

subsequent topics, such as partisanship and the frequency of calls for mobilization.

Chapter 5 reinforces Davis's argument that bloggers are becoming mainstream players, showing how agenda seekers attempt to influence the blogosphere by making them paid consultants and giving them privileged access. He also outlines in more detail the pressure on bloggers to conform. However, the claim that "acceptance of bloggers by the larger political world requires adherence to standards of civility" (p. 99) is not sufficiently supported (p. 131). Indeed, in the British context, the most famous and arguably influential political blog, <http://www.OrderOrder.com>, revels in not adhering to such standards.

Chapter 6 usefully outlines debates about how blogs impact traditional media, and particularly the nature of journalism. It argues that blogs have drawn into question how to define what a journalist is and does, and the professional standards to which they adhere. It suggests that the nature of blogging, such as its speed and lower threshold to publication, creates pressures on traditional media to adapt. Moreover, blogs challenge the media's watchdog role, while also applying a much stronger lens to their own behavior and output. Davis argues that journalism has also impacted blogging, including pressures to establish standards, linked to commercialization, before arguing powerfully that a symbiotic relationship is developing between bloggers and journalists. To further substantiate the analysis, he surveyed (traditional media) journalists about their readership and use of blogs, and compared the blog content with the content of four national newspaper front pages (though this is not necessarily a direct comparison). Chapter 7 surveys blog readers, drawing a distinction between active, regular, and occasional readers.

The book contains much of value but also has two principal weaknesses. First, it offers no real theoretical context. The empirical analysis and interpretation of findings are grounded in the hype that surrounds blogs. It is thus unsurprising that findings are interpreted rather negatively, and, at times, somewhat speculatively. If the benchmark is whether or not blogs are "revolutionary" (pp. 186–8), then they are unlikely to achieve this end. The danger is that this framing influences what research questions get asked (without any real justification) and which parts of the blogosphere are subjected to empirical analysis (the "influentials"). The book would have been strengthened by a broader approach that included "common" blog content and comment analysis. It might also have led Davis to be unduly harsh when interpreting the significance of some results. For example, he states: "Only 11% of bloggers in one survey said that the primary topic of their blogs is politics or political issues" (p. 7). It is unclear on what basis this was deemed to be a surprisingly low finding, but it struck this reader as surprisingly *high*. As David Edgerton (*The Shock of the Old*, 2006, p.ix) contended:

"too often the agenda for discussing the past, present and future of technology is set by the promoters of new technologies." Davis appears to have fallen into this trap.

Second, the book makes very little attempt to compare the findings from the American political blogosphere with blogging in other countries, and where it does, it refers to newspapers rather than the academic literature (p. 97). Moreover, the research design cannot capture the influence (if any) of non-US blogs on American politics. There are examples where US blogs have influenced British political agendas (e.g., criticism of the UK's National Health Service in debates about US health-care reform).

In spite of these limitations, Davis has gathered together some interesting empirical data that adds to our growing understanding of political blogging in the United States.

Americans, Congress, and Democratic Responsiveness: Public Evaluations of Congress and Electoral Consequences. By David R. Jones and Monika McDermott. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009. 203p.

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— Gerald C. Wright, *Indiana University*

This excellent book takes on the difficult task of saying something new with familiar data applied to the well-studied topic of congressional policymaking and elections. The authors succeed in demonstrating that collective evaluations of Congress, the approval survey item that parallels the ubiquitous presidential job-approval question, has a systematic policy component and, further, that it has consequences primarily for—and here is what is genuinely new—the party controlling Congress, rather than the party controlling the presidency. They offer a model in which the public reacts to the policies passed by Congress (measured here as size of the majority party, as well as the ideological scores of bills that pass), and this collective policy assessment matters for the partisan composition of Congress and subsequent congressional policymaking. The contribution that David R. Jones and Monika McDermott make to the literature is their demonstration of a strong dose of collective policy responsiveness in the relationship among the public, elections, and congressional policymaking. Their discovery and exploration of this policy evaluation component in public evaluations of Congress is a genuinely original, and significant, contribution.

The plan of the book is to show first that the public reacts to what Congress does, for which Jones and McDermott use a survey experiment. It is designed to elicit evaluations, based on information provided in the survey, showing that policies passed by Congress were either compatible or not with the respondents' ideological preferences. Their results show that conservatives, when told Congress passed a liberal bill, are 10% less approving

than the control group, which supports their argument. But their data also show (Table 2.2) that liberals, when told about conservative legislation being passed, were *more* approving of Congress than their counterparts who were told about Congress passing a liberal bill, which appears to be exactly opposite of what the authors' theory predicts. Their follow-up multiple regression seems to support their argument but loses fully a third of the respondents in the process, thus providing some grounds for skepticism, if one is so inclined. Fortunately, the evidence in subsequent chapters is more consistent in supporting the argument that congressional job performance evaluations actually reflect, or at least contain some, meaningful reactions to congressional policy.

In building their argument, Jones and McDermott show that the well-demonstrated information processing shortcuts allow for most of the public to know which party is in power and when control of Congress changes. The authors argue that voters, knowing that Democrats pass liberal legislation and that Republicans pass conservative bills, make reasonable evaluations without public tracking of individual pieces of legislation. The effective target is thus the party that controls Congress. To show the connection between congressional approval and majority party control, the authors first look at the individual relationship between voter ideology and control of Congress (American National Election Studies over 13 congressional elections), and they find that conservatives (liberals) are more likely to disapprove of Congress when Democrats (Republicans) are in power. They include measures of respondents' perceived ideological distance from the majority and minority parties in each Congress, and the coefficients for the majority party are consistently significant and in the expected direction. These analyses include controls for presidential approval, evaluations of the efficiency and fairness of the political process in Washington, and even party identification.

In one of the most convincing analyses, the authors show at the aggregate level that congressional approval is a function of variations in public policy liberalism (James Stimson's "mood" variable, which is a general policy liberalism scale constructed from hundreds of policy questions) and the liberalism of winning policy proposals in Congress (from Keith Poole and Rosenthal's NOMINATE scales, which measures the liberalism/conservatism of roll calls of both bills and legislative voting records). Here, the authors make use of a newly constructed quarterly approval series based on multiple polling organizations' questions gleaned from the Roper Center, covering the period 1974–2006. The authors adapt Stimson's method for constructing his public mood variable to deal with the sticky problems of differences in survey organizations and question wording. Again the analysis includes controls for an impressive array of factors that are cited in the previous work on congressional approval; their analysis finds a clear policy component to

congressional performance evaluations that has not been identified as such in previous work.

The evidence provided by the authors for a policy component is persuasive. The only qualification that should be noted is that the effect is small. In their analysis, public evaluations of Congress are a combination of how liberal or conservative legislation is and the movement in public ideology (with appropriate controls). So when a Democratic-controlled Congress passes liberal legislation, especially if the public mood is headed in the other direction, public approval of Congress is expected to drop. And it does, but not by much. A quick calculation from the author's regression results (p. 94) shows that a combination of either party moving legislation one standard deviation in its ideological direction, while public opinion moves the same amount in the other direction, nets only a 2.3% drop in congressional approval ratings, and such movement is not a lot against the full variation of their measure, which ranges from 20% to over 55%. This is not to denigrate the policy effects they find, but only to acknowledge that the congressional-approval responses incorporate a number of other factors in addition to satisfaction with the directions of congressional policy.

The demonstration that congressional approval is influenced by policy considerations provides the foundation for the authors' substantial amendment to the orthodoxy that congressional-election outcomes are primarily about the economy, presidential approval, and challenger quality. The analysis here is thorough and convincing. They first draw on the collected polls of the Roper Center to show that the public attributes a lot of responsibility to Congress for changes in national conditions and events; policy responsibility is less presidency-centric than many of us probably expect. Jones and McDermott then repeat the approach of first individual-level and then aggregate analyses, but here looking at the impact of congressional approval on voting. With controls for evaluations of the economy, the president, and individual incumbents as well as party identification, they find that evaluations of congressional performance have a clear and significant effect on voting for majority party candidates in House elections. Their aggregate analyses of percentages of the vote for major party candidates reveal the same clear pattern.

The book then demonstrates some interesting patterns by which aggregate congressional approval levels are reflected in strategic calculations, as revealed by levels of challenger quality and incumbent retirements (Chapter 6). The strongest test, and the one many might have bet against—at least before the analyses summarized here—is the independent effects of congressional approval in the authors' national-level time series of seat changes in House elections. They show that congressional performance evaluations are a substantial component in seat changes in the House of Representatives. Adding the congressional approval measure to a standard House election

model (17 elections) with presidential approval, evaluations of the economy, and seat exposure on the right-hand side raises estimated R^2 from .45 to .78. They clearly have found something here.

Their final chapter does a nice job of pulling the various pieces together to tell a story in which public evaluations of the ideological directions of congressional policy play a substantially larger role than in major extant accounts. If their story is right, then the substantial legislation passed in the first years of the Obama administration (the stimulus package, health care, and financial reform) should yield a drop in congressional approval (more policy distant from the voters) and, indeed, the run-up to the 2010 election has congressional rating at an all-time low. According to their analysis, this should add substantially to Democratic midterm losses, even if Obama were able to regain some of his popularity and the economy improved. [*Editor's note:* This review was written before the Republicans regained control of the House in the 2010 elections.]

Jones and McDermott accept the limited information-processing proclivities of the average citizen and show that within these, the public gleans adequate impressions of congressional policy to alter, via elections, the general directions of national policy. The account is fully compatible with the general picture of the mutual responsiveness of voters, the institutions of national policymaking, and policy outputs offered by Robert S. Erikson et al., in *Macro Polity* (2002). Jones and McDermott's book is more narrowly focused on the role of congressional performance evaluations. The findings alter our accounts of congressional elections in ways that strengthen the hand of those who believe that the democratic process works reasonably well.

Any good analysis raises new questions, and this book is no exception. One is that responses to the congressional job performance question seem to be in reaction to the House rather than the Senate. This odd asymmetry is noted but not explored. One wonders whether the Senate somehow has no effect on the public, or perhaps that when asked about "Congress," many citizens think of the House of Representatives. That possibility opens up a further question of what the congressional job item actually measures. Specifically, how much do responses to the items reflect ideological judgments about policy directions (which the authors emphasize) versus process dissatisfaction, scandals, or generalized frustration with the partisanship and intensity of conflict? Is this the best measure of the public's policy judgments about Congress? Future work might ask, for example, whether other variables that seem not to have made their way into the congressional prediction models—such as whether the country is moving in the "right/wrong direction" or public responses to the "generic ballot" about which party respondents would prefer to control Congress—might pick up the policy evaluations perhaps even more cleanly than the congressional job performance item. But these are questions, the answers to which would

most likely only underline and reinforce the authors' main argument about the important role of policy evaluations of the majority party and how they deserve a place right next to presidential evaluations and the state of the economy in our explanations for the makeup of Congress and changes in congressional policymaking. This is an important book, and it will change how we think about the linkages among congressional policymaking, elections, and the public's policy preferences.

Reforms at Risk: What Happens After Major Policy Changes Are Enacted. By Eric M. Patashnik. Princeton:

Princeton University Press, 2008. 248p. \$57.50 cloth, \$23.95 paper. doi:10.1017/S1537592710003907

— Michael T. Heaney, *University of Michigan*

Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky's (1973) classic book *Implementation* illustrates how failures of policy implementation are an important reason why the aims of many public policies are never realized. It demonstrates "[h]ow great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland." In advancing this argument, Pressman and Wildavsky laid the foundation for what would become an expansive literature in public policy studies on how organizational and political factors often instigate the failure of public policies in a federal system of government.

In *Reforms at Risk*, Eric M. Patashnik advances an argument that is a close cousin of that of Pressman and Wildavsky, yet offers a distinctly new angle. Patashnik points out how great expectations in Washington are often dashed . . . in *Washington*. He offers examples of elected officials who undo their own work by passing laws that reverse or unravel earlier general-interest reforms. Thus, he highlights the fact that reforms sometimes fail to achieve their goals because the coalition that originally supported them breaks down over time. Accordingly, "the passage of a reform law is only the beginning of a political struggle. . . . By itself . . . the passage of a reform act does not settle *anything*" (p. 3; original emphasis).

Patashnik investigates seven cases of general-interest reforms that were enacted between 1974 and 1996. He defines a general-interest reform as a "non-incremental change of an existing line of policymaking intended to rationalize governmental undertakings or to distribute benefits to some broad constituencies" (p. 2; emphasis removed from original). The cases are selected because of their importance to public policy, as well to ensure variation in the tools of government action, the perceived costs of reform, and the ultimate success of reform. These criteria led Patashnik to select the following cases: the Tax Reform Act of 1986, the Freedom to Farm reforms of 1996, the Employment Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, the Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act of 1988, a series of federal procurement reforms from 1994 to 1996, the Airline Deregulation Act of 1978, and the