

## Book Review

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### Recension

Lessons from Latin America: Innovations in Politics, Culture, and Development.

By Felipe Arocena and Kirk Bowman. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. ISBN: 9781442605497

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Arocena and Bowman's book, *Lessons from Latin America: Innovations in Politics, Culture, and Development*, examines the political, cultural, and social contributions from Latin American countries that can help inform the Global North, especially the United States, in addressing its contemporary challenges. The chapters are written clearly in an engaging style that end with a chapter summation, discussion questions for reflection, and resources for additional reading. Throughout the book, Arocena and Bowman adopt critical and anti-colonial perspectives and present clear cases that show how Latin Americans and Latin American countries are sources of knowledge and leaders of innovation.

In the introduction and chapter one, Arocena and Bowman debunk common colonial and imperial tropes about Latin American people, regions and customs. The authors examine stereotypes embedded in the English literature, anthropological writing, caricatures and media images. They discuss the origins of stereotypes and myths about Latin Americans that were created by the U.S., and demonstrate how such tropes (especially in the Global North) have affected the perceptions of Latin American countries, customs, people and culture. There are two main stereotypes addressed in the chapter one: 'the enlightened stereotype of the savage' and 'the romantic stereotype of the savage'. The authors argue that these negative representations, and others, are being challenged by Latin Americans currently residing in the U. S. through many mediums, including print and image media, and arts and culture.

In chapter two the authors provide concrete examples of women's participation and representation in electoral reform (national parliaments) in Latin American countries, particularly, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Panama. They trace the "history of women's elected political representation" in these countries and show the shifts in attitudes, politics, culture and larger societal institutions that have occurred with regard to gender equality. They also reveal the sociological factors that have propelled, but also limited, the advancement of women and women's rights in the electoral architecture.

Chapter three addresses common problems that can arise during large scale elections, including, for example, the efficient counting of votes, establishing voter confidence, the problem of partisan electoral officials, and fraud. The authors provide clear examples from Latin American countries (for example, “the PRI-controlled electoral institutions” in Mexico and the participatory government of Kuna peoples in Panama) of ways to ameliorate common problems experienced in elections processes, including by such democracies as the US and Canada.

In chapter four, Arocena and Bowman analyze militarization and demilitarization in some Latin American countries (Panama, Honduras, and Costa Rica) during the 1948-1990 period, with a focus on how demilitarization can occur, and the inter-militarization trade-offs that exist. They critically examine the role and use of militaries in general, and the differences between internally- and externally-focused militaries.

Chapter five offers an analysis of how the Indigenous populations in Bolivia have mobilized and gained recognition and political power in recent decades. The case of Bolivia has many valuable lessons to offer Canada and the U.S. in addressing the needs of minority populations, working toward decolonization strategies, and maintaining a ‘plurinational state’.

In chapter six, the authors explore Brazil’s race relations, with a particular focus on how the Afro-Brazilian movement challenged the myth of ‘racial democracy,’ which was a dominant perspective in Brazilian society, and how Brazil has continued to ameliorate the marginalized status of Afro-Brazilians.

Explored in chapter seven are the complexities surrounding how Latin Americans are perceived and treated in the U.S. The authors point out that the majority of Latinos in the U.S. are legal citizens who make considerable contributions to the U.S. economy in several areas, and argue that Latin Americans in the U.S. have maintained their respective traditions and culture despite the imposition of assimilationist (past and present) strategies.

Chapter eight offers the readers’ insight into how some Latin American countries (notably, Costa Rica and Brazil) have dealt with economic redistribution. The authors focus on Costa Rica as a country with a capitalist economy that has managed to create a redistributive state, complete with activist policies to aid the impoverished (growth-with-equity). On the other hand, they show that Brazil opted for the growth-without-equity model up until 1994, at which point it changed to activist policy to address the growing poverty. Arocena and Bowman discuss the varying models used for economic distribution and their implications for neoliberal societies.

In chapter nine the authors discuss the complexities and shortfalls of the 1980s reform of Chilean pension system in which it went from a ‘pay as you go’ system, to one that is based on private individual accounts. These reforms are often touted by proponents who favour private pension plan models. The authors provide a useful critical analysis of both pension models (public and private).

The focus of the final chapter of this book is on sports, especially football, and its role in Argentinian and Brazilian societies across socio-economic statuses. The first half of the chapter debunks the myth that football can be used as a political tool to manipulate the masses, as so thought by certain political powers in the these countries. The chapter then turns to discuss the reasons behind Uruguay's success in creating winning football teams. The authors argue that the Global North has much to learn from the experience of Uruguayan, Argentinian and Brazilian football teams in winning their first World Cups.

In conclusion, Arocena and Bowman eloquently demonstrate how Latin American countries offer innovative thinking and policies in the realm of women's rights, electoral reform, recognition of Indigenous and racialized minority populations, militarization and demilitarization, and pension reform, and show that can benefit countries like the U.S. and Canada. It is an excellent resource for undergraduate students in political science and policy development, and for course directors and teaching assistants who are seeking to stimulate critical thinking and dialogue about Latin America.