

up with as many others as are needed to claim the “spoils” while minimizing sharing. The nature of spoils, in this book’s view, is very straightforward.

Say we want “to confront the party noir,” as the author calls on us to do (p. 12). Here, the book distinguishes “elite” from “grassroots” reform. Repeated financial crises toward the end of the nineteenth century engendered two responses to the problem of “monopoly” (in politics and economy alike). One was the upper-class mugwump tradition, which found its way into political science and Progressive reform more broadly (pp. 155–61). Another was that typified by Typographical Union No. 6, which the *Tribune* later co-opted amidst the Panic of 1893 (pp. 149–50).

Elite reform proved compatible with interests in both parties; otherwise, they would not have let such cost cutting

go forward (cf., Steven Erie, *Rainbow’s End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics*, 1988). Grassroots reform has yet to get its shot, at least in the United States: “Truly, any problem in democracy that party helps to create will require party to resolve” (p. 12).

Overall, *Electoral Capitalism* gives a painstakingly researched view of New York City’s early machine politics. That view includes an extensive analysis of the lesser-understood Republican organization, its ties to the national-level party system, and how its interaction with Tammany shaped both parties’ strategies and agendas. The book also skillfully sets the stage for a nuanced understanding of the Progressive Era. Generalizability aside, the book’s main weakness is that one must read it closely. For specialists in parties or democracy, however, the theory-level challenge is profound.

COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Crises of Democracy. By Adam Przeworski. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 250p. \$24.99 cloth.
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In this exquisitely timed book by one of the leading political scientists of our era, Adam Przeworski addresses the problem of how to explain the global decline of democracy in the early twenty-first century. His analysis builds on themes he has explored over the course of his long and illustrious academic career: the tension between the power-maximizing tendencies of politicians and democratic expectations that they “take turns” at rule through electoral processes; the need to understand both the long-term structural factors underlying democratic consolidation and the more proximate institutional and situational causes of political decision making in democratic countries; and the limits to social science prediction in a world where unprecedented changes in global and social contexts can never be entirely ruled out. Methodologically, the book deploys an eclectic mix of statistical analysis, formal theory, and case studies (or “stories,” as the author prefers to call them), including Weimar Germany, Salvador Allende’s Chile, the French Fourth Republic, and the United States during Watergate. The result is a compact study that is beautifully written, intellectually engaging, and consistently thought provoking.

Przeworski’s findings about the main factors underlying democracy’s survival or failure, although too subtle and complex to be distilled completely within a short review such as this, can nonetheless be roughly summarized as follows. On the positive side, the author argues that

democracies tend to endure when they have already survived several transfers of power through the ballot box. Consolidated democracies also tend to survive when they are fairly wealthy; Przeworski’s earlier work with Fernando Limongi (“Modernization: Theories and Facts,” *World Politics*, 49, 1997), which found that “no democracy...with per capita GDP higher than that of Argentina in 1975 has ever collapsed” suddenly, still stands—with the sole exception of the 2006 coup in Thailand, which took place at only a slightly higher level of per capita wealth (p. 33). Strong political parties for channeling social interests into democratic institutions are correlated with democratic longevity as well. On the negative side, high levels of economic and social inequality, intense political polarization in which the stakes of political competition seem especially high, and the emergence of large-scale street violence and social unrest are all warning signs. Thus, in the contemporary era, which has been marked by both a serious global decline in the efficacy of established political parties and by increasingly unbridgeable partisan divisions in many long-standing democracies, fears of systemic democratic decline are unfortunately very well founded.

Even more worryingly, Przeworski argues, there are increasing indications that even when democracy does not formally collapse, it can be effectively eroded more gradually through a series of formally legal and constitutional measures that imperceptibly change the nature of the regime over time—an argument also recently put forth by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (*How Democracies Die*, 2018). Formal game-theoretic analysis (Zhaotian Luo and Adam Przeworski, “Democracy and Its Vulnerabilities: Dynamics of Democratic Backsliding,” 2019) suggests that democratic opposition forces can only mobilize successfully against such “subversion by stealth” when they correctly foresee from the outset the ultimate

authoritarian consequences of early antidemocratic backsliding—a condition unlikely to be met in reality, given the uncertainties of politics and the short attention spans of most citizens (p. 185). Since this form of gradual democratic erosion, unlike sudden coups or antidemocratic revolutions, can unfold even in comparatively wealthy, established democracies like the United States, the future of global democracy today is very much in doubt.

Given Przeworski's refreshing modesty about his (or anyone else's) ability to predict the long-term political future, and his appropriate caveats about the difficulty in distinguishing causal variables from mere correlations in the historical data, it may be churlish to criticize his overarching conclusions. Nevertheless, I will point to two theoretical lacunae in *Crises of Democracy*, greater attention to which would have further refined its analysis: (1) the absence of any sustained discussion of the entanglement of patriarchy, slavery, and imperialism in the origins of Western democracies and (2) the unwillingness of the author to consider that politicians might sometimes be motivated by goals other than simple power maximization.

The first of these gaps is particularly striking in an era when massive Black Lives Matter protests have erupted in democracies around the world. Put simply, are representative democracies that systematically exclude women, racial minorities, and the colonized from electoral politics really worthy of the label “democracy”—even by a “minimalist” standard? Przeworski defines democracy as “a political arrangement in which people select governments through elections and have a reasonable possibility of removing incumbent governments they do not like” (p. 5). Yet, although all democratic states necessarily exclude some people from the ballot box—young children, for example—surely there is a conceptual limit to such restrictions before the definition of electoral democracy is stretched too far. Once we ask the question of just how many and which “people” must be included for a regime to be defined as a democracy, however, the historical databases on which Przeworski's statistical analyses rely must appear problematic. Was the United States, for example, really a democracy before women's suffrage was granted in 1920? Before African Americans were given more reliable access to the ballot box in 1965? Przeworski does note that the US system of representative government was designed explicitly to curb the power of the poor (p. 199), but surprisingly, he never mentions American slavery directly. Elsewhere, the author lists “civil disobedience” and “blockages of roads and bridges” as examples of “breakdowns of public order” (p. 167) that may spiral in ways damaging to democratic stability. If one categorizes the United States as an authoritarian regime based on white racial supremacy through at least 1965, however, such forms of activism might appear not as warning signs for democracy's stability but instead as

profoundly prodemocratic mechanisms for ensuring that democratic elections are inclusive enough to be meaningful.

The second lacuna relates directly to the first. Repeatedly, Przeworski claims that “the dream of all politicians is to conquer power and to hold on to it forever” (p. 19; see also the formulation on p. 172). It is not entirely clear whether the author means this statement to be theoretically axiomatic or instead to be an empirically valid description of the motivations of all politicians. A cursory glance at history shows that the latter view is clearly fallacious, as suggested by copious examples of voluntary political retirement such as George Washington, Nelson Mandela, Boris Yeltsin, and even Angela Merkel. Either way, Przeworski's stark insistence on this point exists in uneasy tension with his willingness elsewhere to admit that people in general are motivated by all sorts of things besides the simple maximization of power, including sincere belief in ideologies (p. 54), religious views (p. 145), and belief in the value of democracy itself (p. 184). Indeed, Przeworski even allows that “each society has a fringe of fanatics, people who act without considering the consequences” (p. 155). How then, exactly, are all of these diverse individual motivations in the populace systematically eliminated through the political process, in every country, to render a world of purely power-maximizing politicians? Perhaps Przeworski is relying here on an evolutionary argument of some sort—that anyone not ruthlessly power maximizing will always be eliminated quickly from political competition—but if so, this argument is never developed explicitly.

The other possibility, of course, is that Przeworski's axiom is wrong, and we should understand politicians as being quite like other people in their complex mix of motivations and goals. Of course, relaxing the assumption of power maximization would obviously make formal models more difficult to construct. Yet given Przeworski's methodological and analytic modesty throughout the rest of this book, his stubborn insistence on this particular point seems out of place. More importantly, allowing that some politicians might truly “dream” simply of living a life of public service, of strengthening and broadening democratic institutions, of mobilizing the disenfranchised so as to make democracy more “real”—or conversely, of destroying representative democracy because of a sincere belief in some supposedly “higher” ideological principle—would introduce new possible explanations for the global decline or resurrection of democracy in the twenty-first century. Indeed, if such “principled” motivations do turn out to have causal weight in explaining democracy's endurance or failure over time, Przeworski's repeated insistence that all politicians are single-minded power maximizers might inadvertently close off important new lines of scholarly inquiry.

Despite these criticisms, *Crises of Democracy* is a major contribution to the comparative politics literature—and a

must-read for political scientists and educated citizens concerned about the fate of democratic institutions in the contemporary era.

Political Leadership in Africa: Leaders and Development South of the Sahara. By Giovanni Carbone and Alessandro Pellegata. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 390p. \$99.99 cloth, \$34.99 paper.

Political Violence in Kenya: Land, Elections, and Claim-Making. By Kathleen Klaus. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 372p. \$120.00 cloth.

Rural Democracy: Elections and Development in Africa. By Robin Harding. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. 192p. \$155.00 cloth.
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The study of the politics of sub-Saharan Africa (henceforth “Africa”) has blossomed in the last few decades. Dramatic changes not only in the number of texts but also in their orientation have enriched our collective understanding of the political processes that shape economic and political change. The books reviewed here present a diverse set of approaches to some of the core questions around democracy and changes in economic welfare (“development” being the term used in these texts) on the continent. The three books are very different from each other, varying both in substance and method, another testament to the breadth and diversity of the subfield.

Robin Harding’s *Rural Democracy* is a breath of fresh air in the study of distributive politics on the continent. In an area dominated by theoretical frameworks that center ethnic politics and clientelism, Harding presents a thesis focused instead on the intersection of programmatic politics and political geography. This represents a much-needed “normalization” of African distributive politics: the policies that politicians choose matter, and the ways in which they matter are driven in part by political geography and political institutions. Scholars of distributive politics, economic development, and political economy will find Harding’s book a worthwhile and instructive read.

Harding makes two central claims. First, there is a meaningful and consistent divide between urban and rural voters in democratic sub-Saharan Africa. Rural voters are much more likely to support elected incumbents than their urban counterparts. Second, competitive democratic elections make incumbent politicians highly responsive to the interests of the rural electoral base. This has implications both for what incumbents do in office and how they behave on the campaign trail. Intriguingly, Harding argues that these incentives do not necessarily result in an urban–rural partisan divide between parties, but rather that

multiple parties focus most of their attention on courting the rural vote, largely ignoring urban voters.

The variety and breadth of evidence presented in the book are impressive, offering something for everyone, both in terms of the tools used and the balance between external and internal validity. The empirical techniques include broad but well-motivated cross-national descriptive analyses of Afrobarometer (chapter 3) and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) data (chapter 4), more narrow credible causal analyses of Ghanaian service delivery using unique and original data (chapter 5), and deep historical analyses of primary archival documents from Botswana (chapter 6). Through these chapters Harding tells a coherent story about the dynamic evolution of African democratic politics, in which incumbent politicians sought to court the rural base and rural voters responded with electoral support.

There are two areas in which the book may disappoint some readers. The first is that the text, in its totality, is somewhat less than the sum of its parts. The beauty of the work is that it makes a series of important and novel observations about the logic of democratic politics in modern Africa. But the author attempts to package this within a conventional “puzzle, theorize, test” structure that feels somewhat stretched. Neither the empirical puzzle (that rural voters in Africa are disproportionately pro-incumbent) nor the theoretical advance (that democratic elections provide incentives for politicians to show rural bias) can be meaningfully distinguished from the empirical evidence presented. This is no bad thing—in the end the book is primarily an empirical work advancing our understanding of the contours of competitive democracies in Africa. But the attempts to have its structure fit an academic norm feel somewhat unwieldy and disjointed.

The second mild disappointment with the book is that electoral systems appear to receive less attention than they perhaps merit. African polities use a variety of institutional arrangements for aggregating votes into political power. The logics of those arrangements should imply variation in the importance of rural interests in allocating power, yet Harding’s argument appears to be that the advent of competitive democracy uniformly replaced the urban core with the rural periphery as the priority for African politicians. One might anticipate that electoral systems would be a key moderating variable—serving to translate geography into power—and yet they seem to play little role in Harding’s analyses.

Kathleen Klaus’s *Political Violence in Kenya* is a very different book, and one that more comfortably hews to the conventional political science structure of “puzzle, theory, test.” The work seeks to explain a simple empirical observation: the extensive local variation in the presence of election violence, which is seemingly unexplained by conventional accounts. The book extends a growing body of work on election violence in Africa, much of which was