

Rules Are Not Boring; They *Do* Matter

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Procedural Politics: Issues, Influence, and Institutional Choice in the European Union. By Joseph Jupille. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 294 pp., \$80.00 (ISBN: 0-521-83253-5).

The European Union (EU) is the most advanced and most deeply institutionalized example of international cooperation in the contemporary world. That it should have become so despite the unpropitious circumstances of its origins—in a divided, devastated, and enmity-ridden post-World War II continent—makes the Union one of the most extraordinary, if undoubtedly flawed, political achievements in human history. A book that promises not only to tell us about the European Union and its development, but also to advance our knowledge about some key theoretical issues facing scholars of the political world is certainly not lacking in ambition. If that study also largely delivers on its promises, as Joseph Jupille's *Procedural Politics* does, it deserves to reach and to influence a very wide audience.

Procedural Politics explores how, when, and why politics in the European Union sometimes comes to focus on the rules themselves rather than the economic or social outcomes to be achieved through them. As such, the empirical core of Jupille's study concerns some of the most detailed—and to the uninitiated the most obscure—aspects of EU politics. *Procedural Politics* may, thus, attract a narrower readership than it deserves. Any book, for example, that contains a detailed case study of the European Titanium Dioxide Directive will deter some potential readers who are faint of heart! However, those readers who are not deterred will find an opening chapter in which Jupille makes a compelling case that “procedural politics” is, in reality, central to the broader institutionalist research agenda in political science (for general discussions of this research agenda, see Thelen 1999; Weingast 2002). An equally strong argument is presented as to why the European Union is the ideal setting for researching these matters. A similar standard is maintained throughout the study, as Jupille develops his own theoretical insights into procedural politics, explores the logical implications of these insights for politics in the European Union, and then carefully tests these implications across both aggregate quantitative data and several contrasting case studies. Throughout, *Procedural Politics* admirably balances highly sophisticated arguments and methods with accessibility. The text never becomes a deluge of technicalities. Similarly impressive is the manner in which the strength and importance of the case is conveyed without ignoring anomalous findings or lapsing into hyperbole. The conclusions of the study are bold. According to Jupille,

procedural politics yields short-run rules choices, reduces policymaking efficiency, directly and indirectly influences substantive (policy) outcomes, and incites and informs longer-run institutional change. We can understand neither power, nor policy, nor institutional change in the absence of a theory of procedural politics (p. 224).

Although bold, these conclusions are also convincing.

Procedural Politics is certainly one of the best books yet written about European integration. To anyone still in any doubt, Jupille demonstrates that the finer details of EU politics must not be solely the concern of Brussels insiders. Along with other important recent works (for example, Pollack 2003; Franchino 2004), *Procedural Politics* shows the value of close, *theoretically informed* observation of European institutions. As Jupille suggests, “consideration of the conditions under which, the ways in which, and the effects with which actors engage in politics with respect to rules, rather than simply within them, helps better to explain the nature and operation of the EU’s unique emerging polity” (p. 16). *Procedural Politics* is the closest extant rival in the European integration literature to Andrew Moravcsik’s (1998) magnum opus for theoretical clarity, rigorous argument, and empirical detail. In some respects, Jupille helps bridge the gap between Moravcsik’s liberal intergovernmentalist study of EU treaty bargaining and work on the institutions created and shaped by these treaties. But *Procedural Politics* also partly challenges liberal intergovernmentalist assumptions. As Jupille contends, “procedural politics *informs* institutional change by identifying gaps in the existing treaty regime and *incites* it by raising the opportunity costs of the constitutional status quo” (p. 37, emphasis in the original). In short, *Procedural Politics* makes the liberal intergovernmentalist’s relative disdain for EU institutional politics difficult to sustain.

Even though it will surely become a central reference point in the literature on the European Union, the impact of *Procedural Politics* on the broader institutionalist research agenda in political science is somewhat less certain. This outcome will not, however, be due to shortcomings in the book. Jupille’s analysis is deeply embedded in the existing institutionalist literature, and it produces a generalizable conclusion of considerable importance to much of this work. Indeed, Jupille “turns on its head the implicit claim that higher-order rules are best seen as endogenous and lower-order rules best treated as exogenous” (p. 11). Doubts as to the wider impact of *Procedural Politics* stem only from concern that an analysis that is developed in the context of EU institutions, which remain strange to most political scientists, may not resonate with them as powerfully as it should. It would be a pity if scholars’ own narrow horizons were to diminish the impact of this fine book.

References

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