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In This Issue

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In This Issue

Assumptions are common in the study of politics. They sneak in constantly, often without our really noticing. And yet of course they must be not only noticed but tested, either against deeply researched single case studies or by detailed analysis of comparable data on many. All the articles in this issue make such tests, or, in one case, provide information without which the job remaining could not be done.

Matteo Fumagalli (“Alignments and Realignment in Central Asia: The Rationale and Implications of Uzbekistan’s Rapprochement with Russia”) uses the case of Uzbekistan’s shift away from the United States to closer ties with Russia to test an important assumption often made in case studies: a good understanding of internal factors will suffice to tell us all we need to know to explain dramatic policy shifts. Not so, he finds. Exploring internal factors, while crucial, is unlikely to be sufficient when the policy in question is a matter of re-alliance in international politics.

Similarly, Rhiannon Morgan (“On Political Institutions and Social Movement Dynamics: The Case of the United Nations and the Global Indigenous Movement”) finds that her case does not lend credence to the assumption that when social movements are incorporated into a powerful institution they inevitably change and modify their original nature. The global indigenous movement, whose strength is so strongly based upon and enhanced by its presence within the United Nations, has proved strikingly resistant to the socializing pressures that institution could be expected to bring to bear. If anything, the causal arrows may well point in the opposite direction.

Christine Bell and Catherine O’Rourke (“The People’s Peace? Peace Agreements, Civil Society, and Participatory Democracy”) take an interestingly different tack in questioning the certainty that peace agreements which insist on provisions for strengthening civil society will in fact improve the quality of democracy in the states concerned. Inasmuch as the job of reviewing a wide range of existing peace agreements and detailing the presence or absence of such provisions had never been done, that is where they begin. In the process they note some examples giving credence – or not – to the happy assumption, but, as they acknowledge, this part of the job is not complete, nor could it be in the space of a single article. They have provided crucial data; the next step is to go further and look, in as many of the cases as possible, for actual connections between hopeful clauses and post-peace reality.

Anil Hira (“Should Economists Rule the World? Trends and Implications of Leadership Patterns in the Developing World, 1960–2005”) notes the common belief that it is more and more common for technocrats or politicians with an economics background to be in charge of economic policy, and its twin expectation: that this change will lead to improvements in that policy. He tests both assumptions against a database including the qualifications of leaders of the world’s major nations over the past four decades. The first assumption holds up to some extent, but patterns vary by region; the second does not fare even that well. Hira then discusses what he believes are the appropriate conclusions for developing nations.

Finally, in “A Boon or a Bane? The Role of Civil Society in Third- and Fourth-Wave Democracies” Rollin Tusalem examines more than sixty nations and finds that the pre-transition strength and post-transition density of civil society really do appear to be associated with not only greater political freedoms but also better institutional performance. Although the other articles in this issue remind us sharply that “it’s so reasonable it must be true” just will not do, here at last a common belief in recent years is in fact substantiated by the data brought to bear.

One out of five. Is a .200 batting average the best our inadequately examined beliefs can manage when put to the test of serious study?

Kay Lawson