

A Critical Review of Carrie Manning, Ian O. Smith, and Özlem Tuncel's work in "Parties, Politics, Peace: Electoral Inclusion as Peacebuilding" (Routledge, 2023)

Reviewed by Boniface Ikenna Ezenwobi

Carrie Manning, Ian O. Smith, and Özlem Tuncel, *Parties, Politics, Peace: Electoral Inclusion as Peacebuilding*. Routledge, 2023.

I. Before the Critique

"Let the kite perch. Let the eagle perch. Whichever refuses the other to perch, may its wings break." This is one of those legendary Igbo proverbs elders clear their throat for, the kind said before breaking *kola* nut to mark that serious speech is coming. It does not ask the birds to like each other. It only says that exclusion destroys the one who practices it. I grew up in Nigeria, and I know what it means to live in a country where this proverb is tested every day. In the northern part of Nigeria, Boko Haram has bombed schools, and has taken children. The agitation for Biafra has produced mass arrests, roadblocks in the south, and a government that calls one armed group terrorists on Monday and negotiates with a different one on Friday, based not on principle but on whatever is politically useful that week.

So, when I read *Parties, Politics, Peace* by Carrie Manning, Ian O. Smith, and Özlem Tuncel,¹ I did not read it from a distance. I read it as someone who needs the answer to be true and useful. Their central question is one I carry: does giving former rebels a seat at the political table actually produce peace? Their answer is yes. The evidence behind that answer is the most comprehensive assembled on this question. Thirty years. Eighty-one parties. Forty countries. The book earns its conclusion.

Still, a book can earn its conclusion and still leave the most urgent questions standing. In fact, most landmark books do, and so does this one, for several reasons. To start with, it never defines which armed groups deserve inclusion in the first place. It counts parties and elections but not a single victim. While it identifies the problem of dominant parties that use elections to eliminate competition, it says almost nothing about how to stop them. Lastly, it never asks how political parties are funded, which is precisely how that dominance is maintained. These are gaps

¹Carrie Manning , Ian O Smith , and Ozlem Tuncel, *Parties, Politics, Peace: Electoral Inclusion as Peacebuilding* (London and New York , London and New York : Routledge , 2023).

in the center rather than at the edges, and for a pro-law practitioner in Nigeria working to change the armed group-infested system, they are the whole problem.

II. Entering the Conversation

The book rightly observes that since 1990, nearly every civil war has ended with an election. This became the standard template for ending civil wars, and it did not happen by accident. The argument assumed that if groups which once fought each other could compete for power through votes instead of guns, the war would stop and the country would move forward. The thinking was clean, but the reality was messier. Jack Snyder warned that electoral politics are inherently conflictual and likely to increase the chances of violence, particularly in the absence of well-established democratic norms.² Matanock offered a more hopeful reading: electoral provisions give international monitors something concrete to enforce, which helps peace agreements hold.³ Manning, Smith, and Tuncel go further than either. They do not theorize about what elections should do. They look at what happened, across thirty years, in country after country, and they report what they find.

Manning is a Professor of Political Science at Georgia State University. She has spent her career studying post-conflict politics in Mozambique, Bosnia, and El Salvador. Smith and Tuncel bring expertise in electoral competition and hybrid regimes. Their Post-Rebel Electoral Parties dataset—PREP—tracks eighty-one parties across forty countries and more than three hundred legislative election years.⁴ No prior study has followed these parties this long or this widely. Most existing research stops at the first post-war election. This book follows parties through ten consecutive election cycles. That choice alone changes what is visible. Patterns that are invisible at year two become clear at year twenty.

²Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York, New York: WW Norton Co, 2000), 15-17. Snyder argued that elections held before democratic institutions are strong enough tend to reward leaders who inflame group identities rather than solve public problems.

³Aila M. Matanock, *Electing Peace: From Civil Conflict to Political Participation* (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017) (cited in Carrie Manning, Ian O. Smith & Özlem Tuncel, *Parties, Politics, Peace: Electoral Inclusion as Peacebuilding* 5 (Routledge 2023)). Matanock finds that electoral provisions in peace agreements give international actors a concrete and enforceable monitoring role, which strengthens the credibility of the peace process as a whole.

⁴The PREP dataset tracks 81 post-rebel parties derived from 58 conflict actors in 40 countries across more than 328 legislative election years. *See*: Manning, Smith, and Tuncel, *Parties, Politics, Peace: Electoral Inclusion as Peacebuilding*, 13.

Interestingly, the book does more than simply trace these parties' transition from armed groups to electoral actors. It increases its relevance for rule-of-law advocates by raising important questions, even though it does not fully answer them. The central question is whether repeated elections gradually teach former armed groups to accept democratic rules, or whether they instead provide these groups with smarter ways to capture power. The book calls this the difference between habituation and power consolidation. That is the right distinction, and the one that matters most for people designing institutions in post-conflict states. The book names it well, even though it does not solve it.

III. What the Book Argues

The core argument is this: former rebel groups that enter electoral politics tend to stay there. Staying is itself a form of peace. The authors are careful not to claim that elections work like magic. They do not argue that elections heal the wounds of war, remove corrupt leaders, or produce liberal democracy. Rather, they argue only what they can handle which is, once a rebel group contests one election, it almost never goes back to war. The numbers support this. Post-rebel parties ran in about three out of every four elections available to them after conflict ended. When they ran, they won at least one seat more than nine times out of ten. Fewer than ten out of eighty-one parties across thirty years ever returned to armed conflict.

The book makes clear that elections do more than simply test these parties. Parties' organization is shaped in the process, and the logic is simple. Each election cycle compels former rebel groups to perform tasks they had never undertaken before, setting in motion an indirect process of political rehabilitation. This process includes selecting candidates, running campaigns, managing internal disagreements, and responding to voters who care more about schools and roads than ideology. Over time, these repeated pressures gradually transform the organization from within. The rebel command structure that won the war is not the same as the political party that survives ten elections. The book argues that sustained electoral competition slowly converts the former into the latter. This insight may be the book's most original contribution.

Yet the first election is usually the most decisive in shaping this democratic prospect of a former rebel group. A party that performs well in its first post-war election tends to consolidate its strength, while one that performs poorly rarely recovers. The authors call this the "lock-in effect."

The stakes of that initial vote are not only political but institutional: it determines whether the habit of democratic competition takes root at all.

Chapter Six illustrates this point with unusual clarity through three case studies. The first case is Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland. The party broadened its appeal well beyond the goal of Irish unification by addressing practical issues such as housing and healthcare. These were not mere campaign promises; they reflected a recognition of everyday needs long postponed by conflict. Sinn Féin also actively reached out to younger voters, recruiting them as candidates and mobilizing them as supporters. In doing so, it began the slow and largely unintentional process of becoming a normal political party—one embedded in the daily life of the nation, even while preserving its core identity. On the other hand, the FMLN in El Salvador started from strength, won the presidency, and then became the thing it had fought against—a patronage machine. It lost to Bukele, an outsider who campaigned against both old parties. As for RENAMO in Mozambique, it never adapted because it was built around one leader. When elections did not deliver what they wanted, they went back to war. And there lies the story. Same starting point. Three completely different endings. The book explains, with some persuasiveness, why.

IV. Four Critical Gaps

Somewhere in Oyo State, in Nigeria's South West, a woman continues to search for her children abducted by gunmen.⁵ So too does a woman in Borno State, in the Northern Nigeria where Boko Haram has taken root.⁶ Neither appears in this book. They are not variables or data points. They do not affect any participation rate. Yet they represent the very reason peace should matter. A study that claims to measure peace without accounting for them is measuring something else entirely. If such a study were currently applied to Nepal's 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the Maoists, it would offer limited insight into the continued failure to address victims' suffering and the recent calls for meaningful transitional justice.⁷

⁵Ben Ezeamalu, "'We Want Our Children Back': Nigeria's Kidnapping Nightmare Spreads South | Reuters," ed. Macdonald Dzirutwe and David Lewis, "We want our children back': Nigeria's kidnapping nightmare spreads south, June 5, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/we-want-our-children-back-nigerias-kidnapping-nightmare-spreads-south-2026-06-05/>.

⁶Chris Ewokor, "Toddlers among More than 50 Schoolchildren Kidnapped in Nigeria," BBC News, May 16, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c202vrxlwqgo>.

⁷The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed on 21 November 2006 between the Government of Nepal and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), formally ending the decade-long Maoist insurgency (1996–2006) that resulted in approximately 13,000–17,000 deaths and over 1,300 enforced disappearances. While the agreement successfully brought the Maoists into mainstream politics, led to the abolition of the monarchy, and enabled the

Yet, the authors define peace as the absence of armed conflict recurrence. That is a deliberate choice and they say so openly, but a deliberate choice can still carry serious costs. The UN framework for transitional justice insists that durable peace requires truth, accountability, reparation, and the guarantee that violence will not happen again.⁸ None of these appear as variables in this book. A peace process that gives former combatants a political party and gives survivors nothing is not a settlement. It is a transaction. The book describes that transaction with precision but calls it peace. It is worth asking whether that word is doing too much work.

The second gap is definitional. The book never tells us which armed groups qualify for electoral inclusion. It defines a post-rebel electoral party as any group that laid down arms and presented candidates. That tells us what happened. It does not tell us what should happen. It does not ask whether a group's goals can be accommodated within democratic politics. It does not ask whether the group accepts the possibility of losing. It assumes that armed groups have genuine political goals that elections can address. The truth is that some do while some do not.

Nigeria makes this concrete. Boko Haram rejects secular governance. Its goal is not a share of political power—it is the destruction of the system that distributes that power. No democratic framework can absorb a party whose platform is the abolition of democracy. But the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) is different. It seeks a referendum on independence for the Igbo homeland. That is a political demand coming from a place of marginalization. It could be negotiated, refused, or accommodated. While the international organizations have consistently declined to call IPOB a terrorist group, the Nigerian government does so.⁹ But these two groups can never be the same

adoption of a new federal constitution, it has largely failed to deliver justice and reparations to conflict victims. Transitional justice mechanisms, particularly the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission on Investigation of Enforced Disappeared Persons, have been repeatedly delayed and undermined by political interference, leaving thousands of victims without accountability or meaningful redress nearly two decades later. See- OHCHR, “*The Nepal Conflict Report | Ohchr*,” *The Nepal Conflict Report*, October 1, 2012, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/nepal-conflict-report>. see also; Biswas Baral, “*Nepal Continues to Fail Victims of the Maoist Insurgency*,” – *The Diplomat*, May 27, 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/05/nepal-continues-to-fail-victims-of-the-maoist-insurgency/>. See also; Meenakshi Ganguly, (ed.) “*No Law, No Justice, No State for Victims*,” *No Law, No Justice, No State for Victims The Culture of Impunity in Post-Conflict Nepal*, March 28, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/11/20/no-law-no-justice-no-state-victims/culture-impunity-post-conflict-nepal>.

⁸UN Secretary-General, The Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies, S/2004/616 (23 August 2004), <https://undocs.org/S/2004/616>. The UN framework covers truth, accountability, reparation, and the guarantee of non-recurrence—none of which appear as variables in the book under review.

⁹The United States and UN Security Council have designated Boko Haram a terrorist organization. IPOB was proscribed by the Nigerian government in 2017, but the designation is contested internationally. Many Western governments and human rights organizations have declined to apply the terrorist label. The divergence itself illustrates why a workable inclusion threshold matters. See; Terrorist Designations of Boko Haram and Ansaru (US

thing. The book offers no way to tell them apart. A rule of law practitioner in Federal Capital Territory Abuja cannot use a framework that cannot make that distinction.

On a broader level, the ideology of an armed group matters precisely because it shapes and sustains its core **goals**. As Geraldine Butos¹⁰ argues, “Ideology not only shaped insurgent identities but also structures national politics around peace.”¹¹ The divergent paths of the FARC and the ELN in Colombia provide a compelling illustration. The FARC’s 2016 peace agreement was premised on a transition “from arms to politics,” reflecting a strategic recalibration of its goals within the democratic arena. By contrast, the ELN has maintained a more uncompromising revolutionary vision, demonstrating little interest in electoral pathways.¹² For many of its members, the ultimate expression of commitment remains ideological devotion—often bound up with notions of martyrdom and wholesale systemic transformation—rather than participation in existing political structures.¹³ This distinction echoes, in a more rigorously documented form, differences observable between groups such as Boko Haram and IPOB, where ideological orientation profoundly influences willingness to engage in negotiated political settlements.

The third gap comes from the book’s strongest idea. The authors identify three distinct long-term paths for parties that emerge from rebellion. Some settle into genuine habituation, in which they come to accept democratic competition as their normal mode of operation. Others pursue power consolidation, using elections to legitimize their dominance while steadily closing off meaningful opposition.¹⁴ Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is their example. It held elections. It won them with margins that no competitive system produces. It used the state to remove every serious rival. A third group follows a hybrid path. Too weak to dominate.

Department of the State , August 13, 2013), US Department of the State , <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/11/217509.htm>. See also; “Security Council Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Adds Boko Haram to Its Sanctions List,” UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases (United Nations , May 22, 2014), United Nations , <https://press.un.org/en/2014/sc11410.doc.htm >; See also; Ade Adesomoju, “FG Gazettes IPOB Ban, to Write Banks, Embassies, Foreign Missions,” Punch Newspapers, September 26, 2017, <https://punchng.com/fg-gazettes-ipob-ban-to-write-banks-embassies-foreign-missions/>.

¹⁰ Dr Geraldine Butos is a postdoctoral researcher specialising in the role of ideology and patterns of violence within rebel groups in Latin America, with a particular focus on the Colombian case. See Geraldine Butos, “Does Ideology Matter to Make Peace? Lessons from Colombia and Beyond,” Civil War Paths, January 27, 2026, <https://www.civilwarpaths.org/does-ideology-matter-to-make-peace-lessons-from-colombia-and-beyond/>

¹¹ Geraldine Butos, Does Ideology Matter to Make Peace? Lessons from Colombia and Beyond,”

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ Manning, Smith, and Tuncel, Parties, Politics, Peace: Electoral Inclusion as Peacebuilding, 96–97. The authors describe power consolidation as a strategy in which a party uses elections to legitimize dominance while systematically foreclosing genuine competition.

They survive through uneasy coalitions and partial participation while the dominant party slowly empties democracy of meaning — a strategy Renamo has come to know well. The authors are right to treat this danger seriously. Yet after naming it so clearly, they stop. They do not go on to examine what might prevent power consolidation from taking root. They do not ask whether independent courts, free press, or organized civil society can make a real difference. They show us how dominant parties succeed. They do not show us how to stop them.

The fourth gap concerns money. The book does not examine how these political parties are funded. This is not a minor oversight. Funding is the central mechanism. A party that awards state contracts to its supporters, diverts government resources into its campaigns, or accepts money from criminal networks is not truly competing in elections, it is obviously purchasing them. The Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador followed this path. So too did the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa.¹⁵ The book traces both trajectories without ever asking what funded them. Yet party financing is where electoral inclusion and institutional capture intersect. Leaving this dimension out is not a minor omission. It is the very omission that makes the book's optimism possible.

V. What Practitioners Can Still Use

However, the book's gaps do not cancel its value. Instead, they define its boundaries. Within those boundaries, its findings remain real and useful. The most immediately actionable of these is the lock-in effect of the first election. If early performance largely determines long-term survival, then the quality of the first post-war election matters more than most donors and policymakers recognize.¹⁶ Rushing to hold elections because a donor timeline demands it, or before former combatants have had enough time to build functioning party structures, may produce exactly the weak early result that then becomes permanent. Speed serves appearances. It does not always serve peace.

¹⁵ Lodge's characterization of the ANC as neo-patrimonial is discussed in Manning, Smith, and Tuncel, *Parties, Politics, Peace: Electoral Inclusion as Peacebuilding*, Chapter Five. For Lodge's original analysis *see* Tom Lodge, "Neo-Patrimonial Politics in the ANC," *African Affairs* 113, no. 450 (2014): 1–23. Lodge documents how the ANC shifted from institutionalized internal competition toward the personal capture of state resources in the decade after 2004.

¹⁶M.C. Marshall and J. Ishiyama, "Does Political Inclusion of Rebel Parties Promote Peace after Civil Conflict?" *Democratization* 23, no. 6 (2016): 1009–1025, quoted in Carrie Manning, Ian O. Smith, and Özlem Tuncel, *Parties, Politics, Peace: Electoral Inclusion as Peacebuilding*, 8–9.

The book's finding on wartime leadership is equally important. It shows that retaining the same leader from the armed struggle into peacetime does not reliably improve a party's long-term survival. The skills required to command a rebel movement differ markedly from those needed to lead a competitive political party. The public face, the internal relationships, and the demands of governance are all different. A transition plan that simply assumes the wartime commander will become the successful party leader is not a plan but a mere wish. The book provides practitioners with evidence to challenge this assumption.

The RENAMO case in Mozambique offers a clear warning for security sector reform.¹⁷ When a former rebel group retains its weapons alongside its participation in elections, its commitment to democracy remains conditional. It participates only as long as the results are favorable. When they are not, the guns reappear. This is not peace. It is armed negotiation dressed in democratic clothing. Incomplete disarmament does not produce genuine electoral inclusion. It creates a party with its own army. The distinction is not semantic because it marks the difference between a real transition and a mere delay.

The book is relevant to lawyers, judges, rule of law practitioners, NGOs, security sector advisers, international organizations, transitional justice professionals, and armed groups themselves that are weighing whether electoral politics is worth attempting. It is even relevant to governments trying to decide how to respond to armed movements – not whether to fight them but whether to talk to them, and on what terms. Read with its limitations in mind, it is an important resource. Its contribution to the field is genuine.

VI. Conclusion

Manning, Smith, and Tuncel set out to answer one question: has the electoral inclusion of former rebel groups produced durable peace over the past thirty years? Their answer is yes. It is supported by the best dataset assembled on this question and by an analysis that is honest about

¹⁷ Security Sector Reform (SSR) draws directly from the RENAMO case in Mozambique. For twenty years, RENAMO participated in elections while maintaining a parallel military structure. Because it was never fully disarmed, SSR remained incomplete. The state failed to establish a monopoly on the legitimate use of force — a fundamental requirement for both the rule of law and effective governance. When election results disappointed RENAMO, it retained the capacity to return to violence, as that capacity had never been removed during the transition. Practitioners designing post-conflict transitions should therefore treat complete disarmament and the dismantling of parallel military structures as non-negotiable preconditions, not optional or postponed steps. A political party that retains armed capacity is not a former rebel group that has successfully transitioned; it is an armed faction with a political wing. Security Sector Reform exists precisely to prevent this outcome.

what it can and cannot show.¹⁸ The book landed its conclusion well and that is not nothing. In a field full of strong claims made on thin evidence, it matters a lot.

But the question the book answers is not the only question that matters. Which groups should be included? On what terms? With what protections for the people they once harmed? Under what institutional conditions? With what safeguards against parties that use elections to end elections? These questions sit just outside the book's frame, but they are not outside the practitioner's reality.

Again, the Igbo proverb holds that the eagle and the kite must share the sky. But it also carries a warning: the one that denies the other its perch risks losing its own wings. The lesson applies in both directions. A state that excludes legitimate political movements sows the seeds of its own instability. At the same time, a state that admits former armed groups without firm conditions, such as protecting victims, enforcing transparent financing rules, or building institutions strong enough to hold them accountable, is not building peace. It is merely managing violence at a lower cost. In other words, being wary of inclusion that may lead to the exclusion of others is necessary

This book tells us the sky can be shared. That is true and it is important. The harder work—deciding who has earned the right to fly in it, protecting those on the ground below, and building the rules that keep every bird honest—remains to be done.

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¹⁸Dankwart Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics* 2, no. 3 (1970): 337, quoted in Manning, Smith, and Tuncel, *Parties, Politics, Peace*, 19. Rustow's argument that democracy is best understood as process rather than outcome underpins the book's entire analytical framework.

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