

THE REVIEW OF ECONOMIC STUDIES

[ABOUT THIS JOURNAL](#) [CONTACT THIS JOURNAL](#) [SUBSCRIPTIONS](#) [CURRENT ISSUE](#) [ARCHIVE](#) [SEARCH](#)

[Oxford Journals](#) > [Social Sciences](#) > [Review of Economic Studies](#) > [Volume 80 Issue 3](#) > Pp. 845-875.

Why Do Voters Dismantle Checks and Balances?

[Daron Acemoglu](#)

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

[James A. Robinson](#)

Harvard University

[Ragnar Torvik](#)

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Abstract

Voters often dismantle constitutional checks and balances on the executive. If such checks and balances limit presidential abuses of power and rents, why do voters support their removal? We argue that by reducing politician rents, checks and balances also make it cheaper to bribe or influence politicians through non-electoral means. In weakly institutionalized polities where such non-electoral influences, particularly by the better organized elite, are a major concern, voters may prefer a political system without checks and balances as a way of insulating politicians from these influences. When they do so, they are effectively accepting a certain amount of politician (presidential) rents in return for redistribution. We show that checks and balances are less likely to emerge when the elite is better organized and is more likely to be able to influence or bribe politicians, and when inequality and

[« Previous | Next Article](#)
[Table of Contents](#)

This Article

Review of Economic Studies (2013) 80 (3): 845-875.
doi:
10.1093/restud/rdt007
First published online:
February 26, 2013

[» Abstract Free](#)
[Full Text \(HTML\)](#)
[Full Text \(PDF\)](#)
[Supplementary data](#)

All Versions of this Article:
[rdt007v1](#)
80/3/845 *most recent*

Classifications

Articles

Services

[Alert me when cited](#)
[Alert me if corrected](#)
[Find similar articles](#)
[Similar articles in Web of Science](#)
[Add to my archive](#)
[Download citation](#)
[Request Permissions](#)

Citing Articles

[Load citing article information](#)
[Citing articles via CrossRef](#)
[Citing articles via Scopus](#)
[Citing articles via Web of Science](#)

Search this journal:

[Advanced »](#)



Current Issue

[October 2014 81 \(4\)](#)



[Alert me to new issues](#)

The Journal

[About the journal](#)
[Rights & permissions](#)
[Managing Editors Report](#)
[Review of the Review](#)
[We are mobile – find out more](#)
[This journal is a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics \(COPE\)](#)

Published on behalf of

[Review of Economic Studies Ltd](#)

Impact factor: 3.235
5-Yr impact factor: 4.550

Managing Editors
[Jerome Adda](#)
[Stephane Bonhomme](#)
[Francesco Caselli](#)

potential taxes are high (which makes redistribution more valuable to the majority). We also provide case study evidence from Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela consistent with the model.

Key words

• [Corruption](#) • [Checks and balances](#) • [Political economy](#)

[Redistribution](#) • [Separation of powers](#) • [Taxes](#)

JEL codes

• [O17](#) • [P48](#)

© The Author 2013. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of The Review of Economic Studies Limited.

[Citing articles via Google Scholar](#)

[Google Scholar](#)

[Articles by Acemoglu, D.](#)

[Articles by Torvik, R.](#)

[Search for related content](#)

[Related Content](#)

[O17 - Formal and Informal Sectors; Shadow Economy; Institutional Arrangements](#)

[P48 - Political Economy; Legal Institutions; Property Rights](#)

[Load related web page information](#)

[Share](#)

[Email this article](#)



What's this?

Philipp Kircher
Botond Koszegi
Michele Tertilt
Dimitri Vayanos

[View full editorial board](#)

Contact the editorial office

Annika Andreasson

Editorial Office
Review of Economic Studies
Institute for International Economic Studies
Stockholm University
[Click to email](#)
10691 Stockholm
Sweden
Work +46 8 16 29 24
Fax +46 8 16 41 77

Alerting Services

[Email table of contents](#)
[Email Advance Access](#)
[CiteTrack](#)
[XML RSS feed](#)

[JEL Alerting Sign Up](#)

For Authors

[Services for authors](#)
[Instructions to authors](#)
[Submit now!](#)
[Self archiving policy](#)
[Managing Editors Report](#)
[Summary Turnaround Statistics](#)

This journal is fully compliant with the RCUK Open Access policy

[For more information click here](#)

Corporate Services

[What we offer](#)
[Reprints](#)
[Supplements](#)

Disclaimer: Please note that abstracts for content published before 1996 were created through digital scanning and may therefore not exactly replicate the text of the original print issues. All efforts have been made to ensure accuracy, but the Publisher will not be held responsible for any remaining inaccuracies. If you require any further clarification, please contact our [Customer Services Department](#).

Online ISSN 1467-937X - Print ISSN 0034-6527

Copyright © 2014 [Review of Economic Studies Ltd](#)

Other Oxford University Press sites:

 