

BOOK REVIEW:

AFRICA NOW

**GENDERED
INSTITUTIONS
AND WOMEN'S
POLITICAL
REPRESENTATION
IN AFRICA**

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Gendered institutions in this book are described as social structures, norms, and practices that maintain gender inequalities and stereotypes, often to the advantage of men. Many political systems in Africa are patriarchal, with traditional leadership structures dominated by men. The book highlights the formal and informal political institutions that make it difficult for African women to gain access to political power or to have their voices heard within the African political establishment. Additionally, many of the rules and customs of African political institutions are biased against women and sometimes require candidates to have a certain level of education or financial autonomy that may be more difficult for women to attain. These gendered institutions have contributed to the under-representation of African women in politics. While there has been progress in recent years, women remain significantly under-represented in African decision-making bodies such as African National Parliaments. This book has eight chapters, with each chapter representing a unique case study of a country in Africa. The eight African countries that the book focuses on are South Africa, Tanzania, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, and Botswana.

Female political leaders from these countries face many political challenges, including sexism, gender bias, negative media coverage, societal stereotypes, and expectations about women's roles and abilities. Sexism and gender bias often manifest in various

ways, including through double standards around appearance and behaviour, as well as discrimination and harassment. For example, female candidates have been scrutinised for their clothing, hair, and makeup choices. Furthermore, they have been expected to conform to traditional gender roles and stereotypes in order for them to be seen as competent. Negative media coverage has also significantly impacted African female political leaders, with women often receiving less favourable or more critical coverage than their male counterparts. This has led to public perceptions of female candidates being shaped by biased or inaccurate information, which can be challenging to overcome. Furthermore, societal stereotypes and expectations about women's roles and abilities continue to pose challenges for female political leaders.

African women oftentimes face pressure to balance their professional and personal lives in ways that men do not and have sometimes been perceived as being less capable or qualified than male candidates due to their gender. Another challenge the book highlights is the lack of support and resources available to women who wish to enter politics. Women in these African countries face social stigma and barriers discouraging them from seeking political office. They have limited access to funding and the resources necessary to run a successful campaign. As noted on page 7 of the book: 'Women have to negotiate with their husbands over funds, use their professional and private networks for fundraising, taking loans and receiving gifts'. Additionally, women who do enter politics may face hostility or harassment from male colleagues or constituents, leading to further marginalisation and disempowerment. These challenges make it more difficult for female political leaders to succeed in their campaigns and can contribute to ongoing gender disparities in political representation and leadership. However, many women have been able to overcome these obstacles and achieve successful careers in politics, paving the way for future generations of female leaders.

The book highlights the need to adopt a feminist institutionalist perspective. Furthermore, it advocates for the need to modify and adapt 'feminist institutionalism' to African realities on the ground and African conceptions of power, feminism, and institutions. The three components of African feminist

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institutionalism are the re-excavation of the past, the role of African feminisms in reshaping patriarchal institutions, and the development of specific African concepts on gendered institutions. The book provides a more nuanced perspective on African concepts such as Femocracy and the First-Lady Syndrome, as well as a new emphasis on a Politics of Insults, Ridicule, and Rumours that works against the participation of more women in politics. A lot has been written about Africa and African women, but there is a need for Africans to write about themselves. Page 242 of the book notes that 'It has been important to ensure that the majority of contributions are written not just about Africa but also by African researchers'. An element that makes the book unique is that female African scholars contributed to the book; African women were part of telling their own story for a change.

A critique of the book is that the sampling of the countries was not fairly done, as there is a lack of representation from other parts of Africa. No country from North Africa was represented; only two East African countries and one country from West Africa were chosen. The remaining five countries are from the southern parts of Africa, more specifically the SADC region; therefore, the title would have been more fitting as Gendered Institutions and Women's Political Representation in SADC instead of using the term 'Africa'. However, the author indicates that

these eight countries were chosen strategically as some countries, like Ghana, Nigeria, Botswana, and Malawi, have low representation of women in politics, while others, like South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Kenya, are known to have high representation of women in politics. Nonetheless, using case studies from eight countries out of a continent that consists of 54 countries is not enough to draw a conclusion on women's overall political representation in Africa.

While efforts have been made to address some systemic barriers to women's political representation in Africa, addressing the root causes of gendered institutions requires significant social and cultural changes, political will, and investments in women's leadership development. Some countries have implemented quota systems and affirmative action policies to ensure women are represented in political institutions. Others have focused on increasing access to education and resources for women or on changing public attitudes toward women's political leadership. There have also been initiatives to train and mentor women interested in pursuing political careers, providing them with the skills and support necessary to succeed in a challenging environment. By working together to address these challenges, we can create more equitable and inclusive political systems that benefit all members of the society.