2012 Political Sociology Section Award Winners

Book Award

Committee: Seán Ó Riain (Chair), Bart Bonikowski, James Mahoney, Chris Rhomberg


Greta Krippner’s elegant and beautifully crafted book examines the political origins of financialization, one of the defining socio-economic processes of the contemporary era. Krippner argues that the roots of the US financial crisis lie in the unintended consequences of policymakers’ ad hoc responses to the challenges posed by the economic crises in the 1970s. Liberalizing financial markets was initially seen as a political strategy that could discipline inflation and socio-political demands. To their surprise, policymakers soon discovered that financial deregulation and low interest rates resulted in precisely the opposite – a significant loosening of economic discipline. However, this unanticipated policy failure quickly proved attractive to them. Finance provided a new motor of economic growth, apparently resolving the growth crisis and distributional conflicts of the 1970s. Furthermore, the turn to finance offered the opportunity to depoliticize the political management of the economy. By acting under the cover of ‘the market’, policymakers believed they could manage socio-economic tensions while maintaining the appearance of an economy free from politics. Ultimately however, they relinquished control of the economy to financial markets, creating the conditions for the financialization that drove the capitalist economy into systemic crisis. Based on detailed analysis of official documents, hearings transcripts and interviews with key informants, this book adds significantly to our understanding of how the inner workings of the US state shaped the financialization of the economy. Even more fundamentally, it explores the dynamic interaction between politics and economy, showing how the interaction between the state and finance ultimately resulted in the abdication of politics in the face of ‘the market’ it had helped to create.


Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery provide a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the collectivization of Romanian agriculture, a dramatic and brutal project of social engineering. Through a detailed and nuanced account of the process of collectivization, the book explores how peasants were made into bureaucrats and rural communities were transformed by being subsumed under formal organizations. Drawing on a remarkable range of research sites and data, the analysis details the social technologies through which party cadres transformed persons into subjects and created new social divisions and authority relations. However, these processes also varied significantly by locality as cadres were often weak, poorly controlled from the centre and exercised their new power by inserting their practices into local idioms. Ironically, the bureaucratization of Romanian rural life produced a ‘personalization’ of power relations while the promotion of a unitary identity produced a ‘divided personhood’. This is a rich account of the often mundane processes through which the Romanian state transformed communities, persons and ultimately itself. It greatly enriches our understanding of the processes of politics and of the ‘political’ itself.

Article Award

Committee: Isaac Martin (Chair), Mabel Berezin, Celia Winkler, Cheol-Sung Lee

The best article award committee received 23 submissions. After several rounds of deliberation we agreed upon two co-winners.


This article challenges Tocqueville’s classic argument that civic associations encourage the development of democracy. In contemporary China, Professor Spires argues, this conventional Tocquevillian view has it backwards: many civic associations have developed in tacit collaboration with the authoritarian state. Professor Spires’s extensive field work allows him to document the benefits that public officials derive from the unofficial toleration of unlicensed civic associations, and the reciprocal benefits that some of these civic associations derive from allowing the government to claim credit for their actions. The article shows that the relationships between civil society and authoritarian states are neither necessarily antagonistic, nor necessarily cooperative; they are contingent. But at least sometimes a vibrant and illegal civil society...
can aid an authoritarian state by solving otherwise intractable problems of rule. This surprising and provocative conclusion may provoke a major rethinking of a central issue in political sociology: the social conditions that support dictatorship and democracy.


This article addresses a classic question in comparative political sociology: the origin and character of populist rule. By reconceptualizing populism as a form of political practice—instead of as an ideology, or a peculiar class coalition, or a specific form of government—Professor Jansen sheds new light on the trajectory of political regimes in twentieth century Latin America, and opens the door to new comparative studies with even broader application. Much of the confusion in the comparative sociology of populism is cleared up if we recognize that populist mobilization is a strategy that has been employed by various actors to various ends. Professor Jansen equips us to pursue an ambitious comparative research agenda: discovering the conditions under which populist mobilization takes place. Political sociologists will no doubt be pursuing this agenda for some time to come.

**Graduate Student Paper Award**

**Committee:** Edward Walker (chair), Sarah Sobieraj, Kathleen Fallon, Jason Beckfield

The ASA Political Sociology Graduate Student Paper Award committee received 27 submissions from a diverse range of applicants. The committee was generally very impressed with the overall quality of the papers and saw considerable strengths in the submissions.

After a thorough evaluation and an extensive series of exchanges between the committee members, the committee selected the following submission as the award winner:

**Recipient:** Carly Knight, “A Voice but Not a Vote: The Case of Surrogate Representation and Social Welfare For Legal Noncitizens Since 1996”

The committee’s voting members on this case found much to admire in this groundbreaking paper. On a conceptual level, the study examines a fundamental question about the political representation of noncitizens in advanced democratic welfare states. That is, how is representation possible for noncitizens despite few channels of access and the absence of voting rights? The study addresses this question by examining variation across U.S. states in their willingness to extend eligibility of welfare benefits (through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF) to noncitizens in the wake of the 1996 welfare reform legislation, finding that twenty-one states took measures to extend benefits to noncitizens. The study also examines how six of these states, when faced with shifting political sentiments and/or resource constraints, later removed this benefit. Although Knight’s QCA models make clear – as one might expect – that a state’s liberalism was a major factor in whether it extended benefits to noncitizens, Knight’s more consequential finding is that having a sizable representation of citizen co-ethnics in a state served both to promote the extension of benefits to noncitizens and also to thwart the threat of retrenchment. Thus, citizen co-ethnics help to provide “surrogate representation” to noncitizens both in terms of initial policymaking and also in the maintenance of the policy. We expect that this study will have a strong impact on a variety of debates not only within political sociology, but also in scholarship on immigration, social stratification, and ethnicity.

**Honorable Mention:** Christopher Gibson, “Making Redistributive Direct Democracy Matter: Development and Women’s Participation in the Gram Sabhas of Kerala, India”

The committee was also impressed with this important study of Redistributive Direct Democracy in the *gram sabhas* of the Indian state of Kerala, which challenges existing theories of development that emphasize the role of parties in power, women in office, the capacity of the state, social capital, or expenditures by the state. Importantly, the study highlights the unique institution of the *gram sabhas* – institutions that give citizen participants the constitutional authority to engage directly in development activities typically reserved for state bureaucrats – which open important opportunities for women’s political participation. Using a unique dependent measure of public goods that reflect redistributive development – the construction of local housing and latrines – the study shows that women’s participation in direct democracy can have substantial effects on development. The committee was especially taken by Gibson’s effort to collect systematic data on a stratified random sample of 72 local governments across Kerala. Consistent with the “Real Utopias” theme of the 2012 ASA meeting, this study offers concrete evidence of how democratic practices can realize social change, and is likely to reorient thinking about development, politics, and gender.