

Table 6.4. *Explaining support for stealth democracy*

Variable	b	s.e.	p
Gender	-0.02	0.02	0.26
Age	0.003	0.04	0.94
Income	0.04	0.04	0.29
Race	0.04	0.03	0.11
Education	-0.05	0.03	0.17
Democrat	-0.08	0.02	<0.01
Republican	-0.01	0.02	0.77
Ideology	0.15	0.04	<0.01
Negative view of disagreement	0.07	0.02	<0.01
Constant	0.53	0.04	<0.01
F	6.85		<0.01
Adj. R ²	0.05		
N	999		

Source: Democratic Processes Survey, Gallup Organization, 1998.

0.10 level, meaning we cannot confidently state that, compared with those lacking a high school degree, those with many years of schooling are less likely to support stealth democracy. One possible explanation for this disturbing situation is that education may be collinear with the "negative views of political disagreement" variable. In other words, education may be associated with a willingness to tolerate political arguments, to be interested in politics, and to recognize that "most" Americans do not agree on the most important problem facing the nation. This explanation does not withstand analysis. The correlation (Pearson's *R*) between education and "negative views of political disagreement" has the predicted negative sign but is not large: -0.19. Education seems to be related to people becoming more interested in politics, more realistic about the extent of agenda diversity, and more comfortable with political disagreement, but it does not seem to be related to less support for stealth democracy. When the regression is run without "negative view of disagreement," the coefficient for education's effect on stealth democracy is still statistically insignificant.⁷

⁷Given the importance of this relationship, we looked at the effects of education on the individual components of support for stealth democracy. In the multivariate

As described previously (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1996), we believe at least part of the explanation for the fact that additional education does not clearly lead people to be less supportive of stealth democracy is the unfortunate emphasis in most schools on consensus. Difficult, contentious issues are often avoided in schools for reasons that are as understandable as they are lamentable. State legislatures, school boards, administrators, some teachers, and many parent organizations have apparently come to the conclusion that any program realistically confronting public opinion diversity promotes conflict and therefore is anticomunity and perhaps anti-family – as if the only way we can have successful social units is to pretend that everyone thinks the same way.⁸ Numerous foundations contribute to the problem by pouring money into civic education programs that teach only the details of governmental structure and badger students to participate (without giving them good reasons to do so). Unfortunately, these programs ignore conflict appreciation, so why should students come away with an understanding view of debate, compromise, and accountability?

In Chapter 1, we described results from an experiment conducted by Amy Gaugl that showed that, when they were exposed to clear, even nasty, conflict, people actually were led to care about issue positions. When conflict was muted, people's issue positions were irrelevant.⁹ Extrapolating from these results to current educational strategies, if the message students receive is that no meaningful conflict exists among the American people, is it any wonder students' issue positions are largely irrelevant to their political attitudes and behaviors (see Chapter 1)? By adopting a head-in-the-sand approach to conflict, the educational community is unwittingly facilitating the lack of issue relevance in American politics and is encouraging students to conclude that real democracy is unnecessary and stealth democracy will do just fine.

specification, additional years of education do lead to more favorable views of compromise and to less support for government by "experts," but education does not lead to more favorable views of debate or to heightened suspicion of government by successful business people.

⁸When she was a student in secondary school, political scientist Diana Mutz was involved in an innovative program designed to teach about conflict and how to deal with it. She reports that the program was sacked because of fears that it was proconflict and anticomunity (Mutz, personal communication).

⁹There is a parallel here to Ansolabehere and Iyengar's (1995) finding that campaign ads that play on conflict by comparing the records of each candidate are more informative to voters than ads that focus on only one candidate.