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In This Issue

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International Political Science Review 2008 29: 5

DOI: 10.1177/0192512107083866

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In This Issue

Issues of accountability and responsiveness characterize all democratic politics, and are given many different forms of expression. The articles in this issue deal with aspects of governmental accountability and responsiveness in a range of case and comparative settings. Kenneth Paul Tan (“Meritocracy and Elitism in a Global City: Ideological Shifts in Singapore”) discusses the role meritocracy plays in the governance of a small, highly globalized economy and society. He reveals that far from being egalitarian, the practice of meritocracy has instead encouraged elitist attitudes and practices. He argues that the globalizing influences on Singapore’s political culture are likely to put pressure on the continued use of meritocracy as a key selection mechanism for entry to governing elites. Katherine Teghtsoonian and Louise Chappell (“The Rise and Decline of Women’s Policy Machinery in British Columbia and New South Wales: A Cautionary Tale”) consider the institutionalization of feminist policy demands in the form of women’s policy agencies by the governments of British Columbia in Canada and New South Wales in Australia. In a closely argued study, they challenge the dominant view that left-leaning governments are more responsive than right-wing administrations to women’s needs and interests. They also highlight the “reframing” of violence against women as an economic, cost–benefit issue, to the exclusion of the radical feminist analysis that first brought it to political attention. They illustrate, then, that government responsiveness can be shaped in terms that best suit a prevailing ideology (in this case, a neoliberal ideology) to the exclusion of a more sophisticated multilayered and multidimensional analysis.

Francisco Herreros and Henar Criado examine another dimension of the state–society relationship through their study of social trust in Europe (“The State and the Development of Social Trust”). Using a rational choice methodology, they suggest that when the state is seen to enforce private agreements by sanctioning those that break such arrangements, the level of support and trust in the state increases among the general public. They reveal that efficient states foster more trusting societies, and illustrate that this overall positive rise in trust is unevenly distributed by group: minority ethnic groups lag behind majority groups in their trust in the state. They suggest that enhancing state effectiveness should be accompanied by measures to improve the legitimacy of the state directed at specific groups. The article by Michael Hall (“Democracy and Floating Exchange Rates”) explores the relationship between democracy and the likelihood of adopting a floating exchange rate regime. He seeks to identify the causal connection and

suggests that this may be the presence of a moderate number of “veto players” in a political system. He suggests that the moderate veto player theory (the “Goldilocks” hypothesis) can best explain the variation in exchange rate regime choices in the new democratic systems of Latin America and Eastern Europe. In this study, he points out the effects of political institutions on exchange rate regimes. Our final article in this issue, by Anatoly Zhuplev (“Economic Internationalization of Russia: Roots, Trends, and Scenarios”), contextualizes and broadens this political economy discussion in the context of Russia. Overviewing the connections between economic and political developments in Russia, he compares the standing of the country with three similar cases (Chile, China, and Venezuela) and constructs three potential scenarios for the future direction of Russia’s political economy. As with the other articles, Zhuplev considers the accountability and responsiveness of the Russian state to domestic and international challenges, again reinforcing the connections between government behavior and external effects: in this instance, Russia’s efforts at internationalizing its economy. He concludes that the Venezuelan “scenario” is most likely to characterize Russian internationalization strategies, along with displaying some elements of the Chinese model.

These articles provide us with much to consider, and indeed suggest further avenues of research as we grapple with understanding the complex workings of democratic systems and their connections with their legitimizing publics.

Yvonne Galligan