HAL
open science

Compte-rendu de Democracy in Europe: The EU and National Polities

Adrian Favell

To cite this version:

Adrian Favell. Compte-rendu de Democracy in Europe: The EU and National Polities. American Journal of Sociology, 2009, 115 (1), pp.286 - 288. 10.1086/605747 . hal-03587429

HAL Id: hal-03587429

https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-03587429

Submitted on 24 Feb 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

way industries respond to market forces. But their work does help to explain the contradiction between government data showing weak demand for less-educated workers and the perception of employers that there are very few such workers available.

Trying to determine the line of causation between immigration levels and the changes taking place in an industry is certainly difficult. But to assume that immigration levels are a response to restructuring rather than a factor causing the restructuring may be a mistake. Sociologists in general have been less interested in the related question of how immigration impacts American workers, and instead have tended to focus on immigrant adaptation. This book is a continuation of that tendency. In terms of adaptation, the authors in the volume find hopeful signs of immigrant integration. However, a common theme in a number of essays, including one by Massey, is that the very low education level of many Hispanic immigrants is a major impediment to their progress in America.

Another part of the book examines attitudes in the new areas of immigrant settlement. Using focus groups, Katherine Fennelly finds that working-class natives see immigration more negatively than do elites in receiving communities. This is consistent with prior research and points to the underlying reason for the political stalemate on immigration in Washington—a large gap between opinion leaders and ordinary voters. Helen B. Marrow's analysis of eastern North Carolina shows, among other things, that the long-standing concern remains among African-Americans that immigration specifically disadvantages them. She feels there is a "fairly bleak scenario for black-Hispanic socioeconomic conflict in rural locales" (p. 238).

New Faces in New Places provides an enormous amount of information. While it does not directly address the central questions facing policy makers, such as whether the country needs unskilled immigrant labor or the costs and benefits of allowing high levels of immigration, the book is a valuable addition to our understanding of the causes and consequences of immigration to new destinations.

Democracy in Europe: The EU and National Polities. By Vivien A. Schmidt. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Pp. xv+317. $40.00 (paper).

Adrian Favell
University of Aarhus

With Ireland as the latest member state to derail a constitutional settlement for the European Union, the EU's "democratic deficit" remains high on the European political agenda. Vivien Schmidt's contribution to this debate, *Democracy in Europe*, falls into a category familiar among its leading experts, from Fritz Scharpf and Giandomenico Majone to Joseph

Weiler and Andrew Moravcsik, who have all argued that the problem does not lie with the EU—such as it exists legally and institutionally—but that the still highly nationalized European public and media have basically got it all wrong. The EU works, they argue, as a remarkable, sui generis political and legal order, delivering peace, prosperity, and power to European member states; it is just that its unique political structures and multiheaded dynamics do not map onto classical notions of democracy, founded on the liberal democratic nation-state.

These authors are in many ways right, and the continuing failure of European public opinion to accept, understand, and celebrate the qualities and achievements of the extraordinary political beast that European politicians created out of the rubble of the mid-20th century is one of contemporary liberal democracy's most perplexing dilemmas. In many ways, it suggests a nostalgia in Europe for the populist past, seen in the continual quasi-fascistic calls for plebiscitary referenda, as well as the seduction of flashy, American-style presidential politics. The EU, meanwhile, craves love from somebody other than the small band of dedicated scholars who make their careers studying it. But these authors have not yet answered the deeper Tocquevillian question: How can such European citizens—who will trust, identify with, and believe in the EU—ever be created?

As Schmidt argues, democratic politics in Europe today is fatally flawed. A multileveled and functional "regional state" at the EU institutional level offers enlightened and pluralist "policy without politics," while national-level polities, stripped by the EU of much of their sovereign legal power and policy-making competencies, offer declamatory "politics without policy" for the masses—blaming the EU for everything that goes wrong at the national level. The book's central message, repeated throughout, is that the fault lies with the inability of national politicians to conceive of a political discourse that represents the European political system adequately as a democratic construction. Schmidt's major contribution is to detail comparatively across Western European states the degree of "fit" between European institutions and policy styles and the national political systems that interlock and engage with them. The politics of highly centralized, unitary states such as the United Kingdom and France mold far less well onto the consensual, dispersed structures of multileveled EU governance than that of others such as Germany or Italy, whose routine federal and regional politics are much more complementary.

Comparative sociologists of the state will appreciate Schmidt's reliable, synthetic summaries of the institutional structures and patterns of policy making in these four leading member states. Her analysis of their electoral politics as such is less convincing. A somewhat stylized, post hoc "discourse analysis" of familiar political events and figures, with a nod toward "political culture" as determinate, it often engages in essentializing political mannerisms and attitudes that are the stock of European political news coverage: that the proud "French" are obsessed with *grandeur* and universalistic Republican values, that ineffective "Italian" politics is drowned

in a cacophony of political voices, and so forth. The book does, though, in its breadth of references, represent a good state of the art of conventional EU studies today, including its "soft" political science tendencies to rely on eclectic institutionalist explanations and qualitative methods.

The overweening focus on large countries in the EU has its limitations. The awkward, arrogant, and sometimes destructive poses that these large players sometimes take help explain many of the diplomatic blockages and crises the EU encounters. But more often than not, the solutions to these wrangles have come from smaller, marginal, and newer member states, who are able to play brokers, and who have fewer strategic alternatives. An original European Community without the mediating role of the Benelux countries would have never been created. Nowadays, Portuguese, Finnish, Polish, and Cypriot representatives enjoy bargaining power that would never materialize in strictly intergovernmental horse trading. The role of smaller countries in the polity thus accounts for some of the EU's democratic legitimacy, for these are countries whose armies never marched across the continent in search of national glory or power.

In the end, we are no nearer a Tocquevillian answer to the Tocquevillian question the book's title poses. It might be suggested that we need to go outside of politics itself: beyond political institutions, political actors, or political discourse, to genuinely look at European citizens from the bottom up—as living, working, thinking, and sometimes voting in an emergent European space. This kind of sociology of European Union is now being pioneered by scholars such as Neil Fligstein and Juan Díez Medrano, and it is a pity this book continues to take such a narrow view of what "Europeanization" might mean, limited essentially to policy making and institutional dynamics. The limitations of this narrower Europeanization agenda, followed by Schmidt, are one of the reasons the EU studies field continues to puzzle, in circular fashion, over utopian questions of democratic design. What kind of EU constitution would satisfy the democratic cravings of a European public socialized into believing that it already lives in the finest, most civilized, democratic national societies on the planet? Perhaps the question needs reversing. What kind of ideal European citizen would need to be created to populate the sui generis institutional and legal structures that the EU's elite politicians, judges, and bureaucrats have created? Such "Europeans" do exist, but they are in fact very few in number, whether measured as those who self-identify in these terms (around 12%) or as those with some extensive experience of living and working outside their home country (a measly 4%). It is hardly any surprise that so many other European citizens remain locked—politically at least—in deeply nationalized worlds, which resemble the preoccupations of 19th-century nation-state building more than a 21st century of global interconnections. One suspects that the European public has the national democratic systems and the European democratic deficit that it deserves.