


The editors' theoretical framework and conceptual discussion is influenced by, and owes a debt of intellectual gratitude to, Guillermo O'Donnell, whose research from the 1990s on explored issues related to the quality of democracy. His final book, *Democracy, Agency, and the State: Theory with Comparative Intent* (2010), which makes a case for addressing the importance of the state in conceptualizations of democracy, leaves its fingerprints all over this edited volume. Following O'Donnell's work, Cameron and Jaramillo treat democracy, liberalism, and republicanism as three conceptually distinct but interrelated intellectual traditions. As did O'Donnell, they warn against the teleological notion that Latin American democracies are simply immature versions of established democracies in Western Europe and the United States (13). The empirical chapters successfully advance these claims.

Aside from its overt references to O'Donnell, the book is also a spiritual successor to Catherine Conaghan and James Malloy's *Unsettling Statecraft: Democracy and Neoliberalism in the Central Andes* (1994), a comparative study of the politics of neoliberalism in Latin America during the 1980s. But where Conaghan and Malloy focus on the contradictions and difficulties Andean states faced as they made the transition from authoritarianism to civilian rule and neoliberalism, Cameron and Jaramillo's volume explores the continuing challenges to democracy through executive aggrandizement in the region. As they show, this examination is as urgent today as ever.

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## REFERENCES

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Miguel Angel Latouche, Wolfgang Muno, and Alexandra Gericke, eds. *Venezuela – Dimensions of a Crisis: A Perspective on Democratic Backsliding*. Cham: Springer, 2023. Tables, figures, index, 214 pp.; hardcover €96.29.

A current challenge in the international system concerns democracy and its backsliding. From the rise of counterforces flirting with authoritarianism, such as Russia and China, to the declining influence of international pillars of democracy,

such as the United States (US) and the European Union (EU), this seismic shift in the liberal international order might result in the rise of a new order. Latin America is not immune to these developments given that it is home to one of the critical case studies in the literature: Venezuela.

Latouche, Muno, and Gericke tackle the issue of democratic backsliding in Venezuela in this interesting and highly relevant book, accessible to a wide academic and policy-making audience. Their multidimensional approach to the crisis, in editing a book that brings together chapters resulting from a conference, makes it especially useful to a plethora of research in political science and international relations. The book deals with the main issues in three main sections. The first offers a more theoretical perspective and sets a historical base for the discussion. The second discusses the domestic factors that contributed to the crisis. And finally, the editors locate the discussion internationally, providing chapters on geopolitics, regional politics, and democracy, highlighting the country's interactions with the EU, the US, Cuba, and Colombia.

The rise of *Chavismo* in Venezuela during the 2000s changed the political paradigm of the country. A country previously considered to be on a democratic path moved instead toward a unique political system based on political stability and an economic growth fueled by increasing oil revenues. In the book's first chapter, Latouche provides a systemic analysis of the crisis and sets the tone for the other chapters in the book by describing the main characteristics of the phenomenon, basing it on a combination of two factors: the underrepresentation of social interests and institutional failure.

Guillermo Avelo's chapter complements Latouche's well when looking at the ideological factors behind the political crisis. Democracy has played an interesting part in the country's ideological evolution. First introduced to Venezuela by the Punto Fijo Pact in 1958, democracy started a path of decline that culminated in the *Chavismo* of the current period. This can be considered democratic backsliding when understood in terms of the liberal approach to democracy, but this backsliding does not represent a complete denial of some democratic factors, and as such can be defined as illiberal democracy according to the current literature. The ideological trinomial base, according to Avelo, is formed by oil, the use of populist discourse, and a rejection of the West, defying the conceptions of right and left.

The rise and fall of democratic moments in Venezuela are intertwined with the country's economic growth, which is heavily reliant on oil revenue. Muno and Kestler's chapter highlight three democratic moments of Venezuelan politics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The first started with the election of Acción Democrática (AD), finishing with the 1948 military coup that ushered in a decade of dictatorship. The Punto Fijo Pact in 1958 was the main event of the second moment, when the main parties met in New York to sign an agreement that made democracy an important part of Venezuelan political culture. The agreement kickstarted a period of bipartisan politics that was known as *partidocracia*. The final moment began in 1998, when, following a severe crisis caused by oil

revenues, the country elected Hugo Chavez. It also meant the rise of *Chavismo*, and a decline of liberal democracy in the country.

From a *partidocracia* to a political system that constantly flirts with authoritarianism, Venezuela saw a decline in its political parties. Héctor Briceño's chapter on the multiplicity of crises in the party system dialogues very well with Muno and Kestler's when it takes this factor and opens a debate around it, showing that the rise of the leader/president overpassed the importance of the party in the country's politics, a feature of a shift toward populism worldwide. The chapter also stresses the current polarization within Venezuelan politics and society and how elections have been used as a tool to undermine democracy in the country, noting that both Chavez and Maduro ascended to the presidency through elections.

This shift in the balance of the Venezuelan political system, with the decline of parties and the rise of populist leaders, has had a significant impact on the country's internal features, such as public administration and the relationship with the military. Both Alcibiades's and Latouche's chapters aim to deal with these two factors. Although they are not closely connected to each other, the chapters brilliantly deal with the consequences of *Chavismo* in the domestic realm of politics, concluding this section of the book.


Internationally, Venezuela is the setting for a major debate and clash of forces: it is a critical case in Latin America's constant political debate between democracy and authoritarianism, which can itself be interpreted as a debate between the West and the rest. One of the two major actors representing the West is the EU. Within its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the EU has the normative mission of promoting its core values beyond its borders. Democracy is one of the EU's core values, with an extreme ontological importance. Susanne Gratius's chapter exhaustively explores the position of this actor as a promoter of democracy worldwide, focusing on the case of Venezuela. While characterizing it as an exceptional case, Gratius argues that the EU took a more aggressive position toward the country when it imposed sanctions and openly recognized the opposition as the legitimate leadership. While discussing theory, the author informatively explains the role of the democracy promoter, interestingly characterizing democracy promotion tools as "incentives." Critical statements, the recognition of Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's president, the EU electoral observation mission in 2021, and the establishment of the International Contact Group (ICG) were the main incentives used by the EU to promote democracy in Venezuela, with its most vocal institution being the European Parliament, leaving this feature as a prominent avenue for further research. The EU's loss of linkage to, and leverage over, Venezuela due to its undermining of the situation and overestimation of the opposition made Venezuela's populist and autocratic leadership more resilient.

Losing linkage and leverage was not exclusive to the EU, but also applied to the other major actor of the West, the US. Brand and Muno explore this issue in an interesting discussion of Simón Bolívar and James Monroe, two figures who played key roles in shaping the ideological foundations of US–Venezuela relations. The dispute over how to characterize this relationship—as one defined by

partnership, leadership, or a desire for autonomy—continues to dictate the troubled relations between these two countries. Domínguez López adds another perspective to this discussion, depicting the relationship as being trinomial and not binomial by including Cuba's role in it. A clash of ontologies having the US as the counter-ontological but hegemon country in this trinomial relation, provides a severe difficulty in a possibility of change on these dynamics.

To close the chapters, Gericke brings another piece of this puzzle to the table: the role of Colombia as a neighbor to Venezuela. In the recent immigration crisis, Colombia was the main route out of their country for Venezuelans, but Colombia itself has also had a difficult history with democracy. Gericke points out the importance of the leadership of both states in influencing the closeness of their policies and the health of their dialogue. Being neighbors, a constant dialogue is a necessary feature of both countries' foreign policies, but Colombia's proximity to the US remains one of the major incentives for a more pragmatic approach from Venezuela. Regionally and internationally, it represents a crucial relationship with important domestic consequences for both.

Venezuela remains a critical, and exceptional, case while discussing Latin American politics and the debate on democracy versus autocracy. The book provides the main tools for debating and researching the issues, benefiting from the editors' choice of a multidimensional approach, and opens up interesting avenues for further research. An important factor mentioned mainly in the section about the international dimension of the crisis, but not deeply explored, was the role of China and Russia as close partners to Venezuela. The book could have benefited from chapters about the bilateral or trilateral relations between Venezuela and these two countries, exploring a little deeper the antihegemonic international dimension of the crisis. Notwithstanding this, the book makes a highly valuable contribution to the literature on Venezuela and the limits to its democracy.

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Lydia Brashear Tiede, *Judicial Vetoes: Decision-Making on Mixed Selection Constitutional Courts*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2022. Figures, tables, bibliography, index, 305 pp.; hardcover \$110, ebook \$110.

Worldwide, we observe the increasing relevance of courts' decisions on important matters, such as defending human rights and containing processes of power concentration at the hands of incumbent governments. Frequently, this endeavor

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