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my Chinese politics classes as a way to understand how increasing centralization, digitalization of governance, and vestiges of government fragmentation across issues and geography interact in this one policy area to clearly illustrate the advantages and disadvantages of Xi Jinping's style of governance.

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## **Governance and the European social dimension: Politics, power and the social deficit in a post-2010 EU**

Paul Copeland

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Between 2007 and 2008, a major economic and financial crisis hits the global economy. Although the crisis manifested first in the United States, it soon spreads through Europe. Building on imbalances created by the relaunched process of European integration since the end of the 1980s, the crisis soon became a “double-dip” recession for European and especially Eurozone countries. As social scientists know well, crises offer formidable opportunities to alter the status quo. The recession that started more than a decade ago was no exception, and European Union (EU) policy makers made significant changes to the European economic governance framework during its unfolding.

On the one hand, several EU member states in financial trouble were forced to rely on loans issued by the EU and the International Monetary Fund. These loans were conditional to the approval of fiscal retrenchment measures and liberalizing structural reforms. On the other hand, the adoption of new EU legislative measures known as “Six Pack,” “Two Pack,” and the “Fiscal Treaty” not only strengthened the fiscal requirements set by the Stability and Growth Pact but also enlarged the scope of EU intervention over macroeconomic and social policy (de la Porte & Heins, 2016). Under the new “Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure,” EU member states can be fined not only for failing to reduce “excessive deficits,” but also for causing “excessive macroeconomic imbalances” (Erne, 2015). As Erne (2015, p. 473) notes, “the definition of ‘excessive imbalances’ is so encompassing that no aspect of economic-policy making can be excluded from its scope a priori.”

All these mechanisms, along with the new “Europe 2020 Strategy”—the successor of the “Lisbon Strategy”—were integrated in a new process to coordinate the economic and social policies of EU member states: the European Semester. Throughout the European Semester, every year the European Commission drafts several “Country-Specific Recommendations” (CSRs) addressed to EU member states, which are then adopted by the Council. This EU's new economic governance regime led to an increased capacity of EU actors to intervene in key areas of national

policy making that had hitherto been shielded from EU interventionism, such as wage setting mechanisms and employment protection legislation (Erne, 2015; Marginson & Welz, 2015).

Paul Copeland, who is Senior Lecturer of Public Policy at the Queen Mary University of London, has written a new book—the subject of this review—on the impact of this new governance configuration on the European social dimension, whereas the latter is defined as the EU's competence in employment and social policy. The book employs a governance approach to European integration that is nevertheless sensitive to power relations, a subject that governance literature tends to neglect (Keune & Marginson, 2013). As the author notes (p. 67), “developments within the European social dimension (...) need to be considered against the purpose of European integration, who has power and who has less power, and the politics of the social dimension and how all this influences outcomes.”

Copeland describes how “economic” actors have been further empowered by the new EU institutional reconfiguration vis-à-vis “social” actors. While the former definition comprises the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs of the European Commission and the Economic and Financial Affairs Council, the latter are understood as the Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, the Employment and Social Affairs Council but also European nongovernmental actors, such as the European Trade Union Confederation and the European Anti-Poverty Network.

The author further analyzes the outcomes of the new governance structure by collecting all EU country specific recommendations issued in the social field between 2011 and 2018. Starting from the seminal work of Esping-Andersen (1990) on the capacity of welfare states to *decommodify* individuals, making their existence less dependent on the labor market, Copeland notes that contemporary welfare states have the capacity to *commodify* individuals as well, exposing them to the discipline of the market (see also Stan and Erne, 2018). Thus, the author classifies EU labor and social prescriptions in a continuum which ranges from commodifying to decommodifying prescriptions. The result of the analysis is that a majority of EU social and employment policy recommendations in the period under analysis are commodifying or partially commodifying. Examples include calls for liberalizing employment protection legislation, moderating wages, increasing pension age, and introducing conditionality on welfare benefits.

Copeland's analysis thus challenges those scholars who argue that that over time, and especially since the start of the Juncker Commission (2014–2019), recommendations under the European Semester have progressively become more socially oriented (Bekker, 2015; Jessoula, 2015; Zeitlin & Vanhercke, 2018). As the author notes, while the relevance of CSRs in the social field might indeed have increased, their overall orientation has not. The conclusion is thus negative for the possibilities of “social” actors of influencing outcomes within the European Semester process: “The political struggles surrounding the CSRs for the European social dimension relate to their number and visibility, not the politics of such policy” (p. 178). The shift away from austerity pursued toward the end of the Barroso Commission and from the Juncker Commission appears therefore rhetorical rather substantive.

While Copeland's analysis is insightful, it might have been further enriched by providing in-depth comparative analysis of country case studies. As the author also notes, “behind policy headlines the devil is in the detail” (p. 148). Indeed, as the formulation of EU labor and social policy prescriptions might often appear ambiguous, context is key to understand their content (Jordan et al., 2020; Stan & Erne, 2018). While the author makes effective use of additional available information such as the country reports produced by the European Commission throughout the European Semester to classify seemingly ambiguous CSRs, an in-depth focus on a few national cases would offer further insight on the politics around the EU social policy

recommendations, as well as on their effective implementation on the ground. The literature states that national governments often engage in “two-level games” with EU institutions to facilitate the implementation of preferred policy changes (de la Porte & Natali, 2014; Erne, 2015; Moury & Standing, 2017). Furthermore, the European Semester generates a transnational opportunity structure (Farrell & Newman, 2016) also for “domestic” nongovernmental actors such as employers and trade unions, who are differently empowered by EU prescriptions. As the author is concerned with power relations within the multilevel European economic governance framework, these are issues that it would have been worth considering.

Nevertheless, the book offers a comprehensive picture of changes in the European economic governance regime in the decade after the Great Recession and their relevance for the EU social dimension. Shortly after the book was published, the world was overturned by another major crisis, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, with heavy social and economic consequences. This new crisis is also triggering significant changes to the EU's economic governance framework, including the creation of a European “recovery fund” to be financed through a joint emission of EU bonds and the temporary suspension of EU fiscal rules. But the European Semester remains relevant. To access the money from the “Recovery Fund,” member states will submit “national recovery plans” to be assessed by the Commission and adopted by the Council. In its assessment the Commission will consider, among other things, the consistency of plans with the Country-Specific Recommendations issued throughout the European Semester in previous years. While it is still too early to predict the final effects of this new crisis on the architecture of the EU, it would not be possible to understand the debate around how the EU should address it without understanding how it tackled the previous one. This book will be a helpful resource in achieving that goal.

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## Constitutional idolatry and democracy: Challenging the infatuation with writtleness

Brian Christopher Jones

*Edward Elgar Publishing, Northampton, MA, 2020. 224 pp. \$120 (cloth)*

Appearing at a time when many in the United States are contemplating the necessity of constitutional reform, *Constitutional Idolatry and Democracy* serves as a valuable reminder that the biggest obstacle to functional democratic politics in the United States and elsewhere might be, paradoxically, the people's tendency to worship the very constitution that purportedly secures their democracy. This book targets constitutional idolatry, which the author defines as “drastically or persistently over-selling the importance and effects of written constitutions.” As this definition suggests, the author sees constitutional idolatry as closely associated with written constitutions and, in turn, judicial supremacy, and his overarching critique treats these as mostly interchangeable phenomena. As a flipside to the case against constitutional idolatry, the book throughout also offers a sustained defense of the UK's unwritten constitution, which increasingly has been the focus of reform efforts that aim to codify it.

After an introductory chapter and a very short chapter briefly summarizing some possible benefits of constitutional idolatry, the book's remaining substantive chapters address three related questions: are the purported benefits of constitutional idolatry real; are there also costs; and do the costs outweigh the benefits?

With regard to the first question, the author argues that the benefits of constitutional idolatry are mostly illusory. For example, to the oft-repeated claim that citizens' veneration of a written constitution leads to increased attention to the document and, in turn, greater familiarity with its principles and structures, the author adduces an array of national and cross-national surveys that together indicate a written constitution is no better at promoting civic knowledge than an unwritten one (Chapter 3). The U.S. context is especially telling in this regard: