


BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Democracy in Brazil: Change, Continuity, and Crisis

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This essay reviews the following works:

Persuasive Peers: Social Communication and Voting in Latin America. By Andy Baker, Barry Ames, and Lúcio Rennó. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020. Pp. xxiv + 369. \$32.00 paperback. ISBN: 9780691205779.

Lula and His Politics of Cunning: From Metalworker to President of Brazil. By John D. French. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. Pp. 520. \$32.50 hardcover. ISBN: 9781469655765.

Modern Brazil: A Social History. By Herbert S. Klein and Francisco Vidal Luna. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. xv + 419. \$36.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781108733298.

State-Sponsored Activism: Bureaucrats and Social Movements in Democratic Brazil. By Jessica A. J. Rich. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. 256. \$29.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781108456807.

From Revolution to Power in Brazil: How Radical Leftists Embraced Capitalism and Struggled with Leadership. By Kenneth P. Serbin. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019. Pp. 462. \$60.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780268105853.

Religion and Brazilian Democracy: Mobilizing the People of God. By Amy Erica Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. 222. \$105.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781108482110.

Decadent Developmentalism: The Political Economy of Democratic Brazil. By Matthew M. Taylor. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 340. \$99.99 hardcover. ISBN: 9781108842280.

Dano colateral: A intervenção dos militares na segurança pública. By Natalia Viana. Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva, 2021. Pp. 348. ISBN: 9788547001292.

Since 1985, when it transitioned to democracy after twenty-one years of military rule, Brazil has gone through remarkable ups and downs. It enjoyed a long period of substantial democratic deepening that ended around 2011, followed by some erosion of democracy that, according to the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) coding, began in

2016 and accelerated under the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro (2019–present).¹ The economy has gone through periods that generated optimism and positive results (1994–2010) and other prolonged periods of crisis (1988–1992, 2014–2020). The overall economic record since 1985 is mediocre.² Finally, on the social front, the period from 1985 to 2010 witnessed a burgeoning middle class, a sharp drop in poverty, a massive increase in access to education and health care, a drop in inequalities in educational and health outcomes, and a decline in regional and racial inequalities. Overall, despite the decline in democracy in recent years and the disappointing average economic performance, social gains under democracy have been impressive, even though since 2014, most of these positive trends have flatlined or reversed.

This review essay analyzes eight excellent books about Brazil written by distinguished scholars of Brazil and a renowned journalist. These books cluster into three groups. The works by Herbert Klein and Francisco Vidal Luna, Jessica Rich, and Matthew Taylor focus on macro-level change and continuities in Brazil. Natalia Viana's book moves nicely between the micro and macro levels; I discuss it with the first group. Andy Baker, Barry Ames, and Lúcio Rennó's book and Amy Erica Smith's analyze individual-level attitudes about politics. Finally, books by John D. French and Kenneth Serbin use biography and oral history to deepen our understanding of Brazilian politics. Together, they provide an excellent understanding of change, continuity, and crisis in Brazil.

Change and continuity

Offering different perspectives, four of these books deal centrally with change and continuity in Brazilian politics and society and with successes and failures under democracy. Taylor's *Decadent Developmentalism* focuses on dysfunctional policy continuity that results from an institutional equilibrium that blocks a shift to policies that might generate more economic dynamism and more efficient social policies. Rich underscores dramatic changes in Brazil's civil society and the state that resulted in the great success of the AIDS movement. Klein and Luna highlight the massive changes in Brazilian society since 1950, and Viana analyzes growing military involvement in public security and creeping military political power.

Taylor's *Decadent Developmentalism: The Political Economy of Democratic Brazil* poses a great question: What accounts for Brazil's mediocre average economic performance under democracy since 1985? This is one of the most important books on Brazilian politics in recent decades. It provides a panoramic view of Brazil's political economy since 1985. It is essential reading for scholars and analysts of Brazil and of Latin American political economy.

Taylor articulates the core argument on the book's first page: "Brazilian developmentalism has staying power, despite its lackluster results, in part because institutional complementarities buttress and sustain the system, and the incentives of political and economic actors drive them toward strategies that are individually first-best, but collectively suboptimal" (1). Developmentalism entails a large state role in fostering economic development: expansive state regulations and incentives, industrial policy to favor some sectors and firms, and sometimes direct involvement as a producer and banker.

¹ V-Dem liberal democracy score ranges from 0 (the worst possible) to 1 (the highest). In 1986, its first full year of democracy, Brazil scored a meager 0.327. In 1990, when the first directly elected president since 1960 took office, the score jumped to 0.697. In 2011, it peaked at 0.795, one of the highest in Latin America. By 2020 the score had fallen to 0.511, a profound erosion. Varieties of Democracy, <https://www.v-dem.net>.

² The World Development Indicators show that per capita GDP in 2015 constant US dollars increased only 33.1 percent in the thirty-five years from 1985 to 2020, from \$6,179 to \$8,229, yielding a paltry average growth rate of 0.8 percent per year.

Taylor argues that five complementary “institutional domains” have impeded Brazil from undertaking reforms that could set the country on a more fruitful path: (1) a developmental state; (2) a developmental hierarchical market economy; (3) coalitional presidentialism with an extremely fragmented party system; (4) weak mechanisms of oversight; and (5) an autonomous, high-capacity bureaucracy. The first and third are the most fundamental domains for the low-level equilibrium that he calls decadent developmentalism. Institutional complementarities generate incentives that lead firms, policymakers, and politicians to generally stick to the status quo, protecting short-term, narrow interests at the expense of longer-term goals such as more rapid growth and higher living standards. The research is impressive, based on massive reading and great knowledge of contemporary Brazil.

Taylor emphasizes continuity more than change in Brazilian political economy since redemocratization. On the whole, this argument is convincing. Brazil’s turn toward the market has been halting and tepid. Taylor argues that developmentalism remains in place, even if it is “decadent.” Contrary to what would be the case in a neoliberal economy, the tax burden is very high for Brazil’s level of development, and it has increased sharply since 1985 (41). The fiscal system has been persistently regressive (41–43). Most governments have remained committed to industrial policy, often manipulating it for political ends that result in inefficiencies (103–107). Despite periods of opening, the economy remains closed (53–57). Discretionary government spending is very constrained, notwithstanding the country’s high tax burden, leading to chronic underinvestment in infrastructure. Dysfunctionalities have blocked paths to higher investment and to more rapid and more equitable development. For example, large increases in social spending have not had a commensurate impact on reducing inequalities and improving opportunities for poor Brazilians, in part because social security payments benefit the upper 20 percent more than the poor (58–59, 114–116).

Taylor argues that Brazil’s political institutions favor the maintenance of “an ineffective developmental state and make exceedingly difficult a shift toward either a more effective developmental state or a more liberal market economy” (121). He highlights four linchpins of the political system that have contributed to this outcome: (1) an extremely fragmented party system; (2) coalitional presidentialism, in which presidents form broad multiparty coalitions to win support in the national congress; (3) presidential use of appointments to fashion coalitions; and (4) the existence of both pluralist and corporatist forms of interest representation. The result is “defensive parochialism”—the entrenchment and defense of narrow interests—and weak checks on the developmentalist state. “A suboptimal inefficient equilibrium . . . drives up the cost of politics; dilutes policy initiatives; [and] requires costly side payments” (130–131). Part of this inefficient equilibrium included the massive use of corruption schemes to build congressional support and fund political campaigns, as huge scandals in 2005 and the 2010s revealed (147–155).

Scholars have long debated whether Brazil’s formal political institutions are a liability. Taylor weighs in decisively on the affirmative side of this debate. He underscores the high costs associated with the legal and illicit transactions in coalitional presidentialism.

Taylor argues that the Brazilian state is interventionist but that the interventions often misfire (chapter 6). They are ad hoc, usually fueled by narrow political interests rather than geared toward effective policy interventions. He contends that oversight generally fails and corruption goes unpunished. I judge anticorruption efforts to have been more successful than Taylor does, even though the Car Wash (Operação Lava Jato) investigations ultimately collapsed. Former president Lula, several of his top associates, other politicians of all stripes, and some of Brazil’s wealthiest business elite went to jail on corruption charges.

Despite emphasizing continuity, Taylor also notes important changes in Brazilian political economy since 1985. Taxes and public spending have increased greatly, and some

corruption scandals led to successful prosecution of many politicians and business leaders. The economy moved from hyperinflation in the late 1980s through 1994 to price stability since then. The state bureaucracy has designed, championed, and implemented many salutary reforms—a point of agreement with Rich’s *State-Sponsored Activism*.

More than Taylor indicates, the Collor (1990–1992) and Cardoso (1995–2002) administrations moved away from the interventionist state.³ It is worth pondering whether these changes are important enough that Taylor’s overall emphasis on stability is overstated. The periods of Brazil’s relative success in deepening democracy, undertaking reforms, modernizing the economy, and reducing poverty (1995–2010) raise a question: Should we see the entire period since 1985 as a single generally unsuccessful equilibrium with a unified underlying cause for the shortcomings, as he does, or as two different periods of relative failure and disappointment (1985–1993, 2013–present) and one of greater success (1995–2010)? In this alternative narrative, the failures since 2013 are a result partly of misguided statist policy choices during Lula’s second administration (2006–2010) and Dilma Rousseff’s (2011–2016), the end of the commodity boom around 2012, and poor governments since then rather than of policies that were highly likely because of the equilibrium established by the five institutional domains.

Taylor concludes that the five institutional domains reinforce each other and that they set a low-level equilibrium that makes it difficult for Brazil to realize one of two more fruitful paths: a more efficient developmental state or more efficient and less statist economic policies. In sum, *Decadent Developmentalism* offers a rich analysis of Brazil’s political economy under democracy, and it provides a clear answer to the question of why Brazil has not fared better since 1985.

Brazil’s mediocre governing results at the macro level can obscure areas of innovation, change, and success. Jessica Rich’s *State-Sponsored Activism: Bureaucrats and Social Movements in Democratic Brazil* highlights one such area: the successful push by the Movement to Combat HIV/AIDS (the AIDS movement) to secure access to AIDS treatments for all Brazilians. By focusing on important innovations in civil society and within the state bureaucracy, and on Brazil’s success in handling AIDS after an early dismal failure, Rich’s work contrasts with Taylor’s emphasis on policy continuity and relative failure. Her book is theoretically and empirically excellent.

With the adoption of a new law in 1996 guaranteeing treatment to all Brazilians afflicted with HIV/AIDS, “Brazil became the first country to guarantee access to ARVs [antiretroviral drugs] for its citizens and to make access to treatment a centerpiece of its national AIDS policy” (108–109). Rich asks how a country with many obstacles to innovation (see the above discussion of Taylor’s book) became a global pioneer. Continued advocacy by the AIDS movement was crucial; the movement brought about initial change and its advocacy was a necessary condition for sustaining it.

Rich analyzes how the movement was able to sustain itself over an extended period, noting that many social movements fizzle over time. “The AIDS movement was able to endure and even expand over time because (it) was cultivated by national government bureaucrats who depended on activism to help them pursue their policy goals” (4). Supportive state officials used civil society mobilization to overcome resistance and inertia, and they helped the movement develop an institutionalized, nationwide character, which in turn enabled it to sustain itself over time. This is “state-sponsored activism.”

Rich’s book is an important theoretical contribution to understanding how social movements can sustain themselves over a long time, contrary to the expectations of most of the earlier literature. While much of this earlier work argued that states usually repress, co-opt, or ignore social movements, Rich shows that state bureaucrats can instead embrace and nurture them. She argues that the state should not be seen as a single cohesive

³ Klein and Luna share my perspective.

organization but rather as a heterogeneous conglomeration of units. Public-sector employees in some units are deeply committed to their causes, and they form alliances with like-minded civil society activists. Brazil's AIDS movement thus "represents a new form of political organization and interest intermediation . . . in which social movements are sustained by their connections to the government, even while they make aggressive demands on the government" (53).

Rich traces two periods of AIDS activism. In the 1980s and 1990s, AIDS activism emerged from civil society in a handful of large cities. Then, starting around 1998, the movement expanded dramatically, reaching all regions of Brazil. State-sponsored activism was crucial in this second stage, which gave rise to what Rich calls "civic corporatism," corporatism based on active collaboration between committed state officials and their civil society allies.

The AIDS movement uses an unusual combination of combative, contentious politics and institutionalized collaboration with government. The successes and the longevity of the movement defy "the conventional wisdom that Latin American social movements are either coopted or short-lived" (187). The changes in the relationship between social movements and supportive state bureaucrats have generated a new form of interest representation: civic corporatism. Like classical corporatism, civic corporatism gives organized groups in civil society privileged access to the state through formal channels (194–197). Unlike classical corporatism, civic corporatism is based on autonomous, contentious social movements.

It is fruitful to read Rich's *State-Sponsored Activism* in tandem with Taylor's *Decadent Developmentalism*. Her focus on dynamism and innovation within civil society and the state stands in contrast to his emphasis on stasis, continuity, and the difficulty of change in Brazil. I judge that both authors are mostly right; Brazil has arenas of deep innovation, as Rich shows, but the overall governance record since 1985 is mediocre, and some of the root causes have been persistent, as Taylor contends. Her analysis of dynamism from below and the rise of a new cadre of state officials committed to progressive causes nicely complements Taylor's emphasis on the difficulty of effecting change. Rich's book raises questions about whether the mediocre overall governance results since 1985 might partly be a consequence of the difficulty of addressing new demands on the state, and not only a product of stasis.

Klein and Luna's *Modern Brazil: A Social History* analyzes the stunning social changes that Brazil has undergone since 1950, from a rural agricultural society to an urban one, from mass illiteracy to mass literacy, with great leaps in average life spans and a dramatic demographic transition, a huge change in women's roles in society, and many other changes. The book offers a masterful panoramic view of these changes, with copious data documenting the transformations. It also correctly notes some continuities alongside the huge shifts; despite a reduction in inequality in the 2000s, Brazil continues to be a highly unequal country with deep racial inequalities and large regional differences. *Modern Brazil* is an invaluable resource for scholars and students of Brazil. The research is thorough, the empirical evidence is excellent, the book is well-organized, and the writing is clear.

The book paints a variegated picture of Brazil's successes and shortcomings under democracy. It complements Taylor's book by underscoring dramatic social progress under democracy, even if this progress has slowed or reversed in the last decade. Where Taylor emphasizes political continuities and the maintenance of a developmentalist state, Klein and Luna highlight remarkable social changes. Klein and Luna offer the broadest perspective on what has changed and what hasn't under democracy in Brazil, with a focus on society rather than politics.

Huge demographic changes have occurred since 1950: declining fertility and deaths, longer life spans, rapid urbanization, and great leaps in education (chapter 3). Women's education levels have improved dramatically, and their participation in the labor force has expanded greatly. At the same time, women continue to earn less than men and

are more likely to work in the informal sector and in poor-paying jobs. Violence against women remains a great challenge despite some state efforts (chapter 4).

Under democracy, the welfare state and education at all levels have greatly expanded (chapter 5). Notwithstanding the mediocre economic results of the post-1985 period, social indicators have registered striking improvements as social policies expanded to cover far more people and involve much higher expenditures. Pension coverage increased greatly, poverty declined steeply, and income inequalities fell during Lula's two terms (chapter 5).

Chapter 6 focuses on rapid urbanization and its attendant advantages and problems, including the shortage of decent housing, water treatment, and disposal of garbage, growing crime and violence, and poor transportation in the large cities. On the other hand, urban dwellers have better access to health care, education, supermarkets, and cultural opportunities than do rural residents. Those who wanted better life opportunities flocked to the cities despite their problems.

Notwithstanding some improvement in inequality in the first decade of the twenty-first century, Brazil remains one of the most unequal countries on the planet. Nevertheless, the social programs initiated under Cardoso and greatly expanded under Lula sharply reduced extreme poverty. Inequalities by region, sex, and rural/urban status have declined under democracy (chapter 7). Because of the long shadow of slavery, Brown and Black Brazilians have always had much lower incomes and worse access to education and health care than the white population. The income gaps between all men and Black and Brown women are staggering; in 2010, Brown women earned on average only 18 percent of what men earned (292). On a highly positive note, the health and educational gap between Black and Brown Brazilians and white Brazilians has diminished under democracy. Even though racial income gaps remain great, racial segregation in housing is much less acute in Brazil than in the United States (310–311). A long period of high social mobility has ended, but “blacks and browns have rapidly increased their ascent from the lowest class and also reduced the gap between themselves and the whites” (318). Massive government investment in education and health care has reduced the severe inequalities by race and region that characterized Brazil until recently (chapter 8).

If Jessica Rich's book is a testimony to one of Brazil's success stories under democracy, Natalia Viana's *Dano colateral: A intervenção dos militares na segurança pública* speaks to glaring failures: poor public security with the greatest number of homicides of any country in the world, frequent violations of rights of poor citizens, and very unequal rule of law. In the context of the failure to contain criminal violence in parts of the country, the military has become increasingly involved in internal public security, and since 2016, it has enjoyed growing political clout—an important continuity in Brazilian politics.

Dano colateral stands apart from the other books under review here because it is the work of a smart and courageous prize-winning journalist rather than a scholar. It elucidates an important contemporary reality in Brazil and in many Latin American countries: the growing involvement of the military in public security in response to alarming levels of violence. The author, the cofounder and executive director of the Public Agency of Investigative Journalism (Agência Pública de Jornalismo Investigativo), registered at least thirty-five homicides attributable to the military since 2011. This is a tiny number compared to the tens of thousands killed by the police during the same time, but it underscores the military's growing involvement in public security. *Dano colateral* effectively weaves together narratives about some individuals gunned down by the military as “collateral damage” with the broader story of growing military involvement in public security and politics.

Several chapters in *Dano colateral* tell the stories of poor Brazilians gunned down by the military in so-called Operations to Guarantee Law and Order (Operações de Garantia da Lei e da Ordem). These cases involved military cover-ups and judicial lassitude in a legal system profoundly stacked against the victims' families. The book illustrates the brutal

failures of Brazil's justice system for the poor in cases of military homicides. The perpetrators were never convicted, and the victims' families never received justice. Viana interviewed a wide range of military officials, from young soldiers who carried out the operations to the senior military leadership. These military interventions have mostly resulted in failures; in Rio de Janeiro, they have not improved public security except in the short term, and they led to many violations of rights.

Other chapters focus on the macro level. Viana argues that Brazil's deep involvement in UN peace-building missions, especially in Haiti from 2004 to 2017, helped pave the way for its increasing role in policing within Brazil. She summarizes the history of Brazil's National Truth Commission, created only in 2011, twenty-six years after the end of the military dictatorship—a sharp contrast to what happened in Argentina, where its counterpart was created five *days* (December 15, 1983) after the dictatorship's demise. The commission published its report on December 10, 2014. Viana details the military pushback against it, led in part by the federal deputy and future president Jair Bolsonaro, who had served without distinction as a military officer before leaving in 1988. She relates the military high command's hostility toward the impeached leftist president Dilma Rousseff, and its growing presence in public security and enhanced political power under Presidents Michel Temer (2016–2018) and Bolsonaro. She documents some soldiers' improper and often illegal behavior during the military occupations of poor neighborhoods: theft, torture, sexual assaults, and harassment. This excellent and sobering book acknowledges the strong public support for military intervention in public security, but even so it perhaps undersells the appeal of military intervention in the context of public security failures; often corrupted, ineffectual, and violent state police forces; powerful criminal organizations; and judicial systems that fail the poor.

Peer communication, religion, political attitudes, and voting

Persuasive Peers, by Andy Baker, Barry Ames, and Lúcio Rennó, and *Religion and Brazilian Democracy*, by Amy Erica Smith, enrich understanding of the political and religious views of Brazilian citizens and, in Smith's case, also the clergy. Baker, Ames, and Rennó's main argument is that informal conversations among peers significantly influence voting behavior for the presidency in Brazil and Mexico. "Some voters . . . learn from and even defer to individuals whom they trust and find credible on political matters" (46). This is a contrast to the United States, where most voters have clear partisan preferences and engage in political conversations only with individuals who share their political perspectives. *Persuasive Peers* is the first book to focus on the influence of informal communication among peers on voting behavior in Latin America, and the authors do so with great sophistication and interesting results. It is an excellent, innovative book, with smart theoretical arguments, an outstanding research design, and impressive data collection.

Showing that peers influence voting behavior through informal conversations requires methodological sophistication and careful, extensive data collection. The authors needed to rule out potentially confounding influences such as mass media or the effects of political campaigns and clientelistic benefits. They address this problem primarily through panel data: surveying the same individuals multiple times through the same election cycle. The data show that large numbers of individuals, between 25 percent and 45 percent of Brazilian and Mexican voters, depending on the election, change their intended presidential vote throughout the same electoral cycle (21, 73–78)—a stark contrast to the United States, where partisanship anchors most voters, and only 5 percent to 8 percent switch their intended vote preference during the campaign (76).

In the panel surveys, respondents indicated with whom they engaged in political conversations and what presidential candidates those individuals preferred. Voters who had

conversations only with politically like-minded peers were far more likely to have a stable candidate preference compared to voters who engaged in conversations with some peers who preferred different candidates (72–119). Presidential candidates whose supporters were embedded in networks with the same preferred candidate were less vulnerable to bleeding electoral support over the course of the campaign. Conversely, presidential candidates whose supporters conversed with neighbors who had different electoral preferences were more likely to lose support (119–126). Baker, Ames, and Rennó conclude that “the stability of political preferences during campaigns is a product of their social reinforcement. Socially reinforced preferences tend to be stable, while countervailed preferences tend to be volatile” (127).

The research design included panel surveys in two medium-sized, relatively affluent Brazilian cities, Juiz de Fora and Caxias do Sul. As loci of communication and socialization, neighborhoods in Brazil are much more important than in the United States (129–136). In Juiz de Fora, partisanship is weak and unstable, and as a result, neighborhood influences on individual-level voting are muted. In contrast, Caxias do Sul has strong and stable partisanship as well as high polarization between the PT and centrist and conservative parties. Here, peer discussions within the neighborhood have a strong effect in moving individual voters toward the central tendency (whether it was PT or anti-PT) in their neighborhoods. Likewise, “respondents with similar individual traits—but distinct regional locations—have different propensities to vote” for different candidates (171). Peer effects explain these regional voting differences (170–183).

At a broader theoretical level, Baker, Ames, and Rennó show that most analyses of voting behavior miss the specific social context in which voters are embedded. Brazilian and Mexican voters’ contexts shape their daily neighborhood interactions. In contexts of strong neighborhood partisan tendencies, conversations with peers strongly influence how voters choose.

Persuasive Peers contributes richly to the literature on clientelism. Whereas a sophisticated literature has focused on clientelism as a motivation for voting, Baker, Ames, and Rennó contend that for presidential voting, informal conversation among peers is far more important. The prior literature had focused on politicians’ logic for targeting individual brokers or voters as if they were isolated individuals. This book shows that politicians target the individuals with the strongest social networks; they in turn influence their neighbors (chapter 7).

Amy Erica Smith’s *Religion and Brazilian Democracy: Mobilizing the People of God* focuses on two questions. First, what explains Brazil’s culture wars over sexuality, abortion, the family, and church-state relations? Smith argues convincingly that unlike in the United States, until the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro, political parties were not important drivers of political battles over these issues. Rather, she proposes a “clergy-centered approach”: religious leaders have propagated these culture wars. Smith’s second question is how these culture wars have affected democracy in Brazil.

Smith’s meticulous research included some large national-level surveys, interviews of 425 clergy (71 Catholics, 190 Evangelicals, and 164 Pentecostals), a survey of 1,089 residents of Juiz de Fora in the state of Minas Gerais after the 2008 municipal elections, and qualitative field research in Juiz de Fora in 2014 and 2017. In contrast to social scientists who see ideas as epiphenomenal or as window dressing for putatively objective interests, Smith takes seriously the religious ideas that Catholic and Protestant clergy embrace; these ideas generate the frameworks for how the clergy engage with politicians (chapter 4). On some issues, Smith finds large differences among the clergy. For example, on a scale of 0 to 1, where 1 indicated the strongest possible agreement, Catholic clergy scored 0.67 in response to the statement, “The current Brazilian political system is fair and deserves respect.” By contrast, Evangelicals scored 0.39 and Pentecostals 0.41 (77). Catholic clergy were on average to the left of Evangelicals and Pentecostals on the environment, the economy, and racism.

Catholics and Evangelicals diverge significantly on culture war issues, especially attitudes toward homosexuality and abortion (102–104). Surprisingly, however, Smith reports no meaningful differences with respect to most other issues, including the state’s role in the economy, individuals’ left-right self-placement, support for environmentalism, and support for affirmative action to favor Afro-descendants (104–105). However, by 2017, Evangelicals had turned against the PT more than Catholic voters (105). Smith writes that “the clergy-driven nature of Brazil’s culture wars reduces the scope of polarization, relative to what one often finds in party-driven culture wars” (100).

Among members of Congress, the differences between Evangelicals, Catholics, and the nonreligious are much starker than they are among voters (part 4). In the 2016 impeachment vote against Dilma Rousseff, Evangelicals were far more likely to convict the president: 289 non-Evangelical deputies voted to impeach, and 134 voted against impeachment. In contrast, 93 percent of the 81 Evangelical deputies supported conviction (151). With his harsh anti-gay, anti-liberal, anti-feminist, and pro-police and torture discourse, Bolsonaro has polarized culture war issues, and in 2018, he won around 68 percent of the Evangelical vote (176). Indeed, the Evangelical vote was possibly decisive in his election (176). Culture war issues have become extremely polarizing, and Evangelicals are a key driver of this polarization.

Smith concludes that religious politicking in Brazil helps to “root and stabilize Brazil’s post-1985 democracy by mobilizing citizens to engage more fully with the political system” (170–171). This conclusion seems too optimistic regarding the Evangelical congressional caucus, which overwhelmingly supported the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. The culture wars have become a salient political divide in Brazil, generally aligning right-wing cultural positions with support for an authoritarian president.

Individual lives and Brazilian politics

By looking at individual life histories, the books by historians John French and Kenneth Serbin take a very different approach to understanding Brazil. French has long been a pre-eminent historian of the Brazilian labor movement. *Lula and His Politics of Cunning* analyzes Lula’s rise from one of the most important labor leaders in Latin American history to one of its most important party builders, politicians, and presidents. The book effectively situates Lula in the Brazilian labor movement and politics while emphasizing his remarkable leadership. It is a major contribution to understanding Lula’s life, the labor movement, and Brazilian politics.

The long section on Lula’s early life and leadership in the labor movement is superb. Part 1 analyzes Lula’s early life in a poor family, the Brazilian labor movement in the 1960s, and his work as a skilled machinist in the automotive industry in greater São Paulo. Lula first ran for a position as union director in 1969 at the most repressive period of the military dictatorship (1964–1985). Part 2 analyzes Lula’s life in the context of Brazilian politics and the labor movement from the late 1960s until 1978. Lula ascended to the presidency of the São Bernardo and Diadema metalworkers’ union in 1975.

Part 3 begins with the 1978 campaign of Lula’s union to recoup wage losses that resulted when the government falsified inflation data. Wage increases were indexed to the inflation rate, so the falsification resulted in real losses for workers. To recoup their losses, 235,000 metalworkers in Greater São Paulo conducted in-plant slowdowns. The mobilization galvanized national and international attention as the labor movement arose from a long period of relative dormancy that was a result of repression. In 1979 and 1980, the São Bernardo metalworkers went on strikes that catapulted Lula to national and international prominence and positioned him as the country’s most important labor leader. These

mobilizations unleashed a wave of strikes throughout many parts of Brazil, and Lula became one of most visible leaders of the opposition to the dictatorship.

From his early days as a labor leader, Lula pursued an independent path, without tethering himself to a Marxist leftist group or to the government-oriented bureaucratic union leadership. French emphasizes Lula's interpersonal skills, capacity to build bridges to a wide array of individuals and organizations, courage in confronting the military dictatorship, and exceptional capacity to communicate to different audiences, especially Brazil's popular sectors.

In 1979–1980, Lula and others began creating the Workers' Party (PT), which eventually became one of the most successful leftist parties in Latin American history. French devotes less space to the creation and evolution of the PT and Lula's involvement in it; this part of the book is less original for scholars who have read much of the literature on the PT. It would have been interesting to read more about Lula's role in the party's internal debates and about its shift toward much more pragmatism in the 2002 presidential campaign (which Lula won after three previous defeats), and the decision to use institutionalized corruption as a means of winning congressional support during his presidency. Lula's government used public sector funds to pay conservative members of congress a monthly kickback of around \$12,000 to support the government's legislative initiatives in what became known as the *mensalão* scandal when it exploded in 2005. Many of Lula's closest associates were implicated, and several went to jail.

French highlights the impressive accomplishments of Lula's two terms as president (2003–2010). Effective social policies and a sharp increase in the minimum wage significantly reduced poverty, and income inequalities declined in what had been one of the world's most unequal countries. Lula's government expanded policies to confront long-standing racism and generate educational opportunities for poor and Black students. The PT penetrated the poor regions and municipalities of Brazil, brought an end to erstwhile authoritarian enclaves, and helped create new de facto citizens. Lula became one of the world's most admired leaders. These were extraordinarily important achievements. They were possible in part because the great commodity boom of roughly 2003–2012 presented a windfall for the Brazilian economy—a point that the book does not make.

Massive corruption scandals rocked Brazil during Lula's presidency and that of his designated successor, Dilma Rousseff. The Lava Jato or Car Wash scandal had its origins during Lula's presidency even though the criminal investigations began under Dilma. The scandal involved, among other egregious misdeeds, accepting or soliciting bribes from Brazil's huge construction firms in exchange for granting them public sector contracts. Vast proceeds from the kickbacks funded PT political campaigns. In 2016, prosecutors charged Lula with being the head of the corruption scheme. In April 2018, he went to jail to serve a twelve-year term for corruption. French says little about the corruption and about the PT's mismanagement of the economy under Dilma (beginning, many argue, in Lula's second term). Unlike the three books under review that take seriously the PT's deep involvement in the corruption scandals (Klein and Luna, Serbin, and Taylor), French dismisses Lula's convictions as "bogus" (353). The book gives no evidence of serious research on this topic. Lula's convictions were in part the product of judicial misconduct by Judge Sérgio Moro, but it is far from clear that all of the many charges against him were bogus. It is impossible to understand Brazilian politics in the 2010s, including Bolsonaro's election in 2018, without acknowledging that the PT governments presided over huge corruption scandals and mismanaged the economy, leading eventually to a severe and prolonged downturn starting in late 2014. Dilma's impeachment was, as French argues, in part the result of right-wing congressional machinations, and the legal charges against her were thin, but the impeachment enjoyed strong public opinion support (more than 60 percent in most surveys). Because of the corruption scandals and the economic crisis, party identification with the PT plummeted, anti-PT sentiment surged, and voters repudiated

the party in the 2016 municipal elections. The corruption schemes (not unique to the PT, to be sure) were immensely damaging. As one lesser example, Taylor (152) reports that “the market capitalization of Petrobras fell . . . from \$260 billion to under \$22 billion” between May 2008 and February 2016. This, too, is a major part of Lula’s biography and legacy.

In March and April 2021, the Supreme Court voided Lula’s convictions on procedural grounds, stating that the court where he was tried in Curitiba did not have jurisdiction. It also ended the investigation on the grounds that Judge Moro was biased, but it did not acquit Lula. He and the PT rebounded starting in the 2018 elections, thanks to corruption scandals and poor economic performance during Michel Temer’s presidency, and to corruption, poor economic performance, and mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic by the Bolsonaro government. Lula is the favorite to regain the presidency in the October 2022 elections.

Kenneth P. Serbin, another distinguished veteran historian of Brazil, analyzes the individual life trajectories of nine former revolutionaries from the Aliança Libertadora Nacional (ALN, National Liberation Alliance) in *From Revolution to Power in Brazil*, based on oral histories. The ALN was one of many small groups of revolutionaries who took up armed struggle against the military dictatorship in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The book analyzes their time as revolutionaries and their subsequent professional, political, and personal lives, as well as their evolving views about politics, violence, and Brazilian democracy and policy. Like French, Serbin skillfully weaves together personal biography with broader political trends, thus enriching the history of the ALN and of Brazil. One feature that makes the book exceptionally successful is that Serbin conducted interviews with his protagonists over twenty years, from 1996 to 2016, enabling him to follow their lives for an extended time.

Serbin maintains a balanced perspective on the erstwhile revolutionaries. One of his interviewees, Manoel, still contends that guerrilla struggle and armed violence were justified, and that executing members of the Brazilian military, police, and upper classes, or US military personnel, was legitimate. For Manoel, “proof [of the guilt of these individuals] was irrelevant” (48). Serbin disagrees that it was reasonable to execute people without having dispositive evidence of their crimes and a fair trial—and I emphatically share his perspective.

Serbin organized *From Revolution to Power in Brazil* chronologically. Part 1 (“Revolution and Repression”) analyzes the young guerrillas in the ALN, the atrocities they committed, and the brutalities they suffered. Part 2 (“Resurgence”) studies the lives of the young revolutionaries after the military dictatorship had crushed the guerrillas. Some of the fortunate, such as Aloysio Ferreira Nunes Filho, spent years in exile—in his case, mostly in Paris but with a stint in Moscow, where he came to reject Soviet-style communism. The less fortunate were imprisoned and tortured. Some of them later worked in poor neighborhoods, fostering the burgeoning grassroots popular movements that flourished in São Paulo, Rio, and other cities in the mid to late-1970s.

Part 3 studies the former guerrillas in Brazil’s transition to democracy from 1974 to 1985 and the thirty-four years from 1985 to 2019. The nine former ALN members worked tirelessly to grow the democratic opposition to the dictatorship, and their efforts nurtured the transition to democracy. Several of Serbin’s protagonists served as advisors to prominent politicians, and two successfully ran for public office—one for the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB) and later the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), the other as a PT member of the city council of São Paulo. Serbin sketches the successful post-1985 careers of these nine individuals in politics, business, labor organizing and local activism, and music.

Through the personal narratives, Serbin documents the PT’s transformation from an idealist, leftist party to a pragmatic organization that expanded President Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s most successful social programs. Like French, Serbin celebrates the

achievements of the PT governments, but he also emphasizes that they embraced corruption and “failed to invest in critical infrastructure and long-term social investments—factors that acted as a drag on the economic competitiveness and dynamism necessary for stability” (289). Serbin rightly notes that Lava Jato was the biggest corruption investigation in Brazilian history (303); indeed, it was the biggest in the world history of democracy. Eight of his nine protagonists voted for Dilma in 2010, and most remained deeply involved in politics.

By 2015, some of Serbin’s protagonists were retired. All remained passionately committed to social justice, human rights, and improving the lot of the poor. Some defended Dilma and the PT, but others were sharply critical of the corruption scandals that the PT presided over and the PT’s mismanagement of economic policy (318, 323). Surprisingly, few of them recanted their revolutionary days, unlike the situation with many former members of the Argentine revolutionary left of the 1970s.⁴

Conclusion

All eight books under review are excellent and give a rich portrait of what has changed and what hasn’t under Brazilian democracy, about successes and failures of Brazil’s democracy, and about what motivates Brazilian voters. As French, Klein and Luna, Rich, Serbin, and Smith all highlight, Brazil today is a very different country than it was in 1985 at the dawn of democracy. But as Taylor argues, at the macro level, Brazil’s democracy and political economy have not kept pace with the dizzying changes in society. The political system and economy have deep dysfunctions, many of which reflect continuities.

Together, the books provide an invaluable overview of the successes and shortcomings of democracy in Brazil. Brazil’s democracy has had many shortcomings, which are much more prominent today than they were a decade ago. The history of the last decade is one of recurrent political, economic, social, public security, and public health crises. Taylor’s book gives the broadest overview of these shortcomings and the systemic maladies that underlie them and are difficult to overcome. Viana’s *Dano colateral* provides a searing indictment of the failures in public security and legal rights for the poor. Klein and Luna’s work on the massive positive changes in Brazilian society since 1985, French’s *Lula* with its emphasis on the dramatic social inclusion of the 2003–2010 period, and Rich’s book call attention to the important success stories.

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⁴ See María Matilde Ollier, *De la revolución a la democracia: Cambios privados, públicos y políticos de la izquierda argentina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2009).