

# Review of: "Neoliberalism, Strong State and Democracy"

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Interesting review of neoliberalism and the state

This is a well-written and interesting review of neoliberalism. Specifically, it aims to highlight the way in which neoliberalism differed from liberalism and neoclassical economics particularly in reference to concepts of state and democracy. It does this well through analyzing economic debates in the early 20th century. The historicization of the arguments—positions taken by classical economics versus neoliberals as the Hapsburg empire collapsed and concerns for property rights and free trade during decolonization—is very helpful. The author is correct to highlight that characterizations of neoliberalism as ‘market fundamentalism’ and desiring a ‘minimal state’ are inadequate. Neoliberalism has consistently favored an effective state which undergirded political, economic, and social order. The above represents an important contribution for social scientists (and the broader public) on the question of neoliberalism.

I think the essay can be improved in three ways. First, the discussion of Keynes as an alternative- someone who was a truly a liberal ‘democrat’ as opposed to the thinkers mentioned-seems unnecessary in the essay as it is presently organized. I would recommend either removing the section or reshaping the essay as an investigation into liberal economic readings that are more or less favorable to democracy.

Second, the historicization of the neoliberal positions privileges disagreements with classical economics and highlights the connection of neoliberals to conservatives and Nazis in Germany and conservatives on issues about intergovernmental economic regimes. These same neoliberals—characterized here as ‘authoritarians’—were very cognizant not only of union-based and other popular uprisings within Western Europe but also Communist totalitarianism, which colored their impressions of the former. Engagement with neoliberal reactions to Communism seems an important yet missing part of the story. Also, to be consistent with an historicist reading, it is worth considering how much of the support for ‘transitional’ dictatorships and ‘emergency decrees’ were responses to perceived crises and were strategic to a particular moment, and how much of these responses were part of a longer-term commitment to use of coercion to protect private property and ensure market stability.

Finally, the concept of democracy relied upon in the essay is not explicitly identified. During the time period examined, actual democracies were quite different and there are various concepts of democracy that might be more or less aligned with a minimal states without *necessarily* being ‘minimal democracies.’

