

Book Review

Maxwell A. Cameron and Grace M. Jaramillo, eds., *Challenges to Democracy in the Andes: Strongmen, Broken Constitutions, and Regimes in Crisis*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2022. Tables, figures, 263 pp.; hardcover \$98, ebook \$98.

On December 7, 2022, hours before he was due to face an impeachment vote, Peruvian president Pedro Castillo announced that he would close Congress and form an emergency government until new legislative elections could be held. Alberto Fujimori had done nearly the same thing some 30 years earlier, on April 5, 1992, when he announced on television that he was temporarily dissolving Congress and reorganizing the judiciary. However, whereas Fujimori enjoyed high public approval and the support of the armed forces to carry out his *autogolpe*, or self-coup, Castillo was embroiled in allegations of corruption, suffered from tepid public support, and lacked the institutional backing of the military. Lawmakers widely condemned Castillo's actions and proceeded with the impeachment vote, approving his removal from office by a wide margin.

Challenges to Democracy in the Andes, this superb edited volume by Max Cameron and Grace Jaramillo, examines a range of executive aggrandizement—the weakening of checks on executive power—in the Andes. While Castillo's extreme case transpired after the book's publication, the editors provide a framework that explains both why it occurred and why Castillo failed in his gambit. The editors also use the Andean experience to challenge readers to consider a more nuanced theory of democracy that goes beyond elections and liberalism. As a result, the book wrestles with questions that are at once timely and timeless, and should be on any reading list for scholars of the Andes or students of democracy.

There is little filler. A theoretical chapter by Cameron is followed by case studies of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela (by Michael McCarthy), Evo Morales in Bolivia (Santiago Anria and Jennifer Cyr), Rafael Correa in Ecuador (Grace Jaramillo), Alan García in Peru (Carmen Ilizarbe), and Álvaro Uribe in Colombia (Jan Boesten). These assessments are complemented by thematic chapters that examine indigenous rights and democracy (Jason Tockman) and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on democratic erosion (Verónica Hurtado and Paolo Sosa-Villagarcía). As the contributors show, attempts at executive encroachment have been quite common across the region over the past 30 years,

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while characterizations of Andean countries' democracies during that time have often been one-dimensional.

In this vein, the book considers three empirical phenomena in the contemporary age: that crises of democracy tend to be the result of democratic backsliding and erosion rather than military coups d'état; that threats to democracy tend to come from "inside the house" via elected leaders rather than from the military barracks; and that antidemocratic actions by elected representatives often meet with the approval of voters, which hastens democratic erosion. With regard to this last point, the editors, as well as the contributors, highlight the tension between executive aggrandizement and popular sovereignty. Cameron and Jaramillo note, for instance, that an *autogolpe* may enjoy a great deal of popular support and legitimation yet remain unconstitutional, while the slow erosion of horizontal accountability and concentration of power in the executive—which is far more common—may also be popular but harder to reject on constitutional grounds. For his part, Tockman tries to reconcile the tensions between representative democracy and indigenous rights in the central Andes.

The editors also challenge the reader to consider three analytical criteria: the diversity in democratic regimes, the need to use both continuous and dichotomous regime indicators, and most important, to recognize that democracy is not merely a regime but a "constitutive part of a particular form of associational life," of which citizenship is the defining feature (14). Following this premise, Cameron's theoretical framework expounds on the difficulties of balancing democratic, republican, and liberal elements. He argues that the concept of a democratic regime must include not only its electoral components but also its surrounding rights and freedoms, as well as the constitutional order. With this in mind, he then defines several ideal types of regime change, which include not only breaks in the existing regime but, usefully, change within that regime. As a result, he links military coups, civil society coups, and self-coups with executive aggrandizement, constitutional reform, and constitutional crisis, providing metrics by which scholars—and the book's contributors—can more accurately measure forms and degrees of regime change.

As it not so coincidentally happens, contemporary Andean politics provides an ideal workshop to examine these diverse processes. In their chapters, the country experts deftly examine three cases with varying degrees of successful executive aggrandizement (Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, and Rafael Correa in Ecuador), one case of democratic erosion without aggrandizement (Alan García in Peru), and conclude with one case of failed aggrandizement (Álvaro Uribe in Colombia). Contributing to the cohesiveness of the book, all contributors use the three-part framework for assessing the quality of democracy, often explicitly, and bring a great deal of nuance to their analyses.

In his analysis of Venezuela, for instance, McCarthy differentiates the processes and actors that resulted in the breakdown of democracy from those that accompanied the onset of authoritarianism under Hugo Chávez and those that aided Nicolás Maduro in the consolidation of authoritarianism. For him, these processes are

functions of governing project institutionalization—a useful tool for examining the other cases in the book. In a similarly nuanced analysis, Anria and Cyr argue that a greater concentration of power in the executive under Evo Morales in Bolivia was accompanied by nonetheless important advances in inclusiveness and participation of previously marginalized social actors. Although they note that there had long been a tradeoff between these two dimensions, they also optimistically contend that liberal institutions and popular inclusion should, in theory, be able to coexist, “maximizing” democracy for citizens.

There are notable similarities and differences across the cases. The experiences of Chávez, Morales, and Correa, for instance, demonstrate the role of constitutional change as a tactic to legitimize presidents and increase participation and inclusion while also strengthening executive power and weakening oversight. Under the guise of “republican refounding,” these processes afforded their presidents the tools and support to pursue their governing projects. Likewise, when voters rejected executive attempts to change constitutions and allow (additional) reelection, leaders found ways around them, turning to friendly courts to neutralize referendum results. Differences are also illustrative. Peru’s presidential instability, paradoxically, may have thwarted the type of executive aggrandizement seen in the other three cases by preventing any president from consolidating their power. The five experiences suggest that although executive encroachment may be an inherent risk of presidentialism, the level of variation is a function of several factors, from presidential ambitions to the resiliency of horizontal and vertical checks and balances.

Of course, the focus on democracy means that other issues are less explored. In particular, little is written about the economic dimension, from the effect of commodity cycles in resource-dependent economies contributing to executive aggrandizement to the impact of neoliberalism and statist postneoliberal projects on democratic citizenship. To the first point, without the commodity boom of the 2000s and early 2010s, which provided governments with ample fiscal resources, ambitious presidents would have been less able to increase social spending, cultivate support, and promulgate the changes they did. Yet aside from Jaramillo’s chapter on Ecuador and McCarthy’s mention of the Venezuelan petrostate, this is not a major consideration here. Likewise, neoliberalism and its relationship to democracy are not a central focus of the case studies beyond Ilizarbe’s chapter about Peru, nor are the postneoliberal projects of Chávez, Correa, and Morales. At the very least, these may be relevant areas of future research.

The editors’ theoretical framework and conceptual discussion is influenced by, and owes a debt of intellectual gratitude to, Guillermo O’Donnell, whose research from the 1990s on explored issues related to the quality of democracy. His final book, *Democracy, Agency, and the State: Theory with Comparative Intent* (2010), which makes a case for addressing the importance of the state in conceptualizations of democracy, leaves its fingerprints all over this edited volume. Following O’Donnell’s work, Cameron and Jaramillo treat democracy, liberalism, and republicanism as three conceptually distinct but interrelated intellectual traditions. As did O’Donnell, they warn against the teleological notion that Latin

American democracies are simply immature versions of established democracies in Western Europe and the United States (13). The empirical chapters successfully advance these claims.

Aside from its overt references to O'Donnell, the book is also a spiritual successor to Catherine Conaghan and James Malloy's *Unsettling Statecraft: Democracy and Neoliberalism in the Central Andes* (1994), a comparative study of the politics of neoliberalism in Latin America during the 1980s. But where Conaghan and Malloy focus on the contradictions and difficulties Andean states faced as they made the transition from authoritarianism to civilian rule and neoliberalism, Cameron and Jaramillo's volume explores the continuing challenges to democracy through executive aggrandizement in the region. As they show, this examination is as urgent today as ever.

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