

The Academy of Political Science

475 Riverside Drive · Suite 1274 · New York, New York 10115-1274
(212) 870-2500 · FAX: (212) 870-2202 · aps@psqonline.org · <http://www.psqonline.org>

POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

Volume 125 · Number 1 · Spring 2010

No part of this article may be copied, downloaded, stored, further transmitted, transferred, distributed, altered, or otherwise used, in any form or by any means, except:

- one stored electronic and one paper copy of any article solely for your personal, non-commercial use, or
- with prior written permission of The Academy of Political Science.

Political Science Quarterly is published by The Academy of Political Science. Contact the Academy for further permission regarding the use of this work.

Political Science Quarterly

Copyright © 2010 by The Academy of Political Science. All rights reserved.

However, as Page and Jacobs point out, to the extent that politicians are responding to voters' policy preferences, fear of taxes or of big government should not be a political obstacle.

Page and Jacobs discuss how the influence of lobbyists, campaign contributors, and ideological activists may be making politicians afraid to take an active part in confronting economic inequality, despite broad support for government programs in this area. I suspect that a larger issue is whether such programs will really work. The evidence is that national elections are won and lost based on economic conditions, and parties will be loath to implement policies that they think will slow the economy before the next election, however popular they might be right now. This is not to say voters are wrong to support governmental action to reduce economic inequality, but rather to indicate a way in which economically conservative views among the political class could blunt politicians' responses to such desires.

In summary, Page and Jacobs offer an excellent synthesis of Americans' majority views, demonstrating that, at least in the short term, broad agreement exists on an active governmental role in reducing inequality, within the context of providing opportunity in a free-market economy. Their data are taken from a survey conducted in summer 2007, a year before the recent economic meltdown.

ANDREW GELMAN
Columbia University

The Democracy Index: Why Our Election System Is Failing and How to Fix It by Heather K. Gerken. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2009. 192 pp. \$24.95.

Heather Gerken's *The Democracy Index* offers a timely book about the need to collect and analyze data to enable the evaluation of election quality. Policymakers and scholars working in election reform would be remiss not to familiarize themselves with its arguments for the development of standardized metrics of election performance. Since the 2000 election identified potential problems in our ability to count all the votes accurately, academics, activists, interest groups, and institutions of government have been grappling with how to improve the process. However, the reform process, as argued by Gerken, has been hampered by the lack of accessible and comparable data with which to evaluate the operations of elections. Moreover, there are few incentives or resources to encourage election administration entities to engage in this process.

Yet as Gerken points out, such information is necessary if we want to engage in meaningful election reform or, as Gerken puts it, a "here to there" strategy (p. 7). Her argument is that the current election administration environment is highly resistant to change because partisanship and localism make systematic reform difficult. Partisanship is problematic because election officials,

as party members, have a direct conflict of interest with their administrative goals of running free and fair elections. Partisan interpretations can lead to policies that limit or promote voter activity with the intent to ultimately influence election outcomes. Partisanship also emphasizes loyalty over professionalism, when professionalism, continuity, and expertise are necessary for competence and effectiveness. Localism presents another hurdle to the redirection of limited local resources for what is typically an invisible problem.

Gerken's solution is the creation of a democracy index that evaluates every state or locality on the same dimensions. Such a measure allows election jurisdictions to be ranked from best to worst, creating incentives for jurisdictions that are performing poorly to perform better. Because no elected official wants to be at the bottom of the index, rankings will increase the odds that better election administration will follow.

There are some problems, however. Gerken does not create a democracy index. However, this was not her intent, and she discusses possible factors to include. Another problem is that an index might create perverse incentives that tilt election administrators toward goals that may not be important to the quality of elections as entities try to game the index. For example, recent attempts at implementing a democracy index include the time citizens have to stand in line and how long it takes to process voter registration. However, scholars repeatedly find that long waits per se do not matter to voter confidence. There may be some reasons for their consideration, but the bigger point is that some factors might be easier for elected officials to manipulate and therefore may be more desirable. An index could end up being a political tool, and not a reflective one. Furthermore, because an index is a summary of many facts, results may not provide the specific information necessary to actually improve the process. Also, she does not deal with where resources would come from to enable the collection of the necessary data.

But her contribution is not in the details, but in the vision she has for a data-driven election reform process that provides for jurisdiction comparability. It is up to social scientists and policymakers to provide the details. Thus, her book provides a valuable contribution and is a very useful starting point for thoughtful discussion and consideration of the data we need to evaluate democracy. It is only with reliable and valid data that we can create a framework in which we can continually update and improve the election process.

LONNA RAE ATKESON
University of New Mexico

Globalization and Sovereignty by John Agnew. Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009. 231 pp. Cloth, \$75.00; paper, \$26.95.

In the debates about globalization over the last 20 years, one early but persistent theme has expressed an opposition between states and markets, some