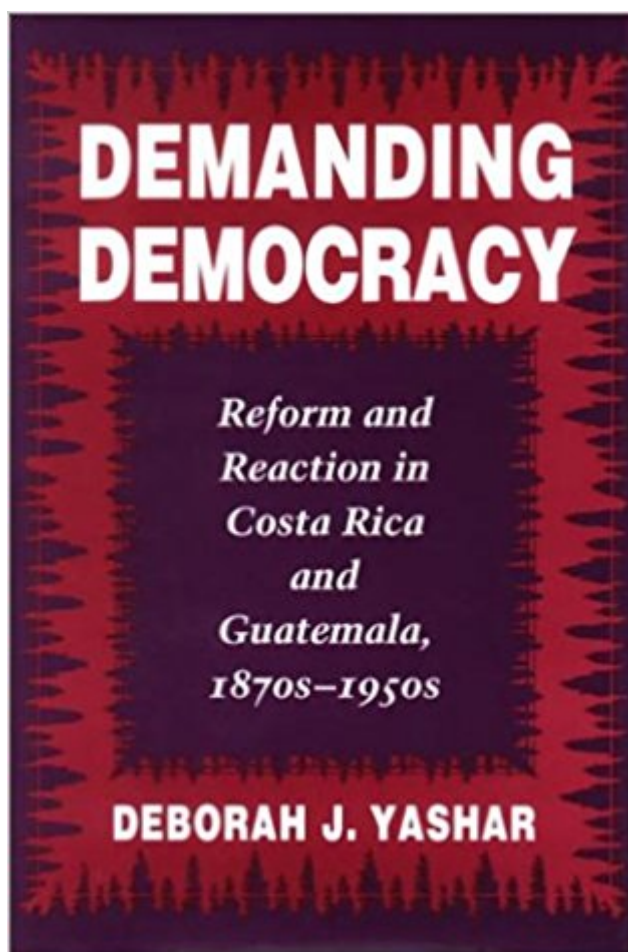


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Demanding Democracy: Reform And Reaction In Costa Rica And Guatemala, 1870s-1950s



Synopsis

This book examines the origins of democracy and authoritarianism using a novel coalitional approach to examine two questions: What are the conditions under which actors found democracy? What are the conditions conducive to its endurance? The book explores these questions by analyzing the cases of Costa Rica and Guatemala. Costa Rica is the longest-standing and arguably the most stable democracy in Latin America, while Guatemala has among the longest and most brutal records of authoritarian rule in Latin America. The author's fresh reinterpretation of these two cases demonstrates that prior to the 1950s, the two countries followed broadly similar patterns of political change and development, including seven decades of Liberal authoritarian rule beginning in the 1870s, just under a decade of democratic reforms in the 1940s, and brief but consequential counterreform movements that overthrew the democratic regimes at mid-twentieth century. Why did Costa Rica emerge with an enduring political democracy and Guatemala with authoritarian rule following these broadly similar historical trajectories? *Demanding Democracy* argues that the democratizing coalition's success in Costa Rica and its failure in Guatemala rested upon its capacity to redistribute elite property early on and to exercise effective political control of the countryside. The book's distinct theoretical approach integrates an analysis of the conditions fostering democracy with those conducive to its endurance. In doing so, it bridges arguments that focus on democratic transitions and those that focus on their consolidation. Moreover, it moves beyond debates about the role of structure and agency in these processes by focusing on the interaction between historical institutions that favor authoritarian rule and the political coalitions that work to remake those institutions in ways consonant with democracy.

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Customer Reviews

“Yashar’s fine book provides a theoretically sophisticated, thorough and rich analysis of two interesting cases. An important contribution to the literature of democratization.”
•Canadian Journal of Political Science

This book examines the origins of democracy and authoritarianism using a novel coalitional approach to examine two questions: What are the conditions under which actors found democracy? What are the conditions conducive to its endurance? The book explores these questions by analyzing the cases of Costa Rica and Guatemala. Costa Rica is the longest-standing and arguably the most stable democracy in Latin America, while Guatemala has among the longest and most brutal records of authoritarian rule in Latin America. The author’s fresh reinterpretation of these two cases demonstrates that prior to the 1950s, the two countries followed broadly similar patterns of political change and development, including seven decades of Liberal authoritarian rule beginning in the 1870s, just under a decade of democratic reforms in the 1940s, and brief but consequential counterreform movements that overthrew the democratic regimes at mid-twentieth century. Why did Costa Rica emerge with an enduring political democracy and Guatemala with authoritarian rule following these broadly similar historical trajectories? *Demanding Democracy* argues that the democratizing coalition’s success in Costa Rica and its failure in Guatemala rested upon its capacity to redistribute elite property early on and to exercise effective political control of the countryside. The book’s distinct theoretical approach integrates an analysis of the conditions fostering democracy with those conducive to its endurance. In doing so, it bridges arguments that focus on democratic transitions and those that focus on their consolidation. Moreover, it moves beyond debates about the role of structure and agency in these processes by focusing on the interaction between historical institutions that favor authoritarian rule and the political coalitions that work to remake those institutions in ways consonant with democracy.

The author makes a valuable addition to the dialogue on democracy by not only incorporating older approaches but also moving beyond them. Based on both archival sources and original interview data, this revised dissertation provides cogent arguments, lucid writing, and credible references.

The book weaves together two perspectives on democratization often viewed as mutually exclusive: structural and agency approaches. It integrates these two by introducing a third approach: political coalition-building. The author's postulates are tested by examining the histories of Costa Rica and Guatemala. The histories of these two countries actually provide three case studies: one example in each country where democratization failed, and one example in Costa Rica where it succeeded. By introducing a new emphasis on the importance to democratization of the mobilization of the countryside, the author sheds new light on known historical events. She also emphasizes that not only the timing but also the sequencing of events is important in attempts at democratization. Finally, other conditions necessary to the emergence and permanence of democracy are identified for use in future studies. This book should enliven the debate on democratization

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