



Ursula J. van Beek. *Democracy under scrutiny: Elites, citizens, cultures.* Ridgebrook: Barbara Budrich Verlag, 2010. 334 S. \$52.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-86649-306-3.



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U. van Beek (Hrsg.): Democracy under scrutiny

Based on a cross-country evaluation this volume makes a major contribution to what could be labelled comparative consolidation of democracy literature. Edited by Ursula J. van Beek, head of Transformation Research at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, and a fellow at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS), the volume analyses democracy, civil cultures and values in South Africa, South Korea, Chile, Poland, Turkey, Germany and Sweden, that is a far-flung range of countries which usually is treated by different disciplines and separated area studies.

The volume's theme is framed by three chapters on cultural values and democracy (by the editor herself), civil culture, citizenship and the quality of democracy (Edmund Wnuk-Lipinski, Collegium Civitas, Warsaw) and the quality of young democracies from a constitutional perspective (Bernard Lategan, STIAS). Analysis of all seven empirical case studies contributions focuses on a productive tension between elite values and public or civil political culture. A concluding comparison is provided by Pierre du Toit (Stellenbosch University).

Three groups and their value orientations are at the

core of this volume: political elites in the form of parliamentarians, media elites (read: journalists) and ordinary citizens. The shared key assumption is that the more closed the convergence of democratic values between these groups is, the greater the potential for the strengthening of those democratic values and the quality of democracy in general (p. 15). The study has been conducted by the Transformation Research Initiative, based at Stellenbosch University. see (31.03.2011). The data for the case studies is based on the World Value Survey series 2005-2007 (WVS). From a perspective of historical institutionalism van Beek's own chapter addresses the stunning difference in outcome in two countries which share Protestant Reformation and Lutheranism as the common point of departure but which took very different routes to democracy, Sweden and Germany. The former developed inclusive identity-forming images, the latter an exclusive ethnic nationalism which ultimately led to Nazi-rule. In his part on the emergence of a particular civic culture Wnuk-Lipinski takes up the general argument of the importance of religious traditions, assuming that processes of secularisation do not invalidate dominant religious values. And in the last part of the theory bloc, Late-

gan is interested in the question whether a constitution can be taken as an indicator of the quality of democracy (p. 19).

In the empirical chapters sub-sets of variables are analysed with a view to all seven countries. The late Thorleif Petterson (Dept. of Theology and Sociology of Religion, University of Uppsala) compares the issue of elite-mass congruence in old and new democracies Simon Moritz (Dept. of Political Studies, Bamberg University) is looking into the link between the performance of a democracy and the support it enjoys. With a focus on economic crises and government performance Ursula Hoffmann-Lange (Faculty of Social Sciences, Bamberg University) reassesses the concept of cleavage. Using a great variety of indicators Dirk Berg-Schlosser (Marburg University, Germany) adds to this topic by looking into institutional effectiveness and the quality of governance, policy orientation and socio-economic performance. The nexus between religiosity and secularism is addressed by Yilmaz Esmer (Dept. of Political Science and International Relations, Bahcesehir University, Istanbul) who also serves on the WVS Executive Committee. In their chapter on cultural diversity Hennie Kotz and Pierre du Toit (both Dept. of Political Science, Stellenbosch University) by and large confirm the assumption that across the seven countries religious people will correlate more with intolerance of moral pluralism, while secular people will be more inclined to tolerate those who do not subscribe to their own moral codes (p. 25). And finally Sang-Jin Han (Dept. of Sociology, Seoul National University) discusses the link between political communication

and democracy consolidation.

In his conclusion, du Toit sums up that Sweden and Germany consistently outclass all the other cases in terms of approximating high-quality democracy (p. 297). The other cases vary in being closer or further removed from the ideal in terms of a large number of indicators, with no clear overall pattern emerging as to which of these countries is closest to the bottom outlier of quality (ibid.). Overall, the cases studies are secondly taken as confirmation for path dependencies on the way to democracy. And thirdly, the volumes make a strong claim that socio-economic development plays a major role in shaping attitudes towards democracy.

While intuitively the overall findings may not come as a major surprise, the empirical analysis still had to be carried out to reach these conclusions. The analysis thus enables the social sciences to re-assess some of the perceived and received wisdom from democracy research. The balanced discussion of values, concepts of democracy and elite-citizen relationships in this volume also represents a welcome departure from some of the conceptual Eurocentrism the World Value Survey series project for a long time was struggling with (for instance with regard to essentialising notions of culture etc.). As few others social science methods, the series demonstrates the challenges of comparative analysis which aims at universalist claims in a world where asynchronous processes of globalisation do not lead to homogenisation, and where cultural diversity and values can only be conceptualised as contingent.

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