

Review: Grassroots of a Green Revolution: Polling America on the Environment

By Deborah Lynn Guber

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Deborah Lynn Guber. *Grassroots of a Green Revolution: Polling America on the Environment*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003. 328 pp. ISBN 0-262-57160-9 (trade paper). US\$24.95

What does America think about the environment a generation after the first Earth Day? It was in 1970, and it was the year Lake Erie died. Fast forward to the 21st century and in America concern for the environment seems to be everywhere. The federal government, the states, and many localities have an agency dedicated to environmental protection. The word *green* appears on packaging, on building plans, and on candidates for public office. And while many still don't care much about the ring-headed newt that only inhabits 300 acres between Yeehaw and Holopaw, people quickly radicalize if everyone in town seems to be getting cancer or the children are developing gastroenteritis. Before considering other possibilities, they cast a suspicious eye on emissions from the local factory or fear pollution in their wells from that smelly operation down the road.

But is it a real national consensus, a meeting of minds on how we feel about the protection of our planet? Or is it little more than lip service? This is what Guber sets out to explore in this book, using her knowledge of statistics and polling.

The book is divided into two broad sections: attitudes and behavior. In the section on attitudes Guber looks at such questions as: Do Americans favor environmental protection? How much? In tackling these questions, she explains basic polling concepts: what is "good" data, what is "bad", and how questions can be framed to pre-select the response. The end of this section deals with the apparent inconsistency of America's commitment to environmental protection. Guber discusses some technical aspects of information gathering and how these can seem to give a picture of inconsistency in poll responses.

That chapter concluding section one sets the stage for section two, on behavior. In this section, Guber puts her knowledge to use dissecting why Americans seem to buy green but fail to vote green, including a discussion of the Bush vs. Gore campaign in 2000. She also looks at some well-known state referendums that passed and others that failed to pass, to find out

why.

Her conclusion reaches back to the introduction of the book in which she asked whether or not there is a national consensus on the environment. Her troubling observation is that there is one, but it may not be leading in a good direction. Instead of goading us into action, it is creating a set of buzzwords and symbols that allows products to be "greenwashed" and political candidates successfully to offer green rhetoric in place of actual green action.

But in her conclusion Guber also offers "an attempt to translate academic evidence into practical advice." She pulls from the lessons learned from polling data and from successes and failures of political and economic measures, to suggest how people who want to protect the environment can frame their argument in a way that may be more successful in turning green attitudes into action.

An appendix includes further technical information about data sources. The notes to the chapters are detailed and worth reading. There are 26 pages of general references. The book is fully indexed, including the material contained in tables. In short, the compact size of the book belies the amount of information contained in it.

Guber has been looking at what the public thinks about environmental protection since she was a graduate student at Yale, and as an Assistant Professor of political science at the University of Vermont <http://www.uvm.edu/~dguber/> she has been teaching these issues as part of her regular courses since 1998.

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