

Likewise, the text operates with an opposition of “communal” versus “individual,” a notion that has long been rejected in the study of African land tenure. This results in contradictory findings which are presented separately and left unexplained: 64 percent of African respondents agreed that “community land rights [are] more important than individual rights” (43), but 67 percent favored “forcing tribal leaders to give each member individual legal ownership of specific plots of land” (67). One is left with the impression that the questions have been framed in ways that cannot capture how African landholding is embedded in social groups that correspond to neither individual nor community.

Finally, the book persistently frames South African land issues in comparison with Zimbabwe, raising the specter of an elite-driven populist campaign and land as “a [potential] major destabilizing force in South African politics” (83). The comparison is a superficial one, based on overarching historical similarities rather than the current political economic contexts; as Alison Goebel has argued compellingly, differences in the place of agriculture in the nations’ economies, in the ruling parties’ commitments to neoliberal policies, and in the ruling parties’ relative electoral (in)security make Zimbabwe’s path unlikely for South Africa (*Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 23 [3]). This difference, in fact, raises questions about why in South Africa existing populist attempts at political mobilization around land reform have been mostly unsuccessful, questions that are largely unanswerable in the decontextualized terms of Gibson’s argument.

The book is aimed primarily at political scientists and social psychologists, not at a more interdisciplinary Africanist scholarly community or a broader audience. Chapter 4, probably the best in the volume, has already been published in article form, and given the price of the hardcover text, the book’s market is probably limited to scholars and libraries at institutions where people directly share Gibson’s theoretical interests. In the longer term, though, this study will form a valuable baseline from which to assess the causes of change (or stasis) in public opinion around land in South Africa in decades to come.

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Joel Barkan, ed. *Legislative Power in Emerging African Democracies*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2009. ix + 277 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$55.95. Hardcover.

As Joel Barkan maintains in the introduction to this fine volume, while scholars working on legislative politics have tended to overlook the African context, so too have those investigating the continent’s politics left leg-

islatres relatively unexamined. This volume makes substantial strides in correcting this omission and presents important insights that will advance understandings and future research on these critical institutions. The book devotes itself to understanding the varied character, sources, and impact of legislative power in the African context. Along with strong introductory and concluding chapters, it consists of case studies that explore the nature and evolution of legislative institutions in six countries. While the book, according to the editor, represents an “exploratory” study (23), it is still an unqualified success.

The introductory chapter by Joel Barkan establishes the intellectual parameters for the volume. This includes a basic, but highly instructive, overview of the key “functions” of legislatures within democratic political systems and a very fine discussion of how African legislatures have operated historically. Building from the observation that the experiences and strengths of legislatures have varied in the multiparty era, Barkan then presents a set of theoretical arguments and hypotheses to help account for patterns of legislative development. The key, he maintains, are the incentive structures encountered by legislators themselves. While these are conditioned by institutional and contextual variables, they also depend on whether a “coalition for change” emerges within the legislature to reshape incentive structures in ways that enhance legislative authority and capacity. The presence, power, and composition of these coalitions substantially determine the power and performance of legislative institutions.

The Barkan and Matiangi chapter on Kenya and the chapter by Kasfir and Twebaze on Uganda are among those that engage most clearly with the theoretical issues raised in the introduction. The former offers an account of the rise of the Kenyan legislature with attention to its increasingly visible role and the specific reforms that have advanced its autonomy and capacity. An active coalition for change, spurred on by elements of civil society, has been the key force propelling such developments. The account of the Ugandan Parliament highlights a similar story of increasing parliamentary power, although its power and legislative autonomy have ebbed during more recent times. From 1995 to 2001 advances in parliamentary assertiveness, capacity, and autonomy were facilitated by the “no party” context, which created an environment in which reformist coalitions could form and advance legal changes unhindered by party discipline. Yet the autonomy of later parliaments weakened as party discipline came to play a larger role and the executive undermined legislative independence.

Chapters by Lindberg and Zhou and by Lewis are equally effective in analyzing varying patterns of parliamentary performance and development. Lindberg and Zhou’s chapter on Ghana demonstrates empirically how parliamentary performance has declined over time, even as the country has become more democratic. Much of this decline is due to increasing manipulation by the executive, which faced stronger incentives to foster legislative docility as party competition increased and the balance of power

in the legislature became more tentative. The Nigerian case study by Lewis, by contrast, presents the story of a legislature that has clearly advanced in terms of its capacities, activities in oversight/investigation, and assertiveness vis-à-vis the executive. However, a legacy of venality and rent-seeking continue to haunt the legislature, undermining its popular support and efficacy.

The final chapter by Barkan effectively summarizes some of the key insights presented in the volume. Of special value is his overview of the most significant variables affecting the emergence of coalitions for change and their capacity to generate reforms that enable legislative performance. Key factors include the relative presence or absence of “reformers” in the institution, the extent to which presiding officers are committed to promoting legislative power, and the character of parties and party discipline.

The virtues of the collection are many. Unlike the selections in many edited books, the chapters in this volume cohere quite well since the authors address similar questions and employ similar methods. Moreover, the volume provides the reader with a novel set of concepts and theoretical models, including insights into the basic issue of how one should analyze a legislature in terms of its organization, activities, and functions. But more centrally it elucidates the variables that affect the operation and performance of legislative institutions. In this regard, although the volume represents a “first cut” into the issue of legislative politics in African contexts, it still offers a major first step forward.

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