

Helcimara Telles and Joscimar Silva (eds.). *Public Opinion and Turmoil in Latin American Democracies*. Springer Cham, 2025. 318 pages. ISBN 978-3-031-83104-1. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-83105-8>.

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This volume offers research papers and essays by 28 Latin American scholars (18 Brazilians, 3 Argentines, 2 Chileans, and one each from four other Latin American countries and Spain). While the book's central theme is intended to be the relationship between public opinion and the region's recent political turmoil, the essays cover a wide range of topics, some related to approaches other than public opinion, and they utilize a variety of methodologies.

The first essay, "Turmoil in Latin American Democracy and Changes in the Public Opinion," serves as the central contribution to the book's overall theme. Authored by the volume's general editors (Joscimar Silva and Helcimara Telles) and two co-authors, the chapter reviews Latinobarometer data from 2000 to 2020 to assess Latin Americans' adherence to democracy, trust in government and parties, and perceptions of corruption. Public support for democracy, overall, is ambivalent. Trust in government and institutions (especially legislatures and political parties) is low, and few people are really interested in politics. Latin America, as a result, is fertile ground for anti-democratic discourse, polarization, and unstable institutions. These are important findings, and they are echoed in a number of other chapters.

In the next chapter, "Population Aging and Dissatisfaction with Democracy: Evidence from a 2-Level Model in Latin America," Silvana Krause, João Camargos and Rafael Fonseca explore the effect of population aging on satisfaction with democracy. Applying a two-level model to Latinobarometer data from eight countries, they demonstrate that dissatisfaction is higher in countries with more elderly people. At the same time, the authors show that it is actually the younger cohorts—those particularly affected by economic pressures—that are most dissatisfied. Despite some odd claims (Brazil's unemployment between 2015 and 2018 was less than 14%, not, as the authors claim, 40%), this is a well-written chapter utilizing a sophisticated methodology. The next step might be an elaboration of individual-level drivers of dissatisfaction. Leaving aside endogenous causes (such as low trust

in democratic institutions), the only truly exogenous variables affecting satisfaction in this analysis are gender and job security.

Taking Latin America's political and economic turbulence as a given, editors Silva and Telles, in "Representation Crisis, Reconfiguration of Political Information Sources, and Digital Political Leadership in Brazil, México and Peru," argue that turbulence in certain countries (Brazil, Mexico, and Peru) has created fertile conditions for the rise of "digital political leadership," leaders, that is, whose claims to representation are based on social media (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube). Such leaders make anti-politics arguments focusing on corruption, political elites, and parties. Silva and Telles make a strong case that political conditions in Brazil and Peru favor the rise of digital political leaders, but the Mexican case seems somewhat weaker: in Mexican social media usage traditional politicians far outnumbered purely digital leaders. Overall, however, this chapter serves as a good introduction to the use of social media by new political actors.

Adwaldo Lins Peixoto Neto, Tito Olavarría and Hugo Jofré ("Remaining in Office Despite the Crimes: The Impeachment Resolutions Against Bolsonaro (Brazil) and Piñera (Chile)") analyze impeachment resolutions against Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro and Chile's Sebastián Piñera (in his second term). While this chapter is really not an analysis of public opinion, it includes an interesting discussion of impeachment as a tool for threatening governments and gaining electoral advantage.

In "Protests and Emergence of New Brazilian Right-Wing: Perception of Democracy, Ideologies and Anti-PT," Mara Telles explores the street protests that took place in Belo Horizonte in 2015 and 2016, protests that contributed to the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff. Illuminating the backgrounds and ideologies of the protesters with in-depth interviews, surveys, and film footage, Telles establishes that protesters were middle class, well-educated, economically liberal, center and right-wing, anti-egalitarian, anti-party and, especially, anti-Workers Party. The protesters got their political information from social media, and these outlets reinforced the protesters' low social trust and authoritarian values. Readers may find it useful to compare this chapter to Leonardo Avritzer's 2017 article in *Opinião Pública* (23:1).

In recent years Peru has experienced two mass mobilizations against authoritarian and conservative coalition governments. In 2020, mass mobilization, occurring mostly in Lima and lasting about a month, succeeded in ousting President Manuel Merino. In 2022-2023, an uprising against Dina Boluarte took place mostly in Puno and the Highlands and continued for four months before its ultimate failure. In "Right-Wing Convergence, Progressive Fragmentation, and Media Alignments. Deciphering the Limitations of the Second Peruvian *Estallido*," Omar Coronel and Noelia Chávez Angeles ask why the two outcomes differed. Imaginatively utilizing protest databases, participant observation, media reports and survey data, Coronel and Chávez Angeles conclude that the second uprising failed because

right-wing blocs coalesced in support of Boluarte, the progressive coalition fragmented, and the mainstream media supported the Boluarte government.

Antón Castromil and Mario Vega Yáñez contribute a largely theoretical piece on polarization, “The Polarized Public Opinion in Bolivia and Spain: Democratic Conflict or Political Intolerance?” The authors argue that polarization takes two forms, “agonistic” (combative or polemical) and “runaway.” The former seeks to integrate the interests of diverse groups into a shared societal vision; the latter excludes opponents from the body politic. Spain, where conflict focuses on territory, left-right issues, and immigration, is an example of an agonistic polarization that integrates diverse interests into society. Bolivia’s polarization, by contrast, centers on ethnic identification and geography and leads to the elimination of opposing groups. Future iterations of this argument might profit from utilizing public opinion data to elaborate and test these interesting but speculative propositions.

Why are Latin American voters reluctant to cast their ballots for female candidates? For many years, Luciana Panke has been asking this question. In “‘I Do Not Vote for Women Because...’: The Justifications that Latino People Give to Explain the Female Underrepresentation in Electoral Politics,” she reports on interviews she conducted in eight Latin American countries. Her respondents give six different reasons for avoiding female candidates, ranging from “there are no women candidates” to “women are very sensitive.” Since Panke spoke to no more than five people in each country, her non-random samples do not really count as public opinion research. Indeed, she is not shy about her “participatory ethnographic methodology.” The next step in this research program, hopefully, will engage representative samples of voters to explore why these views are held and what can change them.

In “Race, Gender, and Class in Francia Márquez’s Electoral Campaign in Colombia,” Érica Anita Baptista, Sandra Avi dos Santos and Joscimar Silva analyze the electoral campaign of the first Afro-Colombian candidate to hold that country’s vice presidency. Given that Márquez ran as part of Gustavo Petro’s winning slate, it is very difficult to assess her electoral appeal quantitatively, but the authors demonstrate that her focus on issues of race and representation helped reach a significant number of followers on social media.

Juan Bautista Lucca, Esteban Iglesias, Jaime Aragón Falomir and Marcos Pérez Talia (in “The 2023 Elections in Argentina, Mexico and Paraguay in Comparative Perspective”) present capsule discussions of the three elections in the title, three cases in which a government-opposition cleavage defined a bimodal political conflict: Peronist versus anti-Peronist, Morena versus its opponents, the Colorado party versus a fragmented opposition. The argument stresses the effects of the bimodal logic of presidential elections and the development of catch-all coalitions. Its conclusion speculates that political change in Latin America is less a question of “left/right turns” and more an alternation between available options.

One of the best chapters in the collection focuses on the rise of outsider deputies after the victories of Jair Bolsonaro and Gabriel Boric. Adriano Codato, Roberta Picussa and Ednaldo Ribeiro (in “The Election of Outsider Deputies in Chile and Brazil”) use Item Response Theory to create an innovative and sophisticated “outsiderism” index. Focusing on previous political activity, office holding, party affiliation, and political activism, they find that first-time deputies in Brazil were more likely to be outsiders and that most outsider deputies were linked to right-wing parties. In Chile, by contrast, the election produced a more balanced distribution of first-time deputies, with fewer outsiders and more independents. The election of maverick presidents, especially when trust in government is declining, also increases the chances of outsiders becoming deputies.

Luciana Veiga and Nayla Lopes ask how voters evaluated environmental policies and Covid-19 management in the runup to Brazil’s 2022 election. Entitled “When the Reality Imposes a Tipping Point: Denialism and Conspiracy Theories in the Evaluations of Bolsonaro’s Performance in Environmental Policies and Covid-19 Responses in Brazil,” the chapter offers a qualitative analysis based on 24 in-depth voter interviews. The authors partitioned their sample into seven categories according to voters’ self-reports of their 2018 and 2022 choices: Bolsonaro/Bolsonaro, Bolsonaro/Lula, Haddad/Lula, Bolsonaro/Nulo, and so on. The categories of greatest interest tend to have very few respondents: only three people, for example, reported switching to Lula in 2022 after choosing Bolsonaro in 2018. Though the analysis is impressionistic rather than quantitative, the results are interesting, as the authors discuss respondents who changed their minds between the two elections in response to concrete events. *Why* minds change is of course a central issue: here the reader might consider the social context approach that Andy Baker, Lucio Rennó and I developed in *Persuasive Peers: Social Communication and Voting in Latin America*.

In the book’s final chapter, Telles, Horrana Grieg Oliveira, Robson Sávio Souza and Leonardo Ev explore the political activities of Brazil’s evangelicals. Focusing on civil unions, abortion, and teachings about sexuality and Marxism, “Religion and Dominionism: The Battle for God Against Evil in Brazilian Politics” suggests that the evangelical movement (like other groups on the ideological extremes) has adopted a logic of good and evil, a logic of battles. Evangelicals see themselves as defenders of traditional historical values against evil, which they identify as the social achievements of groups such as women, LGBT defenders, and so on. Electoral contests become zero-sum battles between good and evil, and representative institutions and judicial systems are viewed with distrust. This polarized world view, as the authors make clear, is truly inimical to representative democracy.

Overall, this is a useful collection. While it offers no unified theory of the relationship between public opinion and political turmoil, the chapters do introduce many of the building blocks for such a theory. Demographic change (especially

population aging) increases the cost of supporting older citizens and reduces the working share of the population. The rise of social media, coupled with the weakness of political parties, results in more outsiders entering the political arena. Political movements based on religious or ethnic cleavages, movements inherently less open to compromise and gradualism than movements based on social class, shape overall public opinion. And finally, Latin America's political oscillations can appear to reflect left/right conflicts, but actual alternations in power may simply imply a rejection of incumbents.

If a piece of this opinion/turmoil story deserves more attention, it is on the economic side. With the exception of the recent commodities boom, the last 30-40 years have produced improvements in living standards that most Latin Americans consider unsatisfactory. We need to understand the effects of weak economies on political turmoil via two channels: directly, through the creation of broad public dissatisfaction, and indirectly, through the elevation of religious and ethnic cleavages over economic divides.

For those who believe, as I do, that Latin American scholars deserve more international exposure, this volume presents a dilemma. Its contributors do excellent work and merit an international audience. But the quality of translation and copyediting in this collection is very low, and a few chapters are quite difficult to read. This is not an exceptional case, unfortunately, and it highlights a need for publishers, editors, universities, and governments to dedicate additional efforts—and resources—to improving the visibility of such research. I recently organized a project in which Brazilian scholars researched and wrote most of the chapters. Post-translations, I spent hundreds of hours making editorial improvements. My publisher then carefully copyedited what I had edited. By contrast, Springer, the publisher of this volume, seems to have done nothing to improve the quality of the writing. Indeed, another volume in the same series (*Current Challenges in Social Sciences*) actually has a mistranslation in its *title*.

Poor editing is not, of course, confined to Springer: this problem occurs with many presses, and presses often outsource copyediting outside their own countries. If Latin American authors cannot depend on their publishers to improve English translations, what can be done? Can governmental agencies like the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) help? National scholarly organizations like the Brazilian Political Science Association (ABCP)? Subfield organizations like the World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR)? I cannot claim to have identified a solution to this problem, but I do believe that we need to take it seriously. Latin American scholars deserve no less.