

BOOK REVIEW

Kevin T. Leicht and J. Craig Jenkins (eds)

Handbook of Politics: State and Society in a Global Perspective

(Heidelberg: Springer, 2010, ISBN: 9780387689296, xii+668 pp., €169.95; \$229.00; £153.00 hb.)

The end of the Cold War marked not only the end of a fairly predictable model of politics, but equally importantly it also unsettled the accepted ways in which politics has been explained and understood. In this respect, the study of political phenomena seems to have been undergoing an intense and oftentimes troubled reflection on the validity and relevance of its theories, methods, and propositions. At the same time, the proliferation of a diverse set of new (or previously overlooked) issues on the political stage has urged such reconsiderations of the study of politics to promptly produce explanatory frameworks that can offer germane responses to the emerging challenges.

A key feature of such reconsiderations of political processes has been the confrontation with the pervasive dynamics of globalization. Its patterns reflect the complex interaction between societies and states as a result of the breadth, speed, and scope of technological innovation, the proliferation of affordable means of travel, and the growing levels of economic interdependence. While it is often difficult to render legible such a dynamic international environment, this has not deterred a number of state and non-state actors to engage in creative entrepreneurship on the global stage. It is the thoughtful explanation and understanding of these dynamics that are at the heart of the volume edited by Kevin T. Leicht and J. Craig Jenkins.

The editors have done an excellent job of emphasizing the distinct aspects from the globalization of the complex interactions between state and society. In this respect, the volume offers an excellent overview of the main trends animating current debates in the study of political phenomena. The point of departure for the collection is the acknowledgement that it will be shortsighted to treat politics only as "why, when, and how people get what they want," because this would make the study of politics merely "synonymous with the study of social life" (pp. 1-2). Instead, the contributors to the volume make the case that while "social life" covers a fairly wide-ranging domain both politics and its study are a much broader and diverse field. In this setting, the collection launches an inquisitive discussion of the continuity and change in the study of politics in response to the challenges posed by globalization.

The volume is divided in three parts. The first one addresses the theoretical reconsiderations in the study of politics. The ten chapters included in this section provide a comprehensive overview of the current analytical trends in the field. The contributions address institutional theory; the redesigning, reorientation, and rethinking of Westphalian statism; public policy



perspectives; societal constitutionalism; neoliberalism; transnationalism; elite theory; conflict theory; and the politics of class. The range of approaches and perspectives included in this part of the volume provide an outstanding survey of the analytical engagements that have animated the study of politics since the end of the Cold War.

The second part of the volume delves into the transformative dynamism of political change. There are two broad thematic trajectories covered by the eighteen contributions to this section. Firstly, a number of changes have been provoked by the conspicuous unpredictability, randomness, and unintended effects of globalization. Secondly, the increased vulnerability to the catalytic effects of issues such as climate change, the economic downturn, and terrorism have called attention to a different kind of political shifts. Thus, the contributors address the alterations in perspective emerging from the enhanced attention to social movements, political violence, corporatism, economic development, gender, collective action, cultural politics, religion and post-secularism, space, the environment, democratization, urban life, authoritarianism, mass media, voting behavior, inequality, and criminality in the study of politics. Such plethora of topics draws attention to the alteration in the very patterns and practices of politics.

Finally, the third part of the volume takes up the methodological innovations in the study of politics. The five chapters included in this section address the advancements in comparative-historical methodology, multilevel modeling, event history techniques, social networks analysis, and time series analyses. An underlying feature of these explorations is the vexed nature of methodology in the study of politics. The inventory of approaches included in this section make it clear that the dynamics of globalization appear to have exacerbated even further the tension between empirical quantification and interpretative ideation. Moreover, methodological innovations seem to have reignited the debate about what is and what should be important in the study of politics. In other words, methodology itself has increasingly found itself at the center of particular research politics and academic camps. The volume therefore seems to suggest analytical eclecticism as a relevant strategy to grasp the complexity of a globalizing political field.

The breadth and scope of the volume edited by Kevin T. Leicht and J. Craig Jenkins makes it a valuable reference resource for anyone interested in the study of political phenomena. In particular, many will find refreshing its proposition that rather than looking for "a single 'best' theory" students of politics will be better off by "willing to consider multiple perspectives and to entertain the idea that multiple theories are useful for understanding politics" (p. 11). Thus, the collection offers a comprehensive overview of the different theoretical debates, topics and methodological perspectives on politics. At the same time, the accessible style, clear and forceful analysis, and the thorough coverage of the field has allowed the contributors to offer a thoughtful survey the different ways for engaging in the study of politics. In this respect, the volume edited by Kevin T. Leicht and J. Craig Jenkins will be invaluable to the endeavors of both students and scholars of political science, philosophy, globalization studies and sociology.

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