

BOOK REVIEW

Yonatan L. Morse. *How Autocrats Compete: Parties, Patrons, and Unfair Elections in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. xxi + 336 pp. Maps. Notes. Bibliography. Index. £95.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978-1-108-47476-4.

In the past years, Cambridge University Press has published some of the most important research monographs on African parties and politics. Yonatan Morse's study *How Autocrats Compete: Parties, Patrons and Unfair Elections in Africa* is the latest, and one would hope more are to follow. Anyone who has read the previously published studies by Sebastian Elischer and Rachel Riedl, for example, will recognize the similarities. All these books are written by young scholars who have done field research in more than one country in sub-Saharan Africa. The analysis is carefully documented and combines the detailed study of a handful of cases with a more cursory intra-regional comparison. Methodological choices are explicit and transparent. All are theory-driven and aim to contribute to debates about the role of political parties in Africa and beyond.

Morse's contribution is threefold. First, he highlights important differences among electoral authoritarian regimes, the most common regime type in sub-Saharan Africa after the end of the Cold War. Morse's distinction between hegemonic and non-hegemonic electoral authoritarian regimes is not new, nor is the actual measure, relying on vote and seat shares. More interesting is his distinction between "tolerant" and "repressive" electoral authoritarian regimes, which is operationalized with the help of data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project on physical violence, clean elections, freedom of association, and freedom of expression. Importantly, although many measures of democracy use these indicators to assess the degree of democracy, Morse uses this information to document variation among and within (electoral) authoritarian regimes. Tolerant autocracies are still autocracies, and no amount of "tolerance" toward political opposition should be mistaken for democratization.

The second contribution of *How Autocrats Compete* lies in the notion of "credible ruling parties." The qualifier "credible" seems to have been chosen because of its affinity with the notion of "credible commitment" and is not grounded in the rich literature on party typologies, which is dismissed in a

single footnote. Concretely, these are parties that have a physical organization, decisional autonomy, a competitive and transparent nomination process, and broad social incorporation. Such attributes are rare in Africa. The prime example in the book is the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) in Tanzania. Like the CCM, the other credible ruling parties in Africa were all either state-socialist or Marxist, a striking commonality the book fails to develop, being admittedly more interested in the outcomes of party building than in the origins of the parties.

The final contribution of Morse's study lies in the way in which he combines the previous innovations to show how all so-called "tolerant" electoral authoritarian regimes in Africa are based on a credible ruling party. The lesson is clear: investment in party building pays off. Those regimes that invested in a credible ruling party before the onset of multi-party elections now have little difficulty staying in power, not only winning elections by wide margins, but doing so in a "nice" way, or at least not an overtly ugly manner. In electoral authoritarian regimes not blessed with credible parties, autocrats have to maintain their grip on power the hard way, through repression and clientelism. These strategies are more costly and less successful. They also open up the regime to international influence, either of democratic patrons, as happened in Kenya, or autocratic patrons, as in Cameroon, the other two main cases in Morse's book.

With three main cases (Cameroon, Kenya, and Tanzania) and a four-cell typology of electoral authoritarian regimes (hegemonic – non-hegemonic / tolerant – repressive), one combination is obviously missing from the case studies: a tolerant non-hegemonic regime. An especially interesting example is Senegal, the only African country with a credible authoritarian ruling party to democratize long term. Morse's study is not about democratization, fair enough, but this self-imposed limitation leads him to miss the opportunity to examine the relationship between party institutionalization and democracy, for example by following Senegal's trajectory.

Morse's study of how autocrats compete makes a general argument with evidence from Africa. That is why, after four chapters with detailed information about the way the post-independent ruling parties in Cameroon, Kenya, and Tanzania organized and related to elites, voters, and outsiders respectively, the reader expects the conclusion to zoom out and examine the relevance of these African cases for other parts of the world. Unfortunately, this never happens. One can only hope this omission is strategic and that Morse goes global in his next book. In fact, one does not have to wait for the author, thanks to the helpful coding schemes in the appendix.

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For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

- Cheeseman, Nic. 2016. "Patrons, Parties, Political Linkage, and the Birth of Competitive-Authoritarianism in Africa." *African Studies Review* 59 (3): 181–200. doi: [10.1017/asr.2016.79](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2016.79).
- Pfeiffer, Elizabeth. 2018. "'The Post-Election Violence Has Brought Shame on This Place': Narratives, Place, and Moral Violence in Western Kenya." *African Studies Review* 61 (2): 183–209. doi: [10.1017/asr.2017.117](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.117).
- Schneider, Leander. 2006. "Colonial Legacies and Postcolonial Authoritarianism in Tanzania: Connects and Disconnects." *African Studies Review* 49 (1): 93–118. doi: [10.1353/arw.2006.0091](https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.2006.0091).