

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

Academic Year 2025-2026

Fall 2025

Topics in Comparative Politics III: Epidemics and Phobia

POL379H1 F; LEC0101

Instructor: Prof. Ato Kwamena Onoma

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Class time: Thursday 11-1pm

Office Hours: Thursdays 9-10:30am

SUBJECT MATTER: This class will explore the relationship between epidemics and phobia with an emphasis on mapping, explaining and making sense of the forms that phobia takes during public health crises. We will also examine the extent to which epidemics constitute defining moments that inflect longstanding social dynamics. The following are some questions that we will explore: What is the relationship between health-related xenophobia and other forms of xenophobia? Do epidemics always coincide with xenophobia? Why are some groups scapegoated while others are not? Which members of scapegoated groups are targeted during epidemics? How do epidemics play into *intra*-group interactions? This course will help students to reflect on broader questions of mobility, citizenship and relations between and within communities in our thoroughly globalized world. The course combines a thematic approach with in-depth case studies of xenophobia during specific disease outbreaks in history with a focus on COVID-19, Ebola virus disease, HIV/AIDS, bubonic plague and SARS. In addition to the politics of epidemic-era othering, the course will allow students to also improve their knowledge of the epidemiology of these diseases.

FORMAT AND REQUIREMENTS: This is a lecture class with a heavy discussion component. It will involve a significant amount of discussions, role plays, debates and policy formulation exercises. The course will be divided into two sections. The first part of the course will help students grasp the dominant literature on xenophobia linked to public health crises. In the second

section of the course, we will critically interrogate the dominant literature on the relationship between epidemics and xenophobia. We will detect its gaps and flaws and explore ways of further enriching it. Students who take this course will improve their capacity for critical and analytic thinking, and enhance their oral presentation skills, writing abilities and capacity to work collaboratively in teams.

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

ASSESSMENT

- *Class attendance (15%)*
- Sustained participation in class discussions and involvement in class activities in a manner that is *informed by course readings: (30%)*
- *Mid-term take home, open book exam (25%):* You will have eight days to submit your response (4 double-spaced pages each, Times New Roman, font 12: around 1400 words) to one of two questions posed by the instructor. *It is critical for you to demonstrate mastery of all the readings on the syllabus* in addition to providing a high-quality response. All papers should be submitted on QUERCUS by noon on **October 24, 2025**. This is a hard deadline. A 2% (of 30% of the total grade for this course) penalty will be assessed each day, including weekends on all unauthorized late submissions. Keep a copy of your exams until the corrected assignment is returned to you.
- *Final take home, open book exam (30%):* Questions for the take home final exams will be shared with students on **November 15**. You will have up to **December 12** to submit your response (4 double-spaced pages each, Times New Roman, font 12: around 1400 words) to one of two questions posed by the instructor. *It is critical for you to demonstrate mastery of all the readings on the syllabus* in addition to providing a high-quality response. All papers should be submitted on QUERCUS by noon on December 12, 2025. This is a hard deadline. A 2% (of 30% of the total grade for this course) penalty will be assessed each day, including weekends on all unauthorized late submissions. Keep a copy of your exams until the corrected assignment is returned to you.

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

EXTENSIONS: Extensions for assignments will only be granted in extraordinary circumstances. To discuss an extension, come to office hours at least one week before the assignment is due.

PLAGIARISM: “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>”.

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. Most are available electronically either as links through the library’s website or as PDFs . You can locate the electronic links and PDF files under library resources on the course page in Quercus. Readings that are not available electronically can be found on short term loan – Course Reserve at Roberts Library.

SECTION I

Week 1 (September 4): Xenophobia

- **Preoccupation:** What is xenophobia?
- **Readings:**
 - Tanasaldy, Taufiq. 2022. “From Official to Grassroots Racism: Transformation of Anti-Chinese Sentiment in Indonesia.” *The Political Quarterly*, 93(3): 460-468.
 - Geschiere, Peter and Francis Nyamnjoh. 2000. “Capitalism and autochthony: The seesaw of mobility and belonging.” *Public Culture* 12 (2): 423-452.

Week 2 (September 11): Xenophobic discourses: Murky terrains

- **Preoccupation:** What is the epistemological weight of xenophobic discourses?
- **Readings:**
 - Geschiere, Peter and Stephen Jackson. 2006. “Autochthony and the Crisis of Citizenship: Democratization, Decentralization, and the Politics of Belonging.” *African Studies Review* 49 (2): 1 - 7.
 - Jackson, Stephen. 2006. “Sons of which soil? The language and politics of autochthony in Eastern D.R. Congo.” *African Studies Review* 49 (2): 95-123.

Week 3 (September 18) Case 1: COVID-19's entangled web of phobia

- Reny, Tyler and Matt Barreto. 2022. "Xenophobia in the time of pandemic: Othering, anti-Asian attitudes, and COVID-19." *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 10(2): 209-232.
- Adebayo, Kudus. 2023. "Pandemics and management of 'dangerous communities': Ebola, COVID-19, and Africans in China." *The Professional Geographer*, 75(1): 164-174.

Week 4 (September 25) Case 2: Ebola virus disease and the African other

- Monson, Sarah. 2017. "Ebola as African: American media discourses of panic and otherization." *Africa Today* 63 (3): 2-27.
- Dionne, Kim Yi and Laura Seay. 2015. "Perceptions about Ebola in America: Othering and the role of knowledge about Africa." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 48(1): pp.6-7.

Week 5 (October 2) Case 3: Troubled Chinatowns during SARS

- Eichelberger, Laura. 2007. "SARS and New York's Chinatown: the politics of risk and blame during an epidemic of fear." *Social Science and Medicine* 65 (6): 1284-1295.
- Keil, Roger and Harris Ali. 2006. "Multiculturalism, racism and infectious disease in the global city: the experience of the 2003 SARS outbreak in Toronto." *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16: 23-49.

Week 6 (October 9) Case 4: HIV/AIDS and anti-Haitian phobia

- Fouron, Georges. 2013. "Race, blood, disease and citizenship: the making of the Haitian-Americans and the Haitian immigrants into 'the others' during the 1980s-1990s AIDS crisis." *Identities*, 20(6): 705-719.
- Costa, Inês. 2016. "Building (In) existences in the US American Empire: The Plight of HIV Haitian Refugees in Gitmo." *Cabo dos Trabalhos*, 13: 1-17.

Week 7 (October 16) Case 5: (Bubonic) Plague and/of prejudice

- Cohn, Samuel. 2007. "The Black Death and the burning of Jews." *Past and Present* 196 (1): 3-36.
- Urbansky, S., 2019. "A Chinese Plague: Sinophobic Discourses in Vladivostock, San Francisco, and Singapore." *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 64(1): 75-92.

October 16: Students receive mid-term exam questions

Week 8 (October 23): Mandatory class discussions. No readings required.

October 24: Students submit mid-term take-home exams

November 4: Professor returns graded midterm exams

Week 9 (November 6): Nuancing links

- **Preoccupation:** How inexorable are the links between epidemics and xenophobic?
- **Reading:**
 - Cohn, Samuel. 2012. "Pandemics: waves of disease, waves of hate from the Plague of Athens to A.I.D.S." *Historical Journal* 85 (230): 535-555.

Week 10 (November 13): Xenophilia

- **Preoccupation:** How do we make sense of kindness towards others during epidemics?
- **Readings**
 - Napier, David. 2017. "Epidemics and xenophobia, or, why xenophilia matters." *Social Research* 84 (1): 59-81.
 - Tewolde, A.I., 2021. "Xenophilia in a Multi-cultural Urban Neighborhood of Pretoria, South Africa: An Auto-ethnographic Account." *Society*, 58(4): 282-289.

November 15: Students receive final take-home exam questions

Week 11 (November 20): Beyond dichotomies

- **Preoccupation:** How useful is the self/other dichotomy in reading social cartographies, including during epidemics?
- **Readings**
 - Napier, David. 2012. "Nonsel self help: how immunology might reframe the Enlightenment." *Cultural Anthropology* 27 (1): 122-37.
 - Stoller, Paul. 2012. "Immunology and the between." *Cultural Anthropology* 27 (1): 175-180.
 - Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2012. "The other who is also oneself: Immunological risk, danger, and recognition." *Cultural Anthropology* 27 (1): 162-67.

Week 12 (November 27): Epidemics and intra-group interactions

- **Preoccupation:** How do epidemics impact intra-group relations?
- **Readings:**
 - Nyamnjuh, Francis B. 2005. "Images of Nyong'o amongst Bamenda grassfielders in whiteman kontri." *Citizenship studies* 9(3): 241-269.
 - Onoma, Ato. 2021. "The allure of scapegoating return migrants during a pandemic." *Medical Anthropology: Cross-cultural Studies in Health and Illness* 40 (7): 653-666.

December 12, 2025: Students submit final take-home exams.