political views and the popularity of ingroup views: “Facebook facilitates people in making biased evaluations of the beliefs of other people, and using the site gives people practice in mapping social and political identities in stereotyped ways” (p. 236).

In the first chapter, Settle describes two types of polarization that she bundles together under the term “psychological polarization”: affective polarization, which is often expressed as negative feelings toward outgroup members, and perceived or false polarization, the tendency to exaggerate the coherence and extremity of the views of outgroup members. Building on a description of the role of the Facebook News Feed in users’ lives, Settle develops a theoretical model that links the affordances of Facebook to psychological polarization and that can be used to generate testable assertions. The framework is informed by insights about Facebook News Feed as “a personalized, quantified blend of politically informative expression, news, and discussion that is seamlessly interwoven in a single interface with non-political content” (p. 15). The core of the book describes a series of survey-based studies used to assess whether the predicted patterns of polarization associated with Facebook use are supported.

Settle asserts that Facebook use does more than reinforce users’ political identity: it allows people to recognize the political identity of others based on both the political and nonpolitical content they post and thereby to learn the political views of others, which they would not discover without Facebook. This then leads people to overestimate the level of ideological extremity in outgroups and to inflate the popularity of their views among others. She ties these behavioral responses to the affordances of Facebook, which include tools for identity expression, mixing of social and political content, amplification of opinion leaders, deceptive quantification of content, immediate social feedback, and frequent promotion of inflammatory content. Settle argues that viewing political content on Facebook in an environment rich with social cues and implicitly political content, much of it coming from like-minded users and a good portion of it designed to inflame intergroup divides, helps strengthen emotional responses tied to social identity.

The multistage research design, which is based on a series of surveys, offers primary evidence that supports the predictions of the polarizing effects of Facebook use. Of particular note, Settle persuasively argues that social media has a greater impact on those who are less politically engaged: not those doing the talking but those who are listening.

A limitation of the study is that the methodology does not offer direct evidence of causality, which Settle readily acknowledges. Additionally, many of the conclusions rely on polarization being a product of Facebook use, not the other way around, an issue addressed in the book but one that will likely be subject to further research and scrutiny.

As Settle points out, we are missing observations of individuals becoming more polarized with Facebook use that would offer strong corroboration of her argument. Despite the limitations of the book, however, Frenemies represents the most comprehensive articulation and treatment of the polarizing impact of social media use available and should be essential reading for scholars who delve into this issue.

Both Cyberwar and Frenemies are excellent contributions to the field. They are intellectually honest in the inferences that can be drawn and the remaining points of uncertainty. Cyberwar is more accessible to a broad audience, whereas Frenemies will appeal primarily to academic audiences. Jamieson’s book is ultimately a description of the multiple points of vulnerability at the nexus of media, democracy, and intentional media manipulation, pointing out those who unwittingly helped Russian efforts, including the press, social media platforms, the citizenry, candidates, and “polarizers” who exacerbate social and political divides. Settle’s book points to media vulnerabilities to polarization that stem from human psychology and the architecture of social media, which may open us up to both intentional and inadvertent misperceptions. Both books motivate and pave the way for further research and highlight the challenges researchers face in establishing causal relationships in studying digital media consumption and political beliefs.


— Benjamin I. Page, Northwestern University

This book is a must read for every student of U.S. politics. In the course of analyzing the role of the “right-wing troika”—the American Legislative Exchange Council, State Policy Network, and Americans for Prosperity—in the recent “stark rightward shift” in policy making across the states (p. xiv), Alexander Hertel-Fernandez offers many general insights into U.S. legislative politics, political parties, wealthy individuals, and organized interest groups, especially business firms.

The setting is state legislatures, many of which operate with little public scrutiny and suffer from extremely limited resources: their members are part-time, poorly paid “citizen legislators,” with little or no personal staff, who meet in curtailed legislative sessions. Legislators naturally turn to helpers like the “right-wing troika” for intellectual fodder, debating points, model bills, and electoral support. Just as Grant McConnell once argued, private power tends to prevail.
The book thoroughly documents the history, organizational structure, activity, and impact of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which enlists a large portion of all U.S. state legislators, provides them with social networks and pleasant perks, and gives them “model bills” that ALEC’s corporate sponsors pay big dues and fees to help craft. It describes the extensive State Policy Network (SPN) of state- and regional-level conservative think tanks (operating in all 50 states) that blitz the public and legislators with press releases and reports, mobilize grassroots activists to push for legislation, and provide the intellectual underpinnings for new legislation. It also offers a close look at the highly organized Americans for Prosperity (AFP), the Koch brothers’ “800-pound gorilla” that brings together a large network of very wealthy, extreme conservatives; engages them in policy discussions; and directs their large contributions (totaling $400 million or more per electoral cycle) toward Koch-friendly right-wing candidates and causes. AFP does not sleep between elections; its state directors and paid staffs get deeply involved in state policy making. Nothing on the Left comes remotely close.

The book notes occasional tensions between AFP’s libertarianism and ALEC’s advocacy of government help for business, but these are exceptions. It points out many links among ALEC, SPN, and AFP in terms of common donors, ideas, and personnel, and outlines specific cases of close coordination. The “troika” characterization seems well justified.

But how much influence does it actually wield over policy making? Even with a mass of observational data and rigorous statistical analysis, causal inference is difficult. Yet the book’s account is remarkably persuasive. The troika’s impact looks quite substantial, especially in these days of Washington gridlock when state policies are often pivotal. Case studies and interviews, aggregate data on legislation, and individual data on legislators (surveys, bill sponsorship, roll-call voting) indicate that several major policy trends of our time owe a great deal to the right-wing troika.

Especially closely analyzed are two major cases: 19 states’ rejection of federally funded Medicaid expansion, which cut the Affordable Care Act’s expansion of health insurance coverage roughly in half, and the post-2010 cascade of measures to defund and restrict public employee unions, which severely cut the membership, mobilizing power, and political clout of what had been the strongest state-level organizational representatives of working people. The troika’s fingerprints appear all over these and a number of other instances of state policy making that have worked against democratic policy responsiveness (e.g., rejection of minimum wage increases, clean-air measures, and gun control) and popular participation in politics (e.g., voter ID laws.)

Given the troika’s assiduous efforts at secrecy, merely identifying legislation as derived from ALEC’s model bills is a major challenge. Hertel-Fernandez cleverly used plagiarism-detection software to identify bills and laws that were substantially copied from ALEC’s models. This enabled him to calculate the number of ALEC-influenced bills introduced (a very large number) and to compute enactment rates overall and in particular states. The book pins down strong connections between the introduction or enactment of ALEC bills and the limited resources of particular legislatures and individual legislators. It also demonstrates links from particular types of corporations (particularly big, politically active ones worried about threats of state regulation) to their support for SPN and ALEC and to resulting bills and legislation. Bivariate relationships in figures and tables are often bolstered by multiple regressions in the appendixes.

ALEC’s success has been greatest in Republican-controlled states, but it has extended to many entirely Democratic-controlled states as well, where its success rate has actually been nearly two-thirds as great! This striking finding—perhaps underemphasized in the book—highlights a major problem for the Democrats: their wealthy and corporate donors tend to push them in certain directions that are unpopular with most Americans, including embrace of some business-friendly measures (e.g., the nonregulation of internet-based firms) and the failure to advocate some highly popular policies concerning jobs, incomes, health care, pensions and the like.

By the same token, the book’s focus on legislative politics may lead to an underappreciation of the importance of elections (which, after all, produce the extremely conservative GOP legislators and governors who most eagerly back ALEC’s model bills) and the enormous importance of big money (including AFP money) in shaping the state political settings within which the troika operates.

From a broader perspective, this book is best viewed as an outstanding account of little-understood mechanisms by which certain conservative political actors in the wider society—particularly business firms, wealthy individuals, and ideological activists—go about affecting political outcomes. It is consistent with various accounts of a “right turn” among those actors and in our political system as a whole, which in turn has probably resulted from historical events that occurred over the course of decades: heightened economic competition from low-wage countries abroad, which set U.S. capital against U.S. labor and (with help from automation) severely weakened workers’ political power; the civil rights revolution and the move of the white South into the GOP; social tensions accompanying women’s liberation, gay and lesbian rights, and high levels of immigration; and other events that helped produce today’s strong and highly conservative, ALEC-friendly Republican Party. In short, the right-wing troika...
has probably served as a vehicle—a fast-moving, highly effective vehicle—for broader social forces.

For those seeking to slow down the troika, Hertel-Fernandez offers some rays of hope. Secrecy and low visibility have been important to its success. After Trayvon Martin’s death in 2012, revelations of ALEC’s role in promoting permissive gun legislation provoked a public backlash, and about one-third of ALEC’s corporate affiliates temporarily dropped their memberships. This points toward a Schnaatsneiderian strategy of expanding the scope of conflict by shining bright light on the troika, light that this book will surely help provide. The book also offers concrete suggestions to the center Left for counterorganizing political power across the states, suggesting based on careful scrutiny of the troika itself.


In Contested Transformation, Carol Hardy-Fanta, Pei-te Lien, Dianne Pinderhughes, and Christine Marie Sierra use original data from the Gender and Multicultural Leadership Project to provide a thorough and nuanced analysis of political elites at multiple levels of government in the United States. This book places intersectionality front and center, exploring race and gender, and as a result it provides a truly groundbreaking study of U.S. politics. The racial groups studied are African Americans, Latinos, American Indians, and Asian Americans, making it a rare study that includes these four groups at once. Moreover, subnational politics is the focal point of the book, as opposed to national politics.

The content of the book can be described in two ways. First, the authors seek to uncover the similarities and differences that exist between elected officials of color. Second, they aim to show whether traditional theories of political science, ones based primarily on white people or on men of color, continue to hold when an intersectionality framework is applied. Overall, their findings can best be described as showing more similarities than differences between elected officials of color (p. 374). As for the second question, their findings for elected officials of color are often different from what traditional theories of political science would predict.

In Chapter 1, the authors provide an excellent overview of the historical narrative of exclusion and discrimination faced by elected officials of color, pointing to two key 1965 laws—the Voting Rights Act and the Immigration Act—that led to an increase in the number of elected officials of color. Although that number has been growing over time, it is actually the number of women of color that is increasing, making this the first study to my knowledge to illustrate this point.

Chapter 2 examines local politics, and its findings warrant mention. It turns out that 90% of elected officials of color serve at the local level, many in small towns and cities (see Table 2.5, p. 103). This finding is novel, and more importantly it justifies the need to study politics in America’s small towns and cities.

Chapter 3 provides insight into the backgrounds and paths to office for elected officials of color. When it comes to whether women of color are disadvantaged more than their male counterparts the answer is both yes and no. On the one hand, women of color are advantaged when it comes to occupational prestige, but on the other hand they have fewer financial resources. Overall, the authors illustrate that women of color are not necessarily doubly disadvantaged, which is consistent with the findings of Christina Bejarano’s The Latina Advantage (2013).

Chapter 4 seeks to answer the question of why people run for office. Unlike the traditional path (Jennifer Lawless, Becoming a Candidate, 2012), women of color do not need to be asked to run by political parties; instead community members, family, and friends ask them to run. Moreover, the authors show that the career ladder trajectory does not apply to elected officials of color. For the elected officials of color who serve in state government or higher levels of office, few initially served at the local level (Table 4.7, p. 200).

Chapter 5 examines the experience of elected officials of color on the campaign trail. In this chapter the findings relating to African Americans stand out. The authors show that blacks are mostly elected from single-member districts, corroborating what David Lublin finds in his book The Paradox of Representation, 1997). Contrary to conventional wisdom, men of color perceive themselves as disadvantaged more than women of color when seeking office, with black men feeling the most disadvantaged. This chapter highlights the important differences that exist among elected officials of color, showing blacks to be different from other minorities.

Chapter 6 explores leadership and governance. The authors show that elected officials of color, regardless of gender, perceive women as better at building consensus and as harder workers. Moreover, although women of color are underrepresented in leadership, they also often vote with the majority. Thus, when looking at political incorporation they are both advantaged and disadvantaged, demonstrating that the world is more complicated than we often characterize it in scholarship.

Chapter 7 considers how elected officials of color think about representation. In response to extant studies about whether elected officials of color are out of line with the preferences of their constituents (Carol Swain, Black Faces, Black Interests, 1993) they show that nearly three-quarters of respondents feel they represent districts...