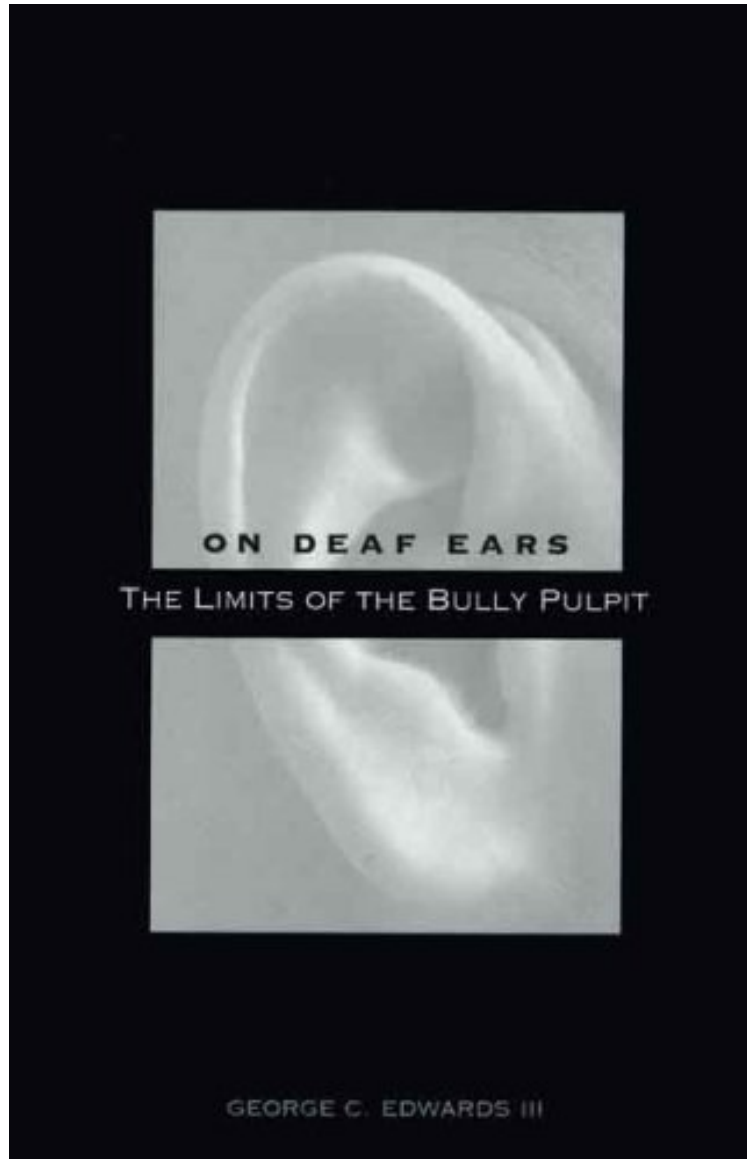


(Get free) On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit

On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit

George C. Edwards III

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George C. Edwards III : On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit:

10 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating TopicBy James R. MacleanWhen the president addresses the nation, is he able to persuade? According to Edwards, the answer is, "No."Edwards uses poll data; he includes a study of numerous presidential initiatives that were accompanied at the time by poll data on public opinions. Hence, he compares presidential approval ratings from before a speech to those taken after the speech;

opinions on a national issue over time, accompanied by presidential campaigns on that issue; and some surveys based on political affiliation. From this, he argues that presidential efforts seldom had an impact. He scrolls through some case histories: Reagan, Clinton, and George Washington as separate examples of presidents who were (1) conservative "communicators," (2) liberal "communicators," and (3) enjoyed personal veneration. Arguably none of these figures effectively molded public opinion. He turns to methods used, and how these methods were embraced, then abandoned, by individual administrations. It becomes clear that choice of technology follows campaigning fashion and initiatives from the opposition. Using the above-mentioned metrics, he concludes these are reliably neutralized by competition for the public's attention. Gradually he turns to the theoretical literature, comparing the empirical support for different understandings of how the presidency can affect public perceptions. Occasionally Edwards' rightward bias damages his analysis, however. For example, he never admits the possibility that there were holes in Reagan's allegedly simple, conservative "philosophy"; the immense power of industrial lobbying groups used to take down Clinton's moderate health care plan is not even mentioned. Instead, while Reagan failed to win public support for what amounted to a terrorist campaign waged against Latin American countries (e.g., the contras)--which Edwards bemoans--Clinton's efforts to reform the dystopian US health system were centrally and mendaciously attacked by a well-documented industry lobby. Edwards chalks that up to the plan being bad, and opposed by "centrists" in Congress. While striving to appear impartial, Edwards excludes the powerful role of industry lobbying groups, whose force in politics consistently favors the right. He seems to be arguing that there are too many forces that influence public opinion for there to be successful White House campaigns for or against a particular issue; this is, I believe, meant to be reassuring. But he excludes entirely the most important part of the story: that the president has increasingly become part of the media. Since the corporate-controlled press has captured Congress and the White House entirely, it's erroneous to actually measure different messages from the White House as if they represented changes in direction. In reality, the consistency of public opinions reflects a constant media barrage directed towards the same object: monopoly control over national policy.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great Political Science research
By Phillip J. Ardoin
This book represents a wonderful work of political science. I use it in my graduate seminar on the Presidency. Edwards uses solid empirical evidence from the Reagan and Clinton Presidencies to solidly dismiss the conventional wisdom which suggests the powers of the bully pulpit provide the President with substantial power. For a more contemporary and light version of this same argument I would suggest Edwards other work, *Governing by Campaigning*.

The typical legislative strategy for recent presidents has been to move Congress by winning public support. George Edwards analyzes hundreds of public opinion polls and finds that this strategy usually fails. He explains why presidents are frequently unable to move public opinion and suggests they use other means to achieve legislative success. "That presidents use the bully pulpit to exert influence in Washington is a truism of American Politics. What Edwards finds in this remarkable book is that the truism isn't true, that presidentseven those at the top of their form persistently fail to move public sentiment in preferred directions." James A. Stimson, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill "Every serious scholar and student of American politics should read this book." Robert Y. Shapiro, Columbia University "Edwards has done it again! A bold, direct, convincing challenge to 30 years of literature." - Richard E. Neustadt, author of *Presidential Power*

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About the Author George C. Edwards III is Distinguished Professor and the Jordan Chair in Presidential Studies, Texas A M University. He is also the author of *At the Margins: Presidential Leadership of Congress and Why the Electoral College is Bad for America*, both published by Yale University Press.