<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

Organizing democracy : How international organizations assist
new democracies, by Paul Poast and Johannes Urpelainen
[Book review]

Morris, P Sean

2019-07-04

Morris , P S 2019 , ' Organizing democracy : How international organizations assist new
democracies, by Paul Poast and Johannes Urpelainen [Book review] ' , Democratization ,
vol. 26 , no. 5 , pp. 889-890 . <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1565405>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/324938>

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1565405>

unspecified

acceptedVersion

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.

This is an electronic reprint of the original article.

This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version.

Organizing democracy. How international organizations assist new democracies, by Paul Poast and Johannes Urpelainen

Although the role of international (intergovernmental) organizations vary, they often will fall into two categories – providing economic and financial assistance to states, or, serve as a security blanket for states emerging from conflicts or states that were either occupied (including colonization). The core international organizations today such as the UN, NATO, the WTO and the World Bank Group reflects this assessment. Furthermore, there are niche international organizations that are not as visible when compare to other international organizations and that provide technical and expert assistance to states. One of the most common elements associated with these organizations is that they are mostly imbedded in the “Western” culture of society and, are, therefore expected to leverage “Western” values as part of their assistance to states. This is the case especially if states seeking membership in these organizations are, or, were at one point, “illiberal”, “undemocratic”, “have poor human rights protection”, “a weak rule of law”, and any other description that fit narratives such as ‘axis of evil’, ‘corrupt regime’, ‘dictatorship’, ‘the last dictator of Europe’ or a dissonance of civil war. But whatever the politics of modern sovereign states, they all aspire to be legitimate in the eyes of the world and one way of legitimising such aspiration is through membership in international organizations. For states that fall into the category of occupation or colonization they have mostly engaged in novel ways of legitimising their existence as part of the liberal international order. They do so either by forming new regional organizations as a form of entry to established international organizations or creating alliances with established democratic states such as the Anglo-American alliance or the liberal integrationist system of Western Europe where established organizations are keen on building democratic liberal regimes.

In this vein, *Organizing Democracy* is a careful and diplomatic assessment of how the Baltic States sought to join NATO to provide a security blanket after the trauma of Soviet occupation, and, also, how, albeit from a different perspective, former British colonies in the Caribbean, especially Barbados, gained a seat at the table of liberal democratic regimes. The evidence that the authors use to demonstrate these developments are the establishment of the Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion (BALBAT, security organization) and the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA, economic organization). For the Baltic States, the road to NATO membership was not to apply directly after they re-established their sovereignty in 1991, but rather to demonstrate a commitment to democratization in order to clear the cloud of Soviet illiberalism, but more importantly, as the authors point out, positioning BALBAT ‘as a tangible contribution by the Baltic States to peacekeeping and wider European stability (148).’ The BALBAT process was, therefore, a “soft” approach for the Baltic States to eventual NATO membership, especially as in the eyes of Western states involvement of Baltic states in peacekeeping operations was not as controversial as the countries’ direct membership. Poast and Urpelainen do not want their readers to be fixated on international organizations democratization process as a post-Soviet event only, and therefore, they literally turn to the opposite side of the world to guide their readers through the economic integration process of Barbados and CARIFTA after the decolonization process in the 1960s. Even though Barbados had healthy democratic institutions during colonization, independence offered the leadership the opportunity to form international organizations as a ‘viable democratic regime (163),’ so that Caribbean states could gain ‘much needed economic support from the established democracies (166).’ In addition, Poast and Urpelainen treat the reader with examples from Uruguay’s integration with Mercosur as part of their narrative on forming, remodelling and reforming international organizations.

Having presented a theory of democratization that promotes the formation and membership in international organization, backed by quantitative and qualitative evidence, the authors successfully demonstrate the benefits that new democratic states gain from forming or participating in international organizations. Yet, one must ask whether democratization was the right approach to develop the arguments presented in the book. The authors introduce a concept of democratization as 'the process by which government institutions transition from authoritarian or foreign rule to self-governing democracy (2)', and this is where the puzzle remains for me--how to understand the international organizations that the authors use as government institutions. My reading of government institutions, in this context, apply to those at the domestic level without external participation. Therefore, the authors could have done a better job in setting out these conceptual discrepancies. Another critique is how the Baltic states should be conceived during their occupation: were they fully autocratic or were there liberal elements governing those states when they were occupied? Perhaps my legally trained eyes became too sceptical of how the authors presented their theory and their assessment of international organizations and new democracies, and, therefore, I am acquiescing to the benefit of the doubt, that this book is valuable and interesting and contain substantial evidence that merits the necessity of forming international organizations as minor steps to admission to larger and more powerful international organizations.

P. Sean Morris, University of Helsinki