

DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL  
INSTITUTIONS IN LATIN AMERICA:  
Reconciling Approaches<sup>1</sup>

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- REFORMING THE STATE: MANAGERIAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN LATIN AMERICA.* Edited by Luiz Carlos Bresser Pereira and Peter Spink. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999. Pp. 213. \$55.00 cloth.)
- STUFFING THE BALLOT BOX: FRAUD, ELECTORAL REFORM, AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN COSTA RICA.* By Fabrice E. Lehoucq and Iván Molina. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. 294. \$60.00 cloth.)
- CONSERVATIVE PARTIES, THE RIGHT, AND DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA.* Edited by Kevin J. Middlebrook. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. Pp. 391. \$23.50 paper.)
- POLITICAL CLEAVAGES: ISSUES, PARTIES AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY.* By Alejandro Moreno. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999. Pp. 224. \$90.00, cloth.)
- LEGISLATIVE POLITICS IN LATIN AMERICA.* Edited by Scott Morgenstern and Benito Nacif. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. 503. \$65.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.)
- PROBLEMAS Y PERSPECTIVAS DE LA DEMOCRACIA EN AMÉRICA LATINA.* By Darío Salinas Figueredo. (Mexico, D.F.: Triana Editores, 1999. Pp. 429. Price not available.)
- MANDATES AND DEMOCRACY: NEOLIBERALISM BY SURPRISE IN LATIN AMERICA.* By Susan Stokes. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Pp. 220. \$55.00 cloth, \$20.00 paper.)

By the mid 1990s Latin American countries appeared firmly on the road to institutionalized and predictable democratic politics. However, the recent detours of many countries have created intellectual tensions in contemporary academic work on democracy in the region: tensions between those who focus on democratic governability and those who

1. Thanks to Scott Morgenstern and Henry Dietz for useful comments and suggestions.

focus on economic equality; between those whose central concern is elites and institutions and those who find explanations at the popular and social level; between those who analyze formal institutions, and those who see informality as the key to understanding politics. In methodological terms we see tension between those who employ increasingly sophisticated methodologies (often from U.S. literature and drawing on the United States as a comparative referent), and those who contend that these methodologies cause us to miss the essence of politics in the region.

These tensions are clearest in debates on rational-choice institutionalism, and in recent work on "delegative democracy." Rational choice institutionalism has become a predominant paradigm for studying Latin American politics. Its basic premise is that instrumental rationality governs political choice within an institutionally based incentive structure. Operating with scientific pretensions based on micro-political foundations and individual rationality, rational-choice institutionalists have built an impressive edifice of theory, especially related to electoral systems and executive-legislative relations.<sup>2</sup> Still emerging crisis in Latin America has helped generate doubt concerning the explanatory power of this approach. Weyland very effectively criticizes rational-choice institutionalism, arguing that it "has difficulty explaining the complicated, variegated and fluid patterns of Latin American politics" (2002, 1). Further, for Weyland this approach relies too much on analysis of the electoral and legislative arenas and cannot deal with political crisis and change.

O'Donnell (1994) argues that we may be on the wrong track as well. He points to a divergence in politics between advanced capitalist countries and the rest of the world, pointing to a "new species" called "delegative democracy" that has taken hold in developing countries. Weyland's critique suggests we may be on the wrong track methodologically, while O'Donnell suggests that we may need to change our view of the empirics of politics and adjust our methodological tools accordingly. He questions the importance of analyzing institutions where citizens forgo representation, surrendering their democratic rights to excessively powerful presidents cast in the role of a Hobbesian leviathan. If this is an accurate vision of democracy, we may be missing the explanatory boat if we rely too heavily on the analysis of lower-level and non-executive institutions.

In light of these tensions, where does the literature on democratic politics in the Americas stand, and where should we go? The works reviewed here show that the study of Latin American politics is healthy,

2. A short list includes Ames (2001), Samuels (1999), Morgenstern and Nacif (2002), Shugart and Carey (1992) and Carey (1996). For a more complete list, see Weyland (2002, 57-61).

dynamic, methodologically sophisticated, and that scholars have heeded the call for methodological diversity and are focusing on the appropriate institutions. In this sense, this essay challenges the contentions of Weyland and O'Donnell. In recent years there have been major advances in the field. We have moved from macro-concerns to micro foundations, often better explaining the "why" of democratic politics, rather than focusing on the "how." The study of transitions has given way to a concern for the maintenance and quality of democratic regimes (perhaps, as shall be discussed later, prematurely). Within the institutional literature we have seen an evolution from analysis based on a single or a few institutional variables, toward recognition of the importance of the complex interaction of institutions. Finally, we have seen a fruitful borrowing of methods between Latin America and the United States, both in terms of theoretical frameworks and concrete methods.

At the same, Weyland and O'Donnell show that we have lost something along the way, both empirically and methodologically. Indeed some of the works reviewed here commit the very sins these scholars criticize. To advance the study of Latin American politics, scholars must focus more on the connection among politics, poverty, and economic crisis; on the interaction between institutions; on the societal-institutional nexus; on sub-national politics; and on the significance of informal institutions. Methodologically, despite hemispheric sharing, mainstream U.S. scholars show less concern with socioeconomic variables and the philosophical foundations of politics, which preoccupy many of their Latin American colleagues. Thus, U.S. scholars should recognize a two-way methodological street and, more explicitly, connect their methodologies to empirical processes on the ground (despite the difficulties posed by data collection). The happy reality is that many of the works reviewed here have begun to do just these things.

The review begins with a description of the types of books and their theoretical ambitions, organized into three categories: (1) those that analyze counterintuitive questions; (2) those intended to build theory related to particular democratic institutions; and (3) those that are less theoretically focused, either because they seek to break new ground or challenge conventional approaches. Throughout the review, I also evaluate the relevance of Weyland's and O'Donnell's observations, arguing that they overstate their cases to make what are still valid points.

The works reviewed reflect a diversity of approaches and focuses. Three are single or co-authored monographs and four are edited volumes. The monographs vary widely in their substantive focus, ranging from Alejandro Moreno, who chooses a cross-national and cross-regional approach, to Susan Stokes who analyzes several Latin American cases, to Fabrice Lehoucq and Iván Molina who present a Costa Rican case study (albeit with much wider theoretical significance). Among the

edited volumes, Darío Salinas Figueredo has eight chapters that focus on the relationship between politics and societies, eight on challenges and national contexts, and four on international variables affecting politics. Kevin Middlebrook's volume is organized along country lines, including seven Latin American cases, and Scott Morgenstern and Benito Nacif organize their volume focusing on four countries, with three parallel substantive chapters on each country, and introductory and concluding theoretical chapters. Luiz Carlos Bresser Pereira and Peter Spink's edited volume on the other hand, is organized along thematic rather than country lines.

In methodological terms the works range widely in the balance between the empirical and theoretical. Lehoucq and Molina, Stokes, Moreno, Middlebrook, and Morgenstern and Nacif have clear theory-building ambitions, while the remaining two works are more descriptive. Still, this difference is due in large part to the different types of questions each asks. Those with a more theoretical orientation ask very specific questions within the context of well-developed literatures. Those with less theory-building intentions either make preliminary statements about under-explored research areas (Bresser Pereira) or challenge the prevalent approaches to studying politics in the region (Salinas Figueredo).

#### THE COUNTERINTUITIVE AND THEORY-BUILDING

Two of the books ask questions about puzzling counterintuitive phenomena, with important theoretical implications. In *Mandates and Democracy: Neoliberalism by Surprise in Latin America*, Stokes's goal is to explore "mandates and their violations" (xii). Her point of departure is that neo-liberalism exists uncomfortably with popular democracy. She is interested in why politicians in a seemingly self-destructive way campaign on socially kinder "security-oriented" policies and then abruptly switch to the "efficiency-oriented" policies dictated by neoliberalism once in office (2). Also puzzling, is that in two of her three principal cases, politicians who most strenuously campaigned in favor of security-oriented policies and then switched (Carlos Menem and Alberto Fujimori) were popular enough at the end of their terms to gain reelection and redraft their constitutions. The rationale behind mandate violations has been analyzed, yet Stokes's approach is innovative and creative. She challenges O'Donnell's explanation for mandate violation, which rests comfortably with his concept of delegative democracy, where overly powerful presidents simply rule as they please. She also challenges Dominguez (1998) who is not so concerned about mandate violations, because citizens can render judgments on mandate violators and remove them in subsequent elections.

Stokes, on the other hand, contends that mandate switching has a rationally consistent and representative logic. She begins by exploring the economic context of the region, dispelling the notion that the debt crisis and globalization transform "efficiency-oriented" policies into the only choice for Latin American executives. She offers a model for understanding policy switches, asserting that mandate switchers may believe that unpopular policies will ultimately benefit their constituents and, in turn, their own political ambitions. However, the unpopularity of these policies forces presidents to dissimulate to have any hope of being elected. Only by adopting a strategy of campaigning on security-oriented issues and then switching to efficiency-oriented issues can presidents reconcile constituent interests with their own political ambitions. She also convincingly dispels the notion that simple rent-seeking or party-system weakness can explain mandate switching. Her model shows that mandate switching will be more likely where there are conflicting preferences between voters and politicians, where voter uncertainty about the impact of policies is high, and where new political parties or coalition governments are in power. Finally, she finds that more competitive elections will keep candidates closer to voter preferences after they are elected.

This methodologically sophisticated volume is an outstanding contribution to understanding mandate switching, and to theory building on the electoral and policymaking connection. It is well rooted in the contemporary literature on representation, but also in a deep understanding of the philosophical roots of mandate theories in the work of Edmund Burke, James Madison, and John Stuart Mill. Combining diverse methods well suited for the question at hand, Stokes uses probit modeling and other statistical tests within a rational choice framework to explain convincingly policy switching.

Lehoucq and Molina begin *Stuffing the Ballot Box: Fraud, Electoral Reform, and Democratization in Costa Rica* with a similar puzzle of politicians doing the unexpected. This case study deals with a central issue in the post-transition comparative politics literature: corruption. A basic axiom of comparative politics is that elites have few incentives to change the systems that benefit them and bring them to power. Lehoucq and Molina ask why Costa Rican elites acted to transform the fraudulent systems from which they benefited.

The authors analyze two extant theories of reform. First, from a rational choice perspective, office-seeking or "efficient" theories hold that politicians will support reforms that benefit everyone, but veto particularistic ones. While particularistic reforms provide individual benefits, their often zero-sum characteristics involve a relative loss for someone, and are likely to languish for lack of support. Second, sociological theories emphasize how social or international pressure may

provide a rationale for the adoption of reforms with long-term benefits but short-term costs for political elites. The authors emphasize that both these theories have some explanatory power for their case, but these more general incentives for reform are also affected by the institutional arrangements through which they filter. Drawing on an impressive database of over thirteen hundred accusations of ballot rigging, they discover institutionally generated incentives for reform. In particular, they find that where the electoral law made elections more competitive there was a greater incentive to denounce fraud. Presidents also had incentives and opportunities to advance institutional reforms in situations where presidents could play rival legislative factions off each other and act as a "pivot" between them (11).

The contributions of this work to understanding Costa Rican democratization are clear to anyone with a cursory knowledge of the case. This account challenges the prevalent understanding of Costa Rican democratization tied to political culture, social structure, and/or optimal patterns of agrarian capitalism. Rather, we see that both institutions and the level of political competition make a difference even in so-called underdeveloped political systems.

This work, like Stokes's study, contradicts many of Weyland's and O'Donnell's contentions. Stokes challenges O'Donnell's model of delegative democracy by showing a rationale for the seemingly capricious and arrogant exercise of presidential power. Lehoucq and Molina also demonstrate an avenue for presidents to step out of the pattern of delegative democracy and actually employ lower-level institutions to achieve their goals. These authors also show that, contrary to Weyland's contentions, rational-choice institutional models can deal with change. Stokes uses such a model to demonstrate the dynamism of politics and to explain the seemingly counterintuitive adoption of neo-liberal reform, while Weyland specifically contends that rational choice institutionalism "could not anticipate this fundamental policy change," (71) because of its linear and static assumptions. Lehoucq and Molina also show that institutional approaches can explain change, underscoring how presidents acting in their rational self interest and constrained by institutions will promote a reform agenda. Thus, these works represent important advances in the study of the relationship between institutions and decision-making.<sup>3</sup>

That said, both also reflect some of the concerns raised by Weyland. In particular, they show that we need to think more about how incentive structures shape decisions, a generalized problem of rational-choice institutional accounts of politics. Both works make the implicit assumption

3. Barbara Geddes' (1996) path-breaking study provides another good example.

that political actors have calculated and deliberate strategies, based on a complete understanding of the constellation of factors they face. But the decisions of political elites may be less deliberate. We imagine Stokes's policy switchers at some point privately labeling themselves as such because they know it is the only way to win elections. They then elaborate a carefully constructed and politically calculated plan on how to handle their policy switch. Similarly, for Lehoucq and Molina, we imagine presidents thinking to themselves, "the constellation of political forces is now perfect to launch my reform agenda, and I will begin to play legislative factions off each other." In many cases these decisions are based on incomplete information, a less than clear understanding of institutional constraints, and are more gradual and reactive than suggested.

In addition, the distinction between efficiency- and stability-oriented policies is much more complex than Stokes suggests. So many economic decisions are made every day by Latin American presidents, some of which may be more security oriented and others efficiency oriented, that it may be difficult to use Stokes' labels. While Alberto Fujimori, Carlos Menem, and Carlos Andrés Pérez (who even acknowledged a "*Gran viraje*") certainly adopted efficiency-oriented policies, the record of presidential initiatives is more mixed in other countries. Stokes' model also fails to capture the role that interest groups, business, and other informal policy networks play in helping to cause such policy switches, lending support to Weyland's criticisms.

#### INSTITUTIONS AND THEORY BUILDING

The questions that Moreno, Morgenstern and Nacif, and Middlebrook ask relate to theory building on institutions that are well understood in the United States and Europe, but that have been less analyzed in Latin America. Two of the works effectively apply methodological approaches commonly used outside the region in order to explore politics within it. Moreno uses the World Values Survey, and theories on cleavages and public opinion, and Morgenstern and Nacif rely extensively on literature of the U.S. Congress.

In *Political Cleavages: Issues, Parties and the Consolidation of Democracy*, Moreno argues that scholars have overlooked an important cleavage in the study of party systems in new democracies. His cross-national study analyzes data from the World Values Survey, to argue that the main determinant of party competition in these countries is an authoritarian/democratic cleavage. Authoritarians retain loyalty to the previous regime and may even advocate a return to it. However, he shows that with the routinization of party politics, this cleavage rapidly fades. We need to see more of this type of cross-national, cross-regional study. While cross-national commonalities in political processes are often

ignored in favor of advocating the exceptionalism of Latin America, Moreno places the region's politics within the universe of the "ordinary," even though he is dealing with a regime cleavage. We see the same logic of divisions, value orientations, and cleavage dynamics in the developed and developing world. Indeed, Moreno's findings would be a good place to start for analyzing the value orientations that underwrite support for populist leaders and the Right in Latin America (an issue I will return to in discussing Middlebrook's book).

Still, this work is not the last word on cleavages in new democracies. The next big question is, of course, what makes this cleavage fade more quickly or slowly?<sup>4</sup> For example, why was the authoritarian/democratic cleavage more important and long-lasting in Chile than in Argentina? Was it the nature of the previous regime? The transition? Relative levels of support for the authoritarian governments?

Unlike other areas where undeveloped research is attributed to a scarcity of data, the very reason that Latin American legislatures are underanalyzed motivates Morgenstern and Nacif's *Legislative Politics in Latin America*. In particular, the authors address the widespread assumption that Latin American legislatures are at best rubber stamps, and at worst impediments to efficient executive policymaking.<sup>5</sup> Their study's motivation is to understand the role of legislatures in new or renewed democracies, how these roles vary across contexts, and what we can learn theoretically from an analysis of Latin American legislatures.

This work represents the best of edited volumes in the field, combining a sophisticated array of empirically grounded case studies by country experts within a tightly elaborated theoretical framework. The authors sought to go deep instead of wide, choosing only four countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico), but providing three substantive lenses through which to view each legislature. There is a chapter on executive-legislative relations, parliamentary parties, and the policy process for each country.

The authors make an explicit commitment to employ methods drawn from the well-developed literature on the U.S. Congress. However, this is not a careless application. Though the United States and Latin America share presidential systems, the other contextual features that are taken as a given in this literature (like the U.S. two-party system) do not exist in Latin America. Also, a wide variation exists in constitutional traditions, electoral systems, party systems, and the geographical distribution of power in the region. This is neatly summed up in Morgenstern's

4. Bartolini and Mair (1990) and Lipset and Rokkan (1967) are good places to begin to answer this question.

5. There are important exceptions to this characterization. See Mainwaring and Shugart (1997), David Close (1995), and numerous individual country studies on Latin American legislatures.



conclusion where he contends that "assumptions embedded in the U.S. Congress must become variables in a comparative context" (415). With these general assumptions, the chapters employ a nuanced and sophisticated combination of methods to arrive at some important theoretical findings on the significance of legislatures in the region. The theme that ties the case studies together is that legislatures are quite relevant to policymaking in Latin America, but the way they assert their powers varies across country contexts. Building on the case materials, Morgenstern notes that while legislatures are primarily reactive, they affect policymaking in a number of ways. Presidents will anticipate the legislatures' likely reactions (*a la* Friedrich's law of anticipated reactions) and adjust their policies accordingly. Country differences are explained by "institutional variation" and in particular "re-election drive, the party structure, the electoral system, and the constitution" (415).

Cox and Morgenstern's epilogue goes one step further than the conclusion to elaborate a useful typology for understanding executive-legislative relations. This typology is based on a bilateral veto game in which the president proposes and the legislature reacts. Of course, the president's choice of strategy varies, in accord with the legislature's type. These findings very much challenge O'Donnell's notion of delegative democracy, showing the complexity of the relationship between the legislature and the executive, and the unexpected and nuanced ways that legislatures can stand up to the juggernaut of presidential power. Weyland contends that the use of U.S. models often obscures the complex patterns of politics in the region. Still, through very focused case studies, this work has achieved the difficult task of balancing empirical richness and complexity of the particular within an imported theoretical framework.

The very high quality and sophistication of this study place it with Shugart and Carey (1992), and Mainwaring and Shugart (1997), as required reading for understanding interbranch relations in the Americas. Still, two notes of caution are in order regarding some of the assumptions and the findings, which echo Weyland's criticisms of rational-choice institutionalism. First, Morgenstern and Nacif explicitly contend that we are safe to assume a long-lasting set of institutions and a pattern of regularity in institutional interactions similar to that found in the United States and Europe. I am not so sure that this is a safe assumption given recent events in Venezuela, Argentina, and Peru. We still need better models to deal with crisis politics that go beyond a "normal" set of institutional constraints acting on political actors. Second, though they go further than anyone else not to define legislative power as a simple reverse function of presidential power, future research should refine some of the sources of legislative power that are not dependent on a definition of executive power, and that are less of a determinant of the choice of executive

strategies. Third, all of the cases could better tie society and voters into the analysis of legislative strength and behavior.

Conservative parties are even less researched than legislatures. Middlebrook's edited volume *Conservative Parties, the Right, and Democracy in Latin America* fills this gap nicely, while providing a useful framework for future research. Though not as coherent in its theoretical framework as Morgenstern and Nacif's volume, this book holds together very well, mostly because of Middlebrook's impressive introductory essay (which provides an estimable historic overview and useful theoretical framework) and the efforts of chapter contributors to address parallel questions. The book analyzes the sources of wide variation in patterns of party competition of the Right, dividing case studies into two categories: those with strong traditional conservative parties (Chile, Colombia, and Venezuela), and those with conservative movements that emerged later (Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador, and Peru). In the traditional cases, Middlebrook points to a set of conditions related to church-state conflict that helped to form strong traditional parties. The dampening of the religious cleavage in contemporary Latin America leaves modern conservative parties without the powerful organizing bases on which they could previously rely. The emergence of modern conservative parties is tied to a more complex set of variables, including shifts in the position of the Left at the end of the Cold War, the success of conservative groups in rallying around a neo-liberal policy agenda, and the changing role of the military and its relationship with elites.

Middlebrook's volume is the most important cross-national volume to date for understanding conservative parties in the Americas. It avoids the simplistic characterization of these parties as reactionary defenders of the upper class. We see that parties of the Right (when electorally oriented) are motivated by the same incentives and goals as other parties, and may actually underwrite democracy by defending the interests of elites within the institutional arena, before they resort to the military. Despite the high quality of the introduction, case studies, and the impressive statistical appendix presenting electoral returns for parties of the Right, there are some pending questions. Conservative parties have traditionally been defined as parties of the rich, but in many countries we see growing working-class support for them (Chile's *Unión Demócrata Independiente* is perhaps the prime example). We need a better account of the increasingly cross-class appeal of parties of the Right. The authors in this volume attribute this phenomenon to "clientelistic" patterns (in the Brazilian case, p. 210), or to "lingering historical partisan attachments" (in the Colombian case, p. 107). But is it Latin American "traditionalism" that explains this trend, or is it similar to parallel movements in more developed countries where conservative value orientations and materialist politics underwrite the

Right's bases in the lower classes? What else might explain why this cross-class appeal has emerged in some countries and not others?

**BREAKING NEW THEORETICAL GROUND AND CHALLENGING CONVENTIONAL WISDOM?**

The volumes edited by Bresser Pereira and Spink and Salinas Figueredo both accept the triumph of the neoliberal / democratic model, but come up with diametrically opposed recipes for policymakers and politicians. Bresser Pereira and Spink's volume accepts the viability of the model, but questions its functioning for the long-term without deep public administration reform. The contributors to Salinas Figueredo's volume, on the other hand, question the model and mainstream political-science approaches to analyzing it.

Bresser Pereira and Spink's volume *Reforming the State: Managerial Public Administration in Latin America* grows out of a seminar hosted by the Brazilian Ministry of Federal Administration and State Reform and National School of Public Administration. In his introductory chapter, Bresser Pereira demonstrates a deep understanding of the evolution of the Latin American state and the history of public administration in the region. This is complemented by Spink's cogent analytical history of the evolution (and usually failure) of administrative reform. The volume's central question is how to redefine the state in Latin America in a global economy. Bresser Pereira counters some neoliberal proposals for a minimal state, asserting that the state must be strengthened, and the civil service reformed. The underlying theme is that the Latin American state must introduce "modern managerial practices without losing sight of its eminently public functions," (xi) and that the involvement of civil society and local governing bodies in processes of decentralization and professionalization is essential. Managerial administration is defined as the introduction of business practices, the delegation of authority, and the strict measurement of achievement based on performance indicators. While generally convincing in his call for reform, two questions remain, and their analyses would have strengthened the chapter: What are the potential downsides to these reforms (the transformation of citizens into consumers, for example)? How are reforms to be achieved with few resources and, in many cases, states already hampered by inefficiency or the deleterious consequences of years of neoliberal attacks?

The volume relies on a distinguished group of contributors to present chapters that range in subject matter from the general design of the state, to the complementarity of economic restructuring and state rebuilding, to the basic details of the move from bureaucratic to managerial public administration in Brazil. In terms of theory building, Adam Przeworski's chapter on the design of the state is the most useful. He presents a

principal-agent model, contending that the state must perform three functions related to three sets of relationships: between government and private economic agents (regulation); between politicians and bureaucrats (oversight); and between citizens and government (accountability). The capacity of the state to operate well depends on the institutionalization of these functions and empowering governments to make "good commitments, while preventing them from making bad ones" (24).

Przeworski rightly contends that a good deal of attention has been devoted to "big" institutional issues like parliaments and executives in the literature, and less attention has been paid to the institutions that can ensure the effectiveness of regulation, oversight, and accountability. Przeworski provides concrete suggestions for doing so within the context of strong presidentialism. In terms of accountability, he answers some of Stokes's questions by providing a model of what is necessary for citizens to hold politicians accountable for mandate violations. Contrary to the assumptions of the delegative democracy model, the chapter shows that efficiently designed lower-level institutions can permit citizens to affect policies and government decisions. Only through analysis of better ways to connect citizens to their representatives can the overwhelming power of Latin American presidents be challenged.

Similarly, William Glade's chapter on the relationship between economic and administrative reform gives us some idea of the challenges posed to reformers by profound economic crisis. Though he contends that these two processes are complimentary, economic reform has proceeded much more quickly than administrative reform. Joan Prats i Català's chapter seeks to answer some questions concerning the relationship between governability and reform. Reforms that are purely technical and indifferent to the specific political system are destined to fail, the chapter contends. Prats i Català advocates an increase in presidential power, a curious recommendation for those familiar with recent findings on the deleterious consequences of too powerful presidents, and what Gary Cox and Scott Morgenstern have to say regarding the incentives for presidents to cooperate with legislatures.

The goals set out in this book are laudable. However, future research must address the central question of how politicians can navigate political systems and bureaucracies to make administrative reform both possible and palatable for reform-weary citizenries. In addition, the criticism leveled at the Morgenstern and Nacif volume also applies to this collection of essays, but even on a larger scale. The book suggests that democracy and the market have prevailed, and that we need only deal with administrative reform to fix an otherwise pretty good model. The jury is still out on neoliberalism, and whether administrative reform can deal with the profound tensions between the market and democracy in Latin America is questionable.

Salinas Figueredo's volume, *Problemas y perspectivas de la democracia en América Latina* deals precisely with this tension. The book's stated theme is democracy. The twenty case studies are too difficult to analyze in any systematic way here, beyond highlighting certain commonalities in argument, focus, and approach.

First, unlike other volumes analyzed here (Morgenstern and Nacif and especially Bresser Pereira and Spink), the authors question the model of market democracy that prevails in Latin America. This volume's chapters present a laundry list of the shortcomings of the Latin America's political systems. Lack of representation, deteriorating connections between citizens and legislators, declining participation, and a lack of concern with profound socioeconomic inequality are all targeted as part of a wider crisis of democracy. While Stokes explores the causes of mandate switches, several of the authors here point to the effect of these reversals and other problems with democracy in undermining legitimacy and citizen participation. Contributors recognize O'Donnell's symptoms of delegative democracy, but for most of these authors it is the neoliberal capitalist model and the insertion of Latin America in the world economy that causes them.

Second, while most of the literature reviewed here fits methodologically within what can be considered the mainstream of political science, the chapters in this volume question this approach. The authors echo Weyland's criticism of rational-choice institutionalism, noting an excessive concern with institutions and an obsession with conservative notions of "governability" in the mainstream literature. For these authors, this literature has not done a very good job of capturing the essential political problems of the Americas.

There is a richness and depth to many of the case studies, though the volume could be much more structurally and theoretically coherent. With the exception of the Néstor Legnani and Flavia Freidenberg chapter, it leans heavily towards description. Still, this volume does a fine job of presenting dissenting voices regarding the relationship between democracy and capitalism, and in providing implicit critiques of methods and approaches to the study of democracy in Latin America. Because most of the authors are based in Latin America, the work also suggests a deep regional divide in focus, methods, and concerns between Latin American and U.S. scholars, though we know from some of the other volumes reviewed here that this divide is not impossible to bridge.

#### CONCLUSION

Despite the richness and quality of these works, the tensions explored in this essay point to areas for potential growth in methodology and theory building. The works explored here demonstrate the validity of

many of Weyland's criticisms of rational-choice institutionalism. Still we are not in as bad of shape as he suggests. In particular, if we limit ourselves to work that employs an exclusively rational-choice framework, Weyland is right on many counts. As this essay shows, however, contemporary work on Latin America is moving away from such a monolithic and obsessively rational-choice approach. The major contributions noted in this review are from those works where rational-choice insights were combined with other methodological tools, and where strong empirical and historical buttresses support rational-choice arguments. Weyland paints a stark picture of the paradigmatic predominance of rational-choice institutionalism, and focuses his criticisms on that literature which fits most squarely into this category. In reality, we see a good deal more theoretical richness, sharing, and creative combination of rational-choice institutionalism with other approaches in the literature more widely considered. In essence, Weyland's concluding call for methodological pluralism has already been heeded. This trend is likely, and hopefully, going to continue.

Similarly, while the patterns suggested by O'Donnell resonate in a region characterized by the widespread domination of presidents, the works reviewed here suggest the complexity of incentives acting upon Latin American presidents, and show that legislatures, lower-level institutions, and bureaucracies can have a more significant effect on the policy process in the Americas than O'Donnell suggests. The key is to find ways to connect citizens with these institutions.

In light of these considerations, a promising agenda for future research on political institutions and democracy in the Americas acknowledges Weyland's and O'Donnell's criticisms without abandoning the very real strides in theory building that have been achieved in recent years. In methodological terms, the movement towards shared theoretical frameworks and borrowing of methods is fruitful. Some of the most impressive works on Latin American politics, including some reviewed here, have been based on U.S. models of analysis. The widespread use and application of U.S. theoretical literature is both positive and responds to earlier calls to recognize the generalizability of political behavior across regions and to cease treating Latin America as a region characterized by political neurosis. Still the application of U.S. literature can only go so far in a region with less institutionalized politics and different patterns of connections between formal institutions and social groups. The challenge lies in collecting sufficient data to build a more uniquely Latin American literature, better grounded in its regional characteristics, but as rigorous as that which characterizes research on institutions like the U.S. Congress, and U.S. political behavior.

The balance between theory and empirics has certainly improved, with scholars heeding early and numerous calls for more empirically

grounded theory. The smattering of books reviewed here **make that** clear, and particularly, those by Stokes, Lehoucq and Molina, and Morgenstern and Nacif. Still it is impossible to resist the **temptation to** simply repeat the recommendation of every book review **that this balance** must be further improved. This is a difficult task given the **impediments** to data collection already noted.

As the evaluation of several of the works reviewed has suggested, the literature could deal better with crisis politics. One may point to the *sui generis* nature of political crisis as embedded in particular national contexts. However, generalizations are possible. For example, situations of crisis provide the ideal context for work on the birth and decay of institutions. LeHoucq and Molina's work is an interesting model for theories developed along these lines. An enhanced focus on the dynamism of institutional creation and destruction will satisfy both the critics of rational-choice institutionalism who claim a static bias in the institutional literature, and those who contend that institutionalism cannot cope where politics as usual does not prevail.

In a similar vein, the literature is underdeveloped when it comes to exploring gaps between rules and actual behavior. While we may be quite sure of the incentive structure created by institutional variations, informal institutions often elicit behavior that contravenes our expectations. One could contend that we have a long tradition of analyzing informal rules in the form of clientelism, patrimonialism, and corruption. Still, we can be more systemic about exploring other informal institutions, and especially those that have a potentially positive political effect.<sup>6</sup> The tendency has been to suggest that all informal institutions in Latin America are "bad." They do not have to be.

The call to analyze lower-level institutions related to mechanisms of oversight in Przeworski's chapter points to a more generalized lacuna in the literature. Presidents, parliaments, and party elites, are well represented, while sub-national and local institutions, and lower-level political activities within national institutions are not. More theory building related to lower-level institutions, voting behavior, and internal party processes like candidate selection, political recruitment, and policy formation will fill this gap.

Several of the works reviewed here point to the need for "improving" and "enhancing the relationship" between civil society and the state. While often vague concerning what precisely civil society is, or how this is to be done, they make clear that the comparative politics literature still has a long way to go in analyzing connections between individuals and the state, groups and the state, and between groups. In

6. Helmke and Levitsky's (2003) work on informal institutions promises progress on this front.

essence, in addition to recognizing social contexts as critical to an understanding of how institutions function, we need to better specify the components of these contexts. Business associations, labor, and other social groups interact with congresses, presidents, and parties to affect political outcomes in ways that are little analyzed. As these relationships become clearer, so too will our understanding of the policy process and policy outcomes.

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