
Book Description

This book provides the first systematic explanation of the origins of constitutional designs from an analytical, historical, and comparative perspective. Based on a comprehensive analysis of constitutional change in Latin America from 1900 to 2008 and four detailed case studies, Gabriel Negretto shows that the main determinants of constitutional choice are the past performance of constitutions in providing effective and legitimate instruments of government and the strategic interests of the actors who have influence over institutional selection. The book explains how governance problems shape the general guidelines for reform, while strategic calculations and power resources affect the selection of specific alternatives of design. It also emphasizes the importance of the events that trigger reform and the designers' level of electoral uncertainty for understanding the relative impact of short-term partisan interests on constitution writing. Negretto's study challenges predominant theories of institutional choice, and paves the way for the development of a new research agenda on institutional change.

Reviews

"Gabriel Negretto challenges the traditional wisdom, largely inspired by the experiences of the United Kingdom and the United States, which conceives constitutions as stable frameworks for political action. With a focus on Latin America, he shows that constitutions can be as unstable as political parties and electoral behavior are in the region, thus making the choices of institutions endogenous to the political process. This work will be of interest to students of political institutions everywhere." - Josep Colomer, Professor, Georgetown University

"This is a terrific book. There are very few studies of institutional choice in Latin America, and fewer still grounded in both theory and careful on-the-ground research. The book shows that in unusual circumstances, when the whole political elite is threatened by widespread and sometimes violent opposition, constitution writers may cooperate across party lines to choose provisions expected to increase government efficiency and responsiveness. Most of the time, however, the partisan interests of constitution makers motivate revisions expected to help them win future elections and enact policies to benefit their supporters." - Barbara Geddes, Professor of Political Science, University of California, Los Angeles

"Despite the fact that constitutional design in Latin America has occurred all too frequently, it is poorly understood. Negretto’s volume elucidates the interaction of politics and environment in producing particular constitutional designs. Combining theoretical clarity, rigorous data analysis, and close readings of important cases, this book will be the state of the art for years to come." - Tom Ginsburg, Leo Spitz Professor of International Law, University of Chicago Law School
"This book explains the choices of institutions regarding presidential and congressional powers in post-1900 Latin America. Gabriel Negretto argues that parties choose rules that they expect to work to their own advantage and hence that the relative power of parties is key to understanding institutional choice. This is the most detailed examination of institutional choice that has been undertaken in Latin American politics, and perhaps in comparative politics as a whole." - Scott Mainwaring, Eugene P. and Helen Conley Professor of Political Science, University of Notre Dame