

Africa: Ethnicity and Governance

Social Sciences Department
University of California, Irvine
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Jean G. Tompohé
E-mail: jtompohé@uci.edu

Office: SST 705

Office hours: T/Th 10:00 to 11:00
a.m. and by appointment

Course Description

This course explores the conditions under which ethnicity becomes politically salient in contemporary Africa. Questions include: What has caused the historic condition of ethnic comity to break down? Why is ethnicity emerging as the reserve currency in the market of power? What is the overall meaning of ethnicity with respect to national identity? How can the present intra-ethnic focus of authority be muted and replaced by a wider-reaching civic politics? Essential to the objective of this course is the analysis of governance in Africa, the African people, and the interaction between the two as this directs the choices of identity. While the course covers general trends across Africa, six countries, Rwanda, Nigeria, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Côte d'Ivoire, serve as case studies.

The course is organized in six sections. We begin with an attempt to understand what a nation is. Within this framework, we review the rise of African nationalism at independence. We then look at trajectories of state-building and power consolidation that strengthened ethnic politics in the postcolonial era. We conclude with processes of violent clashes and the occasional cases of successful mitigation of ethnic conflict.