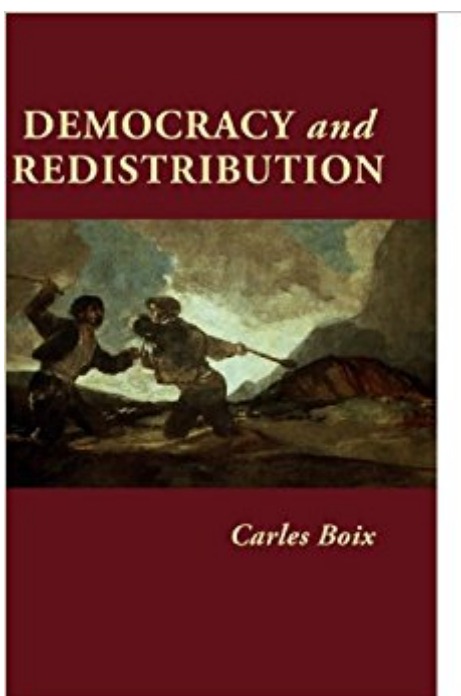


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Democracy And Redistribution (Cambridge Studies In Comparative Politics)



Synopsis

Employing analytical tools borrowed from game theory, Carles Boix offers a complete theory of political transitions. It is one in which political regimes ultimately depend on the nature of economic assets, their distribution among individuals, and the balance of power among different social groups. Backed by detailed historical research and extensive statistical analysis from the mid-nineteenth century, the study reveals why democracy emerged in classical Athens. It also covers the early triumph of democracy in nineteenth-century agrarian Norway, Switzerland and northeastern America as well as its failure in countries with a powerful landowning class.

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Customer Reviews

"...sweeping in its thematic scope. All should be stimulated by the theoretical debate.

Recommended." C.H. Blake, James Madison University, CHOICE"Anyone interested in the origins of democracy or in contemporary political economy will need to read this important work." Nicolas van de Walle, Cornell University

Employing analytical tools borrowed from game theory, Carles Boix offers a complete theory of political transitions, in which political regimes ultimately hinge on the nature of economic assets, their distribution among individuals, and the balance of power among different social groups. Backed up by detailed historical work and extensive statistical analysis that goes back to the

mid-nineteenth century, this book explains, among many other things, why democracy emerged in classical Athens. It also discusses the early triumph of democracy in both nineteenth-century agrarian Norway, Switzerland and northeastern America and the failure in countries with a powerful landowning class.

Book in good condition!

Not going to review his theory...if you study democratic transitions you MUST read this book...several times...no excuses. Read it. Now.

Democracy and Redistribution has set a standard for empirical political economy research, posing a general, empirically tractable mathematical model of political transitions to democracy. This is most useful for economists and social scientists with a cursory introduction to game theory and a background in econometrics. Ambitious and trenchant. Regime choice is key. Boix expands on a classic thesis: increasing levels of economic equality determine transitions to democracy--but so does the mobility of capital. When inequality is low, elites will relinquish grip on authoritarian rule since the redistributive demands of working classes are lower than the costs of repression. Moreover, if capital is mobile, enfranchised working class actors are sufficiently constrained in their ability to tax elites. Under these conditions, democratic regimes are best responses for both elites and working classes. Using broad cross country regressions; historical anecdotes; and finer, intra-national variation in democratic transitions in the US and Switzerland, Boix presents a battery of empirical tests of his model. Of course, you cannot write an ambitious book without criticism. Some econometricians may not find the empirics entirely convincing. There is little attention paid to causation--a central concept in a model of regime transition. The meat of the empirical studies are done with broad cross-country regressions that tell an interesting story, albeit not as well identified as some may like. Endogeneity issues may exist. The concept of "asset specificity" --the mobility of capital--is often measured in share of agricultural production and human capital. While both may determine democratic transitions, they may do so for entirely different reasons than through the mobility of capital. Debates aside, Boix poses an interesting thesis that fits into last decade's political economy tradition. He offers a provocative model that attempts to explain regime choice by the distribution of assets and the state's ability to tax them--providing along the way a predictable game theoretic model of how strategic interaction between class actors produces democracy--or autocracy. Like the work of economists, Acemoglu and Robinson, this work makes the classic works

of historical comparativist scholars into a concise, testable theory. Whether Boix proves it is up to you, but the end result is an intellectually meaty piece of research nonetheless.

Boix seeks to explain the emergence of various political systems; particularly the transitions between democratic governments, right-wing authoritarian regimes, and left-wing dictatorships. However, Boix's use of triangulated research - the combination of quantitative and qualitative measures - provides a more accurate explanation of regime transition than Lipset's original work. Boix uses three main independent variables to explain political outcomes. First, Boix examines rates of inequality. He suggests that a nation with a more equitable distribution of assets is likely to see the emergence of a democratic regime. Boix writes, "A more unequal distribution of wealth increases the redistributive demands of the population and the ultimate level of taxes in a democratic system. As the potential level of transfers become larger, the authoritarian inclination of the wealthy increase and the probabilities of democratization and democratic survival decline" (37). Second, Boix examines the specificity of assets, that is, whether or not assets are expropriable to other countries. The author contends that the more liquid an asset, the more likely a democratic regime will emerge. Boix asserts that if the wealthy are able to expropriate their assets to other nations, these assets are less likely to be taxed heavily by the poor. As such, the upper classes will be more receptive to a democratic regime. On the other hand, assets that are nontransferable - such as oil wealth - are likely to be subject to heavy taxation by the poor if a democratic regime took hold. As such, it is in the best interest of the wealthy elite to repress the poor and protect their monopoly of assets. Lastly, Boix looks at the impact of political resources on regime transition. The costs and benefits of repression or revolt fluctuate between social classes under various circumstances. Boix argues that, holding inequality and specificity constant, the conflict between these oppositional groups, and their relative political strengths and weaknesses, lead to the emergence of specific regime types. He writes, "rich and poor assess both the income and benefits associated with each political regime and the costs of achieving their preferred solution" (44). For example, an authoritarian regime often operates in the interests of the ruling elite. So long as the costs of repressing the poor are less than the costs of granting universal suffrage, authoritarianism will continue. On the other hand, if a shift in the balance of power between classes occurs, transition becomes more likely. Boix argues that as the poor gain political resources, and overcome the problems of collective action, they are likely to put pressure on the upper classes (45). The cost of repression to the wealthy then becomes too high to justify continued authoritarianism and democracy emerges. If the poor believe that they have gained political power,

or that the cost of being repressed has become unbearable, revolt ensues, and a left-wing dictatorship takes over. Boix's combination of econometric techniques and qualitative analysis has reexamined the modernization and democratization debate and will prove a lasting contribution to the field.

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