coalition politics has developed over the years into one of the richest subfields in political science in terms of its theoretical and empirical depth. Carol Mershon's new book is faithful to the tradition of Riker and further deepens our understanding of coalition government. The book is indispensable for scholars engaged in the study of parliamentary democracy and would also be useful reading in general seminars in comparative politics and comparative methodology.

The book begins by drawing our attention to an empirical anomaly in the literature on coalition behavior. In four decades of research in this area, coalition theorists have tended to treat cabinet instability and turnover in government membership as two sides of the same coin. Thus, legislative bargaining environments expected by theorists to be conducive to frequent government collapses were also expected to be conducive to constant alternation in the parties participating in government. As Mershon points out, however, such theoretical expectations do not satisfactorily match up with the empirical reality of coalition governance. For instance, Italy (1946–92)—the most prominent case in her study—has experienced the highest number of short-lived governments among postwar parliamentary democracies (save for the now-defunct French Fourth Republic) but at the same time the lowest rate of government turnover (as the Christian Democratic Party always managed to maintain a place in the cabinet). Other countries, such as Finland, Belgium, Israel, and Portugal, have had similar (though less extreme) experiences with coalition government. The rest of the book is devoted to understanding how apparent instability can coexist with apparent stability in this way.

Mershon makes several original contributions to the study of coalition politics. The first comes from her observation that all coalition theories to date—from the early "institution-free" theories to the current neoinstitutional approaches—make the implicit, and heretofore unquestioned, assumption that there are costs associated with building and bringing down government coalitions that derive from party goals to hold office, make public policy, and/or win parliamentary elections. Further, these theories generally assume that the costs of coalition are invariant across parties, governments, time, and institutional settings and exogenous to coalition bargaining.

The assumptions of invariance and exogeneity in the costs of coalition, Mershon contends, are what give rise to the "puzzle" of short-lived cabinets dominated by perpetual incumbents. She goes on to argue that these rather stringent assumptions fail to hold under certain conditions. In particular, her claim is that the costs associated with assembling and dismantling governments should generally depend upon the types of parties involved in bargaining, patterns of party competition, and the institutional setting. Moreover, she argues that parties can actually work to lower the costs of coalition through their strategic actions within a given institutional and political context.

To explore these arguments empirically, Mershon pursues the two-pronged strategy of providing an in-depth study of the Italian case, as well as a cross-national statistical analysis of coalition politics in 10 European democracies for the postwar period. In her examination of the Italian record of coalition government, she finds that the Christian Democrats, due partly to their size and position in the policy space, could make or break coalitions at relatively low cost. Intriguingly, this party also appears to have pursued a variety of strategies over the years to curb the costs of coalition bargaining, such as progressively increasing the number of cabinet posts when additional parties were brought into the government, which served to decrease the office-related costs of building oversized coalitions. The cross-national analysis further highlights the importance of party and party-system characteristics in determining the costs of making and breaking coalitions, and further reveals that institutional rules (such as the investiture requirement) have a significant role to play as well.

Mershon's justification of her two-sided empirical approach, and then her careful execution of it, are the real gems of the book. The in-depth study of the inner workings of coalition bargaining in Italy, as she points out, provides special leverage for understanding the causal mechanisms behind the combination of government instability and stability—namely, the purposive actions of politicians in their pursuit of cost-reduction strategies. In contrast, cross-national statistical analysis, while less useful than case studies in ferreting out causal mechanisms, provides much greater leverage in assessing the impact of different patterns of party competition and alternative institutional arrangements on coalition bargaining. Too often, students in comparative politics choose one or the other of these approaches in their empirical work, rarely both. While Mershon is hardly the first scholar to employ this dual design, she does provide one of the more thorough (and lively) explanations of its virtues. Given this, as well as her careful attention to theoretical concerns throughout the text, this book would make an excellent choice for general graduate-level seminars in comparative politics and comparative methodology.

Whether the findings from The Costs of Coalition eventually translate into dramatically different theoretical predictions and empirical findings in the literature on government formation, portfolio allocation, government survival, and parliamentary politics remains an open question. Mershon does not provide much speculation on this point. Of course, a full analysis of coalition politics that incorporates the idea of variable and endogenous bargaining costs will probably take several more books and articles to complete. What becomes clear from her study is that such work needs to be done if we wish to continue toward developing a deeper understanding of coalition government in parliamentary democracies.


—Dennis Galvan, University of Oregon

Joel Migdal's career, in some sense the subject of his newest volume, has centered on his fascination with the state, how it is simultaneously rooted in social processes yet has the power to build institutions, restructure relations, make meaning, and in so doing reconstitute society itself. From time to time in this book, Migdal cannot help but reveal his wonder, even awe, at that entity, so emblematic of modernity, uniquely able to "sequester ... children for thirty hours or so a week in a state institution" and "garner from people's yearly earnings a share equivalent to all their work performed through April or May or, sometimes, even June" (p. 233).

This new volume is in effect a testament to what Lawrence Dodd, the scholar of the U.S. Congress, calls "intellectual passion": Migdal's elemental wonder integrates the otherwise potentially disparate chapters, animating the book's journey from the depths of modernization theory, through the various moments of "bringing the state back in," into Migdal's latest, Bourdieu-inspired notion of "mutual constitution and transformation" of state and society. The various chapters, each a review of sorts, hang together and form a coherent intellectual enterprise because they let us follow an inquisitive, open mind building an intellectual apparatus from a decades-long struggle to make deep sense of fundamental questions of authority, power, and participation.

From the outset, Migdal emphasizes that his main concern in this book is to present his
Huntington to historical institutionalism of the 1990s. As such, the book would easily anchor the "nature of the state" and "state-society relations" sections of an introductory graduate seminar on comparative politics, fruitfully read between Huntington's own Political Order in Changing Societies (1968) and a more empirically rooted assessment of the state like James Scott's Seeing Like a State (1998).

But the volume's usefulness for review also suggests its two principal weaknesses. First, while the author's state-in-society synthesis is tantalizing (not least for its courage as one of the rare political science efforts to operationalize Bourdieu's notoriously opaque ideas), this volume tilts too far toward review of antecedent influences to fully explicate Migdal's proposed new approach. For example, he captures, via Suzanne Berger, the historical and cultural embeddedness of state formation in Western Europe (pp. 204–5), yet does not extend this logic to the developing world, as do Bertrand Badie and Pierre Birnbaum (Sociology of the State, 1983), to argue, as Migdal's own framework would suggest, that postcolonial political crises result from the disarticulation of imported state structures from local social organizations and systems of meaning.

Second, the review and synthesis in most chapters take us through the mid-1980s, occasionally as far as literature of the 1990s. Sometimes this leaves the reader with a sense that further engagement with more recent work (from Scott to Robert Bates et al., in Analytic Narratives, 1998) might have enriched and altered Migdal's proposed syntheses. Sometimes, important empirical developments are noticeably absent: Given the historic stability of twentieth-century state structures, one could argue that theory building depends on close analysis of empirical variation, especially the moments, rare in 1990 but more commonplace by 2000, of state collapse (ex–Soviet Union), fragmentation (Somalia), implosion (Sierra Leone), divorce (Czech Republic), or possible obsolescence (European Union). These events and processes make cameo appearances in several chapters, but do not emerge as central empirical puzzles to challenge and refine theory.

But in this kind of work, by an author with Migdal's unusual perch and perspective, reservations are minor quibbles. What we are getting in State in Society is a rare opportunity to see the development of a major subtheme in comparative politics through the eyes of a key architect of that theme. No other recent work on state-society relations offers the reader such a comprehensive vision of the intellectual history of the topic, and few offer a synthetic framework as potentially influential for future research as Migdal's notion of the mutual constitution of state and society.


— Kathleen C. Schwartzman, University of Arizona

Nations encounter many quandaries as they undertake the dual transitions of democratization and economic restructuring. Alfred Montero's book analyzes how two states (one in Brazil and one in Spain) successfully met those challenges.

The author persuasively refutes several claims that have appeared in the literature. He refutes the claim that globalization prevents nations from fashioning their own industrial policies. He shows that under some circumstances, nations and states (subnational units) have important roles in promoting industrial development, higher productivity, and technological innovation. He demonstrates the folly in asserting that government intervention is always detrimental to economic growth; in fact, he documents the absolute necessity of a certain type of government intervention. His study also demonstrates the inaccuracy of concluding that only autonomous states are successful. And he shows that by itself, the devolution of powers to subnational units cannot guarantee good government.

Montero's research design incorporates two positive cases (Minas Gerais and Asturias, states which promoted synergy), several negative cases (Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo in Brazil and Andalusia and Madrid in Spain, and briefly, Mexico). The pairing of Brazil and Spain allows the author to control for some factors and examine the variation in others. On the one hand, both undertook the "dual transition," replacing their authoritarian regimes with democratic ones, and restructuring economic policymaking from state-centered to decentralized. On the other hand, Spain received an infusion of European Union capital while Brazil experienced an economic and debt crisis. Nevertheless, such national-level processes are insufficient for explaining the variation in subnational policies and successes.

Shifting States in Global Markets is informed by the development and institutions literature. Montero elaborates the notion of embeddedness (linkages between firms and governmental agencies) made social science friendly by Peter Evans. Montero's main conclusion is that when