DEMOCRACY MORE OR LESS
America’s Political Reform Quandary

Why do American political reform efforts 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, 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.

Bruce E. Cain is the Charles Louis Ducommun Professor of Humanities and Sciences in the political science department at Stanford University, where he also directs the Bill Lane Center for the American West. In addition to publishing numerous scholarly works, he has served as a consultant for state and local governments on constitutional and charter reform, campaign finance regulation, redistricting, and voting rights. He has received the Zale Award for Outstanding Achievement in Policy Research and Public Service and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.
CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN ELECTION LAW AND DEMOCRACY

Recent developments have pushed elections scholarship in new directions. As a result, interdisciplinary work has flourished, and political scientists and law professors have developed a more sophisticated sense of the relationship between law and politics. This series seeks to create an intellectual road map for the field, one that systematically examines the issues confronting both mature and emerging democracies. It will chart those new intellectual paths to spur interdisciplinary work, to identify productive ways in which scholars' research agendas connect to policy makers' reform agendas, and to disseminate this body of work to the growing audience interested in the intersection of law, politics, and democracy.

Books in the Series

Democracy More or Less: America's Political Reform Quandary by Bruce E. Cain (2015)
Democracy More or Less

AMERICA’S POLITICAL REFORM QUANDARY

BRUCE E. CAIN
Stanford University
## Contents

*Acknowledgments*  
page ix

1. The Ascendancy of Reform Populism  
2. Reform Pluralism  
3. How Much Transparency?  
4. Participation Paradoxes  
5. Reform Cycles  
6. Fair Representation  
7. Raising the Political Ethics Bar  
8. Election Administration or Policy?  
9. A Blended Reform Agenda  

*References*  
page 217

*Index*  
page 235
Acknowledgments

Normally, authors, when recognizing those who have aided them in the production of their book, absolve them of any blame for its weaknesses. With respect to my editors, Heather Gerken, Guy-Uriel Charles, and Michael Kang, I can do the first, but not the second. Heather and Guy in particular lobbied me until I undertook this project and so must share the blame with me for this. All three provided many comments and directed the rewrites. Next on the list are Rick Pildes and Sam Issacharoff, who despite decades of enduring my complaints about their work, invited me to spend a year at the NYU Law School as a Straus Fellow to write the book. I am indebted to them. Similarly, Dennis Thompson has had to put up with my skepticism in the past, but nonetheless provided me with many useful comments and the title for the book. At NYU, I profited from comments and discussions with Nancy Rosenblum, Bernard Grofman, and Alessandra Casella especially. John Ferejohn was an initial reader and provided many thoughts about the book, as he always does so ably. Ned Foley and Dan Tokaji were instrumental in this enterprise, providing me with a symposium at Ohio State about my book and comments as well. I am very grateful to them and to their colleagues, Michael Neblo, Piers Turner, Paula Baker, Stéphane Lavertu, and Daphne Meimaridis. Richard Hasen, Michael Shenkman, Lee Drutman, Mark Rush, Genevieve Lester, Denis Lacorne, Gillian Peele, Frederick Douzet, and Thad Kousser all provided me with encouragement and much feedback. My Stanford colleagues – Larry Diamond, Frank Fukuyama, Stephen Stedman, Morris Fiorina, Tino Cuellar, David Hayes, Matt McCubbins, Alberto Díaz-Cayeros, Daniel Stid, Larry Kramer, Nate Persily, and Didi Kuo – gave me valuable reactions. Finally, while my wife, Jody Foster, could not bring herself to read the entire book, she did get through enough to conclude that it got better.