

admitting that process needed amending. As Thomas suggests, Scalia spoke eloquently of protecting democracy from an unelected Court, but his definition of the concept was “quite simplistic” (p. 44).

What does all this mean for Thomas’s *The (Un)Written Constitution*? While it is true that Black and Scalia used similar language about abiding by the Constitution’s text in critiquing fellow justices for straying too far from it, it is essential to understand the underlying principles that defined their interpretative approaches. To some extent, this is Thomas’s point. Justices, even those who preach fidelity to the text, rely on unwritten principles that are not part of the Constitution. As he writes, “all interpreters are making constitutional judgments that are choices not determined by text and relying on constructions of one sort or another to do so” (p. 140). This is a plea for recognition of something Thomas rightly claims is inevitable in constitutional interpretation. But his comparison of Black and Scalia implies a closer alliance on those principles than their opinions, taken as a whole, in fact show.

Thomas’s focus is not just on Black and Scalia. In chapter 3, he explores early constitutional disputes about religious liberty and the meanings of freedom of speech and of the press in the context of Republican government. Chapter 4 considers the text and separation of powers. A fifth chapter returns to the concepts of unwritten understandings and the necessity of constitutional construction when interpreting the document. In each of the chapters, Thomas quite rightly argues that only with a close examination of these disputes can we understand “the political theory behind America’s republican experiment” (p. 60). For Thomas, this theory was not set by constitutional text, but the result of arguments about the “essential characteristics of republican government that the written Constitution rested upon” (p. 79).

The (Un)Written Constitution is a thoughtful, well-written slim volume that I could easily see assigning in an advanced undergraduate constitutional law course. Indeed, by paying close attention to Thomas’s arguments, students will surely emerge as more confident constitutional interpreters in their own right and enhance their understanding of the necessity of exploring the principles that underlie the opinions of the justices.

Democracy Lives in Darkness: How and Why People Keep Their Politics a Secret. By Emily Van Duyn. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. 284p. \$99.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper. doi:10.1017/S153759272200264X

— Jon A. Shields, *Claremont McKenna College*
Jon.Shields@ClaremontMcKenna.edu

Democracy Lives in Darkness is a study of the pseudonymous Community Women’s Group (CWG), a small secretive group of progressive middle-class women in a

rural Texas county. It formed in the wake of the 2016 election, mostly as a therapeutic space for progressives who were troubled by Trump’s victory. But it evolved into something much more important and interesting.

Through a mix of interviews with 40 of its members and participant observation of its meetings, Emily Van Duyn traces the development of CWG over a four-year period between 2016 and 2020. From the beginning, its members decided to keep their identities and activities a secret to protect themselves from social, economic, and even physical retaliation. The physical attacks surprised Van Duyn: “One had her animal shot in her own yard and another received death threats over the phone for supporting an environmental policy” (p. 204). The group worked out a confidentiality agreement, specifying an elaborate series of rules to protect their closeted identities.

Gently, Van Duyn uses this evidence to criticize those who suggest that the victims of marginalization are invariably political radicals or members of historically disadvantaged social groups. But as Van Duyn observes, the women she studied were both privileged and mainstream. Although they were mostly college-educated, middle-class whites and were politically mainstream—more inclined toward Hillary Clinton than Bernie Sanders—they felt marginalized in their small community. This leads Van Duyn to rightly conclude that marginalization “depends on context,” not some fixed group characteristic (p. 16).

Even so, Van Duyn also sees something more systemic at work. In an age of polarization, we would expect more citizens on the center-right and center-left to hide their politics from their neighbors. That’s a change from, say, the 1950s when radicals were the ones seeking refuge in secretive groups. Van Duyn theorizes that, as “the social context” of local communities “becomes more and more homogeneous ... the more that mainstream beliefs can become politically marginalized” (p. 205).

As marginalization has hit mainstream Americans, it has become more common. Thus, Van Duyn’s study shines a needed light on something that is far bigger than the small group she followed. As she observes, a survey found that nearly 1 in 10 Americans met in secret recently to discuss politics, with Democrats and Republicans equally likely to do so. CWG, she concludes, is “not a wild card,” alas (p. 64).

The most interesting parts of the book detail the evolution of the CWG and its effects on its members. Over time it evolved from a support group for Clinton voters after the 2016 election into a real political organization, pushing some of its closeted members out into the political world. It did so partly because it provided these women, most of whom were political novices, with skills that, in turn, furnished them with a new confidence. Before joining, most CWG members were reluctant to even express their thoughts, but their meetings encouraged them to flex “atrophied political muscles,” improving their “external political efficacy.” “In this way,” Van Duyn

concludes, “CWG served as a communicative backstage, a known place where rehearsing one’s identity and communication was possible without the scrutiny or pressure of frontstage performance” (p. 150).

Gradually, about half its members gained enough confidence and taste for politics to move frontstage by coming out as Democratic activists. They described it as an empowering liberation similar to that experienced by other oppressed groups. One even later ran for city council. In this respect the CWG served as an underground Democratic Party, funneling new activists from its private underground into the official, public-facing party. This new democratic life, Van Duyn believes, had real effects beyond the activists themselves. Although the evidence is only suggestive, she notes that the Texas county enjoyed “steady growth” in turnout and registered voters (p. 165). These metrics both increased after CWG formed and did so at a faster rate than in an adjacent rural county.

Thus, the local Democratic Party, which had been previously moribund, seems to have been revitalized by CWG. One party regular even “said that CWG was the party’s ‘secret weapon’” (p. 140). For this reason, Van Duyn argues that our political parties should consider developing a secret wing. As she concludes, “Reaching members who are a political minority in their community will require a hybridity for political parties” (pp. 208–9).

That would be an interesting reminder of how polarization has turned the political tables upside down. In midcentury America, during the height of our national consensus, the Communist Party USA had a secret wing. Now, it seems, the mainstream parties need to follow the communists’ example to protect the moderates who once constituted a vital center.

Like any good book, *Democracy Lives in Darkness* left me wanting more at times. For example, Van Duyn observes local meetings but not CWG activists out in the community, practicing their new civil skills. Relatedly, one never gets a very textured feel for the county itself, except insofar as it is filtered through reports from CWG members. In these ways Van Duyn never seems to leave the shadowy world of her subjects, even when they themselves ultimately venture out.

Theoretically, the book also might have said more about the larger relationship between secrecy or “darkness” and democratic ideals, especially given the American populist and Progressive legacy that too easily celebrates transparency and openness. After all, the decline of secret “smoke-filled rooms” delivered us presidents like Donald Trump, and some contend that sunshine laws increased extremism in Congress. To her credit, however, Van Duyn is also a careful writer, reluctant to theorize too far beyond her evidence.

But even if these are shortcomings, they point to one of the book’s strengths. In opening up an interesting world, it

is natural that it leaves readers wanting to learn even more about it. More generally, Van Duyn’s book highlights the need for more ethnographic research in American political science. How are we going to understand the evolution of *secret* organizations like the CWG if political scientists do not spend time immersing themselves within them and observing them? Duyn shows the power of participant observation to reveal what other methods cannot.

More importantly, Van Duyn’s book compels readers to rethink the relationship between “darkness” and democracy—and it invites everyone to think in new, concrete ways about how we might mitigate the effects of coarsening polarization. As the book rightly insists, “People keep democracy going not just despite darkness, but because of it” (p. 4). This is particularly so when there is light at the end of the tunnel, as there was in CWG’s case.

Information and Democracy: Public Policy in the News.

By Stuart N. Soroka and Christopher Wlezien. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 300p. \$99.99 cloth. \$34.99 paper.

doi:10.1017/S1537592722002936

— Emily Thorson , Syracuse University
eathorso@syr.edu

Information and Democracy: Public Policy in the News is an ambitious title for an ambitious project. Stuart Soroka and Christopher Wlezien’s book seeks to answer two fundamental questions at the heart of democratic functioning: Do the media inform the public about policy change? And, if so, how does the public respond? These questions are especially relevant given current debates over news quality, and in particular the potential harms of misinformation. But even without deliberately setting out to misinform, media outlets can chip away at democratic functioning by simply failing to give people the basic information they need to evaluate policies (and, by extension, politicians).

The book serves as a sequel of sorts to Soroka and Wlezien’s 2009 book *Degrees of Democracy*, which drew on both spending and public opinion data to show that elected officials respond to shifts in public opinion, and that public opinion in turn responds to changes to the federal budget. Specifically, they argue, the public responds thermostatically; supporting more spending in a particular policy area after a decrease and less spending after an increase. However, *Degrees of Democracy* was largely silent on how the public learns about these changes in spending. As the authors point out, the average American’s lived experience does not provide much insight into levels of, for example, defense spending. Instead, Soroka and Wlezien argue in *Information and Democracy*, people learn about policy change from the media.

The presumption that the media provide a (somewhat) accurate signal about policy change may seem obvious—indeed, it is precisely why many worry when local news outlets close and partisan outlets gain traction. However,