

accept questionable elections and overlook civil rights violations before and after election day.

That republican procedures do not make republican substance has been described as far back as Kant, Madison and de Toqueville. That democratic polity corresponds with national wealth was demonstrated by Lipset, affirmed by a variety of recent authors. That democratisers can succeed, often in the face of fierce resistance and with minimal support, demonstrates the extent to which citizens strongly support pluralist polities, even in the face of those who would try to suppress political expression.

The role of the military as an autonomous actor is largely glossed over. Other authors have gone so far as to say that the military is the principal gatekeeper to political change – dictating whether, and to what extent, effective democratisation is permissible. Additionally, the prerequisite conditions for democratisation are not well operationalised. The authors describe several, referencing specific cases, but only conceptually. For example, donors are simultaneously portrayed as antithetical and essential. Successful transitions seem to hinge on the happenstance office-holding of autocrats with the support, risk-tolerance and patience to see through a bona fide transition. By establishing a baseline, a rubric against which to measure the growth of state institutions could be created to assess future cases.

No authoritarian regime can democratise overnight; sustainable democracy takes decades, if not generations, to build, and is fragile in its early stages. At the same time, people almost invariably want better democracy than they have. Democracy can work in the African context, wanting only for reliable institutions, political norms, external support and leadership willing to take the risks to make it happen. A spark, supported at home and abroad, and allowed to flourish, can start the ball rolling. ‘It is time’, as the authors say, ‘for all actors to align their actions with their rhetoric that repeatedly cites the importance of democracy’.

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**The Struggle over State Power in Zimbabwe: Law and Politics since 1950**  
by GEORGE HAMANDISHE KAREKWAIVANANE.

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In *The Struggle Over State Power in Zimbabwe*, George Hamandishe Karekwaivanane has written an extremely important and historically grounded investigative text on laws and the judicial system in Zimbabwe. Drawing on archival research, extensive interviews, and years of observational research, Karekwaivanane explores the ways in which the establishment of legal institutions and the state’s use of laws both provide justice and keep unjust laws active. It is a delicate task to address the challenges faced by black Zimbabweans in both the Rhodesian and contemporary Zimbabwean contexts. Karekwaivanane delivers whilst both maintaining the agency of citizens and showing the ways in which state actors often manipulate the law to serve their interests.

Karekwaivanane presents a unique study of law and politics in Zimbabwe, examining how the law was used in the constitution and contestation of state power

across the late-colonial and post-colonial periods. In Rhodesia, legal institutions worked perfectly as they would in any other functioning state, but mostly served justice for the white minority and less frequently for the black majority. This is not to say that black citizens never saw justice in the courts – they sometimes did, but it was often a matter of accident or in a few cases, colonial judges found themselves bound by the rules that they had set.

In Rhodesia, the state relegated black affairs to be adjudicated by chiefs. The chiefs were often fairly capable of this task, but they sometimes needed formal legal structures to intervene. When it came to black affairs, the law was whatever the judges preferred to be the law. The colonial government used their control of the legal system to punish dissent and suppress demands for justice. While much progress has been made in independent Zimbabwe, Karekwaivanane shows that the post-colonial government has adopted similar practices as those employed by the colonial regime.

*The Struggle Over State Power in Zimbabwe* offers insight on recent debates about judicial independence, adherence to human rights, and the rule of law in contemporary Zimbabwe. In post-independence Zimbabwe the courts are relatively strong and independent. However, judicial independence has been contingent on the politics surrounding a case and whether important political actors are involved. In a sense, the post-independence government inherited the judicial practice of the colonial government. The ruling party, ZANU PF, continues to wield a lot of power over the courts. In contemporary Zimbabwe, political activists can be jailed for speaking out against the government and ruling party in much the same way that liberation struggle leaders were repressed by the colonial government.

This book is the first of its kind on the role of law in state-making in contemporary Africa. Therefore, any areas of weakness are a reflection of the extensive breadth that the author sought to cover. Future work on state building in new states will benefit from this rich historical exploration of Zimbabwe's justice system.

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