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Parchment, Equilibria, and Institutions
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What is This?

Institutions are rules that constrain political behavior. Although there is consensus that being written down is neither necessary nor sufficient for an institution to be effective, much research on comparative institutions focuses on formal, parchment, institutions. This article argues that parchment can contribute to the generation of shared mutual expectations among political actors, which are essential to the effectiveness of institutions. Next, the article distinguishes between research that emphasizes the role of institutions in aggregating preferences into political decisions and research that relies on coordination models to identify conditions favoring certain equilibrium outcomes when multiple equilibria are possible. The article notes the increasing prominence of such coordination models in research on comparative institutions and concludes with some reflections about the prospects for this trend to foster connections between institutional analysis and the field of comparative politics more broadly.

PARCHMENT, EQUILIBRIA, AND INSTITUTIONS

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What is not an institution? Any effort to map out the current terrain of comparative institutional research confronts the question immediately because *institutional* is used to describe a wide range of research agendas and methods. Institutions are commonly described as rules that govern social interactions, constraining the behavior of and the options open to actors. Political institutions establish guidelines for deliberation, the aggregation of preferences into collective decisions, and the implementation of those decisions. The idea of an institution also summons images of regularity, raising a further question of whether rules need to be formalized to qualify as institutions. The research I discuss in this article pertains to formal rules of political contestation that are written down somewhere as laws, regulations, constitutions, treaties, and so forth—call them "parchment institutions."

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Most political scientists agree that being written down is neither necessary nor sufficient for institutions to act as effective constraints on behavior. In work on the origin and distributional effects of institutions, Knight (1992) relies on a definition of institutions as equilibrium behavior among participants in social interactions, applying his framework similarly to patterns of behavior governing the division of labor within a marriage, and among groups vying for control of state authority.[1] Many game-theoretic models, such as Knight's, place a premium on self-enforcement as a critical property of institutions, emphasizing the conditions that foster incentives among actors to sustain stable patterns of behavior, whether or not those patterns are beneficial to all parties involved and whether or not they are formally codified anywhere (Calvert, 1995). In a similar vein, Bawn (1999a) develops a theory of how ideological alliances endure on the basis of repeated play and benefits from cooperation but in an environment nearly devoid of formal rules of procedure.[2] Bawn's ideologies manifest themselves as expressions of preferences rather than as rules and so are not institutions, but she argues that ideology plays a similar role in sustaining political coalitions to that played by formalized rules of party and coalition membership (Bawn, 1999a, p.327), implying the potential for such models to apply across the study of institutions, political culture, and mass beliefs and behavior.

All this is consistent with James Madison's (1961) famous argument discounting faith in "parchment barriers" (p. 48) and corresponding claim that the ability of the U.S. Constitution to sustain limitations on state authority depended on the proper alignment of interests and ambitions among individual officeholders rather than on the mere existence of the document. Madison made this argument, however, as part of his campaign of advocacy for a parchment institution, on which he obviously placed great importance. Bawn (1999a) also reserves a special consideration for formalized institutions, distinguishing ideological coalitions from political parties on the grounds that the former are sustained by repeated interactions and by externalities accruing to members from ongoing cooperation, whereas the latter are sustained by these same factors plus formal sanctions on members who do not toe the party line.[3]

1. Knight (1992) draws on the Nash concept, in which equilibria are combinations of actions from which no actor has an incentive to deviate if no other actor does.

2. Bawn's (1999a) model assumes a minimal structure by which a group offers an ideological proposal, whereupon other groups decide whether to reject the proposal or to join ideological alliances.

3. Without specifying how formalization ensures that sanctions will be effective, Bawn (1999a, fn. 21) argues that formal institutions interact with each other more powerfully than with informal institutions such that, for example, electoral rules exercise a stronger impact on which groups form and sustain political parties than on which groups form and sustain stable ideological coalitions.

So far, then, we have compelling arguments that not all written rules serve as effective constraints on political behavior and, conversely, that not all effective constraints on social behavior are written rules. Yet, there remains an intuition that written rules can matter at some level, even among those primarily concerned with nonformalized patterns of behavior. Leaving political science (far) aside for a moment, consider the pop cultural buzz generated by Fein and Schneider's *The Rules: Time Tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right* in 1996. Fein and Schneider hold that, at some point in the past, there existed a specific set of nonformalized rules for courtship behavior among women with regard to matters such as returning suitors' phone calls, being available for dates, and consenting to premarital sex. By adhering to these rules, women conveyed to men their terms and availability for marriage. The authors contend that the effectiveness of traditional rules has been muddled by modern changes in social mores with regard to gender roles, which apply more generally than just to courtship and erode clear expectations across genders about what means what in courtship. As a result, women's ability to get what they want in heterosexual courtship relationships (provided that what they want is an engagement ring and a wedding date) has declined. As a solution, Fein and Schneider propose a clear set of rules, written down for easy consultation, by which they seek to reassert their conception of women's power in relationships.

Regardless of whether one buys into Fein and Schneider's (1996) notion of gender roles, the central purpose of their book stands in striking contrast to Knight (1992), for example, who illustrates the importance of self-enforcement in political institutions through analogies to informal rules governing gender relations. *The Rules* (Fein & Schneider, 1996) seeks to use parchment (publication) to generate a critical mass of women sharing a specific set of expectations and exhibiting a specified behavior pattern to (re)establish order in a realm of behavior previously ungoverned by formal institutions.

Aside from indulging in a juxtaposition of Knight's (1992) work with that of Fein and Schneider (1996), the purpose of my digression here is to suggest that a focus on parchment is not necessarily at odds with equilibrium-based conceptions of institutions. Writing things down matters principally if doing so helps to establish the sort of mutual expectations about behavior that are critical to determining which equilibrium will apply when more than one is possible. Under such circumstances, formal institutions are worth more than the paper on which they are written. This explains in part why, despite consensus that formalization is not the apotheosis of institutions, parchment institutions are nevertheless at the heart of some important research agendas in comparative politics—for example, on electoral systems, on agenda con-

trol, and on constitutional design—which I discuss through the rest of this article.

The current trajectory of research in comparative political institutions suggests various ways of organizing an overview of the subfield. One might distinguish research seeking to explain the origins and shape of institutions from research on the effects of institutional format on political behavior and outcomes. A review of this sort would inevitably highlight the extent to which comparative research has been skewed in the latter direction. A related distinction is between research on institutional stability versus specific aspects of institutional performance. In the discussion that follows, I touch on these themes, but the article is organized to distinguish research on the role of institutions in aggregating preferences from research on the role of institutions in coordinating behavior. This arrangement highlights the increasing theoretical reliance in comparative institutional models of coordination as a theoretical foundation. More important, the coordination models illustrate most clearly the potential role of parchment institutions as mechanisms for generating patterns of political behavior that are self-enforcing and for generating outcomes that favor some potentially stable patterns over others. Finally, the work on coordination focuses attention on the interaction between parchment and areas of politics that have tended to fall outside the research agendas of comparative institutionalists—for example, historical precedent, public opinion, political communication and deliberation, and political culture. As a result, I argue, the prominence of coordination models should encourage the institutionalists to broaden the range of empirical phenomena in which they take an interest and, conversely, to demonstrate the relevance of formal institutional research to comparativists more generally.

The article proceeds as follows. In the next section, I discuss research on the aggregation of preferences in which institutional formats are taken to be given, or exogenous, and in which models of political coordination are not central or explicit. This encompasses a broad range of the research on comparative political institutions over the past 20 years on the effects on political outcomes of formal institutions governing phenomena such as elections, government formation, legislative procedure, and judicial review. Next, I discuss models of coordination under exogenous institutional formats. Here, as with the work on aggregation, the formal rules of elections and constitutional design are regarded as given, but the research focuses on the indeterminacy of equilibria even under a given set of formal rules and, in some cases, begins to identify the characteristics of political actors—such as past experiences, information, beliefs, and culture—that may narrow or expand the range of feasible outcomes. Finally, I move on to work that seeks to explain institutions as endogenous but that also relies on coordination models. In this work,

the preferences of political actors and their beliefs about others and the nature of political communication are taken as primary to and determinant of the shape of parchment institutions such as electoral rules and constitutions; yet even in these accounts, parchment plays a critical role in clarifying strategic expectations in ways that subsequently constrain the actions and options open to political actors.

AGGREGATION: ELECTORAL RULES, COALITIONS, AND AGENDA CONTROL

A quintessential motivation for comparative research on institutions derives from the observation that given the same set of preferences among political actors, different methods of preference aggregation produce different results.[4] From this central result of social choice theory, it follows that institutions matter to political outcomes, and much of the literature on comparative institutions has been devoted to mapping out specifically how they matter. Thus, the various institutional mechanisms by which citizen preferences are translated into political representation and, in turn, by which representation is translated into deliberation, policy decisions, and implementation have all attracted substantial attention.

Research on comparative institutions frequently proceeds by identifying a phenomenon of inherent interest for which there is a plausible causal connection to institutional design and by evaluating the evidence for the expected relationship. Hypotheses about the connection between institutional design and political outcomes are often drawn from formal theories of social choice. For example, spatial models of voting equilibria (for a review, see Shepsle, 1991) motivate much of the large literature on the relationship between electoral systems and party system fragmentation. Riker's (1962) theory of politicians' office-seeking motivations, combined with theories of the instability of social choice under majority rule (McKelvey, 1976; Schofield, 1983), have inspired a large literature on the composition and stability of government coalitions. Theories of bargaining focusing on the sequence of proposals and acceptance, rejection, or counterproposal (Baron & Ferejohn, 1989; Romer & Rosenthal, 1979) influence empirical research on the distribution of influence among policy makers. I will not attempt to review the literature in all

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4. See Riker (1982) for a general statement of the social choice problem, a review of the fundamental literature on the topic, and a provocative argument about its political ramifications. For the state of the art in social choice theory of politics, see the more technically challenging Austen-Smith and Banks (1999). For a broad empirical survey of democratic institutions that argues about the importance of formal rules in shaping political outcomes, see Lijphart (1999).

these areas comprehensively. Instead, I discuss examples of current research in each area briefly to illustrate the manner in which theories of preference aggregation have been incorporated into empirical research on comparative institutions and to serve as a base from which to evaluate a trend in comparative institutional research by which models of coordination have become increasingly prominent.

The connection between methods of aggregation and political outcomes is most straightforward in the literature on the effects of electoral systems on party systems. Duverger's (1954) Law, which holds that single-member district (SMD) plurality elections produce two-party systems, is perhaps the most widely recognized hypothesis from the literature on comparative political institutions. The connection between electoral laws and the number of parties has been refined in recent decades by research both generalizing the effects of district magnitude (Taagepera & Shugart, 1989) and estimating the effects of other institutional characteristics, such as ballot structure and interactions between elections for executives and legislatures (Lijphart, 1994) on party system fragmentation and levels of disproportionality. Below, I discuss recent work in this vein that emphasizes the impact of electoral rules on problems of strategic coordination among voters and politicians and therefore also on the nature of the party system (see Cox, 1997). For now, it is worth taking note of two alternative research tracks on electoral systems and aggregation—one focusing on the effects of electoral rules on legislative behavior and a second seeking to evaluate the effects of rules on the congruence between electoral outcomes and citizen preferences.

A number of scholars have noted that voting systems providing for candidate-specific votes—that is, when the candidate and the party are commensurate, as in SMDs, or when open lists induce competition within parties—generate incentives for personalism. The implication is that voting rules ought to affect the sort of representation that elected officials provide (Cain, Ferejohn, & Fiorina, 1987; Carey & Shugart, 1995; Myerson, 1993). The main challenge confronting such claims is to find valid measures of personalistic behavior that can be attributed to methods of election. For example, having argued that Japan's (pre-1994) electoral system generates strong incentives to cultivate a personal vote, McCubbins and Rosenbluth (1995) dissect Japanese budgets, distinguishing expenditures on programs producing targetable benefits from those producing broader public goods, and demonstrating that the share of the former increases with the size of the majority coalition. The argument is that, where electoral laws create personal votes, policy responds to demand for particularism. Ames (1994, 1995) goes a step further toward connecting the actions of individual legislators to competition for personal votes by mapping budget amendments targeted at specific municipalities

onto the geographical distribution of voter support for legislators in Brazil's open-list elections. The data collection undertaken for these studies highlights the challenge confronting cross-national research, which would allow increased variance in electoral rules, to test their impact on legislator behavior.

The recent adoption in a large number of countries of mixed electoral systems, combining SMD and proportional representation (PR) list elections to fill seats in the same chamber, offers the potential to isolate the effects of electoral rules on legislative behavior while holding constant other contextual variables within individual countries.[5] Remington and Smith (1998), for example, find that Russian legislators elected from SMDs favor weaker party leadership structures in the Duma than do those elected from closed party lists. One problem in using mixed systems to isolate the effects of electoral rules on legislative behavior is that many such systems allow candidates to run simultaneously as SMD and list candidates (McKean & Scheiner, in press). If incumbent legislators anticipate dual nominations and the prospect of currying votes on both sides of the electoral system, then legislative behavior may not correspond with the method of election. This complication notwithstanding, the trend toward mixed, SMD-PR systems among reformers in the 1990s offers a potential boon to electoral systems research by allowing comparisons of different electoral rules operating simultaneously in the same country for the same office and analysis of how these rules interact to influence behavior.[6]

Another noteworthy, recent approach to evaluating the effect of electoral rules on the aggregation of preferences is that of Powell and Vanberg (in press), who seek to estimate the degree to which SMD and PR systems produce representation that reflects public preferences. Their standard is to measure the ideological distance between the median voter and the party of the median legislator across a large number of developed democracies. The advantage of drawing on public opinion surveys rather than on voting behavior itself as an indicator of voter preferences is that the former are unlikely to be contaminated by strategic voting behavior that is itself a product of elec-

   5. Germany has used a mixed system since 1949. In recent years, however, mixed systems were adopted by Japan, Italy, Russia, Bulgaria, Mexico, Venezuela, Bolivia, Philippines, and New Zealand.
   6. Shvetsova (1999), for example, presents evidence that contrary to the intentions of their designers, mixed systems in which proportional representation (PR) seats are awarded without regard to the single-member district (SMD) seat distribution discourage coalition building and increase partisan fragmentation because leaders of minor parties that would fail to win seats under pure PR may still sneak into parliament by winning SMD seats with regionally concentrated support.

toral rules. Powell and Vanberg find a closer correspondence between median legislators and citizens under PR elections and note that, contrary to Downs's (1957) proposition about party convergence, SMD systems sometimes yield winning and runner-up parties that are far from the ideal of the median voter.

This result opens the question of how research connecting institutions to political outcomes measures the outcomes of interest, and on what theoretical grounds. Powell and Vanberg (in press) rely on the position of the median legislator's party in a one-dimensional left-right issue space as a summary indicator of electoral outcomes. Other measures, however, are also defensible. For example, if cabinets dominate policy making, then the position of the median member of the government coalition may be a better spatial indicator of where power lies. Alternatively, if the relevant policy space is multidimensional, the idea of pivotal median legislators may be misguided to begin with. Recent work on the politics of parliamentary coalitions, which feature control over policy-making agendas in explaining the distribution of power within coalitions, suggests some alternatives.[7]

Laver and Shepsle (1990, 1994, 1996) suggest that the policy implications associated with any government coalition depend on the distribution of cabinet portfolios across its members. By this account, cabinet members control policy within their jurisdictions based on informational and procedural advantages over other coalition members. Ministerial control, which the authors call departmentalism, narrows the set of feasible policy outcomes, even with multiple parties in multiple-issue dimensions, from something vast to the set of jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction ideal policies of the party controlling each ministry. This greatly reduces the theoretical problem of chaos and highlights the bargaining strength accruing to parties that are members of all viable coalitions, regardless of size. Laver and Shepsle's approach allows them to explain outcomes that have proven to be nettlesome for coalition theory, such as the conditions for stable minority government (see also Strom, 1990). More important, the model generates specific predictions not only about cabinet membership but also about the distribution of specific portfolios, which means it can be tested against more refined data than could previous coalition theories. Laver and Shepsle demonstrate that their model is far superior in predicting portfolio distributions in European parliamentary sys-

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7. The literature on parliamentary coalitions is nearly as vast as that on electoral systems. Laver and Schofield (1990) provide an excellent review in the course of their study of who gets into coalitions, why, for how long, and why it matters. Although most of the coalition literature focuses exclusively on parliamentary systems, Amorim Neto's (1999) research on Brazil suggests that presidents in multiparty systems distribute cabinet portfolios across parties to sustain stable legislative support according to a logic analogous to parliamentary coalition builders.

tems than is random allocation. Eventually, alternative models that make predictions about portfolio distribution may offer more formidable empirical competition. For now, it bears emphasis that the premise of departmentalism rests on the idea that the agenda control exercised by ministers constrains the set of policies to which any cabinet can commit.

The focus on agenda control in connecting preferences to outcomes is a key characteristic of much research on aggregation and comparative institutions. By agenda control, I refer to the rules governing how and by whom proposals are made, amended, rejected, or approved. Formal institutions establish constraints on proposals and responses about important political decisions, including changes in governments, changes in policy, candidate nominations, the filling of appointed offices, constitutional amendments, and judicial challenges to existing or proposed policies. Models of the effects of institutions generally privilege some elements of agenda control over others in explaining outcomes. Consider an example that stands in direct contrast to Laver and Shepsle's model of departmentalism. Huber (1996) notes that in most parliamentary systems, formal rules of legislative procedure license prime ministers to issue policy proposals tied to votes of confidence in the government after the parliament considers the proposals of cabinet ministers. Highlighting agenda control at this latter stage of the policy-making game, Huber argues that prime ministerial proposals can trump those of departmental ministers, particularly when the members of a government coalition fear early elections. For coalition cabinets, Huber's model identifies a set of feasible policy outcomes that looks substantially different from that implied by departmentalism. In particular, when heterogeneity among coalition partners is high, departmentalism suggests jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction outcomes that are distinctive to the coalition member controlling each ministry, whereas the confidence vote model suggests maximum latitude for prime ministers to make successful proposals that stray from the ideals of departmental ministers. The models might be tested empirically, then, by mapping policy outcomes against the expressed preferences of departments and prime ministers in heterogeneous coalitions.

Agenda power is central to a wide range of research on comparative institutions as reference to a few examples will illustrate. Diermeier and Feddersen (1998) argue that the authority to demand confidence votes explains high levels of floor-voting cohesiveness among parliamentary coalitions. In earlier work, Huber (1992) shows that restrictive legislative procedures—package votes limiting amendments and confidence votes—are invoked in the French parliament to offset conditions that threaten the cohesiveness of the legislative majority in a manner consistent with accounts of agenda control in the

U.S. Congress (Bach & Smith, 1988; Shepsle, 1979). In work that moves even further toward erasing the conceptual distinction between parliamentary and presidential systems of government, Tsebelis (1995, 1999) introduces the idea of generic veto players as constraints on the ability of governments to make changes in policy. Tsebelis is interested in the tendency of various institutional arrangements toward policy stability, arguing that the critical determinants are the number of distinct players positioned to block a change in the status quo and the diversity of their preferences. Thus, if its intransigence threatens the government's majority, a member party to a parliamentary cabinet coalition can impose a constraint on policy change equivalent to that of a president endowed with a legislative veto.

A number of other recent examples tests models of agenda control and policy preferences against empirical data. Tsebelis and Money (1997) demonstrate that the rules by which legislative discrepancies between chambers are reconciled under bicameralism affect the relative bargaining power of each chamber, finding supportive evidence from European and U.S. cases, as well as the European Union. Using a model of coalition membership, the location of the reversion policy, and veto power, Bawn (1999b) establishes the necessary conditions for changes in spending levels on particular government programs, supporting her claims with data from West German budgets. Baldez and Carey (1999) argue that the rules governing the sequence of budgetary proposals and amendments in presidential systems affect overall spending levels and the relative influence of presidents and legislatures over spending policy, based on evidence mainly from Latin America. Vanberg (1998) argues that rules allowing legislative minorities to challenge proposed policy changes before constitutional courts (i.e., abstract judicial review) can induce compromise, encouraging consensual rather than majoritarian policy outcomes.

Within the broader research agenda that attempts to explain outcomes as products of the formal rules by which preferences are aggregated, electoral rules and rules of parliamentary procedure have attracted substantial attention in the past. Two substantive areas that are rightly attracting increasing attention among students of comparative institutions, however, are judicial institutions (Bookman & Staton, 1999; Helmke, 1999) and federalism (Diaz Cayeros, 1997; Willis, Garman, & Haggard, 1999). Many of these research agendas present formidable challenges in terms of data collection. In the next section, however, I turn attention toward models of comparative institutions in which the theoretical issue of multiple equilibria precedes and influences questions of how to design empirical tests. These are the increasingly prominent models of coordination.

Players		Sam	
	Actions	Left	Right
	Left	**Joe's first choice**	Joe's third choice
		Sam's second choice	Sam's fourth choice
Joe	Right	Joe's fourth choice	**Joe's second choice**
		Sam's third choice	**Sam's first choice**

Figure 1. **Basic coordination with conflict.**

COORDINATION MODELS

Like the literature discussed above, comparative research focusing on coordination problems frequently addresses questions of how institutions affect the aggregation of preferences, but it gives theoretical precedence to a specific type of problem. The basic strategic issue can be represented in a matrix involving two players, Joe and Sam, each with two available actions, Left and Right, and outcomes that depend on the combination of actions taken by the players. Coordination games have multiple equilibria (see Note 1), and the game shown in Figure 1 involves conflict in that both players prefer to be coordinated on one of the equilibrium outcomes but disagree over which one.

There are two key insights from which these models derive leverage. The first is that the paths between equilibria in coordination games may be lumpy. That is, models of coordination as applied to comparative politics generally propose accounts by which some set of independent variables affects the prospects for coordination (i.e., equilibrium outcomes) to occur and the choice of equilibrium. The catch is that the nature of coordination—its dependence on mutually reinforcing expectations—implies that the relationships between causal factors and the outcomes associated with them are often nonlinear. This is a familiar idea in social science and comparative politics; it is not the exclusive domain of institutional studies. In his account of the popular uprisings against Communist rule in Eastern Europe, for example, Kuran (1992) argues that although levels of discontent with the old regimes were causally connected to levels of open opposition, the relationship was not simply one of more discontent leading to more opposition but also one that

depended critically on the mutual perceptions among East Europeans of each other's willingness to rebel. Kuran applies Schelling's (1978) model of equilibria that tip according to levels of observed prior dissent and individuals' willingness to participate in revolutionary collective action. In an article discussed above, Bawn (1999a) outlines conditions under which ideological false consciousness can sustain informal alliances between groups whose objective interests are incompatible, even when large disparities in interests imply pressure for ideological realignment.

A second insight associated with such models is that although equilibria may be self-enforcing insofar as no actor should change his or her behavior provided no one else does, the choice of institutions is every bit as much about power as about efficiency (Krasner, 1991). In the example above, although neither player would unilaterally switch away from either of the equilibrium outcomes, Joe prefers that both he and Sam play Left, whereas Sam prefers that they both play Right. Determining which equilibrium prevails (i.e., establishing an institution to guide this interaction) or inducing a switch from one equilibrium to another (i.e., reforming the institution) will generate conflict between the actors. The manner in which institutional conflicts are resolved reflects the relative power of the actors and, to the extent that institutional choices have distributive consequences, contributes to subsequent power relationships. As sources of political power, coordination models focus attention on the resources that allow some actors to shape the expectations of others to induce particular outcomes such as information, communications, and the ability to commit to a particular course of action.

COORDINATION WITHIN ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

The degree to which this family of models has recently been employed to explain phenomena across a wide range of formal institutions is noteworthy. The most prominent example is Cox's (1997) book on strategic electoral behavior. From the basic ideas that (a) politicians are reluctant to waste resources and voters are reluctant to waste ballots and that (b) expectations among politicians and voters about electoral viability are often mutually reinforcing, Cox lays out the micro-level foundations of Duverger's (1954) Law, identifies and empirically confirms conditions under which one ought to observe strategic voting, models the effects of electoral laws and their interaction with social structure on restricting the representation of multiple political parties, tests the model on a large cross-national data set, and provides an account of major party system realignments as tipping equilibria.

Duverger's (1954) Law, that SMD plurality elections tend to produce two-party competition, has been the staple of electoral systems studies for over 40 years, as has the intuition that strategic voting, or a reluctance to waste one's vote on a hopeless candidate, is its source. Cox (1997) generalizes Duverger's Law to apply to districts larger than a single member, pointing out that the logic of wasted votes applies to any candidates whose expectations of success fall too far beyond the threshold of success, whether that threshold requires a candidate to be top dog, as in SMDs, or one of the top two (two-member districts) and so on as the district magnitude grows. This observation shifts attention to the issue of coordinated expectations about viability—the questions of what constitutes candidate hopelessness and what happens when voters and prospective candidates cannot agree to which candidates and parties the label applies. In this non-Duvergerian world, strategic voting becomes difficult, candidates proliferate, party systems realign, and natural allies may split their support across competitors, allowing widely unpalatable candidates to win. Cox suggests not only an explanation for results that violate the SMD–two-party pattern (e.g., Fiji, India, and some British elections) but also one in which such outcomes should be associated with conditions that hamper the establishment of the coordinated expectations that make strategic voting possible. The key factors are past electoral results and the strength of communication networks. With data on the ratio of votes between first and second runners-up, Cox shows that voters abandon the latter types in bigger numbers when information about viability is available and communication flows easily.

Within research on electoral systems, the insights of coordination models are most relevant for understanding party systems in new democracies, where the conditions for coordination failure are ripe. Considering the post-Communist experience in Europe, Moser (1999) identifies Russia and Ukraine in particular as Duvergerian outlaws, where SMDs have generated elections so fragmented as to transcend mere multipartism to transpartism. Elections there have produced fields of candidates so divided that many win with votes that total below 20%, based on personal reputations alone and without relying on partisan affiliation and support networks.[8] Moser attributes the failure of electoral laws to consolidate competition to a lack of

8. Ukrainian SMD elections operate under the majority runoff formula, in which the top two candidates progress to a second round if no one wins a majority in initial balloting. This lowers the threshold for first-round viability. Nevertheless, when expectations are reasonably coordinated, even a majority runoff should not increase fragmentation to the extent seen in Ukraine.

institutionalization of party systems, a term he uses to describe conditions similar to those that Cox (1997) relies on to predict when coordination between voters and political elites is possible.

Filippov, Ordeshook, and Shvetsova (1999) draw on the basic coordination insight to explain how non-Duvergerian outcomes spill over between executive and legislative elections, demonstrating that many of the effects of presidential elections on legislative party systems in the new post-Communist systems of Europe appear to be precisely the reverse of those in longer established democracies. In the latter, plurality elections for presidents and electoral calendars that establish concurrent elections for both branches tend indirectly to reduce the number of parliamentary parties due to the interaction between Duverger's (1954) Law and the coattails of strong presidential candidates, which pull parliamentary voting in a similar direction (Shugart, 1995; Shugart & Carey, 1992). In new party systems, however, which may lack sufficiently strong mutual expectations among voters and politicians to support effective strategic voting and candidate entry, the brass ring of the presidency encourages nationally ambitious politicians not only to run with low levels of support but also to register slates of parliamentary candidates as evidence of their stature. Under these conditions, plurality presidential elections held concurrently with parliamentary balloting encourage, rather than discourage, party system fragmentation. The effect may be self-reinforcing if greater short-term fragmentation inhibits the establishment of mutual expectations about party and candidate viability that serve as the glue for Duvergerian strategic voting equilibria.

The immediate question raised by the evidence of these non-Duvergerian results is whether, and under what conditions, shifts to Duvergerian outcomes will occur. The accumulation of past election results only facilitates coordination if past results exhibit patterns that provide the basis for expectations about future viability. Increasing fragmentation between 1993 and 1995 in both the SMD and PR components of Russian Duma elections suggests that the passage of time alone does not guarantee such patterns.[9] Moser (1999) argues that the absence of centralized control over party nomination procedures undermines the information that party labels convey to voters such that preelection opinion polls reporting large pools of undecided and nonpartisan voters may fail to serve as media by which mutual expectations about viability could be developed and strategic voting facilitated.[10] Perhaps

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9. Vote fragmentation in the PR elections declined in 1999, from 10.8 on the Laakso and Taagepera (1979) index in 1995 to 6.9, which is still high by comparative standards (VCIOM, 1999). The appearance of new parties shortly before the election and the tendency of prominent political figures to abandon more established party labels to endorse and sometimes join the new lists undoubtedly contributed to sustaining fragmentation.

reforms to strengthen partisan control over nominations would facilitate coordination, but it is not clear why parties should adopt such reforms when doing so would preclude them from embracing candidates with strong local followings. Moreover, the fluidity of negotiations over cross-partisan coalition lists for the PR component of the 1999 Duma elections suggests that even centralized control over nominations does not guarantee that list labels will convey clear messages to voters (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 1999a, 1999b, 1999c).

COORDINATION AND CONSTITUTIONAL STABILITY

Along similar lines to electoral systems research on Duvergerian and non-Duvergerian outcomes and the paths between them, coordination and the factors that affect it are increasingly prominent in other areas of comparative institutional research. Both Ordeshook (1992) and Weingast (1997) develop models suggesting that constitutions can contribute to the establishment and maintenance of political order by coordinating expectations among political actors about the limits of state authority and about the likely actions other actors will take when new dimensions of conflict present themselves. To the extent that written constitutions help to identify focal strategies for interaction, they can guide actors toward solutions to political conflicts that are Pareto superior to what might be obtained in the absence of parchment.[11] The logic can be extended beyond constitutions and statutes to judicial decisions. Vanberg (1998), for example, argues that constitutional courts coordinate citizens' beliefs about when governments have transgressed constitutional limits of state authority and therefore warrant punishment at the polls.

Other recent work on federalism and constitutional stability also focuses on problems of coordination. Treisman's (1999) model of federalism begins with the idea that the incentives for any subnational government to accept or rebel against central authority depend on both the content of central policies and the behavior of other subunits. Whether a subunit's leader finds it advantageous to accept a given mix of taxes, subsidies, and public goods generated

10. In the 1999 Duma elections, one sign that preelection polls provided credible signals about the relative viability of PR lists, allowing voters to respond strategically, is the gap between the vote shares of the last parties to clear the 5% legal threshold (6.1% and 6.0% for Yabloko and the Zhirnovsky Bloc, respectively) and that of the largest parties not to clear the threshold (2.2%, 2.1%, and 2.0% each for Communist Workers for the Soviet Union, Women or Russia, and the Pensioners' party, respectively). This distribution is consistent with a scenario in which all but the hardcore supporters of parties projected to fall short of 5% jumped ship and voted for viable alternative lists.

11. This does not imply an absence of conflict between the parties over the specifics of constitutional design or that the solutions encouraged by constitutions are efficient or fair.

by the central government rather than to secede depends, in part, on whether other subunit leaders accept or rebel. Here again, the basic intuition is that participation in a federation is an act of coordination such that there are multiple equilibria and the paths between them may be lumpy with respect to the effects of causal variables. From this, Treisman develops an account of how economic stabilization policies such as those prescribed by the International Monetary Fund, which minimize centrally directed transfers across federal subunits and increase public goods provision, can have antithetical effects on the stability of federations, depending in predictable ways on initial economic conditions and on the cultural heterogeneity of the federation.

The equilibria in Treisman's (1999) model are particularly lumpy in that policies altering the mix of transfers and public goods affect subunit actions in ways that are not only nonlinear but also nonmonotonic. Wealthier, more homogeneous federations can attain virtuous cycles of reducing transfers and increasing public goods without threatening stability; however, poorer, more heterogeneous federations, in which the marginal effect of each dollar (or ruble) transferred on subunit loyalty to the center is greater, confront the prospect of a downward spiral when transfers are reduced to finance public goods.

Treisman's (1999) conclusions about the prospects for federalism to contribute to prosperity stand in contrast to those suggested by a prominent alternative—Weingast's (1995) model of market-preserving federalism, which stresses competition among governmental subunits in providing public policies to attract mobile factors of production, whether or not a political system is nominally federal or even democratic. Such competition, by this account, is what keeps government limited, preserving markets from state predation and encouraging states to act as public goods providers, an outcome that resembles Treisman's virtuous equilibrium among wealthier, homogeneous federations. In collaborative work on the political economy of decentralization in China, Montinola, Qian, and Weingast (1995) establish a number of necessary preconditions for market-preserving federalism, including a firm budget constraint on subunit governments, backed by a commitment from the center not to bail out bankrupt subunits or agencies with transfer payments, but they do not establish what conditions produce effective commitment to hard budget constraints. In Treisman's model, the hard budget constraint is a characteristic of one possible equilibrium, but in another, a combination of separatist sentiment (heterogeneity) and economic necessity (marginal returns to transfer subsidies) generates a critical mass of subunits that use the threat of secession to challenge the hard budget constraint and demand subsidies from the center.

Both articles rely heavily on narrative descriptions of a particular case—China for Montinola et al. (1995) and Russia for Treisman (1999)—to illustrate their accounts. A broader empirical evaluation of either model will require comprehensive data on financial transfers across levels of government that are complex and notoriously unreliable. In that it endeavors to explain the key assumption on which market-preserving competition between subunits rests, and particularly in linking this to the issue of secession, Treisman's model of coordination is more ambitious and potentially more satisfying than Montinola et al.'s.

ENDOGENEITY AND INSTITUTIONS

A persistent challenge confronting comparative institutional research is the issue of endogeneity. That is, the research discussed up to now begins with the premise that rules affect behavior and so can explain political outcomes. The converse argument is that the rules that are ultimately codified on parchment merely reflect the outcomes of political struggles and so are endogenous rather than explanatory. The prominence of coordination models as explanations for the origins of parchment institutions is as conspicuous as their inroads in works on institutional effects.

Returning to the study of electoral systems, consider Rokkan's (1970) landmark statement of effects of social forces on the choice of electoral rules. At the turn of the past century, SMD elections were the norm in Europe, yet pressures for the extension of suffrage were growing irresistible. In Rokkan's account, the adoption of electoral rules allowing for PR was a response by traditional conservative parties to impending changes in the electorate, an attempt to ensure the retention of as many parliamentary seats as possible given their expected minority status. The key exogenous factors driving this story are social class structure and the inevitability of universal (male) suffrage, whereas the shape of the parchment institutions appears to be entirely endogenous.[12] If this is the case, then is it not appropriate to regard institutions as reflecting the outcomes of political struggles rather than shaping them, as endogenous to the other factors that really count? The first answer to this challenge is that if the institutional choice between PR and SMD was inconsequential, then Rokkan's traditional parties would not have concerned themselves with altering them. Implicit in the fact that parchment institutions

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12. Universal male suffrage ranks among political science's best oxymorons, although it is rivaled by the name of Mexico's longtime dominant party—the Revolutionary Institutional Party.

are subjects of competition is the common recognition that their form has consequences for the distribution of political power. The more important point, for the purposes of this article, is that in explanations of the shape of parchment institutions themselves, issues of coordination are increasingly conspicuous. Thus, coordination models are invoked at the nexus between sociological explanations for political outcomes, which draw on structural characteristics of societies and cultural and ascriptive characteristics of actors, and the political economy approach, which emphasizes actors' preferences and the strategic environment.

Boix (1999), for example, revises Rokkan's (1970) theory of electoral system choice by adding coordination between the traditionally dominant parties as an explanatory factor. Like Rokkan, Boix regards suffrage expansion and levels of support for labor parties as exogenous factors that potentially push traditional parties to adopt PR, but he notes that not all countries confronting these factors followed the Rokkan road by changing to PR. Some countries retained SMD elections, and other countries experienced electoral system instability with more than one shift between SMD and PR. To create a more fully specified model that can account for diverse outcomes, Boix adds to Rokkan's original explanatory variables the capacity for coordination between parties and their supporters. The premise is that any party will prefer majoritarian electoral rules if it expects to be the largest—or nearly the largest—in the system. Which party will be largest depends not only on the overall ideological distribution of voters but also on whether the voters in a given ideological neighborhood coordinate on a particular party or instead divide their support between more than one. This depends, in turn, on mutual expectations among voters about each party's viability. Boix's point is that even confronting the deluge of predominantly labor-oriented new voters generated by suffrage expansion, an account of the strategic environment among traditional parties in each country is necessary to explain the choices they made about which electoral rules to adopt, and the key elements of this environment are the capacities for coordination between various actors.

Focusing exclusively on post–World War II Germany, Bawn (1993) also emphasizes strategic concerns in explaining the choice of electoral rules. In this account, key exogenous forces include occupying armies that established preliminary representative institutions to select an electoral system and state-level (Länder) elections that provided information about relative party strengths. This context made strategic voting possible and attractive on two levels: first, by social democratic legislators choosing PR electoral rules that maximize their party's coalition potential while sacrificing overall parliamentary strength, and second, by voters abandoning hopeless candidates in district elections while supporting their most preferred parties in the PR vote.

Bawn's argument is persuasive because she is able to establish the motivations for strategic voting and provide empirical evidence that voters and politicians held expectations about the relative viability of parties and acted on those expectations in nonobvious ways.

The argument that institutional choice is a matter of coordination is made most explicitly by Hardin (1989) against those who would characterize the act of adopting formal institutions as one of contracting to overcome collective action problems of the prisoner's dilemma variety. Hardin draws on the experience of the United States under the Articles of Confederation to suggest that the sorts of factors that explain successful contracts—mutual agreement, repeated play, and sanctions for those who do not comply—were irrelevant to the originative act but that the establishment of clear mutual expectations among the states about others' compliance with the Constitution tipped even holdout states toward ratification.

Hardin's (1989) argument is about the importance of coordination in determining whether institutions impose effective constraints on behavior rather than about the specific shape that institutions take. By this account, any one of many constitutions could be binding, regardless of the levels of agreement on their form by the affected actors, provided that some constitution is preferred to no constitution and one becomes sufficiently focal to deter coordination around any other. The insight applies beyond the U.S. case. Consider the adoption of Boris Yeltsin's 1993 constitution in Russia, a document that was drafted with virtually no deliberation among the affected actors (federal subunits, parties, and citizens), endorsed by less than half the electorate (quite possibly rejected by a majority), salvaged by electoral fraud in its original ratification plebiscite, and consistently denounced as illegitimate and subjected to attempted amendments by the country's largest parties since its adoption (Fish, 1995; White, Rose, & McAllister, 1997). The dominance of the presidency over the government, in particular, is widely objectionable to legislators across party factions, yet even ardent opponents of the constitution have worked within its constraints, acquiescing to the president's choices for prime minister, legislating around his decree authority, and working within the constitution's cumbersome amendment procedures even in their efforts to strip the presidency of powers. Even more than in Hardin's U.S. example, this is not because Yeltsin's (then Putin's) adversaries support his system but because in late 1993, through a combination of military might and control over communications and the electoral process, Yeltsin coordinated expectations around an outcome, the many opponents of which were sufficiently divided that coordination on an alternative had been impossible.

The bottom line, which is apparent in all these stories of coordination, is that many outcomes could elicit compliance and that the paths among them

depend heavily on the formation of expectations rather than exclusively on relative levels of support among the actors. This, of course, immediately directs attention to how common expectations are formed and sustained. Calvert and Johnson (1999) address the question explicitly as a critique of the idea that regime transitions culminate with a single act of coordination around a constitution, pointing out that constitutions do not resolve even a small portion of the contentious issues—of procedure or policy—that arise, such that day-to-day politics presents infinite demands of recoordination and opportunity for disruption of equilibria by opponents of a given constitutional regime. Their response is to extend the metaphor of coordination backward to the stage of deliberation and bargaining over constitutional principles and interpretations, claiming that arguments covering general situations can be persuasive, even to those disadvantaged by the immediate outcome, if the application of their principles might facilitate a resolution of unforeseen coordination conflicts in the future. The intention is to acknowledge that constitutional coordination is not a magic bullet for resolving all problems of political disorder; to recognize the potential for arguments based on principle, reason, and perhaps identity to influence actions; and to embrace even chaotic periods of regime transition within the theoretical framework more commonly applied to situations in which actors' motivations are more easily posited.

   How, then, does research on comparative institutions respond to the challenge of institutional endogeneity? To begin, one concedes the point that, of course, parchment institutions are products of political conflicts. Moreover, it is certainly more difficult to develop compelling accounts for the choice of institutions than to develop theories of institutional effects because the range of potential explanatory factors is more expansive in the former instance than when we can turn to a piece of parchment for the rules. Yet the endogeneity of institutions is not damning to the project of studying institutional effects on behavior. First, it seems counterintuitive that the structure of institutions should be the subject of such intense conflict if institutions are merely reflections of social outcomes, without consequence of their own. Second, if institutions are products of coordination, as suggested in so much of the recent literature, then institutional equilibria are sticky, even in the face of changes in the surrounding political environment and even when, in principle, coordination problems are perpetual. What is set down on parchment may be endogenous to a set of social conditions at the moment of institutional foundation, but to the extent that recoordinating around an alternative set of institutions is difficult, the effects of the parchment may endure even as the social condi-

tions change. In this sense, there is nothing fundamentally contradictory in thinking of institutions as both endogenous and exogenous.

PATH DEPENDENCY, COMMUNICATION, AND COORDINATION

Beyond progress on specific empirical questions, applications of coordination models suggest two general points to analysts of comparative institutions: one having to do with path dependency and another having to do with the importance of political communication. First, it is a standard refrain in comparative politics that one should not expect the same set of political institutions, plopped down in different environments, to have the same effects. The point is embodied prominently in work emphasizing the path dependency of political development and the manner in which social and historical contexts interact with formal rules in shaping political outcomes (North, 1991; North, Summerhill, & Weingast, in press).

Although it is difficult to imagine anyone disagreeing with the central claim about the importance of context in shaping the impact of institutions, the focus on path dependency begs the questions of specifically how and under what conditions the effects of institutions on outcomes should differ. By making the idea of multiple equilibria common currency in comparative politics, coordination models suggest that path dependency is less an affront to, and more an opportunity for, institutional analysis. In cases when coordination models aptly describe puzzles in comparative politics, they can also point to the conditions under which we should expect the effects of a given institutional format to go off in one direction or another and why.

Consider Pierson's (2000 [this issue]) discussion of path dependence in the development of welfare systems. Pierson notes how historical, demographic, and economic context shape preferences over welfare institutions and loyalties to the coalitions that support them, limiting feasible policy outcomes and constraining changes in welfare regimes to the incremental. As highlighted in Pierson's discussion of reform proposals for pay-as-you-go social security systems, however, a main source of incrementalism in this particular realm is generational change, which by nature—barring acts of God— is incremental. In the realm of institutions not bound to support coalitions in which change is inherently incremental, coordination models explain not only the tendency toward stability during periods of normal politics but also the potential for unusual periods of fundamental change (e.g., party system

realignment, regime change, secession, unification) when mutual expectations among actors are in flux. The point here is that the metaphor of coordination focuses attention on factors that make institutional loyalties more or less mutable and thus can help us to identify what sorts of institutional transformations are more or less likely and the conditions for these transformations.

A second and related point highlighted by the application of coordination models is the importance of communication in explaining the shape and the effects of political institutions. In all the coordination models discussed above, the establishment (or lack thereof) of clear mutual expectations that make coordination possible hangs largely on the nature of the communication between political actors. Coordination models demand that institutional analyses explicitly address questions of how expectations are communicated and the conditions under which such communication succeeds or fails (Calvert & Johnson, 1999).

The importance of communication in establishing mutual expectations and the impact this can have on the establishment of stable institutions are highlighted in an argument by Pereira (1999) about the structure and authority of military courts in postauthoritarian systems. A key preliminary distinction is drawn between Argentinian military courts (actually, special military courts), which routinely ignored even the formal procedural legality of the military regime, and the Chilean and Brazilian military courts, in which military legality was generally honored. Pereira argues that the legal procedure in these latter cases, although frequently perverse from the perspective of protecting civil liberties, provided the accused and their lawyers with some framework for self-defense and therefore an incentive to pay lip service to the military legal code. The inadvertent result was to legitimize the military's legal code, which in turn makes subsequent reform more difficult.

There are a couple of ironies here and a broader point about communication. First, in posttransition regimes, overhauling the apparatus of special military courts is easiest precisely when the formal structure of military justice was, in practice, least relevant. More interesting is the claim that the stickiness of these institutions—their resistance to change—is partly a product of communication that was widely recognized as insincere (although expedient). This suggests an unexpected extension of the argument made at the outset of this article about the importance of putting words on parchment to the establishment of institutions—in effect, that the power to constrain political behavior can accrue even to counterfeit parchment. More generally, the argument is that parchment can contribute to the effectiveness of institutions by enhancing the "focalness" of agreements.

CONCLUSION

To summarize the main points made here, I first limited the scope of this review to research on formal political institutions on the grounds that the act of writing rules down can contribute to their binding force. Second, I discussed a number of examples of research on the effects of formal institutions on political outcomes, highlighting the role of social choice and game theory as sources of hypotheses about the causal connections between rules and results. Third, I noted the recent ubiquity of models of coordination in research on comparative institutions, discussing some recent empirical research that identified conditions associated with specific equilibria and highlighting the importance of political communication in this research.

Perhaps this is the appropriate place for a word of caution against coordination games becoming for this generation of comparative institutionalists the same sort of theoretical *E. coli* that the prisoner's dilemma was for many political scientists a quarter century earlier. The problem with seeing coordination, or its absence, everywhere one looks in comparative politics is that labeling phenomena as such could become an end in itself. Given the indeterminacy of coordination games, the diagnosis is likely to say very little of interest about the issue. What distinguishes the more innovative recent work on comparative institutions, however, is the effort to move past the initial diagnosis and identify conditions that determine which equilibrium will prevail and why.

Because equilibrium selection under coordination depends largely on the communication between political actors and the establishment of mutual expectations about outcomes, research on comparative institutions focusing on conditions that affect the nature of communication and expectations has been particularly successful. Examples from the study of electoral systems include Cox's (1997) model of conditions that clarify expectations about candidate viability and their effect on vote fragmentation and Boix's (1999) model of expectations about partisan viability and their effect on the choice of electoral system. From the study of federalism, Treisman's (1999) model of whether federal subunits cooperate with a central government is similarly promising in identifying conditions affecting both communication (e.g., ethnic heterogeneity) and the nature of distributive conflict (e.g., tax burdens, levels of public goods provision) that can shape actors' decisions and thus the prevailing equilibrium.

Problems of coordination force researchers to direct their attention toward conditions that shape the communication between political actors and the

development of mutual expectations, whether one is analyzing informal or parchment institutions. As long as institutional research continues to push in the direction of exploring which of the multiple equilibria pertain and why, it will have to address issues traditionally in the domain of researchers in other subfields such as mass behavior, political culture, and historical methods.

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