

The project is based on an 18-nation data set consisting of 130 variables for 650 randomly sampled bills, dealing with either deregulation of working conditions or with social security benefits, 1981–91. The editors argue for their choice. This reviewer does, however, doubt if the choice is optimal, given the fact that such legislation has a very different contextual position across Europe. Labour legislation is something quite different in the Nordic countries, where the 'Scandinavian Model' of labour market regulation prevails, from legislation passed in countries, where, for example, trade unions are weak. The choice of sector has implications for the external validity of all conclusions, for which reason replication is mandatory, before hypotheses can be declared corroborated, weakened – or dead. By the way, the veto player theory does not come out as very successful, if success is a function of the number of hypotheses corroborated.

In the opinion of this reviewer one of the best chapters is written by Erik Damgaard and Ingvar Mattson. It deals with the extent to which dissent occurs in committees and the tendency towards consensus as predicted by Giovanni Sartori in his work on democratic theory. The conclusion is that 'an understanding of parliamentary committees cannot be built solely on the Sartorian notion of committees (p. 138)'. Strangely enough the authors have also noticed that no conflict was visible in the Italian case! Damgaard and Mattson proceed in a straightforward way. In contrast to several of their colleagues, who create and use strange, that is, non-intuitive, indicators and constructs, they allow us to follow each step. If their conclusion is debatable, it is only because they may have misread Sartori a bit. Sartori – probably – had committees in mind, in which members are relatively free to act, and not legislators, who are serving as agents, strictly controlled by their unified parties.

This fine chapter also illustrates a joint problem for the entire book, namely that the cross-nation variance is considerable – and does not disappear – when theoretical variables are introduced. The editors end the book by suggesting that more variables should be added 'in order to control for country properties we have hitherto treated as extraneous variance'. This reviewer agrees fully. There is still a long way to go before it is possible to substitute names of variables for the names of national parliaments.

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The National People's Congress of China by Jiang Jinsong. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2003. Pp.iii + 560. Price unknown, hb ISBN 7 119 03133 3.

As several books and articles have been written by Western scholars (for example, K.J. O'Brien, M.S. Tanner and M. Dowdle) on the National People's Congress (NPC) since the 1990s, what has Jiang Jinsong's bulky volume contributed to our understanding of China's national legislature – 'the Supreme Power Organ' in the Chinese parlance? The author, both as an experienced insider of Chinese legislative politics and a trained political scientist in legislative studies, has provided us with a comprehensive description of the legal structure and institutional arrangements of the NPC as well as

an in-depth analysis of its functions and processes. Since the author examines the NPC in the broader power matrix of Chinese politics, the reader gains a better understanding of other major power actors – such as the Communist Party, the executive, trial and prosecutorial institutions – in the Chinese political landscape.

Despite the fact that in many places the author offers lengthy legalistic description and tries to convince his readers to take some official propaganda pieces at their face value, this book has two conspicuous strengths: First, it reveals the authentic and difficult attempts that China has made in reconstructing its constitutional order in a more democratic direction; it also reveals how disagreements and debates have arisen over these reforms. The author has done a good job in surveying the theoretical debates on the NPC reforms and skilfully welded the insights of Chinese scholars into his analysis of China's NPC and contemplation on its future reforms. We also learn from the author about how the leadership within the NPC seriously deliberated over some important options for China's political future and where they differed from each other.

Second, the author provides, for the first time, numerous detailed cases – for example, the Amendment Bill to the Highway Act, the Criminal Law, and the Land Administration Act – allowing a peek into the diverse and complex law-making processes in China. The clash of different interests in Chinese legislative politics can clearly be seen. There are some interesting episodes to illustrate how democratic practices have increasingly, although not satisfactorily, crept into Chinese politics. For example, the Liu Xiangrong case in which a wronged mayor was rehabilitated with the intervention of the NPC (p.393), farmer deputy Zhou Xingrong courageously asserting his right to appeal to Premier Zhu Rongji on behalf of over-exploited peasants (pp.348–9), and the skilful lobbying by the Gansu delegation in a NPC session for local interest (pp.338–9) are to the point.

With a deep understanding of Western legislatures (particularly the US and Westminster models), the author attempts to shed light upon our understanding of the NPC in a global comparative context. I have sympathy with the author's motif of the book that the NPC has been misperceived and undervalued by the West and the argument that from a developmental perspective, the NPC has been playing and will continue to play a transforming role in China's pursuit of constitutionalism, democracy and the rule of law. Jiang's awareness of the 'promise vs. performance gap' and the weaknesses of the NPC (in particular, its subservient relationships with the Party and the executive branch and its detachment from the people) are laudable. However, in his explanation about the retarded state of Chinese democracy, the author is not persuasive. He puts excessive stress on Chinese culture and tradition, but mentions little about the resistance of the elites against a real democracy – namely a politically accountable system produced through competitive elections. When Jiang tries to elevate the 'model of the NPC' on a par with the Western democratic models in the pantheon of democratic ideas and principles, he is over-optimistic about the future of the keystone sustaining China's NPC – the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. On this point, the author unfortunately sounds more like an ideologue of communist propaganda who uses the game of naming and defining (for example, to adopt popular labels but redefine them in accordance with Chinese uniqueness and characteristics) to legitimate the current Chinese political order. This should not be attributed to a

scholarly failure – the difficult circumstances under which the author works are beyond a simple analogy to anything to which we can relate in Western academia.

A more careful proof reading and editing would have improved this book and an index would help researchers. In conclusion, this book should be read by scholars who want to keep abreast of the changing institutional arrangements and reforms within the Chinese NPC in particular and the Chinese constitutional order and political governance in general.

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Spatial Models of Parliamentary Voting by Keith T. Poole. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp.xviii + 230. £40.00 hb ISBN 0 521 85194 7, £15.99 pb ISBN 0 521 61747 2.

The idea of the spatial representation of preferences particularly in a parliamentary setting is familiar to anyone with even the slightest interest in politics. The familiar terms 'left' and 'right' originated in the seating plan of French Legislative Assembly of 1791 where the royalists Feuillants sat on the right and the Montagnards on the left of the chamber. However spatial theory developed apace from the mid-1970s though its mathematical formulation was not easy reading for the non-cognoscenti. The problem of course is that representing legislative positions in n-dimensional space is harder than using the algebra. Luckily, or perhaps obviously, legislative positions can be represented in two-dimensional spatial maps. At one level, understanding such maps is easy. At another it is not.

Keith Poole's book is about the construction and interpretation of spatial maps of legislator positions based on roll-call data. He uses data mostly from the US Congress, though data from the UK and the UN are also included. It is both an introductory book about the techniques of theory of spatial modelling including practical issues that arise in estimating the policy positions of legislators and a guide for advanced readers.

The basics of the method described in the book are that each legislator is represented by a single point and each vote represented by two points – one for yea and one for nay. Each legislator will then vote yea or nay depending on what the policy consequences are. He will vote according to which policy consequences are closest to his ideal, or bliss point. Together these points constitute a mapping of votes into an n-dimensional space that visually portrays the nature of the legislature. How close two legislators are on the mapping depicts how close their voting records are. From the total distribution of legislature votes the relative ideological space is created.

The development of a computer programme NOMINATE (and successors) allows a relatively easy way for legislative scholars to score legislators. As Poole explains here, however, the world is not that simple. Legislators make mistakes, and may vote yea when their bliss point should really have led them to vote nay. In other words, their votes only probabilistically record their preferences. Building maps of roll-call voting does allow predictions for how given parliamentarians should vote