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978-0-521-19585-0 - Governing for the Long Term: Democracy and the Politics of Investment

Alan M. Jacobs

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Governing for the Long Term

Democracy and the Politics of Investment

While political analysis has commonly focused on the distributive problem of who gets what, many of the hardest choices facing modern societies are dilemmas of timing. If governments want to reduce public debt, slow climate change, or shore up pension systems, they must typically inflict immediate pain on citizens for gains that will only arrive over the long run. In *Governing for the Long Term*, Alan M. Jacobs investigates the conditions under which elected governments invest in long-term social benefits at short-term social cost. Jacobs contends that, along the path to adoption, investment-oriented policies must surmount three distinct hurdles to future-oriented state action: a problem of electoral risk, rooted in the scarcity of voter attention; a problem of prediction, deriving from the complexity of long-term policy effects; and a problem of institutional capacity, arising from interest groups' preferences for distributive gains over intertemporal bargains. Testing this argument through a four-country historical analysis of pension policymaking, the book illuminates crucial differences between the causal logics of distributive and intertemporal politics and makes a case for bringing trade-offs over time to the center of the study of policymaking.

Alan M. Jacobs is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of British Columbia. The recipient of the 2009 Mary Parker Follett Award of the American Political Science Association and the 2005 John Heinz Dissertation Award of the National Academy of Social Insurance, Jacobs is the author of several articles and book chapters on comparative public policy.

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Advance Praise for Governing for the Long Term

“If you care about the future, read this book. Anyone who worries about receiving a pension check when they retire, hopes for investment in education for their children or grandchildren, or is concerned about the preservation of our environment has to wonder why some elected governments impose short-term costs on their constituents to secure long-term social benefits, while others do not. Alan Jacobs advances a theoretically rich argument about the circumstances under which governments make these kinds of policy investments for the future. This book is sophisticated, innovative, and insightful. It contributes to scholarly literatures on historical institutionalism, the politics of time, and the welfare state. But it also tells us something fundamentally important about the political world we inhabit.”

—Erik Bleich, Middlebury College

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ALAN M. JACOBS

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Acknowledgments

Two things can be said of most scholarly books. They take a long time to write. And, even when sole-authored, they are implicitly collaborative endeavors. This book is an exemplar on both counts. In the dozen years since the project's inception, my work has benefited enormously from the insights, practical assistance, and material support of a vast number of individuals and institutions. On one level, it is a relief finally to have a bound sheaf of pages to show those who have aided and advised me along the way. And it is a delight finally to be able to name and thank them in print.

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