

## *Series Editors' Preface*

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The Cambridge series on the Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions is built around attempts to answer two central questions: How do institutions evolve in response to individual incentives, strategies, and choices, and how do institutions affect the performance of political and economic systems? The scope of the series is comparative and historical rather than international or specifically American, and the focus is positive rather than normative.

Gary Cox has written a superb, wide-ranging theoretical analysis of the consequences of electoral systems for the way governments are chosen by the mass of citizens. Rooted firmly in the “transaction benefits” theory of political institutions, which holds that a role of institutions is to prevent some collective choices from arising, or otherwise limit the number of enforceable policy outcome, Cox shows how a range of electoral institutions affect the extent and ease with which voters can coordinate (or form electoral coalitions) to provide outcomes or opportunities for transacting that improve on their status quo, but would not happen in the absence of these electoral institutions. In the coalitional equilibria he describes, voters make their votes count by controlling the number of candidates. But the emphasis everywhere is on synthesis, generalization, and unification of theory. Results apply to coalitions whether they are explicitly negotiated by elites or voluntarily coordinated by electors via strategic voting and convergent expectations about the strength of candidates. An unprecedentedly wide range of real-world electoral systems is classified by alliance structure and district structure with respect to the extent to which they facilitate coordination. Duverger’s conjectures about the relationships between strategic voting, the proportionality of representation, and the number of effective competitors or parties are reexamined. The research also offers many new proposals about strategic entry and exit of parties, as well as the election of executives in fostering or impeding coordination at the national level.

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In its scale and scope, in going beyond taxonomy into analysis, in its relentless testing of the propositions it offers, in its unification of aspects of electoral systems frequently treated as separate, this book is a remarkable achievement. It sets a standard and a challenge for future comparative empirical research on electoral systems.