

Modernization and Politics

Jeffrey C. Isaac

Modernity and modernization have been central themes of social science at least since the writings of Max Weber at the turn of the 20th century. In his classic “Science as a Vocation (1917),” Weber wrote that: “The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world.’” These words have been the topic of much interpretive disagreement. What is not in doubt is that Weber saw that modern society was characterized by the global development and spread of scientific knowledge and technological rationality. Modernity heralded at once the increasing specialization and differentiation of social life and an aspiration to regulate and control this increasing diversity. The relationship between “modernization” in general, and politics has preoccupied scholars for decades. Some have claimed that modern social and economic change brings in its wake the rationalization, modernization, and perhaps the liberalization of the state. Others have questioned this expectation. Much of contemporary political science can be seen as an extended contribution to this conversation. And the articles contained in this issue of *Perspectives* can similarly be seen as discussions of the complex political ramifications of modern social and cultural change.

Our first two articles address a theme of growing importance in comparative politics—the strategies, tactics, and political technologies whereby authoritarian regimes constrain, channel, and coopt oppositional politics.

Calvert W. Jones, in “Seeing Like an Autocrat: Liberal Social Engineering in an Illiberal State,” analyzes the reasons why Gulf state elites promote policies of social, economic, and educational modernization that promise some liberalization of their profoundly illiberal societies. As she writes: “In the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other Persian Gulf monarchies, recent state efforts to shape hearts and minds conform, incongruously, to liberal ideals of character . . . liberal social engineering in the UAE is a particularly striking or ‘muscle-bound’ manifestation of a broader phenomenon. In its exuberance, it suggests a mutated form of ‘high modernism,’ displaying the classic self-confidence about the state’s ability to foster progress and redirect human nature through top-down social engineering that James Scott famously identified with

high modernist ideology. Yet this high modernism is a curious amalgam of Western-style liberal culture, neo-liberal enlightenment, and continued authoritarianism, and so it stands apart from the types of authoritarian social engineering that Scott investigated. It therefore deserves careful analysis.” Jones adopts an interpretive approach, drawing on “extensive palace-based ethnography and interviews with ruling elites, including several with a ruling monarch” to offer a “look into the ‘black box’ of autocratic reasoning.” While she does not disparage dominant “rationalist” approaches to the study of authoritarianism, she insists that “the ethnographic evidence suggests that the reasoning behind such ‘rational’ planning is better explained by ruling elites’ emotional investment in a certain stylized idea of the West than a detached consideration of costs and benefits for themselves . . . Thus, instead of the sophisticated calculations about political survival emphasized in recent work on autocratic liberalization, I stress memory and emotion linked to the West as important influences over reasoning, fostering an eccentric, high modernist-like desire to impose a liberal culture purged of politics.” (For another discussion of the relationship between “modernism” and state-building, see Don Herzog’s Undisciplined review of historian Jonathan Israel’s *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from The Rights of Man to Robespierre*.)

In recent years the social and political ramifications of the new digital and social media technologies have been a major source of debate (we have featured two Critical Dialogues on this topic: A December 2011 dialogue between Phillip Howard, *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Information Technology and Political Islam* and Evgeny Morozov’s *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, and between Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg’s *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*, and Sidney Tarrow, *Revolutions in Words, 1688–2012*). On the one hand, it is clear that these technologies often play an important role in empowering citizens and facilitating the mobilization of political oppositions. On the other, it is clear that the oppositional uses of these technologies are often frustrated by political incumbents employing a complex repertoire of power-maintaining

tactics. Seva Gunitsky's "Corrupting the Cyber-Commons: Social Media as a Tool of Autocratic Stability" argues exactly what its title suggests: "elites in autocratic and hybrid regimes have increasingly begun to subvert social media for their own purposes and employing it as a tool of regime stability. . . . Namely, social media has enabled non-democratic incumbents to safely gather previously hidden or falsified information about public grievances, to increase the transparency of the performance of local officials, to bolster regime legitimacy by shaping public discourse, and to enhance the mobilization of their support base. . . . The opposite of internet freedom, therefore, is not necessarily internet censorship but a deceptive blend of control, co-option, and manipulation."

Like many scholars writing about "competitive authoritarianism" and even more full-blown authoritarianism, Gunitsky—who discusses a range of countries, including Russia, China, Syria, Iran, and Bahrain—acknowledges the importance of the openings made possible by new forms of "modular" communication. At the same time, she points out that these openings are as likely to be cooptive as they are to be democratizing: "The use of social media thus creates the potential for a low-level equilibrium trap: it does improve the range of possible discourse, allows people to call attention to social problems, gives them a greater sense of freedom, and may even result in concrete policy changes that improve their lives . . . the very same sense of government efficiency and accountability created by social media can make fundamental liberalizing reforms less likely in the long run. If citizens feel they have sufficient freedom to voice their grievances, and that the government is sufficiently responsive to such grievances, they may become less likely to call for radical reforms, and develop a sense of loyalty to the regime even in the absence of political pluralism. In this way limited reforms obviate the need for large-scale transformation: the regime acts to eliminate local corruption and amends trivial but detested policies without loosening its hold on the monopoly of political power."

Our third article, Amaney A. Jamal, Robert O. Keohane, David Romney, and Dustin Tingley's "Anti-Americanism and Anti-Interventionism in Arabic Twitter Discourses," also addresses the political implications of the new social media technologies. As the authors write: "Contemporary social media enable individuals who identify with different groups to express their views in public in relatively safe ways. The result is a discordant set of discourses—contentious and not always deeply reflective, but revealing about values, perspectives, and emotions of large numbers of people who have politically relevant views and are ready to express them . . . These discourses expand the public sphere by enabling ordinary people to comment, in real time and for a potentially global audience, on world events. They also provide opportunities for political scientists who are interested in new and interactive patterns of globalization to explore

them directly, by monitoring them and seeking to analyze their content." The piece develops an innovative analysis of a large number of Arabic-language tweets between 2012–2013 to test some common hypotheses about the nature and drivers of Arab attitudes towards the United States, employing the Crimson Hexagon digital text analysis platform developed by Gary King and Daniel Hopkins. Building upon previous work by Keohane, Jamal, and others, the authors find that in the Arabic Twitterverse political anti-Americanism is widespread and intense, but social anti-Americanism is significant but less prevalent, and that "what is often labeled 'anti-Americanism' reflects, to a considerable extent, fear of alien intrusions and hegemonic influence, from whatever source, into one's own society. It may well reflect a desire for political and social autonomy rather than dislike for America *per se*." As the authors note, the Twitterverse is a complex and discordant communicative domain, one that is difficult to pin down, and that is a terrain of contestation for ordinary citizens but also states, social movements, and militant insurgent organizations such as ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) and al Qaeda. Equally important, by its very nature as a global digital network, it makes possible many different combinations of technological, social, and political modernity. And even the most profoundly "anti-American" or "anti-Western" discourses are not necessarily unequivocally "anti-modern," if only by virtue of the fact that they disseminate via hyper-modernist media of communication.

Lindsay Benstead, Amaney Jamal and Ellen Lust's "Is it Gender, Religiosity or Both? A Role Congruity Theory of Candidate Electability in Transitional Tunisia" addresses precisely this issue, taking issue with the argument, associated with scholars such as Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, that in the Arab world the source of gender inequality, and inequality more generally, is a deficit of social and cultural modernization. As they write: "We contend that such arguments treat the region as exceptional and, more importantly, do not encourage us to recognize a more general theory of electoral bias that accounts for political bias in the United States, Tunisia, and cross-regionally. The mechanism underlying the electability of candidates, and attendant biases based on gender and religiosity, is best understood through a new perspective drawn from role congruity theory in social psychology Adapted to electoral behavior, the theory suggests that bias stems from a mismatch between stereotyped traits of a candidate and beliefs about what makes a good leader. The extent to which voters view gender or religiosity as signaling capable leadership depends largely on preconceptions about characteristics of good leaders; these preconceptions, in turn, are based on individuals' and societies' past experiences." The authors test this theory "through a survey experiment implemented in Tunisia following the 2011 transitional

elections . . . [that] presented respondents with photographs of potential candidates (male and female, apparently religious or non-religious) and asked how likely they would be to vote for them.” They find that gender biases in the assessments of candidates for public office “are independent of education, class, income, and other features that were associated with modernization, and . . . are associated directly with leadership and are not general biases against these individuals in other realms of life.” “When voters go to the polls,” they write, “they are likely to cast their ballot for a candidate who ‘looks like a leader.’” And the primary reason why such voters tend to prefer male candidates is because the long-standing limits on women’s political participation have offered them few female political role models. As they conclude: “The theory suggests that policymakers should be encouraged to establish institutions that help assure representation of gender, religious minorities, or others. Quotas, reserved seats, and other policies that bring women and minorities in the public sphere can reshape stereotypes of women and religious candidates as leaders, while fostering more diverse conceptualizations of effective leadership, independently of social or economic changes associated with modernization.”

Danny Hayes and Jennifer L. Lawless develop a very similar argument in “A Non-Gendered Lens? Media, Voters, and Female Candidates in Contemporary Congressional Elections.” But with their piece we turn from a Middle East in the throes of political upheaval to the United States, a consolidated liberal democracy with an institutionalized party system and almost a century of female suffrage. As Hayes and Lawless describe their research: “We rely on a detailed content analysis of local newspaper coverage from nearly 350 U.S. House districts and nationally representative survey data from the 2010 midterms to provide a comprehensive evaluation of whether women experience a more hostile campaign environment than do men.” They find that in these elections female candidates did not experience a more hostile campaign environment than male candidates, and that “candidate sex does not affect journalists’ coverage of, or voters’ attitudes toward, the women and men running for office in their districts.” Hayes and Lawless suggest that their findings are consistent with “changes in the electoral environment that plausibly have reduced the salience and influence of sex as a political consideration. As more women have entered politics over the last three decades, the novelty of female candidates has waned, and public opinion surveys now routinely reveal high levels of support for women at all levels of office. Moreover, in an atmosphere of increased party polarization, there may be less room for gender to exert an independent influence on media coverage or voters’ attitudes. These developments suggest that the campaign environment may be more similar for male and female candidates than it once was.

If that is true, then it augurs favorably for current and future generations of women running for office in the United States.” Their point is not that gender equality has been achieved. It is that a substantial body of evidence suggests that in the United States and perhaps in other consolidated democracies, gender is no longer a strong determinant of success in electoral campaigns. And they conclude that the kind of research they have presented represents “a valuable point of departure for answering pressing questions about gender and representation in contemporary politics, both in an American and comparative context.”

In “Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats: The Asymmetry of American Party Politics” Matt Grossmann and David A. Hopkins address precisely the dynamics of “partisanship, ideology, and incumbency” that Hayes and Lawless insist determine electoral success in the United States. In doing so, they address a question beyond the demographics of campaign politics—the question of the ideological structuration of the American two-party system. Building upon a large body of work, including Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson’s *Off Center: The Republican Revolution and the Erosion of American Democracy* and Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein’s *It’s Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism*, Grossmann and Hopkins argue that: “Although elites in both major American parties have become more ideologically polarized over the past generation, only the Republican Party contains a well-publicized, generously-funded, and electorally potent ideological faction capable of determining candidate nominations, directing the legislative behavior of incumbent officeholders, and visibly exasperating the party’s highest-ranking national elected official before a group of assembled reporters. The unique contemporary influence of conservative activists exemplifies a larger and more enduring asymmetry between the parties. Democrats and Republicans are motivated by dissimilar political goals and think about partisanship and party conflict in fundamentally different ways, which in turn stimulates distinct approaches to governing by leaders on each side.” While the Republican Party “is best viewed as the agent of an ideological movement whose members are united by a common devotion to the principle of limited government,” the Democratic Party “is properly understood as a coalition of social groups whose interests are served by various forms of government activity. Most Democrats are committed less to the abstract cause of liberalism than to specific policies designed to benefit particular groups.” They develop this theme on the basis of both public opinion data and historical evidence, arguing that the current asymmetry is deeply rooted, and that “Republicans have been more ideologically oriented than Democrats for at least the better part of a century, just as Democrats have for generations been more likely than Republicans to view partisan politics through the alternative lens of social identity and group

conflict.” They also draw some tentative political conclusions from their account: “Our findings indicate that differences in kind between the parties may render traditional models of policy-making much more applicable to the practical, group-based approach of the Democratic Party than the symbolic, ideological character of the Republicans.” Or, to put it in other terms, effective and accountable governance may be increasingly difficult as long as these two distinctive parties are locked into their current competitive equilibrium.

This question is the focus of John Aldrich’s 2014 APSA Presidential Address, “Did Hamilton, Jefferson, and Madison ‘Cause’ the U.S. Government Shutdown?: The Institutional Path from an 18th Century Republic to a 21st Century Democracy.” Taking his cue from the inaction of 113th Congress, and widespread concerns about governmental gridlock and dysfunction, Aldrich presents “a reflection on just how we got into this position of possible dysfunction and thus perhaps on how we might seek to form a new version of ‘a more perfect union’ in order to address the problems identified.” His piece integrates a historical account of institutional development with a discussion of political behavior. As he summarizes: “My central argument is that what many are calling the ‘dysfunctional’ government of today is the consequence, in part, of a stream of institutional design decisions made throughout American political history. In many respects, the Constitution was designed for a different place and time, designed to solve a different set of problems than our own.”

In many ways, Aldrich’s wide-ranging account brings to mind Samuel P. Huntington’s discussion of “American exceptionalism,” and America’s “Tudor polity,” in his 1968 book *Political Order and Changing Societies*. In that book Huntington (the 1986–7 APSA President) analyzed American political development as part of a broader critique of modernization theory. He wrote: “In most countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, modernization confronts tremendous social obstacles. . . . As in seventeenth century Europe these gaps can only be overcome by the creation of powerful, centralized authority in government. The United States never had to construct such authority in order to modernize its society . . . America, de Tocqueville said, ‘arrived at a state of democracy without having to endure a democratic revolution’ and ‘was born equal without having to become so.’ So also American society was born modern, and it hence was never necessary to construct a government powerful enough to make it so. An antique polity is compatible with a modern society but it is not compatible with the modernization of a traditional society (p. 35).” Huntington’s point in that essay was that the United States could be spared much of the instability and violence that modernization was causing in other parts of the world—a view that the events of 1968 hardly seem to have confirmed. I invoke him here merely to

underscore Aldrich’s current point: the U.S. constitutional system is in many ways archaic. Whether we think of the haphazard governmental response to the recent Ebola scare, or the incredible discrepancies in electoral practices and ballot systems across the fifty states, or the extent to which basic questions of criminal law enforcement are determined by the vagaries of local situations—as the recent grand jury verdicts in the police shooting deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson and Eric Garner in New York exemplify—the American state is a very peculiar institution, exercising extraordinary power in some domains and subject to Byzantine limits and exceptions in others (a theme also discussed in Sanford Levinson’s book *Framed: America’s 51 Constitutions and the Crisis of Government*, reviewed in this issue by John Finn). Increasing numbers of our colleagues are taking these peculiarities of the American political system seriously, as empirical, functional, constitutional, and normative concerns. Indeed, in his Presidential Address Aldrich neatly combines all of these concerns, inviting us to “consider how to take today’s circumstances and create a more perfect union for those conditions.” As political scientists we will no doubt disagree about how best to describe and explain “today’s circumstances” and how and indeed whether to envision a more suitable way of organizing them (“perfect union”). But the questions themselves are unavoidable.

In my Editor Introductions and Annual Reports to the APSA Council, I have always sought to recognize the incredible work of our journal’s staff. In our September 2012 10th anniversary issue I personally thanked by name everyone who had ever worked as a staff person on *Perspectives*. The young people who work on our journal, and on all political science journals, make extraordinary and largely unsung contributions to the discipline. They make it possible for more senior colleagues to publish their articles, essays, and reviews, and for book authors to have their books reviewed in a timely fashion. What these assistants do is all the more remarkable because when they receive their Ph.D.’s they confront a very weak job market and very precarious and insecure career prospects. I am proud to note that the people who have worked on *Perspectives* have done extraordinarily well. At the same time, it remains to be seen whether they will reap the rewards of their substantial contributions to our discipline.

Dustin Ells Howes is a case in point. Dustin teaches at Louisiana State University, where he was recently named David J. Kriskovich Distinguished Professor of Political Science. His first book, *Toward a Credible Pacifism: Violence and the Possibilities of Politics*, was published in 2009. His article, “The Failure of Pacifism and the Success of Nonviolence,” appeared in our June 2013 issue. Dustin was one of our journal’s Editorial Assistants, from 2003 to 2005, back when the *Book Review* was at UNC, edited by Susan Bickford and Greg McAvoy. When I took

over the *Book Review* in 2006, Dustin visited us in Bloomington, where he helped James Moskowitz and Margot Morgan set up our database and electronic system. Dustin is a fine young man, with a young family and a promising career. At the same time, he was recently diagnosed with ALS—“Lou Gehrig’s Disease.” And he has discovered that many of the things essential for his treatment are not covered by his health insurance.

Our editorial board member, Elizabeth Markovits, was a colleague and friend of Dustin’s at UNC who also worked as an Editorial Assistant on the Review. Liz has recently been circulating and posting a “Crowd Rise” message, Rise Up For Dustin, at <https://www.crowdrise.com/riseupfordustin>. I would like to call the situation and the site to your attention. I would also call your attention to “de-generation document,” at <http://de-generationdocument.tumblr.com/archive>, an extraordinary blog created by Dustin’s wife

Rachel Hall. The blog powerfully weaves together the story of Dustin’s situation with discussion of the difficulties of navigating the U.S. health care system.

Political science is an intellectually serious and demanding scholarly discipline. It is also an association of individual human beings, each of whom has a unique story. *Perspectives* aspires to promote A Political Science Public Sphere. We also seek to foster the kinds of shared understanding and concern that are essential to collegiality. I am not sure whether this note represents an unduly personal intervention. I am certain that it is unusual for the editors of top academic journals to publish such things, and I am also certain that our journal cannot possibly call attention to the many stories of valued colleagues in need. But I do believe we can model a certain kind of care. And I also believe that, as editor of this particular journal, I have a special responsibility to the small group of people who have contributed so greatly to its success.

Statement of Mission and Procedures

Perspectives on Politics seeks to provide a space for broad and synthetic discussion within the political science profession and between the profession and the broader scholarly and reading publics. Such discussion necessarily draws on and contributes to the scholarship published in the more specialized journals that dominate our discipline. At the same time, *Perspectives* seeks to promote a complementary form of broad public discussion and synergistic understanding within the profession that is essential to advancing scholarship and promoting academic community.

Perspectives seeks to nurture a **political science public sphere**, publicizing important scholarly topics, ideas, and innovations, linking scholarly authors and readers, and promoting broad reflexive discussion among political scientists about the work that we do and why this work matters.

Perspectives publishes work in a number of formats that mirror the ways that political scientists actually write:

Research articles: As a top-tier journal of political science, *Perspectives* accepts scholarly research article submissions and publishes the very best submissions that make it through our double-blind system of peer review and revision. The only thing that differentiates *Perspectives* research articles from other peer-reviewed articles at top journals is that we focus our attention only on work that in some way bridges subfield and methodological divides, and tries to address a broad readership of political scientists about matters of consequence. This typically means that the excellent articles we publish have been extensively revised in sustained dialogue with the editor—me—to

address not simply questions of scholarship but questions of intellectual breadth and readability.

“Reflections” are more reflexive, provocative, or programmatic essays that address important political science questions in interesting ways but are not necessarily as systematic and focused as research articles. These essays often originate as research article submissions, though sometimes they derive from proposals developed in consultation with the editor in chief. Unlike research articles, these essays are not evaluated according to a strict, double-blind peer review process. But they are typically vetted informally with editorial board members or other colleagues, and they are always subjected to critical assessment and careful line-editing by the editor and editorial staff.

Scholarly symposia, critical book dialogues, book review essays, and conventional book reviews are developed and commissioned by the editor in chief, based on authorial queries and ideas, editorial board suggestions, and staff conversations.

Everything published in *Perspectives* is carefully vetted and edited. Given our distinctive mission, we work hard to use our range of formats to organize interesting conversations about important issues and events, and to call attention to certain broad themes beyond our profession’s normal subfield categories.

For further details on writing formats and submission guidelines, see our website at <http://www.apsanet.org/perspectives/>