

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

War, Revolution, and Failed Democratization in Bolivia and Ecuador

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This essay reviews the following works:

The FBI in Latin America: The Ecuador Files. By Marc Becker. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2017. Pp. vii + 322. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822369080.

The CIA in Ecuador. By Marc Becker. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2021. Pp. xi + 317. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781478011385.

Movilidad y poder en el sur del Ecuador, 1950–1990. By María Mercedes Eguiguren. Quito: Editorial FLACSO Ecuador, 2019. Pp. viii + 274. Open access e-book. ISBN: 9789978675199.

Peasant Wars in Bolivia: Making, Thinking, and Living the Revolution in Cochabamba (1952–64). By José M. Gordillo. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2022. Pp. xiv + 337. \$34.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781773854014.

A Concise History of Bolivia. 3rd ed. By Herbert F. Klein. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. xix + 380. \$34.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781108948890.

Indigenous Struggle and the Bolivian National Revolution: Land and Liberty. By James Kohl. New York: Routledge, 2021. Pp. xii + 413. \$64.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780367471392.

Historical Dictionary of Ecuador. By George M. Lauderbaugh. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019. Pp. xlviii + 322. \$96.84 hardcover. ISBN: 9781538102459.

¡Vamos a avanzar! The Chaco War and Bolivia's Political Transformation, 1899–1952. By Robert Niebuhr. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2021. Pp. xii + 260. \$60.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781496207784.

Los inconformistas del Centenario: Intelectuales, socialismo y nación en una Bolivia en crisis (1925–1939). By Pablo Stefanoni. La Paz: Plural Editores, 2015. Pp. 383. ISBN: 9789995416430.

The Bolivia Reader: History, Culture, Politics. Edited by Sinclair Thomson, Rossana Barragán, Xavier Albó, Seemin Qayum, and Mark Goodale. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018. Pp. xx + 719. \$35.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822371526.

Political scientists interested in Latin American democratization seem to have a narrow research agenda when we look at the period from the 1930s to the 1950s.¹ Scholarship dealing with those years is generally devoted to the emergence of classical populism and the impact of import substitution industrialization policies. Granted, the Cuban Revolution plays such a large role in contemporary Latin American history that it provides a natural starting point for those who want to understand the political processes that led to the wave of military governments in the 1960s and democratization in the 1980s. The works reviewed here make a compelling case for the need to pay broader attention to the decades preceding the Cuban revolution. These years saw the seeds and denouement of what Charles Blake calls “the second wave” and Peter Smith and Cameron Sells describe as “the second cycle” of democratization in Latin America.² The books provide important clues about why this second wave of democratization failed and offer lessons for those who want to strengthen and deepen democracy today.

Along with Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador make up the Central Andes, a distinct subregion in the Andes. These three countries exhibit larger Indigenous populations than Colombia or Venezuela, the other Andean countries. The books discussed here focus on either Bolivia or Ecuador. The range of topics they explore is wide. Marc Becker offers a fascinating account of the role of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and early Central Intelligence Agency operations in Ecuador, surveilling first Nazis and then communists. He does so by tapping into declassified documents by these agencies, enlarging the sources to study communist parties in the region. In the process, Becker offers an insightful analysis of Ecuadorian politics in the 1940s and 1950s. George Lauderbaugh’s dictionary provides a chronology and short entries to understand Ecuador’s history and social and political context. As he notes, the book is not just about political history; it seeks to give a balanced “coverage of religion, economics, education, culture, and social science” (xii). María Eguiguren focuses on two southern provinces in Ecuador and analyzes the local, national, and international factors that informed three waves of migration from the early 1930s to the mid-1990s.

Turning to Bolivia, José Gordillo and James Kohl pay attention to the role of peasants and Indigenous peoples, their internal conflicts, and their interactions with the national political elite during the years of the National Revolution. Pablo Stefanoni’s primary interest is chronicling progressive and revolutionary ideas in the *Generación del Centenario* (1925–1939), whose influence was felt during subsequent decades. Robert Niebuhr centers his preoccupation on the Chaco War and its consequences up to the onset of the 1952 National Revolution. And finally, Sinclair Thomson and colleagues’ and Herbert Klein’s books offer an overall view of Bolivia’s history, culture, and politics. Thomson and colleagues’ volume is composed of primary documents grouped into twelve parts, each prefaced with short essays. Klein’s book is a comprehensive textbook that offers a historical account that stresses social and political events.

On the whole, the books offer extensive analyses of a variety of historical, social, and political processes affecting these two countries. My interest in this review is to flesh out the national reactions and consequences to traumatic defeat in external wars, the challenges of the 1952 nationalistic revolution in Bolivia, and the failed efforts to establish durable political democracy in the 1950s and early 1960s. Written from different

¹ I thank Fabrice Lehoucq for his thoughtful comments and suggestions. I greatly benefited from his vast knowledge of the Bolivian case. This review essay is better as a result.

² Charles H. Blake, *Politics in Latin America*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Wadsworth-Cengage Learning, 2008); Peter H. Smith and Cameron Sells, *Democracy in Latin America*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

disciplinary perspectives and using diverse methodologies, some of the books center their attention on the national scene, whereas others focus on the subnational level. What they suggest is that those who are interested in understanding the difficulties that democratic regimes currently have, in the Andes but also elsewhere in Latin America, would be well served by paying greater attention to the second wave of democratization that timidly emerged at the end of World War II and came to an end in the mid-1960s. Some of the tensions, practices, and shortcomings of this second cycle can be identified in the wave we are currently experiencing. Some lessons can be gleaned from this early failure of democratization: good governmental performance is necessary, power-seeking behavior must not devolve into autocratic efforts to stay in power at all costs, unmet social demands cannot be left unattended, and polarization cannot legitimize political violence.

War trauma and the push for democracy in Ecuador

In the 1930s and 1940s, all three Central Andean countries were involved in external wars. Bolivia engaged Paraguay in the Chaco War (1932–1935), and Ecuador fought Peru in the War of 1941 (1941–1942).³ The political reverberations of these wars were substantial. In Bolivia, veterans of the Chaco War came to play a crucial role in the governments that followed, including the 1952 revolution. In Ecuador, the national despair after the defeat led to a popular uprising that, for a moment, could have created the foundations for lasting democratization.

Becker's two books are primarily about the activities of US intelligence services in Ecuador in the 1940s and 1950s, but they do offer illuminating discussions about Ecuador's political conditions after the war with Peru and the events that transpired in its wake. The FBI arrived in Ecuador one year before the start of this war (20). At this stage, the FBI was concerned with Nazi influence in the country and the ability of Germany's supporters to organize a coup to prevent the inauguration of Liberal Carlos Arroyo del Río, who was considered sympathetic to the United States (25). As things turned out, the FBI soon switched its attention to the Communist Party, and political upheaval would come not from the Nazis or communists but from those who wanted to oust Arroyo de Río for his role in the war.

The military confrontation between Ecuador and Peru started on July 5, 1941, and formally ended on January 29, 1942, when both countries signed the Rio Protocol, with the United States, Brazil, Chile, and Argentina as guarantors. The war found Ecuador in quite a precarious position. In his book on the FBI, Becker notes that the 1930s "was a particularly chaotic decade, with frequent extraconstitutional changes of government" (133–134). The territorial dispute between Ecuador and Peru had a long history that can be traced back to the moment they became independent nations. Border skirmishes were frequent before, but the 1941 war was a full-blown conflict that was disastrous for Ecuador because the Peruvian army occupied some of Ecuador's southern provinces and blocked the crucial port of Guayaquil. The Rio Protocol essentially sanctioned this military supremacy by acceding to most of Peru's territorial claims.⁴ Carlos Arroyo del Río, Ecuador's president, signed it, but most Ecuadorians considered this a national betrayal. The political fallout was swift.

³ In his bibliographic appendix (346), Klein provides useful sources to study the Chaco War. For a good introduction to the War of 1941 and subsequent border disputes see David R. Mares and David Scott Palmer, *Power, Institutions, and Leadership in War and Peace: Lessons from Peru and Ecuador, 1995–1998* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012).

⁴ As it turned out, the Rio Protocol did not end these border tensions. In 1960, Ecuador's president José María Velasco Ibarra declared the protocol null and void. Flare-ups occurred regularly, most notably in 1981 and 1995 (Lauderbaugh, 247).

Becker mentions that the desire of political actors to remove Arroyo del Río and his party from power was such that “socialists, vanguardists, independent liberals, and conservatives” formed the Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana (ADE) to compete in the 1944 elections (*FBI in Latin America*, 134). Even the communists, after some debate, joined ADE. Arroyo had become increasingly authoritarian and relied on the police force (*carabineros*) to repress any manifestation of dissent. The military did not have the patience to wait for the electoral outcome and a few days before the vote made its move. On May 28, 1944, the Glorious Revolution started.⁵ That day the army artillery unit based in Guayaquil attacked the *carabineros*’ headquarters, triggering the uprising. Bloody confrontations with the police followed, producing hundreds of victims. After the virtual elimination of the police in this city, students organized urban civil guards to patrol the streets. Becker, in his book on the FBI, describes the situation thus: “Protestors encircled government buildings in the capital and paralyzed their operations . . . Crowds cheered Velasco Ibarra [the populist leader in exile at the time], sang the national anthem, and made impassioned calls for social change” (137). Instead of retaining executive power, the military gave it to ADE, which installed a provisional government. A few days later, ADE proclaimed Velasco Ibarra “supreme chief of the republic” (138). Liberal and democratic forces would come to regret that decision.

Once in power, Velasco Ibarra turned autocratic, offering an early example of what many populist governments would replicate in the Andes in the 1990s and 2000s. The eventful political process that followed includes Velasco Ibarra’s call for a new constituent assembly, his rejection of this new constitution because it adopted too many checks on executive power, his 1946 *autogolpe*, and the 1947 military coup that removed him from power.⁶ All this is expertly discussed in chapters 5 and 6 of Becker’s book on the FBI. The 1944 Glorious Revolution did not produce a lasting democratic regime that could have opened a process of social reform. Instead, it handed power to a populist with little to no regard for democratic governance.

In a historical coincidence noted by Becker, the FBI and Velasco Ibarra left Ecuador the same year. No longer concerned about Nazi influence, the arrival of the CIA in Ecuador was exclusively devoted to tracking the work of the Communist Party. But left-wing revolutionary fervor was not a real problem. Ecuador was about to experience what Becker appropriately calls a “democratic parenthesis.” Starting in 1948, Ecuador enjoyed political democracy with four successive presidential elections, interrupted in 1961 when the military deposed, again, the recently reelected Velasco Ibarra.⁷ This came after Velasco had ordered the imprisonment of his own vice president and other members of parliament. In his book on the CIA, Becker notes how, during this parenthesis (1948 to 1961), new political forces emerged, including the conservative Movimiento Social Cristiano (MSC) and the populist Concentración de Fuerzas Populares (CFP), parties that would come to play a significant role in later years (14–16). The great attraction that populism exerted in Ecuador eroded the chances of growth for the radical Marxist Left but also prevented the consolidation of democracy. The frequent divisions in the Communist Party, which Becker chronicles well, did not help nurture a left-wing alternative to populism.

⁵ For a recent reexamination of this crucial event, see Santiago Cabrera Hanna, ed., *La gloriosa ¿revolución que no fue?* (Quito: Corporación Editorial Nacional-Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, 2016).

⁶ This was the second time Velasco Ibarra perpetrated an *autogolpe*. He disbanded Congress in 1935 but was quickly removed from power by the military. His third *autogolpe* was in 1970, when he dismissed Congress and the Supreme Court. See Robert Norris’s two-volume biography of this important figure: *El gran ausente: Biografía de Velasco Ibarra* (Quito: Libri Mundi, 2004). Lauderbaugh’s *Historical Dictionary* has an *autogolpe* entry. We learn that the first *autogolpe* in Ecuador was carried out by Juan José Flores in 1843 (46).

⁷ This political democracy was quite limited, for the literacy restriction was not eliminated until the adoption of the 1978 Constitution.

The Chaco War in Bolivia

Just like Ecuador and Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay had unsettled borders since becoming independent nations in the mid-19th century. In the 1930s, this dispute led to a devastating three-year war that profoundly affected Bolivia's political trajectory. Robert Niebuhr's *¡Vamos a avanzar!* presents an overview of the years leading up to this war and how crucial war veterans would be in shaping the discursive and political environment surrounding the 1952 National Revolution. From his description, one gets the sense that this war, conducted between 1932 and 1935, was the great miscalculation of a weak president, Daniel Salamanca, who was trying to distract the nation from growing social discontent and his own shortcomings.⁸ Niebuhr writes that "it must have been a pleasure for Salamanca to look at the crowds in La Paz . . . [I]nstead of striking workers, disgruntled students, or angry miners, the streets were reportedly filled with Bolivians parading to Plaza Murillo, where they met the president and called on him to speak" (67). Two years into the war, as Paraguayan troops exposed the severe weaknesses of the Bolivian state and took control of vast swaths of its territory, the military removed Salamanca and let his vice president replace him. Klein's excellent book gives us a clear description of how badly the war turned out for Bolivia, resembling the defeat endured by Ecuador in the war against Peru. The Chaco War, he says, "quickly deteriorated into a corrupt, bloody, and bottomless defeat and disaster for Bolivia" (179). Indeed, Klein estimates that about 25 percent of Bolivian combatants had perished or deserted at the end of the conflict. What followed were years of political instability that eventually led to an important social revolution.

The sense of national defeat in Bolivia, as in the case of Ecuador, ran deep and shook the country's consciousness. An angry public confronted their rulers and held them responsible for the catastrophe. There was no hatred against Paraguayans, Klein informs us, "but much hostility" against Bolivian leaders (186). We saw that the anger in Ecuador led to the "revolución Gloriosa" of 1944, but the revolutionary impetus dissipated as its main beneficiary, Velasco Ibarra, betrayed the revolution's spirit and embarked on an authoritarian path. The postwar revolutionary demands were also intense in Bolivia. Pablo Stefanoni offers a thoughtful analysis of the country's intellectual milieu in the years that preceded and followed the Chaco War. A sharp analyst of Bolivia's history and politics, Stefanoni writes that "Bolivian history seems like a succession of cycles with a certain "circularity" in the way old problems re-emerge" (11).⁹ He is right. The trajectory of the hegemonic Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party and its current leadership divisions bear a resemblance to the hegemonic efforts of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) and its ultimate fracture after the 1952 revolution. Will MAS face the eventual division that the MNR suffered because of the party leader's efforts to perpetuate himself in power? Stefanoni also notes how deeply illiberal was the intellectual atmosphere in the 1930s and how this illiberalism came to influence the period of "military socialism."

In the wake of the disastrous war, intellectuals and parties challenged the oligarchical and racist nature of the old order. The 1936 coup led by Colonels David Toro and Germán Busch, both Chaco War veterans, put an end to the oligarchical consensus. Toro declared that his government would embrace military socialism, which was really populism and reformism combined (Klein, 188). Busch removed Toro from the presidency a year later and called for a constituent assembly in 1938. This assembly not only codified the reformist principles embraced by military socialism but also elected Busch to the presidency, turning him into a constitutional chief executive. But Busch was not

⁸ The armed forces refused initially to endorse Salamanca's war plans, cognizant of their own weaknesses. In addition, the armed forces considered that Salamanca's reaction was out of proportion to the actual border incident with Paraguay. They agreed to enter the war only after Salamanca signed a formal document assuming full responsibility for Bolivia's military action (Klein, 178).

⁹ All translations from Stefanoni's and Eguiguren's books are mine.

comfortable with the reforms introduced by the new constitution. In April 1939, following the example of Velasco Ibarra in 1935 in Ecuador, Busch announced that he would rule as a dictator, suspended the 1938 Constitution, and canceled the upcoming congressional elections (Klein, 193). Shockingly, Busch committed suicide in August of that year, and political instability continued during the following.

Before discussing how the books approach the 1952 National Revolution and its impact, it is necessary to return to Stefanoni's book. In addition to providing an exhaustive analysis of the pre-Chaco War intellectual left, he also discusses in detail the military socialists' outlook. He reveals the profound organicist and corporatist foundations underpinning Toro's and Busch's social policies.¹⁰ We learn, for instance, that while Toro appointed a labor leader to head the newly created Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, he issued at the same time a decree banning communist and anarchist "propaganda" and ruled that those embracing those views would be denied state jobs (279).

Stefanoni argues that the goal of the military socialists was to create a "functional democracy" that would link up labor associations with the state (283). Toward that goal, some advisers of the military government suggested compulsory unionization, with the idea that every citizen would carry a union card that would also be used to vote in national elections. Toro had clear sympathies toward Mussolini, and Busch had cordial relations with Hitler, exposing the illiberal leanings of their avowed socialism. In Stefanoni's words, "the youth of the Generation of the Centenary took no time in assuming that being antiliberal was to be a person of their time" (309). In a lucid reflection, Stefanoni tells us that the core ideas established during these years—state and labor co-government, the articulation of leftism and nationalism, and antiliberalism—are ingrained in Bolivia and help explain why Evo Morales appealed to these "ideological images," as he calls them, to win election after election (362).

Bolivia's 1952 national revolution

Bolivia's 1952 National Revolution is one of the three most significant social revolutions in Latin America, alongside the 1917 Mexican and 1959 Cuban revolutions. The Bolivian revolution has not generated as much interest as the other two.¹¹ Some of the books examined here address this gap. Being a textbook, Klein's work is an excellent place to start for a general overview of the revolutionary process and its main protagonists. But his treatment (chapter 8) is not merely descriptive. It outlines the causes that eventually led to the revolution's demise and the 1964 military coup. In his account, one comes to understand the contrasting forces that formed the MNR, its instrumental support for democratic procedures, its vision for a corporatist democracy, its internal conflicts, but also the important transformations the party introduced that ended the old oligarchical order.

The MNR origins are in middle-class intellectuals who took part in the military socialist governments of Toro and Busch and were thus influenced by fascist ideology (Klein, 197). The party gradually radicalized as the middle class became more disillusioned with the old order, and labor began to be more active in the national scene. In December 1943, the party

¹⁰ For an analysis of organicist and corporatist accounts of politics and society, see Philippe C. Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?," *Review of Politics* 36, no. 1 (1974): 85–131; Alfred Stepan, *The State and Society: Peru in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978); Howard J. Wiarda, *Corporatism and Comparative Politics: The Other Great "Ism"* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1997).

¹¹ This is the point that James M. Malloy and Richard Thorn make in the preface to their *Beyond the Revolution: Bolivia since 1952* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971). See also James M. Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970). Gordillo's *Peasant Wars in Bolivia* also comments on this lack of scholarly attention (3).

allied itself with a group of Chaco War veterans who had created RADEPA (Razón de Patria) to carry out a coup against President Enrique Peñaranda. The victorious junta was headed by Major Gualberto Villarroel, who “was committed to the vague reformist and fascist model” that RADEPA embraced (Klein, 201). Víctor Paz Estenssoro, one of the MNR’s leaders, took a seat in Villarroel’s cabinet. Gradually, the MNR built support among miners and other labor organizations. In November 1946, the powerful Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia (FSTMB) adopted the famous Thesis of Pulacayo as its programmatic document. This manifesto—reproduced in *The Bolivia Reader* (371–375)—became representative of the radical left-wing activism that informed Bolivian labor movement during these years and later.

The Villarroel administration ended the odious feudal practice of *pongueaje* (personal service obligation) that tied peasants to the haciendas, but his government also turned quite repressive, triggering a popular uprising that ended it. The provisional junta called for presidential elections, and in 1947, conservative forces returned to power. From that year to 1952, the period known as the *sexenio*, Bolivia witnessed the failed efforts of a conservative restoration. During this period, “the MNR again emerged as the most popular party on the left and the single most powerful political movement in the nation” and “rid itself once and for all of its fascist elements” (Klein, 203).

During the *sexenio*, electoral fraud to reduce the MNR’s representation in Congress as well as violent repression against labor unions led the party to embrace extraelectoral tactics to overthrow the conservative government. Under the direction of Hernán Siles Zuazo, the MNR organized a civilian revolt that ultimately failed. In the 1951 elections, Paz Estenssoro (still in exile) secured a plurality of 43 percent, but the conservative forces refused to give up power. Instead, the departing president resigned and turned power over the office to the chief of the general staff, who then handed it over to General Hugo Ballivián (Klein, 206–207). In response, the MNR started a full-scale military uprising to defend its electoral victory. Urban and rural militias were created, and after three days of intense fighting, the military forces collapsed. The MNR was finally in control of the country.

The 1952 National Revolution transformed Bolivia in significant ways. It established universal suffrage by eliminating gender and literacy requirements. The revolution was accompanied by a burst of societal activism and organization, both in the cities and in the countryside, and these associations became important bases of support for the ruling party. The soon-to-be influential Central Obrera Boliviana (COB) was created a few days after the MNR took power, led by Juan Lechín, leader of the FSTMB. Segments of his radio speech, delivered the morning after the revolution triumphed, is reproduced in Thomson and colleagues’ *The Bolivia Reader* (387–388). The revolutionary government nationalized the three largest mining companies, and the new state entity, the Corporación Minera de Bolivia (COMIBOL), came to control almost two-thirds of the tin-mining industry.

Kohl offers a dissenting interpretation of this crucial period of Bolivia’s history. He argues that the social revolution started not in 1952 but in 1943, triggered by the coup that brought Villarroel and his RADEPA to power. This revolutionary process was “truncated by a counterrevolution (1946–1952), and reignited in the momentous years of radical political, social, and economic transformation (1952–1964)” (Kohl, 57). The bulk of chapter 2 is devoted to discussing the “RADEPA revolution” and its efforts to achieve national sovereignty and integration. He also lists the extensive legislation aimed at securing Indigenous rights. Kohl’s reinterpretation allows him to identify parallels between the Bolivian and the Mexican revolutions: an initial phase led by moderate leaders, their violent fall “orchestrated by the ancien régime . . . [and] foreign imperialists,” a counterrevolutionary phase, followed by “a radical transformative phase of violent assaults . . . against the remnants of the oligarchic state” (57–58). Chapters 3–5 of Kohl’s book frequently references the similarities between these two revolutions.

The Bolivian revolution enacted a far-reaching land reform in 1953, perhaps its most enduring legacy.¹² Klein believes that the political consequences of this land reform were significant. After chronicling MNR's internal disputes between a radical leftist faction represented by Juan Lechín and the more moderate wing to which President Paz Estenssoro belonged, Klein concludes that the land reform satisfied peasants and turned them into "a relatively conservative political force in the nation and grew indifferent to their former urban worker colleagues" (215). Paz Estenssoro, Klein argues, astutely created his own power base by relying on the peasantry to counteract the influence of miners and radical intellectuals. As we will see, Gordillo disputes this analysis.

James Kohl and José Gordillo offer book-length treatments of the revolution and offer important historical details. Kohl centers on the role of Indigenous people during the revolutionary period and their relationship with the MNR. The book excels at illuminating the Indigenous leaders' views and objectives and how they influenced events on the ground. His account complements Klein's, who focuses more on national actors. Chapter 6 in Kohl's book gives a good description of the agrarian reform and what it did and did not accomplish, while chapter 7 provides a fascinating account of the tensions that pitted those who advocated reform (land distribution) versus those who favored revolution (agrarian collectivization). This chapter also explores the conflict between Indigenous people still living in the countryside and those who had settled in the surrounding cities. A subheading in the chapter describes this tension: "A Divided Nation: Indians and Vecinos."

Kohl goes into a detailed description of MNR's successful military insurrection (Chapter 5). The events suggest that the victory came because of the combination of tactical shrewdness by the party, the opportunism of some high-ranking officials (some of whom conspired with the MNR), "and the internal disintegration of the Junta Militar" (160). The crucial events transpired in Oruro, when the local MNR's 16-member revolutionary committee joined forces with General Jorge Blackutt (the Chief of the Oruro Military Region) to take control of the city. When Gen. Blackutt reneged and switched his allegiance back to the Junta, his betrayal "ignited a furious uprising . . . Loyalists carabineros were overwhelmed and their weapons distributed to the citizenry" (Kohl, 165).

Kohl also chronicles the factions within the Indigenous (peasant) communities (Chapter 8), but Gordillo's book pays greater attention to these conflicts by locating his analysis in the Cochabamba Valley. This regional perspective allows him to provide a texture and detail that enriches our understanding of the dynamics, challenges, and tensions of the 1952 revolution, especially in rural areas. Gordillo starts by reflecting on the shifting narratives to describe his subject of interest. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, he writes, led scholars to abandon the language of "class struggle" and replace it with "ethnic confrontation" (4). This "ethnic turn" meant that the term "campesino" was discarded in favor of the notion of "Indigenous." The irony, Gordillo argues, is that before the 1952 revolution, *campesino* was rarely employed, and *Indians*—a term coined by the colonial state—was used to describe rural workers (1). It is telling that his book is entitled *Peasant Wars*, whereas Kohl prefers *Indigenous Struggle* in his title. This is a debate that is ongoing in the Central Andes.¹³ Gordillo's main goal is to provide an "updated version" of how the *campesino* identity came into being during the revolution (viii).

Gordillo questions Klein's interpretation of peasant mobilization and organization as well as their role during the revolutionary process. He relies on the case of the

¹² For an examination of the land reform and its impact, see Carmen Soliz, *Fields of Revolution: Agrarian Reform and Rural State Formation in Bolivia, 1935–1964* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021). This book is discussed in Ulices Piña, "Recent Trends in State Formation Studies on Latin America." *Latin American Research Review* 57, no. 1 (2022): 226–236.

¹³ For similar debate in the Peruvian context, see Julio F. Carrión, "Takeoff and Turbulence in Modernizing Peru," *Latin American Research Review* 54, no. 2 (2019): 499–508.

Cochabamba Valley to dispute Klein's allegation that rural organizing was done by middle-class urban activists (4). Gordillo also challenges Klein's conclusion that peasants became a conservative force after the enactment of land reform (5). By contrast, Gordillo argues that "the Cochabamba valley mestizo population of rural workers forged their own collective "campesino" identity alongside their revolutionary struggles against regional elites and the state" (10). But he also analyzes the tensions inside the peasant movement and between peasant organizations and the MNR leadership. As noted above, one issue that divided peasants was that of land ownership. The most radical activists wanted land collectivization under the control of agrarian cooperatives, whereas other peasants wanted individual property (Gordillo, 86). There were also conflicts when communities (*comunarios*) claimed ancestral land ownership against peasants already settled in the same lands who had obtained them through the agrarian reform law (130). And there was the question of political autonomy, with peasant organizations fighting for their organizational autonomy and resisting the regime's campaign to create competing organizations (169). Frequently, Gordillo concludes, peasant pragmatism informed their relationship with the revolutionary regime (170).

Historical legacies and societal change

Wars, coups, revolutions. These large events are informed by a matrix of historical legacies, cultural factors, and societal reactions to these influences. The identification and discussion of the historical and cultural forces operating underneath the political events discussed here cannot be taken up in an essay of this nature. But any effort in this direction will certainly require a careful reading of Thomson and colleagues' *The Bolivia Reader*. Organized in twelve parts, this valuable volume provides primary sources of Bolivia's rich history, from pre-Inca times to the Evo Morales administration. The selection of texts is impeccable, and they offer firsthand accounts of events in which one might have a particular interest. The materials are relevant to all disciplinary approaches: economics (mining and enclave economies), history (Spanish, criollo, and Indigenous sources), myths, political science (state formation and national fragmentation), literature, and anthropology. Those who want to explore further the revolutionary years will find crucial documents here. The Land Reform Decree is reproduced (278–286), as well as the highly influential Trotskyist-oriented Thesis of Pulacayo. All chapters and the selections are preceded by useful introductions that place them in their historical context. Duke University Press does a very significant service to knowledge by supporting the Latin American Reader series.

Understanding historical context is important, but so is analyzing societal responses that try to cope with the traumatic legacy of colonialism and racism. Andean societies have resorted to voluntary migration as a path to improve their life prospects.¹⁴ María Eguiguren's book offers an analysis of internal and international migration in Ecuador and how the migratory circuits, to use her language, were influenced by local, national, and global factors. As she notes in the book's introduction, the origins of significant migration in Ecuador can be traced back to the mid-twentieth century, and this movement, until recent decades, was heavily concentrated in three southern provinces. She is primarily interested in the migratory waves for the period that goes from 1950 to 1990. Like Gordillo's book, she is interested in subnational analysis, and focuses her research on the southern provinces of Cañar and Loja. Her contention is that the historical configuration of these provinces as a

¹⁴ Internal conflict, persecution, and authoritarianism produce the internal displacement of peoples as well as refugee crises. I am not referring to this forced movement in this section.

“periphery” has encouraged the “conformation of migratory circuits” (24). In other words, people living in suboptimal conditions embrace migration as a path to modernity.

Eguiguren rejects explanations that rely exclusively on economic or social factors and stresses instead the role of “subjectivity.” Describing migration as “a vital subjective experience,” she places this experience in the larger theme of modernity and its tensions (4). *Mobility*, a term she uses in addition to migration, needs to be understood as a “form of articulation with modernity built from peripheral positions” (25). Chapters 3 and 4 are the core of her book, and she relies on interviews to flesh out her propositions. Chapter 3 describes the migratory circuits in Cañar and Loja and contends that these circuits become “enduring forms of mobility” that frequently end up in migration (103). Migration happens not only for economic reasons but also because people look to acquire an education not available in their places of origin (110). Chapter 4 discusses the different generations of migration.

The 1952 revolution in Bolivia challenged the conservative view that individual and social groupings have established places and circumstances from which they could not change. The revolution provided a collective project to modernize society and improve people’s social conditions. Migration offers an individual solution to the question of modernity. María Eguiguren makes a convincing case that many Ecuadorians tapped into an individual project of mobility seeking modernity in a peripheral context. As she puts it, the inhabitants of Cañar and Loja, through migration, “constituted concrete modes” that sought “an articulation to modernity” (161).

Eguiguren identifies and places these migratory circuits in three generations (Chapter 4). The first generation (1930–1950) migrated motivated by the need to find alternatives to the hierarchies of class, race, and gender, when the privileged positions were reserved for the members of the white elites (162). The second generation (1951–1970) is characterized by a greater preoccupation with educational and professional mobility, seeking access to places that provided better opportunities for both (183–185). The third generation (1971–1995) experienced the rise of neoliberalism but also saw changes in the migratory circuits. Immigration to the United States became more difficult due to restrictive policies but immigration to Spain exploded dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s (208–209). For this third generation, Eguiguren argues, international migration becomes the most frequent option. More than previous generations, this younger generation develops a “subjectivity that seeks articulation with modernity in a more individualized manner” (230). Eguiguren’s book has the virtue of calling our attention to the fact that an individual project of migration is another path for those who find their current conditions intolerable and live in societies that cannot, or would not, articulate social projects of change.

Failed democratization

We finish by discussing what many of these books illustrate, which is that despite the democratic hopes many had at the end of World War II, neither Bolivia nor Ecuador was able to create democratic political regimes that sustained over time. With some minor interruptions, the military dominated Bolivian politics from 1964 to 1982. In Ecuador, again with some exceptions, the military controlled the government from 1963 to 1979. While these books do not attempt to provide a causal account of the failure of democratic experiments, they provide some valuable clues that help us understand the dynamics that prevented democratic consolidation in the 1950s and early 1960s. The breakdown of democracy must be attributed first and foremost to the military’s decision to seize power, but four factors that weakened civilian governments and softened the terrain for these coups can be identified in these books.

The first is the loss of public support for the government caused by economic mismanagement and the consequences of the programs of economic stabilization when they are finally adopted. The social and political upheaval created by the 1952 revolution in Bolivia brought havoc to its economy, fueling inflation and the concomitant loss of living standards. The Bolivian revolutionary regime made some bad economic decisions driven by its worthy nationalistic goals. Kohl cites the MNR leader Walter Guevara who stated that the nationalization of the tin industry was no bargain because it was a “white elephant” (258). Differential exchange rates fostered state corruption, as those who could bribe their access to cheaper dollars could exchange them on the black market for a hefty profit. Subsidized food prices in stores (*pulperías*) located in state-owned mines also encouraged corruption, as workers bought low and sold high on the black market. The state bureaucracy grew, both in the central administration as well as in the state-owned mines: by 1962, 70 percent of the COMIBOL payroll went to office workers (Kohl, 258). The drop in agricultural production forced the revolutionary regime to import foodstuffs. Between 1952 and 1956, annual inflation rates rose over 900 percent (Klein, 216). The impact of this inflation was dramatic. In the first four years of the revolution, workers lost 15 percent of their purchasing power, and the drop was 50 percent for middle-class workers (Kohl, 258). The cost of living in 1964 “was 80 times what it had been at the onset of the National Revolution of 1952” (258). As a consequence, the middle class abandoned the MNR “on a major scale” (216).

The second factor that debilitated the civilian regime was factionalism and politically motivated violence. I already mentioned the internecine feuds inside the Bolivian revolutionary regime, between a “center-right middle-class represented by Siles Zuazo and a left and labor coalition led by Lechín and the COB” (Klein, 219). The left was particularly upset that Siles had accepted the International Monetary Fund’s stabilization program of 1957, which, as Klein notes (221), was quite extreme by the standards of the day. The crisis in his government was swift. Siles’s vice president (Ñuflo Chávez) resigned in protest, and Lechín called for strikes. The severe division at the top of the party, unfortunately, filtered down to civil society. Kohl’s and Gordillo’s books aptly describe the tensions, conflict, and even armed confrontations among peasant organizations aligned with different factions of the party. Both authors, but Gordillo in particular, spend considerable time chronicling the conflict in different peasant communities in Cochabamba, particularly the confrontation between peasant militias in Cliza and Ucareña, known as the Champa Guerra (1959–1964).¹⁵

The third factor that weakened the civilian regime was the willingness of key political actors to appeal to the military for their own political purposes. In Bolivia we have the cases of Paz Esstensoro and Siles Suazo. Paz Estenssoro, elected president twice, was expected to not try to run again for the presidency in 1964. But he fell to the attraction of continuismo that has so severely affected democratic regimes before and after, in Bolivia and elsewhere in Latin America. To secure the presidency that year, Paz was willing to tap an acting member of the Air Force, General René Barrientos, as his running mate. General Barrientos had cultivated his own public image by organizing a truce between the Cliza and Ucareña militias and by orchestrating a peasant and military pact in 1964 (Gordillo, 173). Siles Suazo, angry at Paz’s refusal to cede space to other leaders, called on the military to intervene and seize power to block Paz; moreover, “[a]n opposition commission met the commander-in-chief of the armed forces to ask him to lead a coup” (Gordillo, 206).¹⁶ Kohl believes that Paz’s decision “to retain the military institution” after the April 1952

¹⁵ *Champa* is a Quechua word that has different meanings in the Andes. In Bolivia, it is usually used to denote “entanglement” or “mess”—therefore, a conflict that develops in a confusing, messy manner.

¹⁶ This is a clear example of what Lehoucq and Pérez-Liñán call the “coup trap.” When incumbents turn autocratic, opposition leaders face the choice of accepting that behavior or inviting the military to intervene.

revolution was a mistake and his decision to “rearm and modernize the armed forces, to neutralize opposition to his rule by indigenous mine workers and peasants, was fatal” (331).¹⁷ As we know, Barrientos and Alfredo Ovando, the army chief, led a military coup against Paz Estenssoro, on November 4, 1964.

Finally, civilian governments lose legitimacy because of the autocratic behavior of presidents that could not bear to abandon power or rule constrained by institutions. I have already mentioned Paz’s intent to perpetuate himself in power. The presidency in revolutionary Bolivia was to be rotated among the MNR leaders, as Paz and Siles had already been presidents. Either Walter Guevara or Juan Lechín should have been given a chance to lead the party ticket, but this did not happen “because of Paz’s thirst for power and his support from the United States” (Kohl, 302). Angered by Paz’s decision to seek the presidency in 1960, Guevara split from the MNR and created his own political party. Juan Lechín decided to wait and accepted the vice-presidential post. He too would eventually split the party when Paz Estenssoro insisted on running again for the presidency in 1964 (Gordillo, 204). Kohl concludes that the revolution, under Paz’s third administration, “morphed into an authoritarian police state” (290). Indeed, Thomas Field describes Paz’s intention to create a “development-oriented authoritarian state” and chronicles his increasingly repressive character.¹⁸ This authoritarianism generated resistance among other leaders and segments of society. And then we have the case of Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador, who betrayed the ideals of the Glorious Revolution by seizing all power in 1946 through an *autogolpe*, which led to military intervention. He turned again autocratic in 1961 by jailing his vice president and some members of Congress, triggering yet another military coup d’état.

Much has changed in the politics of Latin America since the 1950s and early 1960s, but many patterns of political (mis)behavior persist. Is it fair to lay the blame for the fragility of democratic institutions entirely on the choices of political leaders? Perhaps not. As democracies in our region confront severe headwinds, it is urgent to examine the institutional and structural factors that encourage (or discourage) behavior that erodes democratic governance. Going back to the recent past and studying failed processes of democratization is one way to take up this important task.

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Fabrice Lehoucq and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, “Breaking Out of the Coup Trap: Political Competition and Military Coups in Latin America,” *Comparative Political Studies* 47, no. 8 (2014): 1105–1129.

¹⁷ James Dunkerley states that while the army “had been all but destroyed” in 1952, the police (*carabineros*) remained “intact” but outnumbered by the popular militias. He also describes the debate among MNR leaders over what to do with the military. Lechín wanted to eliminate it, but President Paz started to rebuild it, with the help of the United States. However, the military budget was cut in half and its numbers reduced. In the end, as Dunkerley writes, “The official armed forces were in extremely poor shape and no match for the militias, but despite the crushing blow of their defeat they had survived.” James Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins* (London: Verso, 1984), 50. I thank Kevin Young for this reference.

¹⁸ Thomas Field, *From Development to Dictatorship: Bolivia and the Alliance for Progress in the Kennedy Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 159. Chapter 6 of this book discusses the 1964 coup in detail.

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