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Book review

Electing Peace: From Civil Conflict to Political Participation. By Aila M. Matanock.

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In *Electing Peace*, Matanock argues that the introduction of electoral participation provisions in peace agreements offers a more cost-effective approach to securing peace. First, she develops an external engagement theory to frame her research object around the role of international actors in monitoring and enforcing rebel groups to comply with set commitments by means of electoral participation. The empirical chapters of the book test and consolidate her argumentation with quantitative and qualitative research methods.

The book is of interest to a wide group of social scientists, primarily those working on topics related to international organizations, peacebuilding, and post-conflict elections. However, the key area of interest is at the intersection of international relations and studies of national politics, as the author seeks to understand the emergence of a type of international engagement in post-war societies that is affordable and effective, as elections provide a focal point at which the implementation of the settlement becomes clear and easier to monitor. Theoretical consistency and a convincing argument are the key strengths of this book, as one does not need to be a formal theorist to follow how she constructs her argument.

Matanock provides a series of tests showing that, once a conflict terminates by peace settlement, the presence of electoral participation provisions contributes to more favourable outcomes. However, while the incidence of peace settlements has risen since the end of the Cold War, we should think about how peace settlements compare to other outcomes of civil war. The data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) show that peace settlements are a distinct minority of the cases of conflict termination, and most conflict episodes terminate in low activity.

Furthermore, the sobering finding in the literature is that the most enduring peace comes from instances of termination by military victory. Matanock misses an opportunity to show how well the cases of electoral participation provisions fare not just compared to those terminating in settlement but without electoral participation provisions, but also compared to cases that have seen other types of termination. By limiting the analysis to the cases of termination by peace settlement, Matanock avoids the potential criticism of selection bias – as conflicts that end in settlements likely are different from other conflicts – but also leaves the reader wanting to see more on whether the practice of negotiating peace has the capacity to improve and lead to settlements that produce lasting solutions.

We hope that future work will lend more nuance to the types of international actors that are engaging with the post-war polities: arguably, the engagement of the European Union with a neighbour or prospective member will be different than the engagement of the United States or OECD with any country. Similarly, the discussions of the findings would also be more convincing if engaging more critically with the polity at the centre of international

interventions themselves, and their own gradual involvement in the conflict, as the notorious case of the UN missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo illustrates.

While we agree the key strength of the book is its strong and clearly articulated argumentation, this is also the source of some of its pitfalls. Driven by the demonstration of her case, Matanock does not spell out how her analysis can be understood in parallel to wider peacebuilding debates and how it contributes to them. Doing so, she does not sufficiently guide readers from other sub-fields of conflict and peace studies, and might lose this potential readership.

More importantly, the neatness of the argumentation (providing for elections in peace agreements is the more efficient way to dissuade rebel groups to stop violence and hence achieve peace) also implies the ethical dimensions surrounding the research object are passed to the secondary level. How should her argument be integrated with real-life issues? The author brushes aside these ethical dimensions. For example, the compliance with the electoral rules, democracy and human rights would be handled by electoral observations missions (see page 43). But how would the provisions for the organisation of elections surmount the problems identified by these missions? What is the link between good information on the conflict-affected countries and enforcement mechanisms that can put in place efficient sanctions? What type of elections is considered to be free and fair – and does the quality of elections even matter? Why are elections better than no interventions at all? Why is electoral participation and subsequent monitoring better than any other approach to mediation?

Finally, the book does not fully examine what electoral participation is – presumably, this is providing for elections, but would this imply the actual organisation of elections? Within the standards for good elections, how to deal with violence committed by official security sectors or paramilitaries? What about the cycle of engagements combatants go through? Without such clarifications, the reader is left with a minimalist understanding of political participation.