

coalition determines how conflict dynamics transform state institutions.

Undermining rules occur when centralization of power is granted to a narrow, insulated counterinsurgent elite. Regardless of motivation, “the absence of countervailing political forces allows this counterinsurgent elite to craft and implement new rules corresponding to their narrow interests and thus distort state activities” (p. 9). In contrast, reinforcing rules emerge when “the perceived escalation of threat instead prompts state elites to draw together a broad-based coalition *to create the new rules* and a more expansive, deliberative process emerges wherein the interests of distinct and sometimes competing elites are represented” (p. 247, emphasis original).

Schwartz’s theory is supported by three detailed cases of undermining rules in distinct institutions across three fundamental policy arenas—taxation, public security, and the provision of basic goods and services—and from distinct civil conflicts in Guatemala and Nicaragua. Her work traces the evolution of customs fraud in Guatemala, extrajudicial killings by the Guatemalan police, and persistent land insecurity in Nicaragua.

Chapters 1 and 2 introduce readers to Schwartz’s overall theory of wartime institutional change. Chapter 3 offers concise summaries of the Guatemalan and Nicaraguan civil conflicts, providing readers unfamiliar with Central America’s contemporary history with the necessary contextual background. Chapters 4–6 present her three cases illustrating how undermining rules emerged. The Nicaraguan and Guatemalan conflicts are highly distinct, yet “despite these differences, the perceived escalation of insurgent threat in both cases had a similar effect: It centralizes decision-making authority in a narrow counterinsurgent elite empowered to introduce new rules and procedures to annihilate the rebel threat” (p. 88). But what happens to these undermining rules after the end of armed conflict? The second half of Schwartz’s book answers this crucial question. Chapter 7 details her theory of postwar continuation of undermining rules and Chapters 8–10 offer detailed accounts of her three cases.

While undermining rules begin in response to threats during wartime, they may persist long after the conclusion of conflict and, if broader elite coalitions benefit, undermining rules can become self-enforcing. For example, in Guatemala, the peace process facilitated the entrenchment of the dominant wartime political coalition leading to persistence of undermining rules in both the customs and security sectors, despite reforms in both. In terms of customs fraud, Schwartz shows how “the wartime distributional coalition upheld the undermining rules largely by adapting to new semi- and extra-state spaces—the political party channels and port concessions – created through tax and customs administration reforms” (p. 218). In comparison, the continuation of undermining rules in Guatemala’s security provision were a result of members of the counterinsurgent elite assuming

leadership positions within the security cabinet and National Civil Police (PNC).

The post-conflict era in Nicaragua saw the emergence of new elites and frequent political realignments. Schwartz traces the history of Nicaragua in the 1990s when international development organizations, U.S. government agencies, and technocrats from the National Opposition Union (known by Spanish acronym UNO) all were initially important in reforming the provisional titling procedures that emerged during the Contra War and contributed to rampant land tenure insecurity. However, the subsequent shifts in political alliances and return of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), with power increasingly centralized by President Daniel Ortega, resulted in chronic instability and thwarted the development of new rules to replace the undermining ones from the conflict era.

Schwartz’s work brings empirical rigor to exposing what she describes as “open secrets” in the region. In doing so, she makes a significant contribution to the literature on legacies of civil war and on institutional development. What appears to be “state weakness” is at times not a lack of capacity but rather a result of undermining institutional logics guiding state activities. Civil war does not simply undermine state capacity; rather, it can result in institutions that are quite capable yet wield their capacity for objectives in direct conflict with its stated missions.

In short, *Undermining the State from Within* is a masterful contribution to academic scholarship on legacies of civil war, with crucial implications for peacebuilding and democratic institutional development. It should be read by all academics and policymakers concerned with development in post-conflict settings, as well as scholars with diverse areas of focus. For instance, Schwartz’s case study of policing in Guatemala has important implications for scholars of contemporary violence and criminal politics in Latin America, while her examination of land insecurity in Nicaragua contributes to academic understanding of processes of dispossession and land insecurity.

Politicians’ Reading of Public Opinion and Its Biases. By Stefaan Walgrave, Karolin Soontjens, and Julie Sevenans. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022. 240p. \$85.00 cloth
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In a functioning representative democracy, citizens pressure politicians to act in accordance with public opinion. However, politicians need to be able to read public opinion correctly to serve as good delegates of the public will. In their new book, *Politicians’ Reading of Public Opinion and Its Biases*, Stefaan Walgrave, Karolin Soontjens, and Julie Sevenans argue that politicians are not good at reading public opinion, and that this undermines

democratic representation. The book makes an important contribution to the analysis of mass-elite interaction in modern democracy and specifically the bottom-up link of democratic representation. Existing research focuses on how citizens express their views and how politicians behave, but there is very little research about how politicians perceive citizens' signals. *Politicians' Reading of Public Opinion and Its Biases* addresses this neglected question with an elegant argument and an insightful analysis of Flanders (the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium) using rich and systematically aligned evidence from public opinion surveys as well as a survey and in-depth interviews with Flemish politicians.

The book suggests that politicians care a lot about public opinion, and that their actions follow public opinion. However, despite all their efforts to understand what the people want and their honest desire to act in accordance with the public will, politicians are responsible for a "drama of representation" because their judgments of what the people want are inaccurate. The book reports a survey asking participants to express their opinions about eight important policies, and goes on to show that Flemish politicians, in the aggregate, misjudge public support for these policies by 13 percentage points. Importantly, politicians consistently locate both the general electorate and their own voters further to the right than they really are. When adding up individual errors in estimating public opinion, politicians feature an average inaccuracy of 18 percentage points, and they incorrectly guess the direction of majority opinion (whether people are for or against the policy on average) 30% of the time.

The book reports considerable variation between politicians in their ability to estimate correctly, and then goes through great lengths to show very convincingly that this variation cannot easily be attributed to differences in politicians' characteristics. Specifically, the accuracy with which politicians make good or bad estimates does not depend on their political roles, their estimation ability, their expertise, their seniority, their level of engagement with public opinion, or their investment in their local constituency. By contrast, the direction of inaccurate estimations in the aggregate *can* be explained. First, the book draws on its surveys of citizens and politicians to show that politicians engage in wishful thinking by overestimating the level of public support for policies they like. And second, the book uses evidence from in-depth interviews with politicians to support its argument that the aggregate right-wing bias of public opinion estimates is a function of a right-wing bias of the information environment in Belgium.

Politicians' Reading of Public Opinion and Its Biases starts with a brief introduction that describes the research question, the research design, the evidence, and the structure of

the book. After that, Chapter 1 spells out the function of politicians' reading of public opinion in a general model of democratic representation. The following Part I of the book comprises four chapters that rely on the surveys and interviews with politicians to show how politicians read public opinion and how public opinion affects their behavior. Part II of the book analyzes the accuracy of politicians' perceptions based on data about politicians and surveys of public opinion in four additional chapters. Finally, the brief *conclusion* summarizes the argument, evaluates the generalizability of the Flemish case, and discusses the negative consequences of politicians' inability to correctly estimate public opinion for representative democracy.

The best books get us to think about what else we could do to study the questions they raise, and as a great book, *Politicians' Reading of Public Opinion and Its Biases* inspires lots of ideas like that. So, once the authors start working on a follow-up study (or the second edition), they (or others building on their many contributions) might want to consider the following suggestions. First, the book could make better use of the evidence generated by the in-depth interviews and connect it more extensively to different theoretical considerations about politicians' motives and behavior. For instance, the authors use the interview with FJ, a senior politician and former minister (pp. 29-31), to prove their general point about the ambivalence of politicians vis-à-vis public opinion. They show how FJ asserts initially that public opinion is irrelevant, only to claim a few minutes later with the same level of conviction that it is highly significant. This is consistent with the authors' expectation of finding ambivalence, and the authors make that point very convincingly, but what else can we learn? *Why* did the politician change his view during the interview? Was there something in the conversation that prompted it? Are there alternative explanations for this course of events during the interview?

Second, at the individual level, politicians' average accuracy scores deviate between 12 and 24 percentage points from the average of public opinion for different policies, and the overall average for all eight policies is 18 percentage points. There are some worryingly large deviations on the upper side of the distribution around that mean, but is it really such a terrible judgment when, say, 61% of people like a policy, and politicians think it is 79%? Relatedly, is it really a bad estimate when politicians misjudge the direction of public opinion (for or against a policy) 30% of the time? The authors address the problem of finding a reasonable benchmark for the quality of estimates, and it is a neat idea to compare the accuracy of politicians to the accuracy of citizens. However, this point would deserve a more extensive discussion (including an appraisal of research about expert judgments, which

a sizable literature finds to be worse than the judgments of non-experts). This is important, because the key claim of the book that we are facing a “drama of representation” requires the observed inaccuracies to be substantial and meaningful.

Third, the normative argument that representative democracy suffers from the inaccuracy of politicians’ estimates of public opinion also depends on a valid measurement of public opinion. The authors carefully and convincingly address problems of survey design and question wording that are inevitable in any study of public opinion. However, there is an additional issue here that might deserve more attention, and this is the question of whether policy views really represent the kind of public opinion politicians are able to perceive. Is asking about views of specific policy proposals too demanding and an overly idealistic expectation of accuracy that exaggerates the size of the “drama of representation” highlighted in the book? The authors address the possibility that politicians might be better at other kinds of estimation tasks. Future studies could shed light on whether politicians would be better at judging the general policy mood or the abstract ideological leaning of their electorate than they are at estimating public support for specific policy proposals.

Land Politics: How Customary Institutions Shape State Building in Zambia and Senegal. By Lauren Honig. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 320p. \$120.00 cloth.
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Lauren Honig has revived the debate on land titling with her new book, *Land Politics: How Customary Institutions Shape State Building in Zambia and Senegal*. The book draws heavily from the work of well-known analysts like Elinor Ostrom, Vincent Ostrom, and Daron Acemoglu, while also applying a wider array of scholarship, making it an interdisciplinary study.

The questions that *Land Politics* seeks to answer are: “Why do some chiefs encourage land titling in their domains and others thwart it? Why do some citizens with customary land rights in a community seek a state title while others do not? More generally, how do customary land regimes survive, despite powerful economic interests and state efforts to title land?” (p. 4). Using interviews, Afrobarometer surveys, and observations (pp. 38–82), *Land Politics* offers a rich tapestry of data, which are analyzed systematically, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The results show that customary institutions that are more strictly organized, with clearer structures of administration, are more effective in defending customary land rights against state encroachment. But whether tightly or loosely organized, what customary leaders do is based on what they think they can gain from titling. While Honig

claims that her book supports the case put forth by Michael Lipton, regarded by *The Economist* as the “big man of land reform” (“The Big Man of Land Reform,” 2023, p. 44), when she writes that “[t]hese findings from Zambia and Senegal ... reflect Michael Lipton’s observations of land politics” (p. 288), for this reviewer, Honig has clearly beaten her own path, too. For instance, the book shows that “the expansion of land titling is not an individual-level economic intervention alone” (p. 291). Again, the book contradicts orthodoxy by contending that customary land is not idle land. Rather, customary land relations generate an active force that is shaped by, but also shapes, the actions and inactions of agents (pp. 4–5).

To illustrate and add nuance to these arguments, the book is divided into eight chapters. Chapters 1 and 8, respectively, set the stage and close the arguments. In between them, Honig develops a rich variety of analyses. Chapter 2 builds the foundations of the study “plot by plot.” First the chapter provides a review of land titling research, and then it proceeds to develop a taxonomy of why land titling is adopted. With explanations ranging from an emphasis on the state to a focus on markets, the chapter makes a strong case for developing a customary-based account, justified further by the fact that a substantial number of Africans express more trust in customary governance than in governance by the state. Chapter 3 develops the author’s “theory of collective costs and customary constraints in land titling.” According to this theory, if the benefits (advantage to customary authorities) exceed the costs (e.g., losing the land to the current and future generations from the pool of customary lands, or losing customary power), then states are in a stronger position to expand titling programs without major push-back. To test this theory, Honig relies on case studies of Zambia and Senegal.

Chapters 5–8 are empirical. Zambia is the centrepiece of chapter 5, while chapter 6 focuses on Senegal. In both chapters, Honig uses fractional logistic regression models focused on the subnational levels. These quantitative analyses are complemented by careful qualitative examination of interviews and surveys. Chapter 7, “Exit or Engagement: How Status within Institutions Impacts Smallholder Titling,” shows that whether one receives security from the customary system depends on one’s relationship with its institutions (those with positive relationships do not seek titling, while those with fractious relationships with customary leaders tend to pursue state titling).

Honig seems to prefer customary land reforms. They provide stronger community-based land programs that are transparent and accountable. “In some circumstances, governments might also mitigate insecurity on customary land by providing citizens with well-funded forms of institutional resources ... for example, increasing the accessibility of statutory land tribunals for customary land