

REVIEWS

Gabriel Vommaro, *Conservatives against the Tide: The Rise of the Argentine PRO in Comparative Perspective*

Cambridge University Press, 2023, 75 pp.

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Explaining the organisational structures and political dynamics of conservative parties in Latin America, *Conservatives against the Tide* offers a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing their success or failure in non-authoritarian contexts. Authored by Gabriel Vommaro, a renowned Argentine sociologist who has researched extensively on the recent phenomenon of the new right-wing movements and parties, the book delves into the Argentine case, providing a rich tapestry of insights that extend beyond national boundaries.

The opening chapters set the stage by acknowledging the historical neglect of the organisational forms of conservative parties in Latin America. The author aptly traces the evolution of scholarly attention to this subject. As the introduction unfolds, readers are promised an in-depth empirical examination that contributes to the existing body of knowledge.

A three-factor scheme becomes the guiding framework for the subsequent analysis. The factors – programmatic innovation, singular organisational mechanisms and an appropriate use of moral panic against the Venezuelan Chavista model – form the backbone of the book's argument. Drawing from extensive empirical work, the author applies this scheme to unravel the intricacies of conservative party development. The argument is persuasive and the comparison of the Argentine Republican Proposal (PRO) party with a second conservative party born at the same time (Recrear) suggests the strength of the explanation. However, the third element of the explanation, attributing voter behaviour to a moral panic about the Venezuelan situation, appears somewhat overstated. Given Argentina's economic downturn in 2015, it's reasonable to expect that both economic elites and middle-class citizens would gravitate towards the opposition party. The writing occasionally implies that voters were solely swayed by the moral panic discourse, neglecting more conventional factors like economic considerations.

One of the book's strengths lies in its comparative analysis beyond Argentina. The examination of conservative parties in Colombia and Bolivia provides valuable insights into the portability of the three-factor scheme. In Colombia, the Centro Democrático (CD) emerges as a case study, showcasing both successes and

shortcomings. The book meticulously explores the challenges faced by the CD in building organisational resources, despite gaining electoral traction. The historical context, with traditional right-wing parties dominating the electoral landscape, adds layers to the narrative. In its turn, the Bolivian Movimiento Demócrata Social (MDS) serves as another intriguing case. The latter failed attempt to build a conservative party at the national level highlights the importance of organisational and ideational resources. The analysis dissects programmatic issues, organisational choices and contextual challenges, providing readers with a more complete understanding of the conservative landscape in the region and its challenges.

The influence of political leaders remains a recurring theme. The case of Álvaro Uribe and the CD in Colombia exemplifies personalistic leadership, with its advantages and disadvantages. Uribe's strategic choices, including the failure to build a locally anchored party structure, are examined in light of the party's dependency on his figure. The book astutely notes the uncertainties the CD faced in the absence of a clear strategy for resilience in the event of setbacks. In contrast, the Bolivian MDS, led by Rubén Costas, faced challenges stemming from a personalistic approach to party building. The failure to offer career growth channels for ambitious politicians and the lack of a propitious context for obtaining organisational resources contributed to the MDS's struggles. These comparative case studies effectively underline the book's thesis, demonstrating the applicability of the three-factor scheme in diverse political landscapes.

While acknowledging the importance of leaders, the book maintains a party-organisation-centred approach. It argues that, for conservative parties to be successful, they must focus on building and reproducing party resources over time. The delicate balance between leader-centred and organisation-centred perspectives is skilfully navigated, adding depth to the book's analytical framework.

The book balances the historical and theoretical dimensions with empirical case studies. This balance not only enhances the book's academic rigor but also makes it accessible to a wider readership interested in Latin American politics, comparative politics and party organisation. The inclusion of real-world examples and case studies brings the theoretical framework to life, making it an engaging read even for those outside academic circles. While the book successfully balances historical and theoretical dimensions with empirical case studies, a more explicit engagement with the limitations of the three-factor scheme is warranted. The framework, while providing a structured approach, may oversimplify the complexities of party dynamics, especially in diverse political landscapes. The author could acknowledge the scheme's limitations and potential areas for refinement or expansion in future research.

In conclusion, *Conservatives against the Tide* stands as a valuable contribution to the study of political parties in Latin America. Its meticulous examination of the Argentine case, coupled with insightful comparative analyses, enriches our understanding of conservative party dynamics. The three-factor scheme offers a robust analytical framework that transcends national boundaries. Whether one is a scholar of Latin American politics, comparative politics or party organisation, this book provides a nuanced and illuminating exploration of conservative party development and its implications for democracy. Vommaro succeeds in delivering a compelling

narrative that not only informs academic discourse but also engages a wider readership interested in the complexities of political party dynamics in the region.

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**Manuel Balán and Françoise Montambeault (eds.),
*Legacies of the Left Turn in Latin America: The Promise of
Inclusive Citizenship***

University of Notre Dame Press, 2020, pp. xxvii + 443

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As Kenneth Roberts (p. 85) notes in his contribution to this book, while there have been Left governments before in Latin America, in its breadth, depth and duration the post-1998 Left turn was without historical precedent in the region. This occurrence makes an evaluation of its legacies both compelling and fraught with difficulties. The number of countries ruled by Left and Centre-Left governments in the early 2000s makes it possible to aggregate region-wide results and draw generalisations. But differences between the Left governments in some policy areas were wider than those between left-wing and right-wing ones, and national contexts provided different sets of constraints and opportunities. There is also the question of what to compare and how to compare. Should comparisons be between left-wing and right-wing governments or between the Left government and their predecessors? That the authors managed to produce a meaningful account of the achievements and limitations of the Left governments in question is no mean achievement.

In Chapter 1, François Montambault, Manuel Balán and Philip Oxhorn set up the conceptual lens that will be used for comparative purposes. The authors note that Left turn governments came into power with the promise of deepening and widening citizenship and the question they ask (p. 18) addresses this pledge: how did the governments of the Left turn perform in their efforts to deliver on the promise of a more inclusive citizenship? Answers to the question in subsequent chapters cover the impact of Left governments on democratic institutions and on a variety of political and socio-economic rights.

On the question of democratic responsiveness, Roberts (p. 87) argues that leftist parties in office after 2003 had greater latitude to 'govern from the left' than their predecessors and that the highest re-election rates of incumbent leftist parties vis-à-vis their centre-right counterparts between 2000 and mid-2017 suggests that governing Left parties found ways to respond to popular demands at a time