Africanizing Democracies: 1980-Present.  Alicia Decker and Andrea Arrington.  New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.  ISBN: 9780199915392

The question of how democracy could take root in African countries since independence has drawn many answers, but little consensus.  During the early 1990s, ordinary people from Dakar to Cape Town to Nairobi risked their lives in the name of democratic reform.  For world history teachers – particularly those not well versed in African history – it would be easy to ignore this movement in comparison to more familiar stories of the seeming triumph of democracy in South Korea, Brazil, and Eastern Europe.  Decker and Arrington's short book thus deserves credit for focusing on democracy in Africa in recent decades.  It clearly is aimed at a general audience and undergraduates.  The authors wisely avoid academic jargon as they underline the shift towards democratic institutions after the heyday of dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s.  Besides underlining the return of multiparty democracy, the authors also examine the impact of economics, health, gender, and security in individual chapters.  By including a bibliography for further reading and viewing, this book shows its utility in undergraduate classes as well as for instructors not familiar with Africa.  *Africanizing Democracies* is a snapshot of contemporary Africa that is rarely covered in such a textbook so well and so succinctly.

For all of its merits, readers should take great caution with this study.  The concept of hybrid authoritarian governments that operate within an ostensibly multiparty democratic institutional and legal framework is currently a fixture in the scholarly literature of African political science.  However, undergraduates will probably have never heard of this term. Not introducing this term is not just an oversight – it limits the value of the book as a first look into African political systems.  A glance at recent African political crises demonstrates the ubiquity of hybrid authoritarian regimes: efforts to extend presidential mandates in Rwanda, Senegal, and the

Republic of Congo being just three examples.  Contested elections in Madagascar, Guinea, and other countries also show how multiparty systems and authoritarian governments can coexist. *Africanizing Democracies* also neglects the impact of radical Islamic movements (particularly in Mali).  If one is to understand contemporary African politics, it is crucial to recognize the existence of a broad continuum of multiparty states rather than simply defining governments as either democracies or dictatorships.

Still another fault line comes with the mixed role of foreign governments in democratization. Rather than simply focus on China as an enabler of illiberal governments (pp. 31-33), the authors could have taken the United States and France to task as well.  Western governments have intervened repeatedly in the name of rescuing democracy in some cases (Côte d'Ivoire, Mali) while turning a blind eye to allies like the Thiopian and Ugandan regimes committed to squashing their critics.  The authors' brief discussion of Rwanda (pp. 18-19) illustrates this point quite well.  Decker and Arrington favorably compare Rwanda's emergence as a democracy with the challenges of South African politics.  The Rwandan Patriotic Front's seizure of power following the genocide of 1994 led to an illiberal democracy with little respect for individual rights, no matter how much the regime has worked hard to impress donors and allies with its supposed commitment to limited government.  Rwandan president Paul Kagame has successfully marketed his government as a model of a free democracy, which helped in no small part to secure foreign aid in the 1990s, as democratization in Africa became a priority for the US government.  The fact remains that his government has used vaguely-worded laws to jail his main political challenger Victoire Ingabire and has assassinated critics living in exile.  For all of the South African political system's shortcomings, there is no question that the chorus of critics of the African National Congress can speak their minds freely.

In short, this study is worthwhile for instructors preparing to teach on democracy in Africa, but this work needs to be tied to other studies that take up hybrid authoritarian regimes.  What *Africanizing Democracies* does do well is provide a survey of major social, economic, and political issues since 1980.  If the authors had not chosen to make democratization the conceptual foundation of the book, it would have been a more effective short textbook for African studies courses on contemporary issues.

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