

Julio Carrión. *A Dynamic Theory of Populism in Power: The Andes in Comparative Perspective.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. 269 pages. ISBN: 978-0-19-757229-0. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780197572290.001.0001.

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Since the election of Donald Trump, there has been a growing interest in populism studies. Thanks to its rich history of populism, alongside Western Europe, Latin America is at the center of academic debates on this hot topic. Amid the proliferation of books and articles on populist parties, leaders, and movements globally, Julio Carrión's recent book makes important contributions both theoretically and empirically. *A Dynamic Theory of Populism in Power* studies the trajectory of five populist leaders in the Andean region: Alberto Fujimori in Peru, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Álvaro Uribe in Colombia, Evo Morales in Bolivia, and Rafael Correa in Ecuador. In his book, Carrión analyzes the relationship between populism and electoral democracy and explains why some populist leaders manage to erode democracy, but others fail to do so. In other words, Carrión aims to refine the view that populism in power always leads to democratic erosion. By differentiating between constrained and unconstrained populism, Carrión convincingly argues that only populist leaders who belong to the former group successfully undermine democracy, whereas the latter group faces strong resistance from the judiciary, the legislature, and traditional political parties. As a result of the resistance, democratic erosion in such cases is averted.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

In the first two chapters, Carrión situates the book in the literature and develops his theory of populism in power. Because Carrión is interested in what populists do rather than say, he sides with Weyland's (2017) politico-strategic definition of populism instead of the ideational approach (Mudde, 2017; Hawkins, 2009). Throughout the book, Carrión analyzes populist leaders as power-maximizers, who exhibit personalistic, anti-pluralistic, and confrontational leadership. Despite their distrust

of democratic institutions that are designed as a check on executive power, Carrión demonstrates that populist leaders do not always succeed in eroding democracy. If a populist leader manages to overcome societal opposition and establish power asymmetry, they end up building a competitive authoritarian regime. Otherwise, they do not effectively pose a serious threat to the democratic regime.

Carrión calls the book's theoretical framework "dynamic" because it follows a sequence of "moments" that populist chief executives go through: the Tsunami Moment (Chapter 4), the Hobbesian Moment (Chapter 5), and the Populist Moment (Chapter 6). Before coming to the tsunami moment, Carrión focuses on mass political discontent and elite disarray as the critical antecedents of populism. In Chapter 3, he documents how Fujimori, Chávez, Uribe, Morales, and Correa arrived in the political scene when the voters were disillusioned with the traditional political parties and their elite. In all five cases, with the partial exception of Colombia (I will address this below), he identifies common enabling conditions such as security challenges (Peru), corruption (Venezuela), protests (Bolivia), and presidents who could not complete their terms (Ecuador).

In Chapter 4, the book scrutinizes the tsunami moment, when the populist candidates "all came from behind and increased their electoral appeal up to a point where the momentum became unstoppable" (75). Carrión uses a variety of public opinion polls to illustrate how all five populist leaders did not start the presidential race as favorites but suddenly gained momentum and won the crucial elections. Although they initially polled around 10 percent, Chávez, Morales, and Uribe managed to surpass 50 percent of the vote in the first round. In contrast, Fujimori and Correa finished the first round in second place but defeated Mario Vargas Llosa and Álvaro Noboa in the runoff. Regardless of their exact trajectory, all populist leaders successfully distinguished themselves from the candidates of the establishment and quickly rose to prominence. While Fujimori, Uribe, and Correa almost came out of nowhere, Chávez and Morales had some name recognition prior to their tsunami moment. Chávez became a household name after the 1992 coup attempt, whereas Morales came from the social movements and was the runner up of the 2002 presidential elections. Beyond these five cases, the concept of the tsunami moment helps us comprehend the rise of populist candidates in recent South American elections, namely Pedro Castillo in Peru, José Antonio Kast in Chile, and Rodolfo Hernández in Colombia.

After explaining the meteoric rise of populist leaders, Carrión's primary concern is to understand whether they emerged victorious or defeated from the Hobbesian moment, "a zero-sum struggle whose resolution determines the trajectory of populism in power and the potential for regime change" (103). In Chapter 5, Carrión relies on two productive conditions that help the populist leaders win the power struggle and establish their dominance over their opponents. In line with the Hobbesian logic, the first factor is the use of the state's repressive apparatus

against political enemies in the right moment. For instance, Fujimori counted on the support of the military and the police in the implementation of his self-coup. Similarly, Correa deployed the police to Congress when he needed to establish an all-powerful constituent assembly.

The second factor is the ability to mobilize their base against the actors that resist change as a form of intimidation and deterrence. In their Hobbesian moments, Chávez and Morales not only used the military but also activated their followers, who confronted the opposition in the streets, often violently. In Venezuela, the newly created Bolivarian Circles helped Chávez return to power in the 2002 coup attempt. In Bolivia, during the conflictual constitution-making process and other instances, Morales' social movement base turned out to be useful to encircle and intimidate the opposition in the public space. On the other hand, when the legislature and the judiciary blocked or slowed down his attempted power grabs, Uribe did not resort to repression and mobilization, which, according to Carrión, explains his defeat in the Hobbesian moment and the survival of the Colombian democracy.

Following the temporal order of the theoretical framework, in Chapters 6 and 7, the book deals with the four populist leaders who survived their Hobbesian moments and successfully achieved power asymmetry. Chapter 6 is on the populist moment when the incumbent presidents secured and further expanded their power. As the opposition actors were weak, fragmented and demoralized, Fujimori, Chávez, Morales, and Correa easily won reelection and debilitated the fragile mechanisms of horizontal accountability. A common practice in all four cases was to appoint loyalists to the judiciary and the electoral body, further tilting the playing field in their favor and against the opposition. Chapter 7 exclusively focuses on the electoral arena, where the populist leaders made institutional changes to gain further advantage and validate themselves at the ballot box. One common theme across all four cases is how the power-hungry populist leaders violated their own constitutions and pushed for indefinite reelection. The most prominent cases here are Chávez and Morales, who lost popular referendums on this matter but abolished term limits anyway, in the absence of independent media, judiciary, and legislature.

Overall, the book makes a compelling argument that advances the discussion on populism in power and democratic erosion. Carrión's deep knowledge of the Andean cases helps the reader understand the main actors and their actions in key moments. The structure of the

book follows the causal mechanisms of the theoretical framework. Methodologically, the book utilizes comparative historical analysis and complements the sequence of events with survey data from Latinobarómetro as well as measures of democracy from the Varieties of Democracy and Polity Projects. The book would be of interest to scholars of comparative populism and autocratization as well as specialists on Latin American politics and the five Andean countries.

DISCUSSION

In the remaining parts of this review, I critically evaluate the book and further situate Carrión's contributions to the study of populism in power. To start with case selection, the book covers the most prominent populist leaders in the Andean region from both the left and the right of the ideological spectrum in the last three decades. Despite their ideological differences, there is a consensus in the literature that Fujimori, Chávez, Morales, and Correa ran and governed as a populist. As Carrión acknowledges in Chapter 1, there is no such consensus on Uribe. In their seminal article "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in the Andes," Levitsky and Loxton do not classify Uribe as a populist leader because "he was a career politician whose electoral appeal – though personalistic – was not anti-establishment" (Levitsky & Loxton, 2013, p. 127). In another article that Carrión also cites, Dugas argues against categorizing Uribe as a populist due to the lack of "a movement based upon direct, unmediated ties to the masses" (Dugas, 2003, p. 1134). Like Levitsky and Loxton, Dugas considers Uribe a personalist but not a populist president.

Labeling Uribe as a populist or not would not be a significant issue if Colombia was not the only case of constrained populism among the five presidents that the book covers. As Carrión notes, the party-system in Colombia did not collapse with the election of Uribe, which "had a causal impact in the trajectory of the Hobbesian moment" (61). Unlike Fujimori, Chávez, Morales, and Correa, in the Hobbesian moment, Uribe did not resort to repressive tactics and mobilization to emerge victorious. After the Constitutional Court ruled against his push for a second reelection, Uribe simply respected the decision. Why is that? A potential explanation is that Uribe was not a populist or an anti-establishment figure but simply a personalist president. Alternatively, he was less of a populist compared to the other leaders, more respectful of democratic institutions, and less willing to erode them. In her comparative study of Colombia and Venezuela, Gamboa (2022) considers both Uribe and Chávez equally populist and polarizing but prefers to label them "presidents with hegemonic aspirations." Different than Carrión's focus on the incumbent populist leader's actions, she highlights the agency of the opposition in explaining why Uribe failed to erode democracy in Colombia, but Chávez achieved his objectives. Gamboa argues that the Colombian opposition primarily pursued moderate institutional strategies like legislative obstruction and denouncing procedural irregularities. In contrast, the Venezuelan opposition resorted to radical extra-institutional strategies such as the national strike, the coup attempt and the oil strike. Carrión is definitely right in stating that Uribe did not emerge victorious from the Hobbesian moment, but there may be more to the story than a defeated populist president.

Leaving the definitional issues on populism aside, Carrión's theory easily travels outside of the five case studies. As he mentions in the conclusion section, Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, and Viktor Orbán in Hungary could be classified as an example of unconstrained populism. Given the resilience of the legislature and the judiciary against him, I agree with Carrión that Trump was a case of constrained populism. However, despite strong resistance, he still managed to erode the American democracy to some degree (V-Dem and Freedom House data confirm this) and continues to undermine it at the sub-national level. This is also true for other populist leaders who are out of office, but their polarizing legacy threatens democratic stability in their countries. In the concluding chapter, Carrión refers to the Peruvian, Ecuadorian, and Bolivian cases in preventing democratic deepening, but the autocratic legacy of Uribe is very much alive in Colombian politics, too. Similar to Morales and Correa, Uribe supports proxy candidates in presidential elections and acts as a destabilizing actor on Twitter. Therefore, one key challenge for democracy in Latin America and elsewhere is former presidents who retain a large group of followers and continue to shape ongoing power struggles.

If Carrión's book has one big lesson for the advocates of democracy, that would be to strengthen the constitutional veto players (legislature, judiciary, and electoral body), term limits, and the media against potential attacks in the future. Stronger the democratic institutions, the higher the likelihood that they would endure challenges from populist chief executives. Although *A Dynamic Theory of Populism in Power* is mainly on populist leaders in the Andes, it should be read as a warning to other countries, especially presidential systems where an outsider could easily capitalize on the massive discontent, rapidly rise to the presidency, subjugate the opponents, and erode already fragile democratic regime. Populists around the world are good at turning crises into opportunities, but despite all odds, the opponents should learn from past mistakes and try to achieve unity around democratic values. As Carrión says in the book's preface, "By understanding the dynamics that may lead to the demise of democracy under populism, I hope we will be better equipped to thwart its autocratic impulses" (xiii).

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