

Review: Aila M. Matanock, *Electing Peace: From Civil Conflict to Political Participation* (2017)

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Book Reviews

Matanock, Aila M. (2017), *Electing Peace: From Civil Conflict to Political Participation*, Cambridge, UK, New York, USA, Port Melbourne, Australia, Delhi, India, Singapore: Cambridge University Press, ISBN 978-1-107-18917-1 (hardback), 323 pages

In 2018 elections have been or are still to be held in a total of 20 African countries. Four of those countries are embroiled in armed conflict (South Sudan, Mali, Libya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and another four have experienced civil war in the past (Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Chad, and Guinea-Bissau). While elections in war-torn countries are often branded as dangerous as they introduce new political conflicts, Aila Matanock's book has a more optimistic outlook on post-conflict elections. It offers a persuasive argument that elections reduce the risk of war recurrence when they engage external actors to monitor and enforce compliance with a peace agreement.

Chapter 2 explicates Matanock's external engagement theory. To end costly armed conflict, belligerents must credibly commit to a peace deal. Electoral participation provisions – clauses in peace agreements that legalise the participation in elections of parties from all sides (48) – can help solve belligerents' commitment problems by facilitating external enforcement of peace agreements. Elections produce "coordination cycles" (49) and "moments of maximal impact" (51) for international engagement. With clear public benchmarks and milestones (49–50), elections offer cost-efficient and legitimate entry points for external leverage over non-compliant belligerents, especially through election monitoring and conditional democracy aid (53–55). Compared to the deployment of armed peacekeepers, who tend to leave shortly after elections, such external engagement might be more credible in the long run (57–58). The book's argument hence offers novel insights into how external actors can help solve war-related commitment problems, emphasising the often neglected non-military enforcement mechanisms.

The book deserves praise for considering many alternative views on the causes and consequences of post-conflict elections (64–71). Two of these views are of particular interest due to the amount of scholarly attention they have received: First, Matanock recognises that her argument on the stabilising effect of elections may appear counter-intuitive because elections redistribute political power and, as other studies suggest, may introduce new violent conflict – for instance, militarily strong actors may

return to fighting when they lose elections and the corresponding access to government power. While Matanock rightly acknowledges this conflict-inducing effect of elections, her book also emphasises that elections agreed on by belligerents in peace agreements are often “engineered” to be insulated from competition and power redistribution – for example, by means of ethnic quotas. Therefore, she argues, the type of elections included in her analysis have a stabilising effect (7). Second, in contrast to the book’s view that elections trigger international engagement, past research has proposed that external actors sometimes impose elections to quickly extricate themselves from their peacebuilding responsibilities. Matanock recognises that such “escape elections,” e.g. Afghanistan in 2009 (66), do not prolong but endanger peace. Yet, as the book shows, many post-conflict elections are negotiated rather than imposed, and those negotiated elections have beneficial effects for post-war stability.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that electoral provisions became increasingly prevalent after the end of the Cold War. Democracy assistance paralleled this trend. International election observation (85–87) and development aid for governance and democratisation (89–93) steadily increased, though at different rates, across world regions. Withdrawing material benefits, or threatening to do so, because of election-related violations became common practice, too (93–95). Given this historical development, the book’s inquiry into the causes and consequences of electoral participation provisions is both timely and policy-relevant.

In Chapters 4 to 7, Matanock exposes her argument to careful empirical scrutiny, using statistical analyses of 122 peace agreements in 388 civil wars, detailed evidence from a global set of cases, and two in-depth studies of Guatemala and El Salvador. Chapter 4 investigates why armed groups agree to hold elections. Her analyses reveal that the expectation of external engagement – election monitoring and democracy assistance in neighbouring countries – helps explain why electoral participation provisions are adopted into peace agreements. By contrast, such provisions are less likely to be included if powerful Western actors have special relationships with the war-torn country due to oil, US military aid, or colonial heritage. The empirical analyses correctly focus on expected elections specifically provided for in peace agreements rather than on any election held after a peace agreement. Nevertheless, Matanock also conducts an additional analysis of “implemented” elections after peace agreements, using her Militant Group Electoral Participation (MGEP) data set. Her findings show that the reasons for “implementing” elections after peace agreements are similar to the reasons for including electoral provisions in peace agreements (120–122).

Chapter 5 scrutinises the reasons for the adoption of electoral participation provisions in peace agreements in El Salvador and Guatemala. Both countries were plagued by continuous fighting before the Soviet Union started to collapse. Civil war terminated only after the Cold War ended. Historical process-tracing convincingly shows that both weak Guatemalan rebels and strong Salvadoran rebels agreed to elections with a certain expectation of external engagement resulting from the spread of democracy assistance after the Cold War (148–174). As the book briefly mentions, this explanation extends to civil wars in Africa with similar drivers of electoral participation provisions in Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, and South Sudan. Evidence from Bangladesh – a negative case discussed briefly at the end of the chapter – reveals that this expectation of external democracy assistance is crucial. Its absence in Bangladesh led belligerents to favour regional autonomy arrangements over elections (174–177).

Finally, the book turns to its most essential question: Do electoral participation provisions work to reduce conflict recurrence? Indeed, the statistical analyses in Chapter 6 support the implications of external engagement theory. Electoral participation provisions can stabilise peace agreements. Together with election monitoring and democracy assistance, these provisions lead to more enduring peace in those settlements that include them compared to those that do not (204–205). Chapter 7 details case evidence from El Salvador and Guatemala to probe the underlying mechanisms. Electoral participation provisions helped combatants to credibly commit to the settlement they negotiated, by engaging an external actor – in both cases, first and foremost, UN peace operations (ONUSAL and MINUGUA) – to monitor and incentivise compliance with the peace deal (220–253). On the African continent, Western states and international organisations, freed from Cold War rivalry, have similarly supported domestic election processes since the early 1990s. Party-building assistance and election monitoring in Mozambique, for example, might have helped to maintain the commitment of the rebel-group-turned-party RENAMO to peaceful institutional politics.

A clever research design and careful analyses support Matanock's plea for "electing peace." The conclusion emphasises, "Just any election is not enough" (268). Given external involvement, elections have stabilising effects when they are propagated by "somewhat undemocratic elite pacts" (269). Thus, future research should investigate the prevalence and consequences of elections that deviate from this ideal type and further scrutinise this trade-off between stability and democracy. The analysis suggests that the eight elections in conflict-affected countries in Africa in

2018 may promote peaceful political relations if external actors monitor and enforce compliance and polling does not redistribute too much power. Thus, Matanock's book is a must-read for all scholars and practitioners interested in understanding how elections and outside engagement can help end modern civil wars.

■ Hannah Smidt