RESEARCH IN URBAN POLICY

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BUZZ AS CHARISMA, CREATIVITY, AND GLAMOUR; NEW SOURCES
OF POLITICAL LEGITIMACY
SUPPLEMENTING VOTING, AND
CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Terry Nichols Clark and Filipe Carreira da Silva

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the idea that democratic political legitimacy can
emerge by other means than voting or citizen participation. Beyond these
conventional methods of building legitimacy, we contend that alternative
modes are emerging all over the world. Among these emergent forms are
a wide range of policies, from China's economic growth to Bogotá's use
of pantomime street crossing guards, replacing corrupt traffic police.
Matched to their context, these policies may enhance political legitimacy.
Particularly in locations with weak traditions of citizen participation,
exploring alternatives to classic Tocquevillian participation may have
more impact. Examining some major successes can illuminate alternative
dynamics. We thus feature some specific non-Tocquevillian policies to open consideration of options.

Keywords: Legitimacy; participation; comparative politics; government; public policy

GENERAL SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND: THE RISE OF THE NEW POLITICAL CULTURE

For centuries, leaders and their counselors have used nonparticipatory activities to seek to build legitimacy. The Roman circuses and cooptation policies were theorized by Machiavelli. Military parades on national holidays are classic around the world. But in recent decades, consciousness and discussion of political differences have increased, helped by more direct comparisons via television, travel, and new media. World courts are punishing national leaders who violate global justice standards.

But what is justice? Globalization can enhance recognition of and expansion of local differences. The League of Women Voters thought that it was a moral duty to vote, but many Chinese do not. All this can raise our consciousness about alternative ways of governing, some more and others less democratically. How can we codify these developments? Since 1982, the Fiscal Austerity and Urban Innovation (FAUI) project has surveyed over 10,000 local governments in some 35 countries. It has documented major political transformations across the world, including value shifts away from class politics and clientelism. These classic political rules have been challenged by a New Political Culture (NPC). Its new style of politics is the cumulative combination of many previous social changes, some mutually contradictory in terms of the traditional class political model; e.g., the last decades have seen moves (1) toward social liberalism (captured by Ronald Inglehart’s indexes and other items) and (2) toward fiscal conservatism or, at least, resistance to taxes. How these two apparently contradictory policies have been joined is a critical issue that the NPC analysis has been detailing. What drives the shift toward the NPC? Clark and Ronald Inglehart identify 22 specific propositions, which fall under three general ideas: hierarchy, empowerment, and structural conditions (Clark & Hoffmann-Martintot, 1998: 36 ff.). Clark and Inglehart suggest seven general elements to distinguish this NPC from traditional class politics: (1) the classic left-right dimension has been transformed; (2) social and fiscal/economic issues are explicitly distinguished; (3) social issues have risen in salience relative to fiscal/economic issues; (4) market individualism and social individualism grow; (5) questioning the welfare state (national governments seem to be losing much of their legitimacy as federalism and regionalism claim new converts); (6) the rise of issue politics and broader citizen participation, alongside the decline of hierarchical political organizations; (7) these NPC views are more pervasive among younger, more educated and affluent individuals, and societies (Clark & Hoffmann-Martintot, 1998, pp. 10–13).

Two of these defining elements of NPC are particularly connected to the new forms of legitimacy discussed here. We refer to (1) “social issues have risen in salience relative to fiscal/economic issues” and (2) the “rise of issue politics and broader citizen participation.” As we will show, if one takes a global view on these general changes in political culture and combines these with detailed local analyses of change, a compelling case emerges for one to discard, or seriously qualify, the power of the orthodox Tocqueville/Putnam model which holds that political participation through formal associations builds legitimacy. The alternative points rather to new forms of leadership and legitimacy that are not only more globally widespread than the New England Tocqueville/Putnam political model, but are also more in tune with the emergent forms of political culture in the past few decades. To sum up, on the one hand, one finds more individualism, consumerism, entertainment, and amenities as globalization, the Internet, and market capitalism reach more and more people around the world; on the other hand, one watches the decline of clientelism, hierarchy, and class politics. At the same time, new models of political leadership and legitimacy are needed that overcome the Anglo-Saxon bias of the prevalent Tocqueville/Putnam proposal.

UPDATING WEBER: THEORIZING LEGITIMACY THROUGH THE “THEORY OF SCENES”

Music, art, and theater critics have long invoked “scenes,” but social scientists have barely addressed the concept (Blum began). Silver, Clark, and Rothfield suggested a “theory of scenes” as elements of urban/neighborhood life; scenes have since grown into an international approach to studying contexts more coherently. Scenes have risen in salience as analysts recognize that jobs and distance explain less, and amenities and lifestyle are critical elements driving economic development and migration.