

SUMMARIES

Thirty Years of Political Science: Themes and Books

by Gianfranco Pasquino

This article offers a perspective on the three major themes of political science in the past thirty years. The three themes are identified as comparative politics, political development (and, later, democratisation), institutional analysis. Through an identification of the most important books published in the three major areas, the author also tries to show how in its thirty years of life the «Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica» covered the various topics and contributed to their exploration and diffusion. Evaluating the advances made in the field of political science and taking into consideration the challenge posed by rational choice theory, the author comes to two critical conclusions. In the first place, too often the discipline and its practitioners seem to be unwilling, but perhaps also unable to build upon previous contributions. This is especially evident when analysing democratisation studies that do not make use of the knowledge produced by development studies. Therefore, no cumulability of knowledge follows. In the second place, it is also too often the case that scholars do not attempt to replicate previously important studies. As a consequence, their own contributions appear less significant and less convincing. In sum, the discipline as a whole remains divided and disjointed in a less than profitable way.

Democratization in Southeastern Europe: theoretical considerations and political trends

by P. Nikiforos Diamandouros e F. Stephen Larrabee

The article has two main goals: first, to place Southeastern Europe within the broader, comparative context of democratization studies and to assess the region's prospects for democratic consolidation.

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tion. Its second goal is to contribute to the theoretical debate concerning the conditions of democratic consolidation, by pointing to the significance of macrohistorical factors, such as the long-term legacy of state-society relations, for the consolidation of democracy. In pursuit of that second goal, the article engages in an interregional comparison, involving East-Central and Southeastern Europe, whose main thrust is to identify the legacies in state-society relations created by the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires respectively and to examine their impact on the two regions' democratization processes. The article concludes that these imperial legacies combined with different types of post-totalitarian regimes (early post-totalitarianism in the case of Southeastern Europe, mature or frozen in East-Central Europe) produce distinctly different democratization trajectories affecting the prospects for democratic consolidation in each region.

Undecided Voters, Floating Voters: What is the Face of the Vote Balance Holders? The Italian and French Cases

By Mauro Barisione

In a roughly bipolar political system, the national election outcomes often depend on the behavior of a minority of «marginal» voters who make their decisions at the very moment of voting and/or choose a candidate who belongs to the opposite political camp with respect to their previous choice. These segments of the electoral market are the natural target of political strategists and campaigners, whose goal is to reach and persuade a majority of potential voters using an essentially media-based communications strategy. This article inquires into the attitudes of marginal voters towards politics, their ideological beliefs, as well as their basic sociological features. After drawing the portrait of a citizen who seems mostly apathetic towards the political process, the author discusses the implications of this empirical evidence in relation to the individual logic of voting. In order to explain the electoral choice of marginal voters, the author sketches the theoretical outlines of a new «impressionist» hypothesis as a viable alternative to the traditional explanatory models of electoral behavior based either on «determinist» or on «rationalist» assumptions. The empirical analysis focused on 1996 Italian and 1997 French national elections.

Veto Players and the Executive-Legislative Interaction: the Italian Case

by Francesco Zucchini

Most studies of the Italian parliament during the so called First Republic try to explain the permanent characteristics of legislative output. Scholars trying to account for the change usually interpret it as the complete fulfilment of structural factors operating since the beginning of the Italian Republic. Both explanations of the general characteristics of law-making and explanations of the law-making change along the years seem quite puzzling. For instance, if the political polarization among the main parties are to explain the lack of great reforms and substantive policy changes, why does the executive find it more difficult to pass its legislation exactly when polarization and mistrust are presumed to decrease? If the high rate of consensus in passing the bills is an effect of cultural attitudes of Italian political élites towards agreement (if not collusion), why can one find the same phenomenon during some periods in other political systems such as the United States, presumably culturally different from Italy? In this article the author partially modifies the Veto Players Model, introduced by Tsebelis in 1995, to give an interpretation of Italian law-making change. Applying rational choice theory to the analysis of institutions, the author shifts the attention to decisional rules and their effects. The parliamentary party fragmentation and the depolarization process seem the crucial explanatory variables, no matter how many actors participate in the government coalition. The depolarization process seems to play a counterintuitive role because of the lack of executive agenda power.