

Baldacchino, G. (Ed). (2023). *The success of small states in international relations: Mice that roar?* Routledge. 229pp, hardback. ISBN: 978-1-032-32378-7. US\$136.00.

Godfrey Baldacchino has assembled a fine collection of essays that seek to explain how and why small states in the international system have been able to achieve success. Subtling the volume as “Mice That Roar?” enables the authors to wrestle with the maxim that the small do not typically fare well in international relations. But the question mark also conditions the findings somewhat, as the various authors demonstrate varying levels of success for each of their case studies. This conceptual approach is important because the volume provides plentiful examples of how small states should not be underestimated, while at the same time not trying to overplay the challenges smaller states and territories find themselves confronting.

In addition to three framing and summary chapters, the volume has thirteen case study chapters covering a range of places, issues, and time periods. The biggest strength of this book is in its diversity. While many books on small states only look at one region, here there are cases from Europe, the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. While this approach does not discount the variable pressures in different parts of the world, the reader gets a more comprehensive look at the pressures small states face by having a wide variety of cases to examine. The chapters are assembled chronologically so that the first chapter begins with San Marino solidifying relations with Italy in the 1860s. This wide selection of cases over time helps to control for historical era as a cause of small state power. The authors agree that small states are subject to multiple stressors, but assembling a set of cases over time and place allows us to have a more complete picture of the pressures small states face and what they overcome to achieve success. It must also be noted that the range of authors in this volume is admirable. It includes academics from multiple disciplines, as well as those involved in government service and as activists. The book should be accessible to a wide range of scholars and practitioners interested in the subject matter.

The editor rightly notes that the vast majority of states are not great powers, even as much of international relations theory tends to focus on those fewer numbers. Unfortunately, this volume does not present a fully original framework for studying small states that is carried throughout each of the empirical case study chapters. The first two chapters situate the literature quite well and provide a set of questions that scholars can use for studying small state influence in the world. But the cases do not all adopt that framework as a means of testing or extrapolating those approaches for each of their chapters. While the cases offer a lot of knowledge and insights that are extremely useful, one cannot suggest that theories or frameworks have been rigorously tested. This limits the wider applicability and amount of knowledge that is ultimately accumulated from this otherwise important volume.

It is known that membership in international organizations can enhance the power of small states by providing access to others, as well as allowing resources to stretch further. Additionally, global governance and international law provide legal frameworks that typically reassert and privilege state sovereignty instead of power politics. Several of the chapters in this volume provide convincing evidence of how these international principles matter and how small states make use of them to increase their relative status and effectiveness. For example, Iceland used its membership in NATO to manage relations with the UK in the Cod Wars (chapter 4). Despite not prevailing in the end, Antigua and Barbuda used international trade law and norms as attempts to

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battle the US over offshore gambling rules (chapter 8). Small states combined forces through the Alliance of Small Island States to advocate more powerfully in the 2015 Paris Climate Accords (chapter 10), whilst the Marshall Islands used its membership in the International Maritime Organization to push for greater action on climate change (chapter 14). St. Vincent and the Grenadines angled to get itself elected to the UN Security Council and took a turn as president; this presence did not upend the power of the Permanent Five, but it did give this state the status and position to raise issues that small states cared about, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (chapter 11).

While the cases in the book are well-researched and are convincing in demonstrating the various ways that small states exert influence, it is noted that the endurance of small state success is hard to determine. The evidence provided by the range of cases is interesting and provides more weight to the notion that small states matter. But most of the chapters take a snapshot of a particular state concern. It is not well-known how that influence endures, nor whether small states can have success over a range of issues or with different actors. Still, the authors need not necessarily be too concerned with these omissions because they have all ultimately demonstrated how small states can have success when prior expectations would not have predicted such positive outcomes.

In the end, the authors show that small states *do* matter and that relative power might not be a useful starting point in understanding the outcomes of international interactions. The fact that small states achieve success through the confirmation of status as sovereign states is an important empirical finding. Thus, both scholars and policymakers have a lot to glean from this fine volume.

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