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BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Inclusion, Representation, Populism, and Democracy in Latin America

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This essay reviews the following works:

A Dynamic Theory of Populism in Power: The Andes in Comparative Perspective. By: Julio F. Carrión. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. xi + 269. $26.93 cloth. ISBN: 9780197572290.

¿Por qué funciona el populismo? El discurso que sabe construir explicaciones convincentes en un mundo en crisis. By María Esperanza Casullo. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2019. Pp. v + 208. $19.52 paperback. ISBN: 9789876298964.

The Chain of Representation: Preferences, Institutions, and Policy across Presidential Systems. By Brian F. Crisp, Olivella Santiago and Guillermo Rosas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. iii + 262. $36.69 paperback. ISBN: 9781108745413.

Shifting the Meaning of Democracy: Race, Politics, and Culture in the United States and Brazil. By Jessica Lynn Graham. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019. Pp. iii + 365. $29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780520293762.

The Inclusionary Turn in Latin American Democracies. Edited by Diana Kapiszewski, Steven Levitsky, and Deborah J. Yashar. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. iii + 537. $93.45 cloth. ISBN: 9781108842044.

Diminished Parties: Democratic Representation in Contemporary Latin America. Edited by Juan Pablo Luna, Rafael Piñeiro Rodríguez, Fernando Rosenblatt, and Gabriel Vommaro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. iii + 341. $120.00 cloth. ISBN: 978–1316513187.

Democracia para Venezuela: ¿Representativa, participativa o populista? By Margarita López Maya. Caracas: Editorial Alfa, 2021. Pp. 3 + 238. $19.00 paperback. ISBN: 978–8412266566.

Checking Presidential Power: Executive Decrees and the Legislative Process in New Democracies. By Valeria Palanza. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. iii + 245. $108.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781108427623.

Latin American democracies are in danger. After years of growth in the aftermath of the third wave of democracy, since 2003, V-Dem's levels of Electoral Democracy have declined by

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12 percent.[1] Underneath this democratic recession there is a struggle over the meaning and practice of democracy. The third wave of democracy ended most authoritarian regimes in the region but was unable to push the transformations required to create strong democratic regimes. Latin America has been plagued ever since with democracies that fulfill the minimum democratic requirements but suffer serious problems of representation, governance, and inclusion. In that environment, populism has reemerged as a viable—though dangerous—alternative. Using (and abusing) the tools of liberal democracies while brandishing the principles of participatory democracy, populists provide meaning and easy-to-follow actions that feed into people's despair. The books that I review in this essay analyze these topics. They help us understand the successes and failures in Latin America's recent efforts to create more inclusive (Kapiszewski, Levitsky, and Yashar 2021) and representative democracies (Palanza; Crisp, Olivella, and Rosas; and Luna, Rodríguez, Rosenblatt, and Vommaro), and how populists engage with the citizens left out in them (Casullo; Carrión; and López Maya). Together, the works highlight the region's struggle over what democracy is and what it should look like (López Maya; Graham).

Representation and inclusion

Democracy in Latin America is stagnant. As shown by Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, out of the eighteen democracies in the region in 2000, three broke down into competitive authoritarian and fully authoritarian regimes, and three became high-level democracies.[2] The other twelve became mid- and low-level democratic regimes characterized by poor representation, uneven inclusion, and weak governance. Latin Americanists have spent the better part of the past two decades trying to explain why the region has been unable to attain better-quality democracies.

Part of the answer lies in the region's institutional arrangements and how they mediate the relationship between politicians and their constituents. The rules that govern who gets elected, what officials can do once they are in office, and how different branches of power relate with each other, have important consequences on who gets represented and how.[3]

In *The Chain of Representation: Preferences, Institutions, and Policy across Presidential Systems*, Brian Crisp, Santiago Olivella, and Guillermo Rosas explore how electoral systems and policy-making rules distort the transformation of citizens preferences into policies. The book outlines and assesses a chain of representation: from voters to elected representatives and from the latter to public policies. Using data from Latinobarómetro and the Américas Barómeter, the Parliamentary Elites of Latin America surveys, and the Interamerican Development Bank and the United Nations, the authors create a series of indexes that measure citizens' and elites' (legislators and president) underlying "policy moods" along the pro-state and pro-market axis and state-to-market policy orientation for each country. Combining the indexes into a single scale (with comparable units), the authors then map them onto one another. For the first link of the chain, they find that voters are more likely to choose representatives that match and respond to their preferences only when electoral

[1] Michael Coppedge et al., "V-Dem Dataset V13," Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project, 2023, https://v-dem.net.

[2] Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, "Why Latin America's Democracies Are Stuck," *Journal of Democracy* 34, no. 1 (January 2023): 156–170.

[3] Flavia Freidenberg, ed., *Reformas electorales en América Latina* (Mexico City: Instituto Electoral de la Ciudad de México and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2022), https://biblio.juridicas.unam.mx/bjv/id/6833; Ernesto Stein, Mariano Tommasi, and Carlos Scartascini, eds., *How Democracy Works: Political Institutions, Actors and Arenas in Latin American Policymaking* (Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank and David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, 2010); Mariana Llanos and Leiv Marsteintredet, eds., *Presidential Breakdowns in Latin America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230105812.

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rules are relatively stable (and thus easy to follow) and they are not voting for president. For the second link of the chain, they conclude that systems with stronger separation of powers (i.e., government branches independent from each other) are more likely to produce "congruent" policies that match the representatives' policy preferences (on average across parties) but less likely to overcome the veto players that obstruct legislation.

The book provides a mixed picture of representation. On the one hand, countries like Costa Rica that have stable electoral rules and strong checks and balances seem to have higher levels of policy congruence. On the other hand, countries like Brazil—precisely the kind of mid- and low-level democracies mentioned earlier—with highly volatile institutions and stronger presidencies are poised to see lower levels of policy congruence. Concerningly, the book's findings reinforce the idea that liberal democracy (i.e., checks and balances) can stand in the way of effective representation.

The relationship between institutions and representation is, however, more complex. Focused on the connection between public and elite opinion, Crisp and colleagues' book takes electoral and policy-making norms as static. The authors cannot analyze the dynamic interplay between the various actors involved in the policy-making process, the tools at their disposal, and the space to maneuver that these provide.

In her book *Checking Presidential Power: Executive Decrees and the Legislative Process in New Democracies*, Victoria Palanza provides a more flexible understanding of legislation processes and outcomes. Focusing on the relationship between different branches of government, particularly between the legislative and executive, she models a theory of policy change that highlights the constitutional rules in place and political elites' (i.e., members of congress and the courts) willingness to enforce them. Palanza assumes that the lawmaking process is driven by external actors (e.g., lobbyists, interest groups) who make contributions to elect politicians in exchange for support for their preferred policies.

External actors, she argues, choose different pathways to achieve their policy goals depending on political elites' commitment to their own institution (e.g., legislative, judiciary). Because they sidestep the hurdles of the legislative process, presidential decrees can be assumed to be the easiest and preferred way to achieve policy outcomes. Yet they are not entirely risk-free. They can run the risk of being struck down with constitutional challenges. External actors use them accordingly. If the desired policies have no challengers, external actors calculate congress will not enforce its decision rights to oppose them and will choose the executive branch to push their initiatives via decree, regardless of their constitutionality. If, on the contrary, the policies are contested, external agents calculate that congress will not tolerate the enactment of unconstitutional decrees and will choose to achieve their policy goals via the regular legislative process.

Palanza evaluates this argument by testing the determinants of policy change pathways in Brazil (1988–2005) and Argentina (1983–2007). Using within-case and cross-case comparisons, she shows that institutional decision rights and political elites' willingness to enforce them as well as the stakes of the legislation help explain different policy-making pathways better than other contextual variables.

Palanza's book provides an interesting and empirically solid account of elite behavior in the policy-making process. Although she concurs with Crisp and coauthors that countries with strong presidents and weak checks and balances can be more effective in producing policies, she shows that this is limited to low-stakes legislation. In contrast to the existing literature on delegative democracy, veto players, and policy making that assumes executives with unlimited decree powers and static veto players, she shows that in highly contested legislation—arguably the one that matters the most—congress is more likely to

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play an important role in the policy-making process, and thus, more likely to increase representation.[4]

What kind of representation, of course, depends on who Palanza's "external actors" are and how strong is the electoral connection that ties them to policy makers. A basic assumption in her book is the fact that politicians will always try to be responsive to their external agents. It is unclear, however, who these external agents are and what their connection is to the broader citizenry.

In their book, *Diminished Parties: Democratic Representation in Contemporary Latin America*, Juan Pablo Luna, Rafael Piñeiro Rodríguez, Fernando Rosenblatt, and Gabriel Vommaro question the smoothness of this connection. Although all political parties are electoral vehicles, not all electoral vehicles are political parties. Organizations that bring office seekers to power, they argue, often fail to fulfill key functions of aggregation and transmission of collective values and interests. These political organizations, they posit, are different from political parties. Understanding them as subtypes, they stress, could help explain important deficiencies in democratic accountability.

Luna and colleagues argue that, to be a true party, political organizations need to fulfill two functions: horizontal coordination (between office seekers) and vertical coordination (between parties and constituencies). Uruguay's Frente Amplio (Pérez and coauthors's chapter), Argentina's Propuesta Republicana (Vommaro's chapter), Bolivia's Movimiento al Socialismo (Anria's chapter), Mexico's Partido Revolucionario Democrático and Morena (Combes's chapter), Costa Rica's Partido Liberal Nacional and Partido de Acción Ciudadana (Alfaro-Redondo and Gómez-Campos's chapter) and Venezuela's Voluntad Popular (Cyr's chatper) are examples of this type of political organization.

Parties that lack one or the other form of coordination cannot provide effective representation. Unrooted parties—those with high horizontal coordination but low vertical coordination—can be effective governors but cannot incorporate social demands. Ecuador's Movimiento Alianza País (Conaghan's chapter) provides an example of this type of organization. By the same token, uncoordinated parties—those with high vertical coordination but low horizontal coordination—represent society's cleavages but cannot govern effectively. Argentina's Justicialist Party (Vommaro's chapter), Paraguay's Colorado Party (Abente Brun's chapter), and—to a lesser extent—Colombia's Partido Conservador (Wills Otero's chapter) provide examples of this type of organization.

Last, independent political organizations—those with low vertical and horizontal coordination—cannot properly perform either function. They cannot translate social demands, nor can they resolve elite conflicts. Colombia's Partido Liberal (Wills Otero's chapter), Chile's Partido por la Democracia (Piñeiro Rodríguez and coauthors' chapter), Perú's Fuerza Popular (Vergara and Augusto's chapter), Paraguay's Partido Radical Auténtico (Abente Brun), and Guatemala's Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (Sánchez-Sibony and Lemus's chapter) provide examples of this type of organization.

Scholars have long discussed the role of parties and party systems when trying to understand the connection between citizens and politicians. There is extensive literature analyzing the rise, fall, and survival of political parties and party systems and their consequences for democracy.[5] *Diminished Parties* contributes to this literature by rescuing

[4] Guillermo O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 1 (January 1994): 55–69; George Tsebelis, *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002); Alemán and Tsebelis, *Legislative Institutions*; Stein, Tommasi, and Scartascini, *How Democracy Works*; Ernesto Stein et al., eds., *Policymaking in Latin America: How Politics Shapes Policies* (Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank and David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, 2008).

[5] Steven Levitsky et al., eds., *Challenges of Party-Building in Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Scott Mainwaring, ed., *Latin America Party Systems: Institutionalization, Decay and Collapse* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Noam Lupu, *Party Brands in Crisis: Partisanship, Brand Dilution, and the Breakdown of Political Parties in Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), https://doi.org/10.1017/

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the role of democratic accountability. If we expect political parties to help democracy—as most of the literature does—we need to conceptualize these organizations in terms of the entire "chain of representation." They cannot be limited to electing politicians; they must also channel political demands and promote enough elite coordination to transform these demands into effective policies.

This connection between citizens and those who represent them is at the crux of democratic development in Latin America. Who is and who is not part of the political arena is key to understanding democratic performance and legitimacy in the region. In their edited volume *The Inclusionary Turn in Latin American Democracies*, Diana Kapiszewski, Steven Levitsky, and Deborah J. Yashar analyze Latin America's 1990s and 2000s wave of inclusionary reforms. In the aftermath of the third wave of democracy, the region implemented policies and institutions designed to include indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, and other minorities; enhance participation in policy making; and improve redistributive social policies, providing coverage to previously excluded sectors. The book's contributions study these efforts, comparing them with the incorporation theorized by David and Ruth B. Collier, and assess their effectiveness, and overall impact on democratic politics.[6] Its chapters analyze participatory institutions (Goldfrank; Mayka and Rich), welfare expansion (Garay and Hunter), parties' and movements' linkages with minorities and popular actors (Pop-Eleches; Dunning and Novaes; Etchmendy; Palmer-Rubin; Boas), as well as the characteristics, reach, and drivers of the populist turn in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia (Handlin; Cameron; Mazzuca; Elkins; Seawright and Barrenechea).

Though impressive, as pointed out by Kapiszewski and coeditors in the introduction and Kenneth M. Roberts in the conclusion, inclusion efforts were limited in the 1990s and 2000s. Like the labor incorporation in the mid-twentieth century, these efforts enhanced recognition, political power, and resources but in a way that thwarted their institutional legacies. The inclusionary turn was more pluralistic and democratic. It reached beyond organized labor to informal-sector workers, indigenous groups, and other minorities, as well as unorganized individuals (who had been left out in the midcentury incorporation), and did so without the corporatist structure imposed in earlier incorporation efforts. However, it was also less enduring. The fact that most governments reached out to a larger (but unorganized constituency) in democratic settings hindered their ability to mobilize for more meaningful redistribution and overcome conservative resistance to deep-seated changes. Consequently, the reforms implemented were, with few exceptions (i.e., Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador), "easy redistribution" (16): they did not threaten powerful interests or entailed substantial institutional disruption.

The *Inclusionary Turn in Latin American Democracies* provides an insightful, comprehensive, and thought-provoking overview of inclusion (or lack thereof) in Latin America in the past three decades. In doing so, the book highlights what Kapiszewski and coeditors title the "paradoxes of democracy" (31). Democratic institutions, they posit, generate incentives for inclusion but also mechanisms to protect the status quo. In an effort to circumvent opposition, leaders have sometimes chosen to weaken these institutions. Consequently, countries like Chile and Uruguay experienced limited inclusion but

CBO9781139683562; Jennifer Cyr, *The Fates of Political Parties: Institutional Crisis, Continuity, and Change in Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Jana Morgan, *Bankrupt Representation and Party System Collapse* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011); Santiago Anria, *When Movements Become Parties: The Bolivian MAS in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018);

[6] David Collier and Ruth B. Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

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remained democratic while countries like Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador were able to push for deeper forms of inclusion but at the cost of their democratic regimes.

Populism

The rise of populist leaders is at the center of this paradox. Latin America's inability to transform its new democracies into more inclusive and responsive regimes early in the 1990s, coupled with major economic and security crises, opened the door to populist executives. Leaders like Hugo Chávez (1999–2013), Evo Morales (2006–2019), and Rafael Correa (2007–2017) on the Left, as well as Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010) and Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000), on the Right, came to power in countries in the midst of economic and security crises, weak governance, and broken representation. Using what María Esperanza Casullo calls the "populist myth," these leaders filled the gap. Providing answers and proposing easy-to-follow solutions, they were able to generate a sense of identity and representation that other politicians with more "technocratic" discourses had been unable to create (16).

Chávez, Morales, Correa, Uribe, and Fujimori were neither the only nor the first populists in Latin America. Populism has been pervasive across time and space in the region. In *¿Por qué funciona el populismo? El discurso que sabe construir explicaciones convincentes de un mundo en crisis*, Casullo seeks to understand what makes populism such a successful tool to attain (and retain) power. Different from other accounts of populism, which define it as a "thin ideology" or a strategy to attain power, Casullo conceives of the phenomenon as a discourse.[7] It is a form of narrative that shapes political identities by dichotomizing the political arena in imagined and discursively constructed antagonistic collectives: the "good people" and the "bad elite."

In Casullo's view, this discourse works because it is built on a myth, a "populist" myth that—in contexts of crisis—effectively defines the hero ("us" but also the leader who interprets our desires) and the "villain" ("them" but also those "traitors" from the in-group that deviate from the leader) and justifies why "the people" need the populist leader to repair the damage done, lead the epic battle against "the others," and achieve the historical redemption "the people" deserve.

None of these categories is set. Key to the success of populism, Casullo explains, are the emptiness of "us" and "them" and their perpetual antagonism. To survive, populist leaders use words and images to constantly create and re-create identities. They translate "objective situations" into simple narratives that enhance in-group cohesion and out-group disdain. To do so, populists leverage their personal stories to present themselves as "outsiders" uninterested in politics but morally outraged and willing to enter the political game to redeem specific past offenses suffered by these historically anchored imagined communities.

¿Por qué funciona el populismo? uses this theory to explain the resilience of Latin America's populism. Unlike Fernando Lugo in Uruguay, Casullo explains that Hugo Chávez, Rafael Correa, Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, and Evo Morales were able to survive. Using the populist myth to explain to people "who was to blame" for the crisis they were living, convince them that they (the leaders) were the true "redeemers" or "saviors," and create a shared identity (among unorganized groups that had been sidelined from the political

[7] Kirk A. Hawkins and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, "The Ideational Approach to Populism," *Latin American Research Review* 52, no. 4 (2017): 513–528, https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.85; Kurt Weyland, "Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics," *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 1 (2001): 1–22; Kurt Weyland, "Populism: A Political-Strategic Approach," in *Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 48–72, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.2.

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arena), these charismatic individuals built movements that allowed them not only to push further in their reforms (redistributive or not) but also, and very importantly, to stay in power.

Casullo's book is an important contribution to the literature on populism. The populist myth is a flexible conceptual tool that allows for the analysis of various types of populists with different ideologies and Manichaean worldviews. Moving beyond common accounts of clientelistic support or institutional overreach, her book also helps us better understand how populists legitimize themselves.[8] Contributing to the emerging literature on the microfoundations of charisma, her book sheds light on how populist leaders and movements engage with voters: what they provide that other more technocratic (but not necessarily less clientelistic) leaders cannot.[9] In doing so, Casullo offers us an interesting and original explanation to the pervasive appeal of populism. The populist myth cannot explain the success and failure of populist leaders (some do last more than others, and populist governments eventually end), but it can certainly help explain why—in a region full of weak democracies—populist leaders keep reappearing and overpowering more skilled and experienced politicians across time and space.

In this sense, Casullo's book is nicely complemented by Julio Carrión's *A Dynamic Theory of Populism in Power: The Andes in Comparative Perspective*, which asks not about the resilience of populism itself but about the variation in survival among populists. Using comparative historical analysis in five cases of populism in Latin America—Hugo Chávez (1999–2013) in Venezuela, Rafael Correa (2007–2017) in Ecuador, Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000) in Perú, Evo Morales (2006–2019) in Bolivia, and Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010) in Colombia—it seeks to explain why some populists successfully stay in power and others do not.

Unlike Casullo, Carrión understands populism as a political strategy, a tactic used by charismatic politicians to attain and exercise power. For Carrión, populists are inherently antipluralistic and confrontational toward opponents; they distrust checks and balances and want to undermine them. To do that, they engage in five different "moments." The first is what Carrión calls the "tsunami moment," a time of crisis when, disenchanted with existing elites, voters are willing and eager to vote for outsiders and support broad institutional reforms. The second moment is the "Hobbesian moment." Once in office, Carrión argues, a populist will seek to undermine checks and balances. Attempts at executive aggrandizement will set off a battle for political supremacy, a moment of heightened conflict and polarization between the populist and her opponents. The Hobbesian moment is, therefore, a battle for survival. If the populist loses, she won't be able to achieve the political asymmetry required to solidify her project (the case of Álvaro Uribe). If she wins, she'll be able to rule unconstrained, leading to the third moment—the "populist movement"— which is characterized by the emergence of a superpresidency in which there is total subordination of the legislative and the judiciary to the president.

Not all "populist moments" look alike, explains Carrión. All populists must rely on the repressive apparatus to attain political asymmetry. In countries where they also resort to unorganized masses, populism will be contested (Alberto Fujimori and Rafael Correa). In countries where they add the support of organized movements instead, populism will be dominant (Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales).

[8] Kirk A. Hawkins, *Venezuela's Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Javier Corrales, "Democratic Backsliding through Electoral Irregularities: The Case of Venezuela," *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies/Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, no. 109 (2020): 41–65.

[9] Caitlin Andrews-Lee, *The Emergence and Revival of Charismatic Movements: Argentine Peronism and Venezuelan Chavismo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108917353.

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Carrión's argument taps into an important but largely unexplored question: why, despite the rise of populist outsiders, do we see some democracies break but not others?[10] In doing so, it contributes to an emerging literature on the success and failure of potential autocrats.[11] The sequence he proposes is very useful to better understand the progressive encroachment of populists in power and accurately captures processes of democratic erosion worldwide. I particularly like the space given to conflict in this book. Although the outcome of the "Hobbesian moment" is a little underdetermined (see Selçuk's review of this book[12]), and it is not entirely clear why some populists emerge victorious out of this period and others do not, its inclusion as a key part of the process of backsliding highlights the dynamic nature of democratic erosion, something missing in many accounts of this phenomenon.

The contested meaning of democracy

Carrión's and Casullo's different (though related) accounts of populism bring us back to questions about the practice and meaning of democracy. For Carrión, populism is inherently antidemocratic. For Casullo, less so. Briefly acknowledging that some populist movements do end up as authoritarian regimes, the Argentine scholar also emphasizes populists' ability to incorporate and activate previously unengaged populations organized in new imagined communities. In other words, notwithstanding being risky for democracy, populism in Casullo's definition can also enhance inclusion and representation.

The tension between the two understandings of this phenomenon is emphasized by a similarly contested conception of democracy. At its core, democracy is a government by the people for the people. In practice, this basic tenet has many interpretations. In her book *Democracia para Venezuela: ¿Representativa, participativa o populista?,* Margarita López Maya provides an overview of the contestation between two key modes of democracy in Latin America: liberal representative democracy and direct democracy. Liberal representative democracy, explains the scholar, understands democracy as a system in which citizens vote to elect representatives, endowing them with the power to produce legislation. Emphasizing individual rights, in liberal representative democracies, citizens are entitled to elect and be elected. They do not have direct input on the policy-making process. Their sovereignty is passive, limited to consent (or not) for others to rule. Direct democracy, on the contrary, compares López Maya, conceives people's sovereignty as direct and active. Rather than choosing representatives to produce legislation, it proposes to give that power directly to the people. Mechanisms of direct democracy (e.g., referenda, plebiscites, petitions)—often included in liberal representative democracies—allow citizens unmediated participation in the policy-making process.

Liberal representative democracies, explains López Maya, are often criticized for their lack of inclusion and inability to deal with structural inequality. These regimes, critics posit, weaken citizens' sovereignty. They are ultimately unable to deal with the uneven weight economic and social elites have in selecting representatives. Although it is

[10] Tom Ginsburg and Aziz Huq, "Democracy's Near Misses," *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 4 (2018): 16–30, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0059.

[11] Samuel Handlin, *State Crisis in Fragile Democracies: Polarization and Political Regimes in South America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Matthew R. Cleary and Aykut Öztürk, "When Does Backsliding Lead to Breakdown? Uncertainty and Opposition Strategies in Democracies at Risk," *Perspectives on Politics* (2020): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592720003667; Laura Gamboa, *Resisting Backsliding: Opposition Strategies against the Erosion of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Matthew R. Cleary and Aykut Öztürk, "When Does Backsliding Lead to Breakdown? Uncertainty and Opposition Strategies in Democracies at Risk," *Perspectives on Politics* (2020): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592720003667.

[12] Julio Carrión, *A Dynamic Theory of Populism in Power: The Andes in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

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presented as a panacea to address these flaws, direct democracy mechanisms are also problematic, explains López Maya. Often used to overcome institutional constraints, they create tensions between constituent and constituted powers. If led from the top down, they can also be used (and abused) to legitimize leaders, enhance in-group cohesion, and undermine checks and balances.

López Maya uses the case of Venezuela—with long and detailed historical analysis at the national level and an in-depth ethnographic study of the more medium-term transformations of participatory institutions at the local level—to showcase the tensions, problems, uses, and abuses of liberal representative and participatory democracy. Proposed to resolve Venezuela's crisis of representation direct democracy mechanisms, she shows, enhanced representation during the first years of Chávez's government (1999–2007) but were eventually weaponized to destroy institutions of liberal representation that obstructed his radical agenda (2007–2013).

Although many scholars have analyzed Venezuela's democratic decline, few have done so through the lens of liberal representative and participatory democracy. *Democracia para Venezuela* does a masterful job describing the tensions inherent in both modes of democracy and connecting them to the Venezuelan case. In doing so, López Maya contributes not only to the literature on Venezuela but also to the literature on populism, which often sides with one of these modes of democracy, sidestepping the tensions inherent in them. Acknowledging the limitations of liberal democracy, López Maya is ultimately able to trace Venezuela's dynamic erosion of democracy—one that started off with good (and effective) efforts to enhance representation and inclusion but ended in authoritarianism via the misuse of these mechanisms.

The kind of nuance proposed by López Maya is important for two reasons. First, it allows us to understand the Venezuelan case in more detail. Second, it decouples populism from authoritarianism, inviting us to understand both as Janus-faced, complex phenomena. On the one hand, the book reminds us that populism has the power to use some forms of direct democracy to address structural inequality and exclusion that liberal democratic institutions cannot quite deal with.[13] On the other hand, it reminds us how these forms of participatory democracy can eventually be weaponized to exclude opponents (the "others"), undermine checks and balances, and destroy the most basic tenets of democracy.

This discussion of inclusion, representation, populism, and democracy is further complicated by democracy's normative value. Since the interwar period, activists, leaders, and governments have weaponized different understandings of democracy as a mechanism to legitimize themselves and demonize their opponents. In her book *Shifting the Meaning of Democracy: Race, Politics, and Culture in the United States and Brazil*, Jessica Lynn Graham studies the dynamics of that tug-of-war over the meaning of democracy. Using an impressive array of archival documents, the author shows how Black activists were able to leverage the competition between fascists, communists, the United States, and the Brazilian government for who was "truly" democratic in order to advance racial equality in the 1930s and 1940s.

Few books provide such a clear picture of the fight for the meaning of democracy. Communists and fascists, Graham shows, opposed liberal democracy. Pointing to racial exclusion in the United States and Brazil (in the case of the communists) or their individualist nature (in the case of the fascists), they sought to undermine the democratic credentials of Western democracies. Black activists in the United States and Brazil amplified these criticisms. Interested in protecting their democratic credentials, between 1930 and 1945, US and Brazilian authorities responded, advancing what Graham

[13] Santiago Anria, "More Inclusion, Less Liberalism in Bolivia," *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 3 (2016): 99–108, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0037.

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classifies as "non-action-oriented forms of racial democracy" (9). They acknowledged racial inequality and deployed a racially inclusive nationalism (mostly via cultural expressions) but failed to implement legislation or policies to truly address it.

Graham's book is conceptually and empirically rich. The author outlines not only the ways communist and fascist groups (inside and outside the Americas) explicitly weaponized democracy to delegitimize their opponents but also the forms their messages took across the Atlantic, the mechanisms by which Black activists in different countries leveraged them to advance racial democracy, and the authorities' response to these criticisms. The book is key to understanding the advances and setbacks of racial inclusion in the United States and Brazil and to understanding the complex relationship of inequality, representation, populism, and democracy and the conceptual tug-of-war around them.

Like leaders and activists in the interwar period, populists and their opponents have long weaponized democracy. Criticizing the limitations of liberal representative democracy, the former question liberal democracies and propose their own version of plebiscitarian democracy as the "true" democratic regime. Leaders in liberal democracies have responded in kind. Bypassing important questions of representation and inclusion, they accuse populist leaders of authoritarianism, emphasizing the importance of individual rights and liberties as well as checks and balances. Although I side with the latter conception of democracy, leaders in these regimes should think more carefully about and seek to address the failings in inclusion and representation their opponents wage at them.

Conclusion

The eight books reviewed here connect on their analysis of democracy: what it is and what it ought to be. Together, the books highlight three interrelated debates. The first set of books discusses representation and inclusion, or lack of thereof, in Latin America. For Palanza, representation is a given. Policy making originates with external agents connected to policy makers via elections. For Crisp and coauthors and Luna and colleagues, representation is a bit more complicated. Institutional arrangements and the characteristics of political parties affect citizens' ability to exert influence over government. Kapiszewski and colleagues go beyond representation and discuss inclusion. They posit that the inclusionary turn of the late 1990s and early 2000s was both far-reaching and constrained. It brought new groups into the political arena but was unable to achieve long-term institutional changes. When it did, it did so at the peril of democracy.

The second set of books tackles the tension between liberal democracy and inclusion from two different definitions of populism. For Carrión, populism is inherently antidemocratic. For Casullo, that is not necessarily the case—populists use a particular discourse to fill in gaps in representation. They bring citizens into the political arena, giving them a sense of identity that other more "technocratic" discourses are less poised to give.

In the last set of books, López Maya and Graham unpack this debate. They highlight the dispute around the concept of democracy and how that conversation takes place. Populists have an ambiguous relationship with democracy. They criticize important failures of Latin America's representative democracies and seek to address them using mechanisms of participatory democracy. But they can also weaponize these mechanisms to undermine checks and balances and extend their time in office, effectively destroying democracy. As long as their critics fail to recognize the shortcomings of inclusion and representation in liberal democracies, leaders will weaponize this kind of more collective direct democracy to legitimize their ruling and undermine their opponents.

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