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RECENZE MILOŠE BRUNCLÍKA

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In 2012 Vladimíra Dvořáková, Radek Buben and Jan Němec published a well-written collective monograph that indubitably deserves attention of scholars and other students within the Czech political science community.

On the face of it, the key words that appear in the title of the book (left-wing governments, populism and regime change in the Latin America) might indicate a rather empirical study that narrows down its focus on a description of the phenomena in the very specific region. However, the book is actually much more than that. The book can hardly be labelled descriptive or empirical only. On the contrary, most (!) of the book deals with a review of a number of theories, concepts, terms and definitions. In this way the authors often challenge standard definitions and conventional wisdoms about state, government, regimes, populism and other key terms of political science.

The authors discuss various concepts against the backdrop of paradigmatic shifts within political science - from the ("old") institutionalism, to behaviouralism and (back) to the (neo)institutionalism. As a result, they are aware of various caveats related to these shifts. In addition, the plurality of methodological and theoretical approaches allows them to critically reassess and rethink some of the concepts and suggest their own ones. The authors demonstrate a deep and wide knowledge of the truly large number of concepts that are not only derived from English-speaking political science community, but also from Latin American scholars, who rightfully belong to leading figures within specific fields of research focused on non-democratic regimes, democratic transition, consolidation etc. (e.g. Guillermo O'Donnell).

The authors obviously display their

long-term interest in this specific region, their extensive knowledge as well as scholarship in this particular field of research. It is no secret that one of the authors, Vladimíra Dvořáková, is at least in the Czech research community known for her long-term interest in the region. After all, she makes an explicit reference to this fact saying that the founder of this research was her (now deceased) colleague Jiří Kunc. Even the two other authors have published their articles and books on various issues of the Latin American politics.

The first and at the same time the largest chapter of the book discusses conceptual definitions of the key terms in political science: state, regime and government on about 100 pages. This chapter is clearly invaluable source of various concepts that are introduced, explained and critically examined. The theoretical discussion is sufficiently completed with empirical examples from the Latin American countries in order to show (ir)relevance of the concepts discussed. The chapter is robust, indeed, as the authors, for example, comprise Marxist, traditional institutional, pluralist as well as neoinstitutionalist concepts of state (p. 18-27). The authors tend to prefer those concepts that are of a more complex nature and that refer not only to institutional structure of the state, but also its capacity to carry out its functions (p. 30, p. 94-95 etc.), which is crucial, notably with regard to the Latin American countries that have traditionally been plagued by a low efficiency and incapability to enforce their own rules and introduce policies of their governments [see also Fukuyama 2004].

The authors elucidate many concepts of state that are relevant in the further empirical parts of the book. Here we could perhaps

mention at least the idea of “petro-state” by T. Karl, i.e. a state, whose revenue stems from the sale of oil. Such wealthy states are seemingly in favourable position. However, given no or very little taxation, the state may afford to exclude large sections of population from the politics, precisely in line with the „No representation without taxation“ principle. This chapter is also concerned with democracy its definitions, and problems of transitions. Furthermore it discusses authoritarian regimes, i.e. a very useful concept, which has been applied on a number of the Latin American countries throughout last decades. Due to the complexity and ambiguity of current political regimes and nuanced differences among them the authors talk – with reference to Larry Diamond - about “competitive authoritarian regimes,” a category that – at least according to the authors – can be together with O’Donnell’s [1993] concept of delegative democracy applied on the Venezuelan regime today.

The authors also review the traditional discussion that was triggered by the famous Linz’s article published in the *Journal of Democracy* almost a quarter of century ago [Linz 1990]. Linz argued that presidential regimes (in contrast to parliamentary regimes) are inherently unstable, less capable of dealing with government crises and thus more likely to crumble and consequently clear the way for the rise of non-democratic regimes. Some other scholars raised a number of objections to this argument and Linz’s claim of general nature of his assertion. They asserted that the very fact that democracy often collapsed in the Latin America cannot be solely attributed to the presidential government and pointed at other largely non-institutional factors. The authors of the book do not seek to resolve this intriguing discussion. They are not only inclined to avoid any simplification, but tend to make the discussion even more complex by identifying relevant factors that enter the debate.

On the one hand, presidential regimes are more prone to degenerate into a “delegative democracy”, which is contrasted with a consolidated democracy, where „accountability operates not only, nor so much, “vertically” in relation to those who elected the officer (except, retrospectively, at times of elections), but “horizontally” in relation to a network of relatively autonomous powers (i.e., other institutions)..“ [O’Donnell 1993: 10]. On the other hand, the authors consider other important variables, such as striking social inequalities or a weak national identity, which is „complicated“ by a large share of indigenous people (especially in Ecuador and Bolivia) (p. 215).

In order to assess the extent of regime changes in the three case studies (see below), the authors advocate the concept of “partial regimes” introduced by Philipp Schmitter. Since political regimes are too large and crude categories, it might be tremendously difficult to describe particular regime changes precisely. Hence, on a theoretical level, Schmitter attempted to solve this problem by dis-aggregating various elements of the state into separate analytical components. Instead of examining monolithic regime as such, Schmitter suggested to investigate how different partial regimes have changed over time. Schmitter identified several partial regimes such as constitutional, electoral, clientelist or concertation regimes (p. 53 an). Schmitter claims that this disaggregation into partial regimes “is not only theoretically desirable, it also makes the effort more empirically feasible” [Schmitter 1992:162].

The third chapter of the book deals with populism, which defies an easy conceptualization and attempts to define it clearly may resemble futile efforts to nail pudding to the wall. Yet, the concept of populism has attracted attention of numerous scholars, who suggested a lot of definitions. Even though this concept is often associated with

conceptual confusion, still it is an indispensable tool to analyse (not only) Latin American politics. For example, recently there has been a wave of studies on party populism in European countries, including so-called radical right-wing populism [e.g. Mudde 2007]. It is undoubtedly encouraging to see that even the Czech literature has also significantly covered this issue [Havlík et al. 2012; Bíba 2013]. Although the European party populism differs from that of Latin America with regard to different political, historical and cultural contexts, clear analogies can be found between the two versions of populism, such as the importance of vertical responsibility, leading (populist) politicians justifying their behaviour with reference to an abstract “people”, who are said to have been betrayed and harmed by corrupt politicians, who are in turn characterized by mismanagement, greed and immorality. The “people” and (party) “politicians” are juxtaposed in a “Manichean” discourse, with the former being good and the latter being bad. The allegedly contradicting interests of the people and the politicians allow the populists take any steps necessary in order to “restore people’s will” and “government for the people”. The populist presidents often resort to referenda to by-pass parliaments.

The authors discuss populism in terms of three concepts: populism as an idea, populism as a political style (political discourse) and populism as a political strategy (actual methods and tools to exercise political power)(p. 123-129). They further analyse the relationship between populism and democracy and conclude that populism is not an anti-democratic movement, but rather “an inseparable part of modern...democracies, and together with liberalism it is one of the pillars democracy is based on” (p. 157). Even though the populism (emphasizing will and rule of the people and majority principle) and the liberalism (emphasizing checks on power and protection of freedoms

and rights) often clash with each other, both belong to the modern understanding of democracy. Further in the text (p. 166 an) authors focus on specific features of the Latin American populism and subscribe to the specific definition suggested by Kurt Weyland, who conceptualized populism as a (mainly) political strategy. This understanding is further completed with the idea of “people vs. elites” (p. 178-183).

The fourth chapter – after having reviewed the problems of the left-wing governments and their typologies in the region – aims at designing a new typology, which is based on two criteria: 1) presence/absence of an actor with a regime change program and 2) presence/absence of political conditions conducive to that change (p. 203-211; see the table below).

This typology is further applied on three Latin American cases – Ecuador, Venezuela and Bolivia that are discussed in detail in the fifth chapter of the book. The main author of this chapter (Radek Buben) describes major political developments in these countries and focuses on the recent regime changes (using Schmitter’s concept) in these countries, where the regime change have been the most far-reaching in the region (governments of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador). The authors came to the conclusion that the most profound regime change occurred in Bolivia, where all partial regimes were affected by changes. Whereas Bolivia and Ecuador still meet minimalist (procedural) democratic criteria, Venezuela has rather lapsed into delegative democracy or competitive authoritarian regime.

Very little criticism can be levelled at the book, which is balanced in terms of style and language. The quality of the book can be found not only in the theory, but also in the analytical and descriptive parts. However, two critical remarks will be made at the end of this review. It might appear bit

surprising that the authors do not devote so much precision and attention to the term “left” or “left-wing”, given the abundance of space reserved for the other concepts of the book: regime, state and populism. Even though the authors deal with the “left” in a special section of the book (p. 190-201), they introduce solely various typologies of left-wing governments without an explicit definition of the left. Hence, it is not entirely clear, what the authors have in mind when referring to the left. True enough, the left is a well-known concept and the answer to the question could be intuitive or drawn from a general understanding of the term. Still, the authors merely contrast “left” with neoliberal economic policies. This answer can hardly be incorrect, but the distinction between left and right stems actually from philosophical or political values and perspectives on “a fair society” [cf. Bobbio 1996], while economic policies are secondary (i.e. derived from the primary political distinction).

The second little reproach is concerned with the typology the authors suggested. It is not entirely clear, why this typology refers just to the Latin American “left-wing” governments and not to all the Latin American governments. To put it simply, one could argue that the typology might theoretically encompass a broader range of governments. Of course, the authors talk about governments that have embarked on regime changes from “leftist” positions, and calling for reformism, progress or even revolution might be attributed rather to the left than to “conservative” and “reactionary” right. Yet, the explanation, why the typology must be associated with the left, is missing from the respective chapter. One could argue that even right-wing governments in various countries introduced significant regime changes, and it seems that the general categories in the typology could well reflect even the right-wing governments.

As regards formal aspects of the text,

the book could have been completed with a better (i.e. more voluminous and comprising names of scholars and theorists) index that would allow readers faster orientation in the book. The actual index does not help readers much.

All in all, the book is definitely worth reading. It is a well written theoretical, analytical and empirical source of information on the Latin American political systems, underlying political cultures and other factors that facilitate understanding of peculiarities of the Latin American politics and the almost permanent instability, in the Latin American countries that are once plunging into an authoritarian rule and at another time getting back on the democratic path. It is no exaggeration to argue that the second (“Conceptual definition: state, regime, government”) as well as the third chapter (“Populism: idea, political style or political strategy?”) might be used as authoritative introductions to the study of the concepts that are of extreme importance for current political science, not to speak of these chapters as textbooks in political science courses for graduate and postgraduate students. Since the prevailing part of the book discusses several general concepts of political science, the book might come handy even for those, who are not particularly interested in the Latin American region. It is difficult to find another publication in Czech with same (or similar) topic that would emulate this book at least in terms of theoretical perspective, but even the empirical part of the book is a knowledgeable piece of an academic work.

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Table 1: Regime change and political conditions

		Regime change program	
		yes	no
Political conditions conducive to the change	Yes	radical government	restrained government
	No	limited government	moderate government

Source: Author.

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