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In This Issue

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In This Issue

The range of articles in this issue shows, once again, how truly global are the interests of IPSR contributors and readers. Joakim Ekman begins the issue with an important discussion on hybrid regimes – a topic on which there is a considerable emerging literature. The focus of this article is on constructing a framework that will assist in analyzing the stability of hybrid regimes, and so makes a timely contribution to the study of political systems that are striving to become democratic yet still retain features of their authoritarian past. Indeed, Ekman's study poses questions for the application of the “transition paradigm” and its embedded assumption of a linear progression from authoritarian regime to a democratic polity. Taking Tanzania, Russia, and Venezuela as representative cases, Ekman uses public opinion data to examine the potential for political change in hybrid regimes. He concludes that hybrid regimes can remain stable, and thus caught between authoritarianism and democracy, when the political opposition remains weak or ineffective. This is exploited by the incumbent governing elites, who find ways of circumventing the opposition. Stability is also enhanced by citizens' lack of confidence in political parties and a reluctance to participate in political behavior that could bring about change. In other words, a civic culture is particularly underdeveloped in hybrid regimes, thereby reinforcing this form of government.

While Ekman's focus is on public opinion, Stephen Dyson's study of Margaret Thatcher addresses the importance of individual leaders in shaping political events. Dyson offers a close investigation of her leadership style to determine how it influenced her policy decisions. He highlights how Thatcher's uncomplicated analysis of political affairs – her “profoundly black-and-white view” – shaped her foreign policy positions on the Falklands, the Soviet Union and German reunification. For her, world leaders fell into one of two categories, that of friend or foe, who in turn were players in the wider struggle between good and evil. Dyson argues that Thatcher applied this dichotomous prism to world affairs and her foreign policy decisions were informed by this stark analytical lens. His article offers a rigorous methodological structure for understanding the manner in which political leaders process information on public affairs and moves the debate on leaders' influence on events from one of assumption to one that can uncover causal linkages.

Byong-Kuen Jhee's article returns us to the study of public opinion, this time in ascertaining support among the Korean public for a regional community in

Northeast Asia similar to that of the European Union. He tests a series of hypotheses drawn from the regional integration literature using data on public attitudes in Northeast Asia indicated in the Global View 2004 survey. He finds moderate support among Koreans for the idea of a regional community, limited by the relative newness of the idea and the continued strength of nationalist feeling. Indeed, public support for regional integration is driven more by security concerns and views on Korean relations with China and Japan than by the economic and cultural influences one finds in Europe.

The extent to which public participation can influence elite decision-making is the focus of Judith Teichman's study of civil society organizations in Mexico and Chile. Social policy is a field of particular interest for many non-governmental organizations, and Teichman illustrates the extent to which NGOs in these two countries sought to influence conditional cash transfer programs designed to alleviate poverty. The cases reveal the extent to which democratic decision-making processes are receptive to civil society pressures – in Mexico the demands of community activists met with a more constructive response than in the case of Chile, where the neo-liberal democratic agenda was more salient. The study essentially contrasts two distinct, and distinctive, political cultures, where contestation over the measures required to alleviate and reduce poverty lends insights into the meaning and nature of democracy in each case.

The final article in this issue discusses the important and topical question of the rise of Islamic politics and the capacity of Islamic movements to mobilize significant public support. Taking Turkey as a case, Kayhan Delibas traces the roots of the Islamist AKP party's rise to political dominance. He reminds us that a precursor of the AKP existed as far back as 1972, in the form of the National Salvation Party. Even though this party ceased to exist, the politicization of Islam continued in social networks, local community groups and independent Islamist sects, all of which continued to function even in times of military rule. Delibas makes the salient point that the current Islamization of politics in the Middle East is not an overnight phenomenon, while strong public support for Islamist parties of varying hues enables these parties to challenge, and in the case of Turkey, to defeat, secular-based parties.

The articles in this issue, then, touch on many important aspects of politics today. We hope they will provoke ongoing debates, add to the current fields of knowledge, and give rise to further investigations into these concerns.

Yvonne Galligan, Editor