

African politics essay



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Politics is defined as the interaction between the state and the society, public and private institutions in such a way as to ensure development. However, politics is not autonomous of the society, nor the society simply made up of organized interest groups. Instead, informal institutions, unregulated behavior and differences in culture are some of the aspects that determine the political systems in specific countries (Hyden, 2006).

African politics cannot be defined in a single term because of the diverse nature of the continent. East to west and north to south, the continent is enormous and so is the different political ideologies presented in the independent states. Overall, the continent has fifty three independent states (Hyden, 2006). In the past, the continent was colonized by different European countries whose effects are still evident in some of the African countries to date.

It is however, the megalomaniac dictatorships and neo-colonialism by African leaders that stands out as the most dominant factor of the African politics noticeable by political observer's world wide. The governments of the respective countries in Africa range from ideological, pragmatic, socialism, nationalism, corrupt, neo-colonialism, dictatorial and even semi-authoritarian governments

Thesis

No single description is ambiguously true for the entire continent, which is a common trait not only in politics but also in the economical and social fronts through out the continent.

Diversity

Simply stated, Africa has all forms of politics. There are autocrats, democrats, socialists, liberals all evident in the different governing structures in the continent (Thomson, A 2004). There is a mixture of multi-party and one party politics in the continent. Social decisions which determine the shape of politics in the different states are also diverse.

As Thomas (2004) notes, Africa is “ no more greedy, corrupt or its residents more stupid than other people residing in other parts of the world”, In deed, he notes that the continent is no different than other continents in the planet as far as the capabilities to govern itself is concerned.

From this point of view, one can conclusively state that the political structure in the continent are as rational just like the system in other continents. The difference between Africa and others is the fact that there are more reasons why dictatorships, civil wars and military coups are more common in Africa (Thomas, 2004).

Political legacy of Colonialism

Africa was invaded by the Persian, Greeks, Romans and Ottoman in the early 3rd century. Later, influences from religions such as Islam and Christianity dominated different parts of Africa with Islam gaining a foothold in North America, while Christianity established itself in east and central Africa (Thomson 2004).

These occupancies did not have a direct effect on the political conditions of the continent since they were established for trade and religious reasons only.

With the 19th century scramble for Africa however, the impact of the colonial masters on the political re-alignment of the continent was numerous.

During this period, Africa was incorporated into the state structure common on the international circles. Arbitrary boundaries were also imposed in the continent and a non-hegemonic state reinforced. The colonial ideals also helped perpetuate weak links between the governments and the civil society.

More so, it is at this point in history that weak government institutions gained a footing in the continent and the promotion of a group of state elites took center stage. Specialist export-economies gained a foothold in the continent during this time and this was made worse by the fact that the colonialists took no effort to establish strong political traditions (Thomas, 2004).

Most of these trends set by the colonialists were perpetuated by African leaders once their respective countries gained independence and the effects of the same are evident in the political structures of those countries to date.

Colonial politics were formed on the features of arbitrariness and absolutism (Ake, 1996). As such, the colonial officers had no interest in transforming the continent to self-reliance. Instead, they perpetuated the era of domination.

To ward off opposition from the local people, the colonial masters employed crude mechanics that would discourage any opposition towards them. The Political arena during the colonial times was such that the colonialists immersed as much power as they could because to them security lay in the accumulation of such powers.

The colonial politics hardly allowed moderation or compromise since political competition was not allowed. From this form of politicking, the African subjects got the notion that ruler-ship amounted to power gain.

According to Liebenow, J (1986), most of the political crises observed in Africa especially those that occurred two decades after independence of the respective states can be traced to the ideologies, philosophies, programs and policies used by the colonial masters in Africa.

Consequently, the leaders who took over from the colonialists refused to establish better suited political systems for their countries and instead perpetuated the colonial policies thus disadvantaging their countries further.

Accordingly, most of the African leaders refused to take responsibility for the failures that persisted and instead assumed defeatist attitudes towards crises always seeking intervention from the former colonial masters (Liebenow, J, 1986).

The African leaders who took over from the colonial rulers maintained most of the state characters established by the former. The totalistic nature of the same combined with the static economies that came to being after the colonialists pulled back to their countries was hard for the Africans to grasp.

Because the Africans were used to compliance under coercion by the authorities the new governments which tried democratic leadership faced challenges that prevailed amidst the shallow social base (Ake 1996).

It is also a common thought that in some countries, the colonial masters conceded what was inevitable and handed the reigns of power to African leaders who could perpetuate the colonial ideals, values and attend to the former colonialist's interests.

Because of this, the tendency to reproduce past colonial practices in post-colonial Africa was high. In most parts of the continent, this was made worse by the fact that most leaders de-politicized freedom movements that had played a major role in fighting for the independence of specific countries.

There were divisions in the societies as a class of political elites emerged in different parts of the continent. Yearning to accumulate more powers and hence secure their positions in the helm of leadership in their respective countries, the leaders weakened the solidarity of the people through appealing to tribal, ethnic, communal, nation and even religious loyalties (Ake, 1996).