

**Regime Threats and State Solutions: bureaucratic loyalty and embeddedness in Kenya** by MAI HASSAN

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How do governments retain power in the face of elite and popular threats? Mai Hassan provides compelling insights into this question by centring the role of the bureaucratic apparatus. She develops a novel and nuanced theoretical argument about how leaders make decisions about posting and reshuffling administrative officers, and provides convincing and multifaceted support from the context of Kenya under the successive regimes of Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel arap Moi and Mwai Kibaki. Through nuanced consideration of how the strategic context a leader faces varies, Hassan develops specific predictions about how leaders will distribute the most and least loyal bureaucrats across the state. The book is based on extensive interview and archival material which provides compelling support for the argument, while also making an empirical contribution through the careful documentation of Kenyan politics and their administrative manifestations. Taken together, the book contributes convincing new knowledge about how regimes exert social control and the important role of bureaucrats in this context.

More specifically, Hassan develops an argument that applies to states with politicised group identities and weak political parties. She argues that leaders face elite and popular threats, and that a first recourse is to co-opt challengers into the administration. However, this strategy simultaneously reduces incumbent control, and is not possible for all challengers. Therefore, leaders rely on a combination of co-optation and coercion, and leaders will base their decisions regarding administrative postings on these concerns. Hassan develops an argument about how the relationship between the leader, the individual bureaucrat and the local community within the administrative unit shapes the degree of control. By strategically posting bureaucrats with varying degrees of loyalty to the centre and embedding them in the local community, the leader can optimise the degree of control while still appeasing challengers through appointments within the administration. Importantly, the underlying logic of the argument is applicable to both authoritarian and electoral regimes. In the former, the areas of highest strategic importance are aligned (the leader's own base) and misaligned (opposition) areas, and the most loyal officers will be posted here. Under electoral regimes, unaligned (swing) areas become more strategically important than misaligned areas, as they offer higher chances of securing a winning coalition. Hassan convincingly shows that patterns of bureaucratic postings during the regimes she studies are consistent with these expectations.

One key contribution of the book is that it pays attention not only to bureaucrats' relationship with the centre, but also with the communities where they are deployed. In addition to theorising about the leaders' strategic calculations about how bureaucrat embeddedness affects their loyalty, Hassan provides compelling accounts of the extent to which bureaucrats are often strongly committed to serving the local interests where they are posted. Attention to this fact not only sharpens the theory – by affecting the strategic element in posting and reshuffling administrators – but also acknowledges the agency of individuals at different levels in the administration. Another strength is the consideration (and innovative empirical study) of informal, and not only formal, land allocation as a means of patronage.

One question that could perhaps have been accorded more attention is how fast a new leader can rearrange the administrative apparatus (in Kenya, and in general). Additionally, the question of alignment and what is the relevant unit of analysis at times becomes imprecise (shifting between groups, regions or smaller geographic units). In particular, the degree to which this is equated with ethnic belonging or not in different contexts – and how this affects the strategic calculations – could perhaps have been further unpacked. On the other hand, the analytical utility of the distinction between aligned, unaligned and misaligned units is theoretically compelling and clearly demonstrated in the analysis.

Altogether, Mai Hassan's book is an enjoyable and insightful read. It develops a highly nuanced yet precise argument and provides persuasive support through in-depth qualitative and rigorous quantitative analyses. Despite its detail, it is easy to read and the 'red thread' is consistently present. The book is highly relevant for all readers with an interest in how states function, as well as those with a general interest in Kenyan politics.

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