

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY
OF INSTITUTIONS IN
LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS

Barry Ames

University of Pittsburgh

- BUILDING DEMOCRACY IN BRAZIL: THE POLITICS OF CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE, 1985–95.* By Javier Martínez-Lara. (New York: St. Martin's, 1996. Pp. 238. \$65.00 cloth.)
- ELECTORAL LAWS AND THE SURVIVAL OF PRESIDENTIAL DEMOCRACIES.* By Mark P. Jones. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995. Pp. 246. \$32.95 cloth.)
- FEDERALISMOS LATINOAMERICANOS: MEXICO, BRASIL, ARGENTINA.* Edited by Marcello Carmagnani. (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1993. Pp. 416.)
- THE GLOBAL RESURGENCE OF DEMOCRACY.* Edited by Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. Pp. 336. \$50.00 cloth, \$14.95 paper.)
- LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN LATIN AMERICA.* By R. Andrew Nickson. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995. Pp. 316. \$49.95 cloth.)
- PRESIDENCIALISMO OU PARLAMENTARISMO: PERSPECTIVAS SOBRE A REORGANIZAÇÃO INSTITUCIONAL BRASILEIRA.* Edited by Bolívar Lamounier and Dieter Nohlen. (São Paulo: Loyola, 1993. Pp. 246.)
- TERM LIMITS AND LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATION.* By John Carey. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. 216. \$59.95 cloth.)

Institutions are in. Not that Latin Americanists ever ignored them completely, but in the old days of military authoritarianism, power and international influences seemed more important than governmental structures. With the return of competitive politics has come an outpouring of monographs and articles on parliamentary versus presidential governments, electoral and party systems, federalism, legislatures, and related topics. U.S.-trained scholars have been quick to establish a foothold in the field, probably because the study of institutions takes advantage of the tools and findings that they have absorbed in the non-Latin American portions of their graduate training. Latin American-trained scholars are ac-

tive as well, and both groups are organizing conferences and editing volumes on parties, legislatures, and electoral systems. An "organized section" on institutions has recently formed within the Latin American Studies Association. In the midst of such ferment, this review provides an opportunity to take stock of the institutional literature.¹ What do we know? How well do we know it? What should we be doing?

The seven books reviewed here vary widely. Four are monographs written by single authors; three are edited collections. Two (Martínez-Lara and Lamounier and Nohlen) focus solely on Brazil, one (Jones) treats Argentina, two (Carmagnani and Carey) consider two or three countries, and the rest are broadly comparative. Among the single-authored monographs, one (Martínez-Lara) is essentially a chronologically organized history, a second (Nickson) is descriptive, and two (Carey and Jones) are self-consciously theoretical and empirical. The edited works range from disciplined projects offering parallel treatments of a limited number of cases (Carmagnani), to systematic reviews of a large number of cases, to compilations of pieces previously published in a single journal (Diamond and Plattner).²

I will start with an assessment of the state of knowledge in the field, stipulating that for purposes of this discussion, institutions are the formal structures of governments and the rules affecting their operation. Scholars can conceive of institutions as either objects of explanation or as explanatory concepts. Surprisingly, the vast majority of institutional research treats institutions as explanatory, as independent variables. Only Carmagnani's treatment of federalism seeks to explain systematically the development of a set of institutions. Perhaps only two analysts are fully aware of the reciprocal causality between institutions on the one hand and social and political forces on the other: Nohlen, who discusses the ways that social cleavages affect the choice of electoral rules, and Lamounier, who implicitly argues about the original choice of institutions. Setting this theme aside until consideration of future directions for institutional research, I will turn now to the dependent variables linked to institutional variation.

1. The works reviewed here are simply the latest batch of books on institutions received by LARR. Other recent and important works that are "institutional" in focus include Michael Coppedge, *Strong Parties and Lame Ducks: Presidential Patriarchy and Factionalism in Venezuela* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994); Barbara Geddes, *Politician's Dilemma: Building State Capacity in Venezuela* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996); *Institutional Design in New Democracies*, edited by Arend Lijphart and Carlos Waisman (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1996); *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*, edited by Juan Linz and Arturo Valenzuela (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Matthew Shugart and John Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and *Presidential Institutions and Democratic Politics: Comparing Regional and National Contexts*, edited by Kurt von Mettenheim (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

2. Diamond and Plattner range beyond Latin America to Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. I will treat only the material relevant to Latin America.

What Difference Do Institutions Make?

Consolidation of democracies is the grand issue underlying much of the institutional literature. Will the choice of institutions affect the probabilities of survival of the newly competitive countries of Latin America? One stream of research asks this question with regard to classifying whole political regimes as parliamentarist or presidential. Juan Linz, long associated with the parliamentarist side, makes this case in his essay in the Diamond and Plattner volume, *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*. Linz believes that presidents tend to rule in a plebiscitarian and undemocratic manner. The fixed term of presidential office leads to crises when a leader loses the support of key groups well before an election. And presidential government seems to have recurring problems in selecting successors. Parliamentarism, by contrast, is flexible.

Replies to Linz are also found in *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, in the contributions of Donald Horowitz and Seymour Martin Lipset. Against Linz's argument that presidentialism is winner-take-all, Horowitz responds that the Westminster (British) version of parliamentarism also has winner-take-all features. Against the claim of presidential failure, Horowitz notes that African and Asian parliamentary governments have broken down as well. Moreover, he argues, coalition governments and power sharing are also possible in presidential government. In Horowitz's view, Linz is really objecting to plurality elections and to adversarial democracy, systems fostering a "winners versus losers" attitude. By contrast, Lipset cites the success of former British colonies in asserting that the real causal variables are not institutions but economic and cultural factors. Linz's reply to Horowitz emphasizes the dangers of the plebiscitarian style of going "directly to the people." Responding to Lipset, Linz points out that institutions may not be everything, but they are about the only variable that can be modified in the short run.

Another contributor to this debate (in the Diamond and Plattner volume) is Arend Lijphart, who offers a typology combining the axes of presidentialism-parliamentarism and electoral systems based on proportional representation or plurality. Lijphart seeks to link the cells of his four-fold typology both to stability and to progress on substantive policy issues. Latin American countries mostly fall into the cell combining presidentialism and proportional representation. Lijphart dismisses the Latin American model as "a particularly unattractive option" because, except in Costa Rica and partly in Venezuela and Colombia, "the political stability and economic performance of Latin American nations has been far from satisfactory" (p. 151). To add insult to painful description, Lijphart then proceeds to leave Latin America out of his analysis entirely.

Methodologically, Latin Americanists find this debate problematic. Because all our cases are presidential, the institutional side exhibits no

variance. Whole-system arguments of the presidential-parliamentary type are thus untestable within the region. Still, where dissatisfaction with national institutions is widespread, reform proposals are always on the table. Bolivar Lamounier, one of Brazil's most distinguished political scientists, has long advocated electoral reform, particularly a German-style mix of districts and proportional lists. *Presidencialismo ou parlamentarismo: Perspectivas sobre a reorganização institucional brasileira*, coedited with Dieter Nohlen, essentially transcribes a conference held in São Paulo in March 1992. In addition to Lamounier and Nohlen, conference participants included Alfred Stepan, Maria Teresa Sadek, Liliana Riz, Antonio Octavio Cintra, and Leôncio Martins Rodriguez plus several active politicians, among them Senator Fernando Henrique Cardoso (this conference took place during the latter part of the administration of President Fernando Collor de Mello, well before Cardoso's ascension to the presidency).

Lamounier's view is a country-specific version of Diamond's argument that all democracies, especially new ones, exhibit a series of tensions: between conflict and consensus, between representativeness and governability, between consent and effectiveness. Lamounier views Brazilian politics as an organizational system seeking to disperse power and to fragment majorities. Through institutional engineering, the system avoids the production of a compact governing majority. Hence Brazilian politics is almost consociational, as in Holland, Switzerland, and Belgium but not at all like Argentina, Venezuela, or Bolivia. Yet Brazilian politics cannot be understood without reference to corporativism and presidential plebiscitarianism. Corporativism was supposed to regulate social peace. Instead, it produced social conflict. Plebiscitarianism was intended to counterbalance the fragmentation generated by the electoral system, in the sense that the political-electoral capital of the president would be strong enough to impose coherence. Direct communication between presidential candidates and the huge national electorate would result in its stable adherence and provide the president with sufficient political power. Unfortunately, plebiscitary capital evaporates quickly in an inflationary and volatile economy. The president then resorts to clientelism as a way of maintaining support, but the society condemns clientelism (pp. 24–25). Since 1946, Lamounier notes, only two elected Brazilian presidents have finished their terms, and no president has succeeded in influencing the choice of his successor except the military president, Ernesto Geisel.

Lamounier's position is vigorously supported by Fernando Henrique Cardoso, then a senator from the state of São Paulo. Cardoso details the way in which Brazil's open-list, proportional electoral system creates a Câmara de Deputados that represents regional, corporative, economic, and religious interests but all at the local level. For Cardoso, institutional engineering by itself will not succeed because the majority of deputies fear and oppose changes that might increase their electoral risk.

What has happened to this thrust for reform, now that Cardoso himself occupies the presidency? And what does his experience reveal about the institutional critique of Brazilian politics? If a highly inflationary environment diminishes public support for presidents and forces them to resort to clientelism, then a plebiscitary presidency should work better when inflation is tamed. The jury is still out, but anecdotal evidence suggests that even given extremely favorable circumstances, Cardoso still must rely on individual- and group-based pork to move key parts of his agenda through the congress. Consider that Cardoso was credited with authorship of the Plano Real, an economic program that stabilized the economy and lifted millions out of poverty. The five parties backing his election included more than four hundred deputies, easily enough to pass ordinary legislation or even amend the constitution.³ Leftist opposition to the new administration remains in disarray, utterly demoralized and without a credible alternative program. Given all these advantages, has the Cardoso administration achieved its legislative goals? In the area of economic liberalization, the administration has been largely successful, although much of the economic opening began under Collor de Mello. In other policy areas, however, progress has been slow and uneven. Congress approved a constitutional amendment allowing reelection for executives, including Cardoso himself. Congressional assent, however, came only after the executive branch doled out pork-barrel inducements to significant numbers of deputies. By May 1998, both pension and administrative reform were close to passage, but both had languished in the Congress for almost two years, and neither could pass without substantial concessions from the administration. Tax reform, long regarded as a centerpiece of economic modernization, disappeared from the executive agenda for the entire first term. Political reform, a central plank in the platform of Cardoso's party, is now relegated to his second term at the earliest. My view—and there is certainly much debate in Brazil over this question—is that Cardoso's struggles, even granting his considerable successes, demonstrate the strength of the institutionalist critique in Brazil because conditions could hardly be more favorable for a strong presidency.

The parliamentarism-presidentialism debate is perhaps the most "macro" research question linking institutions to democratic consolidation. But it is probably not the most important—mainly because switches of such magnitude are unlikely—nor is it the most common. Most institutionalist scholars examine much narrower aspects of institutional structure, aspects with wider intraregional variation that are more susceptible to empirical testing and eventually more amenable to reform. A good ex-

3. The formal members of Cardoso's coalition include only the Partido da Frente Liberal (PFL), the Partido Social Democrático Brasileiro (PSDB), and the Partido Trabalhista Brasileira (PTB), but I think the campaign alliance is a more appropriate yardstick.

ample is Mark Jones's *Electoral Laws and the Survival of Presidential Democracies*. His central argument is that presidents need a majority or near majority in their legislatures. Jones's review of the international literature (by Linz and others) produces the usual conclusion that presidentialism is inherently unstable. But the crucial distinction, Jones argues, is whether the president regularly has a majority or a near majority.

Jones's empirical analysis begins with a cross-national assessment of executive-legislative conflict. Here I want to digress a bit into the methodological details because they illustrate the problems confronting comparative work. The dependent variable is not what might be expected because Jones does not utilize "data covering the submission, passage, and duration of legislation in the legislative process" (p. 39). He goes on to explain, "First, each nation has its own legislative rules, with relevant legal instruments often defined in distinct ways across nations. These classificatory differences represent a severe impediment to any type of large-scale comparative analysis. . . . what may be a private bill in one nation may be lumped together in a single category in others. What is a law in one nation sometimes may be considered a law and sometimes a resolution in others. A set of ten new regulations which may be included in a single bill in one nation may require ten separate bills in another" (pp. 39–40). In addition, the legislative record can produce a misleading picture of executive-legislative relations. Presidents are unlikely to submit bills to congress that they expect to be rejected.⁴ High rates of success might mean that the executive branch sent noncontroversial or watered-down bills to the congress.⁵

Jones opts to use a proxy, specifically, reports of executive-legislative conflict published in the *Latin American Weekly Report*, 1984–1993. The dependent variable is the annual percentage of articles (among those with politics as a primary or secondary theme) devoted to covering executive-legislative conflict. In the subsequent regression analysis, the independent variables include the percentage of seats held by the president's party in the legislature, the percentage of the president's term completed (as a measure of "honeymoon effects"), and dummy variables measuring the legislative powers of the president, the legislature's power of censure, and the degree of presidential control over members of the presidential party in the legislature. Jones's multiple-regression analysis demonstrates that executive-legislative conflict is very much a function of the size of the president's party in the legislature, the existence of legislative power of

4. I have found the same result in Brazil since 1988. Presidential success rates would look a lot worse if analysts included the nonbills, those bills that the president gave up on after congressional leaders said they would be "dead on arrival."

5. Note that this problem would be only partially alleviated by comparing equivalent policy areas, such as tax policy, across countries.

censure, and the stage of the presidential term (with conflict higher at the beginning than at the end).⁶

Why do certain systems systematically produce minority governments? At the national level throughout Latin America and in the Argentine provinces, it is clear that multipartism hinders the formation of majorities. Once the number of parties exceeds three (using the Laakso-Taagepera index), the chances of getting a legislative majority are nil.

Jones next needed to determine what produces legislative multipartism. It turns out that two factors matter a lot: the formula used for selecting the president, and the timing of presidential and legislative elections (concurrent or nonconcurrent). A plurality executive electoral formula, by which the candidate with the most votes in the first round of the election simply wins, forces parties to form coalitions, eliminates marginal parties, and discourages party fragmentation. In contrast, any kind of majority runoff formula reduces the likelihood of presidential party majorities and near majorities. A majority runoff formula also allows outsiders like Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori to get in, but once in power they receive little legislative support. The second factor, the timing of elections, has an even stronger quantitative effect: nonconcurrent elections result in 1.6 times as much multipartism as concurrent elections.

Jones also establishes the unimportance of other aspects of institutional rules. The average size or magnitude of legislative districts has no influence on national-level multipartism, and the precise electoral formula used in the legislature, whether that of D'Hondt or Hare, makes no difference.⁷

My guess is that *Electoral Laws and the Survival of Presidential Democracies* is not the last word on the factors that Jones analyses, but it left me convinced that most countries would be better off electing their presidents through a plurality election formula. What makes this book a model of solid scholarship is its combination of careful and imaginative empirical research with attention to subnational detail. It focuses on a limited number of structural factors but includes enough of the real world of politics so that its recommendations are plausible.

John Carey's *Term Limits and Legislative Representation* provides a somewhat narrower take on institutions. Carey's purpose is to draw on the experiences of Costa Rica and Venezuela as a way of understand-

6. Jones then makes a useful jump, one that other country-focused institutional studies would do well to emulate. He switches to the subnational level to examine the experience of Salta, an Argentine province in which the governor, bereft of a legislative majority, was unable to push through legislation crucial to the state's economic recovery.

7. Note, however, that Jones only has nineteen data points in this regression. Moreover, three are from Brazil and two are from Argentina. District magnitude within Argentina is related to multipartism, and this situation is true in Brazil as well. Jones admits that extreme outliers, especially in Uruguay, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, may obscure the relationship.

ing how term limits, once they are widely accepted, will affect politicians in the United States. His approach represents quite a different meta-organization: rather than mining the U.S. or European experience for guides to Latin America, this author looks at Latin America to predict future political behavior in the United States.

Beginning with Carey's central purpose, what do readers learn about the potential effects of term limits in the United States from the experience of Costa Rica, where deputies cannot serve two consecutive terms, and Venezuela, where reelection is unlimited but party leaders tightly control ballot access. We learn that politicians looking for future jobs adjust their behavior to those who will control their political futures. This finding is extremely broad and, given some minimal rationality on the part of politicians, could hardly be otherwise. In Costa Rica and Venezuela, party leaders control deputies' futures. In the United States, voters in races that politicians are considering entering play the same role. If party leaders were stronger in the United States, they might act like Costa Rican or Venezuelan leaders. But they are weak and likely to remain so. Thus the inference for U.S. politicians must remain a broad one. If I were a student of U.S. politics, I would not find this conclusion very interesting.

But Latin Americanists can pay less attention to the discussion of U.S. term limits in *Term Limits and Legislative Representation* and evaluate it simply as a study of political institutions in two fairly similar countries. On these grounds, Carey's book stands up very well indeed.

Why compare Costa Rica and Venezuela? Both countries have long competitive traditions. Their social indicators and levels of income are fairly similar. Both used closed-list proportional representation in legislative voting, although Venezuela has subsequently implemented some changes. Costa Rica, however, has ruled out consecutive terms for legislators, while Venezuela has not.

The fact that Costa Rica and Venezuela have closed-list proportional representation implies that the level of attention to constituents' interests should be low because votes are attached to parties rather than deputies. Neglect of constituency (called "shirking" in political science parlance) should be even greater when deputies are not motivated by the possibility of reelection. But Costa Rican legislators often move on to public-sector administrative jobs, so they are beholden to the party leaders who control these jobs. The question is whether this condition is sufficient to produce constituency-specific pork-barrel politics. Carey finds that there indeed exists what he calls "legislative particularism," even in these unfavorable circumstances. Party leaders expect deputies to provide constituency service, and the leaders' control of future jobs gives them a big carrot. Party leaders assign responsibility for particular communities to deputies, and each deputy controls a small budget line called a *partido específico* that is allocated to local projects.

In Venezuela deputies paid little attention to local interests because party leaders failed to compel them to do otherwise. Beginning in 1993, adoption of a German-style mixed district and proportional-representation system was supposed to address voters' desires for more attentive legislators. Recent evidence suggests, however, that district deputies are not distinguishing themselves from list (proportional) deputies in ways that would be predicted by the "electoral connection" hypothesis.⁸

Finally, Carey argues that party cohesion in the legislature is weaker in Costa Rica than in Venezuela because without the possibility of reelection, deputies have fewer incentives to obey. Moreover, with so many power centers in Costa Rican parties, there is often no unified leadership position.

Of all the books under review here, Carey's *Term Limits and Legislative Representation* is the most "theory-driven" in the sense that the object of explanation, the choice of problem, comes not from the experience of observers of a political system but from a broad theoretical approach, in this case rational-choice theory. The fear that legislators will neglect or violate their constituents' interests unless compelled by fear of electoral defeat or future joblessness is a common rational-choice assumption.⁹ It has not always been considered important by Latin Americanists, but the reforms undertaken in Venezuela are sufficient proof that Carey's focus is a sound one. At the same time, care must be taken to avoid treating theoretical assumptions about *ceteris paribus* (all other relevant things remaining the same) as if they were actual empirical findings. The assumption that deputies' behavior toward their constituencies is affected by electoral rules is a probabilistic assumption, and it turns out that in Venezuela the power of party leaders may negate the impact of new rules. It also turns out (as Carey admits, to his credit) that Costa Rican deputies who perform considerable work for the constituency are no more likely to get administrative jobs than "slackers."

In my view, Carey's fine book illustrates the tension between theoretically driven and empirically driven research. The object of his research was not to maximize understanding of the Costa Rican and Venezuelan party and legislative systems. Rather, Carey sought to understand how term limits would affect behavior in the United States. In the process, read-

8. See Michael R. Kulisheck, "Placebo or Potent Medicine? Electoral Reform and Political Behavior in Venezuela." Paper presented at the conference "Compromised Legitimacy? Assessing the Crisis of Democracy in Venezuela," held in Caracas, 9–10 May 1996. Kulisheck found that patterns of floor attendance and floor speaking did not differ between the two types of deputies (that is, the district deputies were not seeking to "advertise" themselves to their constituents). He did find, however, that the number of parties in pre-election coalitions was sizably larger in district elections than in list elections.

9. It happens that most deputies do not end up with administrative jobs, and it is unclear whether most deputies really want such jobs. Whether all those who want jobs get them, or whether those who please party leaders get them, are questions left to future researchers.

ers learn a good bit about Costa Rican and Venezuela politics. But we cannot draw precise conclusions about the ways that term limits work in Costa Rica and Venezuela because the two systems differ in other ways plausibly related to constituency service, especially in terms of party control over legislators. And the theoretical focus leaves a lot for future research: motivations for constituency service beyond future employment, the bases of party discipline, the relationship between intraparty factions and political careers, and so on. This comment is not meant as a criticism of Carey's project, because the tension is inescapable: if Carey had focused solely on Costa Rica and Venezuela, readers might learn more about those two cases, but the ability to generalize to other Latin American and non-Latin American cases would be diminished.

Federalism and Local Politics as Objects of Study

The four works discussed thus far are extensions to Latin America of topics in the institutional literature with considerable prior theoretical development. Examinations of federalism, by contrast, have only begun to connect with theoretical traditions such as rational choice.¹⁰ Marcello Carmagnani's *Federalismos latinoamericanos: Mexico, Brasil, Argentina* persuades me that the study of federalism has a lot of potential and has been unjustly marginalized from the mainstream of institutional analysis. Carmagnani's edited collection consists of nine essays, three on each country, divided into three time periods: the first federalism of the early nineteenth century, liberal federalism (through the early twentieth century), and centralizing federalism (mainly since 1930).

The essays in this collection emphasize the interaction between doctrine and social and economic experience in the evolution of Latin American federalism. Foreign models were indeed imported, including the U.S. Articles of Confederation and Constitution, the Spanish Constitution of Cádiz of 1812, and the historic constitution of the English monarchy, but they all were adapted to the social and economic reality of Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico.

The essays on early-nineteenth-century federalism make clear that early federalism in Latin America was constructed on a confederative base. In these confederations, provinces or states delegated to a central government a restricted set of functions, typically including control over foreign affairs and foreign commerce. In each case, the evolution of the federal system was heavily conditioned by economic factors: trade patterns, the redistribution of federal expenditures, and the location of new

10. See especially the work of Barry Weingast, "The Economic Role of Political Institutions: Market-Preserving Federalism and Economic Development," *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 11, no. 1 (Apr. 1995):1@-31.

industrial production. In other words, federalism was conditioned by the formation of a unified national market.

At the same time, economic growth strengthened the region's corporatist tendencies, and these in turn hindered the consolidation of liberal-democratic federalism. After 1930 the desire by elites for social peace led to a more centralized federalism centered around the president as a way of guaranteeing governability.

The essays in *Federalismos latinoamericanos* also make evident the differences between the evolution of federalism in these countries. In Argentina after 1840, the greater growth of the province of Buenos Aires was viewed by other provinces as a threat, and the federation considered itself a brake on the hegemony of Buenos Aires. In Mexico regional sectors perceived clearly the difficulty of preserving their economic autonomy without reducing the economic and social weight of the capital and its port. More than in Argentina, the Mexican federal pact reformulated the economic situation. Regional elites strongly identified with the federation because they benefited from the development of the railroad, the ports, and the financial resources of the federation. In Brazil federalism arose from the necessity of redistributing subsidies to poor states. These subsidies made the poor states satellites that were easily dominated from the federal capital.

After 1930 the federalisms of these three countries share the characteristic that their organizing pacts go from the center to the periphery, not the other way around. Federalism is now centralizing and corporatist. Another development was the expansion of social groups lacking territorial bases, especially urban strata like the middle and working classes. Because such groups pushed for industrial expansion and growth in public and private-sector services, they favored centralization. These factors contribute to the development of nationalism and presidentialism, which interfere constantly with federalism. Nationalism inevitably emphasizes the role of the central government, while presidentialism forges a direct link between "the people" and the president.

Amid recent talk of "weak democracies" and "delegated democracies," *Federalismos latinoamericanos* raises a number of questions that will undoubtedly interest even scholars less concerned with historical questions. Will the middle sectors' attachment to centralizing power survive the age of neoliberalism? Can federal systems provide opportunities for participation that are lacking in highly centralized systems? Will they serve as a vehicle for preserving backward regional elites? Is federalism the appropriate theoretical lens for viewing the career trajectories of politicians across levels of government?

Although questions involving subnational governments arise even in unitary systems, investigations of federalism lead naturally to local politics. Andrew Nickson's *Local Government in Latin America* responds to the

paucity, the virtual absence, of research on local government. Nickson's work is best viewed as an early "state-of-the-field" project. Part 1 provides an overview of local government, treating its history, legal status, finances, services, electoral systems, citizen participation, and intermunicipal relations. Part 2 provides brief country profiles. The fact that these discussions are rather thin in content and sources is not Nickson's fault. Little research has been undertaken on these topics, and most has been implemented by public-administration specialists or development economists (like Nickson himself) rather than by mainstream political scientists. It is neither a surprise nor a criticism, then, that this book's title uses the term *government* rather than *politics*.

Curiously, U.S. political science has no real equivalent to local politics as a field of study. Urban politics was once a thriving field, and we know something about small-town and rural politics from scholars like V. O. Key. The problem is more than terminological because Latin American municipalities are typically the only unit of government below provincial or state levels. As a result, most Latin American municipalities include rural areas, even though most Latin Americans live in purely urban municipalities.

Before resolving these definitional problems simply by forgetting the term *local politics* and deciding that we want to learn more about political processes in Latin America's urban or rural places, political scientists should ask why the study of cities fell into such a sad state on this side of the border. In the United States, voters and policy makers came to care little about those who live in inner cities. With the rise of intergovernmental transfers and overlapping jurisdictions, most policy problems (such as crime and welfare) no longer corresponded to the boundaries of a single level of government. And by the end of the 1960s, the big debates revolving around cities, especially the controversy over "who governs," had petered out.

The peculiarity of the factors leading to the demise of urban politics in the United States suggests that Latin Americanists should seek their own justifications for studying politics in subnational (urban and rural) settings. When authoritarian governments dominated the region, local politics was obviously a secondary priority. Similarly, state-led economic development focused attention on national politics. Now, however, the state seems to be withdrawing from the management of productive enterprise, and competitive politics has returned. The neglect of local political processes might be a serious error.

How should Latin Americanists investigate subnational politics? We might benefit from a reprise of the old debate over "who governs," either for the region as a whole or for specific countries. As municipalities become larger and economically more diverse, we know that political competition increases and that career politicians seize power from eco-

conomic elites. But we know little more. Is the relationship linear? Do economic elites lose their dominant position at roughly the same point, in terms of growth and diversity, in all systems? If not, what other variables help determine this phenomenon?

Latin Americanists might also profitably integrate the new literature on social networks into the study of local politics. A generation ago, anthropologist Anthony Leeds wrote about cliques in his classic study of decision making in Brazil.¹¹ With the current interest in civil society and in nongovernmental organizations leading naturally to an exploration of subnational politics, social-network theory might be a way of making these studies more rigorous.

Finally, mass politics should be linked to institutional issues and questions at the subnational level. Latin Americanists have considerable experience with national-level survey data, and the Latinbarometer (assuming we resolve our propensities for data hoarding) promises to increase knowledge substantially.¹² But national-level surveys abstract from subnational contexts, whether these contexts are state, community, or neighborhood. National surveys are perfect for understanding the impact of television on campaigns but inadequate for understanding neighborhood political communication. The effects of local political machines on voters can only be measured with contextually sensitive local samples and investigations of the ways in which machines actually operate.

Conclusion

While commenting on federalism and local politics, I offered avenues of research that might help tie these problems to the mainstream of institutional work. Let us now consider the whole corpus of institutional analysis represented by these seven books. What directions should future research take?

Dieter Nohlen claims in *Presidencialismo ou parlamentarismo* that the core of the “new institutionalism” (not to be confused with other uses of the same term) affirms three central points. First, it argues that no mono-causal theories are possible. Other variables in addition to institutional

11. Anthony Leeds, “Brazilian Careers and Social Structure: A Case History and Model,” in *Contemporary Cultures and Societies of Latin America*, edited by Dwight Heath and Richard Adams (New York: Random House, 1965), 379–401.

12. Modeled after the Eurobarometer, the Latinbarometer covers nearly every country in Latin America. For 1996, Latinbarometer involved over eighteen thousand interviews in seventeen countries. Funding for the surveys came from the European Union (via the Centro de Investigación, Promoción y Cooperación Internacional in Spain) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The Latinbarometer Corporation, which controls the data, sells marginal percentages and cross-tabulations, but it has not released the raw data to the academic community at large. Given the Latinbarometer’s international funding and current norms in the United States regarding data sharing, this practice is clearly unacceptable.

ones must always be taken into account, and cause-and-effect relationships are not unidirectional but circular (p. 145).¹³ Second, there is no normatively ideal point of view. Political engineering has to take space and time into account. And third, analysts should think not in terms of transfers but in terms of adaptations of systems or models, in accord with the individual conditions and circumstances of each country.

Nohlen's remarks carry implications, at least indirectly, for the issue of the primacy of theory building over data collecting. In U.S. political science, theory construction is certainly a more prestigious activity than data gathering and empirical testing. But it is easy to forget that theory construction in the United States builds on an enormous corpus of preexisting data. Latin Americanists are generations away from a comparable empirical base. In my view, the generation of data suitable for empirical verification is still a crucial part of our research programs.

This conclusion does not suggest that development of conceptual arguments should be ignored. An empirically testable hypothesis implies some theoretical position. Whether political scientists are measuring the consequences of parliamentary-presidentialist systems or testing the consequences of plurality versus proportional elections, we advance a theoretical claim. In fact, the books reviewed here, although they make varying use of theoretical arguments, all seek empirical justification for their theories. For the most part, I think they get the balance about right.

Nohlen's comments on the circularity of causation should also be taken more seriously. Political scientists typically assume that prior institutional choices have consequences for democratic consolidation, policy outcomes, or the behavior of politicians and citizens. Because we rarely reverse the direction of causation to study institutional choices themselves, we assume in effect that institutions are "given" and that preferences do not need to be explained. It happens, however, that there are lots of opportunities to examine the moments when institutional choices are made. Javier Martínez-Lara's *Building Democracy in Brazil: The Politics of Constitutional Change, 1985–95* treats exactly that topic, albeit without a well-developed theoretical perspective. Colombia, Venezuela, and Peru have recently undergone such constitution-founding moments, and Mexico might be at the same point.¹⁴

With the exception of Barbara Geddes's pathbreaking analysis in *Politician's Dilemma*, institutional scholars have rarely treated corruption and clientelism in theoretically serious ways. Geddes's work on presidential-

13. The example that Nohlen gives is instructive: it is easy to prove that the fluidity of the electoral system depends to a high degree on the system of party politics.

14. If we want to take seriously the question of how individuals and groups define their self-interest, we might turn to the "historical institutionalist" literature, which argues that institutional context shapes actors' goals. For historical institutionalists, preferences are affected not just by institutions themselves but by leadership and such factors as new ideas

appointment strategies established the importance of threats to survival, party discipline, and coalition structure. Still, much remains to be explained. Is the number of parties related to incentives to pad bureaucracies? Do federal systems create incentives for purely partisan strategies? It should be noted, however, that the institutions-clientelism nexus can be explored only with the concomitant development of cross-nationally valid indicators of patronage and corruption. Theory construction and empirical verification cannot proceed without data gathering.¹⁵

As noted, this collection includes studies of single countries, groups of two or three countries, and groups large enough for multivariate statistical analysis. Is one type inherently preferable to another? The answer, I think, is "no." A single country monograph is "a case study" if the central puzzle interests only traditional country experts and if the explanatory concepts come from the case itself and remain invariant within it. The real issue is not the number of cases but the number of observations. To repeat Harry Eckstein's famous example, "A study of six general elections . . . may be, but need not be, an $n = 1$ study. It might also be an $n = 6$ study. It can also be an $n = 120,000,000$ study. It depends on whether the subject of study is electoral systems, elections or voters."¹⁶ All else being equal, more cases are better than fewer. But in the real world of research, more coverage means less depth. For most scholars, this frontier is sticky. We cannot choose any point on the curve, any relation between the number of cases and the depth per case. John Carey's two-country comparison is not what takes *Term Limits and Legislative Representation* out of the realm of case studies, because Costa Rica and Venezuela differ in many more ways than the ability of deputies to run for reelection. Rather, Carey observes and applies multivariate statistical analysis to a large number of politicians, and his core theoretical argument comes from the U.S. legislative literature. My point here is simply that rigorous research

(such as Keynesianism). A good place to start is *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analyses*, edited by Sven Steinmo, Kathleen Thelen, and Frank Longstreth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). An important theoretical perspective is found in Jack Knight, *Institutions and Social Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

15. Michael Johnston's essay in Diamond and Plattner provides some useful hints for Latin Americanists. Johnston argues that British and U.S. patterns of corruption were different. In Britain, corruption came from above, from government officials, for the purpose of keeping voting under control. In the United States, corruption stemmed from parties and other ethnic entrepreneurs trying to organize power bases. Reform in Britain was accomplished mostly by "new men" and some industrial interests seeking to challenge old elites. In the United States, reform was supported by those displaced by the new immigrants rather than by old elites responding to urban bosses.

16. See Harry Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science," in *Handbook of Political Science*, vol. 1, *Political Science: Scope and Theory*, edited by Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975), 85.

can be done in studies of one, two, or many countries. The choice depends on the resources of the scholar and the nature of the research problem.

Overall, the institutional literature in Latin American political science seems to be in pretty good shape. Latin American social scientists are involved in the subfield to about the same degree as U.S. scholars, and appropriately, younger scholars dominate. Although I have suggested that theory construction without attention to empirical verification is dangerous, both efforts are likely to proceed together, if only because the identification of an argument as Latin American immediately presupposes empirical content, that is, some common characteristics definable as Latin American. At the same time, institutional research should spread both horizontally and vertically. Federalism and local politics ought to become mainstream topics in institutional research. The range of political outcomes affected by institutional factors (such as the electoral system) should expand from democratic consolidation to include income distribution and even particular policy areas such as tax and welfare policies. Finally, analyses of party discipline, executive-legislative relations, and legislative behavior will become more independent theoretically from literature on the U.S. Congress.