

# Briefly Noted

*Democratic Legitimacy: Impartiality, Reflexivity, Proximity*, Pierre Rosanvallon  
(Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), 240 pp., \$35 cloth.

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In his new volume, the historian Pierre Rosanvallon argues that, far from being self-evident, the relationship between democratic ideals and the precise origin of democratic institutions' legitimacy is continually fraught. In constructing a genealogy of democratic legitimacy, he works to reveal the complicated and often counterintuitive origins of democratic legitimation, and identifies important ways in which democratic legitimacy continues to change today.

Rosanvallon begins by noting that "the idea that the people are the sole legitimate source of power has come to be taken for granted." However, "the transition from the celebration of the People or the Nation, always in the singular, to majority rule is anything but self-evident." He demonstrates that while the aim and aspiration of democracy has always been the "expression of social generality," or the constitution and exercise of power by and for the people, there has been a continual historical evolution in its expression. If at one point generality could be understood simply in terms of "general will" and "general interest" as expressed by a relatively unanimous electoral mandate, by the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century a crisis of legitimacy had developed

as partisanship and plurality made these notions increasingly untenable. Mere majoritarian-electoral legitimacy seemed insufficiently democratic. The system of legitimacy that then emerged in the democratic world in the early twentieth century and solidified in the postwar period was one of "dual legitimacy": the legitimacy of an increasingly universalized election process complemented by an unelected bureaucracy meant to continually administer and regulate in the interest of the people.

Over the course of the later twentieth century, Rosanvallon argues, the system of dual legitimacy began to unravel, and many were left with "a powerful sense of loss or even decay." He sees in this change a fundamental shift from the "democracy of identification" to the "democracy of approbation": that is, people can no longer identify and thus legitimize their leaders purely through notions of electoral mandate and the bureaucracy. As the democracy of identification has given way to the politics of approbation, there has been a proliferation of alternative mechanisms and institutions that work to compensate for this inevitable "distance between leaders and the people." Rosanvallon identifies civil activism, indirect democratic

institutions (such as “oversight bodies, regulatory agencies, and constitutional courts”), and popular expectations of democratic conduct as three developments in this direction. In these ways citizens have incorporated notions of impartiality,

reflexivity, and proximity as simultaneous requisites for democratic legitimacy. Rosanvallon further argues that it is essential that we work such notions into any substantive theory of democracy and democratic legitimacy.

*Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 320 pp., \$29.50 cloth.

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The authors of *Why Civil Resistance Works* present empirical evidence that, contrary to conventional wisdom, nonviolent resistance campaigns succeed at overthrowing regimes twice as often as violent campaigns, even in cases of a highly repressive state. Erica Chenoweth, an assistant professor of government at Wesleyan University, and Maria Stephan, a strategic planner with the U.S. Department of State, raise an original question and then employ quantitative and qualitative methods to reach their surprising findings. Unlike previous studies that focus solely on either violent or nonviolent campaigns, this book asks which type of campaigns are more successful at overthrowing regimes, ousting occupations, or facilitating secessions. The authors analyze 326 violent and nonviolent campaigns between 1900 and 2006, and they offer more in-depth study of the Iranian Revolution (1977–1979), the First Palestinian Intifada (1987–1992), the Philippine People’s Power Movement (1983–1986), and the Burmese Uprising (1988–1990)—providing

a range of scenarios where violent and nonviolent campaigns succeeded, partially succeeded, or failed. The authors define a successful campaign as one that discernibly results in the achievement of its own stated goals of regime change, anti-occupation, or secession within a year of peak activities.

There is no moral, bleeding-heart talking point here. Exacting debilitating costs on a state’s sources of power rather than mere sentimental motivation underlie the nonviolent strategy. Such campaigns have two key advantages over violent resistance: (1) higher levels of participation and (2) leverage against the state. Moral, physical, informational, and commitment barriers to participation are much lower for nonviolent campaigns. An office worker need not take up arms and take cover behind rugged terrain to support a cause that she finds legitimate; such nonviolent tactics as protests, boycotts, civil disobedience, and strikes are far less dangerous activities. Nonviolence can also be an effective activity when civic disruption raises the costs of maintaining the status quo. As