

## Reviews

Ian Marsh and Raymond Miller, *Democratic Decline and Democratic Renewal: Political Change in Britain, Australia and New Zealand*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, 383pp.  
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*Democratic Decline and Democratic Renewal* is a provocative study of the changing nature of the democratic process in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. The book has two goals. First, to describe the decline of the traditional model of representative democracy through political parties as new populist forms of political action have eroded the role of parties. Second, are there mechanisms to restore the pattern of ‘thick’ representative government that the authors see as benefitting the democratic process and its citizens? The book’s contributions to these issues are a valuable new addition to the study of democratic change in advanced industrial democracies.

Marsh and Miller discuss the process of democratic governance in terms of four concepts. The first is *identity*, which involves ties to social groups, political ideologies, or norms of citizenship. Second, they discuss *accounts* or ideas of governing. This involves the dominant ideas about the nature of political cooperation, or counter-ideas. *Political institutions* constitute the third concept. *Capabilities* are the final variable in their model, which covers citizen rights, competencies, and resources. The analytic chapters loosely compare how these four traits have changed over time in each nation. Taken together, these traits describe a pattern of ‘thick democracy’ in the period of strong mass parties that dominated the political process. The erosion of the mass party model in all three nations has produced a new form of ‘thin democracy’ in the terminology of the authors.

The bulk of the book is devoted to case studies of the partisan and policy histories of three nations: Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. Chapters 3–5 discuss the British case. Chapter 3 describes the development of a collectivist consensus in post-World War II Britain, tracing this policy development to the effect of strong political parties. Consequently, as parties lost some of their political strength beginning in the 1960s, chapter 4 maintains that this produced the policy trends represented by Thatcher’s neo-liberalism and Blair’s New Labour. In short, the decline of parties as political organizations led to the decline of the state’s strategic capacity. Chapter 5 discusses Blair government’s response to the gap in the state’s strategic capacity and its limited success. The authors see the gap in strategic capacity as a major challenge for British government.

The next section discusses the evolution of partisan politics and policy in Australia. Chapter 6 describes the formation of the party system and its development into a mass party format

that lasted until the mid-1960s. The following chapter chronicles the ‘thinning’ of the parties organizationally as vehicles for political action. Perhaps most striking is the claim that the parties have virtually lost their role in agenda setting: ‘Every wholly new item on the political agenda in the past decade or so has originated with one of the social movements or the neo-liberal think tanks, not the major parties’ (p. 174). In contrast to the British case, the authors attribute these changes in partisan politics and policy to societal change and mass pressures from below, as well as from neo-liberal initiatives by parties and elites. Their narrative demonstrates the disconnect between citizens and the policy-making process of partisan politics and representative democracy. Chapter 7 discusses how the parties, or more specifically the Howard administration, have attempted to deal with this disconnect in changing the way they address policy issues and govern on six policy examples.

The New Zealand experience follows the general pattern of the other two nations. The first chapter describes how the New Zealand party system quickly institutionalized itself and took on the features of mass parties. Then the parties roles started to erode in the 1970s, which the authors attribute to changes in the public and neo-liberal policy forces in the economy. The third chapter discusses the consequences of mixed member proportional (MMP) electoral reform on the parties and New Zealand governments, and how policy making has functioned in this new environment.

The case study material is rich in detail, and provides valuable summaries of the party histories of these three nations. But the result is something like watching three different theater companies perform the same Shakespeare play. The theater critic may stress the differences in presentation and style, but the fundamental story is really the same. In this case, democratic party systems developed into the mass form by the first half of the twentieth century – the author’s era of thick democracy. Then, beginning in the 1970s the parties political roles seemed to erode, producing a new pattern of thin democracy.

The final two chapters discuss the potential of and means to a democratic renewal to address the decline in strategic capacity described in this volume. Their surprising proposal to increase state capacity is to strengthen parliamentary committees as a venue for integrating political interests into coherent political programs. To this reader, the argument is unconvincing because it does not deal with the root issues, which are the weakened connection between citizens and those party officials elected to parliament. And those Western democracies with systems of strong parliamentary committees (the German Bundestag and the US Congress, for example) have not escaped the patterns described in this book.

This book grapples with one of the most important political issues of our time: how can the institutions of Western democracies that were developed for societies in the 1800s be renewed for the political realities of the twenty-first century? One of the book’s claims is that the ‘thick democracy’ of the earlier model of party government is preferable to the ‘thin democracy’ we experience today. Certainly they are different, but a strong case could be made that thick democracy was not better democracy – indeed, this is a central topic in current debates about democracy. This point has to be resolved before considering whether reform is needed, and what type of reform.

The book’s evidence is based on three nations, but the party system research literature tells the same story in virtually all advanced industrial democracies. This general pattern suggests that we look beyond the unique histories of each nation, the nature of the party system, the specific structure of government institutions or other such factors to explain the political change. But

the authors do not fully recognize this point. A broader cross-national context should guide our diagnosis of the condition of contemporary democracy and the prospects for reform. Many of the reforms proposed by the authors already exist in another contemporary democracy, which has nevertheless experienced the same processes of party erosion and complex governance described in this book.

Because the challenges facing contemporary democracies are so complex, they cannot be resolved in a single study. However, Marsh and Miller make a significant contribution to this topic with this rich study of political change in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand.

Russell J. Dalton  
University of California, Irvine

Ian Clark, *Hegemony in International Society*, Oxford University Press, 2011  
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Theories of international hegemony have been applied intermittently over recent decades, alternating between periods in which they seemed to bring the foundations of world order into sharper focus and those in which hegemonic theories appeared to lose purchase on the main world order questions – stability, peace, prosperity. Consider the halcyon days of the 1950s and 1960s, followed by widespread perceptions of American decline, the end of the cold war and the emergence of the unipolar moment, and, more recently, the rise of China and anticipation of another hegemonic transition. Over the course of these developments, the original centrality of material capabilities to theories of hegemony has given way a bit to more of an international society emphasis, including legitimacy. A preponderance of material resources, or primacy, is seen as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for hegemony.

Enter Ian Clark's third in a series of books on legitimacy, which provides a thorough reworking and expansion of this concept and how it fits with hegemony. The book is organized in a straightforward fashion: three parts each contain three chapters. Part one consists of more conceptual chapters on hegemony and IR theory, English School interpretations of hegemony, and Clark's conceptual elaboration of different institutional forms of hegemony. Part two draws three case studies from the historical record: the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe as an instance of collective hegemony, the late nineteenth-century singular hegemony under the auspices of Pax Britannica, and the post-World War II coalitional hegemony that comprised Pax Americana. Part three applies Clark's conceptual apparatus to three contemporary international governmental organizations: the United Nations Security Council, regional order in East Asia, and the climate change regime, each of which is a work in progress.

Clark begins from the premise that hegemony is an institution that is rooted in social legitimacy. It is an institution, however, that can take multiple forms – four rather than one. The familiar singular form lies at one end of a continuum representing the composition of the hegemon; the unorthodox collective form anchors the other end. A second continuum represents the scope of the hegemonic constituency, which connotes something akin to followers and which ranges from inclusive to coalitional. Rendered in 2×2 form, these two continuums yield four