

Godfrey Baldacchino and Anders Wivel (Eds.). (2020). *Handbook on the politics of small states*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar. ISBN: 978-1-7881-1292-5. 448pp. Hbk: US\$202; e-book: US\$65.

Why study the politics of small states? As a scholar focussing on the security and political power of small states, I can think of many reasons. One of them is that small states make up the majority of states in the international system. Although small states receive less scholarly attention compared to larger states, there is an increased interest in the topic. The *Handbook on the Politics of Small States* is a welcome addition to a growing and important body of literature on small states. Edited by two renowned scholars in the field of small states, i.e. Godfrey Baldacchino and Anders Wivel, the book provides detailed discussions and analyses of small state politics around the world. The discussions and analyses show that small states share several domestic and international challenges, but vary considerably in their capacity to meet and handle them. Based on the findings, several lessons are drawn for understanding and conducting small state politics.

The handbook consists of six parts. The first part contains six chapters that set the scene and discuss the fundamentals of small state politics. Chapter One starts with outlining three general questions that the book seeks to answer: What are the characteristics of the politics of small states? What are the major opportunities and challenges of policy-making and policy implementation in small states? How do small states respond to these opportunities and challenges? This is followed by the development of a framework that is used by the contributing authors, including a pragmatic working definition that serves as a point of departure for subsequent analyses:

small states are states that have limited capacity of their political, economic and administrative systems [and find themselves as] the weaker part in an asymmetric relationship, unable to change the nature or functioning of the relationship on [their] own [as well as] stuck with the power configuration and its institutional expression, no matter what their specific relation to it is [at both the regional and global level] (p. 7).

Baldacchino and Wivel further identify three dilemmas of small state politics: nationalism versus cosmopolitanism; democratisation versus groupthink; and influence versus autonomy dilemma. The last sections of this opening chapter sum up the major findings of the book: that capacity and capability matter; that institutions make a difference; and that history creates a strong precedence. Future, exciting research trajectories are also identified.

Chapters Two to Six discuss small states in world history with a focus on: small state survival; the political and policy characteristics of small states; the public administration of small states, including the limitations and opportunities; the political economy of small states; and the challenges that small states face in the UN and how they seek to cope with them.

Parts Two to Five explore and discuss the politics of small states within specific geographical regions: Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Central and South America and the Caribbean, and Asia and the Pacific.

Part Two unpacks the conditions for small state policy-making in Europe and identifies patterns of small state behaviour in the region. The cases discussed include: (1) the Nordic states, which “require shelter, or need to form alliances with larger states and join regional and international organisations to protect their political, economic and societal interests” (p. 113);

(2) Cyprus and Malta, whose experience is assessed from four interconnected angles: their domestic characteristics, international alignments, policy-making, and the challenges they face and the outcomes of their decisions; (3) four European microstates (Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco and San Marino); (4) small buffer states between East and West, with a focus on Ukraine; and (5) small states of the Balkans.

The Third Part of the book looks at small states in the Middle East and Africa. Chapter Thirteen examines mediation efforts in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict undertaken by Norway and Sweden; whereas Chapter Fourteen describes and clarifies political and economic developments in small African island states by carrying out a comparative study of Cabo Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe.

Part Four examines small states in Central and South America and the Caribbean. Chapter Fifteen reviews the historical context of Central America state formation, political development and international relations. It continues by assessing the domestic and international characteristics and challenges of these states and their abilities to affect domestic developments and international contexts. The foreign policy of South American small states in regional and international politics is discussed in Chapter Sixteen with a focus on Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. Chapter Seventeen looks at the politics of small states in the Caribbean including key political tensions that have held sway in the broader Caribbean in recent decades, domestic politics and the state of international relations.

The Fifth Part of the book is centred around Asia and the Pacific. Chapter Eighteen focuses on the politics of five small states of post-Soviet Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. This is followed by a discussion on how small states, through the example of Singapore, can 'enlarge' their international presence and influence via place branding and active use of political economy and diplomacy. Chapter Twenty examines the behaviour of four small states (Cambodia, Laos, Brunei, Singapore), and one weak state that acts like a small state (the Philippines), that are involved in disputes with China over the South China Sea. Pacific small states are discussed next, with a focus on their activism in relation to climate change.

The last part of the book deviates from the previous sections, as it moves from a consideration of sovereign small states to semi/non-sovereign small territories. Chapter Twenty-two offers examples that suggest 'patterns of how small subnational jurisdictions can acquire an autonomy in political praxis that is sometimes even greater than that enjoyed by small sovereign states, precisely because they...decide not to pursue formal sovereignty from the larger state to which they are bound' (p. 362). This is followed by an exploration of whether *de facto* states may be seen as agents in their own right through their role in conflict management and conflict resolution processes, their capability to enter into international relations, and their capability to counter the patron. The authors draw on eight examples which, they argue, constitute the least contested set of *de facto* states: Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria, Somaliland, Northern Cyprus, Kosovo and Taiwan. The handbook concludes with a chapter on sub-state diplomacy and wannabe states.

This handbook is timely, thoughtful, and engages critically with the politics of small states, including the challenges and opportunities faced by these states. The development of a workable definition of small states; the inclusion of different types of small states, ranging from rich democratic states to post-colonial island states; as well as the global geographical coverage, adds extra value to the handbook. However, the first characteristic of the definition

of small states put forward in Chapter One, i.e. ‘small states are states that have limited capacity of their political, economic and administrative systems’, questions the selection of some cases discussed in the book. For example, the Nordic States and Singapore depart from this categorisation as they have strong economies, which arguably has an impact on how these states deal with the challenges that they face. Furthermore, the book would benefit from equal coverage of the regions discussed. For instance, the section on Europe consists of six chapters whereas the section on the Middle East and Africa only contains two chapters. There are plenty of small states that can be covered in the latter region, such as Kuwait and Djibouti. Likewise, chapters covered in the book discuss the agency of small states located in specific regions, except for Chapter Thirteen which discusses the agency of two European small states in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This seems to be an odd choice as regional small states, such as Qatar, have also mediated in the conflict and could have been included in the discussion as well.

Notwithstanding these considerations, I strongly recommend the handbook to students, lecturers and researchers throughout the social sciences as well as those involved in small states’ politics and policy-making.

Sarina Theys

Visiting Researcher, School of Arts and Cultures

Newcastle University

United Kingdom

sarina.theys@newcastle.ac.uk