

often. Related, frustrated majorities can occur even when a majority of elected representatives share the policy preferences of a political majority. According to Jake Grumbach's (2022) new book *Laboratories against Democracy*, interest groups strategically search for states and localities where they can more easily and intentionally frustrate majorities. Overall, institutions still matter, and much of the frustration in American politics is baked into the institutional cake.

Finally, a minor but we think important point: Hill blurs the distinction between opinion intensity and opinion salience. In the public opinion literature, these are closely related but conceptually distinct. Voters can feel strongly about an issue (abortion), but it may be less important than other issues they might consider (the economy) when casting a ballot.

Overall, this ambitious book is well worth reading. The model is carefully constructed and tightly argued, and the subsequent empirical chapters provide supportive evidence. Hill does an excellent job assuring the book is accessible for less technically inclined readers, moving his proofs to the appendix and leaving the text for conceptual description of his model. The book is well written, informed, and appropriately provocative. Most students of American politics know well that intensity matters, so the central argument is not new, but Hill pushes the observation into new and challenging territory. Strategically, candidates might rationally appeal to committed minorities not to undermine democracy but because they want to win the most votes. Paired with *Democracy in America*, *Laboratories against Democracy*, or some similar text, lamenting the decline of majority rule or policy responsiveness would make for an interesting set of readings in advanced undergraduate or graduate-level courses. Our guess is that most readers will not buy entirely into Hill's conclusions, but those conclusions will spur a lot of thought about whether frustrated majorities are a feature or a bug in a democratic political system. Challenging our preconceptions is what a good book does, and on this count Seth Hill's *Frustrated Majorities* unquestionably succeeds.

Response to Kirby Goidel, Nicholas T. Davis, and Keith Gaddie's Review of *Frustrated Majorities: How Issue Intensity Enables Smaller Groups of Voters to Get What They Want*

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— Seth J. Hill 

The argument in *Frustrated Majorities* is simple: even with majority elections, politicians will sometimes cater to intense minority views in their single-minded pursuit of winning votes. As Professors Davis, Gaddie, and Goidel note in their thoughtful review, although the idea that issue intensity influences politicians is widely considered, my book aims to fill out the theoretical story with a

mathematical model and complementary empirical evidence. Importantly, the model helps us understand that politicians sometimes choose to side with an apathetic majority over an intense minority when the minority is either too small or insufficiently intense. Only under specific conditions of size and intensity do politicians choose to frustrate majorities.

I am grateful for the important questions and opportunities for future research Davis, Gaddie, and Goidel identified in their careful read of the book. Two stand out. First is the assumption that candidates know with certainty the policy position of voters. This assumption was useful in the book to show that candidates will sometimes choose to frustrate majorities even when they know with certainty that the majority holds a policy preference contrary to the candidate's proposal. The book does not, however, explore a setting where candidates are uncertain about what voters want or, as suggested is possible by Davis, Gaddie, and Goidel, where voter intensity is *easier* to observe than policy position or where politicians infer position from intensity.

These settings each deserve careful treatment. The book's result that politicians choose to frustrate majorities, however, does not depend on asymmetric information; even with full knowledge of both the intensity and issue position of the electorate, candidates sometimes side with a sufficiently intense minority. This suggests that asymmetric information about issue position rather than intensity would not alone change the electoral incentives that generate frustrated majorities. It might change the dynamics of costly signaling and political participation, however, especially if candidates believed intensity and position correlated in the population. How politicians think about the correlation between intensity and issue position strikes me as an important empirical question.

A second issue unaddressed in the book is what to think about welfare if costly signals have unmodeled negative externalities; for example, political protests turning violent. Although I do not necessarily think that frustrated majorities are a good thing, my book does present a utilitarian welfare analysis suggesting that, in some situations, costly signaling and frustrated majorities can maximize social welfare. Negative externalities of costly individual actions, however, would decrease the net benefit of candidates learning what voters care about in this welfare analysis. To remain efficient, the benefits of policy for the intense minority would need to be relatively larger than without the negative externalities.

I am grateful for the thoughtful review by Davis, Gaddie, and Goidel. I am also grateful for the questions the book prompted, many of which connect to the meaning of democracy and thus our evaluation of the functioning of the American system. *Democracy's Meanings* and *Frustrated Majorities* each add to the discussion of what democracy is and how to evaluate its operation.