



Universiteit
Leiden
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Boekbespreking van: Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective

Rosema, M.

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election is freely and fairly conducted within a matrix of civil liberties, and that all the contestants accept the validity of the election results. (pp. 12-13).

This last requirement – that the loser should accept the results – is quite unusual and the authors should have justified this choice in greater depth. In nearly all democracies, also the established ones in Western Europe, there are groups that do not accept the election results. Does this mean that such political regimes are not democratic? How large and important must such a group be before a regime is classified as non-democratic? Unfortunately, the authors avoid such a discussion. A more serious drawback, however, is that the authors do not apply their own concept in the empirical analyses. In their statistical assessment, they suddenly appear to test the impact of several factors on the *extent of democratization*, measured by the change between 1988 and 1994 in a country's political rights score (collected by the researcher Gastil of the Freedom House). This measurement cannot answer the central question concerning the influences on transitions from non-democratic to democratic regimes. A change in the level of democracy does not necessarily mean a transition to democracy. For example, Angola's democratization score did not change between 1988 and 1994, while Botswana became less democratic, and Burundi and Namibia democratized a bit. Such a score says nothing about the transition to democracy: on the basis of their own concept of democratic transition, the authors themselves classify Botswana as an established democratic regime (p. 79), Angola and Burundi as non-democratic regimes that have not made a transition (p. 120), and Namibia as a country that has made a democratic transition (p. 120). It is obscure why the authors do not use their own classification in the empirical analyses.

Nevertheless, these drawbacks are insignificant compared with the advantages of the book. This book is, as far as I know, the first broad, cross-national study aiming to explore the underlying general causes of regime transitions in Africa. Although the authors gained insights from case studies, they have tried to avoid the overgeneralization from single cases. Until now, under influence of anthropology, studies on African politics have been heavily dominated by heavy descriptions of individual cases. Sweeping generalizations about Africa as a whole are often derived from case studies of individual countries. Extrapolating from the case of Somalia or Rwanda, for instance, one might conclude that political liberalization in Africa inevitably dissolves into ethnic conflicts and warfare. Although the case study method may illuminate a wealth of fascinating detail about political processes in particular settings, it cannot establish generalizations about continent-wide trends to test explanatory theories. Only through cross-national comparison can one gain insight into the conditions that push some countries to democracy and others not. The authors employ such a systematic comparison and that is what makes the book a worthy and important contribution.

It certainly deserves a wider readership than only those scholars who are interested in Africa. The overview of the theoretical approaches is in itself a honourable contribution, because it brings order in the chaotic maze of different democratization

approaches. In addition, although the authors aim to make generalizations, they keep close to the cases. They show that adopting a comparative method does not necessarily mean that one learns little about the complex realities of each country. Researchers who are prone to generalize on the basis of broad comparative quantitative research can learn from this attitude. The book will therefore be a 'must' for anyone studying democratic transitions in all corners of the globe.

Renske Doorenspleet

Geoffrey Evans and Pippa Norris (eds.), *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*. SAGE Publications, London 1999, ISBN 0761960198, £55.00 (hardback), ISBN 0761960201, £18.99 (paperback).

The 1997 British general elections gave Labour a massive landslide of seats. Under the leadership of Tony Blair, Labour finally regained power from the Conservatives, who had been in office since Margaret Thatcher became prime minister in 1979. In *Critical Elections*, a volume edited by Geoffrey Evans and Pippa Norris, the 1997 elections are put in long-term perspective with respect to ideology, issues and social alignments. The study has resulted in a substantial insight into what happened in these elections, and what did not. Moreover, in some respects it sets an example for future studies in other countries. Hence, reading this study is not only a 'must' for those interested in contemporary British politics, it is also highly recommendable for those studying parties and voters in other countries.

The central question that recurs in each chapter is whether or not the 1997 elections mark a critical, realigning development in British politics. This question stems from the typology of elections that Norris and Evans present in the introduction of the book. They distinguish between maintaining, dealigning, and realigning elections. The latter two are divided further into deviating elections and secular dealignment, respectively secular realignment and critical elections. Critical elections are characterized, they argue, by ideological realignment, social realignment, and realignments in partisan loyalties.

Let me first discuss the so-called partisan loyalties. The analysis by Ivor Crewe and Katarina Thomson of voters' general feelings towards Labour and Conservatives suggests that the 1997 election result was due to both negative changes in feelings towards the Conservatives and positive changes in feelings towards Labour. In terms of party identification, Labour replaced the Conservatives as the 'natural majority' party. The authors argue that the findings point more to a process of realignment than to deviating elections. However, Crewe and Thomson warn that, since party identification matches closely the actual distribution of the vote, these figures may not represent long-term preferences as supposed.

Changes in partisan feelings may be due to changes among the electorate, but also

to changes among the parties. The main parties are studied in terms of issues and ideology with respect to their manifestos, MPs and grassroots members. Ian Budge shows that whereas in the 1997 party manifestos the Conservatives' right-wing position was almost unchanged, Labour had abandoned its traditional left-wing position. Labour leap-frogged over the Liberal Democrats and hence became the centre party. Never before had the party shifted right so much, and for the first time rightist issues gained more attention than leftist ones. Pippa Norris shows that Labour's manifesto changes were matched by opinion changes among Labour MPs. In 1997 they showed much weaker support for a number of leftist policy issues than in 1992. Within the Labour Party opinions shifted also at grassroots level, as Paul Webb and David Farrell show. In 1997 Labour members had shifted towards more rightist and more authoritarian positions. The stands of the Conservative Party members were largely unchanged.

Does Labour's unprecedented swing point to a process of realignment and to 1997 as a critical election? Webb and Farrell conclude that this may well be the case. Norris comes to a similar conclusion, because it was not the recruitment itself of new Labour MPs that accounted for the less leftist position, but the fact that these new Labour MPs were young. Budge, however, expects the Labour Party to make a shift back to the left, just like the Conservatives returned to their traditional right-wing position after they had made a major shift left in the 1950s.

Let me now turn from the parties to the voters. What happened with respect to ideology at the level of the electorate? David Sanders shows that in 1997 the ideological positions of the British electorate as a whole had not changed much. The impact of left-right ideology remained fairly stable as far as voting Conservative was concerned, but with respect to voting Labour the effects of voters' stands on left-right issues had decreased substantially in 1997. Geoffrey Evans, Anthony Heath and Clive Payne show that the influence of class on vote choice had also weakened, as 1997 showed the lowest level of class voting yet recorded.

How should these findings be interpreted? Evans, Heath and Payne argue that although there has been a general decline in class voting since the 1960s, the long-term figures in fact point more to a pattern of trendless fluctuation. They further argue that this pattern can be accounted for largely by the degree of ideological polarization between the two main parties. Accordingly, it is Labour's move to the right that resulted in the low level of class voting, not a secular trend in society. Hence, it seems that the weakening of the importance of left-right ideology is also due to Labour's move. Moreover, Sanders concludes that overall the changes in the ideology-vote relationship are too modest to speak of critical elections. Although these developments are not due to changes in the electorate, but to Labour's move, they can be characterized as a process of dealignment in terms of class and left-right ideology.

Labour's move to the centre in terms of left-right may have made room for realignment in other terms. With respect to the social characteristics of race, region, and gender, however, no major changes took place. In 1997 already existing patterns were largely confirmed and no new social alignments were established. Maybe realign-

ment did not take place in terms of social cleavages, but in terms of new salient issues. Two issues were examined: devolution in Scotland, and European Union membership. In Scotland previous patterns also remained unchanged. About Europe, Evans concludes that although it may become an issue that redefines British politics, as yet its influence is limited. In short, evidence of major realignments was neither found in terms of social characteristics, nor in terms of issues.

On the basis of all these findings, Norris and Evans conclude that some major changes took place, especially within the Labour Party and with respect to voters' partisan loyalties, but that these do not justify the classification of the 1997 elections as critical. Changes at elite level were not matched by changes at mass level. It was the move by the Labour Party that resulted in a dealignment in terms of ideology and class, not changes in the relationship between ideology or class and voting as such. Moreover, no realignment took place in terms of social characteristics or issues.

The main strength of *Critical Elections* lies in its thorough analysis of left-right issues and ideology at the level of both voters and parties. The chapters on parties' manifestos, politicians and grassroots members and voters' left-right ideology and class fit together nicely as single pieces of one puzzle. Moreover, these chapters put together findings based on different major research projects, such as the Comparative Manifestos Project, British Election Studies, and British Representation Study (previously British Candidate Study). The theoretical framework provided by the typology of elections has given the book a unifying structure that many edited volumes lack. In all these respects this volume sets an example and its approach deserves to be followed in other countries.

The book is successful in putting the 1997 British elections into a long-term perspective in terms of left-right ideology, social alignments, and a number of 'position' issues. However, it seems that these do not tell the whole story. The book is less successful in explaining the electoral changes that took place in 1997. First, it does not become fully clear to what extent Labour's move into the centre explains the more positive feelings towards the party. Maybe other considerations could have played a role because, as Sanders argues, left-right ideology was just much less a constraining influence for Labour in 1997 than before. Second, it seems that the negative changes in feelings towards the Conservatives cannot be explained well on the basis of the analyses presented.

Maybe these weaknesses of the study result from its theoretical framework. This may focus the attention too much on ideology and social and issue alignments, thereby ignoring other important aspects. For example, Crewe and Thomson argue that British elections do not turn on party positions, but on party performance. Hence, Labour was successful in 1997 because it had replaced the Conservatives as 'the party of good economic management'. The success of future applications of typologies of elections depends on the degree to which such considerations can be incorporated.

Within the typology of elections as presented by Norris and Evans another improvement can also be made. It seems more logical to regard deviating elections as

a separate category, rather than as a sort of dealigning election. Consequently, we would distinguish between maintaining, deviating, dealigning and realigning elections. Additionally, it seems reasonable to add a mirror-image of critical elections (as a realigning election) to the category of dealigning elections. We could then distinguish between 'secular dealignment' and 'critical dealignment', and between 'secular realignment' and 'critical realignment'. Note that the definition of critical elections would not be affected by these adjustments.

Let me make some final remarks about electoral change. As many of the authors argue, only the future can tell whether changes indeed will be permanent. Although the book cannot give the answer, it does give an indication of what determines future changes. As Evans, Heath and Payne argue, future developments seem to depend more on party strategies than on secular trends in society. Arguably the main message throughout the book is that voters are responsive to changes within the parties. Hence, it seems that parties and not voters determine what will happen in the future. Whether this is a reassuring or alarming conclusion, you may decide for yourself.

Martin Rosema

J.H.H. Weiler, *The Constitution of Europe. "Do the New Clothes Have an Emperor?" and Other Essays on European Integration*. Cambridge 1999, ISBN 0521585678, Dfl. 58.30.

Joseph Weiler is one of the few authors who approaches the European order from a combined perspective of public law and political theory. Instead of studying European law, European policy, or the behaviour of actors within the European Union, he argues that the very framework within which policy and material law are being produced should be the object of debate. Not the organization of the European order, but its very foundations are questioned. This calls for a fundamental approach, one which is necessarily conducted at a highly abstract level. The question Weiler lays before us is daunting. He wonders what on earth it is we are doing, creating this thing now called the European Union. In other words, "What is the essence of the European order and what is (or should be) its purpose?"

Before discussing Weiler's attempt to answer this question, it is worth mentioning two things. First of all, do not read the whole book. The author does not expect you to. Besides, as the book is a collection of essays written over an extended period of fourteen years, it is not strange that the book lacks balance and coherence. Reading the whole book instead of the recommended parts is more likely to confuse than to enlighten. Weiler recommends chapters one, two and ten.

Second, one should be aware that the title of the book, *The Constitution of Europe*, can be misleading. The word 'constitution' is not used in the traditional, narrow sense, meaning a body of fundamental principles according to which a state is governed.

Besides human rights, none of the other characteristics of a (liberal) constitution, such as the separation of powers, are discussed. Instead, Weiler is compelled to raise the question whether it is legitimate to call the European order a state in the first place. The book, therefore, is about 'constituting' or 'founding' Europe.

As Weiler himself is well aware, even a descriptive analysis of the European order is controversial. The question, "What is this thing called Europe?", is not a neutral one and is often inextricably bound up with the question what Europe *should* be. Whereas many scholars, in particular those in the field of international law and international relations, claim that the European order still resembles an international legal order, Weiler argues that the Community has acquired important features of a (supranational) state. Following a public law perspective, he designates the European Court of Justice as the one steady driving force in founding the Community, and regards the treaties and the 'constitutional' jurisprudence as the sources of constitutional law.

In the second chapter, Weiler divides the creation of the supranational framework into three periods. The foundational epoch starts in 1958 and lasts until 1973. During these years, four doctrines were established. First, the Court founded the doctrine of direct effect, which means that clear and self-sufficient Community legal norms must be regarded as the law of the land. In other words, Community law is self-executing and operates directly on the people in their individual capacities. Second, the doctrine of supremacy was established, which means that national law yields for any conflicting Community norm. Third, the Court established that powers would be implied in favour of the Community when they were necessary to serve legitimate ends pursued by it. Fourth, Community norms were to be subject to some sort of human rights scrutiny by the Court.

The second period, from 1973 to the 1980s, is generally regarded as a stagnant epoch in European integration. Weiler, however, considers this period no less revolutionary than the first. In a series of cases, the Court established the doctrine that no sphere of material jurisdiction could be excluded from the competence of the Community. This equalled the erosion of the original understanding that the principle of enumeration would be strictly limited.

According to Weiler the third period of the creation of a supranational framework, heralded by the Maastricht Treaty, is characterized by a public reaction to the state-building on the European level. The augmentation of state-like powers in the two former periods provoked a debate about democracy and legitimacy. Weiler considers this public reaction a significant constitutional moment in itself. I would say that the public reaction is still only marginal, but agree that it would be good if there was more public debate.

The debate about democracy and legitimacy is usually couched in the following terms. As things stand, the Council (a collectivity of ministers) can now pass legislation on a proposal of the Commission (a collectivity of non-elected civil servants), and this legislation is binding and enforceable even in the face of conflicting legislation passed by national parliaments, the traditional repository of democratic legitimacy. The