

how party system closure covaries with different factors like the age of the party system, the age of the parties within a given system, the number of parties (party system fragmentation), and how polarized those parties are, understood as the strength of anti-establishment parties. In chapter 10, these four factors are put together in an explanatory model. In chapter 11, party system closure is then used as an explanatory variable to predict democratic survival, which to some extent it does.

For anyone interested in party system development, the book is a great and very informative read. It fully convinced me that looking at party systems through the lens of party system closure is crucial for our understanding of their development. The focus on the stability and predictability of party interactions around government formation is an important one that gives a quite different perspective than an approach based on fragmentation and polarization. That being said, the book is sometimes a bit challenging to digest. The dataset offers a great many possibilities for analyses, but perhaps not quite so many should have been explored in so much detail within one book. The book is also very heavy on tables and figures, which sometimes may it difficult to keep sight of the main points. The long time period is in many ways a strength of the book, but it also raises questions about comparability over time. Party systems operate in a quite different context today compared to the second half of the nineteenth century, which perhaps affects their relationships. This question deserves more attention. The book is also more successful in its descriptive than its explanatory ambitions. How the various factors analyzed in chapters 6–9 relate to party system closure is interesting, but it is not always obvious what the causal direction is, and some readers might also find that the causal distance between the variables is not large. In general, the book pays very little attention to explanatory factors external to the party system.

Yet, none of these more critical comments should distract from the fact that Bértoa and Enyedi have written an important book that will, I hope, put party system analysis back at the center of the political science stage. European party systems are witnessing turbulent times, and the need for strong analytical concepts has never been greater. This book delivers exactly such concepts.

**Rationality of Irrationality: Political Determinants and Effects of Party Position Blurring.** By Kyung Joon Han. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022. 244p. \$80.00 cloth, \$39.95 paper.

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Since the pioneering work of Anthony Downs, students of party competition have focused on the ideological

positioning of political parties. While Downs's formulation mentioned the possibility of political vagueness, scholarship turned to the systematic study of positional ambiguity only years later. The aim of ideological blurring is the broadening of partisan attraction beyond voters who share the party's specific political view. The approaches to blurring fall into two strands. One, originating from studies of American politics, sees position blurring as an attempt to widen the scope of appeal on one ideological dimension, which may prove a political flaw in need of a clarifying remedy. A second strand, deriving from studies of European party systems, sees position blurring as a multidimensional strategy of deflecting voter attention to other political issues on which the party is more favorably placed.

Kyung Joon Han's new book, *Rationality of Irrationality*, is a successful unification of the theoretical insights from both strands of the literature and lays a systematic empirical foundation for understanding the causes and consequences of ambiguous party positioning. The book starts with the observations of students of American politics about the potentially practical, but normatively questionable consequences of blurring. It then turns decisively to the multidimensional conception of politics as a struggle over the composition of political interests, where parties strive to shift voters' attention to areas where they are viewed favorably, and on which their voter base is in unified agreement.

The core argument of the book is twofold. First, it rephrases the prevailing conclusions of the blurring literature that "parties blur their position on an issue ... when their comparative disadvantage on the issue is revealed" (p. 19). Second, and more original, is the idea that "party-competition environments"—the context of the party system— Influence the effectiveness of position blurring (p. 19). Unlike past works, *Rationality of Irrationality* theorizes the possibility that parties simultaneously emphasize and blur a political issue in a context when this issue is too broadly salient to ignore.

The methodology of the book is a similarly impressive combination of approaches. The book marries the study of political supply—the clarity of party positioning—with more sociologically oriented studies of voter demand, focusing on the attitudes and electoral behavior of divergent social groups, such as manual workers and small shop owners. In terms of measurement, Han relies on voter surveys, particularly the European Election Study, and party-positioning data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, complemented with information from the Manifesto Project. To capture positional ambiguity, the book primarily uses the standard deviation of expert placements of parties, while corroborating it with a positional ambiguity score taken from party manifestos.

The findings of the book can be summarized in three points. First, blurring works. The book demonstrates that

blurring leads to voter uncertainty over party positioning, and that “voters reduce their consideration of an issue ... in their vote choice as political parties blur their positions” (p. 54). Second, blurring is issue specific. In line with past works, blurring occurs with issues on which the parties are seen as less competent, and where their supporters are divided. Originally, the book shows that blurring is more likely to occur on issues that are nonetheless systemically salient. This is an important finding, infusing the study of ambiguity with much-needed consideration of broader political context. Third, blurring blinds. Focusing on radical right and social democratic parties demonstrates that blurring removes the core electorates’ consideration of party-voter distance on blurred issues. Manual workers and small shop owners are thus willing to support radical right parties despite their incongruence on economic issues, while other manual workers support social democratic parties despite their disagreement over immigration policy.

The virtue of *Rationality of Irrationality* lies in its successful theoretical synthesis, and in its systematic and convincing empirical demonstrations of how and when blurring works. The innovation of the book is its insistence on the contextual nature of blurring, which is most common in situations where parties cannot shy away from engaging political issues due to their preeminence in public debate. The book is also rich with diverse examples of specific tactical choices of concrete political actors, which brings the acts of positional blurring to life.

Given its quantitative methodological approach, and its reliance on previously existing data, the book cannot engage several important questions about strategic blurring that stand out. First is the question of how voters actually perceive blurred party positions. The book, like past works, suggests that blurring can take on different forms, such as vague statements on the issue, multiple inconsistent statements on the issue, statements that combine similar issues in atypical ways. The book assumes, again with much of the literature, that “if voters do not possess enough information on an issue, they rely more on other issues or nonpolicy features” (p. 24). This is likely the case, but it may also be that some voters engage in wishful thinking and project (their) positions onto the party, perhaps with certainty. The duplicitous economic statements of many radical right parties aim to shift voter attention towards immigration only partly. Calls for economic support for native young families combined with calls for cutting taxes, for example, also hope to instill in voters a certainty that radical right parties would support young families and cut taxes. A young parent may thus be as confident about the party’s (left-leaning) views on family allocations, as a small shopkeeper may be about the party’s (right-leaning) tax policy. Creative use of survey experiments may be able to assess how exactly diverse types of ambiguity influence the positional perceptions and subsequent political calculus of voters.

Second, the book references other works contending that there is deliberate and strategic use of blurring on the part of political actors. Yet it remains unclear how exactly political elites go about building ambiguous profiles. Do they explicitly plan it in smoky backrooms? Or is it rather a political hunch that leads them to express different positions to different audiences? Ethnographic work and interviews with (retired) politicians may provide a useful glance into the making of ambiguity.

Finally, *Rationality of Irrationality* takes a normative position, arguing that blurring is deplorable as it severs the linkages between the people and their representatives (p. 12, pp. 169-70). The findings of the book itself undermine this view and throw into question the *irrationality* of positional ambiguity. Following the multidimensional approach to political competition, the book, in line with past work, argues that blurring is primarily a mechanism of deflecting attention to advantageous issues; no party thus blurs everything. Radical right parties are unambiguous champions of national sovereignty and restrained immigration, while socialist parties are clear defenders of generous welfare systems. And voters dominantly support them because of these stances. Blurring some issues thus does not remove policy considerations altogether and does not dissolve parties of their representative responsibilities in general. Perhaps we should not disparage political elites for rationally employing rhetorical and strategic tactics that work. Indeed, decrying blurring on the part of politicians may be as futile as decrying flying on the part of birds.

Overall, the *Rationality of Irrationality* is an important contribution to our understanding of the strategies of political parties seeking to navigate the complexities of diverse electorates—a must-read for all students of political competition.

**Alternatives in Mobilization: Ethnicity, Religion, and Political Conflict.** By Jóhanna Kristín Birnir and Nil Seda Şatana.

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Why do groups mobilize along one identity cleavage as opposed to another? In *Alternatives in Mobilization: Ethnicity, Religion, and Political Conflict*, Jóhanna Birnir and Nil Şatana argue that “minority group size relative to the majority and the configuration of identity cleavage sharing and segmentation incentivize minority leaders’ choice of identity mobilization and strategy” (pp. 12-13). Rather than accepting an existing coalition that excludes them, large ethnic minority groups who share an alternative identity with the majority will mobilize that shared identity to form an alternative winning coalition, which Birnir and Şatana aptly label as the challengers’ winning coalition