

Jessee, Stephen A. *Ideology and Spatial Voting in American Elections*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. xii, 242 pp. (\$95.00 cloth, \$29.99 paper).

Stephen Jessee's *Ideology and Spatial Voting in American Elections* is an ambitious effort to defend spatial theories of voting and to make them relevant to contemporary debates about mass elections. A problem for spatial voting theory since its inception has been the difficulty of linking the positions of voters and politicians. Over the past decade, political scientists have developed precise tools for measuring the ideological positions of legislators. However, most studies of American political behavior are premised on the belief that most voters do not think about politics in ideological terms. Stephen Jessee seeks both to challenge this view of voters and to develop a means to map the ideological positions of voters and politicians on a shared ideological dimension.

Jessee marshals a wide array of evidence to argue against the claim that voters do not hold meaningful ideological views. He contends that merely asking voters to place themselves on an ideological scale yields results that are not only incompatible with measures of politicians but also are often incompatible with the survey respondents' own policy views. If we use an index of policy questions, however, we can generally discover that voters have coherent sets of policy positions but also that they use these positions to evaluate politicians. Such a claim is not original to Jessee's work – it draws upon the “correct voting” studies of Richard Lau and David Redlawsk and on more recent work by James Stimson and others. Jessee's main addition to this debate, instead, is his effort to develop a model of voting in which ideological placement of candidates interacts with partisanship, valence issues, and information about the candidates. He draws upon data from two of his own surveys of voters in the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections to do this. In these surveys, respondents are treated as (in Jessee's phrasing) “guest senators,” given a variety of policy questions on which political candidates have voted or taken public positions. He uses these surveys to develop ideal points for survey respondents and for politicians, and he is then able to show voters' “implied indifference point” – the ideological location where voters *should* be equally far from both major party candidates on policy.

Most voters, Jessee finds, do vote according to a spatial logic, but they have other considerations as well. Voters of both parties allow their partisanship to influence choice between candidates, with Democrats at times choosing the Democratic candidate even where they are slightly closer to the Republican candidate, and vice versa. In 2004, in particular, George W. Bush held a healthy advantage over John Kerry on valence issues – that is, a large enough number of voters to swing the election to Bush chose him not because they agreed with him on policy but because they found him personally more appealing.

The effects of information about the candidates also influence the criteria voters use in selecting candidates. Ideological proximity to the candidates matters more for high-information voters than for low-information voters. For those with less information, partisanship takes on greater importance. These findings correspond to the standard findings of the Michigan school's analyses of political sophistication, but Michigan school adherents would balk at integrating them into a spatial model. Jessee shows that incorporating information measures can be done in a relatively straightforward way.

This book, then, is a thoughtful effort to develop a comprehensive accounting of the role of ideology in voting decisions, and it provides a forceful defense of the relevance of spatial voting theory to mass electorates. Jessee does not entirely defuse many of the standard criticisms of spatial voting, though he does respond to many of them. It would be good to know, for instance, whether voters hold sincere positions on issues or whether they take positions so as to conform to the positions of their preferred candidates. This is something, however, that requires a panel survey. Issue position indices also are not exactly amenable to scaling – providing the liberal response to a string of policy position questions is not actually the same as being far to the left on a scale of liberalism. But these are criticisms one might encounter of any spatial theory, and Jessee has at a minimum thought creatively about assessing ideology while listening to behavioralists' concerns.

The broader obstacle many readers may confront with this book, however, is that it is presented as a defense of the relevance of spatial theory to American elections, and yet the approach generally tends not to be one where real-world applications are emphasized but instead one where Jessee compares his model to other models. In Chapter 4, for instance, he shows how his model outperforms other spatial models in predicting vote choice. This is a credit to his model, but it is a claim that readers who are not already invested in these debates likely will not care that much about. Similarly, in Chapter 5 Jessee does a nice job of disaggregating George W. Bush's advantage over John Kerry. How might political strategists or pollsters analyzing the 2004 election have responded to these advantages? And in Chapter 2, he provides a clear and concise explanation of why one can use spatial voting concepts to explain elections even in instances where perhaps the best-known spatial voting theorem, the median voter theorem, does not apply. All of these sections of the book call out for the author to step beyond explaining his model in technical terms and to present a clear and concise explanation of how he is able to explain what happened in 2004 and 2008 in a way that makes his ideas relevant to a broader audience.

This is an elegantly written book that makes a clear case for Jessee's model as a logical next step for those who would integrate spatial theory into empirical research on elections. It will appeal to specialists on the subject; Jessee has the ability, however, to inject novel ideas into broader discussions of American elections and I look forward to seeing him do so in subsequent work.

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