the value of face-to-face by examining four key case studies: (1) the meetings between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev near the end of the Cold War; (2) the meetings between Gorbachev and George H.W. Bush on German reunification; (3) the negotiations over the Camp David Accords in 1978; and (4) the Munich talks that preceded World War II.

The value of *Face-to-Face Diplomacy* lies in the degree of analytical rigor that is applied to a complicated topic: how the brain shapes international politics. Holmes not only argues that face-to-face produces intention understanding, he also shows how and when it is likely to work. For example, it turns out that “mirror neurons fire most when [people] are engaged in simulating a specific intention … rather than a vague one” (p. 60). In other words, people are better at understanding specific intentions rather than general intentions. Holmes uses these findings to explain why the initial face-to-face discussions over the Camp David Accords were unproductive. They focused too intently on general principles and historical disagreements between Egypt and Israel. It was only after President Jimmy Carter encouraged Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat to focus on more specific issues that face-to-face interaction started to pay any dividends.

The neuroscience evidence also shows that people with “narcissistic tendencies toward self-aggrandizement” tend to overestimate “their ability to read others” (p. 54). Holmes uses these findings to help explain why Neville Chamberlain failed to accurately read Adolf Hitler’s intentions. While the Munich case is often seen as a hard case for face-to-face diplomacy, Holmes tackles it head-on, using insights from neuroscience to help explain what may be the most significant failure of face-to-face diplomacy in twentieth-century world history.

*Face-to-Face Diplomacy* is an intellectual tour de force, one that will likely have a lasting impact on the field of IR theory. Indeed, since social neuroscience is developing at break-neck speed, *Face-to-Face Diplomacy* is likely to become a standard-bearer for how this kind of scholarship should be done. And in light of its methodological rigor, it should prove useful for diplomats who face the often difficult task of reading the minds of other states.

DAVID TRAVEN

*California State University, Fullerton*

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As the 2020 presidential campaign heats up, the issue of billionaires ascendant within American politics will once again take center stage. The
country could see another billionaire candidate challenge the incumbent billionaire president, whose many informal advisers and cabinet members run in similar circles. Several ultrarich elites will inevitably break new records with their individual campaign contributions. A voter could be forgiven for thinking that billionaires have co-opted the political system.

In a much-needed new book *Billionaires and Stealth Politics*, Benjamin I. Page, Jason Seawright, and Matthew J. Lacombe argue that these public actions are just the tip of the iceberg. For all the money billionaires invest in campaigns, parties, and issues, only rarely do they say anything in public to explain their preferences or reasons for pursuing specific aims. Billionaires engage in what the authors term *stealth politics*: they are extremely active in politics but remain intentionally quiet about the extent of their activities and influence. That silence is even more deafening with regard to issues where billionaires diverge from their less affluent fellow citizens, such as tax rates and redistributive policies.

Investigating the political attitudes of the ultrarich is a daunting task. What busy, privacy-concerned billionaire would find the time to speak with a survey enumerator? To collect evidence and test their stealth politics theory, the authors present an innovative workaround. First, they use keyword searches to systematically comb Google and LexisNexis for any public comments the wealthiest Americans have made on five issues: taxes, Social Security, immigration, abortion, and gay marriage. Next, the authors match how often these billionaires spoke in public (and what they said) with their political activities, including PAC contributions and efforts to bundle donations. This methodological contribution will be of particular use to other scholars trying to study the political preferences held by public but hard to reach subjects.

Overall, the authors’ quantitative analysis persuasively demonstrates the significant transparency gap between billionaires’ words and actions. This disconnect is particularly problematic at the lower levels of government, and even within the companies these elites manage. Billionaires are often able to invisibly reshape state and local politics by advocating a smaller federal footprint while stealthily pressing for special favors from these governments. Moreover, the book really hits home when it digs qualitatively into politics within the workplace. Billionaires such as John Menard Jr. often condition employment in their vast companies on workers undergoing politically charged training exercises and forgoing their right to unionize. The fight to protect and expand billionaires’ wealth unfolds on multiple fronts.

Future research could pick up exactly on this point. Although this book starts to peel back the curtain on the extent of billionaires’ activism, we still know relatively little about the full menu of strategies and the payoffs available to them and other well-resourced actors. To what degree are
billionaires able to actually achieve their political aims, whether that means increasing the fortunes of themselves and their firms or pushing for broader laws that transform society according to their own ideological views? How much are billionaires willing to sacrifice to get what they want? The authors show that many billionaires continue to financially back politicians with whom they have substantial disagreements over abortion and same-sex marriage. We need to know more about the conditions under which certain billionaires might deprioritize their pocketbook and offer public (and financial) support for other issues.

In all, this book raises the alarm about the lack of transparency and accountability surrounding billionaires’ substantial presence within U.S. politics, and it sheds important light on the root causes of growing political and economic inequality in this country.

DAVID SZAKONYI
George Washington University


It is hardly a secret that democracy is in trouble around the world, and the phenomenon of backsliding has prompted a small wave of books diagnosing the problem and suggesting solutions. David Runciman’s contribution to this literature is a breezy and readable tour through mechanisms and alternatives. Easily weaving political theory with grounded examples, he has produced a highly accessible analysis focusing more on diagnosis than cure.

Runciman’s title is to be distinguished from accounts of how specific democracies are dying or what might be done to save constitutional democracy. Instead, he focuses on the idea that Western democracy is undergoing something of a midlife crisis. Nothing lasts forever, and while democracy has had a pretty good run, it now “looks exhausted in the places it has the deepest roots” (p. 72). Contemplating democracy’s death, the book is organized around a series of mechanisms by which this might come about: coup, environmental catastrophe, technological displacement, and the various alternatives of benevolent and not so benevolent authoritarianism that have been put on offer. His main argument is that while we are attracted to democracy because of its history, the past does not repeat itself, and we are likely to face new challenges not yet contemplated. If democracy dies, the autopsy will be a new one.

The main rhetorical trope of the book is a biological one. Systems of government, the analogy suggests, have lifespans, progressing through birth,