

Delaware Review of Latin American Studies

Vol. 15 No. 1 August 31, 2014

Latin American Politics and Development. (Eighth Edition), Howard J. Wiarda and Harvey F. Kline, eds. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2014. 504 pp.

Philip Penix-Tadsen
Latin American and Iberian Studies Program
Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures
University of Delaware

The Eighth Edition of *Latin American Politics and Development*, edited by Howard J. Wiarda and Harvey F. Kline, features the work of more than two dozen expert contributors from an interdisciplinary array of academic backgrounds. This edition, which comes thirty-five years after the first publication of the anthology, has been updated and revised to offer significant insights into the 21st-century transformations taking place in Latin America's political, economic and social institutions.

Like the professors of survey courses in Latin American politics, history and economics that rely upon collections like this one, the editors of *Latin American Politics and Development* take on a Quixotic task: summarizing the modern history of some twenty distinct nations in a relatively clear, concise, and consistent manner. In this case, the editors choose to do so by dedicating a chapter to each of "eighteen Spanish-speaking countries, one Portuguese-speaking country (Brazil), and one French- or Creole-speaking country (Haiti)." (4) In an increasingly globalized world that some critics and theorists characterize as "post-national," this methodology might appear isolationist or anachronistic, however even in the 21st century, political and economic frameworks are still defined (and often have their most significant repercussions) at the national level, and the anthology's approach provides the necessary specificity for an examination of each country's particular political history. Moreover, the writers of each national chapter are careful to attend to the *international* ramifications of trends throughout Latin America, such as the neoliberal reforms that took place under the "Washington consensus" of the 1990s, or the populist and leftist turn in 21st-century regional politics ushered in by Venezuelan leader Hugo Chávez and his allies in Bolivia, Ecuador, and beyond.

Building on established conceptual frameworks from political science, the volume's editors analyze these and other trends in regional politics as a shift from the open, free, and balanced models of Liberal Democracy to newer models of Delegative Democracy based upon the polarizing force of a paternal figure attached to a movement that empowers him to redefine the nation and its interests (66-69). Certainly, there is much evidence to support this view in the recent history of Latin America--for example, the editors show how the 2009 ouster of Honduran president Manuel "Mel" Zelaya prototypically represents the complicated workings of political institutions in the region today, revealing the inner conflicts and tensions between democratic institutions and executive orders, populism and political power. (69-70) There are, however, important recent heads-of-state in the region--think, for example, of Brazilian Dilma Rousseff, Argentine Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, or Chilean Michelle Bachelet--that do not fit easily into this framework, as much for their more-or-less moderate approaches to politics as for the fact that they are women, whose political impact cannot be explained through strictly patriarchal paradigms of political power. The more recently updated contributions to this volume tend to be more gender-inclusive in their analytical approaches as well as their bibliographies, and to be sure, a great many of the chapters attest to the enduring relevance of paternalism in regimes from throughout the region.

Each of the anthology's twenty contributed chapters covers the entirety of a given country's history from colonial times to the present day, with some variation in the time periods and events that are most emphasized, depending on the nation in question. As a general rule, the contributors dedicate roughly one-third of their analysis to history prior to the 1980s, one-third to the period from 1980-2000, and one-third to the period from 2000-2014, making this a very contemporary and well-updated volume on Latin American political science overall. In addition to a new chapter on Ecuador by Jennifer N. Collins, several essays in the anthology have been significantly revised for the Eighth Edition, with new authors updating the existing chapters on Cuba and Peru, and others substantially revising their chapters to include coverage of 21st-century politics and economics in the particular countries they examine. In upcoming editions, the editors' concluding section on "Latin America and the Future" and the individual essays on countries like Brazil, Panama, and the Dominican Republic could benefit from similar efforts.

Some of the largest nations in the region, in both economic and demographic terms, receive especially substantial and insightful consideration—for example, in Judith A. Gentleman’s review of democratization in Mexico from 1988 to the present, Linda Chen’s detailed and in-depth analysis of Argentina’s 21st-century economic and political institutions, and Julio F. Carrión and David Scott Palmer’s examination of Peru’s political transformations from the Fujimori period to the 2011 election of Ollanta Humala. In some cases, the contributors focus on the contemporary repercussions of events dating to the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s—such as the chapters on Cuba, Chile, and Mexico, respectively. Other chapters are tilted more heavily toward the events that have occurred in the fourteen years since 2000—such as those focusing on recent political and social movements in Ecuador, Honduras, and Uruguay, as well as a useful chapter by David Myers focusing on Venezuelan politics *after* Hugo Chávez. In this regard, the volume will be particularly attractive to those who seek an anthology on contemporary Latin American politics and economics that not only examines the past several decades of political trends, but also includes an in-depth look at the 21st century.

Overall, this anthology aims to introduce Latin American political history to English-speaking students from the perspective of the English-language political science academy. This frame of reference is made clear, for example, in the opening sentence of the chapter by Paul E. Sigmund, which asks “What is it about Chile that is so fascinating to the foreign observer?” (127), while other authors also directly take on conventional U.S. notions and misconceptions regarding Latin America, as in Mitchell A. Seligson’s chapter on Costa Rica. There are times when the editors’ U.S.-centered approach wears thin; given the fact that the politically, economically, and culturally impactful nations that make up Latin America today “are no longer sleepy, traditional, backward ‘banana republics’” (475) as they were once derogatorily stereotyped, one has to question the value of rehashing such misconceptions in a current anthology. However the volume’s more recently updated chapters on political institutions throughout the region move far beyond such generalizations to provide substantial and up-to-date analysis of the institutions and movements shaping Latin American politics today.

Thanks to the painstaking efforts on the part of the volume’s contributors, who have continually endeavored to keep this well-established political science anthology up-to-date, the 8th edition of *Latin American Politics and Development* offers a comprehensive and current examination of politics, economics, and society across contemporary Latin America. Its analytical detail at the national level is complimented by the global perspective its contributors bring to their particular chapters, making the volume a useful contribution to the analysis of recent trends in individual countries, as well as a helpful resource for tracing general patterns of political change throughout the region over the 20th and early 21st centuries. Given its three-and-a-half decade history of providing an introduction to the politics of Latin America, along with its continual process of updating and revision, this anthology represents an attractive offering to those who wish to expand their knowledge of the ways Latin America’s present relates to its political past.