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Letter from the Department Chair

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Letter from the Department Chair

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I am delighted to welcome you to volume 25 of *Res Publica*. Written and produced, as always, by students, this Silver Anniversary edition of the journal bears testimony to the robust tradition of serious and engaged social science research that the Political Science department at Illinois Wesleyan University set out to secure when it launched *Res Publica* twenty-five years ago. To be sure, this has been a challenging and dispiriting year as we have all hunkered behind masks or peered at each other through zoom-screens while we try to make sense of a complicated and changing world. But our students have once again risen to the occasion.

Like many observers, our students have been intrigued over the past few years by the worldwide phenomenon of ‘democratic backsliding,’ i.e., a decline in the quality of, and commitment to, democracy in even the most established and venerable democracies. The longer papers in this issue of *Res Publica* originated as original research projects for our Senior Seminar, in which students explored specific elements of the quality of democracy that piqued their interest. Rachel Williams’ shorter but trenchant analysis of democratic consolidation in West Germany emanated from our new departmental seminar: Democracy: What’s the Big Idea? Oscar Romero wrote his short excursus on rational choice theory for Greg Shaw’s class on “Schools and Sects in the Study of Politics.” All of these papers are thoughtful and analytically rigorous. All raise interesting and big questions about the state of democracy. It is deeply gratifying to see our students producing this quality of engaged scholarship across our curriculum.

To produce good research takes a lot of hard work. To curate a peer-reviewed journal takes equal dedication and attention to detail. The editors, Madison Garofalo and Dareana Roy, are to be commended for assembling a rich and methodologically diverse set of empirical papers that showcase skills in comparative quantitative analysis, game theory, survey research, and historical analysis. Oscar Romero’s brief but pithy critique of rational choice theory offers a delightful coda. Dareana and Madison have done superb work under considerable duress, and we thank them for their commitment. We are proud of the results our authors and editors have achieved with this edition of *Res Publica*, and we invite you to enjoy the fruits of their labour.

Thanks for reading!

William Munro