PLSC 597: African Politics
Wednesday 2:00 – 5:00

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This course will provide a survey of the African politics and political economy, including the political consequences of Africa’s (un?)exceptional history and geography; the nature of the African state; and the behavior and preferences of African citizens. Throughout the course, we will address the challenges of generating relevant, accurate conclusions in a context where poverty, autocracy, and insecurity make reliable research simultaneously more urgent and more difficult.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

READINGS

One book is required for this course – Herbst’s States and Power. All other readings are either online and linked in the syllabus below, or on Angel.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Class participation – 20%
Three short design papers – 45% (15% each)
Final research paper – 35%

Design papers

You are to turn in a three-page single-space design memo by the end of each of the three units on the syllabus. In the paper, you will identify a question left unanswered by the reading from the unit: this can include an untested assumption, a missing mechanism, or a new puzzle that follows from the presented findings. In a two-page memo, you will state your hypothesis, justify it, and indicate how you would test it. The memo must include a discussion of what you would observe if your hypothesis was correct as well as what you would observe if your hypothesis were NOT correct. To keep your design focused, identify a single dependent variable, with a single operationalization.

Though this is a design memo, you should focus on theory-building rather than technical proficiency. A design with a simple test of a crisp theory will receive a higher grade than a mathematically advanced test of a poorly-justified empirical expectation. A design that generates and tests a theory of why X affects Y will also receive a higher grade than one that simply estimates the effect of X on Y. You do not need to generate a new theory wholesale – you may develop additional testable implications of theories already in the literature – but you must still precisely state in your own words your theory of how individuals, leaders or firms decide how to behave.

Research paper
Your final paper does not need to address one of the questions you raised in your design memos, but should take a similar approach. You will identify a puzzle/question; present a precise theory of how individual-level decision-making leads to the outcome; generate the testable implications of the theory; and follow through with the test using available data. You do not need to generate statistically significant results, nor must you demonstrate that your hypothesis was correct: otherwise, the paper should have the content and length of a publishable article. Your paper is due May 6 by 5 PM.

Class participation

You will receive a participation grade for each of the 15 weeks of the class. You will receive zero points on days when you are absent. You will also receive no credit on days when you are silent. You will receive half-credit on days when you speak, but do not contribute substantially to the discussion.

CLASS POLICIES

All written material for the class must be hard-copy in a standard 11- or 12-inch font. Late work loses ten percent per 24 hours late; make-up work or extensions will be allowed only with an official written excuse for your absence/inability to meet the deadline.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

By enrolling in this class, you are indicating that you understand and agree to abide by all university regulations on cheating and plagiarism. In the event that you turn in something that violates these academic norms, ignorance will not be accepted as an excuse. I will turn all suspicious work over to the administration. Please note that I do not allow audio (or video) recording of class without prior permission and consider the sharing of any such recordings to be cheating.

UNIT ONE: HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY AND CONTEXT

1. Jan 13: Disentangling Long Term Effects of Colonization
   • Freyer, James and Bruce Sacerdote. 2009. Colonialism and Modern Income: Islands as Natural Experiments.

2. Jan 20: Mechanisms of the Colonial Legacy
   • Michalopoulos, Stelios and Elias Papaioannou. 2011. The Long-Run Effects of the Scramble for Africa.


4. Feb 3: Chieftaincy and Traditional Leadership
• de Kadt, Daniel. 2014. Agents of the Regime? Traditional Leaders and Electoral Behavior in South Africa
• Sandefur, Justin and Bilal Siddiqi. 2013. Delivering Justice to the Poor: Theory and Experimental Evidence from Liberia.

5. Feb 10: **No class. Attend conference Feb 12 or 13.**
• Select five conference papers to read in advance.

UNIT TWO: THE AFRICAN STATE

6. Feb 17: State Origins

7. Feb 24: Democracy?
• Mylonas, Harris and Nasos Roussias. 2008. When Do Votes Count? Regime Type, Electoral Conduct and Political Competition in Africa. *Comparative Political Studies.*
• Ichino, Nahomi and Matthias Schundeln. Deterring or Displacing Electoral Irregularities? Spillover Effects of Observers in a Randomized Field Experiment in Ghana. *Journal of Politics.*

8. March 2: Constraints on the Executive


9. March 9: Distribution


• **Harris, J. Andrew and Daniel Posner.** 2015. (Under what conditions) do politicians reward their supporters?


UNIT THREE: POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

10. March 23: (Non-) Ethnic Voting


11. March 30: Clientelism and Vote-Buying


• **Carlson, Elizabeth.** 2015. The Relevance of Relative Distribution: Favoritism, Information and Vote Choice in Africa. (On Angel.)


12. April 13: Parties and partisanship


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• Moehler, Devra et al. 2015. Partisan Cues and Vote Choice in New Multiparty Systems. Comparative Political Studies.

13. April 20: Improving accountability
• Martin, Lucy. 2014. Taxation, Loss Aversion, and Accountability: Theory and Experimental Evidence for Taxation’s Effect on Citizen Behavior
• Garcia-Ponce and Benjamin Pasquale. 2015. How Political Violence Shapes Trust in the State.
• Friedman, Willa et al. 20116 Education as Liberation? Economica.

14. April 6: Participation
• Blattman, Christopher. 2009. From Violence to Voting: War and Political Participation in Uganda.

15. April 27: Attitudes, policy preferences and public opinion
• Logan, Carolyn and Michael Bratton. 2006. The Political Gender Gap in Africa: Similar Attitudes, Different Behaviors.