

conditions that (for example) make Chilean business so able to influence tax policy outcomes? If so, the careful process tracing of how consultation and cohesion allow business to stymie tax reform will not shed light on the deeper causes that explain persistent inequality in Chile. As a by-product of her emphasis on precisely evaluating how business power shapes discrete policy choices, Fairfield misses an opportunity to more carefully position her work with respect to more structural and historical accounts of political economy in Latin America and thus speak to scholarship on long-term continuities in social, political, and economic inequality.

In all, Fairfield has provided a strikingly clear and compelling account of how business shapes taxation in contemporary Latin America. The book deserves attention from scholars of taxation and other aspects of political economy and public policy, both in that region and far beyond. In addition to its methodological contributions and to the new agendas it opens in the study of taxation, subsequent scholarship might also draw on this book and fruitfully assess whether business power operates similarly in realms beyond taxation—one wonders, for example, whether policy responses to the growing flows of immigration into Argentina and Chile will be shaped by business power. Americanists, too, might draw on the insights of this book to enter dialogue with the growing scholarship on inequality and policy outcomes in the United States.

**Agenda Dynamics in Spain.** By Laura Chaqués-Bonafont, Frank R. Baumgartner, and Anna M. Palau. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015. 292p. \$105.00.  
doi:10.1017/S1537592716000463

— Thomas Jeffrey Miley, *University of Cambridge*

Since the outbreak of the Eurozone crisis, an increasing number of commentators have raised concerns about the damage done to the quality of democracy by the virtual imposition of austerity across much of the continent, especially in the countries that find themselves at the eye of the financial storm.

Spain is of course one of these countries, and there is a new volume out that provides a copious amount of rich empirical evidence documenting the nature and scope of the transformations under way, working to reconfigure the functioning of the country's representative democratic institutions. The book, *Agenda Dynamics in Spain*, co-authored by Laura Chaqués-Bonafont, Anna M. Palau, and Frank R. Baumgartner, is the third volume to appear in a new Palgrave MacMillan series focusing on the Comparative Studies of Political Agendas. It is part of a broader and ambitious comparative research agenda called the Comparative Agendas Project.

Chaqués-Bonafont, Palau, and Baumgartner set out to “explain how and why policy issues get on the agenda” in

Spain, with a focus not only on “policy preferences and institutional factors,” but also on “flows of information, or attention” (p. 3). To this end, the authors compile an enormous amount of information—in all, “more than 190,000 records of data”—that together provide an unprecedentedly robust sketch of policy, parliamentary, and media priorities as they have evolved over time.

The amount of work that went into the compilation of this data is most impressive. As the authors inform us, these “data sets were specifically designed to be comprehensive, that is, they are based not on a sample but contain the entire number of bills, legislative acts, and oral questions introduced in the Parliament.” As if that weren't enough, they also include “Prime Minister speeches and party manifestos . . . all coded at the quasi-sentence level.” So too do they include “the total number of stories published in the media front pages of the two most read newspapers in Spain”—namely, *El País* and *El Mundo*. Finally, they have created a composite indicator of “public mood” as well (pp. 14, 20).

The authors are to be commended for this herculean empirical contribution, one which is sure to prove extremely useful for specialists on Spain and comparative scholars, quantitative and qualitative alike.

The book's most impressive database is of the “political agenda” proper, including laws, bills, speeches, oral questions, and party manifestos. The compilation of all these indicators allows for a precise and meticulous tracking of the policy agenda at the level of the Spanish Parliament. Most helpfully, this “political agenda” database has been coded in accordance with an “exhaustive set of topic codes and subcodes,” which together will allow future users “to locate easily all the oral questions, bills or laws introduced in any policy domain” (p. 21).

The main trends the authors themselves trace from this database are indeed disturbing. For starters, the authors sketch a hollowing out of the Parliament as an arena of democratic debate. In their words: “[m]ore than ever, the Spanish Parliament is a political arena that governmental actors simply deny by, among other things, avoiding political debate and governing by decree-law” (p. 13).

The increasing concentration of power in the hands of the executive vis-à-vis the legislature would perhaps be less disconcerting if it enabled the government to more effectively implement its mandate. But there is little evidence of any trend to this effect; on the contrary, between 1982 and 2011, the authors report the opposite tendency, towards declining mandate-responsiveness, at least as measured by “the number (and percentage) of issues that are mentioned in the party manifesto as important issues but never receive any attention in the speeches or executive bills” (p. 245).

But the bulk of the authors' insightful critique of the trajectory of performance of Spanish democracy has less to do with the criterion of responsiveness, however measured, than it does with the criterion of democratic responsibility.

Throughout the book, the authors repeatedly lament the “transformation of Spanish politics from a model of ‘consensus politics’ to a new model characterized by political conflict and increasing confrontation” (p. 11). They are quick to add that this transformation represents a “normalization” of sorts. Along with the definitive consolidation and entrenchment of democratic institutions, the country has “developed many of the imperfections that are common in other Western democracies.” Most prominent among these, “a government-opposition game in which highly publicized issues are considered largely for their value in the next election” (p. 229). One prominent example of this new style of confrontational politics that the authors provide is the case of abortion, to which the book dedicates an interesting chapter.

But the most divisive of these “highly publicized issues” is, without a doubt, “political decentralization,” to which the book devotes considerable, well-deserved attention as well. The authors develop an elaborate critique of what they consider irresponsible, “electoralist” behaviour, especially on the part of the conservative party (PP), who has paid much attention to the issue, particularly while in opposition, “as a strategy to force the government to take a position about one of the most controversial issues in Spanish politics.” According to the authors, such a strategy of increasing confrontation over decentralization has proven quite effective for the PP; by making the effort to keep scarce public attention focused on this most divisive issue, the PP has been able to exact high electoral costs on its main rival, the socialist party (PSOE). In effect, the PP has successfully managed to drive a wedge between most of the PSOE electorate, which “opposes increasing decentralization,” and the PSOE constituency in Catalonia and the Basque Country, which is nevertheless crucial for the PSOE “to win the general election” (p. 109).

The authors also highlight the role of the print media in contributing to the transformation from consensus to conflict over decentralization in recent years. To this end, they document the increasingly “negative tone” in the coverage of “state-regions relations” in both *El Mundo* and *El País* (p. 144).

This is only part of the story, of course—focused nearly exclusively on political and media dynamics at the “center” in Madrid. To arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the trend towards increasing conflict over decentralization would certainly require more serious attention to relatively-autonomous political and media dynamics at work in Catalonia as well.

There are, however, some crucial exceptions to the trend of increasing polarization and confrontation—exceptions also analysed in the book. The first of these has to do with Europeanization, in support of which a longstanding and very broad political, media, and public consensus remains firmly entrenched. This “despite the fact the EU is increasingly limiting the capacity of Spanish

policymakers to define their agenda according to their policy preferences” (pp. 16–17).

Relatedly, there is the matter of the infamous reform of Article 135 of the Spanish Constitution, approved in September of 2011 under pressure from European authorities, which constitutionally embedded the prioritization of interest and principal payments on public debt over all other public expenditures. The amendment was expressly “designed to mitigate concerns over the willingness of Spanish governments to control public finance,” and it signalled the unity of the PP and the PSOE in unflinching mutual commitment to “economic reforms” (pp. 58–59).

On matters of political economy, the governing ethos of the country remains one of consensus. Consensus in favour of “responsiveness” to the dictates of European authorities, themselves committed to “responsibly” representing and enforcing the interests of the big banks first. As such, the emergent culture of confrontation over some issues would seem to simultaneously serve as a smoke-screen, one that has proven capable thus far of keeping the potential for fissure over the “fundamentals” of austerity effectively at bay.

The recent general election in Spain has resulted in a stalemate, along with a dramatic restructuring of the country’s party system. Ongoing corruption scandals, combined with continuing commitment to unpopular and painful austerity measures, have seriously wounded the traditional parties, thereby contributing to party system fragmentation and the spectacular rise of anti-establishment alternatives on both the left (PODEMOS) and center-right (Ciudadanos). It will be interesting to see how these unprecedented transformations in the party system will affect the trends charted in the book.

A crisis of governability looms on the horizon for the foreseeable future, whether or not new elections are held; meanwhile, the Catalan regional authorities continue to defy the country’s constitutional order. But despite all this uncertainty, austerity remains for now the only game in Spain.

**On Inequality.** By Harry G. Frankfurt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015. 102p. \$14.95.  
doi:10.1017/S1537592716000505

— David Lay Williams, *DePaul University*

After lurking in the background for decades of steady and nearly unnoticed growth, economic inequality has come to demand wide attention. Some politicians, such as Bernie Sanders, have defined their campaigns by addressing this as the age’s foremost challenge. And even those who established their campaigns on different terms have acknowledged the creeping issue and have tapped into it to promote their particular platforms. Similarly, after decades of relative inattention, scholars have become considerably

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.