

POLITICS AND POLICIES

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The Market and the Masses in Latin America: Policy Reform and Consumption in Liberalizing Economies. By Andy Baker. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xvii + 331. \$90.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780521899680.

Latin American Development Priorities: Costs and Benefits. Edited by Bjørn Lomborg. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xxviii + 695. \$115.00 cloth. \$50.00 paper. ISBN: 9780521747523.

How Democracy Works: Political Institutions, Actors, and Arenas in Latin American Policymaking. Edited by Carlos Scartascini, Ernesto Stein, and Mariano Tommasi. Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank; Cambridge, MA: David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies and Harvard University Press, 2010. Pp. xi + 333. \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 9781597821094.

Market, State, and Society in Contemporary Latin America. Edited by William C. Smith and Laura Gómez-Mera. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. Pp. xi + 367. \$52.95 paper. ISBN: 9781444335255.

A growing split has characterized political science, international relations, and political economy since the 1990s as the formal modeling and testing wing of these disciplines, based on quantitative analysis, has gained ascendancy over the older mainstream, grounded in narrative and richly informed by history. The questions, methods, execution, and presentation of projects found in these two approaches are so different that, in effect, scholars in these two traditions tend to coexist in parallel universes. This split affects scholars, policy analysts, and policy makers who study and operate within Latin America as much as those who observe and interact with Latin America from other countries or regions—poor, middle income, or rich. As a result, the study of politics and policies occurs most of the time in parallel, rather than interacting, universes.

On the one hand, some analysts follow the lively and messy process of everyday politics in a given place or places, whose developments are reported by journalists, sources in government or private business, and increasingly users of social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube). Analysts are also influenced by fieldwork and relevant actors on the ground, both of which tend to make them ask questions with imminent, real-life implications and ramifications. Scholars who adhere to this tradition diligently are very skeptical of generalizations, let alone grand predictions. Those who do so realize sooner rather than later that the complexity of human affairs is such that a significant number of social, political, and economic outcomes are the unintended consequences of policy.

On the other hand, some analysts study the creation and simulation of general conditions that can lead to replicable effects in both domestic and foreign contexts when public policies are formulated, implemented, evaluated, reformulated, reapplied, and so on, as inputs and outputs follow one another. The answers to the questions normally asked by these analysts can be tested statistically to create general frameworks and propositions. The goal is to improve the intended consequences of responses to social problems and to accommodate those responses to changing circumstances on the ground. Most who follow this research diligently concede that effective, one-size-fits-all policies cannot be assumed and that a chasm of varying widths exists between Pareto-optimal solutions (which benefit some while not hurting others) and real-life outcomes. Still, they aim to generalize about policies that have had success in particular contexts, in an effort to replicate them.

Fortunately, these two approaches are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily antagonistic. Although most scholars and analysts gravitate toward and work in one or the other of these approaches, there is also a growing body of literature devoted to bridging the gap between them.¹ The four volumes reviewed here are solid examples of such efforts. All of them seek to engage the realms of both theoretical and applied knowledge, of cumulative learning and its messy interaction with unrepeatable human events.

The two approaches, if used concomitantly and appropriately, can help to enrich both the theory and the practice of mixing politics and policies. For orthodox scholars who make an effort not to draw policy implications in their work, learning the outcomes that particular policies have had in particular political contexts should be useful as a way to test general propositions. In turn, for those with one foot in academia and the other in public policy or current affairs as a practice (and not as an intellectual pursuit), detailed analyses and narratives of past events can provide cautionary tales about the likelihood of successful intervention and, notably, about the hubris that can result when the academy informs the actions of global, regional, national, or subnational politicians, bureaucrats, and businesspeople.

Among the main subjects at the intersection of politics and policies today are polling and public opinion; collective action and prioritization of goals; analyses by multilateral organizations acting globally or regionally, such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank; and peer-reviewed journals that explicitly bridge politics and policies so that scholars remain grounded and continue to debate the real-life implications of the problems they study. I examine these four areas sequentially to highlight the contributions of the four books under review.

PUBLIC OPINION AND POLLING

One of the main crossroads of the interaction of politics and policies is polling, a practice central to all democracies, be they advanced, emerging, or poor. Aside

1. See, for example, the influential book by Alexander L. George, *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: US Institute for Peace, 1993).

from its role in elections, plebiscites, and referenda, polling can test support for future, current, and past policies. Polls are also used to test all manner of mass attitudes on political, economic, social, and cultural issues. In all these venues, politics and policies can affect each other in a circular way. The support that polls reveal for a particular policy can lead the government to reassess or to change that policy, which in turn affects the politics of the groups on the ground that support or oppose the policy. The same is true of polls regarding political candidates.

Andy Baker's book is a notable example of how research on polling and public opinion can make sharp, original contributions to the study of both politics (action) and policies (applied knowledge). His inquiry into popular and elite opinions and discourses regarding the free-market policies of the so-called Washington Consensus—implemented throughout Latin America in the 1990s and part of the 2000s—uses a sophisticated methodology to test hypotheses in empirical settings, particularly Brazil. His original angle of observation emphasizes that citizen attitudes in the new democracies of Latin America (or anywhere else, for that matter) should be seen not only from the perspective of production but also from that of consumption. To be sure, citizens are workers or capitalists or unemployed from the perspective of production; but equally important, they are also consumers, and everyone, regardless of their place in the socioeconomic pyramid, supports the lower prices that, given additional investment, competition and higher productivity tend to create.

This insight helps Baker explain why citizens throughout Latin America have opposed some but not all free-market policies and in fact support several. His conclusion that “most Latin Americans are enthusiastic about globalization and unenthusiastic about privatization” (10) is a salutary modification of the conventional wisdom (repeated in the press and in some academic and policy-making circles) that there was all-out opposition to free markets in Latin America as the 2000s unfolded. In reality, monolithic opposition has been the exception rather than the rule. Baker's data suggest that between the early 1990s and 2005, citizens in Latin America supported the opening of trade and foreign investment, but not privatization, especially the privatization of pensions. This finding does not mean that attitudes will not change in at least some countries in the region in the future. Indeed, a generic limitation of polling and public opinion is that the very object of study—people's attitudes—change frequently, and therefore it is difficult to formulate generalizations that travel comfortably in space and time. Baker's latest figures are from 2007. It is not unreasonable to say that between then and 2012 free-market policies have been rolled back by left-wing governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Argentina, and that incumbent politicians in these countries have continued to enjoy majority support.

A related problem in Baker's discussion of the dissonance in polls from Latin America between support for foreign investment and opposition to privatization is his failure to explain why most of the privatizations engendering resilient social movements and diffuse protest from below against the Washington Consensus involve foreign takeovers of state-owned utilities, telecommunications, and heavy industry.

Despite the limitations to generalization and prediction inherent in public-

opinion polls, Baker's analysis is a first-rate, sophisticated contribution to the study of the politics and policies of market reform in Latin America. A prominent, original feature is the use not only of the prevalent bottom-up approach to polling but also of a top-down perspective to elucidate the hegemony effect, the consequence of elite communications on mass attitudes that tends to be overlooked.

GLOBAL COLLECTIVE ACTION

Another point of contact between politics and policies is the growing number of regional, international, and global forums in which politicians, technical experts, bureaucrats, civil society organizations, and the media discuss, negotiate, and try to advance collective programs intended to benefit humanity in the long run but that tend to go against—and be trumped by—short-term considerations. A prominent example is the so-called Copenhagen Consensus. Launched in 2004 to prioritize “the world's most pressing problems,” this initiative has come under public criticism for, among other reasons, its analysis of climate change (which does not rank high enough in the view of many specialists compared to other priorities identified by the group) and its choice of experts (who are too far to the right according to many academics, analysts, and policy activists).

A gathering of experts to discuss global problems should nevertheless be a legitimate and potentially effective undertaking, given the endemic difficulties of international, let alone global, collective action. Bjørn Lomborg and his colleagues in the Copenhagen Consensus convened one such exercise in San José, Costa Rica, in 2007. The panelists were all economists but came from a variety of ideological perspectives. They ranked twenty-nine proposals to meet the challenges of development in Latin America, the top ten of which were then explored in depth by other experts from the fields of economics and political science. The result is a hefty volume on the challenges of democracy, education, employment, social security, environment, infrastructure, fiscal policy, health, poverty, public administration, violence, and crime in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Edited by Lomborg, the contributions are solid, each by an expert on a key problem. A particular strength of the volume is the inclusion of alternative perspectives, in which a second author critiques the strengths, limitations, and implications of each primary contribution. The main drawback relates to the philosophical orientation of the volume, namely utilitarianism. For those who subscribe to the view that the aim of public policies should be the highest utility for the highest number, exercises in prioritization are a powerful tool to work out how an extra, say, \$500 billion, could (at least hypothetically) best be spent in development by institutions affiliated with the United Nations or Bretton Woods systems or by international foundations. Others who subscribe to liberal democracy, whereby the rights and needs of individuals trump claims made in the name of the greatest utility of the greatest number, will question the volume's conceptual framework. Still, the main contributions and alternative views effectively illuminate some of the main political constraints and challenges to optimal policies.

The volume is organized in a cross-country fashion. Though not very satisfy-

ing for readers looking for in-depth case studies, the approach delivers a useful regional perspective. Its specific information about different issues in countries here and there creates a good balance for analysts of both policies and politics. The chapter on democracy is the only one without an alternative view, something that would have been useful, given that democracy is a cornerstone of the effort to determine priorities for development in early twenty-first-century Latin America.

MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS

Multilateral institutions have played a crucial and highly visible role in the effort to break intergenerational cycles of poverty and to promote higher rates of growth. In Latin America, the most prominent of these actors have been the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. An initiative launched by the latter in 2005 to study the interaction of politics and policies throughout the region published at least two volumes before *How Democracy Works*, which focuses more particularly on the cogs and clogs that make democracy work or not work in varied contexts. Its chapters address parties and party systems, legislatures, the judiciary, cabinets, and bureaucracies, as well as the impact of decentralization, organized business, labor organization, and the news media on policy process and outcomes.

This joint publication of the Inter-American Development Bank and the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard will be of great use to anyone interested or involved in the messy workings of democratic governance in Latin America today. Those looking for in-depth case studies will not find them here. Like Lomborg's collection, this volume is particularly good at bridging the gap between general and specific knowledge because most of its information relates to cross-country analyses. Nevertheless, the authors zoom in and out of specific contexts to illustrate other issues in a more refined way.

Two things that could have strengthened the volume are, first, an entire chapter devoted to presidents—who tend to be the center of gravity of most political systems in the region—to understand how constitutional and nonconstitutional faculties and resources help their initiatives. Nevertheless, there are strong chapters on executive-legislative relations, cabinets, and bureaucracies, all of which are key factors in the operation and effectiveness of the executive branch of government. As well, the volume would have benefited from explicit classification of the resources that different actors use to pursue their ends. Instead, resources are taken as a given in the analysis, and although one can more or less infer the different types used by different actors, given the different processes or issues at stake, there would be more breadth and scope if resources were an explicit variable of the problems under inquiry.

A final important attribute of the book is that its solid analytical framework could—with caveats—be used as a starting point to track the many different ways in which technically ideal policies end up delivering quite unexpected outcomes, taking into account the intervention and interaction of institutions, actors, and

arenas in the young democracies of Latin America. In this regard, it is a first-rate contribution to bridging the gap between policy making and politics on the ground.

PEER-REVIEWED JOURNALS

Scholars in particular face the danger of allowing politics on the ground to recede into the background, given their pursuit of theory and methodology as ends in themselves. This is one reason it is important that peer-reviewed publications remain pluralistic, with some content interested in practical implications. The field of political economy—which studies the production and allocation of resources, and the consequence of their distribution in light of different rules, actors, environments, and interests—is particularly well placed for the concomitant analysis of politics and policies.

The volume edited by William C. Smith and Laura Gómez-Mera presents fifteen solid, influential articles that first appeared in the highly regarded *Latin American Politics and Society (LAPS)*, a peer-reviewed journal that prizes multidisciplinary contributions in the social sciences focused on Latin America. This volume is part of a broader project that aims to use other articles from *LAPS* to address other issues of relevance to researchers and practitioners of politics. The current book is devoted to political economy and examines matters such as the politics of market reforms, state provision of resources, labor politics in the context of globalization, the politics of macroeconomics, the politics of trade, and competing approaches to the study of political economy in Latin America.

The intent to bring issues in political economy to the attention of a broader than academic public is worthy, given that public policies have distributional consequences that affect all, most, or some citizens in every society, and because these consequences tend to affect more negatively those who know the least or are ineffective at organizing to promote or defend their own interest. To this end, the volume aims in particular to help readers understand the costs and benefits of the current wave of globalization. The articles range from general, cross-country analyses to paired comparisons and single case studies. Critics may question the choice of articles and the fact that they have already been published in *LAPS*, but there is added value in the identification of major issues in the study of political economy today. Of course, the yardstick to evaluate the success of a project like this is to see how many nonspecialists actually use its volumes to address problems on the ground. One journal that has managed to reach a broader audience with its compilations of articles on democracy and democratization is the *Journal of Democracy*; this, however, is not peer reviewed. It is hoped that the *LAPS* initiative will meet with similar success while keeping itself open to academics of all stripes.

CONCLUSION

The growing interest in the interaction of policies and politics is a welcome antidote to the gap between theoretical and applied knowledge in the social sci-

ences. Given the winners and losers and the sometimes dramatic political, social, and economic consequences of public policies, it is morally as well as professionally important to continue to try to bridge this chasm. The complexity of politics as they really happen means that policies usually result in consequences different from those intended by their designers and executors. It therefore makes sense for outsiders—in this case scholars—to join politicians, technocrats, interest groups, lobbyists, pundits, and the like in scrutinizing the complex interaction of politics and policies. The four volumes reviewed in these pages make original individual and collective contributions to this endeavor.