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## In This Issue

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The first issue of 2012, and Volume 33, contains articles that critique accepted ideas. They offer alternative perspectives on classical intellectual problems and nuanced interpretations of current knowledge. Matthew Basedau and Alexander Stroh's 'How ethnic are African parties really? Evidence from four Francophone countries' leads the issue on these themes. They critically assess the notion that African parties are based on ethnic divisions through a study of individual voting intentions in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. They find that while ethnicity matters as a determinant of voting behaviour, regional ties and accompanying clientelist networks matter just as much in influencing party preferences. Basedau and Stroh suggest that party elites play the 'ethnic card' to garner support rather than it being an organising feature of collective identity. They thus unsettle the convenient explanation of ethnicity as determining the bases of party support in African countries.

Thomas Denk and Daniel Silander's 'Problems in Paradise? Challenges to Future Democratization in Democratic States' points out that democratic states cannot rest on their laurels as democracies. They remind us that the functions of government, the rule of law, personal autonomy and individual rights are areas that require further democratization in many states. Indeed, their discussion harkens back to the discussions in *IPSR's* special issue of November 2011 on The Quality of Democracy in Asia Pacific, where many of these points were made in specific case contexts. Denk and Silander's contribution to this debate is to provide a generalisable theoretical context in which to situate additional research.

How to measure democratic performance is the subject of ongoing debate in the discipline. Responding to recent criticisms, Amy Alexander, Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel argue that their Index of Effective Democracy (EDI) offers a valid tool for this task. In 'Measuring Effective Democracy: A Defence', they also argue that their measurement links democracy with other societal phenomena. They continue: 'What links democracy to other social phenomena are not the defining properties of democracy itself but the conditioning qualities that make the defining properties work.' The authors argue that the EDI reveals this aspect, allowing for a critical evaluation of democracy that takes account of the institutional qualities that condition democracy, especially the rule of law and respect of human rights. This contribution resonates well with Denk and Silander's emphasis on a critical evaluation of democracies.

The effects of young people's political participation on their attitudes to politics has attracted renewed attention in recent years. This is the subject of 'Political Attitudes and Political Participation: A Panel Study on Socialization and Self-Selection Effects among Late Adolescents' by Ellen Quintelier and Marc Hooghe. Their contribution seeks to uncover the reciprocal relationship between civic participation and political attitudes among 16-18 year old Belgian citizens. The authors find a clear causal direction – individual participation increases both political interest

and political trust. Thus, the socialisation effect of participation is stronger than the effect of self-selection. They also find that individual participation is just as important as collective, group-based, action in its socialisation effect. In other words, those who are politically active – regardless of the individual or group basis of the action – are likely to have more positive attitudes towards the political system.

In ‘Disjunctured Narratives: Rethinking Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation’, Adrian Little investigates narratives of reconciliation in Northern Ireland to bring forward evidence showing that the narratives in use are anything but reconciliatory. The close study of this case offers a critical perspective on reconciling discourses. It reveals that these narratives of reconciliation are ‘based on opposition to the perceived perception of the other’. Reconciliation, the author concludes, is not the end point that it is generally taken to be in cases of ethno-national conflict. Instead, reconciliatory narratives can reinforce the sense of ethnic identities rather than contribute to a shared understanding of the conflict and its peaceful resolution. There is much to consider in this article for the analysis of conflict transformation and peace-building in divided societies

Political participation is a theme taken up in ‘Economic Development and Mass Political Participation in Contemporary China: Determinants of Provincial Petition (*Xinfang*) Activism 1994–2002’ by Wooyeal Paik. In a rare and important study, Paik explains the rise in petition activism in China using cross-provincial statistical data analysis. He argues that the petition institution is used by the regime to channel and divert popular anger away from regime deficiencies such as corruption and inequality. The mobilisation potential of the petition to spark regime change is limited also, due to the absence of elite leadership and organisational sophistication. The author warns that the growing petition activity should not be interpreted as a prelude to democratisation. It can be used to redress grievances, though, and a means for national elites to pressure local cadre organisation to address petition conflicts, the nuclei of spontaneous protests, at an early stage. However, as Paik points out, this remedy is but an expedient response and falls far short of electoral contestation.

We would like to repeat an important announcement made in past issues of *IPSR*. We are delighted to announce again the winners of the Meisel-Laponce Award. IPSA, IPSR, and SAGE Publishers organized the award to honor John Meisel and Jean Laponce, the first two editors of *IPSR*. The award is for the article in *IPSR* judged by the editors and the *IPSR* editorial board to be the most significant contribution since IPSA’s XXI World Congress of Political Science, held in Santiago, Chile, in 2009. The winners of the Meisel-Laponce Award are Jørgen Møller and Svend-Erik Skanning, for their article ‘Beyond the Radial Delusion: Conceptualising and Measuring Democracy and Non-Democracy.’ The award will be given to Professors Møller and Skaaning at IPSA’s XXII World Congress, to be held in Madrid from 8-12 July 2012. We congratulate Professors Møller and Skaaning for considerably advancing our understanding of democratic theory and practice. A link to the winning article, as well as the five other articles nominated by the editors, is available on IPSR’s home page (<http://ips.sagepub.com>).

Yvonne Galligan