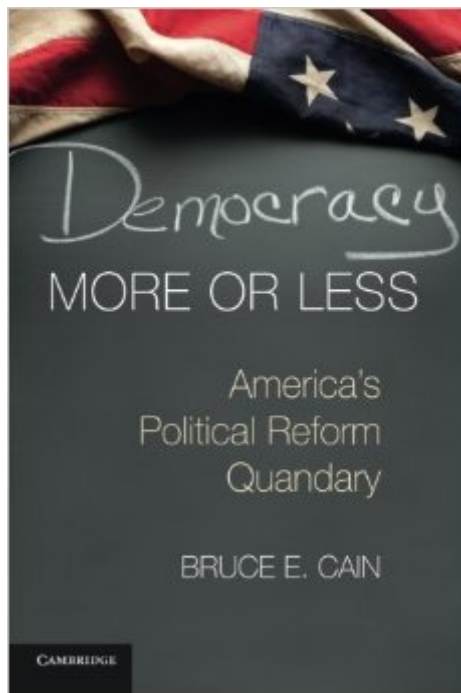


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Democracy More Or Less: America's Political Reform Quandary (Cambridge Studies In Election Law And Democracy)



Synopsis

Why do American political reform efforts so often fail to solve the problems they intend to fix? In this book, Bruce E. Cain argues that the reasons are an unrealistic civic ideal of a fully informed and engaged citizenry and a neglect of basic pluralist principles about political intermediaries. This book traces the tension between populist and pluralist approaches as it plays out in many seemingly distinct reform topics, such as voting administration, campaign finance, excessive partisanship, redistricting, and transparency and voter participation. It explains why political primaries have promoted partisan polarization, why voting rates are declining even as election opportunities increase, and why direct democracy is not really a grassroots tool. Cain offers a reform agenda that attempts to reconcile pluralist ideals with the realities of collective-action problems and resource disparities.

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"Everyone talks about the dysfunction of American politics, but very few people have practical or thought-through ideas on what to do about it. Bruce Cain has studied this topic extensively as a scholar and has first-hand experience in the cauldron of California's ongoing experiments in structural reform. In this book he explains the conceptual weakness in today's most popular reform proposals and offers a convincing alternative. I hope this book informs media, academic and public discussions of a way out of our political morass." James Fallows, National Correspondent, The

Atlantic" Bruce Cain has written a remarkable, deeply insightful book about the American experience with political reform. His survey is wide-ranging, distinguishing throughout a populist vision of tight citizen control of government from a pluralist call to protect the role of interest groups, parties and other intermediaries in building coalitions and encouraging workable compromise. Campaign finance, redistricting, election administration, transparency and conflict-of interest regulation are among the topics that receive careful attention, and Cain offers both keen criticism of policy failure and a fresh path forward. Scholars and policy-makers will be turning to this book for years to come." Bob Bauer, New York University School of Law and Co-Chair of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration "Democracy More or Less is a crowning achievement from one of the leading thinkers on election law and politics. Bruce Cain's must-read account of the failures of political reform efforts in the US should be carefully studied by everyone who believes in easy solutions to the problem of money in politics, redistricting, polarization and representation. Cain's proposed solutions merit our attention and serious consideration." Rick Hasen, School of Law, University of California, Irvine "In this wide-ranging study Cain argues that reforms often fail because they reflect a misguided attempt to increase popular democracy. In his view the latter is like homeopathic medicine, taken in small amounts it may be helpful, but in larger amounts it is harmful." Morris Fiorina, Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution "This is a book all sides of the political reform debate should read. Its fresh thinking and insightful analysis will probably fully please no side, but it will help all sides better understand the scope of the issues and what others are thinking." Benjamin L. Ginsberg, Attorney, Jones Day "Finally, a book on American democracy that challenges romantic, populist 'reform' naiveté and insists that serious and productive reform must instead take into account the way political power is actually constructed, mobilized and channeled - particularly through organizations, including political parties, that inevitably and desirably exist between the isolated citizen and effective political participation. Deceptively short and accessible, this book raises profound and necessary challenges to more conventional ways of thinking about the nature and fate of democracy in America." Rick Pildes, New York University School of Law

Why do American political reform efforts so often fail to solve the problems they intend to fix? In this book, Bruce E. Cain argues that the reasons are an unrealistic civic ideal of a fully informed and engaged citizenry and a neglect of basic pluralist principles about political intermediaries.

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