



Democracy in Latin America: Promise and Problems.

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Often, books written with a sense of immediacy and a bit of courage are far superior to the plodding and narrow monographs that follow.

While writing in the wake of developments sometimes makes Zabih's narrative seem like too much of a list, it is nonetheless useful to have the events collected. His ample quotations from documents give a clear picture of debates within Iran. Above all, however, this is political history; there is relatively little material on social, cultural, and economic changes.

Zabih begins with a brief chapter on why and how the Ayatollah Khomeini succeeded. It is a rather disappointing discussion because, like many Iranian accounts, it overstates the role of the United States in this process and does not impute enough weight to internal factors. Other works have provided a more accurate picture of U.S. policy and the dynamics behind the upheaval.

The book is far better at analyzing the reasons behind Khomeini's triumph over liberal and leftist forces, the establishment of new institutions, the hostage crisis (briefly retold but with a good presentation of its role in Iranian politics), and the fall of President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr. Zabih gives a clear sense of the Islamic regime's strength and its enemies' inability to combat Khomeini's charisma or organization, while also showing the ferocious repression used to keep the government in power.

A final section reviews Islamic Iran's international posture, showing the importance of its nonalignment philosophy and hostility to the Arab states in the Gulf. While he affirms that Iran wishes to export its revolution, Zabih rightly stresses that this is to be done more by example than by attack: "Whether the Islamic Republic could serve as a model for emulation by other Moslem countries depended on its political viability" (p. 193).

Considering the regime's future, Zabih sees a government in serious trouble, attacked by urban guerrillas, Iraq, some regional unrest, and economic problems. But contrary to many Western analysts, he does not underestimate Khomeini's personal popularity and the institutionalization of clerical rule, as well as the government's shrewd use of the media, the treasury, and its Revolutionary Guard, all of which are major assets for survival. Zabih also provides a good basis for understanding the factors and forces that will dictate the country's leadership in the post-Khomeini era. While he can be disputed on a host of points, Zabih lays out the facts and issues in a clear and cogent manner.

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Democracy in Latin America: Promise and Problems by Robert Wesson. New York, Praeger Publishers, 1982. Cloth, \$23.95; paper, \$10.95.

Robert Wesson's book takes on the ambitious task of describing, in a large number of Latin American countries, how authoritarian regimes replaced relatively short-lived populist ones, and of explaining why liberal democratic institutions have persisted in only one or two countries in the region. Wesson's normative position starts from the presumption that Western (actually U.S. style) democratic institutions are better than any other

alternative and that, deep down, many Latin Americans would prefer political systems that allowed them to have these institutions. In this respect, Wesson's book is in the currently much maligned tradition of North American comparative political research on domestic regimes.

The main problem with Wesson's book is that he tries to deal with too many countries over a very long period (the colonial era to the present) and consequently has not enough time to develop his analysis of any one country in depth. His argument about the origins of authoritarianism in the excesses of populism strikes one as correct, but not terribly original.

He wavers somewhat on the role of the Iberian tradition in making Latin America ripe for authoritarianism. For example, he argues that "in Latin America, democracy was more the result of the conviction that modernization required it. . . . It was always to a large extent an import grafted onto a society of basically authoritarian temper and social structure" (p. 15). Later, he cites the Organization of American States vote of July 1979 as evidence of a continued desire for democracy, or at least a desire to appear to favor a return to democratic practices, in Latin America (p. 85). In other words, Wesson tries to defend himself against the claim that a pro-democratic normative focus for a study of Latin America is not ethnocentric by arguing that the Latin Americans themselves might choose more democratic institutions if they thought they would work. This seems somewhat inconsistent.

There are some positive points, though. Wesson starts the book with a fine chapter on the effects of colonialism on Latin American cultures and political systems, summarizing a great deal of historical material in a small number of pages. It would be very interesting to use the book along with *Dependency and Development in Latin America* by Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto in advanced undergraduate or graduate courses on Latin American history or politics, because of the contrast in approaches of the two books despite a similar range of countries and time periods. And, not least in importance, Wesson's approach and argument is much better thought out and defended than that of other authors (such as Jeane Kirkpatrick) on the dynamics of democratic decay and the rise of authoritarianism. Still, I was disappointed at times by the book's shallowness. While better than Kirkpatrick's, it is not as exciting as Guillermo O'Donnell's monograph on the rise of bureaucratic authoritarianism in Latin America or the various books by Fernando Cardoso on the development of dependent political systems in Latin America, because it does not work at the same level of abstraction. Nor does it present a consistent and controversial perspective on its subject.

Nevertheless, it is a useful book that represents the latest attempt to reinterpret the scholarship of the 1970s in terms of North American theoretical concerns of the 1960s. The continuing political relevance of the widespread concern in North America and Western Europe for the spread of democratic forms of government guarantees that books like this will have to be written. The task of North American scholars is to undertake such efforts without succumbing to ethnocentric biases. In this respect, Wesson is only partially successful.

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