

POLITICS AND MARKETS : The World's political-Economic Systems	العنوان:
مجلة الاقتصاد والإدارة	المصدر:
جامعة الملك عبدالعزيز - كلية الاقتصاد والإدارة - مركز البحوث والتنمية	الناشر:
Al-Amri, Bakor O.	المؤلف الرئيسي:
ع8	المجلد/العدد:
نعم	محكمة:
1978	التاريخ الميلادي:
ديسمبر	الشهر:
48 - 49	الصفحات:
655461	رقم MD:
بحوث ومقالات	نوع المحتوى:
EcoLink	قواعد المعلومات:
السياسة الاقتصادية، الاسواق، الاقتصاد العالمي	مواضيع:
http://search.mandumah.com/Record/655461	رابط:

POLITICS AND MARKETS

The World's Political-Economic Systems*

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The author of this book, Charles E. Lindblom, is currently Sterling Professor of Economics and Political Science at Yale University. As his position indicates, he is both an economist and political scientist. In 1953, he and Professor R.A. Dahl published the book *Politics, Economics and Welfare*. This new study continues some of the same analyses as that earlier work, but is enriched by empirical studies and comparative economics and politics. It is also much more explicit in connecting economic and political phenomena. Professor Lindblom has written very interesting political analyses of some factors of economics and marketing which affect the political processes of nations.

As a citizen of the United States, the author necessarily focuses on that system. He doesn't exclude aspects of other systems, to be sure, but to my mind the greatest contribution of this book is the way it analyzes the influence of American business on American government. This analysis is particularly interesting in view of recent changes in American foreign policy, which have their roots in economics. The models developed by the author support the claim of business to a larger share in foreign policy determination than has been claimed before. For example, he writes:

“A *New York Times* political columnist noted at the time: ‘Two months before he takes the oath of office as President, Jimmy Carter already is face to face with one of the major questions that will determine the course of his Administration. Will he seek at the outset to gain the confidence of the business and financial community, or will he risk their disfavor by moving rapidly and perhaps radically to attack the economic and social ills he campaigned against?’ At the same time Carter’s advisor on appointments declared that the new president wants a secretary of the treasury ‘who can verbalize the concerns of the financial community and anticipate the financial community’s reaction to economic decisions he might take.’ Such comments occasion no surprise. That officials are torn between two control systems is widely acknowledged.”¹

* Charles E. Lindblom, *Politics and Markets: The World's Political-Economic Systems* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977).

Professor Lindblom also defends his argument that most reforms and changes in American history were initiated as business controls and later paraded as democratic reform. He gives many examples of ways in which business in the Western world has assumed powers within their states to control political and economic affairs.

In explaining the current surge of crime and violence in the United States and, indeed, the Western world, Professor Lindblom uses his models to blame the business community. The rising expectations of the lower classes and the decline of the work ethic can be traced to advertising which, after all, is geared to selling what can be sold, not to educating people to what they should buy. Confidence in government has similarly been undermined by the control of policies by business, not by the will of the common man. Current violence is seen as a reversion to Hobbes state of nature “the war of all against all,” for the scarce resources and political authority that will not be enough for all to share.

And the solution to this situation, according to our author, is simple — strong political authority. Since this has been my particular theory all along, and since we in Saudi Arabia have seen the benefits of it in practice, I must recommend this book to anyone with an interest in government and how it works.