



Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics

James A. Stimson

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Politics is a trial in which those in government - and those who aspire to serve - make proposals, debate alternatives, and pass laws. Then the jury of public opinion decides. It likes the proposals or actions or it does not. It trusts the actors or it doesn't. It moves, always at the margin, and then those who benefit from the movement are declared winners. This book is about that public opinion response. Its most basic premise is that although public opinion rarely matters in a democracy, public opinion change is the exception. Public opinion rarely matters because the public rarely cares enough to act on its concerns or preferences. Change happens only when the threshold of normal public inattention is crossed. When public opinion changes, governments rise or fall, elections are won or lost, and old realities give way to new demands.

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