and so attempts to generalize these findings to the population of members, all of whom presumably pursue a public strategy from time to time, is more speculative.

This work only scrapes the surface of the ways in which members communicate with the public via the media. That is not an indictment of the project by any means. After all, one can only cover so much ground in a single monograph, and *a lot* of ground is covered with this one. Rather, it is a testament to the importance of the topic and Vinson's significant contribution to pushing the conversation forward. Data limitations pose considerable impediments to scholars working in this area, and this project is among the most ambitious and impressive I have encountered. Vinson's rich data analysis and elegant presentation make this book essential reading for students of Congress and the media.

Presidential Leverage: Presidents, Approval, and the American State. By Daniel E. Ponder. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017. 240p. $90.00 cloth, $27.95 paper.
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— Jennifer L. Selin, *University of Missouri*

Since the 2016 presidential election, there has been much attention focused on President Trump's public approval ratings. This is in part due to the fact that, in his first year in office, Donald Trump had the worst approval average of any president elected since World War II (Jeffrey M. Jones. 22 January 2018. "Trump's First-Year Job Approval Worst by 10 Points." Gallup). Yet in comparison to the rest of government ("The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Poll Database." November 2017. Pew Research Center), the public's opinion of Trump is not so bad; at the end of 2017, while 32% of Americans approved of the way Trump handled his job as president, just 18% of Americans said that they trust the federal government ("Public Trust in Government: 1958-2017." 14 December 2017. Pew Research Center). In *Presidential Leverage*, Daniel Ponder argues that this difference between how Americans view the president and how they view government as a whole likely has real policy consequences.

Ponder explores the relationship between presidential approval, trust in government, and the American policy landscape. While scholars traditionally have recognized the importance of approval ratings, research on the impact of presidential approval on policy success is conflicted. For example, there is disagreement over the extent to which approval influences policy, whether that influence varies over time, the political circumstances that impact the relationship, and the types of policy for which approval matters the most. The author argues that this disagreement may result from the fact that the American public's evaluation of the president is made in response to events and outcomes across the entire government. He recognizes that presidents will almost always want high approval ratings, but that the actions of other political figures constrain presidential success in utilizing that approval to pursue policy. Put another way, the nature of the American separation-of-powers system limits presidential power and forces the president to exert leverage over competing institutions.

This means that any assessment of presidential strength is relative. Thus, when considering the effect of presidential approval on policy, we should account for approval compared to the public's trust in government as a whole. Ponder's examination of each presidency from John F. Kennedy to Barack Obama illustrates that presidential leverage, when measured as the ratio of presidential approval to the public's level of trust in government, is related to presidential policy success. When the public approves of the president's actions in times of high trust in government, the president has little leverage over other political actors. However, if the president's approval ratings are significantly higher than the public's trust in government (even if those approval ratings are low), then the president may be in a more favorable position. For example, in the first three years of President Obama's first term, both presidential approval and trust in government were below average. Yet because Obama's approval ratings exceeded trust in government, the president had more leverage to pass major legislation, such as the Affordable Care Act.

The author explores both macro- and micropolitical policy factors and finds that they vary with leverage in predictable ways. First, he explores macropolitics, or the production of government policy output over time. Leverage directly affects how successful presidents are at creating substantively important, lasting policy legacies. Because the public views the president more favorably than the rest of government, those with high leverage are more successful at pursuing legislative policy, are less likely to rely on executive orders to enact policy change, and are more likely to concentrate their policy agendas on a few significant issues. Second, Ponder examines micropolitical factors, or the organizational resources and personnel that enable the president to pursue his policy and political goals. He finds that presidential leverage influences the capacity of the White House and the location of policymaking. Presidents with low leverage want to protect their policy agendas from the influence of competing political figures, and thus, low-leverage presidents increase the strength of the Executive Office of the President and centralize policymaking in the White House.

Although *Presidential Leverage* contributes in important and new ways to our understanding of the relationship between presidential approval and policy success, a careful reader of the book is left with some theoretical questions. First, Ponder's conceptualization of leverage and his theoretical story may not entirely match. The author compares the public's evaluation of an individual political figure to a general evaluation about the entire federal government. He explains this choice by saying that such a measure allows the respondent to be "free to interpret the 'federal government' however she will, be it as an aggregated, undifferentiated collective or with reference to these [American political] institutions in her own mind" (p. 54). Yet the book's theoretical story of macro- and micropolitics is one of a system of competing institutions. For example, Ponder argues that high-leverage presidents are more likely to be successful pursuing significant legislation in Congress in part because the president is stronger relative to Congress, and not necessarily government as a whole. Similarly, implicit in the author's argument regarding micropolitical factors is an assumption that presidents are concerned about competing political actors' influence over executive branch employees. For example, weaker presidents are more likely to rely on individuals within the Executive Office of the President because those employees are largely outside the direct influence of Congress. This again seems like a story of relative presidential strength. It may be that a stronger conceptualization of leverage compares presidential approval relative to that of other institutions.

Furthermore, while Ponder engages with the idea of the institutional presidency in his theoretical framework and in his empirical analysis, the influence of the executive branch on both presidential leverage and on presidential policymaking remains largely unexplored. The institutional capacity of the executive branch and the president's management of the bureaucracy are likely factors that influence presidential leverage, either because a strong administrative state can help bolster public opinion of the president or because a functioning bureaucracy can impact public perception of government. This has direct consequences for the author's finding that presidents with higher leverage are more likely to leave policy development to bureaucratic agents. While it may be that, as he argues, strong presidents feel comfortable leaving policy formulation to bureaucratic actors, it could also be the case that an executive branch with high policy capacity creates presidential strength. Relatedly, the reader is left wondering how leverage affects the vast majority of bureaucratic policymaking, which is not in the form of legislative drafting but is, instead, in the development and implementation of regulation and in the distribution of grants and contracts. A broader discussion of the interplay between the president and the executive branch would strengthen the analysis.

Overall, *Presidential Leverage* is an important piece of scholarship that encourages the reader to think about the presidency in the context of our American separation-of-powers system. At a time when the president's approval rating is at historic lows, Ponder's work offers new understanding of how and why President Trump may achieve policy success. On the basis of book's insights, readers will find new avenues for research in political science and public policy.

The New Economic Populism: How States Respond to Economic Inequality. By William W. Franko and Christopher Witko. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. 248p. $34.95 cloth.

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— Jacob S. Hacker, *Yale University*

Over the past decade, a cottage industry of scholarship has examined the politics of rising economic inequality in the United States. Understandably, much of this work has concerned national politics. Yet the United States is distinctive not just for its skyrocketing inequities but also for its decentralized system of government. To date, however, analyses of the political, as opposed to the economic or social, dimensions of America's inequality explosion have paid limited attention to the state and local governments that loom so large in America's federated system.

William Franko and Christopher Witko seek to fill this gap with their well-timed new book. Their argument is simple: While the national government has been stalemated, some states have been moving to tackle rising inequality using the tools at their disposal—specifically, higher taxes on the affluent, state minimum wages, and state supplements to the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Further, the states that have responded are those where citizens are concerned about rising inequality. Hence, the "populism" of the title: Federal authorities may not be responsive to popular unease, but states are.

To Witko and Franko, this "new economic populism" can be seen in part as "a coherent, rational response to growing inequality," in which rising inequality sparks public concern and, in turn, state policy actions (p. 167). To substantiate this perspective, the authors present systematic cross-state comparisons of inequality and public opinion, as well as of state policies. The results are illuminating: Witko and Franko make a convincing case that those studying the politics of inequality should pay greater attention to what the states are doing. Yet their findings also suggest some fundamental limits to state responsiveness and, by implication, to the optimistic cast of their account.

The major story of the past few decades when it comes to inequality is the pulling away of the affluent—the top 10% and especially the top 1%—from everyone else. Indeed, Witko and Franko find little relationship between their estimates of state opinion (based on multilevel regression and poststratification using national samples) and broad measures of inequality at the state level (notably, the Gini coefficient, which is relatively insensitive to inequality at the tails of the distribution). Rather, their analyses show that the growing shares of income going to the top 10% and top 1% are most closely related to public concerns.