

by many deaths that lead him on a path to religious conversion and eventually the vision which inspires him to take action and escape the Ixil region.

The point at which my dissonance towards the book emerged came as early as the fifth page, when General Efraín Ríos Montt is held aloft as the saviour Guzaro is taking everybody towards. With Montt currently standing trial specifically for the genocide of Ixil Mayas, the awkwardness of this sentiment is a profound one. Allied with the distinct demonisation of guerrillas, there is a distinctly one-sided perspective that forces you to read between the lines. It is for this reason that I suggest the two distinct reading routes. With the book being written very accessibly and with an enticing religio-heroic narrative, it is clearly intended for a wide spectrum of readers. The omissions and one-sidedness of some recollections would have made me exceedingly reticent to recommend this book to those who were not anticipating the need to read between Guzaro's lines were it not for Stoll's intervention. In just 11 pages Stoll gives a near-perfect overview of *la violencia* while still leaving space to ground the specificity of experiences of Ixil Maya and to contextualise the book within the wider genre of testimonio – a genre he played such an active role in problematising in his critique of Menchu's autobiography. The book is almost worth buying for Stoll's contribution alone. But this is perhaps unfair on Guzaro, as the key point stressed by Stoll, with which I wholeheartedly concur, is that whether you agree or disagree with Guzaro's politics, his voice should be heard. Yes, the problematic tropes of testimonio are present here in a deliberately emotive narrative, selective remembering and the demonisation of 'the other' – in this case the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (Guerrilla Army of the Poor, EGP). But what you are also shown is a largely coherent picture that demonstrates the logic behind some of the support that Ríos Montt has enjoyed for decades since he oversaw atrocities in Guatemala.

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Katherine Isbester (ed.), *The Paradox of Democracy in Latin America: Ten Country Studies of Division and Resilience* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. xv + 396, \$39.95, pb.

This book can be read both as a general introduction to Latin American politics and as a reflection on the condition of democracy in the region. Its focus is clearly set up in a rich and nuanced conceptual discussion of democracy in the first chapter. In this chapter, the author (the book's editor, Katherine Isbester) makes two important points that frame the subsequent historical analysis of the region's political systems: (1) democracy is not just a set of procedures but a system of government with an ethical content based on the principles of freedom, equality and justice; and (2) any analysis of democracy should focus on three core components: the state, civil society and the economy. While welcome, the incorporation of moral, institutional and socio-economic dimensions to the concept of democracy risks falling into a fuzzy conceptualisation of the term. However, Isbester's definition places her within the pluralist tradition, including pluralism's moral core: she defines democracy as 'a system that disperses power through its institutions and procedures so that the domination of one person, group, or interest can be kept to a minimum' (p. 2).

The conceptual discussion in the first chapter is followed by a second chapter on the political history of democracy in Latin America and by a third that surveys

institutions and issues in Latin American governance. The second chapter is used by Isbester to ground her arguments about the nature and weaknesses of Latin American democracies in the history of the region. She claims that a pattern emerges by which most countries are characterised by political regimes of elite rule that are 'constitutionalised' into minimum democracies operating through weak states. She further argues that democratic institutions have been historically subverted by non-democratic practices of economic exploitation, social exclusion, clientelism and crony capitalism. The third chapter examines political and social institutions and concludes that a weak state, limited rule of law, fragmented political parties, malapportioned legislatures, presidentialism and weak bureaucracies have undermined democratic institutions, procedures and norms. The case studies cover the largest countries in the region (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico) as well as some medium-sized (Chile, Venezuela) and small ones (Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Bolivia). The short chapters combine a historical overview with analysis of contemporary political institutions and developments up until around 2009, with a special focus on the strengths and weaknesses of democracy in the countries covered.

The book concludes with a survey of the main social, political and economic indicators of the quality of democracy in the region. It ranks countries in terms of gross national income, human development, social expenditure, tax revenue, inequality, homicide and corruption, and divides the countries of the region into those in which democracy (including state institutions, civil society and socio-economic welfare) works well (Chile, Costa Rica, Uruguay and Venezuela), those in which it 'barely works' (Brazil, Argentina, Mexico), those in which it might work (Bolivia and, again, Venezuela) and those in which it does not work (most Central American nations).

Edited books frequently amount to little more than a number of case studies flimsily held together by a perfunctory introduction, and the diversity of Latin America makes this danger even greater. Thankfully, this is not the case with Isbester's book. The three introductory chapters provide a strong conceptual, historical and institutional analytical framework for the case studies that follow, and the conclusion brings them together with the backing of a battery of well-chosen indicators. Isbester, however, appears to be unable to make up her mind about whether the contemporary condition of democracy in Latin America is yet another chapter of a history of failures and shortcomings, or if substantive progress has been made towards genuine democratisation. The two views are sometimes expressed awkwardly close to each other (see, for instance, the last paragraph of p. 351 and the second paragraph of p. 352). But perhaps this should not be held against her, as democracy in the region has made uneven progress not only between countries but also within countries.

Unavoidably in a regional survey, there are some sweeping generalisations: while the neoliberal reformation swept throughout the region in the 1990s, not every pre-Pink Tide democracy in the region can be characterised as a 'neoliberal democracy' nor every state as a 'neoliberal state' (in the case of some Central American countries, good-quality neoliberal institutions may even have constituted progress if they had been implemented, as shown by the case of Chile). As the case studies show, the failures of the state and the shortcomings of democracy have long historical roots in the region. The classification of countries in the conclusion can be challenged (while far from perfect, Brazilian democracy more than 'barely works'). But a few disputable generalisations are vastly compensated for by a thoughtful and balanced

analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of democratic institutions in the region. The case studies are of a very good standard, with those of Brazil, Venezuela and Bolivia being particularly strong.

In short, this is an excellent book. It should be extremely useful for students of Latin American politics at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels and, more generally, will appeal to all those interested in an informed and insightful overview of the quality of democracy in the region.

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John Crabtree (ed.), *Fractured Politics: Peruvian Democracy Past and Present* (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, University of London, 2011), pp. xxii + 258, £25.00; \$40.00; €29.00, pb.

In 2010, an impressive group of 12 scholars, most from Peru but with Canada and the United Kingdom also represented, came together for a conference on the state of Peruvian democracy at St Anthony's College, Oxford. They also gathered to honour the universally acclaimed long-time *peruanólogo* Julio Cotler, who gave the keynote address. This volume, carefully edited by St Anthony's College Latin American Centre research associate John Crabtree, is the product of that gathering.

The unifying theme of the book is drawn from Cotler's now classic study of the development of the Peruvian state, *Clases, Estado y nación en el Perú* (Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1978). His central concern was with the degree to which the extended Spanish colonial experience scarred Peru with a deep legacy of inequality that has had significant negative effects on the country's institutional development from independence in 1821 to the present. Although the efforts of the military government of General Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968–75) to overcome elite domination and inequality through significant structural reforms were widely recognised at the time, they were only partially successful and did not survive for long the transition to full formal democracy in 1980. When combined with a prolonged guerrilla war led by Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path, SL, 1980–95), hyperinflation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the increasingly authoritarian project of President Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000), it comes as no surprise that Peru's democratic institutions remain weak and shallow to this day.

The book's title, *Fractured Politics*, perfectly captures this reality, and provides the core focus of the individual chapters. Political parties have become little more than personalistic electoral vehicles without deep connections to the wider society. Social groups marginalised by the lack of institutionalised connections to central authority have turned to protest and violence to articulate their concerns. Major outside investors, fully supported by successive Peruvian governments for more than two decades, have stimulated sustained economic growth and a dramatic expansion of exports even as political organisations have failed to incorporate the multiple concerns of local social actors at the national level. True enough, procedural democracy with regular national, regional and local elections has become standard operating practice in Peru since Congress dismissed President Fujimori in the midst of major corruption and electoral manipulation scandals in November 2000. Nevertheless, this electoral democracy has perpetuated rather than reduced the social, political and economic inequalities so prevalent throughout Peru's often turbulent political history.