

refers to a group's (socio)economic position, while kinetic power refers to the resources a group deploys toward shaping the agenda (such as money or information). Structural power has a material as well as an ideational component: Business groups are powerful actors not just because of their economic might but also due to policy makers' *perception* that they are central to the performance of the economy (to an extent that, say, labor unions are not). This conceptualization is valuable and moves beyond simplistic capitalist-worker dichotomies, allowing the authors to capture differences between the structural power of finance and manufacturing. But note that in terms of measurement it remains a *construct* (Abraham Kaplan, *The Conduct of Inquiry: Methodology for Behavioral Science*, 1964, p. 55), that is, it is captured using an agreed-upon meaning rather than through a directly observable quantity (think "bureaucracy" vs. "labor income"). This is not a weakness of the book, but it points toward useful future work fleshing out the operationalization of these key concepts (and their application beyond the American political system).

Chapter 3 provides a detailed overview of the data. The authors machine code all speeches recorded in the *Congressional Record* between 1995 and 2016. Speech on any given issue (e.g., "inequality" or "the deficit") can then be quantified through simple counts of words (or text fragments). This is done carefully and explained step-by-step in the text. Chapter 3 also contains captivating descriptive illustrations of Congress's unequal attention to issues relevant to the interests of the rich versus middle- and low-income citizens. The authors are transparent about limits of their implementation (e.g., the difficulty of ascertaining positive vs. negative connotations of words in context). I am convinced that the created database will be of great interest to many researchers and will provide increasingly fertile ground for future exploration as technology (e.g., sentiment analysis) develops.

The second key ingredient of the authors' quantitative analysis is a measure of campaign donations (a key example of kinetic power) compiled from Federal Election Commission records and matched to individual legislators. In chapter 4, the authors show that corporate donations increase the amount of speech concerning issues central to the rich, such as debt and the deficit, while donations from labor unions increase speech regarding issues such as inequality and wages. The authors' results are summarized compactly in table 4.1 (p. 119) that reports the sign of the coefficients and their associated *p*-values (full tables are in an appendix). While the direction of effects is in line with the authors' expectations, they note that (contrary to expectations) some relationships "just miss ... statistical significance" (p. 120) as is the case for the relationship between corporate donations and speech regarding the deficit. Note that this analysis uses *all* speeches made

during the period under study. Analyzing a population (not a sample) changes the meaning of the reported significance tests. Now, the targets of inference are not the members of Congress in the dataset, but rather the possible population of members and their behavior resulting from a hypothetical continued application of the current regime of unequal influence. I raise this point not to make a sales pitch for the Bayesian inferential paradigm, which only conditions on observed data (see chapter 2 of Simon Jackman, *Bayesian Analysis for the Social Sciences*, 2009, for a spirited discussion). Rather, lack of significance (alone) might not be the most useful tool to quantitatively assess the influence of unequal kinetic power. It would have been nice to see an investigation of how well the model fits the data, for example using simple cross-validation (leaving out legislators or whole Congresses).

Chapters 5 through 7 provide three detailed case studies of financial deregulation and reregulation and of the long and winding road to minimum wage increase legislation in the 110th Congress.

The three chapters are detailed and they insightfully "trace" the process of influence during legislative decision making drawing on a variety of secondary sources as well as the authors' quantitative data.

*Summa summarum*, this is a commendable book combining excellent scholarship with engaging writing. I happily recommend it to you, and I will assign it to my students.

### Checks in the Balance: Legislative Capacity and the Dynamics of Executive Power.

By Alexander Bolton and Sharee Throver. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022. 236p. \$99.95 cloth, \$35.00 paper.

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"It is not possible to give each department an equal power of self-defense," wrote James Madison in *Federalist* 51. "In republican government, the legislative power necessarily predominates." Yet once the Constitution was ratified and the new, reconfigured Congress started its business, the legislative branch immediately found itself at a disadvantage. Joseph Cooper described this phenomenon more than a half century ago ("Jeffersonian Attitudes toward Executive Leadership and Committee Development in the House of Representatives, 1789–1829," *The Western Political Quarterly* 18[1], 1965): The initial House rules permitted legislators to refer subjects to executive officers for a report; though they were unable to introduce legislation themselves, Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson as the Secretary of Treasury and Secretary of State, respectively, were key sources of information and direction over policy.

Congressional weakness in the face of a strengthening executive branch has been lamented for decades if not

centuries. Numerous scholars have diagnosed the problem; solutions arguably have proved elusive. Alexander Bolton and Sharece Thrower enter into this long-standing conversation with their new study of legislative capacity. Their book comes at a time of renewed attention to Congress's ability to adequately check executive power and make use of its own: In 2019 the House of Representatives created a Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress that holds hearings on a range of topics from how committee meetings can be scheduled with fewer time conflicts, to the conditions that improve oversight of the executive branch and private sector; Congress increased staff pay in 2021 for the first time in decades; and earmarks ("congressionally directed spending") have returned in 2022 after Congress acknowledged that their absence ceded budgetary power to the executive branch.

Two questions animate Bolton and Thrower's analysis: How does legislative capacity enhance the ability to constrain the executive branch? And how does that capacity influence executive branch decisions about when and how to exercise power? They argue that executives can act unilaterally to "evade" stronger legislative responses when legislative capacity is low and therefore unable to enact "retribution" (p. 12).

The book's strengths include clear and concise descriptions of Bolton and Thrower's broader argument, its underlying theoretical assumptions, and their definition of legislative capacity as a two-dimensional concept incorporating both *resource* and *policy-making* capacity as necessary conditions. The former refers to tangible materials and human capital (such as staff) while the latter represents opportunities to act. The authors argue that both ambition and capacity are required for legislatures to check the executive branch. Through a logically progressive series of chapters, Bolton and Thrower test their hypotheses regarding the relationship between congressional capacity and exercises of executive power. Whether the subject is agency budget authority, oversight hearings and committee investigations, or the use of unilateral executive policy tools, the authors consistently find that during divided government, higher levels of committee staff are associated with more legislative checks—or more caution on the executive's part—but we do not see similar dynamics with lower levels of staff, even under divided government when we might expect the presidential out-party to constrain the executive branch.

Bolton and Thrower's final empirical chapter moves to the state level. The authors call this chapter "*the key test for the sum of [their] theoretical claims*" (emphasis in original), though their earlier review of fluctuations over time in legislative and executive power focuses solely on national-level institutions. Their measure of resource capacity also changes for state legislatures, to the average number of staff per legislator as well as an index that includes the staff data, expenditures per member, and whether the legislators are

term limited in office. Still, the combination of national- and state-level analysis is a welcome contribution to the study of legislative capacity that more often focuses on one or the other.

For its addition to our understanding of the relationship between legislative capacity and executive power, *Checks in the Balance* could be read in tandem with other recent works. These include John Dearborn's (2021) *Power Shifts*, Josh Chafetz's (2017) *Congress's Constitution*, and Timothy M. LaPira, Lee Drutman, and Kevin R. Kosar's (editors) (2020) *Congress Overwhelmed* as well as older studies like James Sundquist's (1981) *The Decline and Resurgence of Congress* and Lawrence Dodd and Richard Schott's (1979) *Congress and the Administrative State*.

Bolton and Thrower's study inspires deeper reflection about whom in the executive branch the legislature should be checking. We have a whole literature on policy subsystems and the close working relationships between legislative committees and bureaucratic agencies; that is, the idea that the legislative and executive branches can work together to achieve common goals. Even under unified government, the chief executive never gets their budget request enacted wholesale as legislatures are keen to retain their prerogative over the purse. How worried should the legislature be about the "administrative state" rather than simply power claimed by individual presidents? And as a corollary how powerful are those exercises of power, really? Richard Neustadt's (1960) *Presidential Power* and its progeny remind us that executives act unilaterally because they could not convince other political actors to agree with them; while they represent presidents getting (some of) what they want, executive orders and similar actions really come from a place of weakness; that we see executive orders at all means Congress has limited a president's other options in some way.

Another contribution that Bolton and Thrower's book makes is inviting us to rethink the underlying question of how a separation-of-powers system should function, in no small part because the "problem" of growing executive power relative to the legislature persists even as Congress has responded and adapted to prior eras' discontents. Committees and subcommittees once were seen as the source of legislative frailty because they were too close to agencies; eliminating an ineffective program or agency meant losing a subcommittee's reason for being and thus a seat of power. Wilson's oft-quoted statement in *Congressional Government* (1885) that "Congress in its committee rooms is Congress at work" was not meant as a compliment. The solution offered in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s was to centralize and empower party leaders to provide "coherence" to the legislative process. We have a party-driven Congress today, along with a shift to top-down macrobudgeting that has taken some discretionary spending decisions out of the committees' hands. Yet one

is hard-pressed to find arguments that the congressional centralization for which political scientists spent decades advocating has served as a more effective check on either presidents or the administrative state, and indeed Bolton and Thrower's study seem to offer an alternate solution by defining legislative capacity in terms of committee staff and experience.

Readers also may wonder whether this larger conversation can continue without an adequate place for the courts. One reason Congress enacted the Congressional Review Act, which imposes a de facto supermajority vote threshold

in each chamber to override a presidential veto and disapprove of regulation, is because the Supreme Court declared the previous legislative veto process unconstitutional in the 1980s. Checks on executive power require not just legislative capacity and ambition but also judicial acquiescence. The conversation about separation of powers and the legislative branch's ability to check the executive continues to be one not just one for practitioners and academics but also for American society, and that conversation is one which *Checks in the Balance* effectively joins and enriches.

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## COMPARATIVE POLITICS

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**Riding the Populist Wave: Europe's Mainstream Right in Crisis.** Edited by Tim Bale and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 300p. \$99.99 cloth, \$34.99 paper.

**Authoritarianism and the Evolution of West European Electoral Politics.** Erik R. Tillman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 272p. \$100.00 cloth.  
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In one of the opening scenes in the movie *Brexit* (2019), Dominic Cummings (played by Benedict Cumberbatch) finds himself in a pub conducting “focus groups” in search of a slogan for the campaign to leave the European Union. Cummings probes for resentments against the EU until he lands the key question: “It is immigration? Is it immigration? You can be honest, is it immigration?” The patrons agree that it is. To be sure, Cummings uncovers other gripes against cultural change, such as that people seem to have less religious faith and are getting married less often. But these prove to be tangential concerns to a target population that links European Union membership to uncontrolled immigration. What was supposed to be a campaign about the economic costs and benefits of the EU became one about race and ethnicity instead (Clarke, Goodwin, and Whiteley, *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union*, 2017).

The two books reviewed here reach an analogous conclusion about the last quarter-century of European party politics. Neither, however, do so intentionally. Erik Tillman's *Authoritarianism and the Evolution of West European Electoral Politics* posits that authoritarianism, which, following the psychological literature, he defines as “an individual predisposition towards the maintenance of group uniformity, cohesion, and authority at the expense of individual autonomy and diversity” (pp. 24-5) is more or less normally distributed across West European electorates. Low authoritarians (think Green voters) and high

authoritarians have always existed, but whereas in the past class mediated this basic cleavage over the nature of political authority, the combination of value and demographic change over the last four decades have made it so salient that Tillman, drawing on Hetherington and Weiler (*Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics*, 2009), claims that a “worldview evolution” is under way in Europe as well as the United States. What this means is that “authoritarianism increasingly structures political behaviour in twenty-first-century Western Europe” (p. 40)” Although pieces of Tillman's argument are familiar, he organizes them in a compelling way and offers an absolute wealth of survey data and analysis, including an original survey experiment in Ireland.

Many interesting conclusions emerge about the “high authoritarians” that are Tillman's focus, but three deserve mention here. The first is that they do not hold consistent attitudes on economics, and that economic anxieties are not driving them toward radical right parties. (Interestingly, Cummings does not ask one question about economics during his impromptu focus group.) Tillman similarly finds that authoritarians oppose the EU primarily because they view it as a social—and not an economic—threat. A second notable finding is that older voters are not overrepresented among high authoritarians, and as a consequence are not driving support for radical right parties. Tillman reads this as evidence against the cultural backlash hypothesis (Norris and Ingelhart, *Cultural Backlash*, 2019) which claims that older voters are reacting to value change—what Ingelhart initially referred to as a “silent revolution” from material to post-material values—among younger cohorts. A third finding, more a refrain in the data really, is that what really matters to high authoritarians is not value change in general but changes in the ethnic heterogeneity of European societies specifically.

Tim Bale and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser's *Riding the Populist Wave: Europe's Mainstream Right in Crisis* is an edited volume motivated by the proposition that mainstream right parties are caught between Ingelhart's silent revolution—whereby an increasing share of their affluent voters have adopted progressive social values—and Piero