

Diversifying the Curriculum blog 2025-2026

Africa and Global Politics (POLI30862)

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One of the debates we engage with on this UG3 optional Politics course concerns the successes and limitations of electoral politics and democracy in Africa. This year, I used the Diversify the Curriculum fund to bring a guest lecturer back to Manchester. Dr Mitterand Okorie (Nelson Mandela University, South Africa) to give a talk to the students on elections and security policing in Nigeria in March 2026.

The starting point for the student discussion centred on two contrasting BBC news articles. In [December 2024](#), the BBC proclaimed a positive year for opposition parties, with ruling parties defeated in Ghana, Botswana, Mauritius, Senegal and the self-declared republic of Somaliland. In contrast, a [December 2025](#) BBC news article announced a “difficult year” for democracy in Africa, with protestors against a rigged election being shot by the government in Tanzania in October, and military coups in Madagascar and Guinea Bissau, as well as an attempted coup in Benin. After discussing some of the difficulties inherent in identifying “regional trends” or a continent-wide “story” across very different countries and contexts, Mitterand gave the students a deep-dive discussion of Nigerian democracy and some of the problems faced by (and caused by) the police in providing security during election campaigns.

The discussion then moved to a comparison of democracy and elections in Nigeria and South Africa. Both countries have had recent high profile elections: in 2023 Bola Tinubu won election as President of Nigeria; Cyril Ramaphosa has been president of South Africa since 2018 but in the 2024 election the ANC failed to win an outright majority for the first time since the end of apartheid. Mitterand has extensive experience in both countries and the students appreciated his first hand knowledge of democratic politics in both cases, as well as his reflections on the research process.

This year we followed the lecture with a short recorded discussion that was then circulated to students as a video on Canvas. I asked Mitterand for his thoughts in response to three questions: What are the biggest myths about African politics, and how can we challenge them? What are the main causes of the violence and insecurity in parts of northern Nigeria, and is international intervention such as the US Christmas Day airstrikes appropriate? What are some of the implications you see in the rise of generative AI for African politics, and for research on African politics? His answers were thoughtful and nuanced and student feedback was that they greatly appreciated his lecture and the video discussion. The video will be made available to students in future years too.

The question about myths directly links to the central aims of the course: to critically contest myths and stereotypes about African politics. Informed by postcolonial theory, the course explores the ways in which “Africa” has been represented within unequal global power relations, and the ways in which coloniality and capitalism reproduce intersectional inequalities of class, race, gender and sexuality.

The last question arose from the closer discussion we have had this over the implications of the rise of generative AI for studying African politics. This links to core methodological and

ethical questions we discuss, such as: What does it mean to “study Africa” from Manchester? Whose accounts of African politics are privileged and whose are marginalised? How does “African Studies” challenge or reproduce inequitable power relations? What does decolonisation mean in this context?

I have taught the course since 2014, and as a white, male, English speaking, middle-class academic I devote considerable attention to discussing issues of positionality, authority, and alternative epistemologies with students during the semester. We also reflect on how ‘African Studies’ is taught in the UK context and the continuing inequalities in UK academia, particularly in terms of Black professors and lecturers. The course draws upon a diverse and African-centred reading list, and we make frequent use of videos, podcasts and other online materials that centre African perspectives on global politics. However, it is important not to miss out on opportunities to allow students to engage in person with African experts. In the context of our discussions about the ways in which African perspectives are often marginalised in International Relations, it is important for all students – and is often especially welcomed by the many students of African heritage who take this course – to see and hear African academics as authoritative knowledge-producers. I remain very grateful for the Diversify the Curriculum fund for enabling me to bring visiting speakers to participate in our discussions.