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Muhammed, Muhammed Hamid

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Book Review

Making Democracy Work: Civic Tradition in Modern Italy

Muhammed Hamid Muhammed

Assistant Professor,
Department of Political Science and International Studies
Bahir Dar University
muhammedhamid12@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-4629-2307

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From the point where ideological disputation sprang between the proponents of social and liberal democracies to the ultimate triumph of the later, Democracy has been recommended to many governments as a solution for good governance and institutional performance. Nonetheless, so much as being a buzzed word; and embraced, as a means of gaining legitimacy and economic assistant, democracy seemed not to produce the anticipated outcome as such. The case that democracy works in some portion of the world and fails in another cannot be presumed only a matter of luck or a coincidence rather, there has to be a scientific explanation for the phenomenon. Such queries prompted social scientists to experiment and seek systematic explanations behind the failure and success of democracy. In this respect, this book by Robert Putnam serves as a laboratory of the democratization process, and determinants influencing it. The book is the outcome of an empirical experiment of institutional performance based on an institutional reform carried out in Italy for more than two decades in its twenty regions. In 1970, twenty new regional governments were established with identical constitutional structures and mandates in Italy (p.6). The experiment aimed at examining the success and failure of democratic institutionalism in those regions and the predominant factors.

The main ideas of the book spin around the fundamental question of ‘why some democratic governments succeed and why others fail? To address this principal question, the Putnam employed the performance of government institutions as a variable to seek an explanation. Accordingly, a high-performance democratic institution is one that is both responsive and effective: sensitive to the demand of its constituents and effective in using limited resources to address those demands (p.9). He adopted the Italian experience as an experiment to demonstrate why democratic institutions functioned differently in different regions and what variables affected their success? Both place and time comparisons were used to explain the historical and existing enabling and disabling factors for the success of democratic institutions

in the twenty regions (pp. 83-120). The book specified the institutions to be evaluated as a representative government (p.65). In the evaluation, it focused on the responsiveness and efficiency of the regional governments, as a democratic government supposed to be responsive to the needs of the constituents and efficient in using resources to address public problems. Besides the book provided a serious measurement of government performance tests namely; comprehensiveness, internal consistency, reliability, and being corresponding to objectives and evaluations of institutions (p.64). Based on the tests it seeks to evaluate three important aspects of policies i.e., policy process, policy pronouncement, and policy implementations. The book also identified twelve indicators to test the process, the pronouncement, and implementations of policies in the regions and measure their performance (pp.67-73).

The book stratified and conceptualized the twelve indicators into the aforementioned three policy aspects intended to be evaluated. Hence, the Policy process and internal operations were indicated by cabinet stability, budget promptness, and statistical and information service. The three indicators were conceptualized in a way that can demonstrate the consistency of the policy process and internal operations. Policy pronouncement was indicated by reform legislation and legislative innovation; the comprehensiveness of regional legislative tested policy pronouncement. It used the content of policy decisions to conceptualized indicators. Issues like how comprehensive, coherent, and creative the policy decisions taken by regions were. The rest of the six indicators however indicated policy implementation. Policy implementation was conceptualized into direct-serve delivery where daycare centers and family clinics were used as its indicators; repertoires policy tools deployed by regions indicated by industrial policy instruments; effectiveness of regional government in using funds indicated by agricultural spending capacity, local health units expenditure, and housing and urban development; and street-level responsiveness measured by bureaucratic responsiveness. The most interesting issue in the book is how it brought the concept of collective action/ social capital in institutional success. It demonstrated the impact of social capital on intuitional performance and consequently on the democratization process using game theory (PP.163-185).

In general, the book is significantly important in two ways. On one hand, as the research project was commenced following the birth of new institutional arrangement, it created an opportunity for explaining both substantive and procedural issues surrounding the bringing up of institutional change in a given political system. Secondly, it presents a rare opportunity for researchers to study systematically the birth and development of new democratic institutions. In its historical narrative approach, the book demonstrated that the development of democratic institutions is so complex. The Italian case revealed that the performance of democratic institutions could grow faster some times because of the positive push from enabling factors and reversed back based on the strength of disabling factors. Especially the political maneuvering between the central government and regional governments can be used as an enabling and disabling factor depend on in which direction it stirred. Besides, social-economic and cultural factors have a heavy influence on the performance of institutions. However, the book also revealed the impact of institutional norms and values on political behavior and elites` attitude. The book also addresses different historical trajectories that have a positive bearing on the existing institutional democratic behavior in the Italian states. It touched upon the states of affairs of the Italians before and after unification; regional differences in political, social, and economic aspects and the dynamics for regional autonomy and the subsequent constitutional arrangement.

However, the book has both substantive and methodological flaws. While outlining the model to show the course of action in democratic institutional performance, it makes the process seem to be simplistic. It argued a high-performance democratic institution must be responsive, sensitive to the interest of its constituents, and at the same time effective and efficient without explaining the entrenched complex procedural and political process of policymaking. Besides, the model does not involve the most politically contested and technically diversified stage of the policy process, *Evaluation*. In the analysis of the performance of institutions for more than two decades, the evaluation of policies implemented by the institutions would have provided substantial representation of how successful they were. It is also hard to be fully convinced that the book exhausted all indicators to test the process, the pronouncement, and implementations of policies in the regions and gauge their performance. There are important areas that could be used as indicators. For instance, education and promotion of democratic participation were not included. That in return will have its impact on the validity of the result as regions might have had a performance that could change the outcome. Another substantive flaw of the book is its failure to integrate the Italian case with the international experience. In the analysis of democratic institutions, the author limited himself to Italy and unable to draw international experience in the analysis.

The second concern directed to its failure to openly describe the research designs used in the book. Though the methodological strategies and instruments employed and how the data are processed and presented demonstrated it has followed a pragmatic approach, it did not openly state it. The book also did not express, in the methodological part, about the usage of a specific theory. However, there is tacit evidence that it used the Game Theory and Rational Choice Modeling are used. In the analysis of the “new institutionalism” approach, the tools of game theory and rational choice modeling were put to use. In addition, in chapter 6, when it presented social capital and institutional success especially, on the issue of dilemmas of collective action, the book explicitly used game theory to comparatively study the north-south dichotomy of civic culture in Italy and the trustworthiness of the third party in creating the favorable condition.

However, with all its lapses, the book is yet the most instrumental piece to understand the performance of democratic institutions; and how social capital influenced institutional success. It is one of the notable empirical researches on the performance of democratic institutions that can be taken as a good reference.

Reference

Putnam, R. D. (1993). *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.