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Elite Settlements

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ELITE SETTLEMENTS

ABSTRACT

Following the classical elite theorists' injunction to study variations in elite structure, we examine the elite settlement as a major, yet largely overlooked, form of political change. Elite settlements consist of broad compromises among previously warring elite factions, resulting in political stability and thus providing a necessary precondition for representative democracy. To identify the common features of elite settlements, we draw upon four historic cases: England in 1688-1689, Sweden in 1809, Colombia in 1957-1958, and Venezuela in 1958. We conclude by arguing for the extraction of elite settlements from their current embeddedness in such concepts as "bourgeois revolutions" and "democratic transitions," and we advocate greater attention to the elite paradigm in efforts to explain macropolitical outcomes.

ELITE SETTLEMENTS

Understanding how nations become politically stable and democratic is a central goal of political sociology and a matter of obvious concern to policymakers around the world. Current scholarly opinion on the subject differs markedly from the once-dominant "modernization" perspective, which saw stable democracy as a happy by-product of social, economic, and cultural development. Many scholars now see the establishment and maintenance of democratic institutions as decidedly political acts. These scholars divide broadly into two camps: adherents of the class or Marxian paradigm, and those working within the elite or managerial paradigm (Alford and Friedland 1985). The currently more influential class paradigm, despite many intricate nuances, essentially interprets stable democracy as established and maintained by the bourgeoisie, primarily for the bourgeoisie. This paradigm has customarily explained the exercise of bourgeois power through the democratic state in terms of basic economic processes. Responding to the limitations of such economic determinism, however, a number of Marxian scholars have recently stressed the "relative autonomy" of political actors, typically aggregated as "the state."

This latter trend has brought Marxian theorists closer to the elite paradigm's core contention about the

