

Editor's Introduction

In political science as in life, timing is everything. Actors act. Events unfold. Institutions evolve. Regimes transition. Journals change hands. Articles accepted under one editor are readied for publication by another. And all the while things happen politically. In the broadest sense political science at its best is a never-ending, recursive conversation about this ongoing flow of events, in which the object of our inquiry—society—is a constantly shifting target that is at once reflected in, tracked by, and influenced by our intellectual labors, and in which our inquiry itself incessantly shifts, grows, and simply moves onwards, however one judges this forward movement.

Perspectives on Politics is a relatively young journal. As its new Editor-in-Chief, I have very definite ideas about its strengths and weaknesses and the directions in which I would like to see it grow. I have indicated some of my ideas in the Review Editor Introductions I've written in recent years. In the last issue I promised a general statement of editorial philosophy. I've decided to postpone this statement until the first issue of Volume 8, which will appear in March 2010. This allows me the time to more fully discuss this philosophy with colleagues, and especially my Editorial Board. It has the added value of allowing the new editorial statement to appear along with the journal's new cover, signifying changes in substance as well as form.

No more than in the "real world" do things in the publishing world simply happen. The life of a journal is a perpetual process of editorial judgments and decisions, ranging from the most grandiose considerations of intellectual purpose and quality to the more administrative tasks associated with soliciting, processing, and interpreting reviews, to the more mundane but no less challenging or interesting tasks associated with line-editing, copy-editing, proof-reading, planning journal issues, deciding on journal aesthetics, and shipping manuscripts to press. This painstaking work is accomplished by editors working in collaboration with authors, reviewers, readers, copyeditors, printers, and publishers (in our case, the American Political Science Association and Cambridge University Press). For journals such as *Perspectives*, most of the day-to-day work is done by the editorial staff, consisting mainly of very talented and dedicated graduate students. Because things don't simply happen but are *made* to happen by people such as myself—working collaboratively of course

with these others—it is important for us to share with our readers general editorial philosophy as well as the thinking behind particular judgments. Editor Introductions are one way of doing this. They are both a privilege associated with editorship and a duty. Instead of simply describing the contents of each issue, I intend to use these introductions to highlight and perhaps even amplify certain broad themes that are raised in each issue of the journal. These interpretations are privileged in the sense that they are related to the editorial decisions that I have made. But, obviously, in the end each reader can and should interpret for him or herself. I will try not to be overbearing in my comments. But neither will I refrain from "editorializing." For that is my job, just as it is my job to make the journalistic "trains" run on time, and it is the job of each writer, reviewer, and reader of the journal to think for themselves and to share their thoughts in the endless conversation that is our discipline.

All the same, timing is everything. And while editors make their own editorial decisions, they do not do so just as they please, but under circumstances directly found, given, and transmitted from the past. This is especially true for new editors who, like relay runners, are handed off the editorial baton mid-race, and must "hit the ground running" as it were. Every article published in the front end of this issue—and almost every article that will run in the issue to follow—was accepted by my predecessor, Jim Johnson, in accordance with his own processes of editorial review, deliberation, and decision. In the September issue I thanked him for his efforts and for the journal that he bequeathed to me. It now falls to me to run with it.

As I write, in late August 2009, global capitalism remains mired in a financial crisis of proportions that have led many to evoke the Great Depression of the 1930's. While in the immediate aftermath of the East European "revolutions of 1989" there was talk of an "end of history" (reiterating earlier talk of an "end of ideology"), it is now clear that the instabilities and injustices associated with capitalism have not been transcended (Exhibit: the headlines of three successive issues of the *Economist* in October 2008—"Capitalism at Bay," "Saving the System," and "World on the Edge," the latter's cover graced with a drawing of a hapless individual wobbling on the precipice of a cliff and staring into an abyss before him). The political consequences of this crisis continue to unfold with the

enormous variation across systems, regimes, and regions that political scientists would expect. In recent decades our discipline has become increasingly sophisticated in analyzing the sources and consequences of such variations. At the same time, it appeared at least to some that this methodological sophistication was accompanied by a hesitation to pose “big” questions and offer “bold” hypotheses, to the detriment of both the discipline’s scientific aspirations and its public relevance. *Perspectives* was created, at least in part, to address this concern.

This issue’s lead article could not be more perfectly timed. It is an ideal *Perspectives* article. The collaborative product of an “Americanist” and a “Comparativist” who have done important work in their respective subfields, it employs a range of methods, unashamedly draws upon “classical” political theorists, and presents a bold and provocative challenge. Most importantly, it speaks to a question of real importance that is only accentuated by current events—*is the United States an oligarchy?* Simply by posing this question in such a pointed way, Benjamin I. Page and Jeffrey A. Winters perform an important service. While their article leaves no doubt that there is much evidence to support at least a provisional answer of “Yes!” Page and Winters are more concerned here with advancing an agenda of inquiry than they are with offering or testing a hypothesis. It’s not that they forswear hypothesis testing. To the contrary, their article offers some sophisticated hypotheses, and much of their previous work is clearly devoted to hypothesis testing. And, indeed, there is no dearth of empirical work in political science dealing with the range of questions—related to distributional politics and institutional dynamics—that Page and Winters raise. But in agendas of political research as in much else, the whole is often less and not more than the sum of its parts. And if Page and Winters are correct, while scholars of American politics have produced an extraordinary amount of valuable empirical research, they have paid insufficient attention to an orienting question of fundamental importance—how is the U.S. regime best conceptualized or, more pointedly, *is the United States an oligarchy?* As they make clear, addressing such questions requires the mapping of institutional dynamics and the charting of patterns of political influence and the distributional effects of policy choices, engages some of the weightiest concerns of political philosophy, and calls upon analysts to creatively employ both descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis. This is a tall order. But what they are proposing is not a specific hypothesis or a particular research project so much as a broad agenda of scholarly research centered on this big question.

Such a proposal is a throwback to an earlier and most distinguished era in the history of our discipline, and to a set of inquiries that were foundational for the “behavioral revolution.” Indeed, Page and Winters can be read as calling for a renewed commitment to a truly “empirical democratic theory” that is as serious about the “democratic” as

it is about the “empirical.” Such a renewed “empirical democratic theory” can draw for inspiration from such “classic” works of modern political science as Robert Dahl and Charles Lindblom’s *Politics, Economics, and Welfare* (1953), E.E. Schattschneider’s *The Semi-Sovereign People* (1960), Robert Dahl’s *Who Governs?* (1961), Theodore Lowi’s *The End of Liberalism* (1969), Grant McConnell’s *Private Power and American Democracy* (1970), and Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz’s *Power and Poverty* (1970). And of course there is that (in)famous classic of modern political sociology, C. Wright Mills’ *The Power Elite* (1956), whose provocative critique of American oligarchy circa the mid-1950’s helped to inspire the 1960’s New Left and fueled the so-called “three faces of power” debate in political science—and whose very famous cover graces the cover of this issue.

But at the same time, Page and Winters’ provocative article is of a piece with a range of recent contributions by scholars of American politics seeking to refocus attention on material inequality as a profound constraint upon democratic citizenship, and to pose big questions about the American regime type. This issue was amplified by the APSA Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy and its 2004 Report, “American Democracy in a Age of Rising Inequality,” and in a range of publications that followed the report. And it is a theme underscored by the widespread attention given Larry Bartels’ *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (2008), including a recent *Perspectives* symposium. Indeed, Page and Winters can be seen as echoing the call of APSA’s 2006 Conference Theme, “Power Reconsidered,” which enjoined colleagues “to rethink the theoretical status of power in their own empirical work and . . . to reevaluate their models in light of empirical examples of the effects of authority relationships.”

This is a leitmotif that is broached, in different ways of course, by many of the articles, commentaries, symposia, and reviews in the current issue. *The Measure of America: American Human Development Report 2008–2009*, by Sarah Burd-Sharps, Kristen Lewis, and Eduardo Borges Martins, is an interesting portrait of American social indicators modeled on the United Nations Human Development Reports, and it is usefully read alongside Page and Winters’ piece. Our symposium on the book was designed in part to highlight the kind of applied research that the book exemplifies, and the challenges of such work. But it was also an occasion to solicit discussion from a range of prominent scholars of US public policy about the political conditions and consequences underlying the book’s social profile. I am pleased to report that this distinguished cast—Jacob Hacker, Lawrence Mead, and Deborah Stone, joined by philosopher Debra Satz—did not disappoint. This symposium raises fundamental questions about the relationship between public policy and material inequality, an issue also addressed in the book reviews of Scott Allard’s

Out of Reach: Place, Poverty, and the New American Welfare State, Joseph E. Schwartz's *The Future of Democratic Equality: Rebuilding Social Solidarity in a Fragmented America*, and Erin E. O'Brien's *The Politics of Identity: Solidarity Building Among America's Working Poor*.

Another set of questions, regarding the inegalitarian effects of the unusual US electoral system, are addressed in the commentaries by Edward M. Burmila on the Electoral College and Brian J. Gaines and Jeffery A. Jenkins on the importance of mechanisms of legislative and electoral apportionment, and in Stephen J. Wayne's interesting double-review of Charles L. Zelden's *Bush v. Gore: Exposing the Hidden Crisis in American Democracy* and Heather H. Gerken's *The Democracy Index*. (Gerken's fascinating audit of US electoral practices down to the local level is usefully read alongside *The Measure of America's* similar audit of social indicators.) Students of comparative politics have long analyzed the dynamics and consequences of different mechanisms of electoral choice. The renewed attention to these issues by Americanists, no doubt partly stimulated by the contested 2000 Presidential election, is a welcome development.

Our second featured symposium offers an interesting counterpoint to many of the above discussions. For if the above-mentioned work highlights "mobilizations of bias" that reproduce forms of inequality, Frank R. Baumgartner, Suzanna De Boef and Amber E. Boydston's *The Decline of the Death Penalty and the Discovery of Innocence* offers a more "pluralist" account of how the politics of framing can shift the terms of public debate and present citizens and social movements with opportunities for creative intervention. Marie Gottschalk expresses the consensus of her fellow symposiasts—James Morone, Austin Sarat, and Robert Shapiro—in observing that "Baumgartner, De Boef, and Boydston provide a compelling and convincing account of how the rise of the innocence movement with its dramatic focus on people wrongly condemned to death has eroded public support for the death penalty. Employing a sophisticated and path-breaking content analysis of *The New York Times* and public opinion data, they show how this movement has profoundly reframed the debate over capital punishment." In underscoring the responsiveness of the political system to such movement politics, Baumgartner et al can be seen as contradicting the more jaundiced account of power indicated by Page and Winters. And yet this opposition might be more apparent than real, for as the latter maintain, "The literatures on oligarchy and democracy usually view the two political arrangements as mutually exclusive. We view them as compatible and often fused. Thus it does not follow from our argument that the wealthy dominate all facets of politics. In a formally democratic political system, Dahlian pluralistic struggles (Dahl 1967)—and even segmented (not general or revolutionary) mass mobilizations—may carry the day on many issues involving such matters as race, women,

gays, ethnicity, religion, morality, guns, or the environment. These are issues of great importance to many ordinary citizens, but of only limited and cross-cutting concern to the wealthy." Indeed Gottschalk, in her own critical discussion, argues that the success of the "innocence movement" itself can only be understood in terms of a broader regime of penal harshness that very much reflects deeper patterns of economic and especially racial marginalization in American society. Obviously, these issues are complex. My point is simply that this issue's articles and symposia open up interesting lines of debate about the possibilities and limits of American institutions and processes. Even more importantly, works such as "Oligarchy in the United States?" and *The Decline of the Death Penalty and the Discovery of Innocence* represent important work in American politics that employs a range of advanced methods but is not encumbered by these methods, and that engages topics of great public importance in ways that also speak to and draw upon the work of a wide swath of the political science discipline.

The theme of "oligarchy" has long been a concern of comparative politics, at least since the publication of Roberto Michels' *Political Parties*. And our current issue contains two articles that address this theme in interesting ways and that nicely compliment the above-mentioned discussions. Peter Mair and Richard S. Katz's "The Cartel Party Thesis" revisits the authors' earlier work advancing this thesis, addressing a range of criticisms and further refining their argument that "it makes sense to speak of a cartelization of ostensibly competitive parties." And Leslie Anderson's "The Problem of Single-Party Predominance in an Unconsolidated Democracy: The Example of Argentina" addresses from another angle the relationship between the institutionalization of party politics and the flourishing or frustration of democratic openness. Anderson's piece has the additional virtue of drawing on in-depth knowledge of the Argentine case, while at the same time developing some very interesting comparisons between Argentina's form of "single-party predominance" and the monopoly long-held by the Democratic Party in the pre-civil rights US South. (Clarence Stone's review of Jessica Trounstone's *Political Monopolies in American Cities: The Rise and Fall of Bosses and Reformers* also highlights the relevance of theories of party dominance to an understanding of US urban politics.) This discussion—which will resonate with all Americanists familiar with the landmark work of V.O. Key—exemplifies the ways in which the American politics and comparative politics subfields can only benefit from a lowering of the transactions costs of moving between them and, indeed, from rethinking the very point of these distinctions.

Finally, the issue contains a number of important pieces that address questions of democratic theory in a more normative vein. Mariah Zeisberg's "How Democratic are Judicial Elections?" and Annabelle Lever's "Democracy and

Editor's Note

Judicial Review: Are They Really Incompatible?" both address the complex relationships between judicial review and democratic values, calling into question arguments that unelected courts are inherently undemocratic, and in the process raising broader questions about the meanings of democracy as a political ideal and as a complex form of collective self-governance. Susan P. Liebell's "Lockean Switching: Imagination and the Production of Principles of Toleration" draws on the political philosophies of John Locke and John Rawls to consider the ways that political discourse can engender democratic civility by incorporating serious moral differences and group antagonisms rather than by seeking to avoid them. John Kelly's triple review of three important new books on the possibilities and limits of "digital democracy"—a topic of growing importance, about which we are receiving many article submissions—addresses the relationship between democratic values and the new technical infrastructures of communication. And reviews of three works of political theory—Andreas Kalyvas' *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary: Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Hannah Arendt*; Peter Alexander Meyers' *Civic War and the Cor-*

ruption of the Citizen; and Kurt A. Raaflaub, Josiah Ober, and Robert Wallace's *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece*—bring us full circle, reminding us of what Page and Winters point out in the issue's lead article: that serious reflection on the complex relationships between democracy and oligarchy has a quite ancient lineage. At the same time, each of these books reminds us of something that the very best work in political science always makes clear, whatever its specific methods, hypotheses, and arguments—that the big questions about how the political world is ordered and disordered, and what difference it makes, will not go away. It is our hope that *Perspectives* can be one venue where political scientists, and scholars of politics more generally, can reflect on these questions in ways that are at once methodologically sound, academically conversant, and serious in an intellectual, rather than a merely scholastic, way.

Jeffrey C. Isaac
Indiana University
Editor-in-Chief
Perspectives on Politics