

## Notes from the Editor

In my "Notes" in the March 2002 issue, I announced several modifications that we have introduced into the *APSR's* review process. Here I will simply refer again to two new procedures that are included in our "Instructions to Contributors"; I highlight these, not because they are the most important of the new procedures, but because they seem to have escaped the notice of many authors. First, when you submit a paper to the *APSR*, you are also invited to suggest the names of appropriate reviewers. Of course, we do not guarantee that we will follow your suggestions, but so far we have found these suggestions quite helpful. A second, and more mundane, instruction is to submit an electronic (i.e., diskette), anonymous version of your manuscript along with the requisite number of paper copies; having an electronic version on hand can greatly expedite the review process in certain circumstances.

It has not been all that many years ago that, after submitting a paper to a journal, an author could expect to wait six months, a year, or even longer before hearing back about the paper's fate. Times have changed, and authors now quite reasonably expect faster service. The brutal fact is that the news they receive is generally bad, for the great majority of the decision letters that I write (something like 9 out of every 10) are rejection letters. Receiving bad news is doubly painful when one has been kept waiting for it for an inordinately long time. Accordingly, we are working hard to try to make the review process move along in a timely manner. Inevitably, some manuscripts get bogged down, but for the most part our efforts, and of course those of the scholars from whom we solicit reviews, seem to be paying off. So far, from the day a paper arrives in our office until the day my decision letter goes into the mail, the median elapsed time has been just 39 working days.

### IN THIS ISSUE

The March 2002 issue, the first to bear my imprint, was really more Ada Finifter's than mine, for almost all the articles in that issue were in advanced stages of the review process when I assumed the editorship. Of the articles in the current issue, half were submitted to, and revised at the invitation of, my predecessor. Future issues can be expected to contain an occasional article on which a significant portion of the decision making preceded me, but for the most part the credit or blame (depending on one's perspective) for future issues should be directed at me.

In this respect, I am delighted to report that a number of papers are in the queue that are, in my estimation, not only truly interesting and important but also refreshingly diverse in terms of subject matter and analytic approach. Please stay tuned.

In the lead article in this issue, Paul Stern poses a question of special interest to political theorists but of much broader interest as well: What is the connection between politics and philosophy? In "The Philosophic Importance of Political Life: On the 'Digression' in

Plato's *Theaetetus*," Stern turns for guidance to a wholly unexpected source: a Platonic dialogue well known to philosophers but less so to students of politics, and more specifically to a passage in the *Theaetetus* that was identified by Socrates himself as a digression and has been regarded as such ever after. Stern's accomplishment, as one of the *APSR's* reviewers summarized it, is to show that a passage long dismissed as an irrelevant digression "is in fact a rosetta stone" for understanding the interwoven relationship between politics and philosophy. While many interpretations of ancient texts are congenial only to a certain school of thought (Straussian, liberal, postmodern, or whatever), Stern's interpretation can be appreciated by theorists of various persuasions. No less importantly, it is important enough to command the attention of, and accessible enough to be understood by, nonspecialists as well. Even those who have never even heard of the *Theaetetus* and who now remember Plato only dimly, if at all, will find their understanding of politics and political science enriched by Stern's essay.

Two articles in this issue focus on the courts. According to the conventional view, only an independent judiciary can serve effectively as check and balance on the operation of the other branches of government. Although this view is virtually taken for granted in the United States, Gretchen Helmke questions its applicability to other contexts, and in particular to developing democracies. In "The Logic of Strategic Defection: Court-Executive Relations in Argentina Under Dictatorship and Democracy," Helmke contends that it is not judicial independence but the lack thereof that leads judges to turn against a government whose future looks insecure. Focusing on the Argentine case, Helmke integrates this previously overlooked factor into accounts of the calculus of judicial decision making, and in so doing addresses larger issues of judicial legitimacy, institutional design, and the strength of democratic institutions in developing democracies.

While Helmke's mission is to call a widely held idea about the courts into question, Mark Richards and Herbert Kritzer set out to rehabilitate a traditional notion that has fallen into some disfavor and disuse: the idea that judges' decisions are strongly influenced by law and precedent. With the rise of the "attitudinal model," judges' ideological perspectives and policy preferences have come to the fore in analyses of judicial decision making, and judges' understandings of the law sometimes seem to matter hardly at all. By contrast, in "Jurisprudential Regimes in Supreme Court Decision Making" Richards and Kritzer outline and test a law-and-precedent based account. In the process, they suggest a new way, manifested by the concept of "jurisprudential regimes," of thinking about how legal precedents shape the decisions of America's highest court.

The next two articles in this issue focus on the bureaucratic sector—and more specifically, on why bureaucracies are so, well, bureaucratic. Bureaucracies

are reviled in every corner of the globe and from every ideological direction, though for altogether different (and sometimes contradictory) reasons. The image of bureaucracy that motivates Rui de Figueiredo's "Electoral Competition, Political Uncertainty, and Policy Insulation" is that of unresponsiveness. In this article, Figueiredo challenges the widely held view that political uncertainty motivates elected officials to insulate agencies from outside pressures and political opponents. Supplementing the tools of formal modeling with illustrative case studies, Figueiredo illuminates the limits of the uncertainty-based approach and posits new ways of understanding bureaucracies and their foibles.

Unresponsiveness, the face of bureaucracy examined by Figueiredo, is one thing. Death and destruction, the subject matter of William Weaver and Thomas Longoria's analysis of bureaucracy, are something else again. In "Bureaucracy That Kills: Federal Sovereign Immunity and the Discretionary Function Exception," Weaver and Longoria focus on a seemingly innocuous but potentially lethal provision of the Federal Tort Claims Act, the "discretionary function exception." The authors trace numerous cases of damage, injury, and death to this provision, which they unflinchingly characterize as "an anachronism sandwiched into an ideal" that is "at war with justice." Following an historical review of the normative and legal issues concerning sovereign immunity, Weaver and Longoria use data drawn from hundreds of federal circuit court decisions to buttress their historical-legal interpretation. Their article can be read as a case study in what Hannah Arendt called "the banality of evil," and their conclusions have important implications concerning the operation of judicial oversight of government agencies and the achievement of justice.

A much more upbeat message about the effects of governmental policies and programs is conveyed by Suzanne Mettler in "Bringing the State Back In to Civic Engagement: Policy Feedback Effects of the G.I. Bill for World War II Veterans." The "golden age" of civic engagement in the United States was the post-World War II era, when millions of Americans were direct beneficiaries of massive government social programs—most notably, the G.I. Bill. Could it be, Mettler wonders, that such programs helped foster civic engagement by enhancing their beneficiaries' senses of belongingness or reciprocity? Mettler not only presents a close, multimethod analysis of the long-term impact of the G.I. Bill on citizen participation, but does so within a framework that should open up opportunities for parallel analyses of the effects of other government programs in other contexts.

Among students of American politics, debate rages about the role of party in legislative politics, with one side portraying legislators as self-interested actors whose behavior is affected only incidentally by partisanship, and the other viewing parties as an important, or even a central, influence on the behavior of legislators. The normal focus of this debate is Congress. However, in "The Influence of Party: Evidence from the State Legislatures," Gerald Wright and

Brian Schaffner change the venue to state legislatures, following the often-heard but seldom-observed recommendation to treat states as "laboratories" or empirical testing grounds. Using what students of comparative politics will recognize as a "most similar systems" design, Wright and Schaffner match two neighboring states, Kansas and Nebraska, which have many features in common and a great difference as well: Nebraska's legislature, unlike its counterpart in Kansas, is nonpartisan. What Wright and Schaffner discover about the ideological structure of the two legislatures speaks directly to a scholarly controversy that has proven difficult to resolve when attention is confined to Congress, but also speaks more broadly to ongoing public debates about the role of parties in democratic systems.

Completing the institutional focus of the articles published in this issue is Kim Fridkin Kahn and Patrick Kenney's analysis of the outputs of the "fourth branch of government," the press. Over the course of the twentieth century, the norm of "objective" news coverage of political campaigns and controversies gradually diffused. Nonetheless, many politicians, pundits, journalists, and members of the general public continue to lambaste the media, not for taking strong political stands per se, but for permitting their political preferences to shape their news coverage. Such criticism of the media poses a direct challenge to what is supposed to be a saving grace of modern journalism, the "wall of separation" between news and editorial content. How high is that wall? That is the question that Kahn and Kenney ask in "The Slant of the News: How Editorial Endorsements Influence Campaign Coverage and Citizens' Views of Candidates," a calm attempt to address a heated issue that divides critics and defenders of the media. In addition to providing content-analytic evidence that weighs heavily on one side of the debate, Kahn and Kenney introduce survey-based evidence that their answer matters in terms of election outcomes.

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