

## Political Representation in Southern Europe and Latin America

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(Freire, André; Barragán, Mélanie; Coller, Xavier; Lisi, Marco, and Tsatsanis, Emmanouil. *Political Representation in Southern Europe and Latin America: Before and After the Great Recession and the Commodity Crisis*. London: Routledge, 2020)

Which factors or phenomena may shape and pattern political representation? This is one of the most common questions in the Brazilian, international, and comparative literatures in the political and social sciences. Several consensuses have emerged regarding the impact – on political representation – of cleavages (LIPSET and ROKKAN, 1967), culture (ALMOND and VERBA, 1963; INGLEHART, 1997), the evolution of the media and type of political parties (BARTOLINI and MAIR, 1990; MANIN, 1995), and, more recently, the internet and social media (BENNETT, 2012; BENNET and SAGERBERG, 2013; KRIESI, 2004).

The book ‘Political representation in Southern Europe and Latin America: before and after the great recession and the commodity crisis’, edited by André Freire et al., addresses this general question by specifically determining the impacts of two distinct economic crises on political representation, taking Southern Europe and (a few) Latin American countries as empirical evidence.

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This is not an original topic, since economic performance as a predictor of changes in electoral/political representation has been abundantly reported since Downs (1957). In fact, despite its title and ambition, the book does not really deal with economic determinants of political representation, but rather with the impact of economic crises on political/electoral ‘realignments’. Again, this approach is not entirely new, since there is much scholarly work relating political trends to both the 2008 crisis in Europe (see, for instance, BARDI et al., 2014; BOSCO and VERNEY, 2012; HERNÁNDEZ and KRIESI, 2016; TORCAL, 2014) and the 2010 crisis in Latin America (ALBALA, 2018; JOIGNANT et al., 2019; ROBERTS, 2014). The book’s major insight is that it considers these two regions as being comparable with each other and thus analyzes them from a comparative perspective. Indeed, the editors themselves see this as the book’s main original contribution, arguing that “studies of the two regions in the last couple of decades have taken separate paths on almost every research question” (FREIRE et al., 2020, p. 02).

In the book’s introduction, the editors organized the discussion into three convoluted and repetitive Research Questions (e.g. RQ1: “are the current patterns, since the Great Recession (2008–9) in Southern Europe and since the commodity crisis (2014–15) in Latin America, fundamentally different from those before the outbreak of the crisis in terms of degree and/or quality, or do they just signal an acceleration of trends that existed before the crisis?”). In reading this, the reader would thus expect to find – or track – similar trends in political realignments caused by economic crises across Southern Europe and Latin America.

However, the way in which the chapters are organized confounds such expectation. The book is divided into two parts: one for Southern Europe and another for Latin America, with very little dialogue between the two regions. The book’s introduction does not provide a general overview or systematic comparison of these two regions. Each part of the book starts with a comparative descriptive chapter (i.e., one chapter on Southern Europe in the first part, and another about Latin America in the second part). Next, come the case studies: five for Southern Europe – with two chapters dedicated to Spain (why?) – and three for Latin America. Both parts end with a dispensable ‘methodological’ chapter: one, in the section on Southern Europe, discusses the difficulty of carrying out elite surveys; the other

presents the PELA project<sup>1</sup>, an initiative led by the University of Salamanca for the study of political elites across Latin America. Ultimately, the Conclusion – similarly to the Introduction – does not provide an overview of the phenomena and only summarizes the contents of previous chapters.

Hence, the book seems to fail to achieve its main objective that is to provide a comparative and systematic analysis of the consequences of the 2008 and 2014 economic crises for political representation. Apparently, its findings are confined to case studies with a low level of replicability and generalization.

The selection of cases, however, is questionable. If, on the one hand, the case selection for Southern Europe seems quite logical as it contains the countries that are usually encompassed by this title (even if no justification was provided for having two chapters on Spain), the case selection in Latin America, on the other hand, looks more dubious. Only three cases (Chile, Ecuador, and Venezuela) were selected, among which one case –Venezuela – is meaningless for any consideration regarding political representation as the country's democracy has been particularly undermined since 2013. Any scholar who knows something about Latin America would then ask: Why have the editors not considered choosing Argentina or Brazil, both of which have undergone major political shifts since 2013.

Also, it is quite surprising that, in addition to the questionable Venezuelan case, none of the authors of the Latin American cases are actually Latin Americans. This is not a pointless remark. Although every case study in the section on Southern Europe have apparently been written by scholars from the countries under analysis – which entails knowledge and familiarity with the local political process and up-to-date scholarly work –, the same does not apply to the Latin American cases. Indeed, most of these chapters seem outdated, with references going up to 2015-16, except the one about Venezuela. That is most unexpected since the justification for including Latin American cases was to study potential political shifts 'after' the commodity crisis, which exploded in 2014. Moreover, while the European cases seem to follow a similar script and use similar analytical tools, the same does not hold true for the Latin American cases, whose analysis, methods, and scope vary widely. All that leaves us with the impression that the book

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<sup>1</sup>Proyecto de Elites Latino Americanas', led by the University of Salamanca, is a survey conducted among congressmen and congresswomen of all Latin American countries.

lacks balance, both quantitatively (five cases versus three cases) and qualitatively (a consistent and updated part about Europe – despite the two chapters dedicated to Spain – versus a loosely organized part on Latin America).

In short, the book is an original piece that addresses a relevant theme. The European case studies might be especially useful, particularly for scholars interested in comparing political realignments in Europe with those in Latin America or elsewhere.

Revised by Karin Blikstad

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