



Peter R. Kingstone, Timothy J. Power, eds. *Democratic Brazil Revisited*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008. xiv + 342 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8229-4354-9; \$26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8229-6004-1.



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Published on H-LatAm (February, 2012)

Commissioned by Dennis R. Hidalgo

Institutional Stability and Social Uncertainty: Unpacking the Challenges of Democracy in Brazil in the Twenty-First Century

Upon Dilma Rousseff's inauguration in January 2011, the Brazilian and international press made much of her importance as the first woman president in Brazilian history. Her election was notable for another reason: she was the first Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT) candidate to win the presidency in the wake of Luís Inácio "Lula" da Silva's administration. Her election said as much about how far Brazilian democracy has come since the end of a military regime in 1985 as it did about how much the PT has changed.

Brazilian democracy and the PT are the two focuses of Peter R. Kingstone and Timothy J. Power's edited volume, *Democratic Brazil Revisited*. Kingstone and Power had previously edited *Democratic Brazil: Actors, Institutions, and Processes*, published in 1999. That collection painted an uncertain and occasionally bleak future for democracy in Brazil's political systems. In *Democratic Brazil Revisited*, Kingstone and Power bring together political scientists from Brazil and the United States to consider the functioning of democracy and politics in Brazil

in the wake of Lula's 2006 reelection. Although only nine years elapsed between the two volumes, *Democratic Brazil Revisited* draws much different conclusions, finding that democratic systems are thriving and strong in Brazil. However, the ongoing inequalities in Brazilian society temper the great strides in institutional stability in Brazil. Thus, while in 1999 the very democratic institutions in Brazil seemed to be threatened, today it is social democracy, and not political democracy, that faces an uncertain future.

Democratic Brazil Revisited is broken down into four sections. The first part focuses on the PT's rise to the presidency. Wendy Hunter's essay focuses strictly on party politics within the PT. She questions whether the PT can be called a leftist party today. Hunter examines the market-friendly policies of the Lula administration and the rightward shift the party took during the first term of his administration, concluding that while the PT is still a party of the Left that works with an array of social groups, it is "much less so than before" (p. 31).

Kathryn Hochstetler's article builds on Hunter's study of the PT by examining the relationship between the PT and civil society organizations (CSOs), small organizations that focused on particular issues such as the environment or land reform. The alliance between CSOs and the PT had been a major factor in Lula's election in 2002. However, upon his inauguration, the CSOs became increasingly estranged from the party. Popular mobilizations in 2003 in favor of reforms Lula once supported gave way to CSOs questioning their relationship to Lula. Ultimately, as corruption scandals began to plague the PT in 2005, CSOs moved away from the PT and looked for alternate ways outside of party politics to represent their interests, even as they defended Lula in the face of corruption. While this latter point may seem contradictory, Hochstetler points out that if the CSOs turned on Lula, they would have ended up allied with the right-wing parties they had opposed for years, thus demonstrating how the PT has become the lesser of two evils for many who had originally supported its radical demands in the 1980s and 1990s.

Part 2 focuses on political institutions and their roles in society. This section marks a complete reversal from the original volume of *Democratic Brazil*, which expressed serious concerns about the health and future of democratic institutions in Brazil. The three essays in this section instead find that political institutions in Brazil are healthy and thriving, indicating a "much higher quality democracy" from an institutional standpoint (p. 9). Fabiano Santos and Márcio Grijó Vilarouca challenge those scholars and activists who say that the PT's shift has blurred the lines between the Brazilian Left and Right. Santos and Vilarouca argue that ideology still plays an important role in Brazilian politics. While the PT has shifted some, there are still major ideological differences between it and parties like the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) and the Liberal Front Party (PFL).[1] Santos and Vilarouca also directly challenge critics of Brazil's system of presidential parliamentarism, in which a president has to build a multiparty coalition in Congress in order to pass legislation. The authors argue that Brazilian presidential parliamentarism actually increases governability, as coalition-building helps centralize policy formation, thereby providing a new take on the still-contentious debate over the relationship between executive and legislative power in Brazil. Timothy Power's essay draws on surveys of elected congressional members to show a "convergence" in Brazilian politics since the end of military rule in 1985. While this would seem to run counter to Santos's and Vilarouca's argu-

ments about ideology, Power makes clear that the PT is still left of the PSDB and PFL, even as it has shifted closer to the center. Indeed, Power argues this center-ward shift has actually aided political stability in Brazil, as vetoes are more difficult to come by and as there is less of a radical shift in policy between one administration and another. Closing out this section, Barry Ames, Andy Baker, and Lucio R. Rennó focus on the factors voters consider in presidential and legislative elections. Instead of revealing the importance of patronage politics and pork-barrel spending in voters' decisions, Ames, Baker, and Rennó demonstrate that issue-voting is a major factor in the Brazilian electorate's decision-making, thus running counter to "conventional wisdom" (p. 108). This is not to say that pork and patronage are not important, but the authors argue that political clientelism is disappearing in Brazilian politics, thereby further strengthening democracy in Brazil.

Part 3 turns its focus away from institutions to focus on public policies in Brazil. In this section, the challenges facing social democracy in Brazil are more apparent than in the first two sections of the book. The section opens with what is one of the best essays of the volume. Aline Diniz Amaral, Peter Kingstone, and Jonathan Kriekhaus discuss economic policy to demonstrate the constrictions on progressive policy Lula confronted even before his election. The authors contextualize Brazil's economic climate in the 2002 campaign, during which Brazil's economy was teetering on the edge of a collapse similar to the one that ravaged Argentina in 2001. Many scholars, including Hunter earlier in the volume, point to Lula's 2002 "Letter to the Brazilian People" as the watershed in his shift towards market-friendly policies, as he reassured foreign investors that he would not mark a radical departure from his predecessor. Many scholars view the "Letter" as the evidence that Lula had turned away from his socialism and the leftism that characterized the PT in the 1980s and early 1990s. However, Amaral, Kingstone, and Kriekhaus suggest that Lula's rightward shift was largely shaped by the need to spur foreign investment in Brazil as he confronted an increasingly destabilized economy. In this context, investors could tip the balance toward financial success or ruin. Thus, outside factors and the economic consequences of Fernando Henrique Cardoso's economic policies, rather than an internal "betrayal" of leftist ideologies, were what spurred Lula's more moderate stance in 2002 and beyond. Although Lula continued his market-friendly policies as president, he increased the government's regulatory authority to buffer Brazilian citizens against unrestricted

neoliberal capitalism.

The remaining essays in this section also provide more complex analyses of the political and social effects of policy in democratic Brazil. Marcus André Melo's article focuses on social policy during the late 1990s and early 2000s, particularly the Bolsa Família program designed to provide funds to families so their children may continue with their education. Melo argues that the Bolsa Família is another instance of continuity from similar programs that Cardoso began, and suggests that the 1990s and early 2000s were a period when Brazilian presidents reasserted their authority in the wake of decentralization as outlined in the constitution of 1988. Where Melo uses the Bolsa Família to demonstrate the successes of Brazilian social policy, however, the final two chapters of this unit find major weaknesses in other areas. Anthony W. Pereira focuses on the issue of public security and police reform. Pereira starts by highlighting the increasing violence in Brazil, pointing out that 45,000 Brazilians are murdered each year, "a quantity that almost equals the number of U.S. troops lost during the entire Vietnam War" (p. 188). In trying to explain why this is the case, Pereira argues that the causes are wide-ranging and cannot easily be chalked up to poverty. Federalism, institutional disconnect, corruption, and the rise of privatized security forces have all played a role in Brazil's inability to deal with increasingly rampant violence. Pereira concludes that the future of public security in Brazil is uncertain at best. Finally, Ollie A. Johnson III's article examines racial inequalities in Brazil. While not overwhelmingly positive, Johnson does see some hope, particularly in the ways in which Afro-Brazilian organizations have mobilized around affirmative action demands since the 1980s. These groups have successfully mobilized to get politicians to adopt their platforms and to confront racial inequality in Brazil. While there have been legal improvements in the 2000s, many of these laws still fail to address some of the subtle ways through which racism operates in Brazil, and Afro-Brazilians' fight for racial equality at all levels continues to encounter opposition, particularly from intellectuals and university officials.

Part 4 closes the volume by looking at "Views of Democracy from Below." Building on Johnson's article, Alberto Carlos Almeida uses Roberto DaMatta's theories on social hierarchies in Brazil, symbolized by the phrase "Do you know who you're talking to?" to suggest that while strict social hierarchies exist, these stratifications are disappearing as more Brazilians gain access to greater levels of education. The final essay of the volume dis-

cusses how residents of Rio de Janeiro's *favelas*, or slums, experience democracy in Brazil. Perlman draws on over forty years of fieldwork to demonstrate that, in many ways, the democracy that returned as the twenty-one-year military regime exited in 1985 never reached the favelas. Perlman shows that favela residents continue to be excluded from national political processes even while they are increasingly aware of their rights as Brazilian citizens. This has led to greater cynicism and disenchantment regarding a democracy that in many ways has not filtered down to residents in the favelas.

In any work such as this, which covers a wide variety of articles, it is often difficult to trace general arguments. Yet one theme that does clearly emerge is that while Brazilian democracy is healthy and increasingly strong from an institutional standpoint, social democracy has a long way to go. Certainly, some essays within the book draw contradictory conclusions. While Hunter suggests that Lula had begun shifting the PT towards the center ever since the mid 1990s, Amaral, Kingstone, and Kriekhaus argue that the shift only happened in 2002 and was born out of necessity. Likewise, while Power and Hunter's works suggest continuity between the Cardoso and Lula administrations, Meló and Pereira point to real shifts in social policies between the two presidents. However, these differences are not indicative of erroneous research or analysis; rather, it becomes clear that while there may have been some level of macro-economic continuity between the two administrations, when it comes to social policy and the role of the state in regulating and distributing wealth, there are still real differences between Lula and Cardoso.

Although all of the authors have degrees in political science, there is much within *Democratic Brazil Revisited* that is of value to historians. None of the authors attempt to overextend the arguments by making Brazil symbolic of universal patterns of democracy. Indeed, Amaral, Kingstone, and Kriekhaus go out of their way to caution against using Brazil as a model to be applied elsewhere, even while suggesting that certain processes may point to new ways to consider democratic paradigms in other countries. Collectively, these scholars do an outstanding job drawing on the historical context and national particularities of Brazil, a fact evident in the works cited in the bibliography. Articles such as those by Pereira, Melo, Johnson, and Perlman carefully trace the historical roots of modern issues like poverty, security, and racism. Hunter's, Hochstetler's, and Power's articles provide important understandings of how the platforms, policies, and practices of the PT have transformed

over the last twenty-five years. The Amaral, Kingstone, and Kriekhaus article excels at placing the PT's recent moderation in a transnational context. Almeida's work provides a useful addendum to the oft-cited social theory of Roberto DaMatta, while Santos and Vilarouca on one hand and Ames, Baker, and Rennó on the other masterfully challenge many of the traditional understandings of political practices in Brazil.

In dealing with such recent events and analyses, *Democratic Brazil Revisited* is one of the first works to provide a political and historical analysis of Brazil at the dawn of the twenty-first century. The volume does an excellent job engaging broader political science and sociological debates on democratic Brazil. Several of the articles provide a revisionist analysis of political institutions and society in Brazil. The essays in part 2 directly challenge much of the political science scholarship that suggests instability and declares that presidential parliamentarism cannot succeed in Brazil or elsewhere. Together, parts 3 and 4 jointly engage with what it means to be a citizen in democratic Brazil, adding to recent works like James Holston's *Insurgent Citizenship* (2009) that explore how and why different social actors define democracy and activism in Brazil. More specifically, the essay by Amaral, Kingstone, and Kriekhaus provides a far more nuanced understanding of Lula's market-friendly policies than many analyses have offered. Likewise, by taking a longer view of mobilization than Stanley R. Bailey's recent work *Legacies of Race: Identities, Attitudes, and Politics in Brazil* (2009), Ollie Johnston shows that there have been some improvements in racial mobilization and struggles in Brazil, albeit limited in scope. The end result is that *Democratic Brazil Revisited*'s essays collectively address the broader social science literature on Brazil in the 1990s and 2000s even while laying the groundwork for future historical analyses that historians have yet to write.

Naturally, there are some methodological and narrative approaches that might raise questions among historians. Occasionally, the narrative of continuity between the Cardoso and Lula administrations seems to consume some of these articles, even as their evidence points to real differences between the two, particularly in the social arena. Articles by Melo, Pereira, and Amaral, Kingstone, and Kriekhaus all provide data that reveal the ways in which very real and specific changes happened under Lula, suggesting that, when considering the Cardoso and Lula administrations, scholars need to move beyond macro-economic analyses to look at more particular differences between the two governments. Additionally, several of the essays uncritically draw on data

like interviews or census documents dealing with race without questioning the ways in which those sources are biased. And given the focus on institutional democracy in Brazil, these essays overwhelmingly focus on political parties and policymaking, resulting in an emphasis on elites. Very few of the essays concentrate on how these policies affect everyday Brazilians. The one major exception to this emphasis is the Perlman article on the favelas; paradoxically, hers is also the one article that best shows some real continuity not just between Cardoso and Lula, but also between authoritarian Brazil (1964-85) and the New Republic (1985 to the present). However, historians should not rule out this volume. While this work focuses on the upper echelons of Brazilian politics, it still provides important contributions. As Romana Falcón reminded us, top-down history may not be "the only possible perspective," but "it is at least, and fortunately, an essential one."^[2] These essays provide an important understanding of the upper echelons of politics and democracy in Brazil. That said, scholars looking for "history from the bottom up" will most likely be frustrated, but those who are willing to consider how upper-level negotiations and conflicts affect policymaking will be well rewarded.

The best scholarly works pose questions both for their native fields and other fields, and the essays in this volume do an excellent job in doing just that, greatly improving our understanding of late twentieth- and early twenty-first century politics in Brazil. In their introduction, Kingstone and Power comment that "perhaps ... not enough time has passed to make definitive statements about democratization" in Brazil (p. 6). That may be true, but such a statement also unjustly downplays the findings from *Democratic Brazil Revisited*. The essays contained within lay important and insightful foundations for all scholars asking bigger questions about society and the state in democratic Brazil, and this volume will be a vital and valuable asset to scholars conducting research on early twentieth-century Brazil for years to come.

Notes

[1]. In 2007, the PFL changed its name to the Democrats. However, at the time these articles were written, it was still the PFL, and is referred to as such throughout the volume.

[2]. Romana Falcon, "Force and the Search for Consent: The Role of the *Jefaturas Políticas* of Coahuila in National State Formation," in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 107-134.

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Citation: Colin Michael Snider. Review of Kingstone, Peter R.; Power, Timothy J., eds., *Democratic Brazil Revisited*. H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews. February, 2012.

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