

BOOK REVIEW

Nic Cheeseman, Gabrielle Lynch, and Justin Willis. *The Moral Economy of Elections in Africa: Democracy, Voting, and Virtue.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. xv + 259 pp. List of Figures. List of Tables. List of Abbreviations and Glossary. Appendix. Bibliography. Index. \$31.65 Paper. ISBN: 978-1108404723.

In *The Moral Economy of Elections in Africa*, Nic Cheeseman, Gabrielle Lynch, and Justin Willis draw on over a decade of research to provide a thorough assessment of how elections work in Africa. The authors convincingly argue that elections involve a delicate balance between two competing virtues—the civic and the patrimonial—which helps to explain the seemingly contradictory rhetoric and behavior of a diverse set of actors, from voters and politicians to civil society and international monitors.

While “civic virtue” refers to the national community through claims to meritocracy and the public good, the “patrimonial” register emphasizes obligations to the local community through reciprocity and particularistic or club goods. Thus, *The Moral Economy of Elections* refers to the balance between two virtues in tension with one another, offering competing and often contradictory expectations for appropriate behavior during elections. This is a refreshingly nuanced explanation for the frenzy of activity—and the sheer amount of resources—that goes into African elections.

The book focuses on three Anglophone cases: Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda. Leveraging differences in the political history and contexts of the three cases, the authors draw insights into how the balance between civic and patrimonial virtue varies between countries. In particular, they argue that the alternation of power in Ghana has enabled a stronger sense of civic virtue, whereas the weakness of parties and the personalist style of politics has undermined it in Kenya and Uganda. Yet, the authors are also cautious about overstating these differences. The way the moral economy plays out across the three cases is strikingly similar, despite Ghana’s fairly robust democracy versus Kenya’s ambiguous (semi-)competitive multiparty rule and Uganda’s highly personalist hegemonic regime.

The scope of the investigation suggests that while the specific registers of virtue may vary, the findings will likely carry over to many other contexts in Africa and beyond. Drawing on over 300 interviews, nationally representative

surveys in each country, archival research, and laboratory games, the authors provide a model for triangulating information through mixed-methods research. Therefore, this study should have a broad appeal to political scientists and offers an ideal example for graduate courses on mixed-methods research design across the social sciences.

Many of the book's chapters make an individual contribution to the literature that will interest scholars of African studies. After setting up their main argument in Chapter One, the authors provide an overview of the history of elections in the three cases in Chapter Two. These two chapters will be helpful for readers seeking to understand the general argument and contexts for the cases. Afterward, the authors investigate the moral economy of elections through the lens of election officials (Chapter Three), election observers (Chapter Four), civil society (Chapter Five), politicians (Chapter Six), and voters (Chapter Seven). Each chapter draws on a careful analysis of archival, interview, and survey data, with abundant (but not excessive) use of direct quotations to ensure that the voices of those who informed the study are adequately represented. The book clearly speaks to a comparative politics audience; however, the evaluation of international election observation missions in Chapter Four will certainly spark interest among scholars of international relations.

While the book tackles a wide range of actors engaged in the electoral process, women are largely absent from the story. Gender is briefly discussed in Chapter Six within the context of candidacy, but it probably plays a much larger role in shaping perspectives on appropriate behavior for voters, politicians, and election officials. Both Kenya and Uganda have adopted gender quotas with varying degrees of success, while Ghana continues to underperform when it comes to women in politics. Thus, there seems to be a missed opportunity here to engage with how gender influences the deployment of civic and patrimonial virtue within different contexts. Future research might tackle this question.

Nevertheless, *The Moral Economy of Elections in Africa* provides novel insights by illuminating the tension between civic and patrimonial virtue experienced by a diverse set of actors involved in the electoral process. It contributes to the literature on African politics and democratization by offering a new perspective on how elections work and why they do not always produce "civic-minded" citizens. The book is thoroughly researched and highly accessible. Thus, its insights will have far-reaching implications for comparative politics and international relations that will also be informative for civil society actors, election officials, and organizations engaged in international election observation.

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