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Gaming Democracy: Elite Dominance During Transition and Prospects for Redistribution

[Michael Albertus](#)

University of Chicago - Department of Political Science

[Victor A. Menaldo](#)

University of Washington - Department of Political Science

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*British Journal of Political Science, Forthcoming***Abstract:**

Inequality and democracy are far more compatible empirically than predicted by social conflict theory. This paper speaks to this puzzle, identifying the scope conditions under which democratization induces greater redistribution. Because autocrats sometimes have incentives to expropriate economic elites, who lack reliable institutions to protect their rights, elites may prefer democracy to autocratic rule if they can impose roadblocks to redistribution under democracy ex ante. Using global cross-sectional time-series data (1972-2008), we find that only if elites are politically weak during transition, as when there is revolutionary pressure, is there a relationship between democracy and redistribution. Redistribution is also greater if a democratic regime can avoid adopting and operating under a constitution written by outgoing elites and instead create a new constitution that redefines the political game. This finding holds across three different measures of redistribution and instrumental variables estimation. We also document the ways in which elites "bias" democratic institutions.

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Contact Information

Michael Albertus (Contact Author)

University of Chicago - Department of Political Science ([email](#))

Chicago, IL 60637

United States

Victor A. Menaldo

University of Washington - Department of Political Science ([email](#))

101 Gowen Hall

Box 353530

Seattle, WA 98195

United States