Stealth Democracy

Americans often complain about the current operation of their government, but scholars have never developed a complete picture of people’s preferred type of government. In this provocative and timely book, John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, employing an original national survey and focus groups, report the specific governmental procedures Americans desire. Their results are surprising. Contrary to the prevailing view that people want greater involvement in politics, most citizens do not care about most policies and therefore are content to turn over decision-making authority to someone else. People’s most intense desire for the political system is that decision makers be empathetic and, especially, non-self-interested, not that they be responsive and accountable to the people’s largely nonexistent policy preferences or, even worse, that the people be obligated to participate directly in decision making. In light of these findings, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse conclude by cautioning communitarians, direct democrats, social capitalists, deliberation theorists, and all those who think that greater citizen involvement is the solution to society’s problems.

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This series has been established in recognition of the growing sophistication in the resurgence of interest in political psychology and the study of public opinion. Its focus ranges from the kinds of mental processes that people employ when they think about democratic processes and make political choices to the nature and consequences of macro-level public opinion.

Some of the works draw on developments in cognitive and social psychology and relevant areas of philosophy. Appropriate subjects include the use of heuristics, the roles of core values and moral principles in political reasoning, the effects of expertise and sophistication, the roles of affect and emotion, and the nature of cognition and information processing. The emphasis is on systematic and rigorous empirical analysis, and a wide range of methodologies are appropriate: traditional surveys, experimental surveys, laboratory experiments, focus groups, and in-depth interviews, as well as others. These empirically oriented studies also consider normative implications for democratic politics generally.

Politics, not psychology, is the primary focus, and it is expected that most works will deal with mass publics and democratic politics, although work on nondemocratic publics is not excluded. Other works will examine traditional topics in public opinion research, as well as contribute to the growing literature on aggregate opinion and its role in democratic societies.

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Stealth Democracy

AMERICANS’ BELIEFS ABOUT HOW
GOVERNMENT SHOULD WORK

John R. Hibbing
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Elizabeth Theiss-Morse
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
To our advisors,
Samuel C. (Pat) Patterson and John L. Sullivan,
role models and friends
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Acknowledgments

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