

BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS

Elections and the Muddled Present of the Latin American Democracies

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This essay reviews the following works:

Elecciones y partidos en América Latina en el cambio de ciclo. Edited by Manuel Alcántara, María Laura Tagina, and Daniel Buquet. Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales, 2018. Pp. 511. ISBN: 9788474767605.

Presidential Campaigns in Latin America: Electoral Strategies and Success Contagion. By Taylor C. Boas. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. ix + 276. \$29.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781107578890.

The Latin American Voter: Pursuing Representation and Accountability in Challenging Contexts. Edited by Ryan E. Carlin, Mathew M. Singer, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015. Pp. vii + 429. \$40.00 paperback. ISBN: 9780472052875.

Buying Audiences: Clientelism and Electoral Campaigns When Parties Are Weak. By Paula Muñoz. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. xiii + 318. \$105.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781108422598.

Latin American Elections: Choice and Change. By Richard Nadeau, Éric Bélanger, Michael S. Lewis-Beck, Mathieu Turgeon, and François Gélinau. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017. Pp. 248. \$70.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780472130221.

Regime Support beyond the Balance Sheet: Participation and Policy Performance in Latin America. By Matthew Rhodes-Purdy. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xi + 278. \$105.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781108420259.

Partisans, Antipartisans, and Nonpartisans: Voting Behavior in Brazil. By David J. Samuels and Cesar Zucco. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xiv + 184. \$99.99 hardcover. ISBN: 9781108428880.

Dancing Jacobins: A Venezuelan Genealogy of Latin American Populism. By Rafael Sánchez. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016. Pp. ix + 408. \$35.00 paperback. ISBN: 9780823263660.

Well into the second decade of this century, democracy in Latin America is going through rough times. As Steven Levitsky has recently put it: “while Latin American democracies may be surviving, few are thriving.”¹ Yet even this appraisal may turn to be an optimistic one. In the past few years, Nicaragua and Venezuela have reversed to blatant authoritarianism. Brazil’s democratic future is an open question after the election of an extremist authoritarian nationalist as president, following years of twin economic and political crises. In Mexico, the other troubled Latin American giant, political institutions and the rule of law have taken blows from an entrenched war on drugs that has led to deep citizen malaise, and the election as president

¹ Steven Levitsky, “Democratic Survival and Weakness,” *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 4 (2018): 102.

of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, whose ambiguous commitment to democracy is well known. Mexico's Central American neighbors, Honduras and Guatemala, permanently dwell in the quagmire of intense social violence and utter disregard of the rule of law. Farther south, Peru's political turmoil has brought down a president, jailed the main opposition leader, and rocked the judiciary.

Bright spots are few and far apart: Ecuador's post-Correa democratic change, of course; Colombia's complex and conflictive postconflict still holds promise, in spite of strong resistance, of extricating the country from the longest civilian conflict in the Western Hemisphere; and Uruguay's democratic stability stands out amid the turbulence in neighboring Argentina and Brazil. However, even democratic stalwarts such as Chile and Costa Rica experience unexpected problems stemming from the erosion of their party systems.

Yes, we still have elections. This is the longest period in Latin American history in which governments are elected by reasonably free and fair elections. And, yes, heeding the advice made by the books under review, we should not conflate the countries' political problems into one big bundle labeled "Latin American democratic crisis." Yet it is safe to say that the optimistic promise of the Third Wave of democracy for Latin America has faded, and, after a long transition from authoritarianism, most countries in the region remain stuck in the status of hybrid regime, semi-democracy, or low-quality democracy.² Some are now authoritarian systems, and the few traditional democracies are not going through the best of times. Latin America has learned to combine competitive electoral democracy, with flawed rule of law institutions, a bent for authoritarianism from powerful executives encroaching on other branches of the state, and protracted social violence, which curtails the exercise of rights and liberties by the citizenry.

Against this problematic backdrop, a crop of new books on Latin American politics demonstrates both the promise and the shortcomings of comparative studies in the region. Four of them rely on sophisticated survey analysis for studying citizen behavior in the region as a whole, for a subset of countries, or for one case (Brazil), over a decade. A fifth shares an emphasis on electoral democracy with the previous works but has a definitely less ambitious and more descriptive scope. Two other books use mixed methods that combine in-depth country cases and statistics to test wide-ranging theoretical claims. Finally, I review a book that takes on populism in Venezuela from another discipline and in so doing, provides a valuable discussion on the historical roots of identity politics.

Looming large in this set of books is the ambitious *Latin American Voter: Pursuing Representation and Accountability in Challenging Contexts*, edited by Ryan E. Carlin, Mathew M. Singer, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, an exquisitely conceived collective effort by a distinguished group of Latin Americanists. It sheds light on whether, after decades of experience with democracy, citizens in this region resemble their counterparts in advanced democracies when voting in elections. Apart from the impressive array of scholars involved in the project, what makes this book stand apart from the rest is its systematic approach. With one exception (Herbert Kitschelt and Melina Altamirano's piece on clientelism), the authors share a substantive theoretical inquiry: does American political theories on voter behavior travel well to Latin America? Most of them share a methodological design—several essays use a same Left-Right (L-R) variable construction³—and, most importantly, they have a shared source of information: the AmericasBarometer from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University. More than a collection of essays, this is an academic collective project.

Authors use sophisticated statistical models such as multilevel regression models and analysis of change in probabilities to test drivers of electoral choice: sociodemographic (age, gender, race, class); political attitudes; retrospective evaluation of societal performance (economy); or the effect from the exposure to crime and corruption. While one may have objections about the loose operationalization of certain concepts—for example, social class and cleavage, which sometimes end up conflated with *any* meaningful social

² Classification of the countries may vary depending on the framework one uses. For an in-depth analysis of Central American countries, see Programa Estado de la Nación, *Quinto Informe estado de la región en desarrollo humano sostenible* (San José: Programa Estado de la Nación, 2016), chapter 6. For a Latin American and The Caribbean overview, see the *Economist* Democracy Index, according to which in 2018 there were two full democracies, fourteen flawed democracies, five hybrid regimes and three authoritarian regimes in the region. "Democracy Index 2018: Me Too? Political Participation, Protest and Democracy," *Economist*, 2018, https://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=Democracy2018. Bizzarro and Mainwaring examine the fate of third-wave democracies using data from the V-DEM project, and conclude that, indeed, most of these fledgling democracies have experienced roll-backs and, in some few cases, even breakdown. Fernando Bizzarro and Scott Mainwaring, "The Fate of Third-Wave Democracies," *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 1 (2019): 99–113.

³ In the Left-Right scale respondents are asked to politically place themselves on a 1–10 scale, where 1 is Left and 10 is Right. Placement depends entirely on a respondent's understanding of what Left and Right means.

difference⁴—findings in all chapters are robustly grounded in careful empirical analysis. In fact, scholars will find plenty to chew on as each chapter aptly discuss relevant questions and midrange theories for specific correlates of voting behavior, both between and within countries. I found particularly compelling the essays by Zechmeister (“Left-Right Identifications and the Latin American Voter”); Scott Mainwaring, Mariano Torcal, and Nicolás M. Somma (“The Left and the Mobilization of Class Voting in Latin America”); and Taylor Boas and Amy Erica Smith (“Religion and the Latin American Voter”) for the way in which substantive issues are carefully woven with methodological finesse and discussion. Zechmeister provides an in-depth study of the potential and limitations of the L-R scale widely used in electoral politics research, showing how semantics and context should be brought in and cautioning against face-value interpretations of the scale; she also examines the determinants of ideological self-identification and the linkage with electoral decisions. Mainwaring, Torcal, and Somma advance the study of class voting in the region by analyzing its importance for electoral outcomes and its correspondence with theoretical expectations, as well as by discussing the factors that may trigger class voting, which, as the authors underscore, is not always salient. Finally, Boas and Smith take on an issue that is becoming crucial in Latin American politics: the mobilization of religion in electoral processes, in particular the emergence of Protestant voters as a decisive political and ideological force in some settings.

Closely related to the *Latin American Voter* is *Latin American Elections: Choice and Change* by Richard Nadeau, Éric Bélanger, Michael S. Lewis-Beck, Mathieu Turgeon, and François Gélinau. It shares both intent, robust methodological analysis and use of the AmericasBarometer with the former. In fact, one may conceive Nadeau et al. as a necessary double check of *The Latin American Voter's* main contentions. It also seeks to explain whether theories of voter behavior apply to voters in the Latin American fledgling democracies. Each of its chapters systematically tests the explanatory power of the Michigan model, according to which party identifications are generally stable over an extended time periods and are determined by pre-political factors such as sociological characteristics, status, and parental characteristics (what is known as the “funnel of causality”).⁵

The whole book is a step-by-step examination of the extent to which this theory “goes south,” with a plus: a careful discussion on how to apply the concept of cleavage to the study of citizen attitudes. Each chapter underscores the importance of long-term (sociodemographic) and short-term (political) drivers explaining voting behavior, thus revisiting the “funnel of causality” of the Michigan model. In this sense, it is a necessary book for students of Latin American politics. It combines theoretical insight with patient demonstration of how to conduct meaningful analysis using survey data. Not surprisingly, it arrives at similar conclusions as *The Latin American Voter*.

What are the main conclusions of both books? Theories of voting behavior conceived originally for the United States work reasonably well in Latin America. As Nadeau et al. put it: “the Michigan model . . . manages to cross the finish line pretty much intact” (8). Both books strongly deny the existence of an archetypical Latin American voter and see commonalities more in terms of overarching patterns. However, country-level variables, such as polarization, and party systems do play an important role in shaping voting behavior. Both books find that prepolitical, sociodemographic factors are less important than voting drivers such as party identification and L-R identification. Class voting acquires salience only if it is politically mobilized by parties. Of course, there are some discrepancies between the two books (as Nadeau et al. note on page 137), but these are minor. For the statistically minded, Nadeau et al. put more attention to the goodness-of-fit measurements of their models, while authors in *The Latin American Voter* do not bother with it, reflecting the ongoing discussion among scholars on how to assess the robustness of statistical modeling.

Nonetheless, for all their methodological prowess, *The Latin American Voter* and *Latin American Elections* somewhat disappoint. They have little to say about the conflictive cohabitation between electoral democracy and the increasing authoritarian trends in the region. Those trends manifest not only at the level of the dynamics of democratic governance—which, admittedly, is outside the purview of both books—but, crucially

⁴ In the book, income levels are used as a criterion for ascribing individuals to social classes, much in the tradition of functionalist social stratification theories à la Talcott Parsons. However, in the Marxist and neo-Weberian traditions, social class refers to the position of the individual within the socioproductive regime, not to be confounded with the income a person may get from her job. In the case of the concept of cleavage, the original definition of Stein Rokkan specifically refers to those deep divisions capable of structuring political dynamics for a whole historical era. Hence, cleavage should not be used to denote any ideological difference within a party system, no matter how acrimonious and/or salient it may be in a given moment, but only to a subset of them shaping party politics and allegiances over the long run.

⁵ Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960).

for survey analysis, in the conflictive views Latin Americans hold about democracy, and in the pull that a cohort of populist and sometimes openly antidemocratic leaders both from the Left and the Right exert over them since the turn of the century. One learns that Latin American voters are not very different from voters in advanced democracies—not much of a surprise considering human nature and the constraints the institutions of electoral democracy put in place to rein in political behavior. American political theories for explaining voting behavior may be healthy, but the whole finding seems more important for the field than for the understanding of the burning issues democracy faces in the continent.

Partisans, Antipartisans, and Nonpartisans, by David J. Samuels and Cesar Zucco, is a close cousin of the previous books. The authors also rely on the seminal *American Voter* as a theoretical reference.⁶ However, in contrast to the comparative approach to voting behavior of the former books, they use statistical modelling of survey data (including experiments) mostly to understand political electoral dynamics in a single country, Brazil. Chapter 6, though, provides a brief excursus in comparative analysis of antipartisanship.

Samuels and Zucco develop a two-level theoretical discussion. At one level, against the literature on Brazil, which they discuss in detail, their aim is to dispel the conventional wisdom that mass partisanship is unimportant in this country given its fragmented and fluid party system. The authors convincingly show that mass partisanship is indeed well and alive in Brazil. It revolves around Partido de los Trabalhadores (PT), for and against.⁷ They find deep-seated sympathies and antipathies dividing Brazil's electorate in spite of the weakness and fragmentation of the party system. One of the most interesting findings is the distinction between antipartisans (negative partisans)—individuals “who dislike a party but do not identify with any particular one”—and nonpartisans, who have neither positive nor negative partisan attitudes (27). While previous research conflated these two types, Samuels and Zucco demonstrate that they have different political attitudes and behavior. Polarization may remain hidden to scholars if they assume that antipartisans do not hold partisan views. I think this distinction provides important clues for the understanding of Brazil's recent election of a right-wing extremist to the presidency. If, indeed, PT antipartisanship still is as entrenched as the authors report for the period up to 2014, mass partisanship, as these authors conceptualize it, mattered a lot in this unfortunate turn of events.

On another level, they pose a deeper theoretical question: How do social identities emerge? Here Samuels and Zucco argue that polarization is strongly correlated to party identities, in this case for or against the PT, a finding replicated for the Costa Rican case by Ronald Alfaro-Redondo.⁸ More interestingly, they are able to connect the strategies pursued for party organization with the ability to shape identities. This insight is valuable as it bridges the literature of voting behavior with the venerable literature of party organization à la Panebianco.⁹ Once created, party (and antiparty) identities are sticky, or, as authors say, bound citizen allegiances and evaluations over time (56). They may ebb and flow but still shape voter behavior even in the face of party decline, as with the PT in the Brazilian case. So construed, identities, needless to say, pose an important caveat to theories of rational-choice voting behavior: cognitive biases inevitably distort purely utilitarian decisions.

Partisans, Antipartisans, and Nonpartisans exemplifies a tight, systematic, and nuanced analysis of survey data. Each chapter begins with a conceptual definition and then provides a wealth of relevant empirical analysis. Analytical depth, however, comes with a shortage of theoretical ambition. Distinctions between antipartisans and nonpartisans may be relevant for Brazil, but chapter 6's comparative excursus is notably weak: how does it help to understand the dynamics of mass partisanship in other Latin American countries? The book does not provide much of an answer, and it remains firmly anchored in the Brazilian experience without much ability to travel elsewhere.

⁶ Campbell et al., *The American Voter*.

⁷ PT was founded in 1980, during Brazil's dictatorship, as a socialist party with strong ties to trade unions, social movements, and religious communities. For a long time it was the closest case in Latin America of a party resembling the classic European socialist parties of the early twentieth century: strong organization, robust links with workers and other lower-class movements, systematic cadres' socialization in the party ideology, and an antagonist of the social and political status quo. The PT governed Brazil from 2002 until 2016, when President Dilma Rousseff was dismissed by Congress. Initially the poster child of the responsible nonpopulist left in Latin America, the PT was mangled in corruption scandals that helped oust the party from power. For insights on the Brazilian politics post-PT, see Timothy Power and Wendy Hunter, “Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash,” *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 1 (2019): 68–82.

⁸ Ronald Alfaro-Redondo, “Divided We Vote... Turnout Decline in Established Democracies: Evidence from Costa Rica” (PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2017).

⁹ Panebianco argued that party organization should be brought to the fore in analyzing party politics. The way in which leaders and the base interact within the organization and how they set the borders of who is “in” and “out” the party, determines its message and reach with the wider electorate. Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Reading Samuels and Zucco's book in the aftermath of Bolsonaro's electoral sweep, one finds few other clues, besides antipartisanship, about why in 2018 a majority of the Brazilian citizens would embrace a blatantly antidemocratic alternative such as Bolsonaro. The authors left out of their competent analysis crucial issues for the future of Brazil's democracy, such as the combined effects of economic cycles, generalized delegitimation of both the PT and the traditional right parties, protracted corruption scandals, and growing citizen insecurity.¹⁰ The point here is not to demand an accurate forecast from *Partisans, Antipartisans, and Nonpartisans*, which would be unfair because it analyzes the period before the debacle. By emphasizing the PT/anti-PT divide, the authors overlook the importance of the simmering decline of support for democratic politics that was being cooked beyond and below the PT decadence.

The complexity of citizen support for democracy in the region, a variable omitted from all of the previous books dealing with voting behavior in electoral democracies, grabs the spotlight in Matthew Rhodes-Purdy's *Regime Support beyond the Balance Sheet*. In itself, citizen support for democracy is a can of worms. From a definitional standpoint, many authors conflate a multidimensional syndrome of attitudes toward democracy with specific indicators (i.e., the classic survey question on preference for democracy). From a normative viewpoint, no one has come up with a convincing empirical theory explaining how much citizen support a democracy requires to see off challenges to its legitimacy and function reasonably. Still, as the recent course of events in Brazil show, declines in citizen support do matter as they open the door to the emergence of antidemocratic parties with strong popular backing. Why citizens, exercising their rights and freedoms, elect politicians that will curtail those rights and freedoms is a burning issue in comparative political studies, one in which understanding the attitudes of citizens toward democracy becomes crucial.

Hence, in an era in which democracy is under assault, the book takes stock with a crucial political issue: why democratic regime performance does not buy citizen support, and why, sometimes, underperforming hybrid regimes (Venezuela) incite greater support. Chile and Venezuela are the testing grounds for trying to unravel the puzzle. Rhodes-Purdy has a theory that he labels a procedural theory on regime support: performance is not enough; instead, involving citizen in politics may hold the key. Technocratic democracies in which parties have weak linkages with citizens but take decisions for them, and in practice do not create openings for citizen participation, are punished by the citizenry in terms of their "exit" from the public sphere, in the words of Albert Hirschman.¹¹ If a populist regime does create opportunities for participation, then it may get hefty rewards in terms of citizen tolerating underperformance.

What makes this book particularly interesting is Rhodes-Purdy's ability to connect fundamental issues of normative democratic theory with empirical analysis of country cases. In the book's closing paragraph, I found a powerful insight for future normative and empirical studies on democracy and populism: "the common interpretation of ... [populism] successes as the product of xenophobia, racism, and reactionary nationalism is at best incomplete. Perhaps liberal democracy is under threat because ... it is not as well suited to meeting needs for autonomy and collective self-governance as many believe to be" (245). This is a fundamental discussion for scholars thinking about the quality of democracy, and gives guidelines for the empirical study of the extent to which democracies come close to their promise of citizen sovereignty.

Rhodes-Purdy aptly navigates the methodological challenges of analyzing survey data with sophisticated statistical analysis, and he convincingly presents in-depth country case studies. However, one may point to some debatable theoretical elaborations, to say the least. The concept of participation, crucial for his theoretical argument, is quite muddled: it does not require any actual participatory behavior by people but only the existence of "participatory" opportunities within an institutional framework (58). This is participation at its minimum, devoid of any substance; a procedure, not a behavior, one that can easily be co-opted by local party elites reproducing all sorts of impediments for ordinary people's engagement in public affairs.

Another of this book's shortcomings is the limited time span of survey data (less than a decade) used to provide the empirical foundation for a wide-ranging theoretical claim. A broader time frame is needed to test if and when citizens' regime-support attitudes change in response to sudden changes in regime performance. Venezuela is a case in point: if performance is not the key for regime support, the dramatic social implosion recently unfolding should not have altered citizen attitudes if institutional participatory opportunities are still in place. We don't know the extent to which these opportunities have been abolished, but we do know from newer LAPOP data that regime support has significantly shrunk.

¹⁰ Power and Hunter, "Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash."

¹¹ Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

One recommendation to readers: comparing Rhodes-Purdy's book with Matthew Singer and François Gélinau's piece in *The Latin American Voter* ("The Economy and Incumbent Support in Latin America") provides a lot of food for thought in terms of contrasting theories on how the linkage between performance and support can be theorized. An interesting comparison: Singer and Gélinau find that sound economic performance favors incumbents—"support for incumbents swings in accordance with economic fluctuation" (295)—while Rhodes-Purdy argues that this link is, to say the least, much more complex and sometimes nonexistent.

An intriguing book, *Dancing Jacobins: A Venezuelan Genealogy of Latin American Populism* by Rafael Sánchez, takes on one of Rhodes-Purdy's case studies: Venezuela. This book provides useful insights into the depth of populist roots in a Latin American polity, from the standpoint of a scholar outside the comparative political science field.

Using a *longue durée* historical perspective, Sánchez studies how populist imagery and discourse came to constitute an emerging Venezuelan national identity, a response to the chaos, violence, and political void unleashed by the utter destruction of the late colonial era. From this perspective, populism is not an archaic inheritance of a crumbling empire but a definitely modern, nineteenth-century political republican response to the need of building a feasible republic from the ashes of the old order.

As Sánchez demonstrates, state centralization began in earnest around fifty years after independence following a string of postcolonial wars. Creating a political order over an immense and fractured territory required the creation of a secular religion with which people could identify. And, as with any religion, there is always a God, those who speak to him, monuments attesting to the grandiosity of the divine, the masses who believe and can be mobilized to defend the nation, and, of course, the infidels—the outsiders who threaten to destroy all that is to be cherished.

God in this case is Simón Bolívar, the hard-headed Jacobin who spearheaded the radical destruction of colonial order. Those who speak on his behalf, his true heirs are, of course, the strong men—from Guzmán in the 1870s all the way to Chávez in the twenty-first century—who, for all practical purposes, become not only heads of a state but, more fundamentally, the embodiment of the nation, and thus like "modern Bolívars." The monuments are the ubiquitous statues, portraits, and discursive invocations of both the secular god (Bolívar) and his current embodiment that populate the Venezuelan physical and symbolic territories. Populism requires the masses be constantly reminded that they are part of a national destiny, being constantly mobilized in defense of the secular god, which for all practical purposes means the defense of the nation. The infidels are those who are beyond the boundaries of national identity according to the secular religious hierarchy of the moment: Chávez's "escuálidos" are a case in point. The book's title (*Dancing Jacobins*) alludes precisely to the constant gestures to the masses by the leader, through which they are included as actors of the national destiny.

Sánchez uses literary theory to unveil the organic connection between current populist politics and the symbolic creation of the Venezuelan nation-state, between the discourses of power and identity. He introduces the concept of *monumental governmentality* (see definition on page 19) to convey the totalizing aspiration of Venezuelan leaders to occupy all the narrative space. Paradoxically, the country experiences unstable republican order, which, from time to time, breaks down and unravels. Why? Following Sánchez, totalizing efforts lack the capability to reign in societal forces: the Caribbean Leviathan lacks enough infrastructural power (to borrow Michael Mann's seminal contribution to the analysis of the state) to encapsulate the economy and the polity at the same time.¹² Aspiration and reality are, therefore, permanently on a collision course, and from time to time this leads to breakdowns.

This book is a sobering reminder that, in studying the legitimacy and dynamics of political regimes, identities are crucial. In studying the state, Guillermo O'Donnell posited that one of its constitutive dimensions is its ability to "speak for us" and to define the complex boundaries between the inside and the outside of the polity.¹³ In the United States, "We the People," the Constitution's first three words, is a still powerful political weapon that binds together widely different populations and territories.

I found the book a fertile ground to derive testable hypotheses. However, while a non-political science approach to populism is very much welcomed, as it provides nuance and historical perspective to excessive number crunching, the main problem with *Dancing Jacobins* is the lack of comparative perspective. The author weakly asserts that the country case may be relevant to other Latin American countries, but we never learn how and when. Populism comes in many shapes and forms, and, following Sánchez's own argument,

¹² Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹³ Guillermo O'Donnell, *Democracia, agencia, estado: Teoría con intención comparativa* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2010).

not all had to build a republic from scratch, as in Venezuela. So one is left wondering whether the secular religion is something constitutive of the populist genus at large, or of the specific Venezuelan species.

More problematically, the conceptual definition of monumental governmentality, so fundamental for the whole book, is poorly construed. It basically involves almost everything one can think of related to governing a polity: ideological constructs, sensuous economies, forms of discipline, modes of authorities, and so on, all bound together by intent. If literary theory wants to speak of political realities—and to speak to the comparative study of polities—concepts should be much more precisely defined so that they can become useful guidance for research. In spite of these shortcomings, I found *Dancing Jacobins* an enjoyable and challenging book and recommend it.

Returning to political science, I ran into two very interesting books, both of which are exemplary of in-depth, richly textured case-study analysis based on a mixed-methods approach. The first one is *Buying Audiences: Clientelism and Electoral Campaigns When Parties Are Weak* by Paula Muñoz. The author picks Peru, “a democracy without parties” (103), to study how clientelism actually works in such an inimical context. Her “informational theory” states that electoral clientelism has an indirect effect over voting behavior. The key goal of politicians delivering goodies to citizens is not to engage in vote buying (in chapter 3 she demonstrates that individuals, even the poorest ones, do not feel obliged to surrender their vote in exchange for receiving benefits). Electoral clientelism shapes vote behavior by helping to shape the campaign dynamics: it “allows candidates’ campaign teams to make an impression, convey information, and signal to donors and the general public that they are electorally viable candidates ... [and] to persuade voters while campaigning” (25–27). Also, by distributing gifts at rallies, electoral clientelism enable candidates to provide “citizens with valuable information ... [to] form their preferences and make their political choices (27–28; see also chapters 3–5).

What makes this book a fascinating read is twofold. From a theoretical perspective, Muñoz upends conventional theories on clientelism, which assume that clientelism requires functional and stable networks of patrons and clients. For these theories, party machines are a necessary condition for clientelism to thrive (e.g., see Kitschelt and Altamirano’s piece in *The Latin American Voter*). Muñoz provides an alternative theory that is relevant for many other cases in which democracies coexist with weakened and fragmented party systems in constant state of flux—Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Colombia being cases in point.

In an era in which parties are on the retreat but elections are constantly been held, Muñoz’s informational theory of clientelism gives insights into not only the interplay between local, regional, and national politics but also how voting behavior is actually shaped when social identities are weak, and party machines, for all practical purposes, do not exist. The latter point bridges several literatures: it raises new issues for the literature of voting behavior, parties as organizations, constituency service by elected officials, and how representation works in democratic settings in which parties are evanescent entities.

From a methodological perspective, the book is a showcase of a mixed-methods approach to the study of politics: network analysis, survey experiments, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and secondary sources are all combined to provide detailed evidence to advance a substantive, relevant theoretical argument. I found it especially refreshing how Muñoz moves away from the venerable—albeit protracted and outmoded—argument between those espousing quantitative methods and those championing qualitative ones. She gives a lesson on how an eclectic approach to research methods bears fruitful outcomes.

Despite the book’s contributions for the empirical research of electoral campaigns, I do have two critical comments. The first is methodological. Muñoz’s network analysis is quite elementary (113–119). She relies on Ernesto Calvo and María Victoria Murillo’s method for studying networks (see her summary in appendix 1). I did not find any reference to the expanding social network literature and analysis, which gives practical tools to reconstruct complex topologies of social networks relying on database analysis.¹⁴ With the information she has at hand, I do believe a much more sophisticated analysis could have been carried out, one that would probably have rendered interesting outcomes.¹⁵ All in all, however, the book’s main limitation is the weakness of its comparative outreach. For a book espousing an alternative theory of clientelism, one would expect broader, and more systematic, subnational comparisons beyond the discussion of Piura and Cusco in chapter 6, as well as some excursus to other country cases in which parties are in shambles. In spite of

¹⁴ E.g., Julio Leonides Aguirre, *Introducción al análisis de redes sociales*, Documento no. 82 (Buenos Aires: Centro Interdisciplinario para el Estudio de Políticas Públicas, 2011); Carter T. Butts, “Social Network Analysis with sna,” *Journal of Statistical Software* 24, no. 6 (2008), <https://www.jstatsoft.org/article/view/v024i06>.

¹⁵ For methodological possibilities, see Michael D. Ward, Katherine Stovel, and Audrey Sacks, “Network Analysis and Political Science,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 14, no. 1 (2011): 245–264.

the conceptual and empirical richness of Muñoz's new theory, one is left to ponder whether it is a Peruvian idiosyncrasy or may apply to other settings. My hunch is that there is a lot of potential here for new research on clientelism, but the book falls short in this particular aspect.

The second book of a small-N case analysis is *Presidential Campaigns in Latin America: Electoral Strategies and Success Contagion*, by Taylor Boas. Boas is off to debunk a common belief: that in spite of context, presidential campaign strategies always converge into what Giovanni Sartori famously labeled "videopolitics," a process pushed by a growing international community of professional campaign consultants. Also, he pushes back against the Downsian inspired isomorphic spatial theories that hastily assume that campaigns will mirror each other given their common quest to represent the policy preferences of the mythical median voter.

The author studies three country cases—Brazil, Chile, and Peru—providing evidence that, indeed, there are national styles of electioneering that markedly differ from each other. His second point is even more interesting: the determinants that shape those styles. Boas finds that there are key process events (electoral success or failure of campaign strategies early in the period of democratic politics) that help in understanding why in some countries, but not in others, parties from across the political spectrum converge into a recognizable style of campaigning.

Chile and Brazil are cases of convergence; Peru demonstrates the lack of it. Over the course of two decades of electoral campaigns, political communication in Chile focuses on personalistic contents underscoring the ability of candidates to connect with citizens via the empathic understanding of everyday problems and demands. This is a counterintuitive finding: in a country famous for the quality of its technocratic echelons, and for the technocratic backgrounds of many in the political elite, campaigns of parties from both the Left and the Right systematically lack specific policy proposals. In contrast, in Brazil, a country with weak parties and a fragmented party system, campaigns have a definite technocratic bent: policy proposals weigh heavily in political campaigns. Peru, the third case analyzed, provides a different story: its national style of electioneering, after Fujimori's demise, is characterized by politicians constantly shifting strategies from one campaign to another.

What is Boas's theory? Learning: politicians learn from successful experiences in running campaigns and shy away from campaign styles that elected unsuccessful governments to avoid being identified with failure. Success contagion is the key concept here. The initial choice for a particular strategy that later crystallizes is a product largely of context and contingency: politicians bet on a strategy that they and their advisers think is appropriate, but they do not actually know. If they are elected, a second, decisive factor plays in: whether they are able to deliver successful government in terms of reasonable popular support. If they do, the rest of the pack begins copying the formulae for success, beginning with the candidates of the successful party. However, and Peru's case is a reminder, the key causal mechanism is the interaction between learning and governmental success: without the latter, politicians choose their "campaign strategies not by reaching across the ideological spectrum ... but rather through an inward-oriented process of responding to previous errors within their own party or political camp" (137).

To back up his theory, Boas applies content analysis to countless hours of political ads over a period of roughly two decades for each country (an impressive and innovative feat), conducts interviews with key political operators, compiles relevant secondary data, and in the case of Peru, performs path analysis to show the convergence failure. In each case, he includes the next round of presidential elections after the ending of his period analysis as a way of testing his central claims.

Presidential Campaigns in Latin America succeeds in demonstrating that, against conventional wisdom, electoral campaigns are not becoming similar over time. The concept of success contagion, and the reasons for the lack of it, is persuasive. Differences in electioneering between Chile, Peru, and Brazil are clearly documented. From this perspective, Boas makes an important contribution to the theoretical discussion about candidate strategic behaviors. I recommend reading chapter 5 ("Success Contagion and Presidential Campaigns in Comparative Perspective," 176–209), an excellent discussion on the comparative implications of his central theoretical claims, both in terms of sparring with mainstream theories and in the testing of those claims by bringing in another twelve cases. I think that Muñoz's *Buying Audiences* would have benefited had it included such a chapter.

However, I was less convinced of Boas's within-country analyses. Campaigns in Chile and Brazil do exhibit important differences over time in the importance of, for example, policy proposals for the parties' mass communication strategies. In other words, Chilean parties are not always weak in policy proposals, and Brazilian's counterparts are not always strong; Boas's own data shows remarkable variance, as the respective national styles of electioneering would have predicted. This begs the question about the conceptual and

empirical boundaries of an electioneering style. Boas rushes to characterize intracountry differences as “partial deviations” from a national style. But I was then left wondering what the range of acceptable variation is for a campaign to be considered part of or a breakaway from a national style. This important issue is never systematically discussed.

I think that the reported outcome of content analyses falls short: data consists of descriptive statistics (basically, summary frequencies of policy and nonpolicy messages for a campaign as a whole) without further elaboration. I think there is a wealth of unreported data that could enrich Boas’s study of electioneering. To toss up one possible avenue of investigation: time analysis of messages along a campaign to check whether there are changes in personalistic and/or policy emphasis responding to specific events and political dynamics. If a candidate is trailing, does he go for substance? If she is comfortably leading, does she go for the touchy-feely approach? If one is studying strategic behavior in electioneering, those are relevant issues.

My review ends with the book *Elecciones y partidos en América Latina en el cambio de ciclo*, edited by Manuel Alcántara, María Laura Tagina, and Daniel Buquet. This book comprises eighteen short essays written by country specialists, providing an update of the recent evolution of political systems in the region. In part historical recount and in part conjunctural analysis, the pieces present plenty of information that no doubt can be used as input for scholars developing comparative research. Generally, but not always, chapters follow a common structure: a brief economic and political context followed by a section about the country’s electoral rules, information about parties and electoral outcomes over a decade or two, an analysis of the last election’s dynamics and outcome, and finally, a closure. All chapters provide useful data and indicators, as well as insights about the state of affairs in their assigned case study.

Country chapters are preceded by an introductory piece by the three editors presenting bread-and-butter political indicators for the region (number of effective parties or NEP, turnout, ideological placement of presidents, and women representation in Congress). The editors are also responsible for a final chapter in which they dispute conventional wisdom about the inconvenience of party fragmentation and polarization for electoral democracy, cast doubt about the relevance of indicators such as NEP for understanding the dynamics of electoral democracy, and discuss the importance of power alternation for democratization.

The book does not pretend to test hypotheses, nor does it develop explicit theoretically guided comparative research, and it shies away from analyzing regional trends. Its scope is descriptive. Latin Americanists may find the book particularly useful because it summarizes a wealth of secondary data needed by any scholar assessing electoral democracy in the region. This attribute, on the other hand, tags an expiration date to the work, as new elections will inevitably begin to trickle in. All and all, this volume serves an important function for the academic community as a repository of data and evaluations by a group of distinguished scholars.

The closing chapter (20) begins with this statement: “Near the end of the twenty-first century’s second decade, democracy seems to be the ‘natural’ state of political systems in Latin America” (481). Considering recent events in the region, this is an intriguing remark, to say the least: it is just a matter of looking to see democratic regressions in Central America and the big question mark looming over Brazil. It would have been of particular interest for the scholarly community if the authors had developed a convincing argument to back up this claim; compiling political indicators of electoral democracy seems ill suited to the task.

I would like to close this review by saying that these fine books illustrate both the promise and the perils of current research on electoral democracy in Latin America. Most of them are cutting-edge research, carefully written and methodologically robust. On the bright side, *The Latin American Voter* is, I think, a prime example of a book that is, in itself, a research program. *Latin American Elections: Choice and Change* provides us with a systematic testing of an influential American political voting behavior theory. *Partisan, Nonpartisans, and Antipartisans* gives us a fresh new way to understand mass politics and voting behavior in Brazil. *Buying Audiences* and *Presidential Campaigns in Latin America* both showcase small-N research potential for theory building and, particularly the former, provide us with an exemplar of how mixed-methods approaches can fruitfully render richly textured evidence. *Dancing Jacobins* illustrates how political science can gain new insights for understanding political phenomena from other disciplines. *Regime Support beyond the Balance Sheet* contributes a new theory to the literature of citizen support for democracy, nowadays a crucial issue in the region. Finally, *Elecciones y partidos en América Latina en el cambio de ciclo* summarizes a wealth of comparative data, which always comes in handy for scholars and students interested in Latin American politics.

There is a downside, however, with most of these books (with the exception of *Regime Support Beyond the Balance Sheet* and *Buying Audiences*): how little they have to say about current democratic decline in Latin America. Electoral democracy is under siege, encroached by pro-authoritarian actors, by the further hollowing out of the institutions of the rule of law as well as by the rise of undemocratic views among the

citizenries. It is as if scholars chose to assume that we live in “normal times”—in which we can focus on whether theories of voting behavior apply or not to the region—while electoral democracy in a score of Latin American countries is falling victim of democratic involution and, most importantly, is becoming the conduit through which would-be autocrats are accessing power.¹⁶ We ought to be also studying how and why voting behavior is empowering antidemocratic forces.

Author Information

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¹⁶ Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2018).

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