

Krimmel, Katherine. (2024). ***Divergent Democracy: How Policy Positions Came to Dominate Party Competition***. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

The American government system is a complex web of relationships that impact myriad intriguing areas—including party dynamics. Katherine Krimmel’s new book, *Divergent Democracy: How Policy Positions Came to Dominate Party Competition* focuses on understanding political party dynamics while studying the components of evolution within party politics. This new research adds to the academic literature in an intriguing way highlighting influential factors that can serve as indicators for elections. Krimmel eloquently writes, “By analyzing motivations of key actors and details of the context in which they were operating, we can better understand outcomes we observe as well as paths not taken, whether by choice or by chance” (p.5). The book, *Divergent Democracy: How Policy Positions Came to Dominate Party Competition* is a fascinating read as Krimmel walks the reader through her intriguing research study.

Krimmel’s book focuses on programmatic partisanship. Krimmel explains that in exploring programmatic partisanship, there is “an emphasis on policy positions as a basis of competition... Programmaticism is a characteristic of parties and party systems, not of individual candidates or officeholders. Individuals can be ideological in the sense of holding a set of positions that involve more or less government intervention in the market and society” (p.6-7). In essence, the notion of programmaticism becomes the center of political discussions—particularly during elections. Exploring this concept, Krimmel identifies several themes in programmatic partisanship to evaluate. These themes highlight relationships to polarization, and clientelism over time. Krimmel’s methodology follows a “two-state approach to measuring programmatic partisanship through platforms, leveraging the power of machine-learning tools to identify systematic patterns in large volumes of text” (p.16). She writes, “First I estimate a structural topic model (STM) on

party platforms over time at the sentence level using a word co-occurrence to identify topics in the platforms and to calculate the degree to which each sentence relates to the topic.” From there, Krimmel identifies several themes that serve as a foundational piece in her research. These themes include: economy; American dream; foreign affairs; rights; territories and statehoods; labor and antitrust; development; business and jobs; defense; trade and markets; education; regulation and bureaucracy; healthcare, energy; liberal democracy; at home and abroad; culture, arts and multiculturalism; land and natural resources; law enforcement and border control; transportation and infrastructure and social welfare” (p.16). From there, Krimmel examines the programmaticism “looking at the platforms as a whole and within issue areas,” and “I take the difference between the estimates of each party and as a measure of programmaticism.” Krimmel takes a systematic approach looking at these policy positions and how they ultimately impact partisanship and party dynamics - issues that are not only impacting party politics but are also impacting the dynamics of public opinion throughout the United States.

Krimmel’s research adds to the academic literature in a considerable way. This research identifies social indicators. She writes, “I argue that we should treat programmaticism as a macro political indicator to monitor the health of democratic systems” (p.187). “To be considered an effective oppositional force, a party needs to have enough strength and support to be able to win office” (p.189). Identifying these indicators simply helps social scientists to better understand the party politics taking place. She also notes “programmatic differences have not been constant, however; their magnitude has varied over time. While the degree of programmaticism can vary significantly from year to year, the loess curve displays a clear trend: an initial, relatively modest increase between the turn of the twentieth century and its midpoint, a flattening or even slight decrease beginning around the 1950s, and a steep increase beginning in the late 1960s that has

continued to the present” (p.17). And, Krimmel notes that while there is variation, the parties still do not differ substantially on all issues.

Divergent Democracy: How Policy Positions Came to Dominate Party Competition is an interesting book. Many Americans note the policies political parties focus on between and during elections. It is always a matter of intriguing political discussion. Krimmel’s book takes this intrigue into an interesting direction noting how these policy positions shift over time. Krimmel studies what so many Americans have noticed and works to help us understand the ever-changing politics surrounding this. *Divergent Democracy* is an excellent book for any political scientist at any point within their career—whether they are focused on election science or political narratives, and whether they’re teaching or studying political science.

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