

subnational governments share responsibilities for making and implementing policies in most areas. The authors of Chapter 4 discuss how the resulting tensions in intergovernmental relations can lead to conflict, collaboration or innovation. Unfortunately, in the absence of a well-articulated framework, the authors cannot take full advantage of their rich empirical observations.

Chapter 5 documents the rise of civil society in the three countries. Its extensive survey of interest groups, movements and political parties draws attention to how activated or deactivated civil society has become. No doubt many readers will find this general survey both interesting and informative, but the material covered in this chapter seems orthogonal to the rest of the text. We learn very little about what demands these groups have placed on subnational governments, the access they have enjoyed to elected officials or the responses they have received. It is not obvious that the still weak (though perhaps growing) influence of civil society on governments in Mexico and Brazil warrants an entire chapter. The concluding chapter reviews the tensions that have arisen from decentralisation (and sometimes recentralisation) and the way in which these have played out in the three countries. It also revisits the question of the changing capacities of subnational governments in the face of new challenges. The chapter's final section considers how federalism might evolve in several different directions in the future.

*Governance in the Americas* offers a broad overview of decentralisation and democratisation in Mexico, Brazil and the United States. While the book raises compelling research questions and provides extensive empirical coverage, the provision of a clearly specified theoretical framework would have greatly increased its value as a work in comparative policy analysis and its contribution to larger debates about the causes and consequences of decentralisation under federalism.

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Michelle A. Saint-Germain and Cynthia Chaves Metoyer, *Women Legislators in Central America: Politics, Democracy and Policy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), pp. viii + 338, \$65.00, \$27.95 pb.

This book is a detailed study of women legislators in Central America. According to the authors, the book does three things: first, it is a descriptive study of women elected to the national legislatures between 1980 and 1995. Second, it is a comparative study of women elected in five countries in one region: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua; and, finally, it is an analysis of the contributions of elected women to public policy and to the democratisation movements of that era. Taking the increase in the numbers of women elected during the 1980s and 1990s as their starting point, Saint-Germain and Metoyer seek to explore why these increases occurred, which women were elected, the political roles that they played and any changes in public policy they brought about, as well as examining the role of women in the processes of democratisation that were also taking place in the region at that time. The authors base their analysis on a range of data. Foremost are data derived from a vast number of interviews (more than 100) conducted with women legislators between 1984 and 1995, supplemented with other primary and secondary data. As such the book fills a gap in our knowledge. As far as

I know, no other studies with this depth of coverage on women legislators in five countries in Central America have been conducted to date.

The authors have tried to make this study accessible to as wide an audience as possible by providing in the introduction comprehensive background information on the region and the different countries for readers who are not specialists in the area. Chapter 2 explores some of the factors that influence the levels of women's representation more generally and so introduces readers to some of the key themes – the study of women and electoral politics – for those unfamiliar with the scholarship in this area. It also discusses the explanations for the differing figures in the case study countries in terms of the nature of their electoral systems and political parties as well as more structural explanations, such as levels of development, and socio-cultural factors, such as machismo. Chapter 3 then focuses on individual women's paths to power. It makes a detailed comparison between elected and non-elected women, arguing that the women who get elected in the five Central American cases tend to have taken a long road to power, but that there are some significant variations between the cases in terms of women's backgrounds and political experience prior to their election. Chapter 4 looks at what women legislators do when they are in power in terms of the legislation, leadership positions and committee work they are involved in. The authors also explore the different concepts of representation with which women legislators work. Chapter 5 then takes a broader focus to explore the transitions to democracy that have taken place in Central America, beginning with a discussion of the different meanings of the term 'democracy' before exploring the varying roles played by women in each of the transitions. The final chapter looks at public policy and the impact that women legislators could have over four different types of policy (divided according to the impact on women's roles) in the five case study countries.

There is much in this book that makes it worthwhile. It will provide a rich source of detailed empirical information and comparative analysis, for example about how female legislators see themselves and their roles, that has not been available for Central America until now. However, it is unfortunate that, because the research for this volume was undertaken between ten and twenty years ago, it will not always be able to inform contemporary gender and politics debates as much as some scholars reading this volume might have liked. For example, it would be usual for anyone embarking on this kind of research today to interview male legislators as well as female ones and compare the women legislators, not just with other women, but also with male legislators to see whether they differed in terms of attitudes, pathways to power, and roles while in office and afterwards. The analysis in the book could have been even more useful to today's gender and politics scholars if the authors had engaged a little more with some of the more recent debates in gender and politics, even if they could not change their data. For example, I was hoping for some more discussion of descriptive and substantive representation together with the concept of critical mass, as this is something that is currently preoccupying scholars. Also, even though quotas were not very significant during the period the authors were analysing, given their current centrality, a more sustained discussion of them might have been useful. And the same could be said of the debates around different gender policies, which have become so much more sophisticated in the last five to ten years. Perhaps it would have been too much to ask for the authors to revise their whole book, but a concluding chapter that gave readers their views on the implications of the current debates for their cases and their overall analysis would have been very

welcome. Regardless of these misgivings, this study is a very useful addition to the scholarship on women and politics in the Americas.

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Peter Birle, Wilhelm Hofmeister, Günther Maihold and Barbara Potthast (eds.), *Élites en América Latina* (Madrid: Iberoamericana/Vervuert Verlag, 2007), pp. 228, €28.00, pb.

Elites: who are they, have they changed, and what has been and should be their role in the makeup of the Latin American democracies and economies? These are some of the important questions raised in this book. While the media and academic scholarship are increasingly highlighting social movements and governments that derive their legitimacy from their non- or, sometimes, anti-elitist backgrounds (such as in Venezuela, Bolivia and Brazil), this book adds an important perspective, asking what elites – or those groups within society in control of power resources or in control of power itself ('Presentación', p. 7) – are up to these days. In an academic world often eager to avoid normative judgment, the book's introductory chapter (by Waldmann) also questions the absence of a moral dimension in elite studies, suggesting that responsible behaviour and social solidarity should be part of our evaluation standards.

The book has various merits that make it a must-read for Latin Americanists. Several chapters, such as those by Waldmann, Bernecker and Zoller, Sabato, and Ströbele-Gregor, trace the evolution of the concept itself, recount the history of elites, and describe studies dedicated to their analysis. This historical and sociological perspective is an important contribution to Latin American scholarship on the evolution and transformation of the makeup of domestic societies. It provides a useful background for understanding shifts in relative power within and among elites and between elites and non-elite groups. In addition, the book explores alternate or less-studied types of elites, such as intellectual and indigenous elites. The respective chapters (Niemeyer on intellectuals and Ströbele-Gregor on indigenous groups) examine in what way these groups contribute to the formation of national identities, whether they have had influence on processes of national transformation (more in the case of the intellectuals than in the case of indigenous elites, the book finds), and, finally, whether they have had the capacity to integrate their interests and views in national agendas, sometimes a euphemism for a set of rules and principles ultimately favouring elite interests.

The book includes several chapters that compile solid empirical evidence on the processes of elite formation it seeks to describe. The chapter by Adler, Pérez and Salazar on 'Globalization and New Elites in Mexico', for example, is an outstanding attempt to trace the composition, education and impact on government of what are commonly referred to as 'the technocrats'. The chapter does a good job describing the social and economic backgrounds of the Mexican version of the Chicago Boys as well as the links between global events and their domestic consequences. Specifically, the fall in oil prices in the early 1980s reduced the perks available to traditional political groups to induce loyalty and compliance. This was combined with changes in the domestic corporate structure, caused by greater penetration of foreign capital and corporate practices. Together, these phenomena allowed a