

Ruling Oneself Out: A Theory of Collective Abdications (Politics, History, and Culture)

By Ivan Ermakoff

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What induces groups to commit political suicide? This book explores the decisions to surrender power and to legitimate this surrender: collective abdications. Commonsensical explanations impute such actions to coercive pressures, actors' miscalculations, or their contamination by ideologies at odds with group interests. Ivan Ermakoff argues that these explanations are either incomplete or misleading. Focusing on two paradigmatic cases of voluntary and unconditional surrender of power—the passing of an enabling bill granting Hitler the right to amend the Weimar constitution without parliamentary supervision (March 1933), and the transfer of full executive, legislative, and constitutional powers to Marshal Pétain (Vichy, France, July 1940)—*Ruling Oneself Out* recasts abdication as the outcome of a process of collective alignment.

Ermakoff distinguishes several mechanisms of alignment in troubled and uncertain times and assesses their significance through a fine-grained examination of actors' beliefs, shifts in perceptions, and subjective states. To this end, he draws on the analytical and methodological resources of perspectives that usually stand apart: primary historical research, formal decision theory, the phenomenology of group processes, quantitative analyses, and the hermeneutics of testimonies. In elaborating this dialogue across disciplinary boundaries, *Ruling Oneself Out* restores the complexity and indeterminate character of pivotal collective decisions and demonstrates that an in-depth historical exploration can lay bare processes of crucial importance for understanding the formation of political preferences, the paradox of self-deception, and the makeup of historical events as highly consequential.

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Ruling Oneself Out: A Theory of Collective Abdications (Politics, History, and Culture) By Ivan Ermakoff Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #438927 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Duke University Press Books
- Published on: 2008-04-21
- Released on: 2008-04-21
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x 1.11" w x 6.13" l, 1.38 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 440 pages

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Review

"*Ruling Oneself Out* presents a compelling theory of why solitary legislative dissent. . . is rare, particularly in highly charged political contexts. . . . [S]cholars. . . should be reading and referring to this book for a long time to come. It should also find its way onto the shelves of social scientists interested in formal modeling, democratic breakdown, and/or exemplary methodology in historical research." - Malcolm Fairbrother, *Contemporary Sociology*

"*Ruling Oneself Out* is an extremely impressive scholarly achievement at multiple levels. It offers a model of how to identify and pose an important research question; that is, a question worth asking and answering not only because it is intrinsically interesting but also because it is theoretically puzzling and at the same time of great practice significance. *Ruling Oneself Out* is all this and more." - Howard Kimeldorf, *Social Science History*

"*Ruling Oneself Out* is a tour de force, a compelling contribution to our understanding of two of the most troubling moments of the past century and the more general phenomenon of democratic representation and its retention."—**David D. Laitin**, Stanford University

"*Ruling Oneself Out* reads like a novel: we hear the voices of the protagonists, enter their minds, and emerge with an understanding of a fascinating theoretical puzzle. Drawing on richly documented primary sources, employing state-of-the-art analytical tools, and carefully staking theoretical claims, Ivan Ermakoff makes intelligible events that shook world history. A remarkable achievement."—**Adam Przeworski**, New York University

"In this innovative book, Ivan Ermakoff combines game theory with detailed archival research to provide a brilliant and surprising interpretation of a long-standing historical puzzle. *Ruling Oneself Out* opens new vistas for the sociological study of historical events."—**William H. Sewell Jr.**, University of Chicago

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From the Back Cover
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