

PSCI 3101 A
Conflict and Security in Africa
Thursday: 11:35 am - 2:25 pm
Please confirm location on Carleton Central.

I. General Information

Instructor: Isaac Odoom

Student Hours: Thursday 2:35pm – 4:35pm or by appointment

Email: isaac.odoom@carleton.ca

II. Course Description

This course examines the causes, forms, and consequences of conflict and insecurity in Africa, as well as African and international responses. It places contemporary conflicts within the longer histories of pre-colonial and colonial rule, state formation, liberation struggles, and Cold War intervention, while examining how organized violence has changed since the 1990s.

The course considers civil war, military rule, insurgency, mass atrocities, resource conflict, gendered violence, forced displacement, climate insecurity, and digital forms of coercion. Rather than treating states as the sole providers of security, the course examines the roles of other actors such as armed groups, local communities, regional organizations, foreign governments, private military actors, and peace operations.

We will compare competing explanations of conflict, assess how knowledge about African security is produced, and consider whose experiences and perspectives are included or excluded. The course emphasizes African agency and equips students to analyze conflict without reproducing simplistic assumptions about ethnicity, state failure, or endemic violence.

III. Course Format

This is a lecture course designed to be accessible to all students, but it requires consistent reading of assigned literature and attention to current events in Africa to enable meaningful class participation.

Each class will be divided into two parts:

- The first half will consist of a lecture where I highlight key concepts, debates, and approaches. Lectures will not simply summarize the readings but will provide analytical frameworks and broader context.
- The second half will be used for interactive activities such as discussions, small group exercises, and lead discussion sessions.

We will begin each lecture with a brief discussion on “*What’s in the news (about Africa) this week?*” to encourage students to connect course themes with ongoing developments.

IV. Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, students should be able to:

1. Explain how colonial rule, state formation, political exclusion, and international intervention have shaped armed conflict in Africa.
2. Compare state-centred, political-economy, identity-based, and transnational explanations of conflict.
3. Distinguish among civil war, insurgency, coups, mass atrocities, and other forms of political violence.
4. Analyze how conflicts spread across borders and become connected to regional and global actors.
5. Assess how conflict affects civilians differently according to gender, age, class, location, and displacement status.
6. Evaluate the roles and limitations of the African Union, regional organizations, the United Nations, and external security partners.

V. Texts

There is no required textbook for this course. Required readings for each week are listed in the course schedule. Readings and learning materials will be available on Brightspace free of charge.

VI. Evaluation at a Glance

Component	Weight	Due Date	Notes
Attendance & Participation (includes Lead Discussant role)	15%	Ongoing	Attendance, active participation in class discussions; each student serves once as lead discussant.
Africa Map Quiz	5%	Oct 1 (Week 4)	In-class quiz on African geography (countries, regions).
Midterm Test	25%	Oct 22 (Week 7)	In-class test covering Weeks 1–6.
Media Critique Paper	20%	Nov 20 (Week 11)	5–6 page short paper comparing news articles in relation to course themes and readings.
Final Exam	35%	Formal Exam Period	Exam covering entire course, with emphasis on applied knowledge in the course
Total	100%		

VII. Evaluation in Detail

1. Attendance & Participation (15%)

Attendance and active participation is central to this course. Students are required to attend each class, complete weekly readings, and contribute to discussions.

- **Lead Discussant Role (5%):** Each student will serve once as a lead discussant for the weekly readings. Discussants for a specific week will post 1–2 comments on Brightspace by **Wednesday night of the assigned week**, introduce their comments in class on Thursday during lecture, and submit a 1-page reflection after the class. [Further details will be posted on Brightspace)
- **General Participation (10%):** Includes attendance, meaningful contributions to class discussion, and respectful engagement with peers.
- Instructor will take class attendance weekly via Woodlap (see Brightspace for sign up details).

2. Africa Map Quiz (5%)

This will be held in class on **Oct 1 (Week 4)**. Students will identify African countries and major regions. This ensures a good foundation for understanding case studies throughout the course.

3. Midterm Test (25%)

This will be held on **Oct 22 (Week 7)** during class. Test will cover material from Weeks 1–6 (lectures, readings, and discussions). This closed book test is intended to encourage students to keep up with readings and course content, and to allow students to demonstrate their understanding of the early elements of the course material. Students will be required to answer short and long answer questions.

4. Media Analysis: Representing Conflict and Security in Africa (20%)

This short paper is due **Nov 20 (Week 11)** via Brightspace. Students will select two news reports published by different news organizations within the previous 24 months concerning the same conflict or security issue in Africa. In a 5–6 page paper, students will compare how the reports define the issue, explain its causes, represent relevant actors, use evidence, and include or omit historical and political context. The paper must have a clear argument and use at least three class assigned materials to evaluate what the reports explain effectively, oversimplify, or leave out. Students must provide copies or working links to both reports and include a brief research-process statement.

Further instructions and guidelines will be posted on Brightspace.

5. Final Exam (35%)

The final exam is scheduled during the formal exam period. Students will answer essay-type short/long answer questions related to course content. Review questions will be discussed in class on Dec 10.

Contact Policy: Email is the best way to contact me. I normally reply within 24-48 hours, weekends excluded. All email must be through official Carleton University email accounts. For longer questions I recommend scheduling regular office hours or a Zoom appointment.

Students should note that to obtain credit in this course, they must fulfill all of the course requirements.

Previous papers/work. For this course and its assignments, using work already submitted for other courses is unacceptable. Students are invited to talk to the instructor if they have any questions related to this provision.

Copyright: Lectures and course materials (including any PowerPoint presentations, videos, or similar materials) are protected by copyright. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own educational use. You may not allow others to reproduce, distribute, or make available lecture notes and/or course materials, whether publicly or for commercial purposes, without the professor's express written consent.

Changes to the syllabus: This syllabus is subject to change. Any amendments will be posted on Brightspace and announced in class.

Late assignments: It is student responsibility to inform the instructor as soon as it becomes clear that their work will be late. If you do not communicate in advance, and your reasons for being late do not also explain this lack of communication, and if, in the judgement of the Teaching Assistant/Instructor, there is no valid reason and accompanying proof for a late assignment (e.g. health or domestic affliction), you will be penalized by one grade per day on the letter scale. For example, a B would become a B- on the first day, a C+ on the second day, and so on. Assignments more than a week late may not be accepted.

Generative AI Policy:

GenAI tools can assist with learning, but they can also produce inaccurate information, fabricated references, and writing that does not reflect a student's own understanding. The purpose of course assignments is to develop students' ability to read scholarly work, evaluate evidence, formulate arguments, and communicate those arguments in their own words.

AI use in this course: Students may use AI tools only for basic word-processing assistance, such as checking spelling, clarity, and formatting.

Documenting AI use: Ordinary spelling and grammar checks built into word-processing software do not need to be disclosed unless they substantially rewrite the student's work. Students should consult the instructor before using AI in any other way.

Why have I adopted this policy? Course assignments are designed to develop students' own skills in reading, research, critical thinking, analysis, and writing.

Limitations: Students should not use AI to generate all or part of written assignments; develop arguments or analysis; summarize sources; produce citations; or complete quizzes, tests, or examinations. Students remain responsible for the accuracy and originality of all submitted work. The instructor may request notes, drafts, sources, or a brief oral explanation of submitted work. Failure to adhere to the spirit or requirements of the AI policy for this course will be considered a violation of the university's academic integrity policy. For more information, see Carleton's policy on [academic integrity](#).

Course Schedule

[Week 1 — September 10] Course Organization and Introduction

- Overview of course themes, expectations, and assessments.
- What assumptions do we bring to the study of conflict in Africa?
- Africa map activity preview.

Video: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "[The Danger of a Single Story](#)", TED, 2009.

- Use Africa Map learning tool (<https://lizardpoint.com/geography/africa-quiz.php#>) to learn the basic political geography of the continent.

[Week 2 — September 17] Studying Conflict and Security in Africa

- What counts as conflict, and whose security should concern us?
- How do scholarly categories, conflict data, and media coverage shape what we see?

Required reading:

- Paul D. Williams, "Continuity and Change in War and Conflict in Africa," *PRISM* 6, no. 4 (2017): 33–45.
- *Recommended:* The International Crisis Group (2026): *Seven Peace and Security Priorities for Africa in 2026* <https://www.crisisgroup.org/brf/africa/b209-seven-peace-and-security-priorities-africa-2026>
- **Video:** MSNBC, "[Comparing the Coverage of War in Europe Versus War in Africa](#)", 2022.

[Week 3 — September 24] Colonial Rule, Liberation Struggles, and the Cold War

- How did colonial rule shape postcolonial states, borders, and systems of coercion?
- How did liberation struggles and Cold War intervention influence later conflicts?

Required readings

- A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism*, 1987, Ch. 4, pp. 94-112
- Houser, G. M. (1967). African Liberation Movements: Report on a Trip to Africa, Spring 1967. *Africa Today*, 14(4), 11–13. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4184811> (3 pages)
- *Recommended:* Vincent B. Khapoya and Baffour Agyeman-Duah, "The Cold War and Regional Politics in East Africa," *Journal of Conflict Studies* 5, no. 2 (1985).
- **Podcast:** This is a Short History Of... The Scramble for Africa. Available at: <https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/short-historyof/id1579040306?i=1000664049280> [You can skip the first 6 minutes]

[Week 4 — October 1] Explaining Armed Conflict in Africa

- How well do political exclusion, state weakness, inequality, resources, and identity explain conflict?
- Why do similar conditions produce armed conflict in some places but not others?

Required reading

- Williams, P.D., *War and Conflict in Africa* (Polity, 2011), Chapter 3.
- *Recommended:* Mats Berdal, "[Beyond Greed and Grievance—and Not Too Soon,](#)" *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 4 (2005): 687–698.

Africa Map Quiz

[Week 5 — October 8] Coups, Militarized Governance, and Contested Legitimacy

- Why have military coups returned in parts of Africa?
- How have citizens and regional bodies responded to the current wave?

Required reading

- Onapajo, H., & Babalola, D. (2024). ECOWAS and the challenge of preventing a resurgence of coups d'état in West Africa: An assessment of the 'Zero Tolerance' policy. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 31(1), 23–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2024.2353266>
- *Recommended:* Aina, F. (2026). Ibrahim Traore: Burkina Faso's saviour, dictator or revolutionary anti-imperialist. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 37(6), 1473–1488. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2026.2656299>
- **Video:** Al Jazeera 2023-What's behind the wave of coups in Africa?

[Week 6 — October 15] Political Identity, Communal Violence, and Mass Atrocities

- Under what conditions do political identities become bases for exclusion and violence?
- Why are "tribe" and "ancient hatred" inadequate explanations of African conflicts?

Required readings

- Williams, P.D., *War and Conflict in Africa* (Polity, 2011), chapter 6.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "The Myth of Tribe in African Politics," *Transition* 101 (2009): 16–23.
- **Webpage/video:** BBC Africa: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-26875506> (a short retrospective on the causes and legacies of the 1994 Rwandan genocide).

[Week 7 — October 22] Midterm Test

- In-class test covering Weeks 1–6.

[Week 8 — October 29] Fall Break: No class.

[Week 9 — November 5] Civil War and Fragmented Military Authority

- How did governments' reliance on militias and fragmented military institutions contribute to war in Sudan and South Sudan?
- Why have peace agreements and political transitions repeatedly failed to produce stable civilian authority?

Required reading

- Gerrit Kurtz, [*Power Relations in Sudan after the Fall of Bashir*](#) (German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2024), selected sections.
- *Recommended*: Alex de Waal, "The Brute Causes of the South Sudan Civil War," *African Affairs* 113, no. 452 (2014): 347–369.
- **Podcast**: CSIS, *Into Africa*, [Sudan Conflict: How Did We Get Here?](#) April 20, 2023

[Week 10 — November 12] Insurgency, Conflict Resolution, and Regional Security in West Africa

(Guest Lecture: Dr. Moudjib Djinadou)

- Why have military and institutional responses struggled to contain insecurity in West Africa?
- What do international institutions understand (and misunderstand) about African conflict resolution?

Required reading

- Bruno Charbonneau, Counter-insurgency governance in the Sahel, *International Affairs*, Volume 97, Issue 6, November 2021, Pages 1805–1823, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iab182>
- *Recommended*: Violent Extremism in the Sahel (*Council of Foreign Relations*) <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel>
- **Podcast**: *Into Africa*, "The New Alliance of Sahel States and the Future of African Institutions."

[Week 11 — November 19] Regionalized War, Resources, and Armed Authority

- Why has conflict in eastern DRC persisted despite peace agreements and international intervention?
- How do citizenship, land, regional intervention, armed groups, and mineral economies interact?

Media Critique Paper Due on Nov 20.

Required readings

- Williams, P.D., *War and Conflict in Africa* (Polity, 2011), Chapter 4.
- Paul Nantulya, [“Beyond M23: Addressing the Underlying Drivers of the DRC Conflict”](#), Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2026.
- **Podcast:** [“The M23 Rebels and the Conflict in Eastern DRC”](#), *Conflict, Security and Development Podcast*, February 3, 2025.

[Week 12 — November 26] Gender, Civilians, Displacement, and Human Security

- How do civilians experience, navigate, and respond to armed conflict?
- What becomes obscured when gender and security are reduced to wartime sexual violence?

Required reading

- Sara Meger, “Women, Peace, and Security and the DRC: Time to Rethink Wartime Sexual Violence as Gender-Based Violence?” *Politics & Gender* 12, no. 2 (2016): 416–419.
- *Recommended:* Ajayi, T. F. (2020). Women, Internal Displacement and the Boko Haram Conflict: Broadening the Debate. *African Security*, 13(2), 171–194.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2020.1731110>
- **Video:** UN Women: [Fighting the Silence](#)

[Week 13 — December 3] Climate Change, Technology, and Emerging Security Challenges

- Under what political conditions does climate stress contribute to insecurity?
- How are drones, surveillance, social media, and artificial intelligence changing coercion and civilian protection?

Required readings

- Bruno Charbonneau, “The Production of Climate Security Futures in the West African Sahel,” *African Affairs* 123, no. 492 (2024): 329–353
- Karen Allen, [“Drones and Violent Nonstate Actors in Africa,”](#) Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2021.
- **Podcast:** German Marshall Fund, [“Climate Change and Security in the Sahel,”](#) *Thinking Across Latitudes* podcast.

[Week 14 — December 10] Responding to Conflict: Course Conclusion and Exam Review

- Why do some conflict responses fail, and how should success be assessed?
- What do the course cases reveal about African agency and the limits of external intervention?
- Course Wrap-up and exam preparation.

Required reading

- Allen, N., & Mazurova, N. (2024, April 30). African Union and United Nations Partnership Key to the future of peace operations in Africa – Africa Center.
<https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-union-united-nations-peace-operations/>

Political Science Course Outline Appendix

REQUESTS FOR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Student Mental Health

As a university student, you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. Here is a list that may be helpful:

Emergency Resources (on and off campus):

<https://carleton.ca/safety/resources/>

Carleton Resources:

Mental Health and Wellbeing: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>

Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>

Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>

Academic Advising Centre (AAC):
<https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>

Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS):
<https://carleton.ca/csas/>

Equity & Inclusivity Communities: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

Off Campus Resources:

Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311 or TEXT: 343-306-5550, <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>

Mental Health Crisis Service: (613) 722-6914, 1-866-996-0991,
<http://www.crisisline.ca/>

Good2Talk: 1-866-925-5454, <https://good2talk.ca/>

The Walk-In Counselling Clinic: <https://walkincounselling.com>

Academic consideration for medical or other extenuating

circumstances: Students must contact the instructor(s) of their absence or inability to complete the academic deliverable within the predetermined timeframe due to medical or other extenuating circumstances. For a range of medical or other extenuating circumstances, students may use the online self-declaration form and where appropriate, the use of medical documentation. This policy regards the accommodation of extenuating circumstances for both short-term and long-term periods and extends to all students enrolled at Carleton University.

Students should also consult the [Course Outline Information on Academic Accommodations](#) for more information. Detailed information about the procedure for requesting academic consideration can be found [here](#).

Pregnancy: Contact your Instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For accommodation regarding a formally-scheduled final exam, please

contact Equity and Inclusive Communities (EIC) at equity@carleton.ca or by calling (613) 520-5622 to speak to an Equity Advisor.

Religious obligation: Contact your Instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details [click here](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, please request your accommodations for this course through the [Ventus Student Portal](#) at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (*if applicable*). Requests made within two weeks will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. For final exams, the deadlines to request accommodations are published in the [University Academic Calendars](#). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally scheduled exam (if applicable).

Survivors of Sexual Violence: As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and its survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit:
<https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>.

Accommodation for Student Activities: Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation will be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

PETITIONS TO DEFER

Students unable to write a final examination because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control may apply within **three working days** to the Registrar's Office for permission to write a deferred examination. The request must be fully supported by the appropriate documentation. Only deferral petitions submitted to the

Registrar's Office will be considered. [See Undergraduate Calendar, Article 4.3](#)

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Student or professor materials created for this course (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the author(s). They are intended for personal use and may not be reproduced or redistributed without prior written consent of the author(s). Permissibility of submitting substantially the same piece of work more than once for academic credit. If group or collaborative work is expected or allowed, provide a clear and specific description of how and to what extent you consider collaboration to be acceptable or appropriate, especially in the completion of written assignments.

WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT ACADEMIC PENALTY

Please reference the [Academic Calendar](#) for each term's official withdrawal dates

OFFICIAL FINAL EXAMINATION PERIOD

Please reference the [Academic Calendar](#) for each term's Official Exam Period (may include evenings & Saturdays or Sundays)

For more information on the important dates and deadlines of the academic year, consult the [Carleton Calendar](#).

GRADING SYSTEM

The grading system is described in the Undergraduate Calendar section [5.4](#).

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is an essential element of a productive and successful career as a student. Students are required to familiarize themselves with the university's [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

PLAGIARISM

The University Senate defines plagiarism as "*presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own.*" This can include:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorized use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT);
- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original

source;

- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in "*substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.*"

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of "F" for the course.

RESOURCES (613-520-2600, phone ext.)

Department of Political Science (2777)	B640 Loeb
Registrar's Office (3500)	300 Tory
Centre for Student Academic Success (3822)	4 th floor Library
Academic Advising Centre (7850)	302 Tory
Paul Menton Centre (6608)	501 Nideyinnà
Career Services (6611)	401 Tory