

Democracy's Meanings

How the Public Understands Democracy and Why It Matters

Democracy's Meanings challenges conventional wisdom about how the public thinks about and evaluates democracy. Mining both political theory and over 75 years of public opinion data, the book argues that Americans think about democracy in ways that go beyond voting or elected representation. Instead, citizens have rich and substantive views about the material conditions that democracy should produce, which draw from their beliefs about equality, fairness, and justice.

Using survey data collected over several years, the authors construct a typology of views about democracy. Procedural views of democracy take a minimalistic quality. While voting and fair treatment are important to this vision of democracy, ideas about equality are mostly limited to civil liberties. In contrast, social views of democracy incorporate both civil and economic equality; according to people with these views, democracy ought to meet the basic social and material needs of citizens. Complementing these two groups are moderate and indifferent views about democracy. While moderate views sit somewhere in between procedural and social perspectives regarding the role of democracy in producing social and economic equality, indifferent views of democracy involve disaffection toward it. For a small group of apathetic citizens, democracy is an ambiguous and ill-defined concept.

Nicholas T. Davis is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alabama.

Keith Găddie is Professor in the College of Architecture at the University of Oklahoma.

Kirby Goidel is Professor in the Department of Political Science at Texas A&M University.

Democracy's Meanings

HOW THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS
DEMOCRACY AND WHY IT MATTERS



Nicholas T. Davis, Keith Găddie,
and Kirby Goidel

SAVE 30% AT
PRESS.UMICH.EDU
WITH PROMOTION CODE
UMF22

HARDCOVER 978-0-472-13312-3 | \$75

ALSO AVAILABLE AS AN EBOOK.



UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS

Order at www.press.umich.edu or 800.621.2736