

(p. 34). As such, their findings and conclusions are of ‘tentative nature’ (p. 71). Rather than the last word on criminal politics, then, Feldmann and Luna’s book opens up multiple and exciting lines of inquiry. Their conclusion extends an invitation to continue the study of criminal politics: ‘We hope the analytical framework and the preliminary evidence ... will help scholars embrace the challenges and theoretical promise of researching criminal politics’ (p. 71).

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## **Mary Fran T. Malone, Lucía Dammert and Orlando J. Pérez, *Making Police Reform Matter in Latin America***

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*Making Police Reform Matter in Latin America* provides a much-needed comparative analysis of police reform in the region, taking stock of a decades-long policy effort to remedy endemic problems affecting Latin American police forces, from ineffectiveness to corruption to rampant violence. The book opens with a necessary overview of the various examples of the reckoning facing police forces throughout Latin America in recent years, highlighting the fall from grace of three previously celebrated police forces in the region – Nicaragua’s National Police, Chile’s Carabineros and Colombia’s National Police. Whereas all three police forces ‘had previously earned praise for their reforms’ (p. 1) and been seen as significant exceptions in the region, recent years have seen them face severe loss of legitimacy due to egregious repression of protesters, outright politicisation and unprecedented corruption scandals. From start to finish, the book’s analysis makes explicit that police reform is a perpetually unfinished process that requires vigilance and a robust political coalition to sustain hard-fought gains in the long term.

The book sets out to address the question ‘What does it take for successful reforms to be implemented, and how can they be sustained?’ (p. 4). In doing so, the authors pair ‘cases that had reported some successes by the early twenty-first century: Chile, Colombia, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Uruguay’ alongside Peru, ‘where best practices were introduced but never gained traction’ (p. 4). One of the book’s main contributions to the literature is that it provides a clear definition of how we can assess the ‘success’ of police reform, including improving police effectiveness, reducing police corruption and upholding human rights, as well as improving the public’s perceived legitimacy of the police. This approach helps us

take a broader perspective on police reform in the region, deviating somewhat from the more pessimistic perspective found in most of the literature. The discussion of relative trust in police – a composite variable subtracting trust in police from average trust in other institutions – was especially helpful for situating what is generally thought about as nearly uniform low trust in police within the broader context of overall low-trust environments.

Perhaps the book's key contribution, though, is that, even as the authors set out to identify the drivers of 'successful' police reforms, what it actually does far more effectively is to offer a more nuanced assessment of 'success', outlining the various trajectories through which even 'successful' cases can deviate and undermine otherwise laudable achievements. The focus on the police forces that were long considered the region's best – albeit for different reasons – elucidates the pathways by which previous gains of police reform can be lost. In Chile, the Carabineros generated good will and high marks from the public through community policing initiatives, most notably the Plan Cuadrante, but the 'original sin' of the Chilean democratic transition – the continuity of Pinochet-era institutional structures – meant the Carabineros retained considerable autonomy and little accountability to civilian officials. The result was a set of high-profile, expansive corruption and protest repression scandals that led to domestic and international disrepute. In the Colombian case study, the book highlights a veritable transformation into one of the region's most professionalised and effective police forces, which would go on to serve as model and training partner for other police forces in the region, primarily in Central America. But a highly unusual corruption/prostitution scandal and the continued loss of legitimacy following police repression of protests between 2019 and 2021 demonstrate the shortcomings of reforms. Although not discussed as explicitly as in Chile, the case also raises important questions about the role of police's unimpeded institutional autonomy in driving its fall from grace. Finally, the Nicaraguan National Police is less well known as a success story than the other cases, but the book lays out well its relative success in building up a professionalised, largely de-politicised and community-oriented police force that contributed to relatively low crime rates despite high poverty rates. Nevertheless, the book makes clear how the rise of Daniel Ortega led to the outright politicisation of the police, yielding an astonishing outcome: the police actually became directly responsible for a sharp increase in the homicide rate during widespread violent protest repression in 2018, in which hundreds were killed or disappeared. These three cases lay bare how unchecked autonomy and politicisation can persist and re-emerge years after police reforms were considered consolidated, making a strong case for additional safeguards against them.

The book also makes a valuable contribution to the police reform literature by examining lesser-known cases that further our understanding of police reform. The cases of Costa Rica and Uruguay – certainly the region's 'islands of excellence' on many metrics – highlight that, in order to take root, reforms to democratise and professionalise the police require time and broader institutional stability, and must be supported by a broader set of social policies. Nonetheless, these cases also demonstrate that police reform is not a panacea, and that rising crime and violence can create political pressures that may undermine previous successes.

The authors raise important questions about the nature of police reforms and possible next steps for the future of this research agenda. The book underscores

the importance of disaggregating police reforms and giving more consideration to the extent to which the content of the reform is well suited to addressing the enduring challenges to democratic policing. One limitation of the book is that it lumps together police reform processes that diverge in crucial ways – the largely operational reforms of the Chilean police are not the same as the deeper structural reform process faced by Colombia's police. Indeed, the book's overarching focus is on operational reforms, particularly community policing. Even in the Colombian case, where the 1993 reform process comprised ambitious structural and external oversight reforms, the book largely focuses on municipal security policies that undoubtedly contributed to local security improvements, but it remains unclear what was these *municipal*-level policies reformed in the *National Police* beyond operational changes implemented by local units. Instead, a greater effort to disaggregate reforms might well have elucidated the limitations of operational reforms such as community policing to address the challenges posed by unchecked police autonomy and outright politicisation. By the same token, a disaggregated approach to police reform would also highlight the limitations of even well-intentioned reforms to democratise, demilitarise and professionalise police forces (as in Uruguay and Costa Rica) in curbing the potential for rising crime and violence to rupture pro-reform political coalitions and generate pressure to dismantle reforms. As the authors note at the end of book, disentangling these relationships between the content of reform and the nature of the structural challenges to be addressed will be essential in light of the police's role in either advancing or holding back the democratic erosion taking place throughout the region.

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## **Laurie Denyer Willis, *Go with God: Political Exhaustion and Evangelical Possibility in Suburban Brazil***

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This monograph describes the lives of several families in the urban *comunidade* (community) of Batan – a neighbourhood in the north-west of the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The book focuses on women (mostly) and men who frequent Pentecostal services and turn to God in search of ways to carve out a place in the city, and to make a life. Rather than starting out with a lengthy description of their economic predicaments, Laurie Denyer Willis takes us straight to her interlocutors' embodied experiences of grace with a gripping style that stays close to their vocabularies and their