

make this work an invaluable resource for scholars across various disciplines. The work not only enriches our understanding of the Latin American context but also offers insights that transcend geographical boundaries, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how politics and crime are mutually constitutive and mutually reinforcing in spirals of violence or periods of detente. Scholars of criminology, political science and Latin American studies would do well to read Flom and to use his ideas to teach and advance their own research.

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Diego Esparza, *Policing and Politics in Latin America: When Law Enforcement Breaks the Law*

Lynne Riener, 2023, x + 173 pp.

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The breadth and depth of problems with policing in Latin America can often seem insurmountable. Regional analysts and policy-makers are often left grasping for straws on where to begin the necessary transformation of police forces that are, for the most part, at best incompetent, and at worst, partners of organised crime. Amid a voluminous literature on police malfeasance, Diego Esparza's book, *Policing and Politics in Latin America*, stands out as a much-needed guide to understand the historical origins of Latin America's police forces, their respective challenges, and, most importantly, gain clarity on the main institutional and organisational changes that can improve police systems.

Esparza sets out to understand the institutional underpinnings of police misconduct, in other words, 'when and why police break the law for personal gain' (p. 2). He argues that the combination of centralisation, professionalisation and militarisation tends to, historically, reduce police misconduct. He deftly traces the evolution of police institutions in Chile, Colombia and Mexico, through an impressive historical analysis that covers from the early nineteenth century to the present. While today most policing scholars recognise the (relative) prestige and professionalism of Chile's Carabineros or Colombia's National Police, Esparza shows that these forces gained citizen confidence through these three major transformations during the twentieth century. The historical narrative is extremely rich in detail without overwhelming the reader or losing the point.

Esparza complements the three historical case chapters with a cross-case comparison that highlights the stark contrast between the centralised, professionalised, relatively prestigious and less malfeasant Chilean and Colombian police forces, and the decentralised, patrimonial and systematically corrupt and abusive municipal police in Mexico. He also finds that, in line with what most scholars on police

reform have argued, while democratisation is generally necessary for these conditions to cohere, regime change is not sufficient for police misconduct to decrease.

This meticulous historical research provides a long-term view that is crucial to understanding where Latin American police institutions come from, how they have changed over time, and how long those transformations may take. Most analyses of contemporary policing lose this perspective by focusing on narrower historical periods, mainly the decades following the transition to democracy in the 1980s. Another key strength of the book is the rigour and transparency of the case selection process, designed to control for various potential alternative explanations, such as colonial heritage, religion, levels of violence, and the rule of law.

Some of Esparza's findings will undoubtedly spark controversy, the main one being the positive role he ascribes to militarisation in reducing police misconduct. He makes a compelling case that police forces historically improved as they adopted the organisational practices of the more prestigious armed forces. However, to what extent this finding yields actionable insights for present-day policy-making is more dubious, particularly given the ineffectiveness and human-rights abuses incurred through a militarised approach to the drug war in Colombia, Mexico, Brazil and Central America, a point the book does recognise. Esparza subsequently distinguishes police forces' positive adhesion to military *institutions* from their negative incorporation of military *doctrine*. While empirically testing this distinction is beyond the scope of this study, the argument that militarised police can engage in civilian-oriented doctrines, while non-military police institutions can engage in mass abuses has merit and is worth pondering further.

Building on its compelling historical analysis, *Policing and Politics* offers a clear sequence of policy shifts required to reduce police misconduct. First, have a larger and more qualified pool of applicants by providing better salaries and benefits, such as pensions, healthcare, paid vacation, and life insurance. Second, design more rigorous recruitment, selection and training protocols to 'upgrade the police factory' (p. 139). Finally, install proper internal and external monitoring systems to dissuade and punish 'fallen angels'. Enacting these changes should transform the police from a patrimonial, occupational institution to a merit-based, professionalised one. Esparza reminds us that focusing on straightforward material aspects will pay significant dividends in terms of reducing police misconduct and improving police performance, which will be accompanied by subsequent boosts in police morale and vocation.

At the same time, Esparza acknowledges the limitations of these standardised recommendations, stating that 'policing does not operate in a vacuum: history, institutions, and political economies have implications on the behaviour of police' (p. 93). In this sense, perhaps the theoretical framework could have further incorporated contextual (and political) factors while also paying greater attention to the trade-offs involved in these policy decisions. For instance, centralisation, while reducing the power of municipal political bosses to use the police for patronage reasons, can increase bureaucratisation, coordination problems, and distance police from the public it serves. It is also unclear why, in weak institutional contexts, national or state-level politicians would have weaker incentives to use the police for personal or political gain than local officials. Similarly, while aspects of professionalisation such as recruitment, training and monitoring are generally desirable,

the extent to which they are effective in curtailing police misconduct will also depend on the mission and functions transmitted to police by political actors, and the extent to which democratic politicians are able to hold police accountable to such mandates. In this sense, while the book correctly points out the dangers of police politicisation, it could also discuss the risks of excessive police insulation or autonomy.

Too many policy debates on policing in Latin America – and beyond – are mired by the inability to look past the latest headlines or viral social media posts related to such a polarising topic. *Policing and Politics in Latin America* is an essential read for scholars who want to immerse themselves in the historical origins and development of law-enforcement institutions in the region. It is also a key message for policy-makers that certain crucial variables – especially regarding professionalisation – need to be applied to have better police. The book reminds us that with police, as with any profession, only from those to whom much is given, can much be demanded.

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Simón Escoffier, *Mobilizing at the Urban Margins: Citizenship and Patronage Politics in Post-Dictatorial Chile*

Cambridge University Press, 2023, xix + 250 pp.

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Anyone with a passing knowledge of social movements in Latin America will take it as a given that there was an almost total demobilisation of poor people's movements in the Chilean urban periphery in the 1990s, following the return of democracy. Yet that was not always the case, as *Mobilizing at the Urban Margins*, based on a PhD, by Simón Escoffier amply demonstrates. A closer knowledge of the reality on the ground would have meant that observers should not have been taken quite so much by surprise by the unprecedented mobilisations of October 2019.

Based on a comparative study of two Santiago *poblaciones* – Lo Hermida and Nuevo Amanecer (once Nueva Havana) – with over six years of participatory fieldwork, this book is invaluable as a corrective of superficial understandings of democracy, citizenship and social mobilisations in Latin America but also, more widely, as a close analysis of how social movements and various factions of the Left interact.

Escoffier provides a long-term perspective and does not just start with the 1990s. Indeed, there is considerable attention paid to the origins of these settlements in the land seizures or *tomas*, organised by the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria