

As Becker shows in his analysis of the 1944 uprising known as La Gloriosa, the moderation of Ecuador's Left, rather than its radicalness, proved to be its own undoing. Coming to power as part of a broad-based military and civilian coalition that ended the dictatorial presidency of Carlos Arroyo del Río, communists and socialists scored gains in helping to write a progressive constitution and organising the first national leftist labour confederation. But the opportunistic decision to collaborate with the populist conservative president, José María Velasco Ibarra, quickly backfired. True to form, Velasco staged his own *autogolpe* in 1946, turning against left-wing allies and undoing their reforms. The apogee of the Left's influence in national politics ended in defeat. Elite domination of the political system continued for decades.

Readers looking for gripping revelations to add to the list of American misdeeds in Latin America may feel a bit disappointed by the FBI's rather mundane work in Ecuador. Winding their way from Quito through Washington with approving nods from Hoover, the FBI reports informed American policymaking in a general way and conformed to the prejudices of the time; for the most part, they were concerned with how communists, socialists and labour agitators might challenge American economic interests. Yet, the concerns did not provoke direct interventions of the style seen elsewhere in the region. Becker discovers no evidence of 'dirty tricks' or covert actions against Left leaders or organisations in the period covered in the book. That would come later and be chronicled famously by whistle-blower Philip Agee in his 1975 best-seller, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*. Instead, what Becker delivers is a nuanced and empirically rich account of what was happening as the FBI watched from the sidelines: the internal conflicts inside an embryonic Left and the episodic repression applied by domestic elites to thwart its expansion. To be sure, American interests were being served but home-grown anti-communism and reactionary backlashes precluded the need for more intrusive measures. Weaving these fresh archival sources together with his own encyclopaedic knowledge of the country, Becker makes a strong case that hegemony rather than conspiracy theory is the best lens for understanding Ecuador's vexed history of popular mobilisation and conservative containment.

doi:10.1017/S0022216X19000762

Samuel Handlin, *State Crisis in Fragile Democracies: Polarization and Political Regimes in South America*

(Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. xiii + 321, £75.00, hb.

Matthew Rhodes-Purdy

Clemson University

Political science is an odd discipline. For much of its history, the field discounted its own capacity to explain social outcomes, focusing on culture, social class and

economics as explanatory variables. Samuel Handlin's book, *State Crises in Fragile Democracies*, is an excellent example of why political factors matter on both sides of the equation. His book acknowledges the profound economic changes and global trends (i.e. neoliberalism, the decline of Marxism–Leninism and the third wave of democratisation) confronting Latin America at the close of the Cold War, while convincingly showing that those dynamics cannot fully explain why some Latin American countries consolidated full democracies while others fell to democratic erosion under populist leaders.

Summarising the field, Handlin shows that most scholarship on Latin America's third wave outcomes (especially those regimes that experienced democratic backsliding under radical leftists) focused on the role of neoliberal market reforms to explain the rise of radical outsider leftists in places like Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, as well as the success of more moderate leftists in Brazil, Chile and Uruguay (p. 9). Yet market reform alone cannot fully explain regime and party-system trajectories. Handlin notes, for example, that Venezuela had 'scores among the lowest in the region in terms of anti-neoliberal protest' (p. 33). Even in cases where a lack of anti-neoliberal parties would have created a hospitable environment for radical outsiders only a small subset led to success for radical populists (pp. 33–4).

Why the discrepancies? Handlin cites political variables as a crucial and neglected factor, both in terms of their direct effect on these trajectories and through the conditioning of economic factors. Specifically, he argues that two factors determine whether the strain of market reform would arrest democratisation: state crises and the infrastructure of leftist parties. Handlin defines state crises as the combination of the failure of the state to 'effectively and impartially provide goods and services' and 'profound citizen discontent' (p. 38). This is perhaps the book's strongest contribution, because Handlin's elucidation of how state crises influence the logic of electoral competition is particularly compelling. In a non-crisis polity, there is little room for radical parties to compete, given their distance from the median voter. A crisis adds a new dimension of competition to the usual Left–Right dimension: a pro- and anti-system dimension, with voters reacting to crises by moving toward the anti-system pole. And by positioning themselves closer to disenchanted voters on this new dimension, outsiders can win broad support despite their radical views (pp. 43–4; see Figure 2.5). In his case studies, Handlin shows that this competitive dynamic not only makes room for outsiders but also constrains the ability of new parties (such as La Causa R in Venezuela) to strategically moderate. In other words, even if insurgent parties would prefer to form alliances with existing leftist parties and put forth more moderate platforms, the pull of mass discontent with regime politics will rip such movements apart as radical factions within the new parties vie with moderates (pp. 70–1). By contrast, when state crises are not present or are transient, reformist factions of new Left parties (such as the Workers' Party (PT) in Brazil) can win internal struggles for the party's soul and maintain a pro-systemic bent (pp. 110–11).

Even situations that favour the rise of anti-system leftists do not necessarily guarantee their victory. Insurgent leftists must (organisationally speaking) start from scratch, which puts them at an insurmountable disadvantage in most

situations. Only where there is a strong existing leftist party infrastructure (e.g. militants, social organisations, links with unions, etc.) do radical outsiders have a chance to break through, by co-opting existing structures (pp. 46–7). In short, state crises and Left strength interact to produce differing outcomes. Strong Lefts in non-crisis polities produce moderate Left parties and successful democratisation. In states under crises where the Left is weak, outsiders have no choice but to form alliances with centrist actors and thus polarisation (and its pernicious effect on democratic quality and survival) is muted. Finally, radical outsiders who can co-opt the infrastructure of strong Left parties have the support and the organisational capacity to polarise society and undermine representative democracy (pp. 51–4).

Handlin's book is in many ways an exemplary model of how to incorporate political explanatory variables into a crowded field of study. The theories presented here are not wild deviations from existing literature. What sets this book apart and allows it to make an important contribution is Handlin's careful explication of the interactive nature of the economic and the political. The logic of competition under crisis is especially elegant, as is the seamless integration of organisational capacity into his theory. And he effectively uses sophisticated process-tracing methods to provide evidence of the causal relationships he hypothesises, which is often a problem in qualitative work such as this.

No work of research is perfect, and this book is no exception. The riskiest choice here is Handlin's decision to treat state crises as exogenous (p. 39). Handlin acknowledges that the performance failure dimension of the concept is largely structural, leaving citizen disenchantment as the primary source of variation over time (p. 40). Given that dynamic variation in the primary independent variable of the study is mostly due to shifts in public opinion, it is surprising that the book does not engage with the emerging literature on regime support and party system attitudes more extensively. This lack of engagement does not falsify the argument, but it does raise the spectre of competing hypotheses (some behavioural relationship may explain both state crises and the rise of Left outsiders) that are not sufficiently rebutted in the text. The book also too easily dismisses the competing hypothesis that weak Party System Institutionalisation (PSI) may explain the rise of radical outsiders. Handlin argues that PSI cannot explain these outcomes: radical outsiders arose even in stable party systems like *puntofijista* Venezuela (p. 96). Yet this reflects an incomplete understanding of PSI, which is more than just stability. New work analysing the difference between vibrant, deeply rooted PSI and static, ossified party survival could provide alternative hypotheses for at least some of the cases investigated in the book.

These minor quibbles do not detract much from an otherwise fantastic study of regime trajectories. Handlin approaches a topic that has been studied by untold numbers of scholars and still makes a significant contribution to our understanding of contemporary democratisation by bringing politics back in. As these dynamics continue to play out (I find myself hoping that Handlin will extend this framework to the rise of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil), other scholars would do well to take inspiration from this carefully reasoned and well-written work.