

identifies for interbranch conflict in presidential systems, neither of which is systematically explored in this book. On the one hand, delegation, as theorized in the literature on U.S. politics and relayed in Helmke's case studies: if crises arise from difficulties in calculating the acceptable delegation space or the counterpart's disposition to pay specific costs to increase or maintain it, does the frequency and stability of delegation to the executive increase or diminish the likelihood of executive-legislative crises? On the other hand, coalition governments, as recently investigated by Amorim Neto, Chasquetti, Pereira, Power, Zucco, and others: if, as these authors demonstrate, both majority coalition and minority party governments are typically as stable as majority party governments, does this increase or diminish the probability of crises? By the same logic, the influence of party factionalization on the likelihood of crises may also affect Helmke's model and outcomes.

Two methodological issues also stand out: the operationalization of the minority status and past vulnerability variables. Minority status is defined as a situation in which the president lacks a majority in the lower house of congress (83). This definition runs the risk of overestimating minority situations, for at least two reasons. One is the size of the legislative shield—to use Pérez-Liñán's expression—that protects presidents against impeachment. If this size is critical in minority situations, and sizes vary across countries, defining minority simply as the absence of majority conflates situations in which presidents control the legislative shield with those in which they don't. The other reason is, again, coalition governments. If the president's minority party is partner to a stable coalition government, its minority situation may not affect presidential stability. In turn, past vulnerability is defined as the number of previous administrations in the country that suffered a presidential crisis. Applied as is, this definition also runs the risk of overestimation: not all precedents may be comparable, due at least to the size of the electoral margin, the effective number of parties, and the president's control over the legislative shield.

Still, neither these issues nor others that may arise obscure the basic fact that *Institutions on the Edge* is a major work that should be required reading for any course in Latin American politics and comparative political institutions.

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Hillel David Soifer, *State Building in Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Tables, figures, abbreviations, bibliography, index, 307 pp.; hardcover \$103, paperback \$31.99, ebook \$26.

Have you ever wondered if decentralization policies influenced state-building efforts in Latin America? In this book, Hillel Soifer sets forth two casual factors, ideation and administrative capacity, to explain why some states were crafted stronger or weaker in nineteenth-century Latin America. He claims that states with strong capacity to rule, with a unified political economy and a central city, promoted more liberal "order" and "progress" than decentralized ones. He goes further, asserting that where leaders relied on deployed rules, sending outsiders to communities to

serve as administrators over delegated ones, and local elites were appointed to bureaucratic posts, the state grew in power and stature. Soifer affirms that centralization is necessary for a stronger state to grow.

It is common for political economists to try to evaluate public policy outcomes based on state capacity (Bates 1998; Geddes 1994; Smith and Revell 2016). Yet decentralization policies promoted in the 1980s, and nowadays recentralization, are mostly an unsettled policy matter for many distinguished scholars. Endogeneity is often mixed into this literature. Scholars and policy professionals are unsure how decentralization reforms should be made by fragile states. Soifer's book helps us understand this issue.

To do this, Soifer's book uses a mixed-methods approach to analyze variation in state capacity in four countries in the region, Colombia, Argentina, Mexico, and Chile. He determines that three of the four cases built strong states, characterized by a dominant capital city (or what he calls "urban primacy") and a "unified political economy." Yet state-building projects had different outcomes when state agents were sometimes deployed and at other times delegated, such as in Mexico and Peru. By evaluating three areas of state policy for education, taxation, and military recruitment in each country, Soifer identifies how those states built strong or weak governments.

While many comparative politics, public policy, and political economy scholars use quantitative methods, they often worry about claiming too much with suboptimal data. Wouldn't it be nice to understand how public policy affects state creation, bureaucratic quality, or even democratization in the long run? By working with larger time horizons in histories, Soifer is able to analyze casual mechanisms of this scope.

Critics have suggested biases in Soifer's work. Principally, historians disagree about whether data-driven accounts demonstrate history or whether they wash away the thick details. Others object to Soifer's use of "rules" to explain the superiority of his theory that only urban primacy matters over other theories, such as geography, wars, federalism, and tax collection, among others, to explain why and how states form. Still others suggest that Soifer's theory of state centrality lacks transversality to other countries, or the generalizability question in research methods.

Importantly, this is not the first time scholars have used urban primacy to define state formation and development. Dennis Rondinelli (1981) has long written in the fields of public administration and development economics about the importance not only of how cities drive the bureaucracy but also how and when the proliferation of secondary cities is equally vital. Daniel Carpenter's book *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy* (2001) describes how a federalist state deepened and evolved by promoting bureaucratic autonomy. Guy Peters's work *The Politics of Bureaucracy* (2000) demonstrates, through comparative cases, the interworkings of how to strengthen states through different types of bureaucratic formation and execution of public policy.

Case selection and descriptive analysis may be biased in Soifer's work. For example, Mauricio Merino (1992) has frequently claimed that the administrative state in Mexico was crafted by the Catholic Church, which Soifer does not mention. During the nineteenth century, both liberals and conservatives were fighting for

centralization of power. Even though liberal Benito Juárez came from Oaxaca and had regional *caciques* propel him into office, his administration promised development by centralized agencies for agricultural reforms, promoting the railways and improving international commerce.

While these complaints are relevant, this book provides a great use of mixed methods, employing historical datasets, which often are presented as simple OLS regressions or modest causalities, combined with selective cases to demonstrate assertions. This gives interesting insights on how quantitative comparative work affects long-term and case selection.

Overall, Solfer's work presents an easily read version of state formation by presenting a "new" alternative explanation for history scholars to engage with: urban primacy. He also demonstrates possible flaws quantitative scholars can create by trying to claim too much with datasets. While this work adds to the academic debates about decentralization versus centralization, without accounting for issues of federalism in state formation, Soifer limits possible solutions to this vacillation.

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Elizabeth Kath, ed., *Australian-Latin American Relations: New Links in a Changing Global Landscape*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. Figures, tables, bibliographies, index, 254 pp.; hardcover \$100, ebook \$79.99.

Working on Latin America in Australia is a lonely business. The challenges start at the top of the governmental structure, most recently in the form of Foreign Minister Julie Bishop's categorical statement, "We are an Indo-Pacific nation; our interests are firmly in our region" (2017). Indeed, in 2012 and 2013 there was an internal effort at the Australian government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to