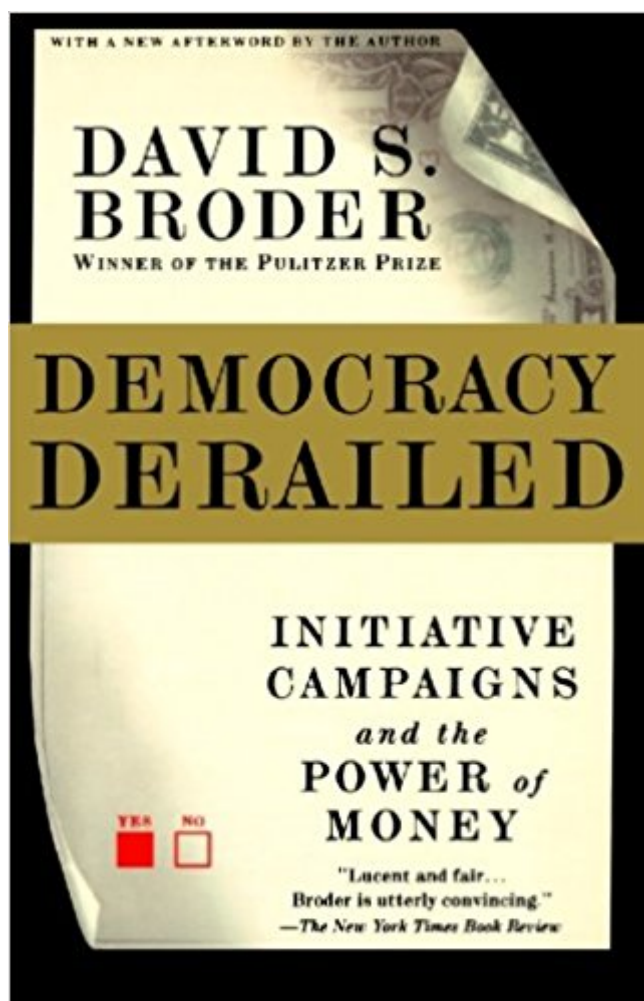


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Democracy Derailed: Initiative Campaigns And The Power Of Money



Synopsis

Now in paperback, how initiatives are remaking our democracy, creating a hazardous new arena of politics. Where once most state laws were passed by legislatures, now voters in half the states and hundreds of cities decide directly on such explosive issues as drugs, affirmative action, casino gambling, assisted suicide, and human rights. Ostensibly driven by public opinion, the initiative process is far too often manipulated by moneyed interests, often funded by out-of-state millionaires pursuing their own agendas. In this highly controversial book, David Broder, the "dean of American political journalism" (Brill's Content), explains how a movement that started with Proposition 13 in California is now a multimillion-dollar business in which lawyers, campaign consultants, signature gatherers, and advertising agencies sell their expertise to interest groups with private agendas. With a new afterword updating the results of the most recent elections and discussing the potential for future initiatives, Broder takes the reader into the heart of these battles as he talks with the field operatives, lobbyists, PR spinners, labor leaders, and business executives, all of whom can manipulate the political process.

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Customer Reviews

Longtime Washington Post scribe David S. Broder, considered by many to be the dean of Beltway journalists, delivers a pounding attack on ballot initiatives in *Democracy Derailed*. Available to voters in half the states and in hundreds of municipalities ("from New York City to Nome"), initiatives allow citizens to skirt the legislative process and put measures directly before voters. And this, writes

Broder, "is alien to the spirit of the Constitution and its careful system of checks and balances." Furthermore, it "threatens to challenge or even subvert the American system of government in the next few decades." Broder begins with a history of initiatives, which grew out of the well-intentioned Populist and Progressive movements, quickly arriving at the present day and the numerous controversial measures on subjects ranging from taxes to campaign finance. Much of the book is devoted to the 1998 election cycle, with particular attention paid to California's Proposition 226--the paycheck-protection initiative that would have limited the ability of labor unions to spend members' dues on political activities. The fact that it ultimately failed doesn't undercut Broder's message, because so many other measures have been passed in California and elsewhere. The real strength of *Democracy Derailed*, however, isn't in its arguments against ballot initiatives, but in its description of how the business behind them really works. Broder spots moneyed interests everywhere; others will merely see citizens choosing to spend their dollars on politics. On one point Broder is indisputably correct: initiatives represent a grossly "unexamined arena of power politics." With this book, they become better understood. --John J. Miller --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Now available in 24 states and the District of Columbia, the voter initiative process has been used to abolish affirmative action, expand casino gambling and deny educational and health benefits to the families of illegal immigrants. It has forced yes-or-no votes on issues as diverse as nude dancing and term limits, and, according to Pulitzer prize-winning Washington Post and syndicated columnist Broder (*Changing of the Guard*), it threatens to subvert the American form of representative government by allowing millionaires and special interests to rewrite state laws. In this well-argued and often chilling study, Broder scrutinizes the initiative process and delves into what one critic calls a "multimillion-dollar cottage industry" populated by paid signature gatherers, pollsters and public-relations firms. He finds democracy run amok: three wealthy men changed the drug laws of five states; billionaire Microsoft cofounder Paul Allen threw cash into a campaign to publicly finance a stadium for the Seattle Seahawks, a team he owned. The public, in turn, was stunned by initiatives and counterinitiatives on which anti-abortion, anti-hunting and pro-casino gambling forces, among many others, spent a quarter of a billion dollars in the 1998 election cycle alone. The centerpiece of the book is a balanced but tough-minded analysis of Proposition 226, the so-called "paycheck protection initiative" defeated in California after a viciously fought battle in 1998. Broder dissects the sloganeering of both sides to confirm a lobbyist's cynical assessment of the campaign as "a lotta little lies fighting one big lie." As tensions rise between direct democracy and

representative government in America, this book gives a provocative critique of the initiative process as a panacea for democracy's ills. Author tour. (Apr.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Being a Californian, and one who works for a State Senator, I was interested to see what an outsider would have to say about our Great State. After chuckling about what some in the national media have said about California politics, I was surprised to see that Broder did a decent job in summarizing the recent proposition campaign in 1998. His book is a case study that follows the money, and the advertising campaign tactics meant to trick and deceive voters. Unfortunately, this tale is all too common in Californian's high priced television driven political process. Broder could have chosen any major proposition ballot initiative in this state and produced similar results. However, because Broder's case study and thesis is such a common occurrence in California, anyone with just a meager understanding of politics would have found the conclusion of this book axiomatic. Of course, this speaks to the well researched and truthful nature of the book, but I picked it up looking for special insight into the political process from a veteran reporter. Unfortunately, Broder's book shines no more light on the problem of money and the lack of checks and balances in proposition campaigns than already exists. I don't want to sound like a snob, and in all honesty, I would recommend this book as a primer in California's proposition campaigns, but it only provided a basic understanding and little more. A clear problem exists, and Broder does a good service in pointing it out so eloquently.

Everything as I hoped. Sixteen more words required--one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, They must not won't cooperation..

The government as envisioned by the US Constitution consists of three parts: the executive, judicial and the legislative. Interestingly, the founding fathers never included any mention in the Constitution of how the state and local governments should be comprised. For most of America's history, state governments copied the national model to some degree. This has changed since the 1970's, with the introduction of referendums and initiatives in over 20 states and numerous counties, districts, and cities. These two changes have allowed voters to directly influence, change, and often counteract the actions of the three established branches of government. The Constitution defines clear checks and balances between the three branches, and ways by which individuals would be chosen to serve in these branches. But there is no such legal underpinning for the referendum and

initiative. The resulting consequences are the subject of this well-thought out and well-referenced book. The author gives a history of the referendum and initiative in America, how these two ideas entered the public consciousness, and how they have come into legal existence in various states and localities throughout the US. The author then proceeds to describe some of the major initiatives and referendums that have passed and failed, their supporters and opposers, and their effects, both intended and unintended, both on the political process in their jurisdiction, but on other jurisdictions. The author shows how money often becomes the prevailing factor in the formation and acceptance/rejection of a referendum or initiative. Specific cases are studied in detail, especially those in bellwether states such as California. The overall image portrayed is that both the initiative and referendum are often instruments of specific industries and business lobbies, and rarely are ever reflective of issues of general concern to the electorate. Also, both instruments have been used successfully to limit tax collection, but without the requisite cut in spending. This book also shows how use of both instruments has led to increased bureaucracy, paperwork, and lawsuits as more pieces are added to the governing process, without a coherent framework of checks-and-balances. Overall, this is a very important book to read, not just for lawmakers, but citizens in general.

David Frohnmayer, president of the University of Oregon, described the degenerating initiative process by saying, "It's no longer citizens fighting the oligopoly. Now it's the oligopoly paying people to act as citizens." An explanation of David S. Broder's feelings on the initiative process would mirror these words. In his "Democracy Derailed: Initiative Campaigns and the Power of Money," Broder makes his convictions known. Although he provides little balance on the issue, he writes a strong, solid message from the anti-initiative camp. Broder has the skills, experience, and information to make a potent argument against initiative and referendum campaigns. He has a B.A. and a M.A. in political science from the University of Chicago. Starting in 1966, he has been a correspondent for the Washington Post, in which his columns continue to appear every Wednesday and Sunday. In 1973, he was honored with the Pulitzer Prize for distinguished commentary. Broder also appears frequently on television news programs. Views expressed by Broder are often left of center, as shown by recent headlines such as "Would FDR Run Those 9/11 Ads" and "Dean: A Milestone, Not A Millstone." With his well-established background, it is no wonder that Broder builds firm grounds against the modern initiative and referendum processes. Broder opens "Democracy Derailed" with a well-researched history of the initiative. In tracing back to the Progressivist and Populist movements of the 19th century, Broder hands the reader the "how"s and "why"s of initiative's origins. He then

proceeds to show the current condition of the initiative campaign, especially in California, Oregon, and other states that implement it. The bulk of Broder's book discusses the negative aspects of the progressivist initiative in the current United States. These chiefly concern the influences of powerful entities (such as big businesses, wealthy individuals, and initiative promoters), the undermining of constitutional legislative power, and the lack of public knowledge of detailed issues. Broder essentially argues that, though politicians have a price, the American voters wear an equally low tag. While that may not be the worst aspect of the corrupted initiative, Broder gives it ample space on the pages of "Democracy Derailed." Perhaps the strongest and most frightening detriment of the initiative is its assault on the structure of a democratic republic. This issue is also given plenty of voice from Broder. He also complains about the corrupt system of putting initiatives on ballots. Many initiative-promoting companies pay campaigners per signature for petitions, a practice of questionable integrity. The book leaves nary a stone in the anti-initiative field unturned. "Democracy Derailed"'s chief downside lies in the fact that Broder makes no effort to break the soil of the field of the initiative benefits. The book starts with the noble origins of the initiative process, then proceeds to indicate that the current process bears no resemblance to those origins. While the current process may be quite different, it still stems from those benevolent origins. Some believe that a few positive elements of those origins remain in the otherwise-corrupt system today. Broder gives little voice to such opinions. The initiative's ability to raise the possibility of issues such as term limits may, in fact, be of benefit to this republic. Though governmental officials should represent the citizenry, they necessarily constitute a small segment of the population with its own interests in mind. There are many intelligent, thinking Americans who see the downfalls of the process as well as the redeeming qualities. However, Broder characterizes some of these people as "a bearded . . . hippie" and others as far-rightists. He includes a few token quotes from initiative rights activists, but usually follows them with rebuttals from the anti-initiative camp. The initiative rights groups may sometimes contain extremists, but they are an important part of the debate over the merits of the initiative process. As anti-initiative literature, "Democracy Derailed" is impeccable. Broder has his facts straight; he has dotted every "i" and crossed every "t." As a springboard for discussion, the book suffices. A book that gives solid voice to both sides of the issue might be an improvement for fruitful bipartisan debate. Whether Broder intentionally omitted a solid voice for the opposition or whether his habits as a liberal journalist have carried over to the pages of "Democracy Derailed," the only fault with the book is its lack of balance. Some books, however, unlike journalistic media, should be unilateral. David S. Broder's Democracy Derailed is one such book.

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