

earlier political socialization) that courts are different from the “political” branches of government and bolsters their institutional legitimacy. Furthermore, exposure to the judiciary (courts as well as judges) “wakes up” preexisting attitudes of institutional loyalty and expectations of judicial impartiality. These preexisting attitudes form a frame for understanding and evaluating courts and judges. Thus, in a battle of frames, such as judicial nominations have become, the public tends to be more receptive to a depiction of Alito the judicious nominee rather than Alito the ideological extremist. The upshot is that, so long as a nominee has (or is perceived to have) sufficient legal credentials, ideology plays a minimal role in public evaluations. Those familiar with research on Senate confirmations of Supreme Court nominees might be struck by the similarities between this evaluative framework and that of Senators in the pre-Bork era.

A third accomplishment of this book is to provide an account of how people update their running tallies when exposed to the Supreme Court. As Court vacancies are rarely predictable, it is extremely difficult to obtain a pretest of attitudes toward the Court. Gibson and Caldeira adroitly make use of a panel study begun shortly before Rehnquist’s death to provide what will likely remain a rare study of attitude change toward the Supreme Court. Here the authors use the Alito confirmation hearings as a time where political learning takes place through exposure to the hearings themselves, and/or through pro and anti-Alito campaign-style ads. Given positivity theory’s contention that all exposure is good exposure, one would expect the Supreme Court to maintain its legitimacy despite any political struggles over its composition, yet this is not the case. Gibson and Caldeira find that anti-Alito ads are surprisingly potent and destructive of institutional legitimacy. While exposure to the confirmation hearings increases institutional support for the Court its effect is far less than that of the anti-Alito ads. Furthermore, even high attentiveness to the hearings does not prevent the ads from degrading institutional support for the Supreme Court. These results are surprising to the authors (and the reader) given positivity theory’s apparent success in explaining public support for Alito.

What makes these results even more surprising is not simply that a seemingly durable attitude like institutional loyalty could be so fragile but that, in light of *Bush v. Gore*, it seemed extraordinarily durable. How can it be that the Supreme Court emerged unscathed when it effectively appointed a president, yet suffer damage from a couple months of campaign ads?

A second puzzle of these findings is why ads that targeted Alito damaged the Supreme Court. Moreover, why did they damage the Supreme Court before he was a member and while his confirmation was far from assured? Gibson and Caldeira suggest that by violating the expectations people have for a fair and impartial judiciary the ads caused people to revise their attitudes toward the Court. This is possible but it is unclear, for the moment, why targeted attacks on a nominee would damage long-term attitudes toward an institution.

Like any good study, *Citizens* both advances the literature and serves as an impetus for future work. While the authors have provided some compelling evidence for positivity theory it is clear that not all its theoretical contours and implications are understood.

Beyond the theoretical and methodological contributions of *Citizens*, its broadest significance is found in the fact that it addresses perhaps the most important manifestation of an increasingly politicized judicial branch. Confirmation battles have consistently grown more salient and contentious, and state judicial elections have in recent years taken on some of the usual political trappings such as campaign pledges and even attack ads. As the “judicialization of politics” proceeds apace what the public knows and thinks about courts is more important than ever. What these trends mean for the vitally important resource of institutional legitimacy is uncertain, but the possibilities are perilous for this least dangerous branch.

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*The Myth of Digital Democracy*. By Matthew Hindman. (Princeton University Press, 2009.)

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Scholarship on information technology and politics can be described in much the same way Donald J. Puchala characterized the study of European integration approximately 40 years ago: blind academics trying to visualize an elephant by touching the various limbs of the beast, which is constantly growing and changing its form. Most studies on the Internet have looked at some aspects and found contradictory evidence to either confirm or disprove any given normative claim. A more comprehensive approach would further our understanding of the ways in which politics and the Internet interact. More specifically, the Internet makes a vast amount of data available, and the spread of information technology significantly reduces transaction costs for gathering

and analyzing this information. However, political science studies on the Internet underutilize these opportunities or do not use them well.

In this context, Matthew Hindman's *The Myth of Digital Democracy* is a delight. He provides comprehensive and methodologically vigorous research supported by extensive and detailed data. The findings are compelling enough to be taken seriously by researchers with diverse specializations as well as policy makers with different persuasions, as Hindman covers a wide array: online campaigning, blogging, link structure, traffic and search, and other issues are tackled in the book. Without much theorizing on his part, the author lets the data speak for itself. He demonstrates that the Internet has not increased political mobilization and has not significantly broadened political discourse. These findings certainly challenge conventional wisdom as well as optimistic scholarly accounts on the democratizing power of the Internet. For instance, media reports tend to characterize online politics as being dominated by young people and used by politicians as a means to engage new generations. Hindman points out that while 43% of all World Wide Web traffic is generated by 18- to 34-year-olds, they only account for 32% of visits to news sites and 22% of visits to political sites (68).

The significance of his contribution comes out best in the discussion on link structure, traffic and search of political web sites. Hindman establishes how so-called Googlearchy (referring to "the rule of the most heavily linked" web sites) shapes the role of political web sites (55). This makes the link structure of the Internet a fundamental element in understanding online political activity. In collaboration with Kostas Tsioutsoulidis and Judy Johnson, Hindman used computer science techniques to explore millions of political web pages and found that "a small set of hypersuccessful sites receives most of the links" (40). Substantial overlap between search results of leading search engines such as Yahoo and Google contributes to the winners-take-all patterns of online politics. This keeps public attention highly centralized. While search engines may provide opportunities for finding new sources of information, they also make it easier to visit known web sites. Most importantly, political web sites are visited by an insignificant percentage of all web users: just slightly more than 0.1% of overall web traffic (51).

Even though the book is already rich in data, it could benefit from the addition of some detailed historical comparisons. Instead of the current, rather static picture, a more dynamic analysis could demonstrate how online concentration has increased or decreased over time, giving some insight into the

dynamism. It would give an idea of whether the Internet is or is not cutting barriers for online competition; for example, whether or not dominant sites on abortion issues have changed or how traffic patterns and relative positions among top 50 web sites have evolved in the last five years. In some areas, such as blogging, it may be difficult to provide a more dynamic perspective due to the relative newness of the phenomena. However, in other areas such analysis is feasible and desirable. If the dominant positions of web sites are a constantly changing factor and new entrants are able to gain top billing quite easily, then the argument claiming inegalitarian outcomes of online politics is certainly weakened.

Nevertheless, extensive data in the current form provides plenty of opportunities for expanding on some unexplored issues. For instance, Hindman points out some evidence for supporting the view that political web sites are essentially online political echo chambers (66). This means that people with set ideological beliefs will visit certain web sites in order to confirm their opinions rather than to seek out alternative explanations. However, the findings are not conclusive. Many political web sites send or receive only trivial amount of traffic across ideological lines. However, such political polarization is not the case for at least 12 of top 50 political sites, as a significant amount of traffic flows over to web sites presenting competing viewpoints. Researchers could explore this puzzle of whether or not the Internet contributes to the political polarization further by using Hindman's data as a starting point. The analysis of the Internet traffic can be conducted over time to see if polarization has been increased or decreased. Data could be further disaggregated to see what these broad traffic patterns imply under more detailed scrutiny. Surveys and interviews with users of these political web sites could reveal further insights. Such analysis can provide insight for understanding the nature of online political communities, which could be built on recent research on social capital and group homogeneity. Scholars could explore whether, in some cases, political online communities allow building what Robert Putnam calls "bridging social capital."

In sum, Hindman's *The Myth of Digital Democracy* makes it possible to visualize the whole elephant. Comprehensiveness and rich data support Hindman's central claim about inegalitarian outcomes of the interactions of Internet and politics, and provide an excellent starting point for future research.

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