Book reviews

Benjamin Reilly and Per Nordlund (eds), *Political parties in conflict-prone societies: Regulation, engineering and democratic development* (2008). Tokyo: United Nations University Press. USD35.00 (hbk), xiii + 325 pp. ISBN 9789280811575.

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Readers of *Party Politics* – whether they study advanced democracies, developing democracies or non-democracies – will learn much from this book. Although ostensibly about 'conflict-prone' societies, it explores the contrasting functions of party system aggregation and articulation at greater length than any book I know. Although a collection of essays, the individual contributions are tightly integrated. They not only reference one another but actually build upon others' analyses and findings.

Often an edited volume issues from contributors who never meet to discuss their topic. Not so in this case. Most, if not all, of the contributors gathered at The Hague in 2006 to report research before outside scholars and met again in Sydney in 2007 to work on the book manuscript. Full disclosure: I was an outside scholar at The Hague conference but had no hand in writing the manuscript.

Unlike most edited volumes, this one reads like a book. As stated in Benjamin Reilly's 'Introduction', the common theme focuses on 'the different regulatory and engineering strategies and innovations that have been applied in fragile democracies' (p. 5). (In a nutshell, 'engineering' involves designing a desired party system from scratch or creating a new electoral system to guide parties' representation and operation, while 'regulation' prescribes rules for parties in an established system.) Per Nordlund's 'Conclusion' aptly describes the collected efforts as seeking 'a balanced position on how much engineering and regulation can be imposed on the free formation of parties in the name of more effective party system development and strengthened democracy' (p. 296).

The 13 chapters between the Introduction and Conclusion focus on 'new democracies that contain ethnic, religious, linguistic, regional or other significant social cleavages' (p. 5). They cover most of the main regions of the world, including South-East Asia, Southern and East Africa, Eastern and Central Europe, Latin America and Oceania. Because social cleavages also prevail in Western nations, efforts to engineer and regulate parties should interest party scholars generally.

Matthijs Bogaards' essay outlines three basic ways that parties can organize: 'They can aggregate socio-cultural divisions, articulate ethnic differences or organize on other bases, thereby blocking the political organization of socio-cultural cleavages' (p. 48). In designing party systems and regulating parties, 'the choice is between interventions (through engineering or regulation) that promote the functions of aggregation, articulation or blocking'.

The terms 'aggregation', 'articulation' and 'blocking' are invoked repeatedly in the book. Denis Kadima says: 'The aggregation function refers to mechanisms aimed at encouraging the emergence of parties across social cleavages; the articulation function ensures that the various social cleavages are represented in the representative institutions in proportion to their respective sizes; and the blocking function simply discourages or bans ethnic parties' (p. 204).

Western nations may block social interests by banning anti-democratic parties, but blocking is far more prevalent in conflict-prone societies. Florian Bieber reviews electoral mechanisms to block minority political representation in Central and South-Eastern Europe, and Bogaards counts 22 African countries that ban ethnic parties (p. 58). For example, Krishna Kumar and Jeroen de Zeeuw report that the Rwandan constitution prohibits political parties based 'on race, ethnic group, tribe, clan, region, sex, religion, or any other division which may give rise to discrimination' (p. 270). What is left for parties to represent?

This question reflects the book's extensive and unique discussion of articulation (to clearly express a political interest) and aggregation (to collect and balance different, often conflicting, interests) by political parties. Almond and Coleman (1960) contended that non-governmental organizations typically articulate interests, while political parties aggregate interests – but said the distinction is fluid. Parties, such as Green Parties, can certainly articulate interests.

Western party scholars usually pay lip service to party articulation while focusing on aggregation. Creating political systems with broadly aggregative parties is a common goal of international aid organizations. For example, a 100-page UN party 'Handbook' states that parties 'aggregate interests' but does not mention their role in articulating interests (Democratic Governance Group, 2006: 9). In contrast, this book gives party articulation equal billing with party aggregation – particularly in giving voice to ethnic groups.

Of the regions studied, Latin America seems least troubled by purely ethnic conflict. Matthias Catón and Fernando Tuesta Soldevilla write: 'The most common conflict is a socio-economic one that overlaps with ethnic dimensions' (p. 131). However, Jóhanna Kristín Birnir, speaking about both Latin America and Central Europe, says that rules against ethnic representation 'provoke the ethnic minority group and contribution to conflict' (p. 162). Henry Okole describes the special situation in Papua New Guinea, in which ethnicity does not figure in party politics at the national level but does in electoral politics at the local level.

Other authors speak about ethnic politics in other regions. In South-East Asian nations, Allen Hicken notes, most states 'have opted for institutions and regulations consistent with aggregative goals' (p. 74). Although discriminating against ethnic groups, these rules, in Hicken's judgment, generally produce 'democratic stability in the presence of societal divides' or accelerate 'the pace of party system institutionalizations'.

Similarly, Kadima contends that in Southern and East Africa 'regulations have undoubtedly contributed to the containment of extremist ethno-regional policies and allowed for a degree of inclusion of ethnic minorities in the political system' (p. 201). And Bieber and Bogaards are cited above for blocking minorities in Central and East Europe and ethnic groups in Africa.

Can engineering party systems or regulating parties produce desired results? Although Ingrid van Biezen recognizes the growing tendency to regulate parties as 'public utilities', she says: 'The broader relevance of party regulation as a contributor to the healthy functioning of democracy remains ambiguous' (p. 43). Iain McMenamin worries that party regulations in 'societies where the only potential social anchor is ethnicity' may destroy the social roots of political parties. 'Thus, policy makers should be aware that they might not be able to achieve institutionalized non-ethnic parties' (p. 238). Such un-intended consequences of regulation are raised by several writers.

Vicky Randall cites countries (Cyprus, Lebanon, Cambodia) where neither engineering nor regulation were likely to help after civil war. However, regulations seem to have desired effects in Indonesia and Turkey – but not in Nigeria and Thailand. 'More generally, where party regulations designed to encourage the formation or large aggregative parties are successful ... the chances for particular, perhaps minority or disadvantaged, communities to make themselves heard must inevitably be reduced' (p. 257).

I recommend this informative volume to anyone studying relationships between societies and political parties.

References

Almond GA and Coleman JS (eds) (1960) *The Politics of the Developing Areas*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Democratic Governance Group (2006) *A Handbook of Working with Political Parties*. New York: United Nations Bureau for Development Policy, United Nations Development Programme.

Amanda Bittner, *Platform or personality? The role of party leaders in elections* (2010). Oxford: Oxford University Press. £47.00 (hbk), 224 pp. ISBN 9780199595365.

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There has been widespread reticence among electoral behaviour scholars to take leaders seriously. In properly functioning democracies it is often considered that electors make their choices at the ballot box on the basis of party platforms and issues rather than take leaders as a heuristic, with the latter synonymous with low quality decision-making. These implicit assumptions have been aided by the fact that existing research on the topic has largely focused on single-case studies, thus making it impossible to form generalizations on the role of leaders in elections. It has, therefore, been difficult to understand the