

Wood, Elisabeth Jean. (2007). Forging Democracy from Below: Insurgent Transitions in South Africa and El Salvador. Cambridge University Press {ISBN 9780521788878}

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The book addresses two related puzzles: (1) What accounts for the transition to democracy in South Africa and El Salvador after decades of elite opposition to democratic participation and electoral contestation by subordinate classes? (2) Why were these civil conflicts amenable to negotiated resolution in contrast to other civil wars whose resolution through negotiation appears so elusive? The answer to the first puzzle, I argue, is that democracy in both countries was forged from below by the sustained insurgency of lower-class actors. "... the persisting mobilization eventually made compromise preferable to continued resistance." "... the nature of the compromises that led to democracy were all forged through insurgent mobilization." "... the transition to democracy would not have taken place ... in the absence of sustained popular mobilization." Two processes together make up this insurgent path to democracy: (a) First, sustained mobilization eventually constituted the leadership of the popular opposition as an insurgent counter-elite. (b) Second, the accumulating cost of the insurgency transformed the core interests of the economic elites. The answer to the second puzzle, together these two processes forged the political and structural bases of compromise. These class-based conflicts differed from many civil wars in that the contending forces were economically interdependent.

The transition to democracy generally takes one of four routes: (1) Defeat in war followed by the imposition of democracy by occupying forces (as in Germany and Japan in the aftermath of WW II). (2) A faction of the moderate elements may emerge within an authoritarian regime and initiate a period of political liberalization which may be followed by democratization... (3) Political mobilization by a cross-class alliance of those excluded from power, if successful in forcing regime elites from office, may bring about a democratic regime... (4) Sustained political

mobilization from below by working-class actors may force regime elites to negotiate a transition to democracy as in South Africa and El Salvador, I argue.

Wood (2007) mentions the elites to be: economic elites, and regime elites. During later discussions political elites are finally introduced, but military elites are not mentioned. Maybe she intended regime elites to encompass everyone except the economic elites. There must be clear distinctions between these four categories of elites because they are all very influential, powerful and interdependent within the state and the purpose of governance. Along this line, the working-class does possess its elite also, because the working-class is not equipped nor has the aspirations for political governance or decision-making. Therefore, it only takes one well educated person from the working-class, with higher aspirations, to convince others for support and mobilize the workers to start the insurgency. Here are the insurgent leaders or working-class elites. Wood says fact, "...is both incontrovertible and irrelevant." They cannot be considered irrelevant because they become policy-makers and leaders of the new regime while the peasants revert back to their subsistence lifestyle. Some may argue that the transition to democracy may be only a transition of elites, or the accommodation of a new group of elites with different values, perspective or politics. Although they may have noble intentions but the political system co-opts the *nuevo-elites*. The few changes they impose are unmatched by their concessions and personal adjustments. Because they are viewed as having the power to control the insurgents, the *nuevo elites* are embraced by the old elites. By giving the working-class elites a seat at the governing table, the insurgency is tamed since the workers will not riot against their leaders.

The author did not address the cost of continued protest and riots by the peasants/insurgents. In some journeys to democracy the death toll and imprisonment were too much for the working-class. Too many lives were lost and the tragic cost was human lives compounded with continued repression broke the will of the insurgency so some fights for democracy from below were essentially squashed by an overwhelming force. Her theory is that insurgency altered elite perceptions and interests by completely ignoring the contributions of international pressure. But, without the international community which at least was looking at the actions of both groups there would not have been a rethinking by the elites. Essentially, the world spot light was on the existing regime during a period when democracy is the preferred form of governance. The

analyses presented here extends these arguments by providing the causal mechanism by which mobilization from below impacted on elite economic interests brought the relevant parties to the negotiating table that shaped the evolution of the transition process and structure of the resulting settlement.