

for the underlying problems. In addition, the authors argue that the term *dictatorship* is incongruent with the gravity of the cases of possible violation of democratic norms that they point to. Thus, for example, the authors suggest that “reasonable arguments” can be made that Maduro should have called an “initiating referendum” for the National Constituent Assembly, given the “sweeping powers” (175) that were conferred on it in 2017. In addition, the authors do not take a pro-Maduro position in their discussion of the “institutional standoff” between the national executive and the opposition-controlled National Assembly after 2015. Nevertheless, these cases were “not enough to warrant [the Venezuelan government] being called a dictatorship or even particularly ‘authoritarian’” (156).

An additional criticism is Maduro’s handling of the system of exchange controls that, after he assumed power, triggered hyperinflation. The authors, however, contextualize the error: due to opposition-promoted destabilization attempts, “Maduro was inhibited from making changes that could alienate his activist support base” (142). In a criticism of Chávez (that could also apply to Maduro), the authors state, “he could have placed less emphasis on political loyalty and more on technical competence when appointing people to key posts.” This error is also contextualized by making reference to “an insurrectionist opposition staunchly backed by a super-power” (202).

US policy toward Venezuela in the twenty-first century has been a failure from all viewpoints. Fundamental questions, such as the motivation behind Washington’s actions and the positions assumed by important actors, including the media, NGOs, think tanks, and politicians of all persuasions, are open to debate. This book, which, despite various criticisms of Maduro, is clearly pro-*Chavista*, presents cohesive, empirically based arguments, and in doing so contributes to a much-needed debate on US foreign policy. More studies like this one, anchored in relevant facts, are needed to examine long-held assumptions and help clarify issues without easy answers.

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Carew Boulding and Claudio A. Holzner, *Voice and Inequality: Poverty and Political Participation in Latin American Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. Figures, tables, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index, 257 pp.; hardcover \$74, ebook.

How frequently do poor citizens in Latin American countries organize, mobilize, and participate in politics, and how do those rates of participation compare to similar

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activity among wealthier individuals? The rich academic literature illuminating these two questions has largely explored them within specific countries, cities, or communities. This focus makes it difficult to draw broader descriptive conclusions about regional trends, which must be pieced together as a composite from the findings of many studies, and even harder to make inferences about why the poor might participate at different rates across national contexts. By sweepingly exploring these questions across the region and advancing a compelling institutional theory for making sense of cross-national differences, Carew Boulding and Claudio Holzner's book offers a particularly valuable contribution to an enduringly important line of research.

A few brief words about the scope of the book are in order. Boulding and Holzner take advantage of the regional surveys run by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). Their analysis focuses on the years between 2006, when the first truly regionwide LAPOP wave was fielded, and 2014. While the data do allow for some limited analysis of change over time, in a broader sense the book captures a time-lapse snapshot of a particular period in recent Latin American political development, when the region's turn toward more inclusionary politics arguably reached its zenith (before encountering some significant trouble). Within this period, Boulding and Holzner explore a variety of descriptive and causal questions regarding the political participation of the poor across the region, focusing on four kinds of behavior: voting, protest, contacting local officials, and petitioning government.

The book makes a number of important contributions that are purely descriptive, perhaps most notably in chapter 3. A lengthy tradition in scholarship on political behavior (particularly in the United States) has found that political participation is strongly tied to socioeconomic resources and that the poor participate less than wealthier citizens. Boulding and Holzner show persuasively that this trend does not hold in Latin America. Instead, we see two intriguing patterns of variation. First, on an aggregate regional level, the poor are less likely to participate via voting and protest than the wealthy, but more likely to participate via contacting and petitioning local officials. The poor and the wealthy in Latin America have different repertoires of participation. Second, there is substantial cross-national variation in the relative participation rates of the poor and the wealthy, with the poor participating more frequently than the nonpoor in some countries and participating less than the nonpoor in others. This is true even of forms of participation such as voting and protest, in which the wealthy have an aggregate advantage when viewed regionwide. A series of puzzles related to this variation provides a foundation for much of the rest of the book.

The book's major theoretical contribution is to provide a framework for understanding and explaining these cross-national differences. When do the poor participate more frequently? Boulding and Holzner argue that political institutions provide the key, especially high-quality democracies and mobilizing structures, such as community organizations and political parties. A long tradition in the social sciences has argued for the importance of these kinds of institutions in

spurring citizen participation in politics. Boulding and Holzner's theoretical contribution is to propose that these factors have particularly important and strong effects on the political participation of the poor, who otherwise struggle to participate, given their lower socioeconomic resources. In a further twist that runs somewhat counter to conventional wisdom, they argue that despite their analysis focusing on the left turn period, the presence of left-wing governments is not a meaningful factor in shaping patterns of political participation among the poor.

Four main analytical chapters are devoted to developing and testing different aspects of this argument. Chapter 4 undertakes a sweeping analysis of the relationship between participation in community-based organizations and other forms of political participation. Consistent with other research, Boulding and Holzner find that organizational membership mobilizes individuals into other forms of political action. But they also find that this effect is (moderately) more powerful among the poor. Chapter 5 shifts the lens to the partisan arena, showing that two characteristics of party systems are associated with decreasing or eliminating the gap between poor and rich in various forms of political participation: the presence of mass parties and the degree of competition (especially whether there is a dominant party). Mass parties—which may or may not be left-wing parties—play a major role in mobilizing members into other forms of political action. More competitive systems create incentives for participation that lower the gap between rich and poor.

The remaining empirical chapters focus on other aspects of the institutional environment, fleshing out the picture. Chapter 6 looks more specifically at whether government by the left is associated with more participation among the poor, finding little evidence for that proposition. And chapter 7 shows that the poor participate more where the quality of democracy is high.

Beyond these descriptive and theoretical contributions, the book's careful but sweeping analysis of political participation in the region from 2006 to 2014 also helps us think about several important questions facing the region right now and into the future. By focusing our attention on the role of political institutions in shaping participatory equality, Boulding and Holzner's analysis raises some troubling questions. If mass parties are vital structures for mobilizing the poor into other forms of participation on equal footing, then what future does participatory equality have in a region where such parties—or, indeed, any kind of political party with a strong base of party identifiers—seem to be growing rarer? Similarly, if participatory equality is more likely when the quality of democracy is high, yet democracy in the region is stagnant at best, what does that augur?

An even thornier question involves what—if anything—participatory equality might produce in terms of public policy, given the other political and institutional factors that shape the operation of Latin American democracies. A persistent concern for analysts of Latin American politics has been that the neoliberal era might be marked by a more atomized and disarticulated popular sector that has difficulty participating in politics and acting collectively to pursue common class interests. Boulding and Holzner's work makes a compelling case that this concern

is overblown, insofar as participation by the poor is much more robust than often assumed. But is there a relationship, let alone a causal relationship, between how much the poor participate in politics and what the poor reap from public policy? What if the poor participate in politics at surprisingly robust rates, yet—in the big picture at least—reap relatively little from such efforts in terms of public policy change reducing socioeconomic exclusion and inequality?

The answers to these questions will be difficult to ascertain—outcomes like policy impact and influence are incredibly slippery and hard to operationalize in the study of participation and interest group politics. Yet gaining better leverage on these questions seems essential to thinking about the relationship between socioeconomic inequality, political participation, and the operation of twenty-first-century Latin American democracies. With their meticulous and trenchant analysis of patterns of participation by the poor in the initial decades of the new century, Boulding and Holzner provide an essential foundation for exploring these and other topics, producing a book that will be useful and enlightening for any reader interested in inequality, political participation, and democratic practice in the region.

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