

## 2022 Best Book Award

**Winner:** Bryn Rosenfeld, Cornell University. The Autocratic Middle Class: How State Dependency Reduces the Demand for Democracy (Princeton University Press)

Prize committee citation: “Does a strong middle class lead to democracy? The role of the middle class in democratization has been core to the study of politics since Aristotle argued that “the best political community is formed by citizens of the middle class” (Rosenfeld, p. 1). In *The Autocratic Middle Class*, Bryn Rosenfeld takes on the conventional wisdom that the bourgeoisie will fight for democracy. Instead, she argues that when the middle class is dependent on the state for employment, it is less likely to challenge autocrats and demand democracy. The logic of the theory is simple, bold, and compelling. When the middle class is largely employed by the state – for example with jobs in schools, in state-run hospitals, in the military, or in the government bureaucracy – it nurtures a relationship of dependence. Members of the middle class employed by an authoritarian state are appreciative of the state supplying their livelihood, but are also at the mercy of a state that could withdraw employment and benefits. This combination makes middle class individuals less likely to support democracy or to take to the street to demand democratization. To make this case, Rosenfeld’s book masterfully weaves together evidence from surveys from across the post-Soviet world. Importantly, this is a unique study in this genre that examines both attitudes and behavior. The result is a book that will reshape our understanding of democracy and autocracy.”

**Honorable Mention:** Michael Albertus, University of Chicago. Property Without Rights: Origins and Consequences of the Property Rights Gap (Cambridge University Press)

Prize committee citation: “Across the world, the rural poor have incomplete rights over their most important and valuable asset: land. In *Property Without Rights*, Michael Albertus examines what he calls the “property rights gap”: “when a government redistributes land but does not grant land beneficiaries property rights over that land” (5). Drawing on new data on land redistribution and titling in Latin America over nearly a century, Albertus brilliantly shows that the property rights gap typically emerges in authoritarian regimes and becomes a powerful mechanism of political control. The book persuasively argues that authoritarian regimes are eager to enmesh the rural poor in relationships of dependence – by redistributing land but only providing partial property rights, autocrats leave the poor reliant on the state for benefits. On the other hand, democracies are significantly less likely to have a property rights gap. Albertus’ book has important implications for the study of democracy, autocracy, and development.”

**Award Committee:** Daniel Mattingly (chair, Yale University), Sandra Ley (CIDE, Mexico), and Guillermo Trejo (University of Notre Dame)