

either because of an in-group bias or a desire for positive group attributions, will tend to be more supportive of racialized candidates. The main motivation for affinity voting, according to this approach, would be a desire among individuals to contribute to the enhancement of their group's social status.

The results provide strong support for self-identity explanations of coethnic and racialized identity while failing to do so for interest-based explanations. Consistent with the book's sophisticated approach to theorizing self-identity in an electoral context, the empirical analysis moves beyond using simple racial and ethnic identity markers and replaces them with a more appropriate self-identity scale in which respondents themselves express the strength of their ethnic identity. The book's carefulness in distinguishing between group membership and self-identity constitutes its main empirical contribution, with the author convincingly calling for survey researchers to begin measuring visible minorities voters' self-identification rather than assuming it from group membership. The analysis provides strong support for this claim, as the strength of one's self-identity strongly correlates with the presence of an in-group bias expected from common group identity.

The author concludes his book by claiming that the results suggest that there is a potential for "rainbow coalitions," as a racialized group identity appears to exist among visible minority Canadians, with self-identity rather than interest-based explanations proving to be determinant. Unfortunately, the empirical analysis provides mostly suggestive but not conclusive evidence in that regard. Many questions remain about the ability of the analysis to untangle identity and policy, the statistical power of many regression models and the precision with which interest-based explanations are tested.

Nevertheless, Randy Besco offers us a very timely book that contributes to the field of political behaviour's growing concern with specific subgroups of the population rather than broadly encompassing generalizations. It does so by focusing on groups that have traditionally been lumped together, providing a thorough investigation of visible minority Canadians' nested identities and how such identities impact Canadian elections. The book is a must read for anyone interested in Canadian voting behaviour and/or visible minority Canadians' political behaviour.

## Neoliberal Parliamentarism: The Decline of Parliament at the Ontario Legislature

Tom McDowell, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021, pp. 264

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Over the past three decades, a considerable body of popular and academic literature has emerged focusing on themes such as the decline of parliament, the dominance of party and government leaders, and a concomitant crisis of democracy, both in Canada and abroad. Yet little of this work has attempted to connect such developments to any broader social and economic changes in a meaningful or substantive way. In *Neoliberal Parliamentarism: The Decline of Parliament at the Ontario Legislature*, Tom McDowell brings together two academic literatures that rarely talk to one another—the study of institutions and critical political economy—to do precisely that. In his study, he argues that in the same way that broader economic changes we have come to label *neoliberalism* have transformed public administration, so too have they reshaped the process of legislative oversight and governance in Ontario over

the past few decades. Specifically, drawing from critical theory on neoliberalism and the state, he argues that securing neoliberal policies in the face of significant public and political opposition required altering the rules of legislative oversight to facilitate and consolidate them, effectively turning the workings of responsible government on its head. Now an increasingly powerful executive uses its ability to manipulate and reform legislative procedures to “protect” the economy from interference from politicians in the legislature, acting for various “rent-seeking groups.” How this has come to pass in Ontario, McDowell says, is a messy historical story, one in which crisis and changes in party government opened space for procedural innovations that opportunistically become more permanent over time. By exhaustively documenting the many legislative rule changes and policy process reforms introduced by successive governments over four decades—both majority and minority, and from across the political spectrum—the author demonstrates the concrete and abiding links between neoliberal policy aspirations and institutional reforms. Not satisfied to merely uncover the pattern of such changes, McDowell brings a formidable (and unusual for legislative studies) array of critical theory to bear on the subject to better address why such shifts in legislative practices are occurring.

The book is organized into 11 chapters, with four setting up the discussion and five exploring the case empirically. Chapters 1 and 2 state the problems the book will address and set out the basic argument to be pursued, review related and adjacent academic debates over parliament and parliamentary processes, and address questions of method and how the study will proceed. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with theoretical issues relevant to understanding debates about the origins and logic of neoliberalism—specifically, how different streams of liberal thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries disagreed about popular and parliamentary sovereignty and the threat of democracy—and introduce critical theories on the state as a means to better grasp neoliberalism’s importance to the functioning of capitalism more generally. For instance, chapter 3 explains why neoliberalism is seen as a distinct antidemocratic variant of liberal theory, while chapter 4 largely draws from Nicos Poulantzas’ Marxist state theory to situate the introduction of neoliberalism as part of a broader struggle to rebalance the class forces affecting state action. Then chapters 5 through 10 review each different era of party government, beginning with the Davis PCs and continuing through to the present Ford PCs. Each chapter painstakingly documents changes to parliamentary procedure in the Ontario Legislature over the period from 1981 to 2021, specifically noting changes in the number of sitting days and standing orders as well as the increased use of omnibus legislation, closure and time-allocation rules, and delegated legislation. Chapter 11 summarizes the key insights from the study in light of the evidence uncovered and assesses the implications of such changes for our understanding of how legislatures operate.

In terms of connecting claims to evidence—specifically, that efforts to introduce and consolidate neoliberal policies (for example, reduced social services, privatization, lower taxes, and so on) were accompanied and facilitated by procedural reforms limiting legislative oversight—the book succeeds. In the period under study, it does appear that governments committed to neoliberal reforms (for example, Rae NDP 1992–94, Harris/Eves PCs, McGuinty/Wynne Liberals, and Ford PCs) did push them through by manipulating process. For instance, charts comparing the use of prescribed time-allocation limits for legislative debate present a stark illustration of the growing impatience of these governments to any resistance to their plans. Meanwhile governments less committed to neoliberal reforms (for example, Davis PCs, Peterson Liberals 1987–90, Rae NDP 1990–91) or just lacking the voting power to effectively manipulate the process (for example, Peterson Liberals 1995–97, Wynne Liberals 2011–14) were much less likely to resort to such techniques. However, there are some anomalous events that don’t quite fit into the neoliberal parliamentarism argument, such as when Bob Rae’s NDP government resorted to time-allocation motions early in their term or

supported the minority Wynne Liberal government in avoiding a non-confidence motion. In both cases, the broader purpose in limiting legislative oversight was to advance social democratic or progressive policy, hardly outcomes that fit a “neoliberal parliamentarism” label. Still, the empirical links between neoliberal policy goals and the introduction of restrictive policy process reforms over the period are generally clear and compelling.

While the research findings are strong in this account, the promise to use critical theory to gain insights into the subject is less developed. Here a tension emerges between the two streams outlined early in the book, with the focus on neoliberalism almost completely displacing state theory. Chapter 3 on neoliberalism sets out the basic story about how debate among liberal theorists eventually spread to the political class, and then the book’s empirical chapters basically recount how the new paradigm comes to dominance, affecting both policy outcomes and the policy process. As we move through the differing party governing eras in Ontario, the narrative increasingly becomes one of antidemocratic neoliberals versus defenders of a traditional view of the role and purpose of legislatures. The author himself slips into just such characterizations with references to the legislature’s alleged “constitutional” role to hold the executive to account or “democratic design” to scrutinize and deliberate (197). Missing from the account is the promised state theory that might have raised questions about just how innovative neoliberal ideas are and interrogate the claimed alleged roles and purposes of legislatures by providing a broader context for the political struggles over them.

All this leads to questions about just what work the term *neoliberal parliamentarism* is doing in this study. In chapter 4, the author claimed not to be forwarding a “universal theory” as much as a historical interpretation, one where the workings of legislatures are not functional but relational, subject to political struggles conditioned by the inequalities of power created by capitalism. In this view, legislatures are not neutral bodies serving the public interest but spaces that “should be studied as a social relation, situated in a particular historical time and place, and subject to influences from broader structural forces” (xiv). Here neoliberal parliamentarism functions less as a unique theory than perhaps a description of a distinct historical epoch, one that relies on a class-based state theory and a broader historical analysis to make sense of its subject. Looking back historically, the antidemocratic thrust of neoliberal parliamentarism hardly looks that unique or unusual. After all, the twentieth century was replete with examples of institutional reforms designed to limit democracy, with ongoing manipulations of the franchise, districting, election registration and administration, and voting systems for partisan gain and ideological defence. And, as the author notes, prior to the 1970s, most legislatures in Canada were part-time affairs filled with part-time, under-resourced representatives. Legislative oversight was dramatically curtailed simply by limiting how long legislatures were open. With this broader take on legislative history, the 1970s appear more as a brief and anomalous opening of legislatures to a degree of genuine contestation and oversight rather than some ideal-type norm that neoliberal parliaments can then be compared to.

Regardless of the issues noted above, *Neoliberal Parliamentarism* is an important book, one that makes a compelling, evidence-based case about just how much the Ontario Legislature has changed over the past four decades and to what end, as well as embarking on an ambitious, long overdue exploration of the theory needed to understand such changes. Indeed, McDowell should be lauded for getting this theoretical conversation started, and I look forward to seeing how he develops these ideas further in future work. As it is, this book makes a significant contribution to the study of Ontario politics, the workings of legislative institutions, the impact of neoliberalism on policy and governing process, and an emerging body of scholarship focusing on critical institutionalism.