

## Book Reviews

Kees Aarts, André Blais and Hermann Schmitt (eds.). 2011. *Political Leaders and Democratic Elections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 242 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-925900-7.

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The book edited by Kees Aarts, André Blais and Hermann Schmitt addresses a topical issue in the field of voting behaviour, namely the impact of political leaders on party support in contemporary democracies. Compared to other efforts in the field, some of them of earlier date, there are two reasons why this book is unique. First, it approaches the issue from a solid comparative perspective, as it benefits from long-term survey data from nine countries (Australia, Canada, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, and United States). Thus, it is able to cover a wide time range in the evolution of leader effects, under very different institutional settings. Second, it goes beyond the common question of how large is the magnitude of leader effects at different points in time and space, by addressing the topic of the 'contextual factors that make leaders a more or less powerful variable in vote choice' (p. 4).

The list of contributors includes some of the most prestigious scholars in the field, with a solid long-lasting interest in the topic of leader effects. This has likely contributed to the clear focus of the chapters and to their good integration and complementarity. *Political Leaders and Democratic Elections* encompasses eleven chapters that are meant to be structured, according to one of the editors (p. 9), in four parts.

The first two chapters are conceived to trace the general framework of analysis. Chapter 1 introduces the topic, with a short discussion on why political leaders are almost absent in the classical explanations of voting

behaviour and on what has changed during the last decades. It then provides an *outline of the book*, both in terms of theoretical expectations for the reader and in terms of structure. Chapter 2 places the discussion on the personalization of electoral politics in the framework of recent *structural transformations in the Western media systems* that are expected to increase the weight of political leaders in the voting decision. Then it provides a longitudinal perspective on the main changes in media systems and on how these evolutions affected the way parties and candidates are covered in electoral contexts.

The following three chapters provide 'an overall examination of party leader effects on the vote' (p. 9) and are quite different in terms of structure and approach. Chapter 3 provides a series of empirical tests to the highly debated hypothesis of a *growing trend of leader effects on party vote*, with rather mixed findings. Chapters 4 and 5 analyse extensively the *relevance of leaders on vote choice in Westminster systems and the United States*, two categories of political systems where the personalization of electoral politics is expected to be at particularly high levels. McAllister's analysis of Westminster systems (ch. 4) is remarkable in terms of the time sequence covered and institutional arrangements considered. Wattenberg's insight on the American case (ch. 5) places more weight on the balance between personal traits, party image, and issue positions for the evaluation of presidential candidates over almost five decades.

The third part (chapters 6 to 9) is dedicated to the conditions that mediate the manifestation of leader effects and, consequently, affect their magnitude. It is definitely the most remarkable section of the book, as it puts into order the theoretical debate on the categories of constraints affecting the occurrence of leader effects and tests empirically the most influential theories on comparative data. Chapter 6 is dedicated to the *institutional context* and its relevance for the personalization of electoral politics; it analyses the impact of the political system, electoral rules, and party system. The next chapter focuses on the relevance of *party characteristics* for the magnitude of leader effects: cadre versus mass parties, governing versus

non-governing parties, party size, party age, and party family. Chapter 8 provides an insight into how variations in *leader characteristics* (age, time in office, gender) impact their capacity to attract party support. Chapter 9 focuses on the *voter characteristics* and tries to identify types of voters that are systematically more susceptible to leader effects than the rest of the population. The authors assess the effects of exposure to TV news, party identification, time of vote decision, and political sophistication.

The last two chapters address new directions of development for the field of leader effects on the voting decision. Chapter 10 analyses whether the negative leader evaluations have more impact upon the vote than the positive ones (the *negativity hypothesis*). The last chapter is dedicated to the *perceived personal traits* that are more likely to impact the leader evaluations and, consequently, the vote: competence, leadership, trustworthiness, reliability, and empathy.

Overall, *Political Leaders and Democratic Elections* is a ground-breaking volume for the field of electoral analysis. It provides a well-rounded perspective on its central topic, based on solid comparative research, which is likely to impact future approaches to the analysis of leader effects on voting. Beyond the unquestionable merits of this volume, there are also some limitations of it. The absence of a final chapter synthesizing the findings of the book is definitely the biggest critique. Such a chapter would have probably become one of the most cited references for the scholars of leader effects. In addition to that, the volume often suffers from an insufficient specification of the methodological approaches employed. Given that the analytical strategies are so diverse and sophisticated, it is sometimes hard for the reader to understand how things are done. Nevertheless, beyond these (insignificant) drawbacks, the volume is absolutely remarkable as a scientific product and is definitely a must-read for all the scholars interested in the personalization of voting behaviour.

Paula A. Tufiş. 2012. *Status Attainment: Predictable Patterns of Trendless Fluctuation?* Iaşi: Institutul European. 159 pp. ISBN: 978-973-611-893-7.

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*Status Attainment: Predictable Patterns of Trendless Fluctuation?* written by Paula A. Tufiş aims at core sociological issues: social stratification and social mobility processes. The book is an original analysis of the status attainment process across time and societies, with a special focus on Central and Eastern Europe. Informed by a classical approach (the Blau-Duncan model) and grounded on an outstanding methodology, the book seeks to explore the relations between four key elements (respondent's social origins, occupation, education and earnings) of a model of status attainment from a cross-national and longitudinal perspective.

The book is structured in five chapters. The introductory chapter briefly discusses several theories (industrialisation thesis, institutional arrangement thesis, socio political system thesis, cultural and historical legacies thesis and varieties of capitalism thesis) concerning the stratification and mobility processes. Drawing on these, the author proposes a grouping criteria of countries into regions expected to show homogeneities of the patterns of status attainment. The effectiveness of these regions/clusters (liberal market economies, Continental Europe, social democratic countries, Mediterranean countries, Central and Eastern European countries) is one important issue explored further in the book.

The second chapter stands for an informative theoretical discussion build around the effects of the socio-political systems (socialist and post-socialist systems as compared to capitalist systems) and industrialization (levels) on status attainment. The two issues are reflected in the empirical part of the book. At the same time, for a reader who is eager to know more about the Eastern European communism and post-communism, this chapter could be regarded as an enlightening synthesis of policies (in areas like education, employment, income) and their effects in creating or blurring

social inequalities. In the final section of this chapter the author raises the set of research questions (pp. 49-52) that are explored in the empirical part of the book. These revolve around three main axes: one regarding the balance between ascription and achievement, one concerning the predictability of status attainment patterns in time and the last one considering the predictability of status attainment patterns between societies and clusters of societies (e.g. 'Do trends in the status attainment model conform to predictions of logic of industrialization theories or status maintenance theories?', 'Has socialism produced similar status attainments processes in Central and Eastern European Societies?', 'Is there a post-communist effect on status attainment?', 'Are there trends of convergence between status attainment patterns in former communist countries and Western capitalist countries?', etc.).

The third chapter presents the data used in the analyses (ISSP 1992 and 1999) and the methodological underpinnings of the book. It contains detailed and accurate discussions of the individual and macro level parameters, sampling issues, and warnings about the problems raised by data availability or measurement. We learn here that based on the results of the equivalence tests of the status attainment model across various subsamples (e.g. rural versus urban, male versus female, etc.) the author is using in her analyses a subsample of employed respondents. Among the methods and techniques engaged in the preparatory and data analysis phases, the author uses multiple imputation procedures, structural equations modelling, and hierarchical linear modelling.

The fourth chapter presents, in a three sections structure, the results of the empirical analyses. A reader who is not familiar with current advanced social statistics could not fully digest this chapter, but, for those interested and familiar with such methodologies, this chapter is a source of inspiration. The first two parts of the chapter examine the results of the (longitudinal and transversal) analyses concerning both the socialist and post-socialist effects on status attainment parameters (relations between the four main variables of the model). The last section presents the results of the cross-

country and within country analyses of the industrialization effects on status attainment parameters.

The last chapter contains a discussion of the results. Pointing towards the title the author says: 'the answer to this question is different depending on the status attainment relationship under examination - whether the relationship captures ascription of achievement processes' (pp. 105-106). Still, a very synthetic expression of the findings is that a division between socialist, post-socialist and capitalist countries is too reductionist. Even though the Central and Eastern European Countries could be characterized by a common model of status attainment, that is not the case among the capitalist countries. Another idea is that no common processes of transformation of the stratification systems along the post-communist transition could be identified nor convergence effects between Central and Eastern European Countries and capitalist countries.

Overall, the book is a meritorious study of the status attainment patterns. Among the drawbacks the book confronts with, I would point the problems raised by the data availability (e.g. the time span and the limited number of countries composing the clusters). Consequently one critique could target the bold assumption that socialist effects are pervasive enough in 1992 to be studied, and then compared longitudinally, in what concerns all the parameters considered. Nevertheless, to conclude, I would say *Status Attainment: Predictable Patterns of Trendless Fluctuation?* is an excellent book that a scholar concerned with social change, stratification and mobility processes and interested in Central and Eastern Europe should definitely read.