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** The surnames are listed in alphabetical order.*

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BOOK REVIEW

Erik Voeten

Ideology and International Institutions

(Princeton: Princeton Press University, 2021, ISBN: 978-0-691-20731-5, 239 PP., £78.00)

In a post-ideological time emanated by the contested 'end of history' after the period of the Cold War, Erik Voeten has the merit of revitalising a debate that experts and scholars often take for granted or overlook. As the title states, *Ideology and International Institutions* does not simply provide two comprehensive angles of investigation over the international politics and institutions, but also reflect on the importance of how ideological visions ameliorate or exacerbate conflictual situations, strengthen economic investments and memberships, implement or discourage international cooperation.

It goes without saying that ideology is the cypher for getting a glimpse of the contemporary worldwide scenarios where political actors and international institutions position themselves accordingly. Hence, Voeten does not delve into the historical development of ideological visions in the global arena but rather advance a spatial modelling framework where political actors and international institutions compete and coordinate with each other.

The structure of the book is organised to allow the reader to navigate between a bundle of contestations, mechanisms and major concerns through the lens of ideology. At the centre of the first part, Voeten coherently employs ideology itself for testing his assumptions within the academic literature, which are used for debating international issues of distributive policies, militarised conflicts, UN voting sessions and others alike. In the second part of the book, the main argumentation is constructed around two key-factors – respectively the interdependence of states and institutions, and a low-ideological institutional space. Within this, ideology is not always the 'same thing', but much of the glue that leads groups of states influencing one another in order to steer their interests and intentions for

pursuing a specific set of policies. This telling phenomenon goes hand in hand with the self-enforcing of international institutions, whose incentives for cooperation and/or completion are driven along with thinner yet relevant ideal stances. Voeten assumes correctly that a larger space for interdependence makes a bigger room for self-enforcing institutions that favour or directly counterbalance the positions that countries often hold for seeking out specific policies or expressing noncompliance. In this direct proposition, ideology functions as an organising device through which one can better understand the challenges of the international liberal order and multilateralism.

However, it should be clarified that Voeten depicts domestic and international politics neither as deeply rooted in ideology, nor as entirely ideological. While a low-ideological institutional space reflects ideological visions, the latter remain imperfect ways for fully understanding contemporary contestations between political actors and international institutions. Yet again, Voeten argues that ideology is nonetheless a useful analytical construct that encapsulates political and normative features for which political actors and states, as well as IGOs and institutions, come along or distant from each other.

In support of this argumentation, the instances of distributive politics and the rampant rise of illiberalism and populist forces are undoubtedly worthy of noting. According to the 'distributive argument', Voeten unravels how ideology drives the distribution of information and its interpretation within a low-ideological space. Both distribution and coordination, which are political tasks and require expertise, display the interdependence of states and institutions through the incentives of sharing information about a wealth of public and private issues. In the case of

illiberal democracies, instead, Voeten argues that some populist forces have less and less space to manoeuvre due to national and international institutions with longer and stronger liberal traditions. In fact, if it is true that populists often complain about the interference of international law in domestic affairs, it is also true that populists themselves are less likely to pursue 'exit strategies' that they rhetorically refer to. Interestingly, the rhetoric noncompliance does not only weaken these 'exit strategies', but it also questions whether or not their voters would seriously support populist strategies until the end.

In short, these two examples are instructive for exploring how ideology as well as ideological stances and visions are not divorced from material interests of power – be they security, economic or other alike. This is why, in the very end, Voeten's main argumentation is as relevant and persuasive for assessing the contemporary actorness of states and their ideological interlinks across time and space. It therefore sheds light on the fact that different network positions have constrained states in spite of the fact that their political behaviour has not changed. This nuanced perspective does not only give credit to Voeten's understanding of international context as a low-ideological institutional space since ideology is inconspicuously yet relevantly challenging the liberal order. It also verifies yet again how noncompliance with liberal stances and/or international membership are a matter of peace or war and display reversely a path of exclusion, contestation, and conflicts that may likely constraint or favour the performance of some states and political actors in the international context.

Last but not least, Voeten's use of ideology is neither employed as an old-fashioned paradigm, nor labelled along pejorative lines in the field of international relations and global politics. Conversely, it is understood as a scholarly lens through which to contribute and advance the state-of-the-art research. In this instance, it may seem that the whole argumentation lies in the realist, liberal and constructivist traditions of the International Relations studies. Instead, Voeten challenges the theoretical frameworks from a variety of different perspectives in literature, thereby providing a comprehensive study which succeeds in overviewing how thinner ideological visions are the new challenges of the contemporary liberal order, and how ideology itself plays a role in a primary dimension of contestation for a large number of countries.

Therefore, this book is not only worth being considered for students of political science, but also for those whose interdisciplinary background and expertise would undoubtedly benefit from understanding the role that ideology can play within institutions worldwide.

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