

those at the top, middle and bottom of an organization will try to shift the blame elsewhere—to others at their level or up or down the chain of command. A decentralized system is one way for top officials to avoid taking the blame for the behavior of subordinates. For example, corporate boards and top executives set up corporate social responsibility and integrity systems so that if anything goes wrong, top managers can disclaim responsibility. If corporations can be criminally liable for the corrupt acts of their employees, they will create structures that protect the firm from liability, even if they do not actually deter payoffs by their employees or subcontractors. Alternatively, rather than outsourcing blame, organizations and individuals can band together so that it is difficult to figure out who is at fault. Hood cites the example of public/private partnerships (PPPs), a much-touted way to finance infrastructure or to provide services. Whatever their other merits, PPPs make it difficult to pin the blame definitively on anyone. The complex relationships between the multitude of private contractors and government agencies, although not a formal PPP, serve the same function; each part of the system is blaming the others for failures.

Third, policies can be designed and carried out with built-in blame avoidance features. Of course, designing an effective, well-working policy is one option, but it is not the only one. Others are to make evidence of failure hard to find, to avoid taking on problems with a high blame risk, to develop a set of rigid protocols, and to engage in “due diligence” *ex ante* that permits deniability *ex post*. Organizations can also seek to shift blame out of their bailiwick to others, such as customers, clients, or suppliers. This strategy sometimes can be accomplished through spin as when the Obama administration blames the Republicans in Congress for the government shutdown and vice versa. The underlying organization of the United States government encourages this strategy; it is set up to facilitate certain types of blame games, even if it was not initially designed with that goal in mind.

Hood speculates on whether blame games have intensified in recent years and shows how the alternative strategies can complement or compete with each other. One of his favorite words is “but”. He presents arguments for a growth in blaming or the complementary of various strategies, say, and then the next paragraph begins with “but” as he canvasses the counter arguments. These arguments all sound plausible, and, as he recognizes, many of the questions that he raises are empirical ones that have no clear-cut conceptual answers. Nevertheless, given his own long involvement with these issues, one would have liked to know more about his overall assessment of the current situation.

Hood does seek to evaluate the impact of the blame game in the last chapter. This is a welcome effort to move beyond taxonomy to judgment. He believes that blaming

is ubiquitous in any organization and, indeed, in any human interaction. Organizations, however, present a wider range of strategies than ordinary human interactions. Hood argues that efforts to avoid blame, on the one hand, and to uncover malfeasance or incompetence, on the other, have positive features so long as they produce constructive responses—such as the promulgation of good policies, transparency, effective partnerships, or genuine due diligence. Although one gets the sense that Hood is not overly optimistic that positive blame avoidance will trump negative blame avoidance, he ends with a set of strategies designed to produce positive effects. Presentational strategies that seek to win the argument can raise the level of public debate. Hard delegation of responsibility can help pinpoint responsibility for failures, and policies implemented through clear protocols will improve transparency. But . . .

One ends the book believing that blaming is here to stay and that it is a worrisome phenomenon. As Hood says, “once we start looking at the structure and operations of government and public services through blame-avoidance spectacles, much that would otherwise be hard to make sense of starts to come into sharper focus . . . . There is even a kind of beauty—albeit perhaps a chilling one—in blame-avoidance engineering and architecture, since it so starkly reflects a logic of design utterly different from the conventional clichés of good regulation, risk management, and organizational design” (p. 158).

In short, Hood has produced a cautionary tale for the modern welfare-regulatory state. Efforts at objective policy analysis are all very well, but officials need to consider what could go wrong—by accident or through the conscious efforts of opponents. If policies do go off the rails, reformers need to counteract finger pointing with constructive proposals, not defensive posturing that can lead to circular and counter-productive blaming.

**The People’s Post Office: The History and Politics of the Japanese Postal System, 1871–2010.** By Patricia L.

Maclachlan. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012. 378p. \$39.95.

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— T. J. Pempel, *University of California, Berkeley*

Patricia Maclachlan’s study of the Japanese postal system is a rich and engaging institutional history in the best tradition of such works. Rather than pursuing any single overarching hypothesis, the book delves deeply into the myriad facets of Japanese politics illuminated by 140 years of the postal system’s changing fortunes. Maclachlan highlights its vital role in Japan’s modernization: its changing social, economic and political contributions, particularly to Japan’s scantily populated rural areas; the

social embeddedness and political centrality of the system's 25,000 commissioned postmasters and their powerful political allies; the successful postal reform efforts led by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and his key economic adviser, Takenaka Heizo, in 2005; and post-Koizumi efforts to blunt what rear-guard opponents identified as the worst impacts of those changes. Showcased is the postal system's role in Japan's modernization, its politicization, and eventually its privatization with a continual emphasis on the ongoing manifestations of institutional "stickiness." Such stickiness allowed the "postal regime," as Maclachlan refers to it, to delay for decades any major challenges to its prevailing powers and practices. Equally highlighted are the roles played by powerful political leaders at critical junctures. And throughout the book, as the phrase "people's post office" implies, she provides a sympathetic portrait of the human ties fostered between postal officials and the citizens with whom they continually interacted.

As it was created in the early Meiji period by Maejima Hisoka, Japan's postal system was an instrument of modernization facilitating the state's successful penetration of the country's many previously insulated regions and their integration into a single, unified, Tokyo-centric nation-state. Critical to its success was the fusion of three basic services—mail delivery, a postal savings bank, and the sale of postal insurance policies. And overseeing the local post offices were commissioned postmasters, typically men of local note willing to run these services from their homes or connected offices. During the period following World War II, these postmasters became special civil servants who took on classical interest-group characteristics; they were public servants holding private interests. Organizationally, they formed a key leg in an iron postal triangle along with the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications and Japan's long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

Two key strengths were central to the long-running political power of the postmasters. Electorally, they mobilized votes for conservative politicians, a political service they could provide as the result of their deep community roots and their provision of local social services. Economically, they generated enormous and politically fungible financial resources through the postal system's extensive savings and insurance programs. At its peak in 1999, the postal savings system accounted for roughly 260 trillion yen, or one-third of the nation's total savings, and more than the four largest private banks combined. Similarly, more than five million postal life insurance policies were sold in 2001 alone. The bulk of the money generated by these programs was fed into the Fiscal Investment and Loan Program (FILP), widely identified as the nation's "second budget," and a fund capable of supporting favored off-official-budget projects.

Throughout its existence, the postal system has been a central player in some of Japan's major political clashes. One of the earliest postwar struggles centered on the brutal left–right contest between postal workers' unions, on the one hand, and the postmasters along with their government and LDP allies, on the other, a battle that was mirrored by similar unionization and anti-unionization struggles during the first two decades after the war. Subsequent political jousts mirrored the general struggles over bureaucratic turf in pitting the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications against the Ministry of Finance for control of the funds generated by the postal savings and insurance programs.

The central battle, however, and the one to which the final three chapters are devoted, centered on the various efforts at postal reform and the corresponding push-backs by postal regime loyalists since the 1990s. Tentative reform efforts began under the Hashimoto government in the late 1990s, but at the heart of the postal reform story is Koizumi, an advocate of such reform as early as his unsuccessful campaign to head the LDP in 1995. As Koizumi saw it, the postal system was rife with inefficiencies as well as political quicksand. Postal privatization, he contended, would result both in better service and in a more globally dynamic Japanese economy. Moreover, he argued, if his party, the LDP, could extricate itself from its long-standing reliance on traditional rural constituencies and become more urban and consumer friendly, its longer-term electoral fortunes would be greatly enhanced.

Koizumi's creative political and tactical leadership was central to the passage of Japan's extensive postal privatization legislation in 2005. Astute manipulation of the media and his deft utilization of a number of administrative changes that had strengthened the powers of the Cabinet and the Office of the Prime Minister enabled him to flout longtime LDP party conventions. Throughout the reform process, he proved astute at outflanking the phalanx of old-guard opponents within his own party, who were continually torn between their desire to impede his reform efforts and their awareness that continuing to burnish Koizumi's pro-reform image was vital to the electoral fortunes of the party.

In the end, Koizumi succeeded with most of his reforms after calling a snap election that denied LDP party recognition of his reform opponents, large numbers of whom were replaced by a cadre of new LDP parliamentarians who were typically younger, more media savvy, and unshakably loyal to his reform agenda. Not surprisingly, however, once Koizumi departed as prime minister, there was considerable pushback from the not-quite-dead postal regime led sequentially by Koizumi's LDP successor, Abe Shinzo, in his crony-riven first administration and, ironically, by the notionally

liberal and urban Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government (2009–12), which took power from the LDP in part through its embrace of the most hard-core opponents of reform.

These recent struggles over postal privatization in Japan mirror the much broader debates that have engulfed the country since the early 1990s. To what extent can and should Japan alter its long-standing political economy? What is the ideal balance between economic efficiency and social cohesion; between globalization and “rich national customs”; and between a politics of protection and a politics of risk? Maclachlan herself reflects these tensions. She shows an almost equal admiration for the political skills of Koizumi the reformer and the dying breed of postmasters he defeated, many of whom she knows and for whom she has an unmistakable empathy. As she writes: “The postal services may have produced economic inefficiencies that are the bane of classical economists, but they did much to enhance the social wellbeing of the Japanese people” (p. 148).

*The People’s Post Office*, therefore, is an extremely well-wrought study that will be of considerable value not only to students of Japan but to any political scientist concerned about the skills of political leaders as well as the painful trade-offs of Schumpeterian “creative destruction.”

**Voice and Vote: Decentralization and Participation in Post-Fujimori Peru.** By Stephanie L. McNulty. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011. 224p. \$65.00 cloth, \$21.95 paper.

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— Maxwell A. Cameron, *The University of British Columbia*

A revolution in participation is sweeping Latin America. From community councils in Venezuela to participatory budgeting in major cities in Brazil and indigenous self-governance in Bolivia, institutions for participatory democracy are being adopted and put into practice, and in some cases, like Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela, enshrined in new constitutions. Within this dynamic landscape, Peru stands out as an early pioneer of participatory governance, but a laggard in implementation. On this point, Stephanie L. McNulty makes an important and nuanced contribution to our understanding by refocusing attention on the subnational level. In *Voice and Vote*, she documents how the process of decentralization in Peru has been accompanied by a remarkable experiment in participatory budgeting. She also analyzes less successful efforts to create Regional Coordination Councils (Consejos de Coordinación Regional, or CCRs) designed to link mayors and elected civil-society representatives in order to undertake regional development plans and budgets. These she calls participatory decentralizing reforms.

McNulty argues that following the crisis induced by the collapse of President Alberto Fujimori’s authoritarian rule in 2000, the newly elected democratic government of Alejandro Toledo gave new impetus to a process of decentralization that had begun earlier, in the 1980s, but with a twist: Democracy at the regional level would be reinforced through participatory innovations. With surprisingly little contention, and with the backing of the powerful Ministry of Finance, a push was made to encourage participatory budgeting as a way of promoting accountability and transparency at the local level. The CCRs were more controversial, and the debate around them more politicized, because key politicians opposed giving more power to civil society. Yet both innovations were incorporated into constitutional reforms in 2002, and were subsequently set out in implementing legislation. Much of *Voice and Vote* is devoted to explaining how these particular institutions emerged, why participatory budgeting was more successfully adopted than CCRs, which are weak and ineffective in most regions, and what accounts for variation across six of the major regions of Peru. The book concludes with a recommendation for advancing participatory decentralizing reforms.

I will spoil the suspense—but not, I hope, the inclination to read the book—by giving away the main findings: Strongly supportive regional leadership combined with coherent civil society organizations seem to have been crucial to the success of participatory decentralizing reforms in Peru. The success stories are Lambayeque and Cusco, while Ayacucho and Loreto are classified as unsuccessful; Moquegua and Cajamarca are moderately successful intermediate cases (p. 120). Experts on Peru will detect no obvious pattern in these pairings, which do not line up well in terms of the most obviously relevant socioeconomic or political factors, such as income levels, the size of regional investment budgets, levels of per capita spending, party politics, or other historical and social conditions. They do, however, align closely with the support of regional presidents for participatory institutions and with a well-organized and collaborative regional civil society. Compared with Robert D. Putnam’s *Making Democracy Work* (1993), this is an optimistic book in that it suggests that a virtuous circle leading to more participatory governance is possible when leadership interacts with a collaborative and organized civil society, despite substantial variation in historical tendencies to form civic organizations.

It is, perhaps, both a strength and a weakness of the book that it seeks to explain the “success” of the reforms on their own terms. Success is always difficult to define, and some readers may object to the decision to focus on such criteria as the number of meetings, level of attendance, and the gain of new powers over time to assess the success of CCRs. By the same token, the success of participatory budgeting is measured according to whether regional governments followed the methodology