

Marcia Grimes (2005): *Democracy's Infrastructure: The Role of Procedural Fairness in Fostering Consent*. English text. Göteborg Studies in Politics 97. Department of Political Science, Box 711, 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden. Göteborg 2005. 199 pages. ISBN 91-89246-23-3, ISSN 0346-5942.

Several strands of democracy theory posit that citizens ought to consent to political institutions only under the condition that those institutions adhere to fair procedures of decisions making. While this theory linking citizens' consent to the design of decision-making processes may be normatively compelling, our current knowledge of this link in real political life remains incomplete. Which approaches to decision making do citizens view as more, or less, procedurally fair? To what extent do citizens' evaluations of decision-making processes actually affect their willingness to defer to political institutions and to political decisions?

Public opinion research has documented a long term decline in citizens' confidence in government in established democratic nations. In addition, citizens are increasingly inclined, and equipped, to contest political decisions. These trends suggest a growing reluctance to consent to political authority. Attempts to explain and interpret these trends abound, yet the theory of procedural fairness remains empirically under explored.

The theory of procedural fairness postulates that citizens evaluate decision-making processes, and that these evaluations in turn can either engender or undermine consent to the decision-making authority. *Democracy's Infrastructure* employs two attitudes as indicators of consent: willingness to accept decisions, and trust for political institutions. The study considers citizens' assessments of decision-making processes along two different conceptualizations of procedural fairness. The first relates to citizens' satisfaction with their own ability to exert influence in the decision-making process. The second draws on a theme in deliberative democracy theory, which suggests that political decision makers should engage in dialogue with constituents, show a willingness to receive and address input from citizens, and provide clear explication of the various alternatives considered and selected.

The empirical analyses examine citizens' assessments of seven decision-making processes in a single political issue, the construction of a double-tracked railway along Sweden's west coast. This comparison sheds light on what approaches to decision making citizens evaluate more favorably or critically. Panel data gathered through two mail surveys enable an examination of the causal order in perceived procedural fairness and indicators of consent.

The results show that authorities perceived to employ a more deliberative approach are regarded as much more trustworthy and also, though to a lesser extent, are more able to induce citizens to accept the final decision outcome. Citizens' satisfaction with their own influence in the issue also fosters consent, though to a lesser extent. Furthermore, citizens' assessments of their own influence in the issue seem to reflect personal attributes more than the actual availability of opportunities to exert influence.