

Introduction

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Political institutions play a critical role in the attempts to overcome collective action problems, both domestically and internationally. In the framework of domestic politics, political institutions work to serve, oppress, or neglect people. On the international stage, they provide a useful tool for interstate cooperation to maintain the status quo, alter the current order, or overcome collective action problems that countries cannot effectively address alone. Challenged by wars, stagnation, economic shocks, or crises of legitimacy, political institutions are inevitably questioned and face trials. Both scholars and practitioners hold the responsibility to accurately describe how political institutions function so that we can figure out how to adjust them to better serve us. In this issue of the journal, scholars across various disciplines seek to answer important questions regarding institutions, both formal and informal, across different fields. From international governance to foreign policy, political parties in the US Congress, and the media, the articles presented in this edition of *Political Perspectives* seek to address critical questions of how these institutions shape behaviour of states, individuals and groups and affect the world around us.

This issue of the journal originated from a graduate research conference that was held at Georgia State University on March 4th, 2010, entitled “Negotiating Solutions: Political Institutions and Governance in the 21st Century.” Bringing together graduate students active in the study of

political institutions, this conference provided a forum for dialogue and exchange within and across the various fields of political science, resulting in 26 papers from seven different universities. The best essays were selected for a peer-review process and five were chosen for publication. These papers represent creative thinking, quality research and, most importantly, an interesting cross-disciplinary exchange of arguments.

Betul Gokkir begins this journey with an article “Global Governance of Renewable Energy and the WREC/WREN Case,” in which she investigates the origin and operation of global governance, using the World Renewable Energy Congress/Network as her case study. By studying the framework that brings together private, public and non-profit entities, she asks whether the distinctions between public and private, and between science and policy, prevail in the field of global environmental governance. She argues that, as within states, the lines between these areas in international politics are blurry at best and are not effectively distinct.

Wes Eberhard examines the causes of China’s increased participation in East Asian regional institutions in his article “Socialised or calculated interests?” He analyses changes in China’s foreign policy in light of competing explanations for the shift to a more cooperative strategy in Beijing’s interaction with other states. The author asks whether rationalist or constructivist explanations best account for China’s foreign policy behaviour in recent years. The focus of the debate in this paper centers on the potential of states’ interactions to socialize them to behave in a similar fashion. Essentially, the author asks if China’s shift toward more cooperative behaviour in the realm of foreign policy is the result of a calculation designed to promote its

interests, or whether this change is the consequence of Chinese leaders' internalizing the norms of such behaviour between and among states.

In "Media and the Bush Administration," Erin Cottle analyses how the inaccurate media coverage of the causes of the 2007 mortgage crisis may have influenced the administration's response to these events. In an attempt to stem the damage of the mortgage crisis, the Bush administration created the Hope Now Initiative. This plan asked mortgage lenders to postpone increases in their adjustable rate mortgages (ARMs) and, by most accounts, did little to help those suffering from the effects of these events. Throughout this process, the media paid a significant amount of attention to ARMs and, as this paper argues, directly shaped policy. By analysing news articles in the New York Times and Washington Post before and after the Bush administration announced its plan, the author identifies a link between the media and policy. This paper adds to the study of the interaction between the media and politics by looking at the role of media coverage as a watchdog of and for government. Ultimately, we learn that this critical but informal institution of democracy influences not only the reactions of the public, but of politicians as well.

In the paper entitled "Touchdown, slam dunk, or home run," Ryan Yonk delves into the importance of the media as a force for shaping public perceptions. This paper focuses on the institution of the press, looking at how small media outlets in rural areas affect the population's view of the quality of education in that specific area. While education and the media are hotly discussed topics, this piece makes an important contribution by analysing how newspaper coverage affects the perceived quality of schools. In addition, most of the studies involving

these two topics neglect rural areas, where approximately 20% of the population of the United States still lives. The author of this paper conducts an analysis of print media at the local level and surveys of adults living in rural areas of the inter-mountain west region of the United States. He finds that while positively framed stories can have a positive effect on public opinion of schools, such a relationship only exists in the cases where the stories are paired with athletic coverage.

The final paper explores the US Congress. In “House Journal Votes,” Brian Webb explores why individual members of the House request votes on the daily Journal. This exploration asks whether individual members, through voting on the daily Journal, are primarily engaged in behaviour that strategically attempts to help or hinder the goals of the Congressional leadership. Webb discovers that Congressional majority members use Journal votes strictly as tools to assist leaders, while minority members use Journal requests as both obstruction and leadership assistance. This examination of individual representatives’ Journal votes provides critical insight into the use of formal institutional rules as a tactic for aiding or hindering the goals of institutional leaders.

The topics of the articles in this issue vary greatly from the smallest of institutions in the rural United States, to large multi-national institutions that attempt to solve international collective action problems. However, the common theme through each of the papers points to the effects of the institutions on the behaviour and their outcomes of individuals, groups, and states. This set of analyses demonstrates that the institutions matter, regardless of whether they are the informal

oversight of the media or the formal rules of standing legislative bodies. In addition, the articles presented in this issue add to our knowledge of the role, effects and functions of these structures.

This issue of *Political Perspectives* and the graduate student conference at Georgia State University, which served as its basis, show a vibrant discussion of burgeoning scholars in the study of institutions. The efforts would not have been possible without the support and participation of the Department of Political Science at Georgia State University, including its graduate student association, as well as the contributors from other universities. In addition, we would like to thank *Political Perspectives* for the opportunity to share this volume of scholarship with a broader audience, and the reviewers whose quick and constructive feedback played a crucial role in shaping the final forms of the essays. We would like to especially thank Katherine Allison for her helpful guidance and patience in the development of this journal issue.