

## Book Reviews

GRINDLE, Merilee S., 2012, *Jobs for the Boys: Patronage and the State in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press. 336 pp.

This book focuses on attempts to control how public service jobs are attained and how they are used – something which has been and continues to be a fundamental component of public administration. Merilee Grindle researches how patronage systems in various countries and eras have been challenged and eventually transformed into Weberian bureaucracies – systems of recruitment and public service careers based on systematic evaluation mechanisms or evaluation of merit.

Patronage systems in public service have been, and continue to be, intensely criticized and characterized as anti-democratic, corrupt, and incompetent. They are systems “where discretionary appointment for personal and/or political purposes is a principal route to a nonelected position in government for a large portion of those enjoying such positions” (p. 18). Recruitment and career trajectories are controlled from above (p. 20) and, as a result, the contracts between the employer and the employee are based on a political principal and personal reciprocity instead of on a procedural principle. (p. 21)

If patronage systems are as dysfunctional as their critics suggest, how is it that they have endured for centuries in so many countries and continue to exist in so many today? How has it been possible to replace them with professional civil service systems? To answer these questions, *Jobs for the Boys* analyzes public sector reform processes undertaken in the 19th and 20th centuries in six developed countries, the United States, Germany (Prussia), Great Britain, France, Japan and Spain, as well as more recent efforts in four Latin American countries: Brazil, Mexico, Chile, and Argentina. These cases were selected

following Mill's direct method of agreement, in which different cases are studied to find common causal factors. Grindle compares the experiences of the different countries as well as variations over time. To this end, this comparative historical study uses the process tracing method of analysis. This method involves in-depth analysis of sequences of events, conflicts, and negotiations in reform efforts in order to reconstruct the causal mechanisms with which different countries were able (or not) to transform their patronage systems into civil service meritocracies.

Grindle adopts a theoretical analysis framework that combines historical institutionalism with a focus on conflict and strategic interaction (p. 24). The author maintains that the ability to push ahead with reforms as well as the resulting institutional realignments were constrained by institutional legacies. Among these, the author emphasizes decision-making methods in each government systems, the class structure, and existing access to education, as well as the presence or absence of competitive political parties (pp. 244–250). Patronage systems were able to be reformed in exceptional moments, such as the loss of a war or severe political or economic crises, which opened windows of opportunity for reformers to advance their agendas. Within the parameters defined for each context, "career civil services were and are politically constructed, forged from conflicts and compromises among those who have very different views on how appointments to public sector jobs should be made and who should control them" (p. 3).

Thanks to its historical emphasis, *Jobs for the Boys* provides the reader with a very detailed analysis about the patronage systems that existed before reforms were initiated in the ten countries studied and also about the processes of negotiation and reform that were undertaken, the circumstances that made these possible, and failed reform efforts. The analysis of these processes of institutional transformation demonstrates the usefulness of previous studies of historical institutionalism which touch on these issues, such as that of Martin Shefter. In contrast, the author finds little evidence to support approaches which emphasize civil society mobilization as an explanatory factor for the approval of reforms. At the same time, she dedicates considerable attention to analyzing what happened in each of the cases after the approval of reforms and demonstrates that those who were unable to get their reforms introduced did not give up and continually attacked the new system, in some cases hampering its functioning. Thus, in Chapter 7, Grindle prepares a "catalogue" of the principle methods of attack on the new civil service systems that she identified. This analysis calls into question alternative theoretical explanations, such as rational institutional choice, which is limited to analyzing a specific legislative moment – the approval of the reform – and overestimates its definitive nature. In contrast, Grindle demonstrates that greatest challenges to civil service reforms appear after the reforms are adopted and, in some cases, reform opponents are able to effectively alter

the reform's original intent. For example, Spain, Argentina, and Mexico have not been able to consolidate a professional civil service.

Without doubt, *Jobs for the Boys* is an indispensable text for those interested in studies of the state and public policy. In my opinion, one point made by Grindle is fundamental for both future research and policymakers interested in the management of public employment: throughout the book, the author emphasizes that the persistence and durability of patronage as a mechanism for filling public sector jobs is related to its flexibility and malleability as well as its usefulness for the political elites who control it. From this point of view, patronage is, more than anything else, a valuable instrument for political negotiation, which facilitates the administration of the government in various circumstances (p. 241), and not a category of performance or competence (p. 23). Systems of patronage respond to the objectives and effective uses that are made of them by the political elites that control them. In these systems, high-level functionaries have the capacity to use their discretionary power to fill posts in order to attract highly qualified personnel to develop specific or innovative public policies (p. 261). Thus, if they wish to, they can create islands of public efficiency and excellence – as the evidence provided in the book demonstrates. Therefore, the problem of systems of patronage is not that they are inevitably corrupt or inefficient, but rather that they are “capricious” or unstable. On the other hand, eventually new civil service systems also develop their own problems and are currently criticized for their excessive stability and rigidity and for their incompetence and limited capacity to respond to the needs of citizens. New critiques and approaches, such as the “new public management,” seek to resolve these problems.

Finally, one weak point of the book is its limited theoretical discussion. While the text is rich in descriptions of cases, the theory is not explained until the end of the book and the synthesis is too succinct and does not identify clear causal mechanisms. These deficits could be the consequence of an eclectic approach that over-emphasizes agency, uncertainty, and contingency. In addition, despite having sufficient material, the author does not elaborate on the differences in the reform processes among the groups of countries studied (developed vs. developing). In addition, historical circumstances and the international context appear to carry more weight than Grindle acknowledges.

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