MONTHLY ARCHIVES: FEBRUARY 2014

ARCHIVES
Select Month

A Conversation with Paula Newberg, Fellow of the Wilson Chair

Posted on 26 February 2014

— Paula Newberg

Paula Newberg is Clinical Professor of Government, and Fellow of the newly endowed Wilson Chair in Pakistan Studies, the country's first and only privately funded faculty chair in the study of Pakistan. Newberg came to the university most recently, from Washington DC, where she was the Marshall B. Coyne Director of Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy. She has held a battery of academic and professional positions during her career, including as Special Advisor to the United Nations across three continents, Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, an opinion columnist, and for several decades, an advisor to human rights and democracy organizations in the United States and abroad.

Newberg's focus is on governance in crisis and transition states, which for her means learning how to create environments that makes effective and rights-respecting government possible — through domestic and foreign policies, state and non-state actors, and citizen-to-citizen relations. We sat down with Newberg to discuss her thoughts on politics, Pakistan and south Asia, and her thoughts about the Wilson Chair.

Why UT, and why the Wilson Chair?

Newberg: Several years ago, the Temple Foundation very generously offered UT a matching grant to establish a chair to honor Congressman Charlie Wilson who, like the Foundation, was from Lufkin. Wilson, a Democrat with a very independent and occasionally controversial streak, became involved in south Asia in the early years of the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan (a story that George Crile told in *Charlie Wilson's War*, a book that was subsequently made into a film). Texas residents raised matching funds to support the Chair, which now sits in the Government Department. With a long-standing, strong program in south Asia, UT is a natural home for the study of politics in the region, and we're all trying to take full advantage of the opportunities that this chair can offer.

Tell us a little about Pakistan: what can we learn from the study of a country that most Americans today know only as troubled and terror-stricken?

Newberg: Pakistan embodies a fascinating mix of complicated domestic and global challenges. Most people start with location. Pakistan is the second-largest state in south Asia, and its importance derives in part from its long borders with India and Afghanistan, as well as its proximity to central and southwest Asia, and the Gulf. Its relationships with all its neighbors, in all directions, are significant for trade and migration, economy and security: domestic politics and foreign policy are tightly connected in this part of the world. In this sense, Pakistan reflects its crossroads history — empires, settlers, traders, and politicians have all influenced each other over the centuries. Today, that role brings with it the complications and burdens of rapidly changing politics in these regions, and fluctuating relationships with the rest of the world.

Pakistan is also a state living at the cusp of enormous transitions in the global political economy, and is struggling, as many other countries are, to reconcile its pasts and its futures. In this sense, it embodies many characteristics at once: a post-colonial state that since independence has lived through a searing civil war and continual internal and regional conflicts that are both the cause and the consequence of its praetorian habits; a still developing economy with serious internal inequalities that is seeking its place in the global marketplace; a state whose alternations between civilian and military rule (and often a mix of both) has created a confusing — and some would argue, unstable — constitutional foundation for its political institutions. Pakistan faces problems like terrorism and extremism (from within and without), an economy that modernizes slowly, and a growing population that may soon test the limits of the state's political and material capacities.

Pakistan is also a place with a dynamic constellation of civic actors who have taken on every imaginable governance challenge, from relations between citizens and police, to the role of women across the entire society, to the future of a country that is urbanizing at a rapid — perhaps frightening — rate. These are challenges that are local and regional and international, all at once.

Moreover, Pakistan sits right at the center of the United Nation's deepest concerns about the effects of climate change, which are anticipated to hit this region first and possibly hardest. With them come real challenges to livelihoods, including disease and food security, and therefore very basic questions about how a place is governed. For Pakistan this means many things, one being the literal question of how to govern the country. The old colonial privileges that set the groundwork for Pakistan's current governing structure were functions of money, land, and water. As relationships between resources and power are altered, governance will no doubt change as well. How does Pakistan confront such challenges — challenges that its neighbors and an entire crowded region are now also encountering? Competition for resources in areas that are beset by conflict is difficult enough. But climate change is also a borderless problem — no one can control the monsoon rains (at least not yet) — in a region that has built very tall political fences.

One of the areas you study is the relationship between rights, the law, and mediatory institutions, such as the courts. How does this fit into the picture you are painting?

Newberg: Pakistan's history is one of contentious politics and jurisprudence. It is a constitutional republic that has endured many long periods of non-constitutional, military rule — decades full of rules but without the rule of law. This trajectory has weakened the constitutional and statutory basis for protecting rights or providing avenues for citizens to redress their grievances. Each era has brought new questions about whose rights should be respected and whose rights ignored or violated; many Pakistanis have had to live without the protection of law, and often under violent conditions. This experience has been exacerbated in recent decades as militancy and extremism grew within the country and was complicated by the security problems of cross-border conflict with Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and other fighting groups. Dealing with sectarianism or divisive ethnic politics is very tricky anywhere, under any circumstances, and for its victims, understandably frightening. Blame for these problems in Pakistan lies in many places, including within the state itself. Disentangling the strands of responsibility for this situation will take years to understand.

Are these the subjects that occupy your time?

Newberg: Yes, in different ways. Deciphering the paths of political change in light of turmoil is always challenging, and I've spent many years working in Pakistan and Afghanistan, in other parts of the region, and in other parts of the developing world — trying to understand how these states function, and how they might respect rights more broadly and rigorously, and how international law and politics affects national behaviors. I've gone from studying laws to studying conflict, and from conflict to state building and peace building, and then back again to law. This has meant delving into the tacit imperatives of foreign policy, and the nooks and crannies of legal and political development. It's a fascinating field that ties theory to practice, and practice to education. History, law and politics — all are integral to understanding the dynamics of change.

At UT, I teach an undergraduate seminar on rights and the state in modern south Asia, and (as I have before in different ways at Georgetown and earlier at Columbia) a more policy-based graduate seminar on complex emergencies — combined crises of governance, development, and humanitarianism. These are issues on which I've worked in many parts of the world; the Wilson Chair has provided an opportunity to focus again on modern south Asia.

The chair has also provided me the time to undertake other teaching and research-related activities. For example, through UT's South Asia Institute, we are offering a seminar series this semester on conflict and recovery in south Asia that brings academically trained practitioners to Austin to explore different ways that public policy can confront south Asia's deeply-rooted political challenges. As another example, with the support of the American Institute for Pakistan Studies, we are embarking on a year-long teaching and mentoring workshop on conflict resolution and peace building for young social scientists who teach in Pakistan's universities. Both of these activities involve some of my former colleagues in the US and Pakistan. I am still working informally with non-governmental groups in south Asia to train lawyers in the practice of human rights law, and hope that we may be able to expand such programs to involve UT as well. And with time, we'll build on this foundation to involve research and teaching across UT, and across the many regions in which Pakistan plays significant roles.

Posted in Faculty Interviews

Applied Political Strategies Scholarship

Posted on 21 February 2014

Are you interested in political campaigns and elections? Do you want to learn more about cutting-edge data analysis and technology in campaigns? Do you want to jumpstart your career in this exciting field? The Department of Government is pleased to announce the inaugural competition for the Applied Political Strategies Scholarship.

Established in 2013, the Applied Political Strategies Scholarship provides scholarship support to students interested in the study of federal and statewide campaigns and elections. The scholarship encourages and subsidizes targeted internships with campaign-oriented organizations.

Scholarship recipients receive funds that may be used to offset living expenses associated with an unpaid internship, tuition and other fees, and other academic related expenses. Recipients also receive assistance being placed in a relevant internship. Internships will be targeted when related to digital campaigns and/or data analysis related to campaigns and elections.

Apply online through the scholarship portal: http://links.utexas.edu/cedgrk

The application is currently open and set to close March 28, 2014.

Posted in Undergraduate News

Tendler to Receive Outstanding Staff Award

Posted on 18 February 2014

Stuart Tendler has been selected to receive a University of Texas at Austin 2014 President's Outstanding Staff Award.

Posted in Staff News

Nancy Pelosi's Revolving Door

Posted on 12 February 2014

Nancy Pelosi recently stated that the revolving door is actually quite small in Congress, at least compared to the executive branch. Was she correct? According to graduate student Trey Thomas, no. Read the Monkey Cage post for more.

Posted in Graduate Research

Tendler Appointed to Shared Services Steering Committee

Posted on 11 February 2014

Stuart Tendler has been appointed to the university's Shared Services Steering Committee.

Posted in Staff News