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Left and Right and Global Politics. Alain Noel and Jean- Philippe Therien. Reviewed by Josephine Chaumba.

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autobiographical texts. It will contribute significantly to an understanding of the role of the nationalist leaders in the struggle for independence, and the way the postcolonial era was constructed through the shared imagination of these leaders and their followers.

James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley

Alain Noël and Jean-Philippe Thérien, *Left and Right in Global Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. \$28.00 papercover.

Although the left and right divide is popular in political discourse and analyses, its meaning and usefulness remain contested. Split on whether or not the left-right divide is still relevant for contemporary politics, political science literature also offers alternative positions. Whereas the left-right divide is closely associated with Western democracies, its applicability to non-Western and non-democratic countries has been questioned. Alain Noël and Jean-Philippe Thérien join this dialogue proposing that the left-right divide forms the core of global politics, and “makes contemporary politics intelligible, within, but also beyond, the boundaries of nation-states” (p. 3). They add that the left-right divide changes through time and space.

The authors suggest that to fully understand the influence of the left-right divide, readers need to view it as a social fact, which in spite of being “abstract and constructed socially” has profound influence on individual and collective behavior uniting different actors across space and time. After an informative delineation of the left-right divide, controversies and caveats in explaining global politics, they turn to empirical evidence to illustrate the significance of the left-right divide. The authors use a mix of historical analyses and survey evidence, to persuasively illustrate how the left-right divide has influenced individual and collective perceptions and attitudes about equality, redistribution, the role of the state, world affairs, development, multiculturalism, terrorism and the environment.

For example, chapter two presents data on left-right self-placement surveys from 78 countries, highlighting

relationships between the left-right scale and citizens' attitudes about immigration, same-sex couples, and qualities to promote in children. In addition, the authors examine the connection between left-right self-placement and demographic characteristics such as gender, age and socio-economic status. This empirical evidence is intriguing and informative for researchers and students interested in social justice issues.

A major strength of this book is that it is easy to understand, yet very enlightening about the left-right divide and how it plays out in world politics. In addition, Noël and Thérien include useful current statistics on the growing income gap between developing and developed nations, agricultural subsidies and other pertinent social justice topics. Apart from political science, the book appears relevant to researchers and students in disciplines such as social work, sociology and development studies where social justice and equality topics are also discussed.

A weakness of the book is that while interesting supporting evidence is presented, the authors acknowledge numerous caveats and alternative explanations, and point out that "the left-right metaphor does not explain everything" (p. 229), which may leave readers questioning the relative importance or superiority of the left-right divide in explaining global politics. For example, while the authors recognize the growing prominence of the global civil society in world affairs with values that contrast those of the left-right divide, they do not persuasively demonstrate the relative importance of the left-right divide over global civil society. Another weakness is that the survey evidence that the authors use does not demonstrate how the left-right scale influences attitudes over time, yet one of their main claims is that the left-right divide changes with time. Nevertheless, Noël and Thérien demonstrate the universality of the left-right divide in global politics in a compelling and instructive manner.

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