

alternative realities and possibilities that are more just and equitable. In the process, audiences are encouraged to reexamine the essential question of what it means to be human by simultaneously exploring the promise and possibility of human action, on the one hand, and the limits of human capacities, on the other.

As a collection of individual essays, this book is a masterful effort that appeals to readers interested in the political theory of liberalism, democratic theory, classics, cultural studies, aesthetics, and philosophy. For those unfamiliar with the comedies, each chapter provides a brief overview of the relevant plays that largely avoids pedantic discussion of Aristophanic scholarship. Indeed, Zumbrunnen goes out of his way to reach a diverse audience by using contemporary political theorists to highlight important themes in Aristophanes' comedies, and by connecting his findings to hot-button topics in current American political culture, such as populist antigovernment rage and elitist hijacking of the political process, as well as the nature of civic education and the role of identity politics.

The parts of this impressive project, however, do not always add up to an integrated whole. In the end, Zumbrunnen's concept of "comic disposition" ultimately consists of an assortment of possible reactions and teachings that could be gleaned from the works of the surprisingly subtle yet always amusing playwright. The sheer number of contemporary thinkers the author is compelled to marshal in crafting the principle of comic disposition belies the concept's fragmented nature. Bringing academics together is always a dicey proposition, and his eclectic group would surely pose no exception, yet the important and instructive disagreements among them remain unexplored. The heavy reliance on Rancière in elaborat-

ing the Aristophanic comic disposition is also problematic. Perhaps there is some humor in the idea of an anti-intellectual French intellectual, a career academic who speaks out for the working classes without speaking for (or down to) them, all the while berating the academy for its elitism and banality. Given the sheer abundance of hypercritical philosophers who rail against stultifying intellectualism, however, it is unclear why Rancière rises to the top. And this choice is not without cost. Like his French counterpart, Zumbrunnen is so engrossed with the "ordinary citizen" that he overlooks the equally important implications of Aristophanes' teachings for elites. The theory of comic disposition could perhaps be framed more cohesively by critically engaging debates regarding irony, dialectic, or the philosophic role of humor. With a more extended exploration of the relations between comedy and tragedy, instruction and entertainment, and, most important, between poetry and (political) philosophy, the unique nature of Aristophanic comedy could perhaps emerge more clearly.

It is no easy task to capture the richness of such a deeply enigmatic and sophisticated artist. *Aristophanic Comedy and the Challenge of Democratic Citizenship* breaks important ground in several ways. Zumbrunnen's judicious use of contemporary theorists as a lens through which to examine Aristophanes' works in remarkable detail, steering clear of oversimplification and directly confronting issues of anachronism, offers a model for future scholarship. As the author rightly concludes, "democratic citizenship is hard work" (p. 135). We must take full advantage of every opportunity to prepare ourselves for the task, finding lessons wherever we can in often unexpected places.

---

## AMERICAN POLITICS

### **Collective Action in Organizations: Interaction and Engagement in an Era of Technological Change.**

By Bruce Bimber, Andrew J. Flanagin, and Cynthia Stohl. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 240p. \$29.99.

### **iPolitics: Citizens, Elections, and Governing in the New Media Era.**

Edited by Richard L. Fox and Jennifer M. Ramos. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 310p. \$32.99.

### **Rebooting American Politics: The Internet**

**Revolution.** By Jason Gainous and Kevin M. Wagner. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011. 232p. \$85.00 cloth, \$30.95 paper. doi:10.1017/S153759271300159X

— Daniel Kreiss, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

When it became public in February 2012 that the Susan B. Komen Foundation, a breast cancer research and education organization, planned to cut off funding for cancer

screenings provided by Planned Parenthood, journalists and scholars alike watched as tens of thousands took to Twitter and Facebook to criticize the seemingly ideological motivation of Komen's board and to donate money to offset the lost revenue—more than \$400,000 in small donations in the 24 hours after the news broke. The events surrounding this controversy raise a host of questions for students of political engagement. Who were these online legions that fueled the massive outcries of support for Planned Parenthood? Were they members, volunteers, supporters, or were citizens outraged by this particular incident? How should we understand this highly delimited and temporal form of collective action among otherwise strangers? And, what does it mean for research on political and civic engagement when collective action takes shape and rapidly scales across many media platforms and organizational contexts?

While none of the books under review discusses this public controversy explicitly, they all offer their own

perspectives on these questions—asking, at the broadest level: What does it mean to be a citizen in the early twenty-first century?

In their significant contribution to the political science and communication literature, Bruce Bimber, Andrew J. Flanagin, and Cynthia Stohl provide a rich set of conceptual tools for understanding collective action in a networked age. One of their key insights is that organizations such as Planned Parenthood are not irrelevant in an era of much-hyped “organization-less organizing” (*Collective Action in Organizations*, p. 4). Instead, organizations such as the American Legion and AARP (two of their cases) have responded to changing technological contexts by providing supporters with a panoply of new ways to navigate their own definitions of membership and engagement. MoveOn (their third case) grew up entirely natively in this environment, and has developed porous organizational boundaries, rapid-response mechanisms to temporal political events, and instantaneous forms of member feedback through analytics (for a discussion of MoveOn, see also David Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect: The Unexpected Transformation of American Political Advocacy*, 2012). Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl convincingly argue that these organizations have provided increased opportunities for engagement and expression given the changing expectations of networked citizens, who have different orientations toward membership and can act upon them in a radically different technological context.

The most important argument of *Collective Action in Organizations* is that scholars should treat technology as a context. Explicitly rejecting variable-based approaches that reduce technologies to discrete tools for particular tasks, and survey methodologies that query respondents on crude measures of the time they spend online, Bimber, Flanagan, and Stohl argue that technology is now simply part of the context within which all of social life is lived. Its very ubiquity, the authors argue, has rendered it generally invisible, woven into the fabric of experience of much of daily life. As such, people use technology routinely and in unthinking ways, moving across public and private boundaries and domains of social activity. In this context, the challenge for scholars is to understand how people “experience the totality of the media environment” (p. 53).

Appropriately given this technological context, Bimber, Flanagan, and Stohl argue for the need to examine the “memberships” of formal organizations “within an environment in which individuals have much greater autonomy and prospects to shape their organizational experience than ever before” (p. 15). Membership is an understudied aspect of collective action. The prevailing orientation in the literature is toward the role of formal organizations in providing opportunities and incentives for people to join, an analytical perspective that gives rise to research that stops with the decision of individuals to participate. The authors argue that in an era of increased choice, charac-

terized by a host of alternatives to collective action housed within formal organizations, the sorts of orientations, attachments, and goals among individuals that shape their decisions to stay involved have taken on greater importance and need to be explained.

Bimber, Flanagan, and Stohl convincingly demonstrate that the presumed homogeneity of interest and desire among members of formal organizations that pervades the literature on collective action is empirically wrong. As they show through survey data, the diverse memberships of the American Legion, AARP, and MoveOn differ in their interests, motivations, and goals, with individuals having their own “participatory style” (p. 31) that the authors plot across four dimensions, depending on orientations toward interaction with others and engagement with the organization. The broader point is that people vary, and their relationships with the organizations of which they are members vary as well, both within and across these three organizations that were founded in different eras of American political advocacy. What emerges is a complex “collective action space” shaped by the intersection of individual goals and motivation, the technological context, and organizational structures.

Ultimately, surveys of organizational membership can take us only so far. Surveys depend on stable populations that can be identified in advance—an entirely appropriate methodological decision in this case given the authors’ theoretical interests. That said, we are still left with a number of questions about the nature of networked collective action, particularly in cases that are event based and highly temporal. How should we understand episodes such as the Komen–Planned Parenthood controversy, where people may not so much choose between formal and informal organization as react to what is best suited to the opportunity at hand, depending on disparate goals and the political context? How should we think about cases where formal organizations maintain only tenuous, but anticipatory, relations with extended networks of elites and ideological supporters for the purposes of rapid mobilization? And how can we think expansively about political contexts and their role in collective action, given that for many, the Komen incident may have offered a low-cost, networked form of proxy partisan engagement in the midst of a presidential campaign and soon after a devastating midterm election?

The various chapters of Richard Fox and Jennifer Ramos’s coedited *iPolitics* deftly explore the complex embeddedness of networked media within an expansive set of political and institutional contexts and domains of social activity. Contributors to this volume analyze the diverse institutional, political, and cultural contexts within which individuals and organizations take up new media, and with what consequence. The organization of the volume into sections on news, campaigns, and governance provides a set of case studies that can be compared across institutional contexts. We see, for instance, a yawning gulf

between citizen participation in electoral politics and governance. Matthew Kerbel explores both topics in his wonderfully nuanced chapter on the influence of netroots in the debate over health-care reform. Kerbel reveals the different institutional contexts at play in campaigning and governance, and the need for coalition building in Congress that made Barack Obama's first years in office very different from the movement organizing style that permeated his campaign. It was the netroots (which Kerbel rightly notes was always peripheral to the Obama campaign) that engaged in movement-style organizing and utilized a set of variously "inside" and "outside" tactics in the attempt to shape policy outcomes. By contrast, the Democratic Party put the remnants of the Obama campaign, "Organizing For America," into the service of the president's coalition-building efforts. This chapter demonstrates the power of temporally delimited case studies to reveal the contexts within which challengers and incumbents utilize new media and the outcomes of contentious networked action.

A number of contributors similarly suggest that the uptake of new media is shaped by goals for strategic action, institutional constraints, political opportunities, the resources at hand, and the actions of opponents. The inclusion of chapters that analyze new media in different nation-states, and therefore in different political and cultural contexts, enables readers to understand when and how technological contexts matter. Urs Grasser and Jan Gerlach's contribution provides a wonderful overview of "E-campaigns in Old Europe." These authors find significant cross-national differences not only with respect to new media campaigns in Europe and the United States but also across Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. It is clear that political systems, culture, institutions, and technological environments shape how candidates and parties take up new media, and what they do with the vast new array of tools for interacting with and mobilizing citizens. This analysis is echoed in what is the most radical institutional departure of all from Western contexts, the nondemocratic societies of Jordan, Egypt, and Kuwait. In this context, Deborah Wheeler and Lauren Mintz argue that we see mass mobilization, both institutional and disruptive, as citizens attempt to gain more representative and better governance.

In all, *iPolitics* provides a thorough overview of the intersection of new media and politics, with much import for scholarly understanding of democratic citizenship. The chapters are consistently strong, complement one another, and are tied together with an engaging introduction that nicely frames the volume. *iPolitics* would work well at the advanced undergraduate and graduate level, especially in classes on political communication.

In contrast with both books, Jason Gainous and Kevin M. Wagner attempt to make a more expansive argument in *Rebooting American Politics*. The title alone indicates the scope of their claim to "examine why the Internet

presents such a significant change in the very structure and operation of our society and governance" (p. 1). In a sweeping assessment that explicitly rejects more moderate and nuanced findings about political "normalization" (see Michael Margolis and David Resnick, *Politics as Usual: The Cyberspace Revolution*, 2000), Gainous and Wagner contend that the Internet has radically changed the information environment and the capacity for the dissemination of ideas, so much so as to render previous institutions increasingly obsolete: "The Internet has changed the very nature of how people and society engage with one another. It is a medium that makes everyone your neighbor. It makes the vastness of human knowledge available in homes around the globe. It makes interactive communication possible at an increasingly low cost. It makes the transmission of ideas, images, and humanity itself available in ways unimaginable just a few short years ago. It is not altering the rules; it is changing the electoral game itself and creating a new paradigm" (p. 5).

Yet for all this talk of "rebooting" American politics, the empirical findings that Gainous and Wagner outline are actually quite modest and crosscutting in various ways. For one, their findings are comfortably situated within a body of literature on "differential effects" (for an excellent review, see W. Russell Neuman, Bruce Bimber, and Matthew Hindman, "The Internet and Four Dimensions of Citizenship," in Robert Y. Shapiro and Lawrence R. Jacobs, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media*, 2011) that has shown how knowledge gaps are exacerbated in high-information-choice environments, where interest and ability have increased consequence given the possible decline of inadvertent exposure to political information. Gainous and Wagner suggest that this is revolutionary, though not in the direction of greater democracy and the wider distribution of power. A similar differential effect comes in relation to their more speculative chapter on e-voting, which, the authors argue, will benefit white, young, and more affluent voters. In normative contrast, they are rather bullish on the prospects for the Internet to create heightened political participation. The sources of this effect lie in the increased social capital fostered through social media, lowered costs of online campaigning, and the polarization that comes with partisan selectivity in political information—although the latter has the potential consequence of increasingly fractured governance and a disaffected electorate.

The challenge is that the reader is not quite sure what this disjointed, kaleidoscopic set of findings means for "rebooting American politics." In other words, what exactly is this "Internet Revolution" that Gainous and Wagner speak of and what are its democratic consequences? In the end, it is not quite clear because no composite picture emerges. That is fitting, perhaps, as all three books recognize that in the long arc of the history of technological development, the Internet is still young. While they take

different conceptual and methodological approaches, from treating technology as context (Bimber, Flanagan, and Stohl) and a variable (Gainous and Wagner) to part of a cluster of political, economic, and social conditions (the authors in Fox and Ramos's edited volume), all suggest the potential for an endless series of rapid permutations in applications, businesses, and social practices online.

In the end, this necessarily makes all three books empirical snapshots of the Internet and society at a particular moment in time. Their most lasting contributions will be theoretical and methodological, and I suspect that Bimber, Flanagan, and Stohl's reworking of collective-action theory and the methodological precept of treating technology as context will reshape the field. All three leave us with as many questions as answers regarding political communication, collective action, and democratic processes. And all three make contributions to the literature because of these questions.

**Agenda Setting in the U.S. Senate: Costly Consideration and Majority Party Advantage.** By Chris Den Hartog and Nathan W. Monroe. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 252p. \$85.00.  
doi:10.1017/S1537592713001606

— Scott H Ainsworth, *University of Georgia*

In one common view of the U.S. Senate, the chamber is tied into knots by devious obstruction. Imagine Jimmy Stewart's "Mr. Smith" being replaced by a less savory character set on killing meaningful legislation. Indeed, many important books on the Senate filibuster have been published over the last several years. The steady emphasis on the filibuster might lead one to think that the minority party in the Senate has undue influence. Chris Den Hartog and Nathan Monroe want to move away from analyses of obstruction and negative agenda control. Instead, they ask how the minority and majority parties fare in the policymaking process.

Den Hartog and Monroe recognize that the policymaking constraints in the Senate are real—especially when one contrasts the majority party in the House to the majority party in the Senate. But the authors argue that a stronger minority position in the Senate (when compared to the House) does not mean that the minority party dominates the chamber. The majority party in the Senate is weaker than the majority party in the House, but that does not mean that the Senate's majority party is powerless. Policymaking does occur, and the presence of roadblocks and hurdles need not curtail all majority party influence over policymaking. The authors' discussion of scheduling is indicative of their general argument in this regard. They state that "too often . . . the fact that the majority cannot shape *all* scheduling decisions to its liking seems to lead to the conclusion that it is unable to shape *any* decisions to its liking" (p. 84; original emphasis).

Den Hartog and Monroe do not provide a wholesale refutation of the earlier literature on the Senate. Rather, they provide a refinement of our view of majority-party power with an eye toward policymaking. When, how, and to what extent does the majority party dominate the policymaking process? Anytime a party wants to pass legislation, there are consideration costs. These consideration costs are akin to opportunity costs. The authors posit that the majority party has lower consideration costs than the minority party. They contend that at every stage, whether in committee, during scheduling, or on the floor, the majority party is advantaged.

The variation in consideration costs makes it easier for the majority party to push proposals under a wider array of situations. Consideration costs create "no offer" zones (similar to gridlock regions). A minority member cannot make a counterproposal that benefits him or her, as well as the floor median. Better proposals for the minority member do exist but the considerations costs would overwhelm the policy gains. The majority party member, with lower consideration costs, proposes a bill just at the edge of the no-offer zone for the minority.

How do the authors show higher consideration costs for the minority party and greater majority party influence over policymaking? They look at various hurdles in the legislative process. They rely on a body of results, not separate findings. No particular test or illustrative example is meant to be definitive; rather, the body of results is. They look at tabling motions, motions to proceed, and points of order. For instance, points of order kill most amendments—but points of order against minority amendments are particularly effective. For this reviewer, the results on roll call rates were most convincing and clotures least convincing, but the larger point is that the overall body of results is impressive. The majority party possesses procedural advantages that the minority does not. Finally, the authors successfully pair procedural and policy votes, finding that final-passage votes skew in favor of the majority party.

The book is not without shortcomings—although some of them come with the territory. That is, the authors suffer a similar fate to that of other legislative scholars. To wit, there are many theories of legislatures that are difficult to distinguish from one another with available data. For instance, we cannot always distinguish the difference between movement of the chamber median and movement of the party median. Theoretically, these are crucial distinctions, but those legislators' preferences often march in lockstep. Distinguishing among the costly consideration, the median voter, and the pivotal legislator in models is not easy. Given the aforementioned difficulty, I would have liked to see more discussion of consideration costs. In particular, need these costs be fixed? A strong majority party ought to be able to alter the consideration costs for others. Certainly, we have seen the majority discuss holds,