



The Paradox of American Democracy: Elites, Special Interests, and the Betrayal of Public Trust

John B. Judis

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John B. Judis, one of our most insightful political commentators, most rational and careful thinkers, and most engaged witnesses in Washington, has taken on a challenge that even the most concerned American citizens shrink from: forecasting the American political climate at the turn of the century. *The Paradox of American Democracy* is a penetrating examination of our democracy that illuminates the forces and institutions that once enlivened it and now threaten to undermine it. It is the well-reasoned discussion we need in this era of unrestrained expert opinions and ideologically biased testimony.

The disenchantment with our political system can be seen in decreasing voter turnout, political parties co-opted by consultants and large contributors, the corrupting influence of "soft money," and concern for national welfare subverted by lobbying organizations and special-interest groups. Judis revisits particular moments—the Progressive Era, the New Deal, the 1960s—to discover what makes democracy the most efficacious and, consequently, most inefficacious. What has worked in the past is a balancing act between groups of elites—trade commissions, labor relations boards, policy groups—whose mandates are to act in the national interest and whose actions are governed by a disinterested pursuit of the common good. Judis explains how the displacement of such elites by a new lobbying community in Washington has given rise to the cynicism that corrodes the current political system.

The Paradox of American Democracy goes straight to the heart of every political debate in this country.

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