
Book Review: *Politics is for Power: How to Move Beyond Political Hobbyism, Take Action, and Make Real Change* by Eitan Hersh

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What does politics mean to you? Is it spending hours consuming news and arguing with people on the internet about social issues? Or is it about gaining power, multiplying your vote, and making a real change in your community? To Eitan Hersh (2020:3), “participating in politics by obsessive news-following and online ‘slacktivism’” is not politics, but what he considers as political hobbyism. In his book *Politics is for Power: How to Move Beyond Political Hobbyism, Take Action, and Make Real Change*, Hersh argues that politics should be about seeking power and influence to make meaningful change, rather than for expressing one’s values and for one’s self-gratification. Hersh shows an alternative way to do politics.

Eitan Hersh is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Tufts University where he teaches on American politics. As a data analyst, he studies civic participation, voting rights, and U.S. elections. His take on our political climate is relevant to sociological research as it addresses sociological concerns on political participation, social movements, media, and privilege.

Hersh’s book is packed with historical context, statistical data, and real-life stories of volunteers engaging in politics, all of which highlight the impact of political hobbyism on American politics. The author contrasts between shallow, unproductive activities such as consuming news, participating in partisanship, using social media, making donations, and signing petitions, and more meaningful activities like deep canvassing and local organizing. Hersh argues that most people engage in politics as a shallow hobby and for knowledge-seeking rather than as power-seeking activity. The author argues that treating politics as a hobby is counterproductive because political hobbyists practice the wrong skills, seek the wrong news, and pursue wrong goals. The book ends with Hersh sharing his own journey of political

participation and offering tips to readers on how they can start engaging in politics for power. He encourages readers to redirect their attention from social media and national news to learning about their local community and finding ways to support it. Ultimately, Hersh calls on the readers to take action and become more actively engaged in politics.

The strength of Hersh's argument comes in the success stories of people in local politics. He writes about men and women who are 19 to 98 years old. He tells the stories of people like Drew, a college student who establishes a precinct organization to get students involved in politics beyond the campus; Lisa, a woman who travels from Brooklyn to Staten Island to have deep, open conversations with complete strangers; and Naakh, a man who commands a thousand votes amassed through his history of assisting retired immigrants in his neighborhood. The experiences in local politics Hersh highlights in this book shows that anyone can make a difference. These accounts also strike at the heart of his argument: change starts with people talking to others within their community.

This book is an inspiring read for anyone who is interested in learning what amassing real political power means - which certainly includes professors and students wanting to increase their own knowledge, especially for sociological relevance. If you are spending hours of your day thinking about politics but find it purposeless and fruitless, *Politics is for Power* "is about you" (Hersh 2020:5).

REFERENCES

Hersh, Eitan. 2020. *Politics Is For Power: How to Move Beyond Political Hobbyism, Take Action, and Make Real Change*. New York, NY: Scribner.