



The Performance of Democracies: Political Institutions and Public Policy (Comparative Politics)

Edeltraud Roller

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Is the performance of western democracies in decline? Which countries show the best performance? Do institutions matter for political performance? This book offers a comprehensive analysis of twenty-one OECD countries by systematically examining all major domestic policy areas - domestic security policy, economic policy, social policy, and environmental policy - and using outcome indicators. The quality of democracy is assessed both at the level of the four policy areas and at a general level encompassing all policy areas. The question of trade-offs between policy areas is studied in an unprecedented way and, for the first time, national types of policy patterns are identified.

The findings of this book confront widely-held assumptions about the performance of democracies. Western democracies as a whole did not converge at a lower level of performance, and trade-offs between different policy areas did not increase. The question 'do institutions matter?' can only partially be answered in the affirmative. Political institutions do matter, but formal and informal institutions cause different effects and both matter only sometimes and to a limited degree.

The Performance of Democracies is a book with significant theoretical implications. It stresses that the effect of institutions is more complicated than most of the neo-institutionalist approaches assume. No clear predictions can be made on the basis of institutional factors. Consequently, it does not support the established assertion that fundamental political problems can simply be resolved through institutional reforms of liberal democracies.

Comparative Politics is a series for students and teachers of political science that deals with contemporary government and politics. The General Editors are Max Kaase, Professor of Political Science, Vice President and Dean, School of Humanities and Social Science, International University Bremen, Germany; and Kenneth Newton, Professor of Comparative Politics, University of Southampton. The series is produced in association with the European Consortium for Political Research.

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