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978-0-521-19101-2 - Social Choice and Legitimacy: The Possibilities of Impossibility

John W. Patty and Elizabeth Maggie Penn

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Social Choice and Legitimacy

The Possibilities of Impossibility

Governing requires choices and hence trade-offs between conflicting goals or criteria. This book asserts that legitimate governance requires explanations for such trade-offs and then demonstrates that such explanations can always be found, although not for every possible choice. In so doing, John W. Patty and Elizabeth Maggie Penn use the tools of social choice theory to provide a new and discriminating theory of legitimacy. In contrast with both earlier critics and defenders of social choice theory, Patty and Penn argue that the classic impossibility theorems of Arrow, Gibbard, and Satterthwaite are inescapably relevant to, and indeed justify, democratic institutions. Specifically, these institutions exist to do more than simply make policy – through their procedures and proceedings, these institutions make sense of the trade-offs required when controversial policy decisions must be made.

John W. Patty is Associate Professor of Political Science at Washington University in St. Louis. His research focuses on mathematical models of political institutions. His work has been published in various journals, including *American Journal of Political Science*, *Games & Economic Behavior*, *Journal of Politics*, *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, and *Social Choice & Welfare*. He also coauthored *Learning While Governing* (2013) with Sean Gailmard, which won the William H. Riker Prize awarded by the Political Economy Section of the American Political Science Association for the best book published on political economy.

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