



Cultivating Democracy: Civic Environments and Political Socialization in America

James G. Gimpel, J. Celeste Lay, Jason E. Schuknecht

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Scholars across several social science disciplines have indicated that the behavior described by the term "civic engagement" is girded by a set of attitudes that show knowledge about, and positive evaluations of, government and politics. Drawing on extensive interviews with high school students from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, *Cultivating Democracy* examines the sources of those attitudes, including individual characteristics, and the qualities of local environments that shape the experiences of late adolescence.

The authors gathered data on adolescent attitudes by interviewing students in a wide variety of locations, from Baltimore's inner city and suburbs to the most affluent communities in Montgomery County, Maryland. Focusing initially on attitudes toward ethnic diversity and immigration, the authors expanded their focus to the political socialization of young people, including patriotism and political knowledge and participation.

The authors demonstrate how political socialization is shaped through the social messages presented to citizens by others. According to Gimpel, Lay, and Schuknecht, while formal education as a means of socializing youth is critically important, other useful means for communicating positive socializing messages, through political parties, elections, and the media, have been ignored. They recommend compensatory strategies to promote civic engagement among those who are at risk to be nonparticipants.

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