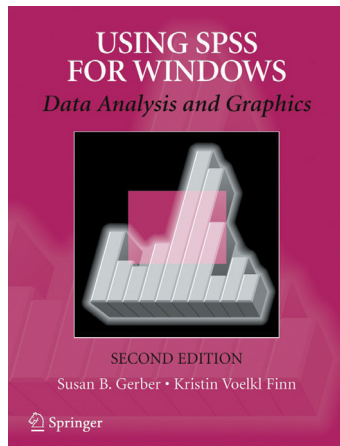


## Using SPSS for Windows (2nd edn)



Susan B. Gerber and Kristin Voelkl Finn; New York: Springer; xi + 227 pp.; 2005; £30.50; ISBN 0387400834

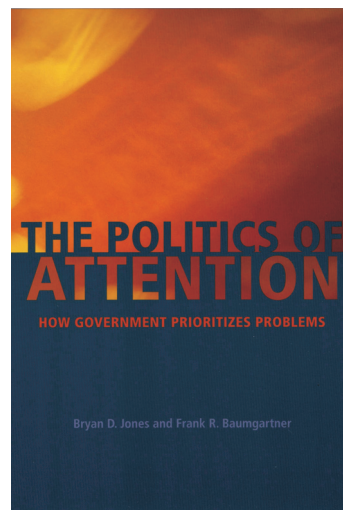
I think that the visual aspect of data presentation is sadly neglected and so I pounced on this book, because of the promise of its subtitle *Data Analysis and Graphics*, in relation to the use of the statistical software SPSS. I was not disappointed: there is a welcome emphasis on the use of graphics—especially in relation to descriptive statistics. Overall, the book does not fail on any front. It is a clearly written guide, suitable for undergraduates or maybe Masters level students with no prior experience of statistical analysis. The basic, important and necessary areas, such as probability, sampling, regression and analysis of variance are included, with enough detail (and reproduction of SPSS dialogue boxes and windows for up to version 13) to make the whole thing easy to follow.

However, this is a relatively slim volume and so does not contain as much depth or range as its fatter sisters Pallant's *SPSS Survival Manual* (Open University Press, ISBN 0335208908) or Miller, Acton, Fullerton and Maltby's *SPSS for Social Scientists* (Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN 0333922867). For instance, both these rival books discuss factor analysis, whereas this one does not. In other respects these books are of the same ilk. The choice is really one of fitness for purpose—those students requiring less detailed

knowledge and wanting a slightly more attractively designed (and probably cheaper) text would do well to buy the present book. Those with an appetite for undertaking slightly more complex statistical analysis may well prefer one of the stouter competitors.

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## The Politics of Attention: How Government Prioritizes Problems



Bryan D. Jones and Frank R. Baumgartner; Chicago: University of Chicago Press; xi + 316 pp.; 2005; £17.50; ISBN 0226406539

This excellent book provides an enlightening glimpse into an important topic: how information is used in politics and how it is prioritised. The main focus is to guide readers towards understanding the relationship between the governmental agenda and its public policy commitments. The key question is why do policy makers concentrate on some information, while ignoring or discounting other material that majorities believe to be significant? It is provocative, challenging and insightful, making a valuable contribution to politics and constitutional law.

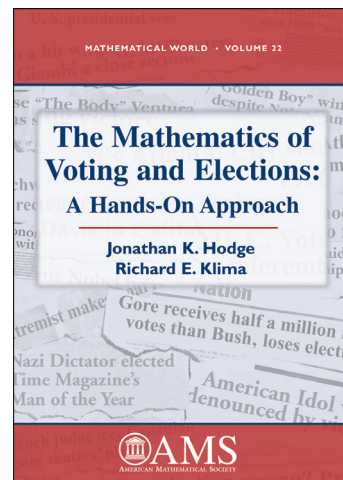
However, it also has its limitations: although the authors suggest

using regression modelling for analysing the functioning of a stable institutional environment, and a stochastic process approach to the analysis of connections between the standard incremental model of policy change or the information processing model, they do not mention relevant software for data analysis. It would have been interesting if the authors had offered their own answers, or given suitable references, to the questions they pose in their concluding chapter.

It is quite long, and not an easy read, but I would recommend it to anyone interested in understanding American politics.

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## The Mathematics of Voting and Elections: a Hands-On Approach



Jonathan K. Hodge and Richard E. Klima; American Mathematical Society; xiii + 226 pp.; 2005; £26.30; ISBN 0821837982

Given  $n$  objects possessing various attributes, how should they be ranked? This question arises in many forms in statistics: even the case  $n=2$  has no unique answer, and for larger values of  $n$ , there are cogent arguments against any particular procedure. "League tables", supposedly ranking universities, provide a continuing example.

This book examines the logic of ranking procedures. It is over 50

years since Kenneth Arrow shook the political world with his "impossibility theorem". He listed five conditions for a voting system in a democracy, each of them uncontroversial, indeed desirable, and gave a dramatic punchline: in an election with more than two candidates, there is no voting system that can satisfy all of them.

The material in this book has been used in liberal arts mathematics courses in American universities. The examples are overwhelmingly US-based. Consequently, a reader without a working knowledge of US society and political history may feel lost at times.

The mathematical background needed is gentle, but accurate reasoning is required throughout. Simple numerical examples show how Arrow's conditions may or may not hold, using particular voting systems, and illustrate the benefits and drawbacks of, say, the borda count, the single transferable vote or approval voting. A full proof of Arrow's result emerges on pages 80–89, as the reader is guided through the logical steps involved.

The second half of the book looks at weighted voting systems, such as are used by shareholders in public companies, or in the United Nations Security Council. Ways to measure the power of small voting blocks, by their ability to join with another group to form an unstoppable coalition, are examined. The most extensive discussion is of the workings of the Electoral College that chooses the US President.

Chapter 10 covers the vexed history of apportioning the number of seats in the House of Representatives among the US states, including a description of the infamous Alabama paradox. This refers to the events of 1882 when, according to the rules then in force, a House of 299 seats would allocate eight seats to Alabama, but, with 300 seats, Alabama's share would drop to 7!

To get the most out of this book, you must be prepared to work through the scattered exercises. Overall, the book achieves its objective of demonstrating the power of mathematics to inform political debate.

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