

Political Participation of Civil Society in Latin America

Review Essay by Peadar Kirby

- *Social Movements and Leftist Governments in Latin America: Confrontation or co-optation?*, edited by Gary Prevost, Carlos Oliva Campos and Harry E. Vanden, Zed Books, 2012.
- *Culturas políticas en la región andina*, edited by Christian Buschges, Olaf Kaltmeier and Sebastian Thies, Iberoamericana, 2011.
- *La plasmación política de la diversidad: Autonomía y participación política indígena en América Latina*, edited by Felipe Gómez Isa and Susana Ardanaz Iriarte, Universidad de Deusto, 2011.
- *Venezuela's Bolivarian Democracy: Participation, Politics, and Culture under Chávez*, edited by David Smilde and Daniel Hellinger, Duke University Press, 2011.

Since the early 1990s when the Brazilian Workers' Party for the first time began to implement participatory budgetary processes at municipal level, new forms of popular participation came to be identified with the emerging 'new left' in Latin America. As more and more countries came to be governed by these parties from the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s, the promotion of popular participation came to be widely seen as one of the distinguishing features of the new political wave, a key feature uniting what was otherwise a very disparate group of governments. Yet, apart from studies of participatory budgeting and from general discussions of relations between new left governments and civil society, there has been little systematic examination of the extent and nature of popular participation in left-led Latin America. The four books reviewed in this essay, two in English and two in Spanish (with one chapter in Portuguese) begin finally to open up the issue to more detailed and systematic examination, drawing attention to

the innovative nature of what is happening in the region, and allowing some tentative conclusions to be drawn.

Social movements

The book *Social Movements and Leftist Governments in Latin America* poses the key question in its title as to whether the relationship is defined by confrontation or co-optation, a somewhat sharp juxtaposition of possibilities on which the book unfortunately fails to draw conclusions. Despite this, it is a good introductory text for readers not familiar with the history of social movements in the region, the rise of the new left and the role such movements played in this. The book is divided into country cases with six chapters each covering Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Venezuela. Some chapters such as Gary Prevost's on Argentina and Marc Becker's on Ecuador take a rather general and descriptive approach, others such as Harry E. Vanden on the Brazilian landless rural workers' movement (MST) and its relationship to the PT governments and Edward Greaves on Chilean urban popular movements in some municipalities of Santiago choose to focus on particular movements, while the chapters by Waltraud Q. Morales on Bolivia and Daniel Hellinger on Venezuela are more systematic examinations of the tensions between social movements and the left-led governments in each of these countries.

While the book is therefore somewhat uneven, what it clearly shows is the wide variety of experiences that characterize the relationships being examined. The key variables, though they are not systematically identified, are the character of each of the governments (including the personality of each of the Presidents) on the one hand, and the history, makeup and orientation of the social movements on the other. The nature of each variable and the interactions between them result in each case being markedly different and very difficult to fit into a neat juxtaposition between confrontation or co-optation. While Prevost offers a now familiar account of the Kirchner governments dividing movements such as the *piqueteros*, he concludes that this has helped provide a new stability, though the jury is still out 'on whether or not this represents a stable, long-term relationship' (33). On Ecuador, Becker outlines a case that is characterized perhaps in equal measure by confrontation and co-optation in which Correa has centralized power and proven adept at dividing and weakening social movements which increasingly label him as being right-wing and pro-neoliberal. Becker concludes that 'Correa appears to be playing a dangerous game of consolidating short-term gains at the potential risk of the long-term prospects of his socialist policies' (134).

Vanden shows the waning influence of the landless rural workers' movement (MST) in Brazil on the Workers' Party governments which have become more allied with rural agribusiness interests. He fears that the MST and other social movements, representing those sectors of Brazilian society that still suffer injustice and exclusion, 'would be left out in the cold' (47). Greaves's insightful chapter on Chile reveals a very different terrain of social movement-state interaction in which 'a strong, legalistic, bureaucratic, complex, and multi-tiered state ... extends its presence deep into civil society to dispense an array of targeted, focalized social programmes to a number of different groups, and which is capable of shaping political and associational space' (107), fragmenting social movements and insulating the state from popular pressures. The chapter shows how a coherent and determined state can fundamentally reconfigure the terrain of social movement activity, though it is surprising that no attention is paid to the student protests that emerged under Bachelet and have proven a determined focus of resistance to Piñera.

The cases of Bolivia and Venezuela show the interaction of mobilized social movements and a state committed to developing a participatory democracy. Yet both cases are very different. On Bolivia, Morales describes in detail the contentious politics of social movement activism that helped elect Evo Morales and in part continues to support him, and the vigorous opposition he has faced from lowland regions and even the COB trade union confederation. For all the success of building what Morales calls 'Bolivia's highly participatory social movement democracy' (83), chronic protests and roadblocks have continued. But, as the author emphasizes, 'Morales' presidency has been unique among Latin American leaders, providing an instructive lesson on how building trust and a working alliance between social movements and a progressive, like-minded executive can advance fundamental reforms within the democratic process and without destructive violent revolution' (84). Hellinger illustrates a similar dynamic in the case of Venezuela where he describes the close links between social movements and the government of Hugo Chávez. He makes the very good point that, in a country 'with a state that enjoys outsized economic resources in relationship to the productivity of labour, social movements in Venezuela are bound to be more state-focused than their counterparts elsewhere in the hemisphere' (144). Yet he emphasizes that, despite high levels of support for Chávez among social movement members, 'Bolivarian officials often find themselves in confrontation with local movements of core supporters in the working class, the poor and the peasantry' demanding better services or protesting against deficient state provisions (148). Venezuela

therefore is a much more complex case than often appears from outside and is considered further below in discussing the Smilde and Hellinger volume.

Political culture

If the book on social movements is by authors working in US universities (with the exception of Oliva Campos who is in Havana), that on Andean political cultures is largely by Germans and is published by the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut. In their introduction of *Culturas políticas en la región andina*, the editors highlight the political mobilization of the indigenous population as a new political dynamic in the Andean countries of Colombia, Bolivia and Ecuador. They write that the particular alliances between broad social movements and political actors outside the traditional party system raise important questions about changes in political culture in the Andean region since the 1990s. The contributors to the book analyse the political and discursive practices used by different actors and discuss their importance in relation to the political continuities and changes in the Andean region since the 1990s. The book's 20 chapters are grouped into five sections: the first examines political practices and representations and whether they contribute to a participatory democracy or a resurrection of authoritarian-populist political styles; the second looks at political actors and public spaces; the third is entitled 'politicizations of the ethnic, ethnicizations of the political'; the fourth looks at transnational cooperation and conflicts, and the final section covers culture as a political resource. It is disappointing however that the editors do not draw conclusions from the very varied mix of chapters about the changes in Andean political culture and the relations between social movements and political actors.

The first section examines in some detail the interactions of popular organizations with state entities with chapters on Venezuela, Colombia, Bolivia and Ecuador. The chapters on Venezuela and Ecuador offer the most valuable conclusions. Writing on ten years of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, Hans-Jurgen Burchardt acknowledges the significant improvement in the incomes and in the basic provision of goods especially to poorer sectors but identifies many problems in the complexity and lack of institutionalization of the many social initiatives that characterize the Chávez administration. On Ecuador, Pablo Ospina Peralta dissects how the Correa administration is using an understanding of corporativism systematically to disempower and marginalize trade unions, indigenous groups, ecological organizations and professional associations, thereby making void the commitment to building a participatory democracy in the 2008 constitution. Nidia Catherine González's chapter on Colombia is, together with the Alci-

bíades Escué Musicué chapter in the *Plasmación política* book, the only treatment of Colombia in these four volumes. Both chapters focus on how local participatory processes (the municipality of Mogotes and the Nasa indigenous people in Cauca) are breaking down an exclusionary dominant culture and clientelist practices of inclusion, thus implementing some of the promise of the 1991 constitution and protecting against guerrilla incursion. The focus, however, is very local and does not permit more general conclusions to be drawn. The chapter on Bolivia by Andrea Kramer and Ulrich Muller also has a narrower focus tracing attempts to develop greater ownership within the decentralization processes and urges the development of social capital in conjunction with projects of political reform and respect for a pluriethnic society.

Section II on political actors and public spaces has a similar uneven quality. The two most valuable chapters are those by María Pilar García-Guadilla on urban land committees (CTUs) and the communal councils (CCs) in Venezuela (she also has a chapter in the Smilde and Hellinger volume with a slightly different focus: see below for discussion of her two chapters) and Simón Ramírez Voltaire's examination of the historical roots of recent conflicts in Bolivia between the 'media luna' departments and the central government in La Paz going back to the 1950s. He shows how the agrarian trade unions in the Cochabamba area emerged as key institutions from the 1952 revolution negotiating political power 'with consequences for political subjectivities (ethnicity, gender and class relations), practices of citizenship, territorial control (centre-periphery), governability and the construction of the precarious mestizo national identity' (176). At the same time in Santa Cruz the comité cívico emerged as a parallel structure to the communal and local governments with the role of defending the interests of the department. 'One can sum up that in Bolivia there are two opposed projects, expressing themselves in different political practices and imaginaries and articulating two political spaces' (192), he concludes.

The third section on ethnic politics has somewhat of an historical focus so that its contribution to the contemporary emergence of the phenomenon is limited. The most valuable chapters are those by Almut Schilling-Vacaflor and Bettina Schorr, and by Jonas Wolff. The first of these shows how the social organizations that mobilize and structure the 'indigenous movement' in Bolivia today do not conform a monolithic bloc but rather contain profound differences within and between them, some more pluralist and classist in their self-identity and others more exclusively indigenous. The Wolff chapter examines the weakening of the indigenous movement in Ecuador since 2002 identifying the movement's success in overthrowing

presidents but not in improving the lives of their adherents, and the co-optation of leaders, groups and organizations by the state and political parties resulting in division and demobilization within the organizations. In more historical chapters, Christian Buschges outlines the different phases of how the liberal republics dealt with their indigenous populations, from the independence period to the assimilationist project that dominated policy for much of the twentieth century. Marta Iruozqui examines different processes of politicization and national incorporation of the indigenous population of Bolivia in the nineteenth century.

Section IV on transnational cooperation and conflicts contains chapters by Hartmut Sangmeister and Alexa Schonstedt examining different models of regional integration which they describe as containing ‘a large dose of utopia’ (314). Theodor Rathgeber looks at inter-Andean cooperation among indigenous organizations which, though weak, he sees as proposing ‘a different concept of the use of natural resources and of autonomous regulation’ (333). The final section treats culture as a political resource with a chapter by Olaf Kaltmeier and Sebastian Thies arguing that the 2007 UNDP report on the Bolivian state expresses a multicultural vision produced from the standpoint of mestizo intellectuals, and one by Marco Navas Alvear examining the role of Radio La Luna in the political crisis of 2005 in Ecuador which resulted in the overthrow of President Lucio Gutiérrez. These chapters echo some of the cultural themes in the Smilde and Hellinger volume. Quite distinctive is Marco Thomas Bosshard’s chapter going back to the indigenous Warisata school (1931-38) to throw new light on the educational reforms of Evo Morales.

Indigenous political participation

The volume *La plasmación política de la diversidad: Autonomía y participación política indígena en América Latina* contains the papers presented at a congress at the Pedro Arrupe Human Rights Institute of the University of Deusto in Bilbao in 2010. Its first part, on indigenous autonomy, opens with a philosophical chapter on the ethical and political tensions around the issue of autonomy for indigenous peoples as expressed in the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples centred on the core tensions between the individual and the collective in terms of which is the subject of rights, and the tensions between autonomy and state integrity. Chapter 2 examines the right to self-determination and autonomy from a legal standpoint. While recognizing that the right to self-determination does not confer a right to secession, he argues that this does not make it a lesser right as that would imply ‘a narrow and statist vision of humanity and of the

world' and 'blind to the contemporary realities of a world which is moving simultaneously to greater interconnection and decentralization, a world in which the formal frontiers of statehood do not determine totally the order of communities and of authority' (51). He argues that 'substantive self-determination can be achieved through a range of possibilities of institutional reorganization different to the creation of states' (51). The rest of Part I, with chapters on the Mapuche in Chile and Argentina, on Chiapas, on the revitalization of indigenous languages in Guatemala and on indigenous languages in Colombia, shows just how far from realization are the rights enshrined in the UN Declaration.

Part II examines indigenous political participation in the national sphere. Chapter 7, by Salvador Martí i Puig provides an excellent overview of the reasons for the emergence of indigenous peoples as key political actors and their impacts on the domestic political arena. The author identifies three central impacts: the recognition of indigenous rights in many Latin American constitutions; the stronger emergence in the discourse of indigenous leaders of an ever closer link between territory, self-government and jurisdiction as expressions of the right to self-determination; and the emergence of indigenous political parties. However, he concludes by observing that over recent years the cycle of major mobilization and of the priority of indigenous issues on the national agenda seems to have waned. Chapter 8, by Carlos Mamani Condori, gives a comprehensive overview of the indigenous peoples of Bolivia and the extensive rights they have now gained in the constitution of the plurinational state. However, he warns that 'both in the local as in the national spheres, the fullness of multiculturalism as a strategy of coexistence among different actors has not yet been fully grasped' (197). These chapters are a sobering reminder that, despite the emergence of the indigenous as strong political actors, they continue to face daunting challenges.

The final part of the book examines indigenous political participation in the international sphere. Rodolfo Stavenhagen gives a succinct but excellent and comprehensive overview of the emergence of indigenous peoples as a political force on the international stage. In a longer chapter, Luis Rodríguez-Piñero Royo critically examines the successes of indigenous peoples at an international level but also the limitations they face. He writes that their successes derive from 'the capacity to translate indigenous demands into the language and procedures of governmental organizations' (259), particularly those associated with promoting human rights. However, pointing to the 'gradual loss of effectiveness of indigenous peoples' in these fora he also highlights both the co-opting strategies of governments and

the limitations that working in these fora pose for wider demands of indigenous for self-determination. In her chapter on indigenous participation in negotiations on the Convention on Biological Diversity, Patricia Borraz Fernández offers an example of these limitations as she shows how states effectively limited the recognition of indigenous rights to issues that did not limit their own room for manoeuvre. These echo the principal conclusions of the previous section. The book's final chapter offers 'a vision from Euskadi' (the Basque country) on the issues raised in the book. Joseba Arregi Orúe examines the activities of indigenous peoples in international fora as an example of 'paradiplomacy', carving out new possibilities for self-determination beyond the existing option between assimilation and secession, clearly issues that are of major concern for many Basques.

Participatory democracy

The final book, *Venezuela's Bolivarian Democracy*, co-edited by David Smilde and Daniel Hellinger, is devoted exclusively to Venezuelan participatory democracy. In his introduction, Smilde writes that commentators on Venezuela were ill-prepared for the phenomenon of Chávez because their overwhelming focus had been on the central institutions of the state, and on parties and unions, leading them to miss 'the extent of discontent and the burgeoning forms of alternative participation growing within Venezuelan society' (1). Therefore the unifying focus of the book is 'to understand actually existing democracy in contemporary Venezuela through empirical research on political phenomena outside the central institutions of the state' (2). Identifying the growing forms of exclusion during the Punto Fijo period and the downfall of its highly structured division of power, he emphasizes that it was those excluded sectors, organizing in their own autonomous ways, that provided the basis for the rise of Chávez. Smilde is particularly insightful in conceptualizing spaces of participation in cultural terms, embodying 'visions of citizenship, democracy, social obligation, and the future' (18) which are found not only in the central institutions of the state 'but also in social spaces and cultural discourses' (20), conceiving of them as fragments of a participatory democracy.

This excellent introduction sets the agenda for this ground-breaking book with its 12 chapters covering a wide range of topics, from activists' views of democracy to analyses of some of the organizations of Venezuela's participatory democracy, from community radio and television to popular history, *telenovelas* and online blogs, and from racial labelling as a political practice to the relationship of Catholic and Evangelical churches to *chavismo*. For this reviewer, the most helpful in offering insights into the

prospects for a more participatory democracy to emerge are the three chapters dealing with organizational forms of such a democracy. Veteran Venezuelan social scientists, Margarita López Maya and Luis E. Lander offer an excellent overview of the origins, ideas and implementation of participatory democracy in their country. They write that chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution consecrates citizens' rights to direct, semi-direct and indirect participation, not only through the vote but also through the 'formulation, execution, and control of public administration' (59). The state's role is seen as a facilitator to empower citizens with three key objectives: correcting the unjust distribution of income and wealth; overcoming discrimination in access to fundamental human rights such as nutrition, health, housing and education; and the development of full citizenship with values of solidarity, responsibility and participatory attitudes (64-5). '[I]t is apparent that the popular sectors have been experiencing surprising levels of social mobilization, providing them with increasing levels of organization and a growing sense of efficacy,' they write (65). In chapters on urban land committees by María Pilar García-Guadilla and on the *Misiones* by Kirk A. Hawkins, Guillermo Rosas and Michael E. Johnson some of these forms of popular social mobilization are empirically examined. In keeping with her chapter in the *Culturas políticas* book (see above), García-Guadilla writes that their scarcity of resources and limitations of space 'can tempt the CTUs to become part of the extensive populist and clientelist webs and networks' created by the government (98) though in the chapter in the first of these books reviewed she compares the urban land committees (CTUs) with the communal councils (CCs) pointing out that, in the case of the latter, 'the structure of traditional clientelist relationships has not been broken and, for this reason, they are not spaces in which new subjectivities can be constructed or in which divergent forms of citizenship and society are being promoted' (149).

The range of *Misiones* created by the Chávez government is, write Hawkins, Rosas and Johnson, 'designed not only to bring the benefits of the welfare state to the poor, especially those in the informal sector, but to alter the governance of the economy from one emphasizing atomistic participation in the market to one relying on cooperatives, state coordination, and local know-how – in a word, what the government celebrates as "endogenous development"' (190). However, the authors find them almost entirely government financed and controlled with a tendency towards greater centralization. 'There is usually only a thin veneer of self-governance at the community level,' they write (198). However, they argue that this cannot be seen as a return to the clientelism of the Puntofijo era as

the evidence they uncover points instead to forms of ‘charismatic linkages with a populist discourse’ as benefits are offered not based on electoral conditions (ensuring votes) but rather based on a strong affective attachment to the person of Chávez. (They report workers on some of the *Misiones* using words like *amor*, *ídolo*, *lo adoro*, when speaking of the President (207)). The conclusions of López Maya and Lander therefore seem comprehensive: ‘In sum, the future remains open to contradictory tendencies’ (78). While there is an unprecedented level of mobilization ‘nevertheless participatory and organizational enthusiasm has not always implied greater autonomy in popular mobilization and organization’ (76), ‘while the concentration of power in the presidency has arguably weakened representative democracy’ (62).

The rest of the chapters focus on various aspects of the rich political culture of contemporary Venezuela, documenting ‘the complex and contradictory ways in which popular sectors engage with the Bolivarian revolution’ (159), as Alejandro Valesco puts it in his chapter on the challenge of popular history, identifying the ‘conflicting currents of loyalty and disloyalty in the heart of *chavismo*’ (159). Again and again the detailed empirical examination that characterizes the book surprises the reader as it shows just how more complex and rich is the reality than is often captured in academic and journalistic description and comment. Daniel Hellinger’s chapter on attitudes to democracy among social activists shows both a mature belief in Venezuelan democracy, a reluctance to dispense with political parties and the prioritization of equality and inclusiveness as key characteristics of democracy. The differences between more popular barrios and more middle class ones are less than might have been expected. Naomi Schiller in her chapter on community television shows how barrio-based media makers who depend on government resources imagine, discuss and engage the logic of the state, the tension between the state and grassroots groups and how they view their own autonomy from the state. As she writes, these debates, reflections and negotiated relationships are ‘forms of state formation’ (109). A similar reality is described by Sujatha Fernandes in looking at community media that have expanded dramatically since Chávez rose to power. The chapter reveals how community radio, TV and newspapers ‘balance their desire for autonomy and locality with an orientation to funding bodies and state institutions, albeit in varying ways’ which is ‘part of on-going efforts to create spaces of participatory democracy and agency in the Bolivarian Revolution’ (133).

One of the most disappointing aspects of this excellent book is the very short Afterword by Daniel Hellinger. This largely repeats points made in

the Introduction and in Chapter 1 but fails to assess the evidence provided about the ways in which an activist and innovative state claiming to empower an engaged citizenry is moving beyond traditional clientelist state-society relations into a participatory democracy. This is the key question about claims made that the new left is advancing a participatory democracy and it is unfortunate that none of the four books reviewed here attempts to draw conclusions from the rich array of contributions they offer. What, then, are the main conclusions that can be drawn?

Advances and limits

Overall, these four books document a highly active and mobilized civil society which is organizing itself in many novel ways and changing the nature of political discourse and of political action in ways that have major significance not only for Latin America but beyond. What clearly emerges is that the region today is the locus for what must be the most innovative and ground-breaking forms of popular political action anywhere in the world. But one of the great strengths of each one of these volumes is that they avoid the pitfalls that one regularly encounters in treatments of civil society-state relations among the new left: both the tendency to claim too much for what civil society is achieving and the opposite tendency to claim that little or nothing has changed and that all we are witnessing is a resurgence of well-established forms of populist political clientelism. These books show that something far more interesting is taking place, the development of which is very contingent on how the state interacts with it. What emerges is a very mixed picture; indeed, what is striking is just how different each case is and the key difference is located in the dynamics of the state-civil society interaction, an interaction that in each case is fraught with tensions. These books also highlight that the tensions exist not just between civil society and the state but also within civil society and, though less examined here, within different parts of the state. For example, though the Venezuelan state proclaims most clearly and coherently the goal of facilitating a participatory democracy, its actions fail to exhibit the same clarity and coherence and instead are characterized by what Burchardt in the *Culturas políticas* book calls ‘a marked increase in institutional incoherence’ (43), a lack of transparency and accountability in administration, and a strong acclamatory dimension to politics with impulsive jumps and politics celebrated as direct communications between people and leader.

Despite these tensions, perhaps the key conclusion of all the books is that where sufficient consensus exists across a section of organized society and where the state facilitates (as in Venezuela or Bolivia, or in the case of

indigenous rights, the UN system) the achievement of goals espoused by civil society, then major advances can be made. However, the limits of these advances is also made clear (for example, the limits of indigenous rights achieved through the UN system or the very varied achievements of different *Misiones* in Venezuela). This is the promise of what is labelled ‘participatory democracy’; the pitfalls lie in the many ways in which the state actively seeks to divide and control civil society. At points in these books, the reader is forcefully reminded of just how sophisticated and determined this can be. For example, the Greaves chapter in the *Social Movements* book describes in a stark way the extensive mechanisms developed by the Chilean state to disempower civil society with great success. And here we are referring to a state that is widely seen as among the best organized and most modern in the region. Or, the chapter on Chiapas by Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor in the *Plasmación política* book offers a sobering account of just how little the Zapatistas achieved and how the Mexican state has proven adept at side-lining their more radical demands. Therefore, where the state is actively hostile to the aspirations of a more activist civil society (as in Chile and Mexico, but also in Ecuador as emerges clearly from a number of chapters in the two volumes that have just been mentioned), then social movements face an almost impossible task.

However, there are possibilities for shifting discourse and creating new spaces for action both among social movement actors and with the state, as the emphasis on culture in a number of these books highlights. Use of social media is shown to be a real possibility here, both in contesting a hostile state (as in Ecuador) or opening new spaces in a friendly state (Venezuela). The Smilde and Hellinger volume is most coherent in showing the potential of discourse change through cultural activities. Writing about the popular *telenovela*, *Cosita Rica*, Carolina Acosta-Alzuru sees it as a space to foster reflection and encourage ‘closing the gap between two political extremes’, inviting laughter so that viewers accept it despite their own political views (267). Daniel Hellinger examines the, ‘at times shrill and superficial, at other times tolerant and rich’ political discussion on the Aporeia blog site which, he writes, ‘serves as another arena for the percolation of democracy’ (242). These are reminders that civil society activism covers a multitude of activities beyond the conventional forms of engagement with the state, and the importance of more innovative forms of contesting power should not be underestimated.

While these four volumes document and analyse the very rich terrain of state-civil society relations, what they do not offer is any overview of the prospects for a participatory democracy to emerge. Apart from the Smilde

and Hellinger volume, the term ‘participatory democracy’ is hardly used and even in the case of Venezuela it is not systematically analysed. This may be due to the continuing vagueness about what the term actually means in the practice of democracy, particularly in institutional terms. This, then, is one issue that would warrant further examination, requiring a combination of theoretical elaboration in dialogue with empirical evidence. A second issue that emerges very clearly is the importance of the state’s willingness to engage with civil society. Our understanding of the different elements that come into play in constituting the state’s stance remains quite rudimentary, usually put down to contingent factors such as historical trajectories and the personalities of political leaders. The range of different state responses that emerges from these books would seem to offer a rich terrain to build a more robust theoretical explanation, identifying the range of variables and how they interact. Finally, the brief treatment of Colombia in these books reminds us of just how absent this very important case is from much of the literature on the emergence of the new left and the role of civil society. With the new left now governing Bogota again, the time has come to draw Colombia much more centrally into this literature.

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