



University of Dundee

Review of Routledge Handbook of African Politics, edited by Nic Cheesemen, David Anderson and Andrea Schehler

Graham, Matthew

Published in:
Political Studies Review

DOI:
[10.1111/1478-9302.12053_142](https://doi.org/10.1111/1478-9302.12053_142)

Publication date:
2014

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Graham, M. (2014). Review of *Routledge Handbook of African Politics*, edited by Nic Cheesemen, David Anderson and Andrea Schehler. *Political Studies Review*, 12(2), 338-339. https://doi.org/10.1111/1478-9302.12053_142

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Nic Cheeseman, David Anderson, Andrea Scheibler (eds) (2013) *Routledge Handbook of African Politics*. Abingdon: Routledge. 440pp, £120.00 (h/b), ISBN 978 0 415 573788

Since the 1950s, as the decolonisation of Africa gathered apace, the political fluctuations and developments that have affected the continent have been enormous. Ranging from stable democracies, through to dictatorial rule, and with factors such as ethnic, regional and religious identity influencing its political trajectory, the African continent has experienced it all. For an up-to-date and comprehensive assessment concerning some of the issues affecting African politics, then you should look no further than the *Routledge Handbook of African Politics*.

Trying to effectively tackle a subject as large and diverse as African politics is a task fraught with difficulties. However, the *Handbook*, comprised of 32 highly readable chapters written by a range of established and emerging Africanist scholars, ensures that many of the pitfalls associated with writing an all-encompassing text are avoided. By focusing on 32 different subject areas, which are divided between six core overarching themes (politics of the state; identity; conflict; democracy and elections; political economy and development; and international relations), the collection provides a valuable breadth of perspectives about the continent. A particular strength of this approach is that themes such as the role of civil servants (Chapter 6), emerging legislatures (Chapter 20) or public opinion (Chapter 22), which are so often neglected in larger texts on contemporary Africa, are given a voice.

As a *Handbook* the collection does not have an overarching argument, but each chapter effectively stands alone, and importantly does not require too much prior knowledge. Indeed, the purpose of each essay is to offer a condensed introduction to, and précis of the main arguments, developments and theories on a specific subject matter. By offering a self-contained analysis on a specific area, it allows one to gain a deeper understanding on a breath of topics, ranging from the politics of oil, the role of women in politics, the influence of Islam and the rise of China. The result is a collection which the reader can dip in and out of, or focus on an area of interest. For those wanting to gain a holistic insight into African politics this is an important text to read.

The *Routledge Handbook of African Politics* is a valuable addition to the existing literature on African politics. The sheer scope and accessibility of the topics covered in this collection is impressive, which ensures that this handbook on Africa is the most complete book of its kind currently available.

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MATTHEW GRAHAM
University of Dundee

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