

The Elements of Good Government

Too much diversity makes it more difficult

Book Review by Wayne Lutton

Among the movers and shakers, “Diversity” is all the rage. The “diversifiers” include Republican presidential wannabes George W. Bush, who has roundly attacked as “uncaring” those who call for immigration control, and Dan Quayle (recall that during his tour as Vice President he intoned that “Diversity is our strength”). Hillary Clinton — the Madame Mao of the Democrats Great Diversity Revolution — is fond of lecturing teens on how “fortunate” they are to attend grade schools that resemble a meeting of the UN or the Mexican Mafia (when she was Hillary Rodham, the future Mrs. Clinton grew up in an “Ozzie and Harriet” western Chicagoland suburb and admits to having been a Teen for Goldwater). The Commander of the NATO attacks on Serbia, General Wesley Kane Clark, declared that the Serbs would be compelled to accept a multicultural, Islamic-majority status for their home territory of Kosovo. “Diversity,” we are assured, is just great and represents the wave of the New Age future.

Not all are yet convinced that “Diversity” is always and everywhere a good thing. Indeed, a number of scholars have been taking a harder look at “Diversity” and “Multiculturalism.” A study released in 1995 by the National Center for Policy Analysis, *Multiculturalism and Economic Growth*, concluded “Countries with a common culture are more likely than culturally diverse

nations to be economically prosperous and to offer their citizens more personal freedom.” The author of the study, Gerald Scully, remarked, “Multiculturalism sounds fine in theory, but we find that where there are multiple cultures there is almost always conflict. Most homogeneous cultures have more civil and political freedom, while culturally heterogeneous ones have less.”

More recently, a team of researchers from Harvard and the University of Chicago assembled data from 152 countries in an effort to determine the answer to this question: Why are some governments better than others? By “good government,” they mean how efficiently a particular government helps deliver quality goods and services, levels of personal freedom, and the extent to which a government interferes in the private sector. Their findings challenge a number of the key assumptions upon which public policy is being redirected in the United States and other nations.

First, the authors present an overview of current theories of political, economic, and cultural dynamics. These provide a framework for interpreting data on gross domestic product, per-capita income, tax rates, measures of corruption, public and private sector salaries, personal freedom, literacy, and public health. “History and traditions matter,” the authors emphasize, noting that cultural theories state clearly that “some societies form beliefs and ideas that are conducive to good government, while others do not.”

Citing the work of Robert Putnam and David Landes, the authors observe that trust in strangers is a key to facilitating positive collective action and is essential for the provision of public goods. Protestant areas constantly rate higher in “trust” than do Catholic and Muslim

The Quality of Government

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countries. Catholic and Muslim countries tend to be characterized by “vertical bonds of authority” instead of “horizontal bonds of fellowship.” Landes argues that Catholic and Muslim countries “have acquired cultures of intolerance, xenophobia, and closed-mindedness that retarded their development” — a point raised at the turn of the century by Max Weber in his classic book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Ethnic diversity, this study’s authors discovered, is not conducive to good government. On the contrary, “ethno-linguistically heterogeneous” countries are not as well governed as those that are far less “diverse.” This is because competing ethnic groups expend too much of their energy, and their country’s resources, trying to compete with (or even exterminate) other groups for political and economic shares. “As ethnic heterogeneity increases, governments become more interventionist and less efficient, and the quality of public goods falls,” the authors write.

They also looked at each country’s legal traditions. Countries that have laws based on the Napoleonic Code are most often badly governed, while those still influenced by the English common law are better governed. The Napoleonic civil code was designed to protect state interests over those of the individual. By contrast, the English common law protected individuals’ rights, especially property rights, from the vagaries of the state. This protection, in turn, gave encouragement to, and insured a higher degree of security for, political freedom and economic growth.

The Quality of Government is an excellent introduction to comparative politics around the globe. An extensive bibliography and tables providing the variables they worked with is included. As the authors forthrightly state in their conclusion,

The data show clearly that, using these

measures of performance, the quality of governments varies systematically across countries. Rich nations have better governments than poor ones.

Ethnolinguistically homogeneous countries have better governments than the heterogeneous ones. Common law countries have better governments than French civil law or socialist law countries. Predominantly Protestant countries have better governments than either predominantly Catholic or predominantly Muslim countries. These results tend to be consistent across the many measures of government performance we use.

All of this is important for those concerned with immigration policy in the United States and other Western countries. Current policies encourage more and more “diversity.” But nowhere does the evidence suggest that this will lead to more freedom and economic health. Quite the reverse.

Furthermore, those in the immigration reform movement who self-righteously assert that they are “only concerned with numbers,” should acquaint themselves with this study and some of the works, cited in the bibliography, upon which it is based. As I wrote in *National Review* fifteen years ago in an exchange with a student of Julian Simon, people are not interchangeable economic growth blobs. They are carriers of, and contributors to, culture. And culture does matter! We need to remember such an important factor if “America” is not to become a mere geographic expression for a territory largely populated by the descendants of today’s Third World.

