

African Politics: A Very Short Introduction explores how politics is practised on the African continent, providing an overview of the different states and their systems. It considers the nature of the state in sub-Saharan Africa and why its state structures are generally weaker than elsewhere in the world. Exploring the historical and contemporary factors that account for Africa's underdevelopment, it also analyses why some African countries suffer from high levels of political violence while others are spared. Unveiling the ways in which African state and society actually function beyond the formal institutional façade, this VSI discusses how external factors—both inherited and contemporary—act upon the continent.

1. Introduction to Africa and its politics

Africa is a continent of over a billion people, yet questions of underdevelopment, malgovernance, and a form of political life based upon patronage are characteristic of many African states. 'Introduction to Africa and its politics' explains that the core questions underpinning this VSI centre on how politics is typically practised on the continent; the nature of the state in Africa; and what accounts for Africa's underdevelopment. This VSI aims to appraise sub-Saharan Africa's recent political history, examining post-colonial political structures, the impact of colonialism, and the form and nature of post-colonial states. The type of politics practised in many African states continues to be hostile to genuine nation building and broad-based, sustainable development.

2. Pre-colonial political systems and colonialism

Pre-colonial Africa had a wide diversity of politics and government, all related to the type of economic systems practised. Hunter-gatherers practised a form of primitive

communism, while elsewhere three broad systems may be identified: large centralized kingdoms and empires; centralized mid-sized kingdoms; and widely scattered chiefdoms. 'Pre-colonial political systems and colonialism' explains that political and social identities were generally more related to affiliations, such as sharing a common language, than to being an inhabitant of a particular territory. It also outlines the impact of the slave trade, which began in the 15th century, and the different types of late-19th-century colonial rule on the African people and their politics.

3. The transfer of power and the colonial legacy

Colonialism profoundly transformed African political, economic, and social structures. The exploitation of Africa's labour and natural resources for the benefit of the metropolises was to have intense implications for the continent as it emerged towards independence in the 1960s as, in most cases, the foundations necessary for the construction of sovereign, economically viable, and politically stable African states did not exist. 'The transfer of power and the colonial legacy' describes how the European powers left most of their colonial possessions unprepared for self-rule. The key colonial legacy was economic, which massively influenced the political realm. Initial state and nation building encouraged the centralization of power and creation of political monopolies.

4. The primacy of patronage politics

A great number of post-colonial African countries, bounded by formal frontiers and with an international presence at various international institutions such as the United Nations, function quite differently from conventional understandings of what a formal state is and should do. 'The primacy of patronage politics' explains that to understand African politics, the concept of neo-patrimonialism must be considered. Neo-patrimonialism is where patronage, clientelism, and rent-seeking exist, but where the structures of a modern state are also in place. In general, post-colonial African leaders have relied on coercive

control and patronage through capturing power over the state, rather than through constructing a functioning impartial administration.

5. Women in African politics

Gender inequality in Africa varies depending on the histories, culture, colonial legacy, and levels of economic development of each community. Generally, inequality is very real and has a direct impact upon the possibilities of the active involvement of women in political processes in Africa. 'Women in African politics' outlines the pre-colonial situation, the effects of colonialism on gender roles, and post-colonial Africa. At independence, most new states granted women the franchise. However, the societal norms of respectability, motherhood, and domestic responsibility often resulted in strong opposition to women playing particularly prominent roles in politics. Despite this, in recent years, women have begun mobilizing politically.

6. The role of identity in African politics

'The role of identity in African politics' explains that identity politics are symptoms of Africa's underdevelopment, not the cause, and the prominence of such political mobilization reflects much deeper structural problems facing many post-colonial states. Before the colonial era, African societies were based on notions of identity, such as the family, ancestral lineage, the clan, or the community. Colonial rule forced together different communities (some of which were traditionally hostile to each other) and was mainly responsible for producing the situation found today where very few nation states exist. Colonial authorities concretized differences among and between the subjugated and the de-colonization period further contributed to the politicization of identity.

7. The military in African politics

Since the 1960s, there have been more than 200 coups—extra-constitutional or forced changes in government—in Africa, with around half of them being successful. The period between the 1960s and 1990s was characterized by Cold War machinations, economic crises, and the growing de-legitimization of many post-colonial regimes. The majority of coups were followed by the formation of some type of military government, but after this diverse outcomes resulted. ‘The military in African politics’ outlines the nature of military rule and why there were so many coups. The fragility of the state and its tenuous hold on legitimacy, accentuated by the behaviour of those in power, is of critical importance.

8. Democracy in Africa

Modern Africa’s first formalized liberal democracies came with various legislatures left behind by the colonialists. Yet soon after independence, most new African leaders enforced their own imprints on the states, restructuring, even abolishing, the various institutions they controlled, suggesting them to be colonial burdens inappropriate for African conditions. One-party systems of government became the norm. ‘Democracy in Africa’ discusses the wave of democratization beginning in the 1990s and the introduction of multiparty elections. The quality of Africa’s democracies is, however, uneven; despite political changes, the entrenchment of democratic values remains shallow and compromised. However, some progress has been made: around one-quarter of African states are now ‘free’.

9. Africa’s international relations

Despite the myth of marginality and irrelevance, Africa has always played an important role in international politics. The slave trade, the Scramble for Africa and subsequent colonial period, the proxy wars of the Cold War, and the increasing importance of the continent’s natural resources all demonstrate how significant Africa has been to the wider

global political economy. 'Africa's international relations' considers the implications for Africa's international relations and discusses interests, old and new. The continent is increasingly important in international relations and is attracting interest from a huge array of actors such as China, India, and Brazil. It also considers the question of aid and the concept of pan-Africanism.

The year 2005 was named the second Year of [Africa](#), recalling 1960, the Year of Africa in which African nations won their independence one after another. With aid to Africa being a major discussion topic of the Gleneagles Summit and focus of the mid-term evaluation of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) on Africa, international attention has been turned to the serious issues of poverty, communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and conflicts faced by Sub-Saharan African nations. From the standpoint of area studies, whose goal is the understanding of others, the increased attention on and increased newspaper and television coverage of Africa is seen as a positive development. However, given the focus of coverage on disasters, it is important to recognize that such narrow coverage can potentially lead to one-dimensional stereotyping of the region. There are 49 independent Sub-Saharan countries (including island nations), each with its own history and characteristics. In order to develop a deeper understanding of Africa as a region, it is important to pay attention to both unique characteristics of individual nations as well as to identify commonalities.

The same can be said for understanding politics in Africa. While donor countries and international development agencies tend, in general, to focus on the "problems" such as deficiencies in governance, dictatorships, corruption, conflicts, and insecurity of multi-ethnic societies, the political realities of individual African nations, each of which has its own unique characteristics, does not allow us to generalize them with such a stereotypical view. The elimination of such single-sided, generalized evaluation can be said to be the mandate for African political science research. For example, the most important development in African countries in recent years is the democratization in the 1990s, in

which military rule or single-party rule has been replaced by multi-party regimes in almost all African nations. While some countries have experienced insecurity during the democratization process (for example, Cote d'Ivoire), there are other countries in which democracy seems to have taken root after experiencing one or more successful free and fair elections (Kenya, Zambia, for example). With regards to civil wars and unrest, again, while there are countries experiencing chronic war (in recent years, Liberia, Burundi, etc.), other countries have experienced a certain degree of success in national reconciliation after the cessation of conflicts (for example Rwanda). These differences only come to light through an area studies approach, whereby the political situations of individual countries are carefully analyzed and compared with those of other countries within the region.

There may be some question here as to whether it is necessary to limit comparisons to other African nations. Naturally, comparison of African countries with non-African countries is an important approach. There is, however, an important methodological reason for limiting the scope of comparison to the region. Although the discipline and theory of political science, including the sub-discipline of comparative political science, has developed rapidly since the end of the Second World War, this theoretical evolution has not incorporated the experiences of new African nations that have gained independence since 1960. This has led to a large disconnect between political theory and the political realities in Africa. Many scholars of African politics face the dilemma of not being able to simply apply accumulated political science theories to analyze African politics. That is to say, while the reality of African politics appears not to fit into the framework of political science theory, at the same time, political science has actively ignored the experience of African politics (an example of this is researchers who take a pessimistic view of Africa based on the "absence" of Western-style democratization and civil society).

The conceptual framework of "African politics" is intended to bridge the gap between

political science theory and the reality of African politics and is well-suited for the study of a mid-sized region with shared issues. In comparing the cases of individual African nations, we simultaneously develop regional theories and identify unique characteristics of individual countries. In other words, these investigations capitalize on the ongoing reformulation of regional research and contribute to the eventual unification with existing political science theory. “African politics” serves both a research approach as well as a forum for that discussion.

Introduction

South Africa is a constitutional democracy with a three-tier system of government and an independent judiciary. The national, provincial and local levels of government all have legislative and executive authority in their own spheres, and are defined in the Constitution as distinctive, interdependent and interrelated.

Operating at both national and provincial levels are advisory bodies drawn from South Africa's traditional leaders. It is a stated intention in the Constitution that the country be run on a system of cooperative governance. Government is committed to the building of a free, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic, united and successful South Africa.

Legislative authority

Parliament (national)

- National Assembly (350 – 400 members)
- National Council of Provinces (90 delegates)

Executive authority

Cabinet (national)

- President
- Deputy President
- Ministers

Legislative authority (provincial)

Provincial Legislature

Executive authority (provincial)

Executive council

- Premier
- Members of the Executive Council

Judicial authority

Courts including the:

- Constitutional Court
- Supreme Court of Appeal
- High courts
- Magistrates' courts

The Judicial Service Commission appoints judges.

State institutions supporting democracy

- Public Protector
- Human Rights Commission
- Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities
- Commission for Gender Equality
- Auditor-General of South Africa
- Independent Communications Authority of South Africa
- Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC)

Government clusters

Government clusters are groupings of government departments with cross-cutting programmes. They foster an integrated approach to governance that is aimed at improving government planning, decision-making and service delivery. The

main objective is to ensure proper coordination of all government programmes at national and provincial levels.

The main functions of the clusters are to ensure the alignment of government-wide priorities, facilitate and monitor the implementation of priority programmes and to provide a consultative platform on cross-cutting priorities and matters being taken to Cabinet.

The clusters of the Forum of South African Directors-General (FOSAD) mirror the ministerial clusters. The FOSAD clusters provide technical support to the ministerial clusters. The Director-General (DG) in The Presidency is the chairperson of FOSAD. Ministers enter into delivery agreements with the President, having to give progress reports on their departments' set targets.

Economic Sectors, Investment, Employment and Infrastructure Development

The departments in this cluster are:

- Mineral Resources and Energy (Chair)
- Tourism (Chair)
- Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development
- Communications and Digital Technologies
- Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
- Employment and Labour
- Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
- Finance
- Higher Education, Science and Innovation
- Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation
- International Relations and Cooperation
- Police

- Public Enterprises
- Public Works and Infrastructure
- Small Business Development
- State Security
- The Presidency
- Trade, Industry and Competition
- Transport
- Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (in The Presidency)

Co-Chairpersons:

- Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy
- Minister of Tourism

Governance, State Capacity and Institutional Development

The departments in this cluster are:

- Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Chair)
- Public Service and Administration (Chair)
- Finance
- Home Affairs
- Justice and Correctional Services
- Public Enterprises
- The Presidency
- Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (in The Presidency)

Co-Chairpersons:

- Minister of CoGTA
- Minister of Public Service and Administration

Social Protection, Community and Human Development

The departments in this cluster are:

- Health (Chair)
- Basic Education (Chair)
- Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development
- Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
- Employment and Labour
- Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
- Higher Education, Science and Innovation
- Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation
- Justice and Correctional Services
- Public Works and Infrastructure
- Small Business Development
- Social Development
- Sport, Arts and Culture
- The Presidency
- Transport
- Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (in The Presidency)

Co-Chairpersons:

- Minister of Health
- Minister of Basic Education

International Cooperation, Trade and Security

The departments in this cluster are:

- Sport, Arts and Culture (Chair)
- Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (Chair)
- Communications and Digital Technologies
- Defence and Military Veterans

- Finance
- International Relations and Cooperation
- Justice and Correctional Services
- Mineral Resources and Energy
- State Security
- The Presidency
- Tourism
- Trade, Industry and Competition

Co-Chairpersons:

- Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture
- Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment

Justice, Crime Prevention and Security

The departments in this cluster are:

- Defence and Military Veterans (Chair)
- Police (Chair)
- Finance
- Home Affairs
- International Relations and Cooperation
- Justice and Correctional Services
- Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (The Presidency)
- Social Development
- State Security
- Small Business Development
- Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (in The Presidency)

Co-Chairpersons:

- Minister of Defence and Military Veterans

- Minister of Police

National Development Plan (NDP)

The [NDP](#) is South Africa's socio-economic policy blueprint that focuses, among other things, on:

- eliminating poverty by reducing the proportion of households with a monthly income below R419 per person from 39% to zero and the reduction of inequality
- increasing employment from 13 million in 2010 to 24 million by 2030
- broadening the country's ownership of assets by historically disadvantaged groups
- ensuring that all children have at least two years of pre-school education and that all children can read and write by Grade 3
- providing affordable access to healthcare
- ensuring effective public transport.

Monitoring and evaluation

Institutional Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (IPME)

This function monitors the quality of management practices in government departments through the Management Performance Assessment Tool. The Frontline Service Delivery Monitoring programme of IPME is responsible for designing and implementing hands-on service delivery monitoring activities with Offices of the Premier and for setting up and supporting the implementation of citizens-based monitoring systems.

The programme has also been successful in elevating monitoring and evaluation to strategic levels in certain sector departments, several of which have developed their own iterations of the programme. One of the key focuses of the programme is on monitoring the implementation of the National Youth Policy. The Presidential Hotline is also located in this branch.

The programme assesses the following:

- Transport: driver's licence testing centres.
- Education: schools.
- Health: hospitals, clinics, community health centres.
- Home Affairs.
- Local Government: municipal customer care centres.
- The National Youth Development Agency.
- The South African Police Service: police stations.
- South African Social Security

Government priorities

The NDP sets out a long-term vision for the country and is the programme through which South Africa aims to advance radical economic transformation through development planning. Government's 2019 – 2024 Medium Term Strategic Framework outlines the priorities to be implemented in the Sixth Administration and the interventions required across South Africa's national development pillars.

The seven priorities are:

- Economic transformation and job creation;
- Education, skills and health;
- Consolidating the social wage through reliable and quality basic services;
- Spatial integration, human settlements and local government;
- Social cohesion and safe communities;
- A capable, ethical and developmental state; and
- A better Africa and World.

Transforming South Africa into a developmental state requires building critical and necessary capabilities to foster an environment, which mobilises government and non-government contributions to realise changes in the socio-economic structure and the culture of society.

Over the medium term, government will prioritise engagement between the leadership of the executive, legislature and judiciary on strengthening governance and accountability. During this period, government further commits to manage the political administrative interface more effectively, reduce the levels of fraud and corruption in the private and public sectors, and rationalise the Public Service Governance System.