THE INSTITUTIONAL ROOTS OF DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING

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BOOK REVIEW

- How Democracies Die. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt.
TWO TROUBLING IDEAS

- Democracy is a fragile creation that can be undone by unscrupulous elites who use the institutions of democracy to slowly but surely undo it.

- Transitions to democracy are more likely to come about, not because elites have conceded defeat to popular forces but because they have figured out how to use institutions to entrench their political and economic power under democracy.
DISTRIBUTIVE CONFLICT MODEL?

- inverted U shape

- Elite-led:
  H&K: empirical, interelite
  A&M: game, the key actors are political elites who control the autocratic state, their economic allies, and outsider economic elites who pose the primary threat to incumbents.
WHAT DETERMINES WHETHER POPULAR OR ELITE MOBILIZATION DRIVES DEMOCRATIZATION?

- Economic performance and international factors
- the institutional structures in place under dictatorship
- A&M: authoritarian legislatures & an elite-biased democracy
- H&K: multiparty autocracies
- legislatures and parties in dictatorships do not always preserve regime stability.
Authoritarian institutions have a complementary twofold role:

1. Whether elites have the upper hand over the masses in driving the transition
2. Useful tools for the elite in cementing their position under a new democracy

constitutions
If the leaders of new democracies inherit such elite-biased institutions, why do they not try to overturn them?

While radical reform of the institutional rules under an elite-biased democracy is rare, it is more likely to happen after the previous autocratic leader has died and when the country experiences poor economic performance. A generational shift among elites accompanied by clear evidence that the status quo does not work seems key to institutional change. Yet even under these conditions, an effective way to protect elite interests may come in the form of political parties.
CAN DEMOCRACY DEFEND ITSELF?

- One of the easiest ways in which they can build support for institutional modifications is by claiming that such changes are designed to diminish the power of elites.
- how democracy’s institutions can be used against it.
- (1) the enablers
- (2) norms
- (3) the use of stealth
- democratic backsliding? perception of democracy.
CONCLUSION

- revisit the study of democratic transitions with a broader theoretical and empirical perspective.
- revisit questions related to the design of institutions.