Putting Portugal and Spain into the Political Science Syllabus

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Several of us gathered in 2003 at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association to discuss why, in an association with groups dedicated to Canadian, French, German, Italian, and Churchillian studies (to name but a few), there was no organized group dedicated to the study of politics in Spain and Portugal.

We found this to be especially remarkable because the transitions to democracy in both countries had received such a great deal of study and have become paradigmatic examples of transitions to and consolidation of new democracies. As well, after a flurry of superior scholarship on the transition to democracy in Spain, it seemed as if political science in general and the APSA (as far as its annual meeting program was concerned) had almost forgotten Spain and Portugal. Few, if any, panels and papers are devoted to these countries in any given year.

As a result of these discussions we joined together to create an Iberian Politics Related Group at the APSA. The new related group seeks to help scholars of Iberian politics find a forum to discuss their ideas, disseminate news, and form a community of academics, both young and more established, interested in Iberian politics.

As part of our activities we organized a short course at the 2006 APSA annual meeting in Philadelphia to discuss ways to include Portugal and Spain into the political science curriculum. The following articles are an outgrowth of that short course. We seek to examine, from a comparative standpoint, the politics, institutions, political history, and policies of the Iberian countries during the past three decades. Over the past 25 years Portugal and Spain have experienced a profound transformation as a result of the combined processes of democratization and European integration. Scholars consider both countries as two cases of democratic and economic success. Their experiences provide an important model and point of departure for other countries throughout the world. We seek to promote research on issues including: the transition to democracy; the basic changes in Portugal's and Spain's economy and society as a result of democratization and European integration; the impact that these changes had on the "quality" of Portuguese and Spanish democracy; and the role that both countries have played in the world and specifically in the process of European integration. In sum, we seek to reflect on how far Portugal and Spain have come since the 1970s in order to understand better where these countries are headed at the dawn of the twenty-first century and to use their experiences as references in the comparative analyses of other countries. Our research in these areas also filters down into our comparative politics classes. We think that our students have much to learn from the Iberian cases, and the short course, as well as the articles in this issue, speak to the questions of how we can include Iberia in comparative politics courses and what our students can learn from this inclusion to enrich their understanding of comparative politics.

At the same time we want to build bridges among scholars, students, policy makers, and social actors interested in Portugal and Spain to examine the impact of democratization and European integration on both countries from an economic, social, institutional, and cultural standpoint. Some of the group objectives include: to compare the democratization and European integration experiences of both countries, to analyze the impact of EU membership, and to examine the role that both countries play in the world.

From a theoretical standpoint, we want to contribute to the debates on democratization, globalization, and European integration. More specifically, the analysis of the Portuguese and Spanish experience will illustrate the combined challenges of democratization and economic integration. It will also contribute to the debate about the interplay of international and domestic factors at a time of integration and economic liberalization. Furthermore, it will serve a purpose to pause and reflect on the impact that such transcendent developments had on the societies of these countries. Finally, at a time in which the EU is integrating the eastern European new member states, the integration of Portugal and Spain will provide insight about the legal, political, economic, institutional, and cultural challenges and opportunities involved in such a complex undertaking.

We also hope to generate new debates and provide a forum for the discussion of provocative ideas. One issue that has come up in our

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conversations is that despite our own interest in Spain and Portugal, it seems that the discrete study of either country is hardly a growth industry in the United States. Why is this the case? Are the two countries victims of their own success? Were their transitions too successful—so much so that they now assume the unremarkable position of being just two more of the many established, stable democracies?

Or, is it the case that they consolidated at a particularly unpropitious era? Spain and Portugal consolidated and then quickly joined the EU. Now, so many of the issues that confront these two countries are subsumed in pan-European discussions of the same, such as immigration, nationalism, demographic crises, terrorism, immigration, and so forth. Does the future of Spanish and Portuguese study now lie in the study of their simultaneous dissolution into smaller states and absorption into the greater European megastate?

The following articles reflect on some of these issues and discuss how the lessons and insights won from the Iberian cases can be used to enrich comparative politics courses.

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