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Democracy as Problem Solving: Civic Capacity in Communities Across the Globe (MIT Press)

Xavier de Souza Briggs

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Complexity, division, mistrust, and "process paralysis" can thwart leaders and others when they tackle local challenges. In *Democracy as Problem Solving*, Xavier de Souza Briggs shows how civic capacity -- the capacity to create and sustain smart collective action -- can be developed and used. In an era of sharp debate over the conditions under which democracy can develop while broadening participation and building community, Briggs argues that understanding and building civic capacity is crucial for strengthening governance and changing the state of the world in the process. More than managing a contest among interest groups or spurring deliberation to reframe issues, democracy can be what the public most desires: a recipe for significant progress on important problems. Briggs examines efforts in six cities, in the United States, Brazil, India, and South Africa, that face the millennial challenges of rapid urban growth, economic restructuring, and investing in the next generation. These challenges demand the engagement of government, business, and nongovernmental sectors. And the keys to progress include the ability to combine learning and bargaining continuously, forge multiple forms of accountability, and find ways to leverage the capacity of the grassroots and what Briggs terms the "grasstops," regardless of who initiates change or who participates over time. Civic capacity, Briggs shows, can -- and must -- be developed even in places that lack traditions of cooperative civic action.

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