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The Personalization of Politics: A Study of Parliamentary Democracies, by Lauri Karvonen

Donatella Campus^a

^a Political Science, University of Bologna

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and a practical function. In Chapter 5, “Brands and Megaprojects,” Pasotti shows how politicians deployed their brands to advocate for the construction of high-profile projects, what Pasotti calls “catalyst events” or “trademark interventions.” To match the discourse frames of public access and universality, mayors focused on projects affecting public space and public transportation. These high-profile projects helped the mayors obtain external legitimacy and recognition as well as convince domestic audiences of the validity of their efforts.

Yet the pretense of access and universality was not matched in the execution of the projects. Indeed, the consensus game of brand politics comes with a series of contradictions: increased centralization of power in the mayoralty, creating a massive imbalance between executive and city councils; the privatization of major infrastructures; cuts to municipal budgets; and so on. Loyalty to the brand comes at a cost, as Pasotti further reveals in Chapter 6, “Elusive Representation.” Is brand politics any better than clientelism after all, she asks, if all it does is appeal to business elites, the main sources of funding in public opinion politics? With a political strategy founded on the strength of public opinion, there is little room for complexity or nuance. Multiple perspectives and differences of opinion do not fit well into a brand framework.

In her final chapter, “Brand Politics in Global Context,” Pasotti describes other cases worldwide, using these as a platform on which to lay out the theoretical implications of brand politics. An important legacy of brand politics, she argues, is the need for a broadened understanding of rational decision making, one that includes emotional processing and heuristics. This is just one of the many novel interventions Pasotti makes. The book is an important contribution to understandings of political communication and the emerging field of critical brand studies.

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The Personalization of Politics: A Study of Parliamentary Democracies, by Lauri Karvonen. Colchester, UK: ECPR Press, 2010. 124 pp. £13.50 paper.

Reviewed by DONATELLA CAMPUS

Should we really be convinced of the emergence of candidate-centered politics as argued by some research literature? Or is the process of personalization less developed and

Donatella Campus is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Bologna.
Address correspondence to Donatella Campus, Dipartimento di Scienza Politica, Strada Maggiore 45, 40125, Bologna, Italy. E-mail: donatella.campus@unibo.it

widespread than commonly assumed? This book by Lauri Karvonen tries to answer such questions by offering a large body of evidence and several subtle and nuanced arguments that contrast vividly with the common belief that our political systems have become thoroughly personalized.

The book discusses the hypothesis of the increase in the personalization of politics by looking at four key dimensions. The first concerns institutional aspects, that is, whether parliamentary systems are affected by a process of growing presidentialization, the extent to which prime ministers have become powerful and autonomous, and how electoral systems may encourage candidate-centered campaigns. The second dimension deals with the role of candidates, that is, whether they have become more visible than in the past and how much their personal qualities have become important to voters. The third dimension focuses on party leaders, that is, the extent to which evaluations of leaders' character have become more central at the expense of party loyalties. Finally, the fourth dimension concerns political personalization in the mass media, that is, to what extent media coverage of politics has become more characterized by references to leaders and their personal qualities.

All four dimensions are examined through a discussion of empirical data coming from previous studies and/or through the analysis of existing databases. This means that the sources of empirical evidence are differentiated in their nature and scope: from expert surveys and in-depth descriptions of country specialists to survey data and content analysis of newspaper coverage. For each dimension, the evidence is mixed, with some elements pointing at an intensification of personalization over time, but many others suggesting that the personalization of politics has been too overstated both by scholars and political observers. In particular, while the evidence is positive for the media issue, although the trend is not so dramatic as one may expect, there are dimensions for which the hypothesis of a clear and general increase over time is disconfirmed. As for the dimension relating institutions and personalization, there are countries (for instance, Belgium) that show an increased prime ministerial influence and a greater candidate-centeredness in their electoral systems, but there are clear contrary cases as well (for instance, Japan and Norway). Similarly, as for candidate salience in voters' decision making, there is no indisputable trend, and "the relative importance of individual candidates seems to have increased [only] in those countries where the possibility of choosing between candidates has existed for a long time" (p. 63).

Even more skepticism is produced by the analysis of data on voters' attitudes toward leaders. Those who expect to find here the most striking evidence in support of the personalization thesis may be highly disappointed: all of the evidence points out that, notwithstanding the decline of partisanship, in recent years leaders have not become more decisive for election outcomes. Rather, "the party leader factor is, by and large, a function of the party factor. Party leaders are first and foremost associated with their parties, and it is the voters' evaluation of the party that is the strongest determinant of their evaluation of a given leader" (p. 84).

To sum up, the author's conclusion is that even if, in some countries, leaders and candidates have become more prominent both in elections and in government, there is no general trend toward personalization in parliamentary democracies (p. 106). As noted, Karvonen's arguments are quite nuanced and not conclusive. In some ways, the book leaves the door open to the hypothesis that a process of change toward greater personalization may well be ongoing. Therefore, nothing prevents the reader from thinking that what we are facing today is only a first sign of an impending phenomenon. However, the overall conclusions of the book clearly challenge those of other scholars, for instance, the quite peremptory thesis of the presidentialization of parliamentary systems supported by Poguntke and Webb (2005). Rather, Karvonen's arguments seem to be more in line with the results of King

(2003), who had previously advanced a perceptive critique of the personalization hypothesis. Clearly the book brings important new insight into a controversial issue and, at the same time, helps the reader to avoid overly easy generalizations.

For instance, the book makes a convincing case for the fact that the emergence of the personal factor is not to be seen as the automatic response to the decline of parties. As a matter of fact, leaders matter especially for party loyalists, while voters with no party identification do not express intense opinions on leaders as they are not so important and central (p. 84). In general, the book suggests that the shift from the party-centered to the candidate-centered style of campaign communication that has indisputably concerned contemporary democracies should not be regarded as incontrovertible evidence of a true candidate-centered politics. In other words, communication is just an aspect of politics, albeit a very important one.

Although the author openly states that the book is not a comparative study in a proper sense, nonetheless the concluding chapter provides a sort of classification of some parliamentary democracies in order to assess where the personalization of politics appears more consolidated and where the trend toward personalization is scarcely or not at all evident. Since data were not available for all countries for all of the four dimensions of personalization considered, this line of discussion may be questioned. In fact, the description of some countries leaves out important pieces of evidence and could be misleading for a general understanding of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, the book is an important contribution to a crucial debate and may serve as a useful guidepost to directions for future research either in the form of single-country case studies or in a comparative and cross-country perspective.

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Art/Museums: International Relations Where We Least Expect It, by Christine Sylvester. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2009. 240 pp. \$33.95.

Reviewed by KEVIN V. MULCAHY

Art museums have traditionally seen their mission as essentially the acquisition, conservation, and display of aesthetic objects with the goal of education and enlightenment. These objects were typically seen as "high art," with pride of place going to old-master paintings and sculpture; the decorative and utilitarian arts were also valued, especially 18th-century French and English furniture.

Kevin V. Mulcahy is Sheldon Beychok Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Public Administration at Louisiana State University.

Address correspondence to Kevin V. Mulcahy, Department of Political Science, Louisiana State University, 240 Stubbs Hall, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, USA. E-mail: kmulcah@lsu.edu