

## Book Review

– *Rethinking global democracy in Brazil*, by Markus Fraundorfer, Rowman & Littlefield, 2018

What should global democracy look like? What kind of mechanisms could be embraced to make global society more democratic? What role(s) can actors like the state and civil society play in this process? As its title suggests, *Rethinking global democracy in Brazil* is situated within a broad discussion involving democracy and global governance (*latu sensu*), and Brazil is brought in as a case study to reflect upon the discussion's two key concepts. Fraundorfer anchors his approach to the global system with the concept of 'polycentric democracy'. Such choice highlights the opportunities for democratization of global governance, taking advantage of its fractured and networked nature to transform global power relations. The choice for Brazil as a case study is based upon two key elements. First, as an opportunity to innovate in the field of global democracy, mostly attentive only to Western/developed countries. Second, due to Brazil's particular actions and experiences with democratization efforts between the mid-1990s and mid-2010s. Simply put, the book explores the "activities of an emerging democratic state actor [Brazil] in contributing to the creation of more democratic global governance mechanisms".

Following the introductory and theoretical chapters, the book focuses on four "democratic experiments" in Brazil, giving each one its own chapter: HIV/AIDS drug purchasing and the creation of UNITAID; food security and the Committee on World Food Security; participatory budgeting program and the Open Government Partnership; and internet governance and the NETmundial meeting. These cases are selected as being exemplary of Brazilian domestic and foreign policies to promote social justice and democratic values in the aftermath of its re-democratization in the mid-1980s – as such, they are not restricted to the Workers' Party tenure (2003-2016). At the same time, Fraundorfer was wise to early on explicitly acknowledge that such successful democratic *experiments* studied should not be mistaken for a successful *democracy*.

The book came out in 2018, thus obviously written before Jair Bolsonaro's election. As most publications on Brazilian politics post-dictatorship (including this reviewer's own work) to come out before Bolsonaro's presidency, the en-

tire piece feels like it was written about another country altogether. Reading about the idea of Brazil serving as a global leader or positive example in the global governance of democracy, human rights, and a progressive civil society feels like a distant past, as exemplified by president Bolsonaro's recent frustration of not being able to "kill this cancer called NGOs". Of course, not capturing Bolsonaro's Brazil is obviously not the author's fault and does not disqualify the research done. But this political change invites certain questions that touch upon the book's focus on democracy and global society, especially as it presents civil society as inherently progressive and pro-democracy. But should 'civil society' *always* be expected to adhere to democratic and progressive values? Put differently, what happens when prominent 'civil society' voices are conservative and embraced by a (democratically elected) conservative leadership? Or when 'civil society' groups spouse *anti*-progressive political views? Does that make the uptake of their appeals democratic or not? Simply put, the dramatic political shift in the country – with impressive levels of popular support and/or indifference towards policies that go against human rights and plurality – draws questions over the normatively positive link between 'civil society' participation and democracy.

The author also states how Brazil, notwithstanding all its democratic flaws, "is [sic] capable of creating niches for democratic innovation of a kind so impressive that it can inspire the whole world". But given the rabid rejection of the Worker's Party by a significant portion of Brazil's electorate, it does not seem that the positive impression gathered externally was equally admired internally. Again, the point is not to directly contest Fraundorfer's arguments, but rather to reflect on a broader debate over democracy and civil society under (self-proclaimed) morally conservative right-wing leadership – whether in Bolsonaro's Brazil or elsewhere. From an International Relations perspective, the shift in Brazil's foreign policy from the picture presented in the book to its current deflated status raises an intriguing question: when (and why) do countries consciously 'walk away' from soft power, exemplified in leadership or prominent positions in global governance?

Ultimately, *Rethinking global democracy in Brazil* does its job in using the selected cases to provoke a reflection over democracy and global governance, providing compelling evidence and reflection over the cases selected. However, as the adage says, "Brazil is not for beginners", and anyone claiming to know where the country is going is ill-informed. As any other author working on Brazilian politics prior to early/mid 2018, Fraundorfer cannot be blamed for not foreseeing Bolsonaro's presidency. Hopefully, he is inspired to write another book addressing this shift, re-rethinking global democracy in Brazil.

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