

## Book Review

Political Studies Review

2018, Vol. 16(1) NP76

[journals.sagepub.com/home/psrev](http://journals.sagepub.com/home/psrev)

**In-Your-Face Politics: The Consequences of Uncivil Media** by **Diana C Mutz**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015. 263pp., £19.95 (h/b), ISBN 9780691165110

Published in April 2015, this book could hardly be more relevant today with in-your-face politics dominating political debate all the way to the White House. The book focuses on how viewers react to televised in-your-face politics and the real-world political consequences of such programmes. Mutz defines in-your-face politics on two dimensions: first, uncivil discourse defined as the violation of social norms of politeness in face-to-face settings; second, spatial proximity that violates social norms of physical distance through close-up camera shots of politicians and political commentators.

Through a series of innovative laboratory experiments, she establishes the causal effect of in-your-face politics on several dependent variables. In-your-face politics increases arousal among viewers, which leads them to better memorize the content. Furthermore, the uncivil programmes were more popular among viewers than civil programmes. Thus, in-your-face politics could have positive outcomes since '[p]olitical television cannot educate the public unless people watch it' (p. 43). The book also presents negative effects of in-your-face politics. First, the perceived legitimacy of opposing arguments decreases. Second, political trust as measured by trust in politicians, trust in congress and trust in the system of government dramatically decreases.

After establishing the causal relationship through experiments, the book provides convincing evidence for the external validity of these results. To leverage her findings, Mutz makes interesting suggestions like fantasy politics (analogous to fantasy football) and TV shows such as *Our Next American President* (analogous to *American Idol*) to educate more people about politics.

The research presented in the book is innovative in several regards. Producing a political talk show as an experimental treatment is highly original. To measure arousal and its effects, the skin conductance level is introduced to political science, which is certainly innovative and helpful. For understandable reasons, the book exclusively focuses on a contest between two (white, male) candidates. However, it would be interesting to see how the results generalize when there are more than two parties involved, as in most elections outside of the US context voters have to decide among more than just two options. Mutz writes in a way that makes her book accessible and enjoyable to a broad readership, particularly the simple and clear presentation of her results. In short, *In-Your-Face Politics* is an innovative, interesting and highly relevant read for political scientists and anyone interested in contemporary politics.

Marcel Neunhoffer  
(University of Mannheim)

© The Author(s) 2017

Reprints and permissions: [sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav](http://sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav)

DOI: 10.1177/1478929917724097

[journals.sagepub.com/home/psrev](http://journals.sagepub.com/home/psrev)