PS 355U: Introduction to African Politics

Spring 2017 (4 credits)  Tuesday, Thursday 12:00pm – 1:50pm
Professor: Robert Asaadi [email: rasaadi@pdx.edu]

Course description:
Africa is often imagined as a continent set apart from the rest of the world, a place beset by recurrent crises, or more generally as an unstable or underdeveloped exception to the rule of modernization and global progress. In opposition to this construction, our class will examine the ways in which Africa is profoundly implicated in international political and economic relations. The class will explore several critical themes in an effort to better understand contemporary African politics. These include the following: Africa’s pre-colonial and colonial inheritance, political identity and ideology, the politics of class, the question of legitimacy in governance, the role of the military in politics, Africa’s political economy, state strength, and democratization, among others. Alongside this thematic focus, the course will also emphasize more in-depth historical analysis through detailed case studies of several African states, including: Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Botswana, Côte d’Ivoire, Uganda, Somalia, Ghana, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), and Zimbabwe. Furthermore, students will have the opportunity to develop a research project on a topic of their choosing over the course of the term.

By the end of the course students will be able to write and speak about African politics in an informed, thoughtful manner; critically scrutinize both academic and media representations of the African continent; analyze the ways in which global politics and the colonial legacy shape contemporary African politics; and interrogate contemporary African politics across multiple issue areas through the application of various theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

Required text: