When Majorities Fail is a study of institutional failure in Russia’s first democratic legislature. Inadequate rules and a chaotic party system combined to make it nearly impossible to pass a coherent legislative program, including a new constitution. The peculiar form of internal instability in Russia’s parliament is known as cycling, one of the most important theoretical concepts in the formal study of legislatures. There are few recorded cases of cycling in politically important settings: this book documents, with comprehensive case analyses and exhaustive statistical analyses of roll call data, the presence of cyclical majorities in the Russian Parliament, and it demonstrates how the resulting failure to adopt a new constitution led directly to the violent confrontation between parliament and president in the fall of 1993. Earlier theoretical work has shown that the design of a legislative institution is crucial in preventing a breakdown in majority rule. In this study, the author shows how the institutional design of the parliament failed to prevent cycling, underscoring the importance of institutional design in a democratic transition.

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For Robbie and James
WHEN MAJORITIES FAIL

The Russian Parliament, 1990–1993

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