

Gerardo L. Munck and Juan Pablo Luna, *Latin American Politics and Society: A Comparative and Historical Analysis*

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Since the 1960s there have been recurrent attempts to produce a textbook on Latin American politics that is comprehensive in its geographical scope and in its coverage of the principal analytical themes, topics and debates. This new textbook by Gerardo L. Munck and Juan Pablo Luna is so far superior in every respect to all these previous efforts – and I write as the co-author of one such – that it sits squarely in a league of its own; and it is likely to remain the definitive work of this kind for many years to come.

Latin American Politics and Society: A Comparative and Historical Analysis is securely rooted in history, rigorously comparative, thematically organised and richly and deftly illustrated by examples, debates and discussions from diverse political contexts and times, referring to a wide range of political actors and a plethora of significant political events. The presentation of this impressive range of political inquiry is lucid and succinct, the direction of travel clearly signalled, and the treatment of each topic enhanced by lists of further reading, internet sources, archival material, films and cinematic documentaries. Thus, while the exposition of the argument is cumulative, with an effective use of cross-referencing between the major analytical themes, there are always sufficient resources at hand to explore each topic in greater depth and detail.

Binding this multifaceted enterprise together is a clear conceptual scheme that privileges the analytical axis that runs between the states and the democratic regimes of the continent, and in this sense the textbook is very much ‘of its time’, reflecting as it does the very best of the current comparative political science of and on the region. This is perhaps to be expected from two of the leading political analysts of Latin America. Munck’s work has long been characterised by his uncanny ability to organise and clarify complex fields of inquiry and debate; his genius for the taxonomic generating the building blocks for his innovative conceptual framing of key questions and big issues. Luna, very differently, often works inside the warp and woof of the political process across different contexts to produce strong analytical narratives that often reach counterintuitive conclusions. These distinct ways of working are finely balanced and combined here, and serve in tandem to stimulate their insights into, and modulate their reflections upon, the materials at hand.

That said, there is always the temptation to ask for more. For example, their treatment of ‘high-level corruption’ demonstrates beyond any doubt that it is

endemic, but stops short of explaining that it is also systemic, insofar as it reflects a pervasive pattern of patrimonial politics that serves to reconcile oligarchic interests with democratic rule, and so ‘protect’ – in the Schumpeterian sense – the degree of democracy achieved to date. Equally, their inquiry into state violence in its different forms shows it to be closely linked to drug trafficking and criminal organisations but eschews the broader question of the precarious rule of law across the region and the reasons for it. Yet it must be recognised that each topic of inquiry must stand alone in some degree, and that there will always be trade-offs between (descriptive) breadth and (analytical) depth in such an ambitious account of the politics of the continent.

The first part of the book provides a ‘sweeping historical overview’ (p. 547) of Latin America from pre-Columbian times to the present day that takes up approximately one third of the total text. It focuses primarily on state formation and nation-building and sticks closely to a traditional periodisation of the making of modern Latin America, starting from the mid-nineteenth century, as defined by stages of economic development and democratic progress. The novel element of the account draws directly on the recent work of Sebastián Mazzuca to highlight three distinct paths of state formation that led to very different and enduring political outcomes (Sebastián L. Mazzuca, *Latecomer State Formation: Political Geography and Capacity Failure in Latin America* (Yale University Press, 2021)). The bulk of the book is then dedicated to the contemporary politics of the continent (the past 30 or 40 years or so), with a focus on a diverse range of problems for and of ‘democracy in a democratic age’ (p. 163).

Part 2 begins by discussing the quality of democracy across the region, and the problems such as executive overreach that may serve to diminish it, before taking on neoliberalism and the subsequent turn to the left, as well as the political inclusion of women, and Indigenous and Afro-descendant groups. Eventually, this diversity of topics begins to threaten the coherence of the argument, which is then secured by the closing and co-authored chapter that rounds out the section with a cogent and convincing account of political parties and representation. Part 3 is more tightly constrained by its focus on civil rights, and the cognate issues of transitional justice, corruption and state violence, and may well be seen as the most compelling part of the argument overall; while Part 4 attempts a parallel account of social rights ‘as a problem for democracy’ (p. 429) that must again encompass the widely disparate topics of social and economic inequality, the territorialisation of such inequality, social inclusion and social policy, sustainable development and neo-extractivism, and much else beside. There follow the appendices, the first a timeline of Latin America and the second a glossary, both of them useful supplements to the text; but the conclusion, comprising just four and a half pages of rather vague and anodyne observations, fails to provide a worthy response to the richness of the discussions that precede it.

In sum, this final quibble aside, this is a textbook with true intellectual pedigree and ambition that yet remains clear in exposition and accessible to readers who are approaching Latin American politics for the first time. It will be entirely suitable for upper-division undergraduates, but not exclusively so. Many master’s students may benefit from its in-depth discussion of contentious issues; and even doctoral students may find it helpful in locating their specific research interests within the

comparative compass of Latin American politics and the wide field of comparative political science itself.

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Fabián A. Borges, *Human Capital versus Basic Income: Ideology and Models of Anti-Poverty Programs in Latin America*

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Fabián A. Borges' book *Human Capital versus Basic Income: Ideology and Models of Anti-Poverty Programs in Latin America* is a very welcome contribution to our understanding of the emergence of conditional income transfers as the front-line policy instrument of poverty reduction in Latin America and of the influence of ideology in social policy.

Borges is particularly interested in the role of ideology in the adoption of conditional income transfers. Right-of-centre presidents and left-of-centre presidents introduced conditional income transfers but, as he notes, they were initially embraced by right-of-centre presidents (Mexico) and rejected by left-of-centre ones (Brazil). This runs counter to conventional accounts of the development of social protection in the region emphasising the leading role of labour organisations and left-wing parties.

Borges argues that the influence of ideology extends to the design and implementation of conditional income transfers, resulting in two distinct models: Mexico's 'Progresa' with its emphasis on strictly monitored conditions, and Brazil's 'Bolsa Família' with looser conditions. He argues that Progresa was easier on the eye for policy-makers committed to neoliberal principles because it identified poverty as primarily to do with deficits in human capital. The looser conditions of Bolsa Família, on the other hand, were likely to be more acceptable to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party, PT) as they came closer to the unconditional transfers advocated by basic-income supporters. Borges' discussion of the two models is more nuanced than is suggested by the book's title (arguably Bolsa Família is closer to a guaranteed minimum income rather than a basic income).

The book approaches the spread of conditional income transfers in Latin America as an example of policy diffusion heavily influenced by ideology. The term 'policy diffusion' could be used to describe a situation in which the same type of policy can be observed in many countries, such as individual retirement saving plans or conditional income transfers. More strictly, policy diffusion is