

Book Reviews

Joe Foweraker and Dolores Trevizo, eds., *Democracy and Its Discontents in Latin America*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2016. Tables, figures, appendixes, bibliography, index, 325 pp.; hardcover \$75.

Democracy is the default means of organizing government in Latin America, and since the beginning of the twenty-first century, though especially during the commodity boom of 2003–2011, the region saw considerable poverty and inequality reduction. Joe Foweraker, in his introduction to this excellent volume, identifies the above as on the good side of the balance sheet. Prominent on the other side are the concentration of power in the executive branch and the persistence or increase in corruption and citizen insecurity. Each defect, for Foweraker, represents a concern for democracy's core: accountability (in his introduction and chapter 2). The book explores this by examining how "much" democracy, what "kind" of democracy, and how the formation of the state impacts current democratic performance in Latin America.

Never far in the background is the Guillermo O'Donnell corpus, particularly his work in the 1990s (e.g., *Counterpoints: Selected Essays on Authoritarianism and Democratization*, 1999), on delegative democracy, horizontal accountability, and brown spots. Indeed, *Democracy and Its Discontents in Latin America* echoes O'Donnell's mission to make sense of the puzzle of democracy's uneven success. The most explicit response to O'Donnell's work comes from Foweraker's chapter 2, which focuses on accountability, because it corresponds to the "lived experiences" of citizens (15). David Doyle follows this with a long-term perspective on the relationship between institutions, state capacity, and rule of law (chap. 3). He focuses on state capacity—such as between the citizen and policy effectiveness (34)—in an institutional analysis that highlights how institutions lengthen time horizons and produce more efficiency, fewer incentives for predation, and more credibility.

But Latin American institutions often miss the mark. Will Barndt's analysis of political parties offers an innovative and severe explanation (chap. 12). Barndt disentangles the resources available to political parties (core capacity and abilities to recruit, self-finance, produce, and divulge publicity and to network, 205) and considers these in relation to changing demands in contemporary electoral politics. Demands outstrip inherent capacity, which leads to a structural transformation toward "corporation-based parties," parties that cohere to corporations and favor large, organized special interests to resolve resource shortcomings (such as running expensive campaigns).

Political parties may enhance governability, and indeed, when Mexico's PRI signed a pact with its rivals (PAN and PRD), it improved governability, a persistent problem in that country since its democratization in the late 1990s. Yet Roderic Ai Camp (chap. 13) finds that as governability increased, public support for democracy

declined, and expression of it “makes no difference” if the country has a democratic government. Perhaps, since governability merely advances a political program and gives no indication of distributional consequences, and since the region has such entrenched inequality, it is not governability but distribution that influences public support.

Melissa Ziegler Rogers’s chapter 4 offers an interesting response in a reconceptualization of inequality in Latin America. She notes that Latin America is the global leader in both interpersonal inequality and interregional inequality (the latter only if Indonesia is not included in calculations for Southeast Asia). Implicit among most political economy readings is that inequality should encourage political entrepreneurs in a democracy to pursue redistribution, and economic elites to resist such efforts. But Rogers finds that while interpersonal inequality creates such incentives for redistribution, interregional inequality offers powerful disincentives that counter redistribution efforts. This finding is consistent with the need to take seriously O’Donnell’s “brown spots.”

The bulk of the book examines traditional sectors and issues. David Pion-Berlin (chap. 5) and Dolores Trevizo (chap. 14) examine the military. The former’s chapter looks at the increase of military accountability via an examination of the ministry of defense. The latter’s chapter finds that while trust for the military in Mexico is high in general, it is consistently less so in areas where protests took place during the “dirty wars” of the 1970s and 1980s. This trust deficit is particularly important, given the militarization of the drug war under President Calderón and the ongoing battle against cartels. Todd Landman generalizes these concerns about human rights in his chapter on human rights institutions in Latin America (chap. 8). Against accounts based on modernization (modernity leads to more human rights) and rational choice arguments (the actions of individuals are causal), he argues that mobilization was critical in establishing the region’s powerful human rights institutions, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and the Inter-American Human Rights Court.

Jennifer Piscopo and Jane Jaquette examine the impact of state quotas for women and challenges for plurinational democracies in chapters 9 and 10, respectively. Piscopo argues against the literature that focuses on loopholes that reduce the efficacy of gender quotas, as well as criticisms that women in office have not brought transformative feminist agendas. Jaquette identifies a tension between women’s rights, which presuppose a single set of universal claims, and indigenous rights, which reject such claims, instead favoring preservation of traditional social and cultural rights, roles, and obligations. This tension is one of many in the internal practices of indigenous movements that effect their electoral participation, which Neil Harvey highlights in chapter 11.

Trevizo’s conclusion highlights weak institutions, informal pacts, and cultural legacies as significant obstacles to greater accountability (265). These create and entrench “brown spots,” which are bad for democracy both in terms of its institutionalization and its state capacity (and, therefore, performance). Trevizo remains optimistic, considering how much progress has occurred and how civil society has

been its agent. But what about cases in which popular sectors and at least some civil society groups have supported stronger presidents and weaker institutions of horizontal accountability? The case of Venezuela is paradigmatic but not exceptional. Landman writes, “democracy has been overturned and undermined through the actions of elected presidents,” and cites Venezuela since 1998 as an example (138).

This raises the question of what kind of democracy. Most chapters in the book assume liberal democracy, but a number of Latin American governments have visions of democracy that are only partially liberal, if not deliberately illiberal. The two chapters that examine this most in depth, those of Javier Corrales (7) and Gerardo Munck (6), are important windows on future research. Though both authors find significant problems with the more radical approaches to democracy, they recognize the importance of claims for alternative models of democracy.

Corrales takes seriously claims made by Bolivarian governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua to produce a nonliberal, “radical” form of accountability. He finds these wanting as, over time, the governments shifted from increasing participation to dissolving horizontal accountability. Participation became increasingly partisan, polarized, and ineffective; representative institutions weakened and, curiously, shifted toward more socially conservative positions. Munck’s essay offers a comprehensive typology of more and less radical models of democracy in connection to the strategic action of political forces from the right, center-right, center-left, and left. Although he finds that rightist governments have been most associated with democratic breakdowns, his emphasis on extremism and the level of conflict between government and opposition do not bode well for leftist governments, most specifically Venezuela. Elsewhere Munck argues that how actors see democracy (what model they endorse) impacts how democracy develops and whether it endures (*Building Democracy . . . Which Democracy? Ideology and Models of Democracy in Post-Transition Latin America*, 2015).

This last point may seem too cautious, given that democracy is the default regime. It has endured despite many potential challenges, and, as the authors in this impressive volume note, has progressed in many ways despite (and because of) that discontent. But what has persisted as democracy and brown spots tends to be where liberalism is shallow or absent. As O’Donnell and Schmitter highlighted three decades ago (*Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies*, 1986), the processes of liberalization and democratization overlap but are distinct. Perhaps the next step is to evaluate discontent with liberalism.

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