participation (15%):* Informed and sustained participation informed by course readings during the entire semester;
- *Africa map quiz (15%):* A closed-book Africa map quiz administered in class on week 3;
- *Mid-term take home, open book test (30%):* You will have one week to submit your response (4 double-spaced pages each, Times New Roman, font 12: around 1200 words) to one out of two questions posed by the instructor. All papers must be submitted online by 9am on **March 5, 2026**. This is a hard deadline. A 2% penalty will be assessed each day, including weekends on all unauthorized late submissions.

- *Final take home, open book test (40%):* You will have three weeks to submit your response (4 double-spaced pages each, Times New Roman, font 12: around 1200 words) to one out of two questions posed by the instructor. You will receive the questions no later than March 18, 2026. All papers must be submitted online by 9am on **April 15, 2026**. This is a hard deadline. A 2% penalty will be assessed each day, including weekends on all unauthorized late submissions.

ABSENCE: Students who absent themselves from class should complete the Absence Declaration form available to them directly on ACORN. Students should also inform the instructor of their absence.

EXTENSIONS: The deadlines for submission of assignments are hard deadlines. Extensions will only be granted in extraordinary circumstances.

PLAGIARISM and submission of examination papers: “Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and will be dealt with accordingly. For further clarification and information on plagiarism please see Writing at the University of Toronto <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources>”.

“Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University’s plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool’s reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).”

ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS: The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/> as soon as possible.

COURSE MATERIALS: The materials below are required readings that must be completed *before class*. Almost all are available electronically through the University of Toronto library website. Those not available through the library website can be found in electronic format on the Quercus site for this class. Readings that are not available electronically can be found on short term loan – Course Reserve at Robarts Library.

Week 1 (Jan 7): Peripheralization

- Rahmane Idrissa. 2021. The Sahel: A cognitive mapping. *New Left Review* 132 (Nov/Dec): 5-39

Week 2 (Jan 14): The state, development and democratic governance

- Thandika Mkandawire. 2001. Thinking about Developmental States in Africa. *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 25 (3): 289–313.
- Thandika Mkandawire. 1999. Crisis management and the making of “choiceless democracies”, in Richard Joseph ed. *State, conflict, and democracy in Africa* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner), pp. 119-136.

Week 3 (Jan 21): Foreign Aid, the state and society

- Adia Benton. 2015. *HIV exceptionalism: Development through disease in Sierra Leone*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (Introduction and chapter 5)

Map quiz (Jan 21)

Week 4 (Jan 28): (Re)building the continent: Infrastructure

- Adunbi, O., 2019. (Re) inventing development: China, infrastructure, sustainability and special economic zones in Nigeria. *Africa*, 89(4), pp.662-679.
- Boeck, F.D., 2011. Inhabiting ocular ground: Kinshasa's future in the light of Congo's spectral urban politics. *Cultural Anthropology*, 26(2), pp.263-286.

Week 5 (Feb 4): Social policy and social welfare in Africa

- Jimi Adésinà. 2009. Social policy in sub-Saharan Africa: a glance in the rear-view mirror. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 18, pp.S37-S51.
- Brass, J., 2014. Blurring the boundaries: NGOs, the state, and service provision in Kenya. *The Politics of Non-State Social Welfare*, pp.99-118.

Week 6 (February 11): The youth question

- Alcinda Honwana. 2012. *The time of youth: Work, social change, and politics in Africa*. Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press. (Chapters 1 and 2)

Reading week (no class): February 18

Week 7 (Feb 25): The political economy of migration

- Caroline Melly. 2011. Titanic tales of missing men: Reconfigurations of national identity and gendered presence in Dakar, Senegal, *American Ethnologist* 38 (2): 361-76.

- Nyamnjoh, Francis B. 2005. "Images of Nyongko amongst Bamenda grassfielders in whiteman kontri." *Citizenship studies* 9(3): 241-269.

Students receive take-home mid-term (Feb 25)

Week 8 (March 4): Gender, politics and the economy

- Awino Okech. 2021. Gender and state-building conversations: the discursive production of gender identity in Kenya and Rwanda, *Conflict, Security & Development* 21 (4): 501-515
- Lyn Ossome. 2014. Can the law secure women's rights to land in Africa? Revisiting tensions between culture and land commercialization. *Feminist Economics*, 20(1), pp.155-177.

Week 9 (March 11): Sexuality and politics

- Aminata Mbaye. 2018. Queer political subjectivities in Senegal: Gaining a voice within new religious landscapes of belonging. *Critical African Studies* 10 (3): 301-14.
- Thabo Msibi. 2011. The Lies We Have Been Told: On (Homo) Sexuality in Africa. *Africa Today* 58 (1): 55–77.

Students receive mid-term grades March 11

Week 10 (March 18): Ethnicity and politics

- Peter Ekeh. 1975. Colonialism and the two publics in Africa. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17 (1): 91-112.

Students receive final take-home exam questions (March 18)

Week 11 (March 25): Islam, pentecostalism and politics

- Roland Marchal and Zekeria Ould Ahmed Salem. 2018. What is the concept of “radicalization” good for?, *Politique africaine*, 149 (1): 5-20.
- Afolayan, A., Yacob-Haliso, O. and Falola, T., 2018. Introduction: The Pentecostal and the political in Africa. In *Pentecostalism and politics in Africa* (pp. 3-23). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Week 12 (April 1): Africa in/and international relations

- Nadege Compaoré. 2018. Rise of the (other) rest? Exploring small state agency and collective power in international relations. *International Studies Review*, 20(2), pp.264-271.
- Tandeka Nkiwane. 2001. Africa and international relations: Regional lessons for a global discourse. *International Political Science Review*, 22(3), pp.279-290.

Submission of final take-home exams (April 15)