Reviews

Good Rebel Governance: Revolutionary Politics and Western Intervention in Syria, Dipali Mukhopadhyay and Kimberly Howe (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 185 pp., cloth $105.00, paperback $34.99, eBook $34.99.

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The precursor to many revolutions is a revolutionary situation—a moment during which the loyalties of the body politic have cleaved in two, placed either with the ancien régime or the revolutionary opposition. The revolutionary opposition may cultivate the body politic's loyalty in many ways, but one possible pathway is through certain kinds of governance.

Good Rebel Governance: Revolutionary Politics and Western Intervention in Syria, by Dipali Mukhopadhyay and Kimberly Howe, centers on governance by elements of the Syrian rebel opposition. Mukhopadhyay and Howe explain how rebels in the Syrian conflict created, bolstered, or undermined authoritative insurgent rule. "Authoritative rule" refers to institutional closeness and "strong attachment[s]" (p. 13) between the governing and the governed. Rather than focus on material factors, the text focuses on governance as comprised of relational bonds of overlapping solidarities (p. 41). These solidarities include kinship ties (networks of interpersonal relationships between family and friends); aspirational ties (connections to new, imagined communities and orders); and experiential ties (solidarities forged in profound shared experiences). When rebels effectively harness and embed themselves in the concatenation of these solidarities, they produce authoritative rule.

Authoritative rule is a conceptual innovation that contrasts with existing conceptions of governance, which, according to Mukhopadhyay and Howe, prioritize the material over the relational. These material dimensions of governance include coercion and capital. Capital facilitates capacity building, such as service provision. Coercion facilitates control, such as the ability to regulate access to a space or use force to compel collaboration (p. 13).

The book's primary contributions rest in identifying this relational, nonmaterial dimension of governance and illustrating, theoretically and empirically, interactions between nonmaterial and material governance dimensions. Whereas existing Western policy paradigms have assumed that capital and coercion can generate a popular, enduring legitimacy alongside sentiments of institutional closeness between governed and governing, Mukhopadhyay and Howe are far less optimistic: coercion and capital alone are insufficient to establish an authoritative rule. By contrast, while institutional closeness cannot replace coercion and capital, it can compensate for their absence (p. 14).

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These interrelationships between core aspects of governance compel Mukhopadhyay and Howe to interrogate Western intervention in the form of aid to Syrian rebels. While this aid, they argue, may have provided both coercion and capital for rebel governors, it could not create and, indeed, often undermined the institutional closeness necessary for authoritative rule. In the Syrian context, although Western aid was a response to Syrian demands, a collaboration with local partners (p. 172), it could not topple the Assad regime and replace it with an effective alternative. They conclude that "foreign aid might have kept more of the town's residents alive, or at least better nourished, but greater outside influence might also have dampened their revolutionary ardor or undercut the survivalist cohesion that arose out of necessity in the face of suffering" (p. 169). Indeed, this material support from the West would have, at best, only improved the material, not the relational, aspects of governance, while at worst, it would have subjected Syrians to "powerful outsider agendas in a project that required internally driven and situated political work" (p. 169). Their conclusions lead them to acknowledge that "nonintervention may be the most responsible path" (p. 17).

Beyond the work's explorations of the interconnections between dimensions of governance, Mukhopadhyay and Howe's approach to research reflects a clear commitment and thoughtfulness concerning the ethics of the endeavor (pp. 57–60). The text prioritizes Syrians' lived experiences and takes seriously the complexities of data collection in the context of armed conflict. Their research design incorporates elements of both interpretive and positivist approaches (p. 61). The prose is rich, textured, and thought provoking.

The notable contributions discussed above notwithstanding, arguments about the deleterious effect of Western influence could have been better supported in the text. Most of the book's case studies evaluate interrelationships between material and nonmaterial dimensions of governance, exploring how dimensions of capital, coercion, and institutional closeness produce orders and relate to the creation of authoritative rule. While the authors recognize the presence of foreign aid and how some civilians responded to it (p. 92), the bulk of the empirics relates to describing governance in various cities and towns, changes to it over time, and civilians' perceptions of governance there. What does not come across in the cases is information about how aid packages were structured, what constraints and limitations these aid packages and projects placed on recipients, how local governors responded to these constraints and limitations in ways that eroded institutional closeness, and how, specifically, aid projects changed when donor objectives shifted from regime change to halting immigration and countering violent extremism (p. 30).

The relative scarcity of case evidence for this part of the argument raises several theoretical questions. For instance, the United States' closest collaborator and recipient of substantial assistance, the Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF (p. 18), seemed to be very effective at both governing and combating the Islamic State, but other components of the Syrian opposition that received less aid were not. The SDF also seemed to establish authoritative rule in some areas. Why was the SDF successful with aid, but the Syrian opposition not? Moving beyond the case of Syria also raises questions. Mukhopadyay and Howe emphasize the deleterious effects of *Western* aid, but some non-Western states, like

China, Cuba, Vietnam, and the Soviet Union, also historically provided considerable support for many successful revolutionary movements. For instance, the Soviet Union supported the Chinese Communist Party, and the Chinese Communist Party supported Vietnam and trained successful rebels in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Vietnam. Is there something unique about Western donors that makes their aid less effective relative to that of non-Western donors, or is *all* foreign aid problematic?

The absence of case study–based evidence related to the effects of Western intervention in the form of aid also raises policy questions. Had the revolutionary coalition not received Western support, would it have successfully rebuffed the Islamic State and toppled the Assad regime? If not, how much more successful would they have been? Would these successes be worth the costs of not providing food and medicine for Syrian civilians? The authors recognize the "wickedness" of these policy problems (p. 17) and suggest that though the discomfort at their conclusions might arise from a well-intentioned place, these sentiments ultimately amount to "paternalism" (p. 173). Without more empirical support to help answer the questions above, however, policy recommendations to avoid any form of intervention anywhere in the face of requests from local governments to feed, support, and provide medicine to their local constituents could similarly amount to paternalism: we hear your pleas but deny your requests because we know what is best for you in the long run.

Despite these concerns, Mukhopadhyay and Howe's work represents necessary scholarship amid one of the most challenging and devastating research environments. The text ultimately advances our understanding of the dimensions of governance, especially in the Syrian context, and the crucial interrelationships between them.

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Delivering on Promises: The Domestic Politics of Compliance in International Courts, Lauren J. Peritz, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), 336 pp., cloth $105, paperback $35.

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International courts (ICs) are expected to facilitate cooperation by enforcing states' international commitments. ICs are tasked with identifying when states have violated their international obligations and ordering said states to reform their policies. State compliance with such international judicial orders is essential to restoring effective