University of Toronto,
Faculty of Arts and Science,
Department of Political Science,

Academic Year 2023-2024

Topics in Comparative Politics III: Epidemics and Phobia
POL379H1 F; LEC0201

Instructor: Prof. Ato Kwamena Onoma
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Class time: Wednesday 9-11am

Class location: OI 2214

Office Hours: By appointment

THEMES: This class will explore the relationship between epidemics and phobia with an emphasis on mapping and making sense of the forms that phobia takes during public health crises. We will also examine the extent to which epidemics constitute defining moments that inflect longstanding social dynamics. The following are some questions that we will explore: What is the relationship between health-related xenophobia and other forms of xenophobia? Do epidemics always coincide with xenophobia? Why are some groups scapegoated while others are not? Which members of scapegoated groups are targeted during epidemics? How do epidemics play into intragroup interactions? This course will help students to reflect on broader questions of mobility, identity and belonging while advancing their knowledge of the more specific issues of epidemics and phobia.

FORMAT AND REQUIREMENTS: This is a lecture with a significant discussion segment. This course will be in-person. The course will be divided into two sections. The first part of the course will help students grasp the dominant literature on xenophobia linked to public health crises. In the second section of the course, we will critically interrogate the dominant literature on the relationship between epidemics and xenophobia. We will detect its gaps and flaws and explore ways of further enrichening it.

PREREQUISITES: 1.0 credit in POL/ JPA/ JPF/ JPI/ JPR/ JPS/ JRA courses

ASSESSMENT

- Class attendance and informed participation (20%)
• **Ask your favourite AI Bot discussion 1: (10%)**: Each student will generate and submit a response to a question that the instructor will pose to their favorite AI chatbot. We will discuss some of these responses in class on the chosen day. You will be assessed based on both your submission and participation in discussion of the responses.

• **In-class mid-term exam (40%)**

• **Ask your favourite AI Bot discussion 2: (10%)**: Each student will generate and submit a response to a question that the instructor will pose to their favorite AI chatbot. We will discuss some of these responses in class on the chosen day. You will be assessed based on both your submission and participation in discussion of the responses.

• **Final open book take-home exam (20%)**: You will have two weeks to submit your response (4 double-spaced pages each, Times New Roman, font 12: around 1500 words) to one out of two questions posed by the instructor. Submit your response in MS Word format on Quercus by 9am on December 11, 2022. A 2% penalty will be assessed each day the submission is late without excuse.

**ABSENCE**: Students who absent themselves from class should complete the Absence Declaration form available to them directly on ACORN. Students should also inform the instructor of their absence.

**EXTENSIONS**: The deadlines for submission of assignments are hard deadlines. Extensions will only be granted in extraordinary circumstances. *Late submissions that have not been granted an extension by the instructor prior to the deadline will not be marked and will receive a grade of zero.*

**PLAGIARISM**: “Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and will be dealt with accordingly. For further clarification and information on plagiarism please see Writing at the University of Toronto [http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources](http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources).”

**ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS**: The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit [http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/](http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/) as soon as possible.

**COURSE MATERIALS**: The materials below are required readings that must be completed before class. Most are available electronically either as links through the library’s website or as PDFs. You can locate the electronic links and PDF files under library resources on the course page in Quercus. Readings that are not available electronically can be found on short term loan – Course Reserve at Roberts Library.
Week 1 (September 13): The problem of xenophobia

- **Preoccupation**: What is the nature of the problem of xenophobia?

- **Readings**:

Week 2 (September 20): Epidemics and xenophobia: Scope, forms and location

- **Preoccupation**: What is the historical and geographic scope of xenophobia related to outbreaks of infectious diseases? What types of epidemics have spurred hatred towards those cast as other? To what extent is epidemic era phobia linked to broader angst over invading foreigners?

- **Readings**:

Week 3 (September 27): Epidemics and xenophobia: Motivations

- **Preoccupation**: Why do outbreaks of infectious diseases coincide with phobia targeting others?

- **Readings**:


**Week 4 (October 4): The link between epidemics and xenophobia**

- **Preoccupation**: Do epidemics always coincide with xenophobic outbursts?

- **Readings**:

**Week 11: Ask your favourite AI Bot discussion 1**

**Week 6 (October 18): Mid-term exam**

**Week 7 (October 25): Targeting patterns**

- **Preoccupation**: Why are some migrants and migrant communities targeted in xenophobic outbreaks while others are spared?

- **Readings**:

**Week 8 (November 1): Breaching boundaries 1**

- **Preoccupation**: How do we make sense of kindness towards others during epidemic-era xenophobic outbursts?

- **Readings**

**Week 9 (November 15): Breaching boundaries 2**


**Week 10 (November 22): Beyond dichotomies**

- **Preoccupation**: To what extent is the self/other dichotomy useful in reading social cartographies, including during epidemics?

- **Readings**
  
  
  

**Week 11 (November 29): Epidemics and intra-group interactions**

- **Preoccupation**: How do epidemics impact intra-group relations? Does epidemic era phobia necessarily spare in-group members?

- **Readings**
  
  

**Week 12 (December 6): Ask your favourite AI Bot discussion 2**