Overview
Sub-Saharan Africa is booming. The continent—broadly—in the past decade has seen incredible economic growth, greater democracy, improved governance, and, overall, greater stability. However, significant questions remain regarding the degree to which these gains are sustainable in the long term or whether they are subject to backsliding. The answers are not simple, and getting at them takes a nuanced understanding of the political structures and processes of 49 individual countries that, despite sharing a great deal of common DNA, have significant differences—historical, cultural, linguistic, religious, etc.—among one another.

No one is going to walk away from this course an expert on all 49 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, but the goal is to give students a better understanding of the political dynamics at play across the continent, from both conceptual/theoretical and substantive standpoints. At the end of the course, students should be able to walk away with a better understanding of the continent’s political systems, their historical evolutions, their prospects for the future, and the confluence of money and politics that is so important to understanding African politics. Students also should be able to use scholarly writings and apply theoretical constructs to analyze current events in Africa.

Grading and Requirements
This course is not a Writing in the Disciplines (WID) course, but there will nonetheless be a significant focus on developing analytic writing and thinking skills. Whether or not you walk away from this course with a lifelong interest in Africa is less important than ensuring that you leave it a more analytical writer, critical thinker, and confident presenter. No matter whether you choose a career in government, academia, or some other discipline, developing these skills will be essential to your futures. Your grade will depend on the following; please be advised that late submissions without prior approval will not be accepted:

1) **20%** Class participation and attendance. Students are expected to participate in class discussions, show that they have done the reading, and (most importantly) show up for
class. Please advise in advance if you will be unable to make a session for a religious holiday or some other reason; unexcused absences will negatively affect your grade and more than two will result in forfeiture of this portion of class credit. In addition to class discussions on current events (with which we will start the course most weeks), I will set up a class blog in Blackboard to post articles and links for discussion the following week and online. I understand that not all students like to speak up in class—I was that way myself!—but for those who are less voluble, I encourage you to actively participate in online discussions to maximize your participation grade.

2) **10%** Map Quiz. I’ll be giving you a map quiz during class on Week 6. Not everyone’s a geography expert, but I want to see that you’re making progress learning where everything is! There are 49 countries; I will grade this out of 40, meaning you’ll have some wiggle room.

3) **30%** Policy Memo and presentation (1,500-2,000 words, excluding references). The first assignment of the course (due Week 8) is to formulate a policy memo on a sub-Saharan African country of your choosing (please clear your country with me by Week 5). The idea of the memo is that you are a country desk officer, and you are writing this for the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa outlining basic background on the country, key strategic US interests in that state, and the key issues of concern for 2013. Alternatively, for international students in particular but not solely, I encourage you to approach this through another country’s lens (that of your home country, China, France, or any other). Brevity is key here—the Assistant Secretary is very busy, so you must make your points quickly and effectively!

From Week 9, we will schedule presentations by each student on either their policy memos or (if they are sufficiently advanced with the research) your final papers. Being the best speaker or presenter ever is NOT the goal—rather I want to see that you’ve mastered your material, have spent time preparing, and can answer questions from the class and myself. Powerpoint is optional but by no means mandatory. We will have three presentations per class from Weeks 9 through 14 (possibly some extras that last class, depending on class size); you can reserve your date when you choose your topic by Week 5.

4) **40%** A final paper (4,000-5,000 words, excluding references) on a selected analytical question related to contemporary Africa. You have a lot of leeway on this, so please be creative. I must clear topics by Week 10; I want to see a one-paragraph proposal, and I’ll give you constructive feedback on how to make it the best possible product. The key to this project is that I want it to be analytical and forward-looking rather than descriptive and purely historical. A good report for me is not “Nigeria’s Military,” but rather “Prospects for Nigeria’s Military to Perform x in the Coming y Years.” Security, foreign policy, trade, development, foreign involvement…all of these are worthwhile topics. These are due to me by midnight on **Wednesday, May 7**.

Ultimately, I hope these projects will give each of you the opportunity to develop your writing and critical thinking skills. I will give you all detailed feedback on each of your assignments, as
well as a post-course critique. FYI, I am happy to provide any student feedback on your written products if you get them to me at least two weeks before they are due.

Administration
There are no established office hours for this course, but meetings can be set up by appointment with the instructor. Please email at johnasiko@yahoo.com or call on 202 222 5485.

Required Textbooks
A course like this is difficult in that there is no master document that covers all of the ground in one place. However, a few excellent books—combined with a selection of journal articles and press pieces—provide an excellent foundation and are required for the course. All are easily found at the book store and online:

Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa*, Public Affairs, 2006

*Democratization in Africa: Progress and Retreat*, edited by Larry Diamond and Marc Plattner, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010


Course Schedule

Week 1 August 27
Introduction
The first class will provide an overview of the course objectives, with an eye toward allowing students to make their interests and objectives known. These can then be incorporated wherever possible throughout the semester.

*Democratization*, Introduction

Schraeder, Chapter 1

Week 2 September 3
African Governance, from Pre-History to Present
This class will provide a brief overview of the African state from pre-history to today, with a specific focus on governance structures and state formation. We will devote significant discussion to the democratization wave of the 1990s and what it means for Africa today.


Meredith, Chapters 1-10
Schraeder, Chapters 2-4


Week 3 September 10
Who Matters: The Head of State and Personal Rule
For the next four classes, we will disaggregate the structure of the African state, examining the various actors that dominate it. First off, we will tackle the national leader, examining the role of the African “big man” to help determine whether the powers of African Presidents/Prime Ministers are changing, or whether the classic personal rule paradigm is on its way out. We will also examine the various means by which oligarchs that constitute a “ruling class” around the leader are able to influence decisionmaking.


Democratization, Chapters 1-2, 4

Meredith, Chapter 23


Week 4 September 17
Who Matters: The Military and Politics
The African political sphere has had an uncomfortably close relationship with its militaries since independence, with the coup d’état becoming a term synonymous with African politics. While democratization in the 1990s saw a “withdrawal to the barracks” from the political scene, they are by no means a spent force, given recent coups, strong generals, and a number of leaders who come from military ranks.

Democratization, Chapter 6
Schrader, Chapter 9

Meredith, Chapter 13


Week 5 September 24 Topics for Memo/Presentation Due

Who Matters: The Rest of Government

As the previous two classes will make clear, most African political spheres are dominated by small oligarchies, at least at the national level. This class will look at some of the other players in African governments—notably legislatures, Cabinets, and judiciaries—to better understand their roles in the functioning of the state. We will also look at the various systems of government in place across the continent, from those that are highly centralized to more federal systems, to determine their benefits and drawbacks when it comes to good governance and democracy.

*Democratization*, Chapters 3, 5, 8


Week 6 October 1

Who Matters: Everyone Else

In the West, the state derives its authority from the will of and participation by the people. In most of Africa, this is not the case. While elections are more frequent and tend to have high rates of participation, citizen interaction with government between cycles tends to be very low, and their impact lower still. We will also examine the roles of other actors outside government, notably civil society organizations, unions, and religious groups, to see how and where they are able to impact government decisionmaking.

Schreder, Chapter 8


Week 7 October 8
What Matters: Identity and Competition
How do Africans construct identity, and what does it mean for the health of the state? Identities are shaped by multiple factors—religion, gender, ethnicity, language, region, and many more—and we will attempt to disaggregate the various components of African identity to determine how it impacts acceptance of the state by African citizens.

Schraeder, Chapters 5, 6


Week 8 October 15 Policy Memos Due
What Matters: Africa’s Political Economy
With some of the world’s fastest growth, the political-economic confluence in Africa is becoming increasingly important. This class will take a look at African economic growth and development, what it means for citizens, and most importantly, what it means for the structure and function of the African state in coming years. We’ll also briefly examine what the rapid expansion of external actors—notably China—in Africa’s economy means for governance and democracy.


*Democratization*, Chapter 7

Meredith, Chapters 16, 22


**Week 9** October 22 **Presentations**

Up Close: South Africa

The first of several closer examinations of key players in Africa. South Africa has long been considered Africa’s “superpower” due to its political, economic, and military dominance of the region and continent. This status was elevated after the country’s successful transition to democratic rule in 1994, particularly given the new government’s stated commitments to human rights and democracy. However, in the face of growing public unrest over lagging growth, little progress on human development indicators, and perceived growth of corruption, South Africa is starting to lose its shine.


*Democratization*, Chapter 19

Meredith, Chapters 24, 34


**Week 10** October 29 **Presentations/Topics for Final Due**

Up Close: Nigeria
Nigeria is on the rise. By 2040, Nigeria will likely have more than 300 million people, making one of every four Africans a Nigerian. Its oil-driven economy is also booming, likely to soon overtake South Africa’s as the largest economy on the continent. However, the country faces massive challenges in terms of tackling endemic corruption, dealing with longstanding religious and ethnic conflicts, delivering services to its citizens, and ensuring good governance and democracy. Nigeria is critical juncture; where it goes is uncertain.


Democratization, Chapter 9

Meredith, Chapters 11, 30

Week 11 November 5 Presentations
Up Close: Congo
Congo is a mess; in many ways, it’s been a mess since it was first constituted as the personal fiefdom of Belgium’s King Leopold. It’s been plagued by abhorrent development indicators, rampant corruption, non-existent infrastructure, conflict, and misrule since independence, and the immediate future does not look much brighter. That said, Congo is often described as the “wealthiest poor country in the world” given tremendous natural resources. This class will focus a great deal on the subject of “big man-ism” to better understand how a handful of corrupt, incompetent leaders played key roles in running what should be an African success story.

Democratization, Chapter 22

Meredith, Chapter 17

Alec Russell, “The King of Kleptocracy”, in Big Men, Little People, NYU Press, 2000


Week 12 November 12 Presentations
Up Close: Rwanda
Rwanda brings one word to mind: genocide. The killing of nearly 500,000 people in a few months time serves as one of the world’s most horrific acts of the 20th century. However, Rwanda during the past two decades, under President Paul Kagame, has seen a spectacular rebound in regard rebuilding and diversifying its economy while seeking to heal the scars of the genocide. However, Rwanda’s continued involvement in eastern Congo fighting and its neglect
of democratic institution-building raises the specter of the degree to which such changes are cosmetic and if they are sustainable.

Meredith, Chapters 27, 28

Ruth Wedgwood, “Paul Kagame and Rwanda’s Faux Democracy,” *New Republic*, 5 August 2010
http://www.newrepublic.com/blog/foreign-policy/76786/rwanda-kagame-faux-democracy#


Week 13 November 19 Presentations
Up Close: Botswana
The final country deserving a closer look is the ultimate outlier: Botswana. The world’s poorest country upon independence in 1966, Botswana has, through visionary leadership, utilized its bountiful diamond reserves to become one of the continent’s richest countries and most vibrant democracies. However, recent years have brought growing scrutiny to the Botswana success story, with economic diversification efforts flagging and new questions being raised about the effectiveness and democratic nature of the government.

*Democratization*, Chapter 20


http://worlddefensereview.com/pham041708.shtml

http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/president/slewis/speeches_writings/botswana_success/

Helen Suzman Foundation, "Botswana's Success Breeds its Own Problems," *Focus*, April 2003


Week 14 November 26 Presentations
Wrap-up and Outlook
We will use this class to tie up loose ends, explore any other topics you’d like, and take some time to digest what we have examined in the course. After all we’ve learned, where does Africa fit into the global geopolitical and economic picture? What does the future likely hold for the continent and its power relations with the rest of the world? And to what degree can we even talk about “the continent” in this context?


**Additional Readings**

In addition to the assigned readings, a few—suggested—readings may be posted during the course, particularly in regard to current developments in relation to African security. It is recommended that students make a habit of browsing African news websites (like [www.allafrica.com](http://www.allafrica.com) or BBC Africa) to keep abreast of the latest developments, as these will often help drive class discussions. In addition, students are encouraged to sign up for the daily press summaries issued by the African Center for Strategic Studies (africacenter.org), as these often contain many articles pertinent to class discussion.