

Clarence N. Stone: *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1989. 305 + xii pp.

After the intensive debate during the 1960s and early 1970s over the analysis of community power structures, including theoretical vantage points as well as the pros and cons of various methods employed in these analyses, the study of community power vanished almost completely. Instead, the 1980s saw an increasing interest in the structural preconditions for urban politics, such as local political economy and the behavior of organized interests at the local level.

However, with his new book *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*, Clarence Stone puts the issue of city politics back on the social-science agenda. Stone's account of Atlanta's postwar politics offers an intriguing analysis of the political management of deep, political and social cleavages, of which race singles out as the most important one.

To be sure, Atlanta is a deviant case in most respects. First, race has for long been a key social and political cleavage: the urban racial composition throughout the twentieth century has been roughly equally black and white. However – and perhaps less deviant for these types of cities – the political and financial establishment is significantly dominated by whites, and lower-class social strata equally dominated by blacks. The most important social change during the past 45 years has been the emergence of a black middle-class, whose interests criss-crossed with the racial socioeconomic cleavage. Second, Atlanta singles out from most other cities in the American South to the extent that it has been a thriving financial center of the region for most of the postwar period. Atlanta has made great – and successful – efforts to market itself as the conference center and financial hub of the American South, thus attracting (white-dominated) investors to the city and the region. Finally, during the heated 1960s and 1970s, Atlanta found itself as the shop window of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations' anti-segregation politics. Federal programs to increase white-black integration, e.g. integrated school systems, were initially enforced in Atlanta with the rest of the nation watching. Thus, in many respects the Atlanta case seems to be representative only to itself – the significance of racial tensions makes it deviant from most West European cities and the rapid economic growth sets it apart from most other cities in the American South.

To students of city politics, the Atlanta case is immediately associated with Floyd Hunter's seminal study 'Community Power Structure'. Generally perceived as one of the 'elitists' in the elitist-pluralist controversy, Hunter found the Atlanta business community to be by far the most powerful actor in Atlanta politics.

Stone carefully avoids siding with any group of scholars in the debate between elitists and pluralists. Instead, he employs a theoretical framework that draws both on a social-structuralist theory as well as a (implicit) pluralist perspective. His chief aim is to describe the political and social foundations of the governing coalition of urban politics in Atlanta. The key concept used in his analysis – 'the regime' – refers to 'the *informal arrangements* that surround and complement the formal workings of governmental authority' (p. 1). The concept of 'governing coalition is a way of making the notion of regime concrete' (p. 5).

Stone's analysis departs from the hypothesis that a 'regime' consists of a 'governing coalition' of diverse, sometimes even conflicting interests. What holds the coalition together is basically the prospect of the mutual yielding of political power. For groups outside the official political machinery the coalition offers a gateway to political influence; for the elected political elite, the coalition is a means of incorporating outside actors into the process of making and implementing city politics, thus generating political consensus as well as the political and financial resources

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for those policies. One of Stone's most important arguments is that the coalition itself is 'empowering', i.e. that by joining forces all actors come out politically strengthened, and that the regime is not only subject to the social structures surrounding it – its actions also structure society.

Thus, along with the careful consideration of the social structures that create and sustain a 'regime', there is an implicit pluralistic conception of city politics in Stone's theoretical framework; no single group can alone govern the city, hence the need for creating 'governing coalitions'. What comes out very clearly in the analysis is that coalitions comprising the business elite (controlling large financial powers but very little voting powers) on one hand, and a middle-class political constituency (with strong voting powers but limited financial resources) on the other, are able to fend off political pressures from virtually all other significant groups of actors. Stone clearly demonstrates that while these outside groups may have just as strong voting powers as the groups constituting the governing coalition, the 'out' groups will remain 'out', in part because they cannot join forces with other major actors, in part because they have very little to offer these groups, and also in part because they, lacking the necessary political entrepreneurship, are simply poorly organized (pp. 163, 188f.).

Conversely, the local business elite is highly organized and entrepreneurial in dealing with elected officials and also mass political movements. The downtown elite's perhaps most significant power asset is its ability to incorporate outside groups into its power network by providing political payoffs also to other actors in this network:

Because the downtown elite is so highly cohesive and because the civic network is both cohesive and wide ranging, alliance with this business elite is a unifying force. It overcomes much of the personal rivalry between officeholders; it knits together what might otherwise be competing agendas of action; and it downplays potentially conflicting ideologies among elective officials. . . . It would be an overstatement to suggest that the white business elite has created a black leadership in its own image, but it is no exaggeration that the network of civic cooperation pulls the black leadership strongly in that direction (p. 194).

From the point of view of the elected city officials, there was never any really viable alternative coalition partner other than the business elite. Mayor Young (see below), commenting on his close relationship with private business, argued that this relationship is one of exchange:

Politics doesn't control the world. Money does. And we ought not to be upset by that. We ought to begin to understand how money works and why money works (p. 132).

In this vein, he defined his own role as 'to see that whites get some of the power and blacks get some of the money' (p. 132). Building large segments of his policy on public-private partnerships insulated from political pressures – primarily agencies created to promote economic development – Young developed a politico-economic *modus vivendi* that Scandinavian political scientists recognize as a 'negotiated economy'.

Stone faces two major methodological problems. The first one is circular evidence defining the 'governing coalition': if the coalition is defined as those actors and officials controlling political power (leaving the definition of that concept aside), then all actors with a political say will by definition constitute the 'governing coalition'. Thus, while the concept of a 'governing coalition' at first seems to be a promising way of perceiving city politics as the output of compromises and concessions among the political elite and the business elite, it has to be able clearly to

discriminate between those who are part of the coalition and those who are not. Since an important part of this analysis is the question of how the 'governing coalition' deals with its political adversaries, this problem may become significant.

The second major methodological problem is that of accounting for change. Referring to Ralf Dahrendorf, Stone finds political and social stability more intriguing and difficult to explain than change. An important result of Stone's study is that the election of Maynard Jackson as the first black mayor in 1973 – following a slow but continuously increasing black racial awareness – seemed more to generate political stalemate and social friction than improved living conditions for the black lower-class community which helped bring Jackson to office. Drawing on a campaign of mobilizing the underdogs in the Atlanta political power-game (e.g. by encouraging neighborhood councils to get involved in city planning), Jackson sought to use the powers and political clout granted him by his mayorship to take issue with the downtown business elite. However, he soon found that while enhancing his electoral popularity, Jackson faced the problem of alienating the business elite and potential investors in the Atlanta area. Stone's conclusion, that Jackson's bold political intentions failed largely because of the tacit opposition from the business elite and the white middle class, in many ways corroborates Hunter's findings twenty-five years earlier: paraphrasing Stein Rokkan, Stone argues that in Atlanta 'voters count, but resources decide' (p. 239).

With the election of Andrew Young (later to be the US Ambassador in the United Nations) as the second black mayor in the history of Atlanta, this picture rapidly changed. Young clearly sought to repair the bonds between city hall and the business elite. Having kept a low political profile during the Jackson era, the business elite now gained renewed access to elected city officials. Joining forces with the black middle class, the business elite created a strong power position in the city's politics, and the policies enforced reflected the interests of these groups.

These changes suggest that the 'governing coalition' underwent profound changes during some 10–15 years. However, Stone's overall conclusion is that there was no regime *change*:

I regard it as a single regime, because the central membership of the coalition remained constant and the basic mode of promoting cooperation stayed the same. Yet important changes took place. The influence of the black partners in the coalition expanded enormously (p. 181).

What were the consequences of the strong power exercised by the business elite? First, they made great efforts to control the city's political agenda – Stone finds this to be one of their most important instruments for influencing city politics. Atlanta politics only marginally catered to the interests of the low-class black population. The belief that the city's overall economic growth would 'trickle down' to the poor has proven wrong (p. 205). Instead, race- and poverty-related problems stacked up, unattended to by city policies.

Second, in a larger perspective Stone sees business-elite influence over Atlanta policies as a violation of the basic 'one person, one vote' democratic rule. Since business by its mere existence in the local community always exercises a smaller or larger amount of political influence – this is a key result from another study of city politics and urban power structures, Crenson's study of anti-air pollution policies in two American cities – Stone suggests an increased 'civic cooperation' and 'social learning', where powerful actors understand the importance of seeking ways of accommodating politically resource-weaker groups. "'One man, one vote' is not enough' are the final words in Stone's book.

These theoretical and methodological problems notwithstanding, *Regime Politics* offers an intriguing analysis of urban politics and power structures. Indeed, in an appendix the author attacks the methodological problems and elaborates on the historical approach employed in the study. Although going through a large number of major decision-making processes, of which land use seems to bring out the clash of interests most conspicuously, Stone never loses the overall perspective of his study. For anyone interested in urban politics, this book is highly recommended reading.

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