

# Latin America and Comparative Politics

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In this issue, we have a special section on “Las Américas” devoted to several pieces in comparative politics from and about Latin America. In the pugilistic arts, a competitor who hits harder than expected is described as “punching above weight.” In comparative politics, this captures the position of the study of politics in Latin America. Even though only four percent of articles in leading political science journals mention the region in their titles or abstracts (Wilson and Knutsen 2022), it has played a critical role in the development of contemporary theory in comparative politics. In contrast, among the seventeen political scientists interviewed in *Passion, Craft and Method in Comparative Politics* (Munck and Snyder 2007), there are three Latin Americanists, more than any other region (Guillermo O'Donnell, Alfred Stepan, and David Collier), as well as a scholar who did some of his best work in Latin America (Philippe Schmitter). In this issue we highlight a series of articles and a reflection which consider some of the pressing problems of our age—democratic backsliding, resistance and repression, policing, suffrage, colonialism and its legacies, inclusion, and empowerment—all set in Latin America. First, however, it is worth considering how work on this region has developed by reflecting on the contributions of the scholars working on Latin America highlighted in *Passion, Craft, and Method*.

Guillermo O'Donnell (1936–2011) was an Argentinian who received his academic training in the United States and split his time in the profession between Latin America and the United States. He spent the lion's share of his career as a faculty member at Notre Dame, which remains a major center of research on Latin America. His early work was dedicated to patterns of development in Latin America, where his theory of bureaucratic authoritarianism linked the end of the “easy” phase of import-substitution industrialization with the creation of a political coalition of technocrats and military officers who imposed austerity on the newly empowered middle sector (working and middle classes) in the quest for new sources of growth. It was a highly influential work in explaining the second global wave of authoritarianism in the developing world in the 1960s and 1970s (O'Donnell 1973). Along with Barrington Moore (1966), O'Donnell

produced one of the definitive works that undermined the teleological link between economic development and democratization associated with some varieties of modernization theory.

O'Donnell also presided over a multi-volume collection which brought together a large group of leading comparativists to make sense of the onset of the third wave of democratization in Southern Europe and Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s (O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 1986). His contribution with Schmitter to that project was a novel actor-centered process model of democratic transition that dominated discussions of democratization in the third wave (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). Following the almost universal installation of democratic regimes in the region, O'Donnell turned to the problems of democratic consolidation, deepening, and the institutionalization of fledgling democratic regimes. Under the rubric of “delegative democracy,” he warned of the autonomy of executive power, the weakness of horizontal accountability, and the precariousness of democracy in Latin America (O'Donnell 1994, 1998, and 2004). This analysis in many ways presaged our current attempts to make sense of the widespread phenomenon of democratic backsliding. While this summary certainly does not do full justice to O'Donnell's work as a whole or the magnitude of his contributions, it does highlight how his concerns about the form of rule in his native Argentina provided him with a unique perspective that enabled him to make general contributions to theories of comparative politics.

His partner in the influential actor-centered process model of democratization, himself the author of a plethora of other important works on regimes and regime change, was Philippe Schmitter. Schmitter was born in the United States but has lived in many parts of the globe, and as result is a citizen of the world, despite his long associations with both Stanford and the European University Institute. His earliest work also made fundamental contributions that continue to shape our contemporary understanding of systems of interest articulation both in democracies and autocracies. He is responsible for the resurrection of the term “corporatism” in political science, purging it of its normative authoritarian uses and redeploying it in a novel

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analytical frame, making it highly useful for understanding the relationship between the state and organized interests in both authoritarian and democratic regimes. His research on Brazil (Schmitter 1971, 1974) fundamentally expanded our understanding of the relationship between political development and organized interests.

Alfred Stepan (1936–2017), an American, had a long and distinguished career which spanned a number of leading universities—Oxford, Yale, Columbia, and Central European University. He was the author of a large number of publications, both single-authored and in collaboration with Juan Linz. As a Latin Americanist, he published important works on both Peru and Brazil. His early research was on military rule in Brazil (Stepan 1971), a subject he would revisit as the military sought to return to the barracks after a generation in power (Stepan 1988). His research on Peru not only contributed to the study of the military in politics but also to the organization of interests under authoritarianism (Stepan 1978). This work on corporatist intermediation was second in influence only to Schmitter. Connected to his research on military rule was his work on the failure of democracies, which led to the organization of a highly influential multi-volume edited collection on the breakdown of democracy in interwar Europe and Latin America in the 1960s and '70s (Linz and Stepan 1978).

As Latin America embarked on a wholesale wave of democratization in the 1980s, Stepan contributed to the resurrection of the concept of civil society, which he connected to the study of bottom-up resistance to authoritarian rule, something that was present in the study of Eastern Europe as well (see Stepan 1988). While some of the most prominent scholars of comparative politics were bringing the state back in, Stepan was sneaking civil society in through the side door (Stepan 1985). The concept would come to figure prominently in his joint work with Juan Linz on democratic transition and problems of democratic consolidation. In the second generation of research on democratic transition in the third wave, his scholarship stands out as one of the major contributions that institutionalized the concept of civil society as central to the understanding of political change and stability (Linz and Stepan 1996).

David Collier's earliest work brought together a dynamic team of younger and senior Latin Americanists to explore alternative explanations for authoritarianism in the region (1979). This research built on O'Donnell's challenge to modernization theory. Alongside several contributors, Collier's work highlighted the theoretical importance of regional perspectives in comparative politics. Specifically, the volume showed that prevailing explanations for authoritarianism failed to fully account for the Latin American experience. Later, in their iconic work on labor incorporation (1991), Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier offered one of the most sweeping

works on Latin American politics to date, one that stands as a landmark in the uses of historical institutionalism and gave further credence to the use of critical junctures and path dependence to periodize change and stability. The book demonstrated how different forms of labor incorporation had long-term effects on national party systems and political regimes in eight Latin American countries. Centering the labor movement in an analysis of macro-level political institutions was a welcome advance in research on the region, influencing important historically oriented political science research concerned with inclusion and democracy in and beyond the context of Latin America.

One of the brutal facts highlighted by Munck and Snyder (2007) is that our field was long dominated by men. And this was also true of Latin American politics until the more recent emergence of a generation of outstanding female scholars. Recognizing that a truly inclusionary democracy must actively account for historically marginalized populations, novel scholarship on Latin America has focused on the role of Indigenous identities and movements in broadening democratic incorporation. Both Donna Lee Van Cott (1961–2009) and Deborah Yashar have been pioneers in this line of investigation. Van Cott's influential work centered important questions about cultural diversity in the region: from constitutional reforms that enhanced the political participation of marginalized ethnic groups (2000); to the emergence and success of ethnic parties (2005), and their performance on the local level (2008). Van Cott's death in 2009 was an untimely tragedy, but her path-breaking contributions to Latin American politics continue to have a great impact on the discipline today. The Donna Lee Van Cott Book Award for the best book on political institutions in Latin America is awarded each year by the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), recognizing her important and path-breaking scholarship on the region.

Deborah Yashar's work on Indigenous movements and the problem of democratic incorporation has emphasized the concept of citizenship rather than formal political institutions. In her second book (2005), Yashar developed what would eventually become a paradigmatic account of Indigenous movement formation in Latin America. Focusing on changes in citizenship regimes, as well as the availability of political associational spaces and networks that bridge communities as central for understanding variation in Indigenous mobilization in the region, Yashar not only advanced comparative historical methods, but also framed Indigenous struggles against neoliberal citizenship as central to debates on democratic inclusion. This concern is reflected in her most recent book (2021), co-edited with Diana Kapiszewski and Steven Levitsky, which highlights, among other things, the relationship between social mobilization and inclusionary reforms in

Latin America. Coming full circle, the book is dedicated to David Collier and Ruth Berins Collier (who mentored the editors and most of the contributors in the volume), and to their legacy for the study of political inclusion and democracy in Latin America.

On the basis of its size, population, or wealth we would not expect Latin America to garner nearly as much attention as it has received in comparative politics. However, its history and politics are highly dynamic, and it presents a great number of puzzles that vex its political life and command the attention of the best minds both from within its culturally rich mix of peoples and traditions, and from outside its boundaries. Latin America works as a counterbalance to the discipline's often Eurocentric theoretical frame. The lesson here is that incorporating new sources of regional variation into comparative politics theorizing challenges us to rethink what we know, and that Latin America has long been such a catalyst for the subfield. The wide range and importance of the articles included in our special section for this issue suggest that the region's importance for generating broad-reaching conceptual and analytical frameworks continues apace.

## The Special Section

The "Las Américas" special section includes six articles and a reflection. These cover a great deal of ground, including partisanship and democratic quality, high risk activism, police reforms, women's suffrage, territorial rights, democratic elitism, and protests in Latin America.

Matthew Singer starts us out with a timely analysis of citizens' perceptions of the state of democracy in "Fiddling while Democracy Burns: Partisan Reactions to Weak Democracy in Latin America." Analyzing survey data at the elite and mass levels in several Latin American countries, Singer finds evidence for a strong degree of partisan bias in evaluations of democratic quality. Specifically, he shows that respondents are significantly more likely to express positive evaluations of the current state of democracy in their country when their preferred party controls the presidency, even when the quality of democracy is objectively low. This finding highlights a serious challenge to democracy: if electoral winners are hesitant to criticize democratic infringements from their preferred elected officials or parties, public pressure to protect democracy is severely under threat.

Alejandro Peña, Larissa Meier, and Alice Nah focus on the personal and political consequences of engaging in dangerous activism in "Exhaustion, Adversity, and Repression: Emotional Attrition in High-Risk Activism." The authors leverage key insights from more than 130 interviews with human rights activists in Colombia, Kenya, and Indonesia, and develop the novel concept of emotional attrition. The concept highlights the ways in which activists working in high-risk contexts may develop a great sense of emotional exhaustion that can deeply affect their

personal lives while also precluding their engagement with activism in the long term. But one of the key conclusions of the article takes this finding from the individual to the collective level, arguing that the process of emotional attrition includes a relational dimension and may affect how groups evaluate risks, trust others, and participate in politics.

We shift our focus to the relationship between politicians and clientelistic intermediaries with Joy Langston and Rodrigo Castro Cornejo's article, "Why Do Clientelist Brokers Go Rogue? Parties, Politicians, and Intermediaries in Mexico." Challenging common assumptions about the prevalence of broker disloyalty, they argue that politicians generally prefer brokers who have a good reputation. They ask: what influences brokers' decisions to maintain their loyalty to their patrons as opposed to cheating? Relying on more than fifty in-depth interviews with local politicians and brokers in Mexico City, they argue that electoral competitiveness and the level of resource autonomy between brokers and politicians are central to understanding the conditions behind brokers' behavior. They find that independent brokers under highly competitive contexts will most often resort to cheating. These findings problematize the role of clientelism in voter-party linkages, bringing up important questions related to institution-building and democratization.

In "Reforming to Avoid Reform: Strategic Policy Substitution and the Reform Gap in Policing," Yanilda González raises important questions about institutional change and democratic responsiveness. Focusing on police reform in Colombia and Brazil and drawing from a variety of qualitative evidence (including interviews with elites and civil society advocates in the two countries), she demonstrates that while societal pressures for reform normally focus on structural factors like violence and corruption in policing, actual reforms tend to emphasize operational measures aimed at improving social trust and police performance. González refers to this process as "strategic policy substitution," wherein politicians and police bureaucracies leverage their power to shape the content of reform, avoiding the backlash of ignoring pressures to reform altogether. Importantly, she finds that although these shallower reforms may improve societal trust, they enhance the police's ability to resist more meaningful structural changes. This is one of those contributions that will certainly stir critical reflection beyond Latin America, as popular mobilizations against police brutality continue to take center stage in the United States and around the world.

Isabel Castillo adds to the conversation about institutions and political inclusion, looking specifically at the determinants of women's suffrage expansions in "Motivation Alignment, Historical Cleavages, and Women's Suffrage in Latin America." Castillo argues that for suffrage reforms to occur, both the strategic calculations about the

effects of incorporating new voters *and* some normative concerns about inclusion need to align. Contrasting the cases of Uruguay and Ecuador (early reformers) to Peru (failure to reform) in the twentieth century, she develops a historical argument for understanding women's suffrage expansions centered around the idea of motivation alignment. Her theory offers tools for better understanding the several trajectories behind successful (and failed) reforms, depending on the levels of strategic and normative motivations. For instance, reform is more likely to take place when elites and women's movements work to expand the acceptance of women's political roles in a context of either favorable or uncertain electoral incentives. By bringing together these two sets of political motivations, Castillo helps bridge the gap between institutional and ideological determinants of democratic reform.

With a timely contribution to political theory, Paulina Ochoa Espejo asks who should have rights to territory in "Territorial Rights for Individuals, States, or Pueblos? Answers from Indigenous Land Struggles in Colonial Spanish America." Challenging the existing emphasis on either the individual or state-based groups' jurisdiction over a certain area, Ochoa Espejo argues that *pueblos*, or communities traditionally attached to the land, should likewise be considered as subjects of territorial rights. Relying on sixteenth-century documents from Spanish America, as well as historiography and the writings of colonial legal thinkers, Ochoa Espejo shows that Indigenous communities actively conceptualized and asserted their rights to territory. Her theory has profound implications for liberal states that consider individuals or states as the sole subjects of territorial rights, while overlooking the significant territorial claims advanced by grounded communities. These claims continue to be at the center of social mobilization efforts in parts of Latin America where Indigenous groups struggle for political and cultural sovereignty.

Finally, the section concludes with a reflection by Matthew Rhodes-Purdy and Fernando Rosenblatt on the dangers of democratic elitism. In "Raising the Red Flag: Democratic Elitism and the Protests in Chile," Rhodes-Purdy and Rosenblatt argue that shifting the balance of power from ordinary citizens to political elites may worsen anti-system crises rather than containing them. Focusing on the recent protests in Chile, the authors highlight the powerful consequences that suppressing public participation might have on democracy. Rather than decreasing opportunities for participation, they argue, the best way to avoid populist crises is to empower citizens through political parties and continuous democracy. They emphasize parties' potential to effectively channel citizens' voices in productive directions. In a similar vein, continuous democracy stresses the potential for new actors to challenge the status quo through transparent and inclusive democratic institutions rather than elite

bargaining. Taken together, the articles and reflection included in this special section significantly advance existing research on Latin American politics while also contributing to broader conversations in political science.

## Other Programming

In "Empire, Popular Sovereignty, and the Problem of Self-and-Other-Determination," Inés Valdez turns to W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of democratic despotism, which suggests that popular sovereignty in Western democracies was predicated in part on a desire to partake of the wealth and resources obtained by empire. For this reason, Western nations articulated a claim to determine themselves democratically while simultaneously treating others despotically, in a process Valdez calls "self-and-other-determination." She connects the issue of imperial democracy with the broader literature on empire and racial capitalism to think about how racial affective attachments enable citizens both past and present to restrict democratic concern to a limited community, one whose wealth relies on the imperial exploitation of racialized others. At the same time, Valdez points to the absence of such questions in the literature on self-determination and concludes by reflecting on the implications of her framework for the contemporary rise of right-wing populism.

In "Exit, Voice, Loyalty ... or Deliberate Obstruction? Non-Collective Everyday Resistance under Oppression," Stephanie Dornschneider explores low-level non-collective resistance strategies employed by Palestinians under Israeli occupation. When repression renders collective resistance exorbitantly costly, resistance takes on non-collective, low visibility, and indirect forms. Such behavior signals an unwillingness to cooperate with oppressive regimes and is geared to obstructing the exercise of authority. Her theory shows that under conditions of fear of repression, resistance is possible but takes on forms that are harder to detect. Importantly, it cautions against seeing populations that do not take strong actions to resist oppression as quiescent or loyal.

Boris Heersink explores the importance of national party committees in shaping the public perception of parties in "Examining Democratic and Republican National Committee Party Branding Activity, 1953–2012." Building on the qualitative literature on the role of the RNC and DNC in shaping party brands, he presents a new quantitative data set measuring DNC and RNC activity on the basis of *New York Times* coverage from 1953 to 2012. He then examines whether the DNC and RNC consistently engage in party branding activity. He finds that when the party holds the White House, the committee engages in less branding activity. At the same time, he shows that they continue to engage in other routine activities, suggesting that party branding gives way to branding by the presidential administration.

In “Persuasive and Unpersuasive Critiques of Torture,” Ron Hassner identifies two arguments that critics make against the use of torture. A pragmatic strain argues that torture is ineffective, that it does not uncover useful information, and is thus futile. In contrast, ethical arguments highlight its cruelty and immorality. In a survey experiment, he turns up very little evidence that pragmatic arguments are effective, as most of those surveyed believed despite evidence to the contrary that torture was an effective way to extract information. However, when treated with information about the prolonged nature of torture, highlighting sustained cruelty, support for torture declined regardless of age, gender, political preferences, or prior beliefs. Hassner concludes that those opposed to torture would be more effective in making ethical rather than pragmatic arguments.

Pre-analysis plans (PAPs) have been posed as a solution to doubts about the credibility and scientific legitimacy of research. George K. Ofosu and Daniel N. Posner analyze a sample of almost 200 PAPs filed in political science and economics in the period 2011–2016 in “Pre-Analysis Plans: An Early Stocktaking.” Ultimately, they find large discrepancies between the preregistered research designs and hypotheses in the subsample that yielded published output. They conclude by weighing this evidence in terms of the prominent arguments made in favor of and against PAPs and discuss how norms and institutions will need to be reformed if pre-registration hopes to meet its stated goals.

In “Conducting the Heavenly Chorus: Constituent Contact and Provoked Petitioning in Congress,” Geoffrey Henderson, Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, Matto Mildeberger, and Leah Stokes conducted extensive interviews with congressional staff to better understand how congressional offices cope with our information-rich environment. They show that congressional staff not only respond to direct contact from constituents but also reach out to stakeholders to collect information on important issues. Rather than focus on polls, staff try to understand the sentiments of key constituencies on policy propositions. The picture they present is not one of equal decentralized representation, but an environment where staff seek to understand the preferences of their best organized and resourced constituents.

Rebecca Tapscott returns to the subject of non-violent state actors and their role in politics. In “Vigilantes and the State: Understanding Violence through a Security Assemblages Approach,” she focuses on situations where state capacity is lower and develops the notion that there are “historically-embedded” relationships between violent non-state actors and institutions. She thus questions the assumption that states have a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence and argues that we need to treat this as an open empirical question. Further, this means that we need to be cognizant that in this environment, all violent actors,

including the repressive apparatuses of the state, operate under strong constraints. She illustrates the utility of this approach, and its implications, in a mixed-methods nested study of vigilantes in Uganda. She finds that the police and vigilante groups complement rather than compete with each other, with the police focusing on political dissent and vigilantes providing everyday security.

In “‘An Unacceptable Surrender of Fiscal Sovereignty’: The Neoliberal Turn to International Tax Arbitration,” Martin Hearson and Todd Tucker explain the emergence of a neoliberal institution despite nationalist pushback to recover economic sovereignty since the Great Recession. They explain the cession of sovereignty in the resolution of international tax disputes to transnational tax adjudicators as the product of the power of business and the influence of the United States. Using historical documents, they show how this counterintuitive result, the ceding of tax authority by states increasingly defensive of their sovereignty, was possible despite strong pushback against the excesses of neoliberalism.

Adam Lerner looks at the political consequences of the psychic damage that war inflicts on its participants in “Blurring the Boundaries of War: PTSD in American Foreign Policy Discourse.” The article considers the origins of “post-traumatic stress syndrome” as a diagnosis and the role it has played in our national discourse on war. It finds that despite the fact that PTSD entered medical discourse in 1980, it did not become an issue in foreign policy until the 2008 presidential cycle. It also finds that the discourse, in stressing the lingering impacts of war outside the war zone, blurs the spatial and temporal boundaries of war, creating ambiguity around the ethical distinction between victims and perpetrators in martial violence.

The issue also includes four additional reflections. Keith Dowding and Enzo Lenine respond to the recent piece by James Johnson (2021) on formal models-as-fables published in *Perspectives*. In “Models, Conceptual and Predictive: A Response to Johnson’s Models-as-Fables” they argue that because models also provide predictions they can be productively tested, and thus are also explanatory in nature. Cyanne Loyle, Kathleen Cunningham, Reyko Huang, and Danielle Jung take stock of new developments in the literature on insurgent group governance in “New Directions in Rebel Governance Research.” They identify five areas where this literature is poised to make important contributions: multi-level governance, the employment of self-constraint by rebel groups, the connection between rebel institutions and the establishment of legitimate rule, the subtleties of territorial control in governance, and the legacies of rebel rule on post-conflict development. In “Why Do We Speak to Experts? Reviving the Strength of the Expert Interview Method,” Christian von Soest argues that in cases where there is a dearth of data, interviewing experts can be useful in examining causal

mechanisms. He advocates talking to both “inside” experts who play a role in decision-making and “outside” experts that analyze political decisions. He concludes by making suggestions on how to identify the relevant experts, control for their biases, and use such interviews to generate systematic evidence.

Finally, beginning with the publication of Michael Dawson’s classic, *Behind the Mule* (1994), the concept of linked fate is something scholars of race and politics who take a behavioral approach cannot ignore. Written, at least in part, as a rebuttal to sociologist William Julius Wilson’s *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978), Dawson outlines a mechanism, anchored in a history of social and economic deprivation, through which Black people are able to make political choices often cluttered by a bewildering array of information. In “Rewiring Linked Fate: Bringing Back History, Agency, and Power,” Reuel R. Rogers and Jae Yeon Kim acknowledge the theoretical import of linked fate, but that doesn’t stop them from engaging in constructive criticism of the concept. In a nutshell, they argue that Dawson and others emphasized the micro-level, social-psychological component of the theory to the detriment of the macro- and meso-levels of analysis: history, and the roles played by elites, respectively. The extension of linked fate to other racial groups beyond the Black community therefore produces results that are, at best, uneven. This, they suggest, is because researchers who study these other communities fail to pay sufficient attention to the macro- and meso-levels when applying linked fate to non-Black populations. Ultimately, they argue that a more thoughtful approach to the wider application of the linked fate argument would continue the revolution begun by Dawson in 1994.

## Note

1 Karla Mundim is an Editorial Assistant at *Perspectives on Politics*. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Florida completing her dissertation entitled, “Legacies of Resistance: A Long-Range Approach to Indigenous Movement Convergence in the Andes.” In fall 2023, she will take up a position as Assistant Professor of Comparative Politics at John Jay College of the City University of New York (CUNY). Her article, “My Body, My Territory: Indigenous Women, Territoriality, and the Rights of Cultural Minorities,” was recently published in *Politics, Groups, and Identities* (2021).

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