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Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars: Crackdowns and Cartels in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Illustrations, bibliography, index, 354 pp.; hardcover \$94.99, paperback \$34.99, ebook \$28.

This book, part of the Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics series, provides a comprehensive analysis of drug-related violence in contemporary Latin America and should be of interest to scholars, policymakers, diplomats, and practitioners. While centering its analysis on three Latin American countries, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico, its novel argument has broad implications for other regions afflicted by drug-related violence.

The book is divided into three main parts: a theoretical-conceptual section, in which the logic of the main argument is laid out; an empirical section, composed of three case studies in which this theory is tested; and a section examining why reform attempts in the realm of drug control succeed or fail.

As it is often the case, a great book stems from a great research question, or questions. Lessing asks, why does massive drug-related violence arise in certain cases and times and not in others? In particular, he is intrigued about why drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs) would attack states if, unlike insurgent groups, their main objective is not to topple them but to “keep them of their backs”? (3). The author also asks why states seldom succeed in their attempts to control organized criminal violence.

Lessing’s work forms part of the burgeoning literature on civil wars and violence and focuses on a particular form of criminal violence: cartel-state conflict. This is conceptualized as a direct and sustained armed confrontation between DTOs and state security forces (27). Lessing posits that this important dimension of drug-related violence has been sidestepped by the civil war literature, which has centered on anticivilian violence, as well as by scholarship on criminal violence, which has focused on intercartel turf wars. While cognizant of the links between them, the author convincingly argues that these forms of violence are logically and analytically distinct, informed by different causal mechanisms and therefore requiring different conceptual approaches (28–29).

The book presents several important arguments. In what is clearly a major contribution to our understanding of existing patterns of violence, Lessing posits that cartel-state violence can be conceptualized as violence to constrain an opponent.

DTOs, he explains, attack the state, not to conquer it but to alter its behavior in accordance with their preferred outcomes (i.e., conditions that allow them to keep carrying on their profitable business) (277).

In other words, the massive criminal violence, often referred to as criminal wars in countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia, can be conceptualized as a war of constraint. In their attempts to constrain state action, DTOs deploy two major forms of violence. One is violent lobbying, which seeks to change a given public policy (e.g., extradition), normally through terror campaigns (e.g., the Medellín Cartel's string of bombings, executions, and kidnappings in Bogotá and Medellín and the Comando Vermelho torching of buses in Rio de Janeiro). The other is violent coercion, in which criminals utilize violence to undermine efforts by state enforcers (judges, police, the military, investigators) to curb their illicit activities. This form of violence is pristinely illustrated by Pablo Escobar's famous dictum, *plata o plomo* (silver or lead), whereby DTOs "negotiate a bribe with enforcers, while simultaneously threatening the use of force if no bribe agreement is reached" (15).

According to Lessing's account, cartel-state violence is fundamentally driven by the nature and degree of state repression. Put more simply, state antinarcotics policy is the key driver of cartel-state conflict (23). While counterintuitive, the logic is sound: when states decide to attack DTOs with all their might, regardless of these groups' behavior, cartels have no other choice but to defend themselves and strike back. Conversely, when states use force as a deterrent and condition their response to DTOs' behavior, keeping repressive force in reserve, DTOs have an incentive to modify their behavior. In what becomes the central empirical finding, the book persuasively shows how unconditional crackdowns exacerbate antistate violence whereas more conditional forms of repression lower it (9). Conditional repression, the author explains, requires the state to mount a credible threat of using extra levels of force in response to DTO violence.

If conditional crackdowns succeed in lowering violence, then why have policy-makers been reluctant to use them? Lessing maintains that unconditional crackdowns are exceedingly difficult to implement and maintain over time, as a result of logistical and acceptability constraints. Logistical constraints refer to the difficulties states confront in gathering sound intelligence to assess violent actions by DTOs and repress them accordingly. This means articulating a coordinated response from security services, which, by nature, tend to be fragmented and in competition with one another. It also means maintaining, over time, a policy that is not only expensive but also labor-intensive (246). Acceptability constraints, for their part, correspond to normative concerns: leaders are hard pressed to sell to the public a policy in which they seem to be yielding to criminals. This may lead to accusations of being soft on crime, or worse, being compromised by criminals.

Lessing's book has several strengths. It is superbly written and entertaining. Conceptually, the analysis is exceptional: the author navigates the intricate world of violence—described by Stathis Kalyvas as a conceptual minefield (*The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 2006, 19)—producing with ease a gripping, powerful account. Lessing's examination of the links between violence and corruption is particularly

insightful. While he draws on a rationalistic-strategic framework, his analysis seriously engages with alternative accounts that view criminal violence more broadly as a result of cultural expressions or irrational impulses (59). Lessing also engages with arguments linking drug violence to U.S. policies but avoids the common trap of attributing to this variable a disproportionate weight, which often obscures the endogenous roots of violence.

The result is a highly nuanced explanation concerning the logic behind DTO violence that, unlike other academic studies, is not detached from reality. What's more, in what seems a rarity in mainstream political science, Lessing strikes a very delicate balance between sophistication and intellectual rigor and thoughtfulness, never losing sight of the predicament of victims affected by violence, as well as the challenges faced by policymakers and state enforcers. Lessing's extensive experience with community work in Brazil's favelas seems to have helped him achieve this remarkable balance.

The author also produces work with significant relevance in the realm of public policy. In connecting his theoretical work and findings with the policymaking challenges, Lessing comes up with concrete solutions to implement more sensible policies in the realm of drug control, capable of lowering acute levels of violence. The author should also be praised for integrating important research produced in the countries he investigates and published in Spanish and Portuguese.

The empirical basis of the book is also phenomenal. The theoretical portion is buttressed by three exceedingly well researched case studies that reflect serious, methodical, and clever fieldwork. The author provides a wealth of information, including a major database of violent acts and scores of interviews with relevant sources, such as policymakers, DTO operatives, state enforcers, journalists, and activists. The provision of such a rich and detailed empirical basis is one of the major achievements of this work, particularly if one has in mind the enormous challenges that investigating a clandestine industry characterized by exceeding levels of opacity entails. Methodologically, the book is also incredibly strong: the author combines with great skill an assortment of tools—formal, quantitative, and qualitative—that create a well-balanced study exemplifying solid multimethod research.

It is hard to find weaknesses in this book. The characterization of the links between Colombian DTOs and paramilitary groups is probably underdeveloped, although, in all fairness, the point is not central to the author's main argument. Likewise, the analysis of Mexico would have gained a lot from including a more systematic discussion of President Enrique Peña Nieto's term in office (2012–18). Also, the book would have gained a lot by engaging with the security literature; in particular, with new work on stabilization operations (see, e.g., Robert Muggah, ed., *Stabilization Operations, Security and Development: States of Fragility*, 2014), which dovetails nicely with Lessing's insights. More than a shortcoming, however, this omission sadly reflects the existing lack of communication and cross-fertilization among different fields in our discipline.

In sum, *Making Peace in Drug Wars* represents a groundbreaking theoretical analysis based on solid empirical research that will set the agenda on this critical

issue afflicting Latin American societies for years to come. Lessing's extraordinary book is clearly traceable to the influential Berkeley School of Latin American comparative politics, which has made such great contributions to our discipline and to which Lessing has proven he rightly belongs.

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Esteban Pérez Caldentey and Matías Vernengo, eds., *Why Latin American Nations Fail: Development Strategies in the Twenty-First Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017. Illustrations, index, 240 pp.; hardcover \$85, paperback \$29.95, ebook \$29.95.

After a decade of cautious optimism over economic, social, and political gains, Latin America is again a region in flux. Growth has slowed for most countries, and the inclusionary trend is at risk, as the increased social spending fueled by the commodity boom has come to an end. Democracy seems more fragile as well, with voters confronting economic and social reversions as well as pervasive corruption scandals and creeping authoritarianism. Whereas the first half of the 2000s offered the promise of a new, more inclusive, more democratic Latin America, the second decade has raised concerns about the sustainability of those gains and the extent of possible reversion.

"Why Latin American nations fail" is therefore an apt question, and this volume is a timely addition to the search for ways to approach the problem. The title explicitly evokes Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson's *Why Nations Fail* (2012) and shares with it a concern for the role of institutions in the development process. But the book actually offers a critique of Acemoglu and Robinson and the institutionalist turn in economics more broadly, as well as a critique of both neoclassical economic and neoliberal approaches.

The central argument of the volume is that economic development depends, on the one hand, on innovation and technological change and on the other hand, on demand-led growth. While the new institutionalism makes property rights the central focus, the contributors to *Why Latin American Nations Fail* argue that property rights are insufficient. Instead, institutions that foster innovation and promote expansion of demand really drive development. Thus, very much in contrast to both new institutionalist and neoliberal arguments, the editors and the contributors collectively make a case for an interventionist state (albeit an effective one).

The book's greatest strength lies in the series of chapters that develop explicit critiques of Acemoglu and Robinson specifically and the new economic institutionalism generally. For example, the editors' chapter on institutions and property rights begins by showing the affinity between new institutional economics and neoclassical theory. Neoclassical theory cannot account for sharp variations in per capita income and growth relying on standard measures of inputs. The new institutional economics solves that dilemma by showing that the differences stem from variations in governance structures; specifically, inclusive versus extractive institutions. The former