

Richard Lachmann

Jan Pakulski and András Körösenyi, "Toward Leader Democracy". London: Anthem Press, 2012, 194 pp.

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Book Review

Jan Pakulski and András Körösenyi, *Toward Leader Democracy*. London: Anthem Press, 2012, 194 pp.

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Jan Pakulski and András Körösenyi examine a fundamental change in democratic politics: the decline of voter identification with and loyalty to parties and their platforms. The authors marshal both quantitative data and short discussions of the politics in various European countries and the United States to argue that leaders rather than parties now are the main “democratic linkage between the rulers and citizenry” [p. 3.] They point to the dealignment of voters and parties since the 1970s, the expanding coverage by mass media of politics and politicians, the centralization of power in executives rather than legislatures, and the globalization of politics and media as the primary causes of this shift. The authors also note that leaders and leadership came to be seen as dangerous and somewhat illegitimate in the aftermath of the horrors of fascist and communist dictators, most notably Hitler and Stalin. As memory of those politicians and their crimes have faded, so has the sense that leader-based politics is an absolute danger also diminished, allowing admiration for ambitious leaders.

Pakulski and Körösenyi critique analyses of so-called new politics: they argue that those authors correctly diagnosed the decline of parties, but mistakenly thought parties would be superseded by new social movements motivated by social and environmental issues, when in fact it has been leader democracy that has replaced party politics. The authors contend that leaders are attractive to voters because they are seen as better able than party officials and anonymous bureaucrats to respond to global pressures. This is an original and provocative claim. Unfortunately, the authors offer no evidence that contemporary leaders in fact are effective at responding to globalization, environmental degradation or any of the other forces that transcend national boundaries.

At some points the authors make a milder claim: that globalization increases “the likelihood of unintended consequences...Governing states to resemble attempts at regulating complex weather systems – it is increasingly risky and triggers risk-related public anxieties” [p. 73.] Those anxieties lead publics to embrace strong leaders, or at least charismatic politicians they hope will be strong leaders rather than anonymous party blocs. This latter argument ties in well with the authors’ accurate observation that media pay increasing attention to the personalities of leaders, making it ever harder for voters to focus on party platforms or the actual decisions of legislators who don’t attract the media spotlight. However, the authors rightly note that often leaders fail to deliver on their promising of stability and growth and then voters turn them out of office, replacing them with new leaders who claim that they can do better. This book doesn’t examine what voters make of their elected leaders’ repeated failures, or how voters’ rising cynicism in the face of broken promises will affect leader democracy.

The authors are outstanding in their analyses of what they present as the original social science theorists of leader democracy: Max Weber and Joseph Schumpeter. This book offers perhaps the best exegesis of Weber’s writings on charisma. The authors make clear that Weber had a complex analysis of the relationship among charismatic leader,

parties, and the public, and lead readers through the steps of Weber's analysis. Weber saw parties as developers of charismatic politicians; however, Pakulski and Körösenyi fall into the same trap as Weber in failing to develop any clear criteria for determining who is charismatic.

For Weber, and probably for Pakulski and Körösenyi (although they don't offer a clear position on this), charisma is in the eyes of the beholder. If voters or masses follow a leader beyond the bounds of tradition or bureaucratic rules, then the leader is charismatic. Yet, when they look at the range of contemporary leaders, Pakulski and Körösenyi have little to say about their actual leadership. What is it that Berlusconi or Obama or Julia Gillard of Australia (three of the leaders identified by the authors), or any of the other leaders do that makes them leaders? What are their accomplishments, besides winning elections? How are these leaders transformative, or at least how do their policies differ from what parties pursued in earlier decades? Since we don't get any specifics, it remains just the authors' assertion that the rise of leader democracy is a better explanation of contemporary politics than pluralist or deliberative-participatory models. Similarly, when the authors present Schumpeter's model of innovation and show how it applies to politics, they make a valuable contribution by so clearly bringing Schumpeter's writings to the attention of contemporary readers and explaining how it can be used to understand the rise of leaders. However, Pakulski and Körösenyi don't show what is innovative about the policies of the contemporary leaders they mention. Their innovations, at least as far as the evidence the authors present goes, seem limited to successful self-advertisement and to propelling their careers through the venues of modern media outlets.

The final substantive chapter of this book is highly persuasive. There the authors argue that the continuation and deepening of leader democracy is a more likely prediction of the future of politics than what they call demo-optimism and demo-skepticism. Demo-optimism, exemplified by David Held, posits that publics increasingly are becoming cosmopolitan and transcending national borders. Pakulski and Körösenyi rightly note that this appealing vision is highly unrealistic since it doesn't reflect how actual publics in Europe think about democracy or themselves, and it "is unable to identify the major social or political actors who would be interested in, and capable of, reforming the world order in line with the cosmopolitan-egalitarian vision" [p. 129.]

The demo-skeptics, presented here through the work of Colin Crouch, see democracy weakening as global elites become ever more capable of setting policy within nations and through international agencies. Pakulski and Körösenyi rightly critique this view, especially as presented by David Rothkopf, for failing to offer evidence that could demonstrate that "the members of the superclass form a group or a cohesive collective, rather than a mere statistical category" [p. 123.] However, other scholars, dating back to C. Wright Mills, do show how elites are cohesive. More significant than the connections among members of elites is their ability to actually determine government policy.

Pakulski and Körösenyi assert "Most students of the contemporary power structure point to the persisting centrality of elected political executives" [p. 114.] In fact, many if not most elite studies don't give primacy to elected public officials. While Mills saw national political and military leaders as two of the three ruling elites, more recent work on the U.S. (such as that of G. William Domhoff), and work from Euro-

pean countries which unlike the U.S. are not geopolitical superpowers, point to the primacy of corporate and financial elites over government officials. The recent book by Mark Mizruchi, *The Fracturing of the American Corporate Elite* [Harvard University Press, 2013,] traces the decline of business networks centered on banks in the United States over the past four decades, but finds that the disorganization of business has been paralleled by the decline of unions and of governmental capacity. This creates what he calls “a paradoxical situation” in which business is disunified but most individual corporations and the rich as a whole are still able to get what they want for government in the form of tax cuts, favorable regulations and subsidies. Business interests also seem able to work their will on the EU and most of its component national governments as well. Leaders may be more visible in the absence of organized interest groups, but such visibility does not necessarily mean leaders are effective counterweights to elites.

Ultimately, the relative worth and explanatory power of elite and leader democracy theories, and of the other efforts to account for the decline of states run by disciplined and coherent political parties, will depend on their ability to explain the actual policies states pursue today. Despite the other strengths of Pakulski and Körösenyi’s book, the almost total absence of an effort to specify and analyze the policies leaders adopt, limits the value of this book. However, their clear articulation of what leader democracy entails, and their success at finding the analytic foundations for the study of democratic leaders in the work of Weber and Schumpeter, mean that this book provides the essential theoretical basis for empirical studies that Pakulski and Körösenyi or others can undertake in the future to assess the actual impact leaders have on the domestic and international policies of the states they head.

Richard Lachmann
University of Albany