

**Wolf, S. (2020). *Eine Governance-Theorie des Kleinstaats*. [A theory of governance of the small state.] Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer VS. 110pp. ISBN: 978-3658-30442-3. Pbk. €39.99.**

The debate about the political effects of scale is one of the oldest in political science; and yet, it only occupies a marginal position in the contemporary discipline. The same can be said of the study of small states, which are still rarely taken seriously as cases for comparative investigation. Given this state of affairs, it is most unfortunate that research on small states and territories is further fragmented by persistent linguistic divisions. For example, most publications on the Lusophone African island states of Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe are written in Portuguese; much of the scholarly work on the French overseas departments is written in French; and most scholarship on the Dutch Caribbean islands is only available in Dutch. Such linguistic divisions limit our opportunities to gain more knowledge about these cases, and also produce an unwelcome split between academic communities that are working on highly similar questions and theories.

Sebastian Wolf's *Eine Governance-Theorie des Kleinstaats* fits in the longstanding tradition of German(-speaking) scholarship on small states. This tradition includes the seminal works of scholars like Hans Geser and Arno Waschkuhn, who – as Wolf correctly points out – are largely unknown in Anglophone academic circles. One of the key virtues of Wolf's book is that it effectively connects these German publications to their Anglophone counterparts. Unfortunately, however, the fact that the book is published in German will likely do little to raise the familiarity of Anglophone academics with German-speaking scholarship on small states. It is therefore certainly to be hoped that the author will consider also publishing an English version of this book.

When looking at the book's content, the case for an English language translation becomes even more compelling. Combining the academic literatures on state size and governance, the book formulates a broad number of hypotheses about the effects of small state size (or, with a much better German word: *Kleinstaatlichkeit*) and the ensuing political characteristics of small states. Extensive attention is paid to conceptual and definitional matters, including the perennial question of how to define small states. The book also provides a sophisticated discussion of the treatment of state size as an independent (i.e., causal) variable, and the extent to which political phenomena in small states can in fact be ascribed to their size. This meticulous discussion of conceptual and methodological matters, coupled with a large number of clearly formulated hypotheses, results in a remarkably transparent theoretical model that in principle can be applied to small states around the world.

Most of the supposed characteristics of politics in small states – e.g. the adoption of institutions from larger states, the outsourcing of public tasks, the higher levels of political participation, and the dominance of political executives – will sound familiar to readers of this journal and/or citizens of small states. However, this is not the case for several other hypotheses, which appear to apply primarily or exclusively to European small states. For instance, it is presumed that the absence of ideological forms of competition, the lack of programmatic differences between parties, and the personal nature of politics conspire together to produce a more consensus-oriented, political environment. While this may be true for the

European microstates and Luxembourg, which all have consensual institutional frameworks, it will come as a surprise to experts on most African, Caribbean or Pacific small states, as well as Malta and Cyprus, which are subject to the same triple conditions, and yet are all known for having fiercely polarized politics. The author also posits that the absence or weakness of ideologies creates weak forms of party competition, but this is hard to square with the political reality of many small states in which party competition takes the form of an all-encompassing, zero-sum struggle for political control. Finally, while noting the closeness and intimacy between citizens and politicians in small states, the book does not pay attention to the potential downsides of such relationships, among which loom conflicts of interest and patron-client linkages.

Wolf's book is, however, not just a theoretical publication: it also examines the accuracy of its theoretical claims in a small state that is most familiar to a German-speaking audience: the Principality of Liechtenstein. In light of its very small size (population: 38,000), Liechtenstein is presented as a most likely case, even though the author admits that the Principality's extreme wealth and exceptional institutional framework (including the role of its monarch) likely set it apart from many other small states. Indeed, the earlier-mentioned hypotheses relating to consensus-oriented politics and the weakness of party competition clearly fit the case of Liechtenstein very well. However, looking at the experience of other small states, it seems fair to ask if these dynamics can perhaps better be explained by the idiosyncratic factors that Wolf mentions (p. 80) rather than by the small size of Liechtenstein.

As the author indicates in the conclusion of his book, in the end such matters can only be resolved through comparative analyses. The chapter on German-speaking Liechtenstein includes an interesting but brief comparison with Germany, which as Wolf indicates can be regarded as its 'most similar' large state. Another alternative would be to compare various small states from different parts of the world in a most different systems design. Unfortunately, the enduring exclusion of small states from the discipline of comparative politics means that most comparativists will not pay attention to these cases. It is therefore the task of small state-scholars to develop comparative research projects that will further raise our awareness and knowledge of the political effects of small state size. Since the academic field itself is so small, in doing so we cannot afford to ignore scholarship that occurs in different linguistic contexts than our own.

Both in light of its efforts to connect German and English literatures, and in light of the many clearly formulated hypotheses it presents, *Eine Governance-Theorie des Kleinstaats* offers a very useful basis for further scholarship on small states.

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