

Critical Dialogue

Dictators and Democrats: Masses, Elites, and Regime Change.

By Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016. 424p. \$99.50 cloth, \$32.95 paper. doi:10.1017/S1537592718002761

— Michael Albertus, *University of Chicago*
— Victor Menaldo, *University of Washington*

The study of democracy is one of the most long-standing and venerable traditions within comparative politics. And it has never been more relevant: After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the ensuing wave of democratic transitions, the majority of the world's countries achieved democracy. Its march seemed unstoppable. Scholarship did not entirely keep pace. Notwithstanding several seminal contributions, such as Adam Przeworski et al.'s *Democracy and Development* (2000), there were few novel takes on democratic change.

To be sure, Carles Boix's *Democracy and Redistribution* (2003) and Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson's *Economic Origins of Democracy* (2005) were triumphant elucidations of the median voter model of distributive politics. Both formalized long-held intuitions about the role of inequality in driving and shaping democracy. Yet at the dawn of the twenty-first century, scholars turned to studying more vexing problems: ethnic conflict, civil war, and failed states.

No more, however. Recent years have seen an explosion of research on democratization. *Dictators and Democrats* is one of the most important new contributions. Focusing attention on democracy during and after the Third Wave, Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman gainsay the notion that democratization typically revolves around distributive conflict among classes. The authors argue that while about half of democratic transitions exhibit some elements of class conflict, many democratic transitions occur from above and have nothing to do with redistributionist threats. Some involve international actors that impose democracy, but most are determined by domestic political factors and tend to center on elite splits and bargains. Moreover, these latter cases are not a monotonic reflection of a country's degree of economic development or the distribution of assets and income. Their framework, therefore, harkens back to work by intellectual titans, such as Dankwart Rustow, Terry Karl, and Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter.

Part of the return to democratization studies stems from global events of the last decade. The Arab Spring revolutions forced observers around the world to bitterly recall that uprooting entrenched authoritarianism takes more than protests and a pent-up desire for change. Meanwhile, budding authoritarian rulers in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere began eagerly chipping away at democratic institutions, feeding off the discontent unleashed by the global financial crisis. Recep Erdogan has overrun civil liberties and pluralism to consolidate power in Turkey; Viktor Orban has done the same in Hungary; illiberal democracy has strengthened its grip over countries as diverse as Poland, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Venezuela and Russia have marched unflaggingly toward authoritarianism.

Then citizens across the developed world seemed to turn on the *liberal* part of liberal democracy: The Brexit vote in Britain in 2015 and the election of Donald Trump to the American presidency in 2016 were followed by the return of the Far Right to political relevance in Austria, the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy. Populism arrived with a vengeance. Ostensibly, "the forgotten men and women" who were victims of deindustrialization in the heartland finally found their voices, shrill with xenophobia and nationalism while eschewing "political correctness." Globalization in all its forms was blamed for threatening traditional ways of life and genuine patriotism.

On the back of this earthquake to the liberal international order, time-honored theories about voter preferences, the role of ideology and identity in electoral politics, and core beliefs about the coherence and integrity of political parties have been shaken. For academics who study democracy and have a normative commitment to its ideals, including individual liberty, a free media, and public policy dictated by reason and evidence, it has been a time of soul searching.

One of the fundamental and widely espoused premises about democracy is the idea that it is a great equalizer. Because democracy reflects the popular will, it allows otherwise marginalized groups to have a seat at the table and pursue their interests in a systematic manner. The rules of the game are structured to incentivize politicians to be responsive to the demands of average citizens and to contest power peacefully. Policy areas are constrained to a few bread-and-butter-issues that can be neatly arrayed

on a left–right spectrum, and predictable, if not banal, left-of-center and right-of-center parties stick to a preordained script.

A few intrepid scholars have begun to question some of these long-held beliefs about democracy, particularly as inequality has churned inexorably higher and polarization inexorably deeper. Haggard and Kaufman are among the most clear-eyed and perspicacious.

Dictators and Democrats goes a long way toward shattering a Pollyannaish view of democracy. It fundamentally challenges many dogmatic notions of where democracy comes from, what it is about, whom it serves, and what it achieves.

Haggard and Kaufman identify three main types of transitions from above: 1) elite displacement transitions, in which domestic rivals to incumbent elites push for regime liberalization; 2) preemptive transitions, in which incumbents themselves initiate a transition; and 3) institutional transitions, in which incumbents gradually introduce incremental changes that culminate in democratic transition. What these cases tend to have in common is that they reflect the “perceived opportunities” of democratization for elites, typically due to advantages they hold over the opposition, such that they can expect favorable political outcomes under democracy. On this score, our own work points in much the same direction.

To be sure, Haggard and Kaufman also recognize that democracy sometimes comes from below. They point to cases such as Argentina, South Africa, and South Korea. But even then they challenge conventional wisdom. Transitions driven by class conflict do not hinge on inequality and the desire by the masses for redistribution, but on political factors such as how authoritarian regimes co-opt or exclude social forces and the capacity of the masses to mobilize.

The consequences of this argument for democracy are profound. Democracies are, in several respects, no more likely than dictatorships or competitive authoritarian regimes to be stable, prosperous, or egalitarian. Poor countries are not necessarily destined to revert to dictatorship, and achieving a middling level of development is not necessarily, contra Przeworski et al.’s *Democracy and Development*, an inoculation against democratic breakdown. Moreover, democratic breakdowns are rarely the result of reactionary backlashes by wealthy landlords and industrialists against redistribution. Indeed, “populist reversions” are characterized by left-wing authoritarian governments that seize power in the wake of widespread dissatisfaction with the lack of redistribution. Venezuela under Hugo Chávez is an example.

Methodologically, the book pushes the frontier in showcasing a strategy for making sense of rare events, such as democratic transitions. It exploits the *entire universe* of transitions, submitting it to “structured causal process observation.” The authors created a data set of

78 democratic transitions and 25 reversions to autocracy from 1980 to 2008. They are therefore able to identify the key players that took part in each democratization and outline their interests, motives, and interactions. This monumental undertaking allows Haggard and Kaufman to carefully assess their “political” explanations against alternatives rooted in distributional and similar “structural” accounts.

Like any book as ambitious in topic and scope, this one is not without its faults or blind spots. For one—and this is by design—when it comes to fleshing out the mechanisms that explain the why and how of democratic transitions and breakdowns, Haggard and Kaufman create a data set in which they select their cases on the dependent variable. This, of course, creates problems for causal inference, in that it potentially introduces selection bias. There are no counterfactual cases where a democratic transition does not occur, and so it is hard to know if, in the presence of key variables, there may not have been a transition with the sequence of events they anticipate. For example, we do not hear about the cases where elite splits are present but no transitions follow. Cases such as Egypt, Iran, and Sudan come to mind. If we had access to these “placebo” data points, it might call into question whether these splits are the type of dispositive intervening variable privileged by Haggard and Kaufman.

This brings us to another weakness: The authors only look at Third Wave transitions. They choose this scope because, besides being enmeshed in different economic contexts and geopolitical dynamics, they argue that the political actors involved during them were qualitatively different from those who struggled either to bring democracy about or to prevent it in the iconic historical cases. We are not entirely convinced on this point, but in any case, readers may be disappointed that the approach fails to capture a rich source of time-series variation within countries, especially those that experienced multiple transitions before 1980. This includes canonical cases such as France, Argentina, Peru, Turkey, Thailand, and Pakistan. By the same token, the book fails to document gradual transition paths over time that begin much earlier than 1980, such as Sweden or, arguably, Mexico.

Finally, *Dictators and Democrats* leans too heavily, perhaps, on a typology of democratic transitions in which different types of transitions have their own players, logic, and end points. The first type reflects splits within elites that catch incumbents by surprise. The second encompasses scenarios in which crafty elites initiate a transition on their own terms. The third entails incumbents gradually, but inexorably, yielding power, paving the way for democracy. The fourth are transitions from below that catch everybody off guard, including the revolutionaries themselves.

While the book gets a lot of traction out of this scheme, the trade-offs involved with typologizing

democratic transitions are not trivial. The typologies seem to collapse the effect with its cause. And it is only possible to categorize each transition *ex post*, instead of *ex ante*. This seems to rule out the elegance of a unified and more deductive framework.

Of course, Haggard and Kaufman's more inductive account may have the benefit of being the correct one, even at the expense of parsimony. Indeed, this is the book's finest accomplishment. It is a much-needed dose of realism, messiness, and honesty.

It is courageous in that it follows the evidence to its logical conclusion, even if doing so cuts democracy down to size. Deep down, proponents of liberalism and justice want to believe that democracy can cure many of the world's ills: instability, inequality, poverty, famine, and the weakness of citizens against the rich and powerful. *Dictators and Democrats* helps alert us to the fact that our faith might be misplaced.

Response to Michael Albertus and Victor Menaldo's review of *Dictators and Democrats: Masses, Elites, and Regime Change*

doi:10.1017/S1537592718003213

— Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman

Michael Albertus and Victor Menaldo raise three important criticisms of *Dictators and Democrats*. All are well taken, but they also reflect contested terrain about how best to study regime change and rare political events more generally. The jury is far from out on these core theoretical and methodological issues.

The first criticism concerns our focus on Third Wave transitions, a criticism that we explicitly address in the book (pp. 7–10). Studies of democratization over a *longue durée* are based on the assumption that omitting the early European transitions introduces bias. Although Albertus and Menaldo are not as insistent on the need for a longer time frame, they similarly suggest that we forgo “a rich series of time-series variation within countries.”

Yet studies that “go long” face their own challenges. As the time frame becomes longer, the problem of panel heterogeneity also increases, including with respect to the outcome of democracy itself. Earlier transitions, for example, were often marked by incremental and partial franchise extensions; contemporary ones typically move toward universal enfranchisement rather quickly. Do we believe that these very different democratizations are driven by similar processes, in social, economic, and international settings that also vary widely? We are both skeptical of the heroic efforts to control for these sources of heterogeneity, and less concerned about the loss of generality. Getting our heads around transitions during the postwar period or Third Wave poses plenty of challenges as it is and has the advantage of practical relevance.

A second criticism concerns our gamble on “a typology of democratic transitions in which different types of transitions have their own players, logic, and end points.” Albertus and Menaldo make reference to some finer-grained distinctions we draw between types of elite-led transitions, but our basic conceptual distinction is in fact quite similar to theirs, and is motivated by a particular theoretical target: class-conflict models in which inequality and mass mobilization are expected to play a role. The basic players in these transitions—elites and masses—are in fact the same, although with varying organizational and institutional capabilities. And it is important to emphasize that the end points are not different either. In coding both elite- and mass-driven transitions, we rely entirely on two extant data sets' coding of when transitions occur and assume equifinality.

We also find, as do Albertus and Menaldo, that different transition paths can affect the quality of democracy, although these differences decay over time. This conclusion is similar to their claim that democracies emerging from elite-biased transitions are less redistributive than their popularly-based counterparts, but contain the potential for more progressive reforms over time.

Finally, Albertus and Menaldo express a concern with selection on the dependent variable, namely, the well-known criticism that it “creates problems for causal inference, in that it potentially introduces selection bias.” We would note that our book takes a multimethod approach, with standard panel designs complementing our large-n qualitative analysis. But we are also convinced that our qualitative focus on successful transitions—the dependent variable—is in fact appropriate, as most other contemporary analyses of qualitative designs have also concluded (for example Gary Goertz, *Multimethod Research, Causal Mechanisms and Case Studies: An Integrated Approach*, 2017). Frequentist approaches favored by Albertus and Menaldo can identify the average treatment effect of a chosen causal variable, but do less well in identifying the cases that conform—and do not conform—with the specified causal mechanisms. Our mixed-method design allows us to ask not only whether the causal factor in question has a generalized effect, but also whether it operates as stipulated in the cases the model purportedly predicts.

Authoritarianism and the Elite Origins of Democracy. By Michael Albertus and Victor Menaldo. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 312p. \$77.01 cloth, \$29.99 paper.
doi:10.1017/S1537592718003225

— Stephan Haggard, *University of California–San Diego*
— Robert R. Kaufman, *Rutgers University*

Theoretical and empirical work on the origins of democracy has long debated two issues: the relative

importance of elites and masses and the impact of underlying socioeconomic forces in the transition process. This significant new book by Michael Albertus and Victor Menaldo unpacks the role of both political and economic elites in democratic transitions. The fundamental theoretical puzzle the book poses is why democracies so often prove to be much less redistributive than they are expected to be. In addressing the puzzle, the authors offer a coherent political economy framework that specifies the conditions in which we can expect either “elite-biased” or “popular” transitions.

The central framing point is that both authoritarian rulers and their allies within the economic elite might see it in their interest to support a transition to democracy, but only when they can impose *de jure* rules that assure their property rights and wider interests. This in turn is more likely under two conditions: when incumbent elites are motivated by threats posed from rival economic elites capable of coordinating with mass popular interests; and when they can rely on authoritarian legislatures and relatively strong states to ensure credible and sustainable commitments between alliance partners. Truly “popular” democracies emerge in the face of shocks, when the absence of co-opting legislatures and the weakness of the state impede elite coordination and offer an opening to rival political coalitions.

The authors go on to show that the distinction between elite-biased and popular democracies makes a difference. The principal indicator of an elite democracy is whether the fundamental rules of the game—constitutions—are initially written under the auspices of the outgoing authoritarian regime or *de novo* by democratic groups that replace them. The authors provide a very useful catalog of the variety of ways that constitutions lock in *de jure* protections for the outgoing elites through majority-constraining checks and balances, protection of property rights, amnesty for outgoing officials, and super-majority requirements that make constitutions difficult to change. On the basis of the distinction between the origins of the constitutions, and using V-Dem data dating back to the early nineteenth century, Albertus and Menaldo provide statistical evidence that elite-biased regimes have a smaller range of consultation, more restrictive suffrage, are less egalitarian across social groups, and more unequal in the distribution of resources. With economic data available since the 1970s, they also show that elite-biased democracies have smaller states, lower levels of social spending, and less exchange-rate flexibility. They are also less likely to prosecute outgoing dictators.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the authors show that although the constitutional rules imposed by elite-biased democracies are difficult to change, not only are these regimes better than the authoritarian alternative, but they also have the potential to become more popular over time. This becomes much more likely with

generational change, as outgoing elites are replaced by actors with weaker stakes in the old order, and as economic changes and new organizational resources increase the capacity of reformist challengers.

The book adds value in a number of ways, not only by theorizing the heterogeneity of causal processes leading to democracy, but also by developing a more nuanced model of how elite interests work. Rather than assuming a unified political-economic elite, as is the case with much of the formal and sociological literature, the authors ground the logic of transitions in more complex dynamics in which the interests of authoritarian political elites and contending economic interests are by no means tightly aligned (see also Dan Slater, Benjamin Smith, and Gautam Nair, “Economic Origins of Democratic Breakdown? The Redistributive Model and the Postcolonial State,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 12(2), 2004).

One question about this analysis concerns the incidence of cases falling into different transition paths and the findings with respect to post-transition dynamics. Although the book is largely framed in terms of the puzzle of elite-led transitions, the incidence of these cases is somewhat less than the framing might suggest. As their highly original data show (Figures 3.1 and 3.2, pp. 76 and 79), only a minority of democracies—about 25% at the current juncture—operate with autocratic constitutions. Moreover, although coded as a binary variable, these constitutions differ in the balance of power at the time of the transition, and not all can be considered equally constrained by the authoritarian past. As Chapter 5 shows in some detail—and as we found in *Dictators and Democrats* (2016)—transitional bargains may generate path dependence, but with some noticeable decay. Post-transition dynamics typically prove as important for long-run democratic equilibria as the transitions that structure both the Albertus and Menaldo book and our work on the topic.

An important conclusion follows with respect to the balance of theoretical and substantive focus: that “popular transitions” and post-transition processes in all systems are more significant than Albertus and Menaldo’s framing suggests. The book sees popular transitions arising from “revolutions,” a somewhat unfortunate choice of terms in our view. In fact, few democratic transitions arise from revolutions or insurgencies as typically conceived, but rather from mass mobilizations, often relatively peaceful. The driving factors in the authors’ popular transition model are the well-known role of economic shocks—a contingent and short-run rather than structural economic factor—and the absence of co-opting and coordinating institutions.

The Swedish case study is instructive in showing how long-run post-transition causal processes are important for understanding the shape that democracy ultimately takes in equilibrium. As the authors acknowledge, by

their own measure Sweden did not become a “popular” democracy until the constitutional reforms of 1974, decades *after* the basic features of the egalitarian welfare system had been put into place. It is true that these achievements were facilitated by earlier institutional reforms, but again as the authors acknowledge, the main factor was a change in the political balance of power that came with the formation of the red—green alliance in the 1930s and the institutionalization of a wage-setting formula after World War II. Moreover, although the 1974 Constitution did eliminate some of the “elite overhang,” in the Swedish system, it is also true that many of the egalitarian reforms that followed had to be modified significantly in the other direction following the severe recession of the early 1990s.

With respect to transitional processes, the authors place much weight on the role of constitutions; and the research and tabular material on constitutional design is one of the important contributions of the book. But, as noted, constitutions are clearly endogenous to the balance of power, not only at the time of the transition but going forward as well. In the authors’ extended analysis of Chile, it is telling that efforts to reign in military authority tended to come only after the death or retirement of cohorts associated with the old dictatorship. Constitutional protections were undoubtedly important in the establishment of a political equilibrium favoring the old elites, but they were clearly undergirded by the power resources of the elites themselves and tended to diminish in importance only as these resources declined. More generally, the emphasis on *de jure* power tends to understate the importance of lingering *de facto* threats; economic corruption and military threats continue to loom large in many African and Latin American democracies.

Finally, it is worth considering in more detail the nature of the constitutional and political bargains that undergird both elite and popular transitions. The book makes an important contribution by noting the significance of popular transitions for redistribution (although this point is still contested). Yet it may underestimate the extent to which all transitions—both elite and popular—involve difficult trade-offs between the interests of elites and mass publics. Important distinctions need to be drawn between popular transitions that strike reasonable balances in this regard and those that drive off the rails. The book rightly critiques the work of Thomas Piketty for concluding that growing inequality is built into the dynamics of capitalist systems; Piketty’s own data show significant differences between levels of inequality in European welfare states and the United States. But it is also the case that majority-constraining checks may provide mechanisms that are essential for both economic and political stability. This lesson is seen in the predictable economic difficulties that followed the radical redistributive initiatives of Latin American popular governments in the 1980s and early 2000s.

In sum, this is an impressive work that adds theoretical value in a tightly structured model that differentiates more sharply between and among political and economic elite interests; it thus deepens the sophistication of the current socioeconomic turn in the study of democracy. It also adds particular value in understanding the role of constitutions and in providing new evidence of their effects. This latter point is particularly significant in pushing the theory and analysis of democratic transitions forward. Put most simply, in what ways do democratic transitions ultimately matter?

Response to Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman’s review of *Authoritarianism and the Elite Origins of Democracy*

doi:10.1017/S1537592718003237

— Michael Albertus and Victor Menaldo

Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman end their review with a clearly formulated and weighty question: In what ways do democratic transitions ultimately matter? At its heart, *Authoritarianism and the Elite Origins of Democracy* makes the claim that not all democratic transitions are the same. Most fundamentally, some dictatorships transition into elite-biased democracies, those in which political and economic elites from the outgoing authoritarian regime coordinated to impose a constitutional framework for democratic change that benefits them. Others are popular democracies, those that arise when external circumstances catch incumbent authoritarian elites off guard, and, under duress, they concede institutional control and rulemaking to a coalition of outsider economic elites—those elites who are shut out of power and influence under authoritarianism—and the masses. This distinction has critical consequences for polities’ basic architecture, citizen rights, the nature and inclusivity of representation, the size of government, social justice, and egalitarianism.

As Haggard and Kaufman point out, only a minority of democracies today—just under 30%—operate with constitutions penned by a former authoritarian regime. However, this masks a key point that underscores the importance of distinguishing elite-biased democracies: over the last two centuries, authoritarian constitutions guided almost two-thirds of democratic transitions. This single variable, of course, cannot capture all the salient variation in the balance of power between outgoing authoritarians and the opposition during a transition. Moreover, not all new democracies are equally constrained by their authoritarian past. Furthermore, a host of countries, such as Canada and India, gained independence as democracies and, therefore, are not strictly elite biased in our framework—despite having antidemocratic colonial legacies that we discuss in Chapter 8.

What explains why and when elite-biased democracies shift to become more popular in nature? We agree with *Dictators and Democrats* that bargains forged between outgoing authoritarians and the opposition create path dependence. Outgoing authoritarians rely on this hysteresis to safeguard their rights and interests under elected government. However, we also argue that this dependence can decay (see Chapters 5, 6, and 7). Exogenous shocks, in the form of economic crises, trade shocks, or wars, can overturn elite biases written into a democracy's social contract. This tends to occur within predictable windows: Constitutions often impose a half-life on the political privileges and immunities enjoyed by the former authoritarian old guard that mirrors their own mortality and fear of persecution and revenge.

We also concede that constitutions are endogenous—to a degree—to the balance of power. However, as we show empirically in Chapters 4 and 5, this is not entirely so. Even after controlling for typical measures of balance of power during transitions, democracies that inherit elite-biased constitutions are systematically different from “popular” democracies. This is because constitutions reflect not only the political and economic power of their authors, but also the ability of elites to coordinate with one another on their preferred political outcomes. Moreover,

once penned, constitutions are sticky for the many reasons we outline in Chapter 3—shaping future political dynamics and outcomes, rather than simply reflecting contemporaneous preferences.

Dictators and Democrats, as well as our own book, should disrupt the conversation on the causes and consequences of democratization. While scholars should continue to theorize and operationalize the importance of elites versus the masses in democratic change, they should no longer debate whether it makes sense to conceive of elites per se as a unified actor. Furthermore, they should not be blind to systematic evidence that the authoritarian past continues to matter long after democratization. Indeed, while scholars should continue to examine fine gradations of democratic practice, representation, inclusiveness, and egalitarianism, they should also consider turning to both *Dictators and Democrats* and *Authoritarianism and the Elite Origins of Democracy* to aid in understanding the reasons behind the growing trend in democratic erosion.

Scholars will—and rightly should—continue to debate the role of elites and the masses in democratization as well as underlying socioeconomic factors. We hope that when they do so, they consider the new facts being unearthed rapidly in this growing literature.