

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910411926003321
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Titolo	Coordination, Cooperation, and Control : The Evolution of Economic and Political Power / / by Randall G. Holcombe
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Cham : , : Springer International Publishing : , : Imprint : Palgrave Macmillan, , 2020
ISBN	9783030486679 3030486672
Edizione	[1st ed. 2020.]
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (331 pages) : illustrations
Disciplina	303.3 330
Soggetti	Economics Economic history Political science Social choice Welfare economics Social structure Equality Development economics Political Economy and Economic Systems Economic History Political Theory Social Choice and Welfare Social Structure Development Economics
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Includes index.
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references.
Nota di contenuto	1. The Concept of Power -- 2. Political Power -- 3. Economic Power -- 4. The Separation of Economic from Political Power -- 5. Power in Pre-Agricultural Societies -- 6. Power in Agrarian and Feudal Societies -- 7. Institutions That Support Commerce and Industry -- 8. Power in Commercial and Industrial Societies -- 9. Politics as a Vocation -- 10. The Social Contract -- 11. Ideology, Politics, and Power -- 12. Clouds

Sommario/riassunto

There are two ways people coordinate their actions: through cooperation, exercised by economic power, and through control, exercised by political power. When economic and political power are held by the same people, the result is stagnation; when those who hold economic power are not the same people who hold political power, the result is progress. This book presents the ways in which economic power and political power can be separated, and how they can remain so, by analyzing the nature of power and the differences between economic and political power. The book then discusses the history of economic and political power, including hunter-gatherer societies, agrarian societies, and modern commercial and industrial societies. This background lends insight into why political and economic power were typically held by the same people, and why recently those without political power have been able to acquire economic power. Incentives play a key role in understanding how those two types of power can become separated, and why there is always a tendency for them to recombine. But ideas also play a crucial role, including the influence of the Enlightenment, on the progress that has occurred in the last several hundred years.
