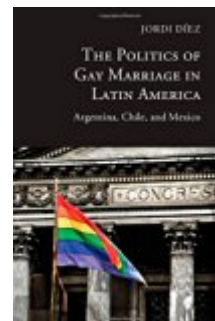


Jordi Díez. *The Politics of Gay Marriage in Latin America: Argentina, Chile, and Mexico.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 303 pp. \$47.99, cloth, ISBN 978-1-107-09914-2.



Reviewed by Gustavo Subero

Published on H-Diplo (November, 2015)

Commissioned by Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

After the historic ruling in June 2015 by the Supreme Court of the United States to allow same-sex couples to marry nationwide, the issue of gay marriage has become even more pertinent in the whole of the Americas. *The Politics of Gay Marriage in Latin America* provides one of the most significant contributions to the study of same-sex politics within the Latin American context. Author Jordi Díez is very thorough in the way he approaches the subject matter and provides a rather detailed analysis of the social and political conditions that in both Mexico and Argentina have enabled the emergence of governmental policies aimed at safeguarding and guaranteeing the same social and political rights and level of citizenship to people engaged in a same-sex relationship. Díez is also very thorough in the way he explains how national politics have operated during the different stages of policy-making within the Federalist system of Mexico and the Assembly system in Argentina.

The central argument in this project is that policy change occurs most effectively in those so-

cieties where gay activism has demonstrated a high level of organizational mobility and influence in most spheres of governmental power by creating networks and alliances with key political figures, political parties, nongovernmental organizations (NGO) and other political actors, whilst also making sure that the agenda for same-sex marriage equality becomes a key issue for policy reform. Díez dexterously traces the history of LGBT activism in both Argentina and Mexico by looking at the first LGBT organizations that emerged in these countries and how much they influence public opinion on matters of same-sex citizenship, as well as the crucial issue of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and 90s. By doing so, he paints a clear picture of the way that LGBT activism paved the path not only to achieve gender recognition outside the biological binaries male and female, but also to guarantee the same rights for same-sex couples historically enjoyed by their heterosexual counterparts.

The second part of Díez's work explains the reasons behind policy stasis in most areas of

LGBT policy reform and the processes that led to the implementation of gay marriage in these countries. A key argument is that by framing gay marriage as a human right's issue, rather than framing it within the politics of LGBT rights, social and state agents were able to create a body of public opinion that mobilized and advanced the rights of LGBT couples. Díez argues that in both countries a crucial point in the fight for marriage equality came through the back door of the AIDS crisis in the 1990s. Partners of those who had suffered or died as a result of AIDS-related diseases found themselves in situations where they had no conjugal rights over their partner's possessions, or those that had been acquired in the course of their relationship. What is also clear is that amongst LGBT activists the issues of gay marriage versus civil partnerships became a site of contention, with some believing the latter should be given priority since they would offer the same rights marriage extended without the limitations concerning the influence of religion in civil life. Alongside this strategy, political and social actors realized the importance of engaging in public debates framed around the notion that to deny the possibility of gay marriage to same-sex couples violated LGBT individual's intrinsic human rights.

Another important factor in the consolidation of gay marriage in both countries was the access to the process of policy making that activists and NGOs members had that took advantage of the regional and national idiosyncrasies that best allowed the majority of the population (presumed to be heterosexual) to engage with the struggle for recognition of the legal rights of same-sex couples. Díez notes, for instance, that social media has played a pivotal role in engaging the population and creating consensus in matters of LGBT rights and marriage equality. He also acknowledges that the institutional makeup of each country, as well as the political party systems in place, clearly determines the avenues of operation that activists and policymakers follow to effectively make gain for their demands. In this regard, he argues that

policy change has occurred more effectively in these two countries because the political party system is conducive to it. Lastly, the third factor in the success of marriage equality was the alignment of activists' collective actions with certain party policies. That is, activists and their allies were effective in framing their demands in a way that resonated with larger social debates in these countries. In this way, such demands did not appear to be the demands of a small minority, but the demands of a larger majority whose advocacy reaffirmed their sense of citizenship and their democratic values. As a result, the collective actions of gay activists, as well as pro-marriage equality political and social actors were put forward in ways that resonated with national debates regarding each country's democratization process. In other words, at the core of Díez's work is the premise that agency and social movements are key factors in social reform.

Perhaps the only area of contention with this work would be the notion of Latin America itself advanced by the author, which seems slightly misleading considering the real scope of his work. Latin America as a subject of study could be broadly defined as a set of territories that share "Indian heritage and European dominance; macho men and stoical power; violent revolutions and ruthless dictatorships; agrarian reforms and urban congestion; dire poverty and sumptuous luxury; remote hinterlands and advanced industrial enterprises, la casa and la calle, liberation theology and dependence theory." [1] However, it becomes clear in Díez's book that the "politics of gay marriage in Latin America" is limited to Argentina and Mexico, whose advancements in same-sex politics are then contrasted with the political stasis experienced in Chile. Unfortunately the author infers that his work operates at a continental level when, in fact, it looks at only a handful of countries. There are two issues that are rather striking about this volume. On the one hand, it seems an odd choice that the author decides not to offer an analysis of the politics of gay

marriage in Brazil, especially since this country has a long history of LGBT advocacy and political activism. One has to assume that this project was finished before same-sex marriage was introduced through a sweeping Federal Court ruling in May 2013 across the country (despite the fact that the author provides references to sources dated from that same year). Nonetheless, to bypass the politics of gay marriage in a country where civil unions for same-sex couples have been legal since 2003 seems at odds with the purpose and title of this work. On the other hand, the author's decision to offer an analysis of the Chilean situation seems rather arbitrary, since, as he rightly asserts, there are other countries, such as Ecuador, that would have offered a much better panorama of same-sex marriage politics on the continent.

Therefore, it seems a shame that this volume does not engage more thoroughly with other Latin American experiences that would have painted a broader picture of the strategies and political platforms that LGBT individuals have adopted in order to enjoy the same rights as heterosexual married couples in a region that is historically regarded as intrinsically *machista* and heavily influenced by the Catholic Church. Díez's book, nonetheless, makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature on the advancement of same-sex marriage equality and will undoubtedly become a key text for those trying to understand the politics of LGBT activism in some countries in Latin America.

Note

[1]. Marit Melhuus and Kristi Anne Stolen, eds., *Machos, Mistresses, Madonnas: Contesting the Power of Latin American Imagery* (London: Verso, 1996), 6-7.

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Citation: Gustavo Subero. Review of Diez, Jordi. *The Politics of Gay Marriage in Latin America: Argentina, Chile, and Mexico*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. November, 2015.

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