

These efforts had further consequences for electoral politics, as Brazilian evangelical politicians became some of the standard-bearers for a renewed cultural Right.

Boas's explanation is powerful and intellectually satisfying, although I have a few quibbles with the analysis. Most importantly, I believe he dismisses the institutional explanation too quickly, particularly in the Brazilian case, and subjects it to more strenuous tests than he does his own alternative explanation. In my own study of Brazil, I am persuaded that evangelicals are more successful in races for the lower chamber of Congress than the national Senate or executive office largely due to differences in electoral rules. He also could have made more of the point that evangelicals remain substantially underrepresented, even in Brazil. Nonetheless, the book represents the best that the new wave of comparativist religion and politics scholarship has to offer: the intersection of rigorous empirical analysis with deep case knowledge and careful thinking about how causal processes play out cross-nationally. In this sense, it belongs on a bookshelf with Latin Americanist books such as Luis Felipe Mantilla's *How Political Parties Mobilize Religion: Lessons from Mexico and Turkey* (2021) and Amy Erica Smith's *Religion and Brazilian Democracy: Mobilizing the People of God* (2019), as well as new Africanist books such as Gwyneth H. McClendon and Rachel Beatty Riedl's *From Pews to Politics: Religious Sermons and Political Participation in Africa* (2019) and John F. McCauley's *The Logic of Ethnic and Religious Conflict in Africa* (2017).

Going forward, big questions remain in the study of conservative Christianity in the developing world. Scholars of political behavior and psychology should continue to investigate when, where, and how conservative Christians mobilize to support democratic processes and causes such as environmental protection. Moreover, the extent to which evangelicals and conservative Catholics can ultimately form a single rightist political coalition remains unclear. Finally, the next decade will likely bring a religious earthquake: Roman Catholicism will become a minority religious identification in many countries of Latin America, and evangelical identification will likely subsequently overtake it in a few countries. How the two religious groups and their institutions respond will undoubtedly be a question of great scholarly interest.

**Undermining the State from Within: The Institutional Legacies of Civil War in Central America.** By

Rachel A. Schwartz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023, 310p. \$34.99 cloth.  
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In *Formation of National States in Western Europe*, Charles Tilly (1975, p. 42) famously argued that “War made the

state, and the state made war.” In contrast to Tilly and moving away from conventional approaches to war and state formation, Rachel A. Schwartz's book, *Undermining the State from Within: The Institutional Legacies of Civil War in Central America*, explores how civil wars shape state institutions in ways that often persist long after the end of armed conflict.

Opening the black box of the wartime central state, Schwartz shows that civil conflict can be a catalyst for institutional innovation, yet the rules created during war may prove counterproductive to institutions' official objectives and can ultimately undermine state functions. She argues that the problems plaguing post-conflict countries are not necessarily weak institutions, as prevailing analyses suggest. Instead, as a Guatemalan official described to Schwartz, the main issue consists of “rather effective institutions, but for the wrong reasons” (p. 262).

Schwartz does not see conflict as an exogenous shock to existing institutional arrangements nor a critical juncture determining a set path of development; rather, she views civil war as periods of institutional change defined by the introduction of new rules. Following James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen's work on institutional change (*Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*, 2010), Schwartz claims that the generation of new rules “is less about sweeping upheaval or the radical transformation of political structures, but instead the institutional gray zone that emerges within the gap between the interpretation and enforcement of the prevailing rules” (p. 44).

She presents a framework to conceptualize or distinguish between two main types of wartime regulations: undermining and reinforcing rules. Undermining rules are defined as “those that diverge and produce substantively different outcomes from a given state function” (p. 39). The extrajudicial killings by Guatemala's police serve as an example of undermining rules within the policy realm of security provision and control of violence as they produce the opposite outcome of what would be expected. On the other hand, reinforcing rules are “those that converge with and produce substantively similar outcomes to a given state function” (p. 39). For example, Nicaragua's community and preventative policing procedures that emerged following the Sandinista Revolution were highly effective at maintaining lower levels of criminal violence for decades.

Whether undermining or reinforcing rules emerge varies based on coalitional dynamics. Schwartz argues that the escalation of the insurgent threat is the crucial wartime condition that fosters institutional uncertainty. When the state perceives that the insurgency presents a risk to its survival, lapses in institutional enforcement occur leading to the generation of new rules in response to the increased sense of state vulnerability. While the perceived escalation of the insurgent threat is the catalyst for both undermining and reinforcing rules, the structure of the counterinsurgent

coalition determines how conflict dynamics transform state institutions.

Undermining rules occur when centralization of power is granted to a narrow, insulated counterinsurgent elite. Regardless of motivation, “the absence of countervailing political forces allows this counterinsurgent elite to craft and implement new rules corresponding to their narrow interests and thus distort state activities” (p. 9). In contrast, reinforcing rules emerge when “the perceived escalation of threat instead prompts state elites to draw together a broad-based coalition *to create the new rules* and a more expansive, deliberative process emerges wherein the interests of distinct and sometimes competing elites are represented” (p. 247, emphasis original).

Schwartz’s theory is supported by three detailed cases of undermining rules in distinct institutions across three fundamental policy arenas—taxation, public security, and the provision of basic goods and services—and from distinct civil conflicts in Guatemala and Nicaragua. Her work traces the evolution of customs fraud in Guatemala, extrajudicial killings by the Guatemalan police, and persistent land insecurity in Nicaragua.

Chapters 1 and 2 introduce readers to Schwartz’s overall theory of wartime institutional change. Chapter 3 offers concise summaries of the Guatemalan and Nicaraguan civil conflicts, providing readers unfamiliar with Central America’s contemporary history with the necessary contextual background. Chapters 4–6 present her three cases illustrating how undermining rules emerged. The Nicaraguan and Guatemalan conflicts are highly distinct, yet “despite these differences, the perceived escalation of insurgent threat in both cases had a similar effect: It centralizes decision-making authority in a narrow counterinsurgent elite empowered to introduce new rules and procedures to annihilate the rebel threat” (p. 88). But what happens to these undermining rules after the end of armed conflict? The second half of Schwartz’s book answers this crucial question. Chapter 7 details her theory of postwar continuation of undermining rules and Chapters 8–10 offer detailed accounts of her three cases.

While undermining rules begin in response to threats during wartime, they may persist long after the conclusion of conflict and, if broader elite coalitions benefit, undermining rules can become self-enforcing. For example, in Guatemala, the peace process facilitated the entrenchment of the dominant wartime political coalition leading to persistence of undermining rules in both the customs and security sectors, despite reforms in both. In terms of customs fraud, Schwartz shows how “the wartime distributional coalition upheld the undermining rules largely by adapting to new semi- and extra-state spaces—the political party channels and port concessions – created through tax and customs administration reforms” (p. 218). In comparison, the continuation of undermining rules in Guatemala’s security provision were a result of members of the counterinsurgent elite assuming

leadership positions within the security cabinet and National Civil Police (PNC).

The post-conflict era in Nicaragua saw the emergence of new elites and frequent political realignments. Schwartz traces the history of Nicaragua in the 1990s when international development organizations, U.S. government agencies, and technocrats from the National Opposition Union (known by Spanish acronym UNO) all were initially important in reforming the provisional titling procedures that emerged during the Contra War and contributed to rampant land tenure insecurity. However, the subsequent shifts in political alliances and return of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), with power increasingly centralized by President Daniel Ortega, resulted in chronic instability and thwarted the development of new rules to replace the undermining ones from the conflict era.

Schwartz’s work brings empirical rigor to exposing what she describes as “open secrets” in the region. In doing so, she makes a significant contribution to the literature on legacies of civil war and on institutional development. What appears to be “state weakness” is at times not a lack of capacity but rather a result of undermining institutional logics guiding state activities. Civil war does not simply undermine state capacity; rather, it can result in institutions that are quite capable yet wield their capacity for objectives in direct conflict with its stated missions.

In short, *Undermining the State from Within* is a masterful contribution to academic scholarship on legacies of civil war, with crucial implications for peacebuilding and democratic institutional development. It should be read by all academics and policymakers concerned with development in post-conflict settings, as well as scholars with diverse areas of focus. For instance, Schwartz’s case study of policing in Guatemala has important implications for scholars of contemporary violence and criminal politics in Latin America, while her examination of land insecurity in Nicaragua contributes to academic understanding of processes of dispossession and land insecurity.

**Politicians’ Reading of Public Opinion and Its Biases.** By Stefaan Walgrave, Karolin Soontjens, and Julie Sevenans. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022. 240p. \$85.00 cloth  
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In a functioning representative democracy, citizens pressure politicians to act in accordance with public opinion. However, politicians need to be able to read public opinion correctly to serve as good delegates of the public will. In their new book, *Politicians’ Reading of Public Opinion and Its Biases*, Stefaan Walgrave, Karolin Soontjens, and Julie Sevenans argue that politicians are not good at reading public opinion, and that this undermines