

Linda J. Beck. *Brokering Democracy in Africa: The Rise of Clientelist Democracy in Senegal*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

*Reviewed by Rodrick Henry**

The literature on democracy and clientelism is rich. It holds that the third world, and particularly African countries, has remained the host ground for clientelism. This has been the case due to abject poverty and dependence of the citizenry to their respective ruling class. This state of affairs has made the democratic project to be a failure. In most cases, for example, during elections, votes have been exchanged with materials such as money, a bag of rice and a promise for a job. In this case, clientelism serves as a brake in distorting democratic competition and participation. Contrary to this dominant view, the *"Brokering Democracy in Africa"* reveals that Senegal is an exceptional case both within and beyond Africa. The country has demonstrated its ability to democratize despite the persistence of clientelism. This phenomenon happened in 2000 when the ruling party since independence, the Socialist Party (PS), lost the election and peacefully handed over power to the Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS). Beck attributes this electoral defeat to the political reform concomitant with the progressive erosion of clientelist support for the ruling party. Such dramatic decline of support was in both urban and rural areas.

The book focuses on the socioeconomic power of local brokers to explain the relative constraints that clientelism places on political competition and participation. It examines the variations in social authority and political economy of four sets of local brokers: Murid marabouts (these are found in central Senegal and constitute influential brokers since they have a high degree of social authority and political autonomy), Tukolor nobles (these are found in northern Senegal and are dependent on PS for authority and resources), Casamançais "sons of the soil" (these are limited brokers and come from small-scale egalitarian societies in the southern Senegal), and the *mberu gox* (neighborhood wrestlers) among the Senegalese immigrant

*M.A Student, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Dar es Salaam, E-mail: henryrodrick@yahoo.com

Book Review on "Brokering Democracy in Africa"

community in New York City who have been eligible to vote in Senegalese elections since 1993. This group is independent from the state and the party. It has its own resources but influences politics at home.

In this book, Beck presents a theoretical and practical discussion on clientelism and democracy in Africa and beyond. Through a clear and well-ordered exposition of themes, the author divides her work into seven chapters. Chapter one presents a theoretical overview of clientelist democracy; chapter two focuses on the rise of clientelist democracy in Senegal; chapter three up to chapter six deal with the four categories of brokers in Senegal; and chapter seven discusses the fragility of clientelist democracy. Each chapter is well referenced and founded on sound arguments. The author does an excellent work when she innovatively contributes a typology of local brokers to the literature on clientelism and democracy (p.17). She empirically applies this model (dependent broker, limited broker, influential broker and autonomous broker) to understand four Senegalese electoral districts.

There are, however, four areas in which the book slips up. One of the serious problems is related to its methodology. Beck states "[T]he research for this book was based on hundreds of interviews in four electoral districts with national politicians, local brokers, religious figures, other community leaders, and ordinary citizens along with dozens of focus groups and several opinion polls conducted between 1992 and 2003" (p. 17). One may wonder, for example, what was the size of her sample? How were respondents sampled? How representative were they to Senegal and Africa in general? For one thing, she over-generalizes her single case study to Africa. For ease of reference, Beck posits that the four Senegalese cases present "illustrations of different potential trajectories within Africa's democratic and competitive authoritarian regime" (p.20). What I find strange is that the responses of the claimed "hundred interviews" and "dozens focus groups" are hardly found in her discussion. Furthermore, the "several opinion polls" over the stated period of time are missing except the one in 2000 (p.205-7). My close reading of the book reveals that the author relied entirely on secondary sources mainly books and journal articles.

As a general rule, a case study method is oriented toward an in-depth investigation of social phenomena implying that a researcher should strive to be as much specific as possible. It appears to me that the author overlooked

R. Henry

this principle. In some cases, Beck provides general claims without supporting evidence and hence amounting to mere speculation. For example, she claims that under the new constitution, decision-making was highly centralized; Ministers served as high-level functionaries to Senghor; The National Assembly was a rubber stamp for the laws and budgets proposed by the president; and that the judiciary was not immune to Senghor's influence (p.55). It is difficult to follow which specific constitution is referred, leave alone citing particular provisions of laws to back such claims. A similar problem occurs when she claims political maneuvers and fraud in favour of the PS (p.59). One would have expected the author to substantiate such rigging claims with reports of election observers something which is lacking. A further weakness of the book is on contextualizing Senegal. The author describes Senegal based on two criteria: ethnicity and religion and concludes that unlike other African countries, Senegal is relatively homogeneous (p.49-50). I find this conclusion insufficient unless more parameters are included such as economic, ideological, social and political indicators.

Finally, the typology of local brokers is problematic. Beck admits that her typology illustrates ideal-types of local brokers and yet she claims to prove it using empirical evidence from the four Senegalese electoral districts (p.18). How could she prove such an imaginary model? Are there any other existing models from which Beck's ideal type was derived? A close examination of the brokers in the four cases in Senegal suggests that they match to something empirical rather than utopian. While such typology might be useful in analyzing brokers in Senegal, I do not recommend it to claim for the "ideal" status. Besides, it is useful for this model to be tested with the increased data in other different places. Notwithstanding, this work will be of interest to a wide audience, particularly those who seek to understand clientelism and democracy in Africa and beyond such as graduate students, analysts and practitioners.