

BOOK REVIEWS

Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative versus Participatory Democracy. By Diana C. Mutz. (Cambridge University Press, 2006.)

Diana Mutz's book charts a new course and introduces what might become known as Mutz's paradox. As the title suggests, two major variants of democratic theory are at odds. Mutz argues it is not possible to promote political participation *and* lively exchanges with "cross-cutting" discussants who hold dissimilar views. In other words, even though citizens tend to be more tolerant and aware of reasons for dissent when they hear from others who disagree, few people actually encounter opposing positions and those who do become less likely to act politically. This is a nuanced but stunning message that is delivered in a persuasive manner.

Mutz begins by reminding readers of the alleged benefits of diversity found in the works of political philosophers like John Stuart Mill, but she is quick to reconcile those visions with reality. Drawing upon the literature as well as her own experiences, Mutz argues that committed political activists often have the sort of homogenous social networks that undermine what deliberative theorists routinely advocate.

The second chapter expands on visions of democracy as well as the prevalence of cross-cutting influence. Regrettably, cross-cutting communication is not widespread. According to her analyses using several social network surveys fielded between 1992 and 2000, only a slim minority, perhaps as few as one in four, have regular contact with people who hold opposing viewpoints. Chapter 2 goes on to offer descriptive statistics on cross-cutting exposure as well as some unexpected patterns. For example, there is more disagreement in the social networks of non-white, low income, and low education respondents as well as those with low levels of political knowledge. In addition, moderates and independents have the most cross-cutting discussion, not partisans or ideologues. Mutz makes a strong case that cross-cutting discourse is not a variant of participation, it is not a proxy for social capital, and it does not conform to

the typical patterns of socioeconomic status in political behavior.

At this point some readers might be wondering how so many scholars could have missed such a unique but potent form of political activity, but cross-national data on variations in discussion patterns provides important clues. As it turns out, the United States ranks above the median in frequency of political discussion, ahead of countries like Britain, Singapore, and Canada but behind nations like Israel, Norway, Sweden, Greece, Poland, and the Netherlands. Even though Americans are relatively talkative, the United States ranks highest in the extent to which discussants hold political views that are similar. Forget claims about red states versus blue states. Americans lack confrontation in their social networks.

Her finding about the lack of confrontation is, ironically, confrontational. Other works come to different conclusions, most notably, Robert Huckfeldt, Paul E. Johnson, and John Sprague book's, *Political Disagreement: The Survival of Diverse Opinions within Communication Networks*. While Huckfeldt et al. see more diversity in discussants than Mutz does, Mutz argues that their conclusions stem from overly optimistic assumptions and unfortunate empirical choices. The crux of the debate seems to be that Huckfeldt et al. believe that contexts are imposed, although individuals might choose discussants within them, while Mutz thinks social contexts are selected on considerations that are quasi-political. In particular, Mutz claims political preferences influence choices about social surroundings as well as choices about discussants as evidence by people segregating themselves into gated communities, suburban enclaves, and the like.

The third chapter critiques the empirical literature on deliberation on external and internal validity grounds. While some might see the glass as half-full rather than half-empty, Mutz makes insightful points. She then tests a few key assertions about the beneficial effects of cross-cutting influence, particularly on the awareness of legitimate rationales for opposing views, but also awareness of rationales for one's own

viewpoints and the role of civility. Mutz constructs a model with cognitive and affective linkages from cross-cutting communication to support for the civil liberties of disliked groups. The empirical results show more tolerance via the increased knowledge of opposition rationales and friendship bonds between discussants. Demonstrating awareness of causality concerns, Mutz explores these relationships in an experimental setting, but she acknowledges that emotional relationships are not easy to manipulate experimentally (i.e., it is unrealistic to assign friends randomly) so that part of the argument is admittedly more tentative.

Chapter 4, provocatively titled “The Dark Side of Mixed Political Company,” offers a rare but necessary corrective. Mutz revives some of the work on cross-pressures to argue that cross-cutting dialogue increases ambivalence in a manner that reduces the likelihood of voting and related forms of political participation, especially for individuals who are conflict avoidant. This is refreshing. Few authors are courageous enough to deal with the pros and the cons of their topic.

In her final chapter Mutz offers “no easy solution” (p. 127). Diversity is often touted as a public goal, yet privately people seek similarity and avoid cross-cutting political discussion. If forced to choose between promoting like-minded networks and vigorous participation or heterogeneous networks with tolerance, Mutz writes that she “would come down on the side of promoting greater heterogeneity” (p. 148), but the choices are not easy and she does not argue for more deliberation within institutions or other elite venues.

So where does this leave us? Some political theorists might not put discussion in the same category as deliberation, yet deliberative exchanges occur at many levels. Moreover, Mutz makes a strong case that it is not just discussion that matters, but exposure to opposing viewpoints. Herein lies a ray of hope. Even individuals with homogeneous discussion networks could be exposed to countervailing messages. In particular, some high profile policy or political debates in the mass media might supply cross-cutting viewpoints. Mutz anticipates this criticism and argues that the proliferation of media sources generates homogeneity via self-selection, but the issue is not resolved. If deliberation takes place in the mass media and citizens follow the debate, then it could offer a way out of the conundrum.

There is no mystery, however, about the importance of this short book that packs a lot of punch. As the 2007 winner of the prestigious Goldsmith Book Prize from Harvard’s Shorenstein Center, Mutz’s work

has already achieved some of the acclaim that it deserves. Scholars who have come into contact with this book are already rethinking their work. Anyone who has not yet read it should do so. Mutz has ignited a fierce academic debate that will not be resolved anytime soon.

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Presidents, Parties, and the State: a Party System Perspective on Democratic Regulatory Choice, 1884–1936. By Scott C. James. (Cambridge University Press, 2000.)

The Democratic Party Heads North, 1877–1962. By Alan Ware. (Cambridge University Press, 2006.)

Each of these important books, written by a prominent scholar of party politics in the United States, contributes significantly to our understanding of intraparty politics and its consequences for state building and electoral outcomes. Each also revises the conventional wisdom about heavily studied periods in American political history. These fresh, original accounts of American party politics, though not entirely flawless, should be read by every serious student of political parties and American political development.

Scott C. James’ *Presidents, Parties, and the State*, initially published in 2000, is already an influential and highly regarded work, having received both the Gladys M. Kammerer Award from the APSA for best book in American national policy and the Leon Epstein Award of the APSA Political Organizations and Parties Section for its contributions to the study of parties and political organizations. Alas, it has not yet received review in this journal, an oversight that is rectified here. Breaking from new institutionalist or interest group models of the emergence of the modern state, James’ central theoretical contention is that the trajectory of regulatory state building in the United States has been profoundly shaped by political parties’ efforts to win the presidency. As James shows, the importance of party politics to regulatory state building derives from the political constraints imposed by the Electoral College on parties’ efforts to build presidential majorities. Because parties have to win a majority of Electoral College votes (rather than merely a popular majority) to win the presidency, they have strong incentives to craft their regulatory proposals to appeal primarily to highly competitive “swing” states that could throw the election to either party, and to unaffiliated constituencies whose votes are essential