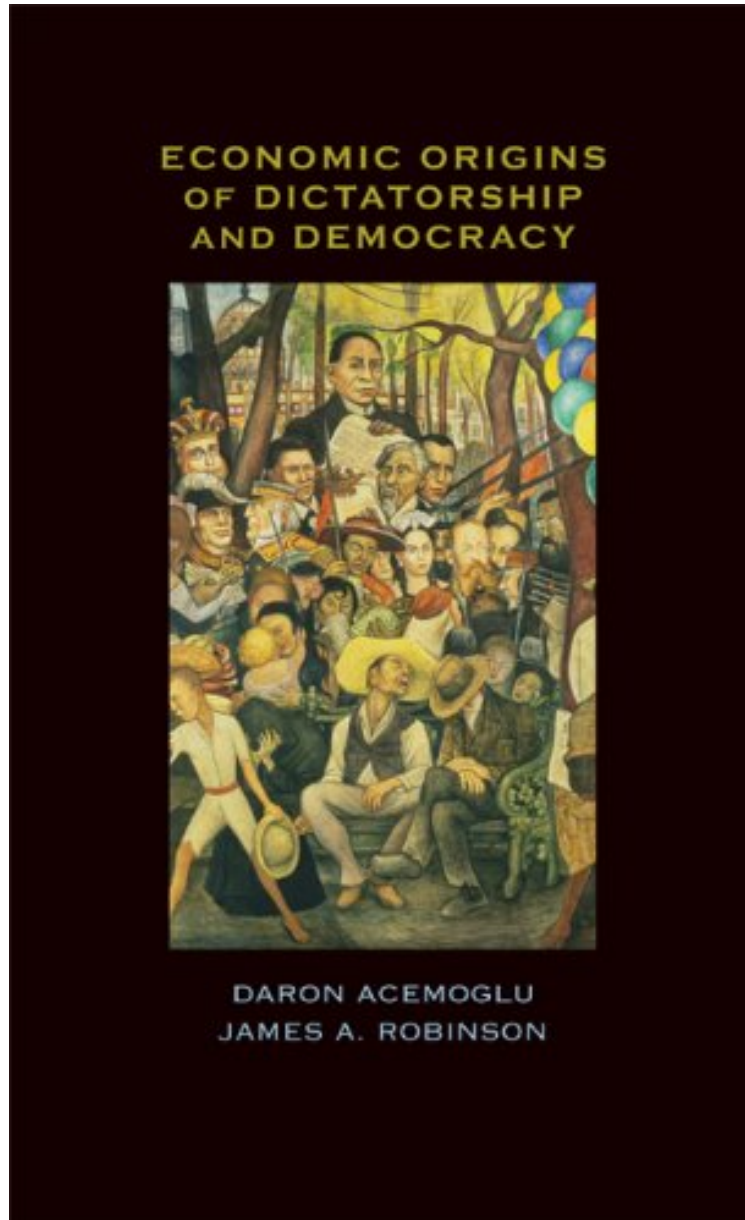


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Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy

James A. Robinson, Daron Acemoglu
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analysis of the institutional development. I have read many other texts on the subject of institutional evolution by people like Avner Greif, Peyton Young, Samuel Bowles and Elinor Ostrom - this book gives quite a lot new on the subject and is very well written and even if mathematical it is not too complicated. The Kindle version of the book is however horrible. The mathematical formulas as such are mostly ok, but when the text refers to the symbols used in the formulas the symbols are to big extent (25% ?) wrong. must draw back the Kindle version. I have read several (15) Kindle books already - also books which use mathematical formulas extensively. Like Bowles and Gintis book "Cooperative Species" - A Cooperative Species: Human Reciprocity and Its Evolution. In general I have been very happy with Kindle and reading experience - specifically I have been pretty happy with how the mathematical formulas are reproduced in the Kindle books (e.g. the book by Bowles and Gintis). IT books also show e.g. the XML documents OK. The question really arises has anybody read this Kindle version of the book before this has been published. 14 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Solid Exposition of Half the Story By Herbert Gintis Acemoglu and Robinson present a clear, straightforward and compelling explanation of the conditions under which political democracy emerges from dictatorship. The strength of their analysis, as they repeated tell us, flows from their use of that key tool on the economist's workbench, the so-called rational actor model (p. 19). "We stress individual economic incentives as determining political attitudes, and we assume people behave strategically in the sense of game theory." (p. xii) There is also a clear-cut class analysis, although by contrast with Karl Marx, the classes are defined mainly by their relationship to state power rather than the means of production (although that matters as well, as we shall see). "We emphasize the fundamental importance of conflict," they assert. "Different groups, sometimes social classes, have opposing interests over political outcomes and these translate into opposing interests over the form of political institutions which determine the political outcomes." (p. xii). The main social groupings in the non-democratic society, according to Acemoglu and Robinson, are the elite that controls the state and the citizens, who are blocked from exercising political power. "Nondemocracy is rule by the elite; democracy is rule by the more numerous groups who constitute the majority... In nondemocracy, the elite get the policies it wants; in democracy, the citizens have more power to get what they want." (p. xii) The authors claim that there is a single dynamic leading from nondemocracy to democracy: "We argue that this only occurs because the disenfranchised citizens can threaten the elite and force it to make concessions.... In the limit, a revolution... repression is often sufficiently costly that it is not an attractive option for elites." (p. xii) Acemoglu and Robinson elaborate by noting that simply making non-structural concessions to the enraged masses might not be sufficient to head off revolt, because the concessions can be revoked once the collective action spirit dissipates. The concession of political democracy, by contrast, creates a long-term alternative set of rules of the game in which the previously omnipotent elites no longer have the power to get their way. There is one additional conceptual tool on Acemoglu and Robinson's workbench, that of social class. First, the authors assert that state repression does not hurt landlords much but it is very harmful to capitalists because the latter benefit from freedom of movement, speech, and consensual labor relations, whereas traditional landlords never really get beyond the stage of medieval social relations (p. 288). Hence industrial capitalism has an elective affinity with democracy that is completely absent from earlier economic formations based on agriculture. Second, Acemoglu and Robinson argue that the elites are more likely to accede to democracy when there is a strong middle class (entrepreneurs, academics, professionals), because the latter will not allow so much power to pass to the unwashed masses as to seriously threaten the wealth and influence of the elites (p. 255, 258). Acemoglu and Robinson's argument is so powerful that one might be forgiven for overlooking its weak points. But it does have some significant weak points. First, it assumes that there is a monolithic elite and a potentially monolithic citizenry. Neither of these is in general correct. For instance, often there will be conflicts among the elites, one side drawing on support from the lower classes to defeat the other. This was the case in Great Britain in the passage to democracy. Second, and more important, I think it is just false that political democracy is compromise in which the elite gives up hegemonic power and the citizenry gives up the vision of revolution and complete mass hegemony. As Samuel Bowles and I argued in *Capitalism and Democracy* (Basic Books, 1985), large-scale collective actions have virtually always had the goal of social emancipation, in which the common man and woman are endowed with the blessings of liberty and in which democratic institutions are desired not only because they lead to an alteration in the distribution of wealth, but also because political democracy is desirable in its own right, given the nature of our species as, to use Aristotle's term, *zoon politicon*. Third, Acemoglu and Robinson incompletely address the question as to why the dominant movement in the past two centuries has been from nondemocracy to democracy. Their recognition that capitalism and middle classes are relatively favorable to democracy explains part of this movement. But I think another crucial element is the emergence of modern warfare based on infantry with small arms weapons. Elite control of the state goes along with small armies of elite and/or mercenary mounted warriors with a heavy capital cost per man, whereas enlisting the common man to participate in national armies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries required ceding the suffrage to the masses. Acemoglu and Robinson do not appear to realize that their commitment to the rational actor model does not oblige them to model all social behavior as self-interested, and all political goals as materialistic. There are whole dimensions of social and moral history absent from their account because they do not accept that the fight for dignity and freedom is just as central to collective action as the fight for shoes, a coat, and a job. Nor can they possibly understand why collective

action even takes place unless they admit that people fight and die for ideals, and for comforts that will only be enjoyed by those who come after them. There is another volume to be added in explain the emergence of democracy--- not a volume hostile to Acemoglu and Robinson's effort, but rather fleshing out the moral and emancipatory thrust of modern collective action.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Political OpinionBy Thabiso NThe book offers a well researched account of the linkages between the conduct of various leaders, and prevailing economic imperatives. It reinforces the well understood notion of the relationship between politics and economics, mainly as a means to obtain access to limited resources. The evidence is of the indeed linkage compelling, regardless with geographical location, race and creed. A worthwhile read for students of contemporary politics.

This book develops a framework for analyzing the creation and consolidation of democracy. Different social groups prefer different political institutions because of the way they allocate political power and resources. Thus democracy is preferred by the majority of citizens, but opposed by elites. Dictatorship nevertheless is not stable when citizens can threaten social disorder and revolution. In response, when the costs of repression are sufficiently high and promises of concessions are not credible, elites may be forced to create democracy. By democratizing, elites credibly transfer political power to the citizens, ensuring social stability. Democracy consolidates when elites do not have strong incentive to overthrow it. These processes depend on (1) the strength of civil society, (2) the structure of political institutions, (3) the nature of political and economic crises, (4) the level of economic inequality, (5) the structure of the economy, and (6) the form and extent of globalization.

"This path-breaking book is among the most ambitious, innovative, sweeping, and rigorous scholarly efforts in comparative political economy and political development. It offers a broad, substantial new account of the creation and consolidation of democracy. Why is the franchise extended? How do elites make reform believable and avoid expropriation? Why do revolutions nevertheless occur? Why do new democracies sometimes collapse into coups and repression? When is repression abandoned? Backed by a unified analytic model, historical insight, and extensive statistical analysis, the authors' case is compelling." - James E. Alt, Frank G. Thomson Professor of Government, Harvard University

"This tour de force combines brilliant theoretical imagination and historical breadth to shine new light on issues that have long been central in social science. The book cannot be ignored by anybody wanting to link political and economic development. Its range is truly impressive. The same logical framework offers plausible predictions about revolution, repression, democratization, and coups. The book refreshingly includes as much Latin American experience as European experience, and as much Asian as North American. The authors offer new intellectual life to economics, political science, sociology, and history. Game theory gains a wider audience by being repeatedly applied to major historical issues for which commitment is indeed a key mechanism. Economists and political scientists gain more common ground on their political economy frontier." - Peter Lindert, University of California, Davis

"Sociologists are given a new template about class interactions in the political sphere, one that suggests both new tests and new ideas. And comparative historians, while fleeing from active involvement in game theory, have a new set of conjectures to support or be provoked by." "Acemoglu and Robinson have developed a coherent and flexible analytical framework that brings together many aspects of the comparative political economy of democratization and democratic consolidation. Beyond being an excellent work of synthesis, this framework also leads to insights that will pave the way for further theoretical and empirical investigation. The combination of theory and historical application make this a first-rate book for teaching, as well as a major research contribution." - Thomas Romer, Princeton University

"This book is an immense achievement. Acemoglu and Robinson at once extend the frontiers of both economics and political science; they provide a new way of understanding why some countries are rich and some are poor; and they reinterpret the last 500 years of history." - Barry Weingast, Stanford University

"A vast body of research in social science on the development of democracy offers detailed accounts of specific country events but few general lessons. Acemoglu and Robinson breathe new life into this field. Relying on a sequence of formal but parsimonious game-theoretic models and on penetrating historical analysis, they provide a common understanding of the diverse country histories observed during the last two centuries" - Torsten Persson, Director Institute for International Economics Studies, Stockholm University

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"Acemoglu and Robinson have dared to set themselves up as targets. It is unlikely that the naysayers and nitpickers will be able to desist. Nor should they. And if the authors' effort survives the pounding---as well it might---it will be a triumph not just for Acemoglu and Robinson but for economics and its methods." - Arvind Subramanian, International Monetary Fund Journal

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"In this superb volume, Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson seek to answer age-old questions in political economy: What factors, particularly economic factors,

explain why some countries pass from dictatorship to democracy? What determines whether such transitions will be consolidated or whether a country will revert to rule by a small elite? Their answers, and the manner in which these were obtained, are refreshingly new." - Romain Warciarg, Science "...there is much [here] to admire. True to their title, Messrs Acemoglu and Robinson offer a unified theory of both democracy and its opposite. According to two scholars cited in this book, even to look for a general theory of democratic reform requires great temerity. Happily, Messrs Acemoglu and Robinson have temerity in spades." - The Economist "The book will be widely used in undergraduate and graduate courses in political economy. [It] will be appreciated by economists who are not satisfied with an argument until it reaches its apotheosis as a set of mathematical equations. 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