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Book Review: Education and Empowered Citizenship in Mali by Jaimie Bleck

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BOOK REVIEW

***EDUCATION AND EMPOWERED CITIZENSHIP IN MALI* BY JAIMIE BLECK**

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2015. 207 PAGES

\$39.95 (PAPER)

ISBN 978-1-4214-1781-3

In the introduction to her book, *Education and Empowered Citizenship in Mali*, Jaimie Bleck draws on Western political science theories and a rich bibliography as she describes the evolution of education in Mali. The book addresses three key research questions:

1. How does attending school shape citizens' capacities and willingness to engage in politics?
2. Do all schooling experiences shape students' political knowledge and engagement in the same way?
3. What is the impact of a child's education on parents' political engagement? How does exposure to different types of schooling communities affect parents' political behavior? (150)

Bleck, who is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Notre Dame, begins by defining key terms she uses throughout the book, such as "empowered democratic agents," "the engagement toward the state," "internal efficacy," and "high-initiative participation." She then analyzes how the different types of education students and parents have received affect their political knowledge, and how that knowledge shapes their engagement with and participation in Malian politics. Bleck shows that children who have attended school, whether public schools or madrassas, are more knowledgeable about politics than children who have not. Parents of children who are receiving an education also participate more in politics. Bleck demonstrates that increased education is correlated with more engaged forms of political participation, such as campaigning for government officials and considering a run for office. She argues that there was an important correlation between enrollment in public and private francophone schools and voter turnout during the 2009 municipal elections.

Bleck's book is based on an "immersive survey" of one thousand citizens in ten school districts, and on data from Mali's education ministry, the territorial administration, the National Archives of Mali, and the national assembly, most of which was collected in 2009. With my insider's background—I am Malian—and having received my graduate education in America, I greatly appreciate that Bleck collected data using both strong research methods and deeply involved local communities in her research. As a result, I believe the information she presents is fair, accurate, and clearly interpreted.

I found this book fascinating and difficult to put down. However, there are several issues I hope Bleck will tackle in a second volume. First, the data collected from various sources—young students from public and private schools, their parents, and school officials and administrators—show that many respondents remain skeptical about the political process and democratic system in Mali. It would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study to determine the impact education has on creating an empowered citizenry over time.

Second, I believe Bleck is right in thinking that increased enrollment in public and private schools is a good thing and that education can empower students. But, in fact, many of Mali's private schools were created without the involvement of education professionals and are supported instead by businesspeople and religious leaders who care little about the quality of education. This issue merits further consideration.

Third, I believe the book would have been improved if Bleck had included some information on the cultural and religious dimensions of education relative to the empowerment of citizens. This is and will continue to be an important issue for education policy-makers in countries with parallel state and religious education systems.

Finally, a comment on the overall topic of the book: because it connects education to empowered citizenship in Mali, some Malian readers are likely to think there is a deeper (Western or American) agenda behind the research. While the relationship between education and democracy is well established in the political science literature, this is not typically the way Malians think about education. The idea that education leads to increased political empowerment contrasts with the French model of education that Malians have come to appreciate. Therein lies much of the book's importance.

I would like to congratulate Bleck for her hard work and for taking an important

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political stand. This book is well structured, well written, and appropriate for academic readers. It successfully presents her methodological approach that uses a survey, her analysis of Mali's political culture, her assessment of the expansion of different types of schools, parents' experiences, and the implications of her findings. The book is highly informative and will help readers better understand the political dimensions of education in Mali. Along with academics who may be interested in the book's findings, I suspect that many Malian scholars, students, civil society organizations, political parties, including members of Congress and Parliament, and parents would appreciate this book. A French translation would also be an excellent contribution.

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