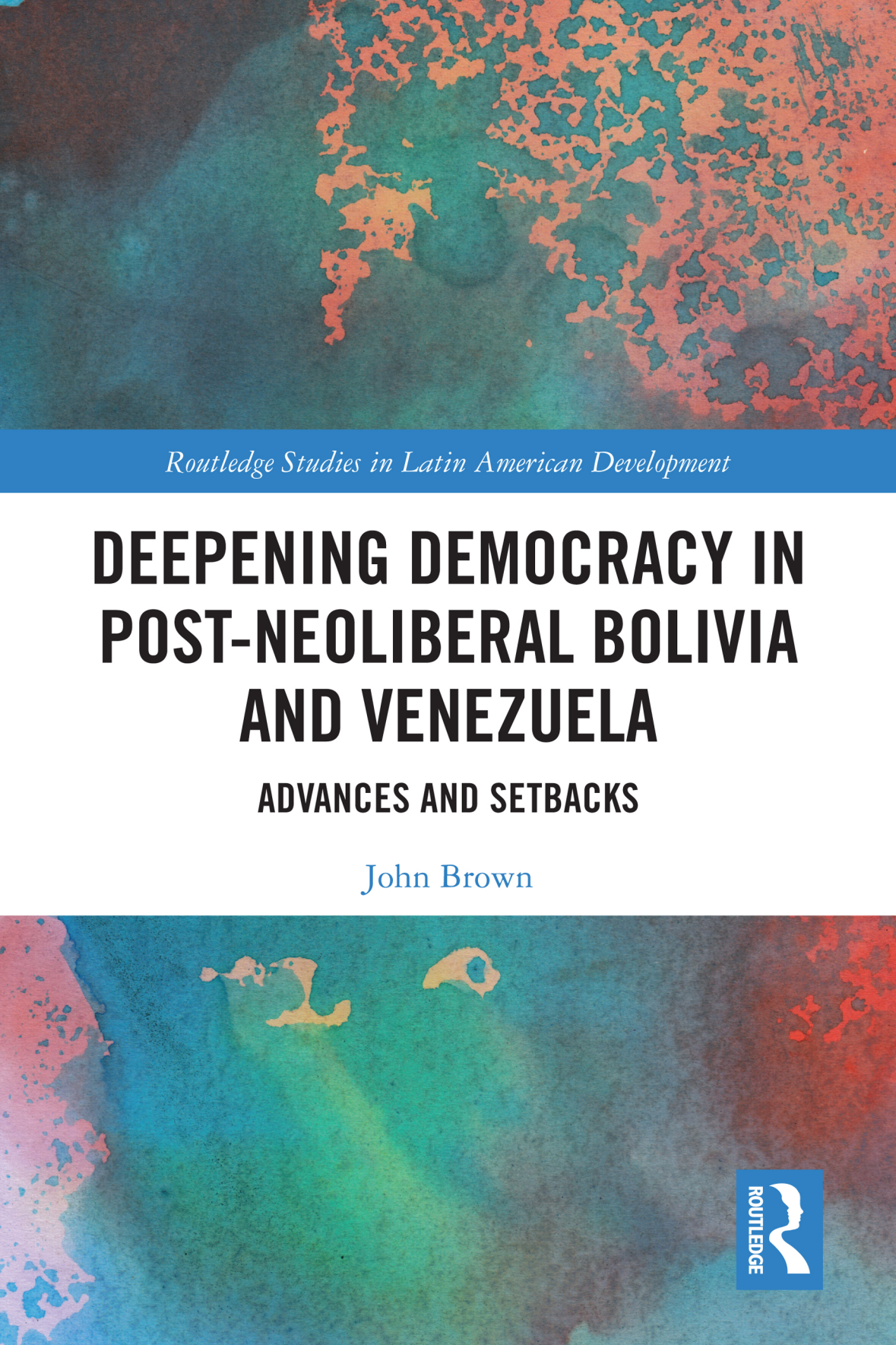




Routledge Studies in Latin American Development

DEEPENING DEMOCRACY IN POST-NEOLIBERAL BOLIVIA AND VENEZUELA

ADVANCES AND SETBACKS

John Brown



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Deepening Democracy in Post-Neoliberal Bolivia and Venezuela

This book provides a timely and nuanced analysis of the successes and shortcoming of efforts to move beyond market democracy in Bolivia and Venezuela.

A twin crisis of democratic representation and socio-economic precarity created space for anti-system outsiders to emerge on the left flank of traditional party-systems in Bolivia and Venezuela, paving the way for a “post-neoliberal” democratization process. Over the course of the projects headed by Evo Morales in Bolivia and Hugo Chávez and his successor Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, however, power struggles emerged between a recalcitrant elite, the left-led government, and organized popular sectors. These tensions shaped the pathways that processes followed, with simultaneous democratization and de-democratization occurring whereby a partial deepening and extending of democratic quality for popular sectors was accompanied by the bending of liberal norms. Comparing the varying balance and forms of power between competing actors, this book offers a novel and rich explanation of the partial and stuttering efforts to advance a post-neoliberal democracy in Bolivia and Venezuela.

Bringing important insights on the reasons for the emergence of anti-system leaders and parties, the impact that they have on the quality of democracy, and how progressive governments interact with social movements, this book will be of interest to researchers studying Latin America, as well as those specializing in development and political science more broadly.

John Brown is a lecturer at the Centre for the Study of Politics, Maynooth University, Ireland.

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Deepening Democracy in Post-Neoliberal Bolivia and Venezuela

Advances and Setbacks

John Brown

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Introduction

The crisis of market democracy and the emergence of anti-system outsiders

Depending on who you ask about the democratization processes headed by Evo Morales in Bolivia and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, you will get an array of polarized and complex answers regarding their impacts on democratic quality. Critics from the liberal school of democracy decry that the leaders were illiberal populists who damaged the very fabric of democracy by boosting the power of the president over other branches of government, by limiting private property rights, and by restricting opposition media organizations. Less orthodox analysts highlight that executive powers were boosted so as to overcome the power of entrenched economic and media elites who sought to limit the scope of the leftist presidents to govern from the left. While the processes have fostered polarizing debates between liberal and radical scholars, contrasting analyses have not been confined to academia.

During my fieldwork in Bolivia and Venezuela, popular sector appraisals of the processes highlighted both the advances and shortcomings of the processes. Supporters of the presidents from poor neighborhoods in both countries told me that democracy did not exist for them before the elections of Morales and Chávez.¹ For example, during a meeting of a community council in the Petare *barrio* of Caracas, a community organizer described to me that

before Chávez, when I was younger and saw someone talking about the constitution we turned off the television because we felt that politics did not matter for us, it was only for ‘them’ ... the rich. When Chávez came he asked us ‘Do you know what this constitution says?’ He encouraged us to ask questions.

Aside from being encouraged to participate in democratic politics, people regularly emphasized to me that for the first time in their lives they could call an elected government “their government” because policies actually sought to alleviate some of the worst excesses of poverty and exclusion that they experienced on a daily basis. Walking around low-income neighborhoods in Caracas, Venezuela and El Alto, Bolivia, residents showed me how state funding had supported the development of new housing projects, schools,

health services, and markets selling subsidized foods. Residents told me that previous governments had literally forgotten about them and left them isolated in the crumbling outskirts of cities. Under Morales and Chávez, new infrastructure projects sought to re-connect these forgotten sectors of society to urban centers. Indeed, on my daily trips on the new highway and cable-car system connecting El Alto to La Paz, mini-bus drivers and passengers told me that “Evo is one of us ... He cares about us,” “he listens to us.” Likewise, while watching a game of basketball in Petare, Caracas, on a court built using state funds, a youth worker pointed up toward the highest reaches of the *barrio* where a cable-car system was under construction. The youth worker explained that the poorest residents of the *barrio* lived in the highest zones as the journey down the steep-sided valley was long and difficult. When the cable car is completed, he noted, “we will be connected, we will be part of Caracas, we will be part of Venezuela.”

Popular sector support for the projects, however, was never uncritical. There were concerns over the presidents’ moderating of reform processes in the face of opposition, while some popular sector organizers suggested that space for grassroots critique of the presidents and their parties was too limited. In Venezuela, an ardent Chavista (supporter of the process headed by Hugo Chávez) complained to me that when their local communal council and commune representatives sought to raise concerns regarding the speed and direction of the process with members of the new left-party, they were ignored and that a “bureaucracy of the Right” had been “replaced by a bureaucracy of the Left.” Issues of a lack of space for critique were also prevalent in Bolivia. As the coordinator of Defense Committee for La Paz (CODELPA) stressed to me, Morales and his party “tell our popular organizations that ‘if you support me, I will finance you, I will give you power’. They (popular organizations) have been co-opted, for me, they have been extorted.”

Liberal academic analyses describe the processes as examples of illiberal de-democratization; radical scholars and supporters of the processes in Bolivia and Venezuela describe how popular voices have been incorporated into democratic politics for the first time; and some popular organization members suggest that while new voices may have been incorporated, critical popular voices were not. How is one to interpret such paradoxical interpretations of the reform processes in Bolivia and Venezuela? Were Chávez and Morales examples of authoritarian populists whose lack of respect for the norms and institutions of democracy placed democratic stability in doubt? Or were they radical democratizers who responded to calls from long-excluded sectors of society for political and socio-economic inclusion? Did left-wing governments seek to curb critical voices coming from sectors of their popular support base? Is it possible that democratic quality simultaneously weakened in some areas while strengthening in others? If so, what explains the directions processes took? This book sheds light on these questions by analyzing what happens to democratization processes when left-governments find themselves squeezed between popular sectors demanding political and socio-economic

incorporation and a powerful opposition who seek to protect the status quo. In doing so, though examining two Andean cases in detail, the book's analysis is in effect responding to what is arguably the most important global phenomenon at present, namely the crisis of democracy.

Democracy in crisis

There is growing recognition, both in academic literature and in popular commentary, across the political spectrum from Liberals, Conservatives to Marxists, that the contemporary dominant model of democracy faces a crisis. There is, however, a debate as to how this crisis of democracy should be understood and responded to. The dominant narrative has focused on the illiberal behaviors of "populist" leaders whose discursive styles and lack of respect for liberal norms and institutions have threatened democratic stability.² The arguments suggest that if opportunistic populists are not kept from power, there is a risk of democratic backsliding leading to the emergence of hybrid, competitive authoritarian regimes in which democratic institutions are politicized and used by populists to skew the playing field to such an extent that an opposition's capacity to compete is seriously compromised.³

While mainstream analyses raise salient issues regarding the dangers of bending liberal norms, there are several issues with such appraisals. First, and most fundamentally, the symptoms of the crisis of democracy are conflated with the causes of the crisis of democracy. That is, by identifying populism as the major threat to democratic rule, the underlying causes that foster support for outsiders receive far less attention. From this, a second issue emerges whereby "populists" of all ideological stripes are understood as threats to democracy, irrespective of what it is that they seek to do when elected to office, or what forces shape their behaviors following election. Populism has become a catch-all term to describe—and in most cases denigrate—any challenger to the political status quo irrespective of fundamental differences between "populists" in terms of their stances on socio-economic, political, and identity issues. As such, rather than using a populist framing, the terms outsiders and anti-system parties are used here to describe leaders/parties who come from outside the traditional mainstream party system, who call into question the functioning of democracy, and who raise concerns regarding elite capture of institutions.⁴

Outsider, anti-system leaders and parties should be understood as responses to neoliberalization processes which fostered de-democratization processes. In the 1970s, Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki (1975) wrote a highly influential report, *The Crisis of Democracy*, for the Trilateral Commission. The report began with a question: "Is political democracy, as it exists today, a viable form of government?"⁵ The authors described a scenario (particularly in the United States, Western Europe, and Japan) whereby democracy itself had created its own crisis by fostering an overload of demands for increased participation, higher social security payments and a wider social security net,

and better economic welfare. Citizens were said to be demanding “too much democracy” for the state to deliver, while an erosion of authority and governability was due to “over-participation.” As such the report stated that the “crisis” of democracy was a result of the over-permissiveness of democracy itself.⁶

The report presented the challenge of how to reconcile democratic politics, which is built on the premise of equality, with market economics, which is centered on inequality.⁷ With ideological origins in the liberal Weber-Schumpeter model of democracy,⁸ proponents of a neoliberal-infused democracy believed that both political and economic life should be a matter of individual freedom and initiative. A free market society with a minimal state is the goal.⁹ While neoliberalism is a contested concept, fundamentally it is an ideology “founded on an idealized vision of market rule and liberal freedoms, combining a utilitarian conception of market rationality and competitive individualism with deep antipathies to social redistribution and solidarity.”¹⁰ Projects of neoliberalization are not simply about a withdrawal of the state but are instead concerned with its capture and reuse. Neoliberalization processes thus entail both rollback politics of deregulation and dismantlement, and rollout politics of pro-corporate and market-conforming governance. Rollback and rollout neoliberalization processes “sought to create a political economy and social order where public policy is premised upon the dominance of the investor” and where dominant economic forces are insulated from democratic rule and popular accountability.¹¹ Monetarist economic policies are taken out of public debate and enshrined in binding supranational treaties, while the extent of policy is confined within “acceptable” limits set by transnational trading agreements, central banking mechanisms, and bureaucratic expertise.¹² Democracy in the neoliberal era thus became a technocratic affair with experts in non-majoritarian institutions, including independent central banks, playing an increasingly dominant role.¹³ The rules of the game were designed to “‘lock in’ commitments to neo-liberalism and to ‘lock out’ other potential political economy alternatives.”¹⁴

Concerns of socioeconomic citizenship and inequality were reduced to afterthoughts to the overarching drive to provide “good” investment environments. Labor became “flexible,” meaning precarious. Austerity and social-welfare retrenchment became the norm. Individual risk was increased as socialization of risk was decreased, while neoliberal policy design allowed inequality to reach unprecedented levels.¹⁵ Rising economic inequality is translated back onto rising political inequality in a vicious feedback cycle, as the owners of wealth increasingly set the rules of the game that promote their own interests.¹⁶ This extremely narrow (low-quality political citizenship) and shallow (low-quality socio-economic citizenship) form of democracy underpinned by neoliberal rationale may be defined as “market democracy” in which the state’s role is to guarantee the protection of the interests of transnational and domestic capital, irrespective of whether such interests run contrary to those of domestic citizens. This market model of democracy was

promoted as “the only game in town” by both center-right and center-left parties. Unsurprisingly, the de-politicization of politics under market democracy, and its embrace by political parties on both the right and the left, meant that democracy became “devalued” as a political currency.¹⁷ The neoliberal response to the 1970s “crisis of *too much* democracy” engendered a crisis of *too little* democracy today.

The general trend of a (self-reinforcing) narrowing and shallowing of democracy, and the congealment of parties and political leaders around marketized citizenship models, fostered the development of unstable democratic equilibria with traditional party systems feeling the strain in Europe, North America, and Latin America. Where the interests of the wealthiest sectors of society are organized into politics, while issues concerning popular classes are increasingly organized out, democracy becomes unstable. Where party-voter distances widen, while party-party differences narrow, popular indifference and distrust of parties and political institutions more generally grows.¹⁸ This combination of mistrust in the political system alongside anomie and withdrawal from participation opened space for a movement of opposition that could threaten “democracy as we know it.”¹⁹ As parties and politicians become more detached from their traditional social bases, while inequality and socioeconomic precarity become entrenched, democracy is viewed by excluded sectors as a façade for the maintenance of elite privilege, and space for anti-system outsiders widens. Appealing to a sense of personal danger and a shared sense of political exclusion, such candidates may, not wholly inaccurately, portray the political class as having failed, and that it will go on failing, effectively barring citizens from any realistic prospect of a better life.²⁰

Hence, while mainstream analyses locate “populism” as the threat to democracy, they confuse the symptoms of the crisis of democracy with its underlying causes. By painting all outsiders as threats to democracy, including anti-system leaders or parties that seek to respond to the underlying causes of the crisis of democracy, mainstream accounts of “populists” miss the very crux of the matter. This is not to suggest that all outsiders offer a genuine response to the narrowing of and shallowing of democratic quality over the course of neoliberalization processes. They do not. But neither should we fall into the trap of assuming that all outsiders are threats to democracy.

Anti-system outsiders have taken clearly distinctive forms²¹ across Europe and the Americas, with conservative, regressive-reactionary outsiders such as Marine Le Pen and the National Front in France, Viktor Orbán and Fidesz in Hungary, and Donald Trump and the Republican Party in the United States “supporting trade protectionism and forms of ‘welfare chauvinism’—that is, generous welfare states that concentrate their benefits on ‘authentic’ members of the ethno-national community, to the partial or complete exclusion of immigrant and minority populations.”²² Nativist, right-wing regressive outsiders “have thrived in northern and central European countries with relatively unified labor markets and universalistic welfare states under pressure from the forces of market globalization.”²³ While space for such outsiders

grew as a result of the narrowing and shallowing of democratic quality in the neoliberal era, their anti-market positions are not always clear. Indeed, many adopt “positions typical of the pro-market right, such as lower taxation, strong defense of private property and sympathy for business.”²⁴ As such, while these anti-system outsiders critique some features of globalization and challenge the mainstream center-left and center-right parties who converged around neoliberalization processes, they offer little in the way of a clearly demarcated critique of the core underlying factors that fostered the crisis of democracy—and their own elections—in the first place.

In cases where financial crises were followed by free-market austerity and structural adjustments, and “where the traditional labor-based or leftist parties played a major role in the imposition of neoliberal austerity and adjustment programs, thus converging with the programmatic platforms of their more conservative rivals,” mass social and electoral protest paved the way for the election of progressive outsider parties and candidates.²⁵ Moreover, these progressive outsiders emerged in countries where labor markets are highly dualistic and welfare states are segmented,²⁶ resulting in large sections of society being excluded from formal sector employment and the social protections that go with these jobs such as social security, health insurance, and unemployment insurance.²⁷ Outsiders in these cases critiqued mainstream party systems and promised voters redistributive policies and social protections from market insecurities, thereby aiming to provide both political and socio-economic incorporation for previously excluded sectors of society.²⁸ For example, SYRIZA in Greece and Podemos in Spain called into question the neoliberal model of capitalism and its unfettered markets. The leaders of these parties rejected austerity and supported “a shift in economic policy and regulation away from the preference for financial interests and in favor of a redistribution of wealth and income towards the non-wealthy majority in society.”²⁹ While SYRIZA and Podemos politicians were elected to power and sought to deliver on electoral promises, their capacity to challenge the market model of democracy and its accompanying citizenship regime was curbed due to pressure from powerful creditor EU member states as well as threats of capital flight and disinvestment.³⁰

With similarities in the underlying conditions that fostered the emergence of outsiders in Greece and Spain, in several Latin American cases progressive anti-system outsiders were elected to office where they remained in power for extended periods of time. Moreover, in comparison to their European counterparts, these governments made more radical efforts to challenge the market model of democracy and to incorporate excluded sectors via the creation of new spaces of political participation and socio-economic inclusion. While the more aggressive efforts to challenge market democracy ensured the outsider-led processes in Latin America retained greater popular support than their European counterparts, by their very nature the processes challenged the status quo and triggered opposition. In the struggles between the anti-system governments and opposition, both sides adopted institutional and

extra-institutional tactics to advance their agendas. As such, the region's cases merit deeper investigation so as to uncover broader lessons regarding if and how progressive anti-system leaders/parties can respond to the crisis of market democracy that has engulfed much of the globe, what factors enable or restrict them from doing so, and what the longer-term impacts on democratic quality and stability of outsider-led processes may be.

Latin America's anti-system outsiders

Anti-system outsiders emerged in cases where labor-based and center-left parties were at the forefront of advancing neoliberal policies, a configuration found in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela.³¹ Neoliberal policies were adopted in a bait-and-switch manner whereby center-left candidates reneged on pre-election promises not to adopt market-friendly reforms.

The adoption of neoliberal policies by center-left parties caused party systems to converge around variants of market orthodoxy, programmatically de-aligning partisan competition and channeling societal opposition into extra-systemic forms of social and electoral protest, thereby opening vacant political space for outsiders on the left flank of mainstream parties.³² The underdeveloped nature of social citizenship and the dualistic labor market whereby the vast majority of workers are employed in the informal sector sees a divide in society between those with a place in organized, formal society, and those without.³³ As such, the anti-system nature of Latin America's outsiders refers to challenging political and economic elites whose insider status is founded on the exclusion of other sectors of the national community.³⁴ Reflecting protester sentiment, the electoral campaigns of progressive anti-system candidates such as Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia engaged in strident critiques of mainstream party systems, overtly critiqued neoliberalism and global capitalism, challenged domestic and transnational economic elite control of wealth and resources and called for a strong state that guaranteed social citizenship for all sectors of society. They also promised to deepen political participation via plebiscitary measures to convoke constituent assemblies and re-found national democratic regimes. Moreover, given Latin America's position as a post-colonial developing region and the sentiment amongst protesters that the United States and the International Monetary Fund were seeking to curb national sovereignty by imposing structural adjustments on borrowing governments, popular sectors and outsider-candidates adopted a progressive-internationalist stance that not only sought to curb the influence of unelected external (f)actors such as foreign capital and international financial institutions, but also advocated international solidarity with regional socialist/progressive parties and leaders. Anti-system outsiders thus engaged in a strident critique of market democracy and its neoliberal underpinnings, calling instead for a post-neoliberal model of democracy that was more attentive to the needs of the majority-popular sectors of society rather than investors, traditional elites, and transnational capital.

Echoing the broader “populist” analyses of outsider-candidates mentioned above, scholars from the liberal tradition have described how Chávez and Morales threatened democracy by challenging liberal norms.³⁵ For example, Weyland outlines the ways these leaders eroded institutional checks and balances and marginalized the opposition through “discriminatory legalism.”³⁶ Likewise, Levitsky and Loxton³⁷ describe these cases as “competitive authoritarian” whereby democratic institutions exist and are used as the primary routes to power, but incumbents then abuse state powers to skew electoral competition in their favor to such an extent that an opposition’s ability to compete is seriously compromised. Leaders in these cases were said to rely on “populist rhetoric” to build their political hegemony before riding roughshod over democratic norms by boosting the power of the executive. The Andean cases have become a sort of parable in mainstream accounts and the media regarding the dangers of “populism,” with liberal scholars warning what awaits the “developed” democracies if outsiders are not kept from power. Levitsky and Ziblatt’s “How Democracies Die” is a prime example. The authors mention Chávez a number of times, highlighting that it was in fact his “populism” that triggered an opposition-led coup, that he moved toward authoritarianism by delaying an election until oil prices rose, that he sought to pack the courts with loyalists, that he closed a newspaper, eliminated presidential term limits, arrested opposition media and political figures, and won elections that were “free” but not “fair” because of his influence over the media and the machinery of government. However, as Hellinger³⁸ highlights, Levitsky and Ziblatt present a narrative that selectively or wrongly paints a portrait of Chávez “to serve an argument not only against socialism but against progressive populism.” The problems with such analyses are that they do not sufficiently couch executive behaviors within empirical realities, ignore opposition destabilization tactics, fail to account for the contested nature of democracy in the continent, and ultimately only capture a part of the story. Fundamentally, these analyses elide detailed discussion as to *why* left-presidents behaved in illiberal ways as well as *what* it is that they actually sought to do with boosted presidential powers.

While liberal scholars have decried the “hyper-presidential” nature of the “radical” left cases, anti-system outsiders in the Andes emphasized that entrenched political elites and regional powers blocked programs for change, and hence argued for a strong president who relied on “plebiscitarian appeals for popular support” so as to “counter the bias toward the status quo.”³⁹ Hence, while liberal analysts rightly raise concerns regarding the stability of democracy where presidents accrue power in the office of the executive, progressive-outsiders and their support base highlight that a *stable* democracy that adheres to liberal norms does not automatically equate with a *quality* democracy. Indeed, the quest for “democratic stability” as a response to the “crisis of too much democracy” meant that for popular sectors “stable” democracies had become an incubator for the maintenance of political and economic exclusion, and hence, a new conception of democratic inclusion

was required, even if this entailed challenging the boundaries of liberal democratic norms. Once again, this points to the logical fallacy of much of the academic theorizing on “illiberal populists” in Latin America, and beyond. It is precisely because “stable democracy” in the market era came to mean low-quality democracy that outsiders emerged. While conservatives argued for a neoliberal response to the “over permissiveness” of democracy and to foster greater stability, the model they advocated fostered such rampant inequality, precarity, and limited capacity for popular sectors to influence the political agenda that it could not remain stable in the long run. Once a trigger in the form of an economic crisis hit, the unstable democratic equilibrium that had been teetering collapsed and anti-system outsiders emerged to act as correctives to the underlying fault lines. However, whether such outsiders were able to respond to popular critiques of the market model of democracy was greatly influenced by resistance efforts from those who opposed the advancement of a post-neoliberal model.

As Ellner⁴⁰ stresses, the left-led governments in Latin America confronted powerful oppositions with clashes emerging regarding distinct visions of society and democracy. From the outset, opposition-blocs that adhered to strict neoliberal rationale rejected the legitimacy of progressive-outsiders’ reform projects which supported, to greater or lesser degrees, nationalistic economic goals, regional integration to act as a counterbalance to US influence, ambitious social programs, non-elite input into decision-making processes and an increased role for the state in the economy. Moreover, opposition-blocs were backed, at times openly and at times more covertly, by North American and European politicians and state agencies. Opposition-blocs in the political sphere, who had been in office before the election of the progressive-outsiders, had traditionally held close linkages to, and supported the agendas of, privileged sectors including business groups, landowners, media owners, and church hierarchies. That is, an elite or oligarchic class existed.⁴¹ Oligarchy combines economic and political power, and this power may be exercised formally or informally to ensure that public institutions serve private interests. In Latin America, oligarchy has tended to be organized within business families, political families, and mafias.⁴² It is

the political oligarchies that do most to constrain the reach of democratic politics ... The radical economic and social extremes of Latin America do not simply describe a continuum from very poor to very rich but rather reveal a pattern of oligarchic interest and control.⁴³

Oligarchic actors allied to powerful economic interests have traditionally targeted the executive to capture benefits that flow as patronage and privilege, capturing political parties and the democratic system to defend the status quo.⁴⁴ During the market democracy era when inequality increased, socio-economic well-being and security declined, and mainstream political parties offered no alternative to the neoliberal rationale, these political and

economic elites became the central focus of popular sector animus. Echoing and re-enforcing popular sector concerns, progressive-outsiders represented a challenge to oligarchic and corporate interests, with calls for an overhaul of the distribution of political and economic power. Indeed, the point of departure for analyzing the Pink Tide of elections of leftist presidents in Latin America in the past two decades must center on the clash between non-hegemonic social groups and the old elites.⁴⁵

Re-conceptualizing left-led democratization in Latin America (and beyond): the challenges of escaping the confines of market democracy

To respond to the shortcomings of liberal analyses of progressive outsider-led processes and the calls from heterodox scholars for a more rigorous appraisal of the clashes between competing social blocs, this book advances a novel conceptualization of democracy and a flexible framework that move beyond a narrow institutionalist focus. In doing so, the book develops nuanced analytical tools that allow for more accurate insights into the messy realities of struggles to advance a post-neoliberal democratization process.

While “competitive authoritarianism” speaks to the notion of hybrid regimes, a centralization continuum is advanced here that runs from “progressive centralization” through “regressive centralization” to “authoritarian centralization.” Centralization in progressive centralization relates to a strengthening of executive power. However, rather than automatically depicting such boosting of executive power as being a power-grab for personalistic gains, as Weyland⁴⁶ argues, in some scenarios executive power *may* be used “progressively” to bypass opposition forces who limit the possibility to extend democracy to long-excluded popular sectors, while at the same time executive power is tethered to new, deepened spaces of popular sector participation who shape the actions of the president. The concept of progressive centralization allows us to evaluate democracy on three continuums; respect for liberal norms and use of executive powers; deepening democracy by boosting popular participation in decision-making processes; and extending democracy via boosting popular sector social citizenship and challenging entrenched inequality. Regressive centralization, meanwhile, captures the possibilities that executive power is boosted not only to curb the power of elite opponents but also to side-line or co-opt popular organizations that critique the behaviors of the ruling left-party or leader. At the same time, however, bottom-up access for less critical popular sectors may be retained while the quality of social citizenship is advanced. Centralization may become authoritarian when the executive authorizes state forces or militia to physically repress both opposition and contestatory popular sectors and ignores the outcomes of elections.⁴⁷

While accounts of the Andean cases couched in the liberal tradition highlight the use of executive powers to curb the power of opponents of wealth redistribution as authoritarian behavior, in the most unequal region in the

world strict respect for liberal norms may mean that radical challenges to inequality remain off the table. As Grugel and Riggirozzi⁴⁸ stress, there remains a fundamental question over

whether it is possible to reach a cross-party or inter-elite consensus over some measure of social and economic redistribution or, whether on the contrary, an entrenchment of socio-economic privilege is still the price that must be paid for liberal democracy.

Such issues resonate outside the Latin American region. Indeed, this is precisely the situation in Europe and North America where center-left parties have abandoned any pretense of adhering to a project that would curb the spiraling inequality fostered by neoliberal globalization. These parties have succumbed to Margaret Thatcher's dictum that there is no alternative.

The conceptualization of democratic quality and democratization advanced here allows for engagement with the deep tensions inherent to any process that seeks to demonstrate that another world is possible, that is, where a progressive anti-system outsider is elected on a mandate to respond to the shortcomings of market democracy. Moreover, the notion of progressive centralization is useful if an analysis of progressive outsider-opposition contestation is to incorporate an extra-institutional sphere. While much has been written about progressive-outsiders' abuse of liberal institutions, there is a lack of analysis of the extra-institutional tactics used by opposition-blocs who seek to impede left-led processes that aim to redistribute political and socio-economic power. Indeed, this points to the more general need for a framework capable of highlighting why processes move in a given direction.

While left-led governments faced opposition-blocs who demanded pro-market orthodoxy and a protection of pre-existing political/economic power distribution, they simultaneously faced pressure from organized popular sectors via social movements, unions, and neighborhood organizations amongst others for greater participation and improved living conditions.⁴⁹ If traditional elite sectors advocate a market model of democracy while popular sectors call for more communitarian participative-substantive forms, how are we to understand the pathways and outcomes of processes headed by progressive-outsiders? To evaluate which social bloc left-governments respond to, why, and what tactics they use to achieve their goals, a relational framework that accounts for the power of left-parties in office, oppositional forces, and popular sectors is developed in this book. That is, to gain insight into the advances and setbacks of left-led efforts to escape the confines of market democracy and to respond to popular demands for boosted political and socio-economic incorporation, the book calls for analysis of oppositional power vis-à-vis left-governments as well as left-government—organized-popular base relations. Moreover, what *form* the powers of competing blocs take is addressed because the available sources of power to one bloc, and how they instrumentalize them, in turn shape the sources of power

available to their adversaries and how they utilize them, which in turn shapes how processes impact on the quality of liberal, participatory, and substantive components of democratic quality. Though the framework is used in this book to evaluate Latin American cases, it is flexible and can be adapted to analyze differing contextual realities.

While mainstream scholars balk at the uncomfortable possibility that popular sector incorporation is boosted at the same time that the liberal rights of opposition elites are restricted, this, unfortunately, is closer to the realities in Latin America. Unlike normative accounts that hold liberal democracy to be the beginning and the end of debates regarding the outsider-led processes, the aim here is not to hold one model above all others but rather to examine empirical realities and to bring popular sector opinions into discussions when assessing democratic quality. Grading a country as democratic or undemocratic by simply check-marking whether a country meets Dahl's characteristics of a polyarchy⁵⁰ elides such discussions of democratic quality from the perspective of vulnerable sectors, as well as the potential that opposition-blocs do not play by the rules. Therefore, such "analyses" drafted from offices in Europe and North America miss the fundamentally contested nature of democracy in the region, which is in fact the crux of the matter. The case study chapters of this book seek to respond to such shortcomings.

While liberal analyses offer only part of the story of outsider-led processes, there is also an issue in some heterodox theorizing regarding the potential for anti-system progressives to respond to the crisis of market democracy. For example, Chantal Mouffe⁵¹ has cogently outlined how the "consensus of the center" of parties around a market model of democracy has fostered a post-democratic scenario, and she calls for a "left populism" in response. There is an issue, however, that remains under-theorized in her work regarding how to respond to the crisis of market democracy. The problem rests in the lack of discussion of what may actually happen if and when a "left-populist" is elected to office. As the power framework briefly discussed above suggests, it is not sufficient to assume that left-governments will always govern from the left—that is, in the name of popular sectors. If an opposition-bloc's power over the governing left is extremely high, and the government moderates policies in response, tensions between the left-party and the popular base may emerge. This in turn raises questions regarding whether popular sectors are willing to confront "their" parties, are capable of having their voices heard, what tactics they use to hold the government to account and, crucially, how left-governments respond to popular sector critique. That is, party-base relations must be a central component of enquiry. The framework and analysis in this book sheds light on such matters, advancing our understandings of how processes headed by progressive-outsiders aimed at escaping the confines of market democracy may advance, stall, or reverse altogether.

In summation, the central issues this book seeks to deal with relate to why progressive-outsider candidates are elected, what impact they have on the quality of democracy not only in liberal terms but also in more participative,

substantive criteria, and what the longer-term impacts of such projects may be in terms of popular sector organizational power and the nature of the party system. Moreover, rather than a simple descriptive evaluation of outcomes, the book addresses the key issue of *why* projects advance as they do.

While issues surrounding the crisis of market democracy are universal, the case study chapters of this book focus on the Bolivian and Venezuelan processes. A contextualized comparison⁵² of Bolivia and Venezuela is well suited to uncovering emergent tensions in left-led efforts to challenge the political and economic exclusion popular sectors experienced in the market democracy era. In both cases, neoliberal reforms were imposed by labor-based or center-left parties, thereby leaving opponents of processes without effective representation in established parties.⁵³ Both cases witnessed recurring cycles of anti-neoliberal protest⁵⁴ and “societal claims were mobilized outside and against established party systems, forcing traditional parties to share the political stage with new popular contenders.”⁵⁵ These progressive-outsiders, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia, were elected on a mandate to “carry out radical change in both political institutions and economic policies.”⁵⁶ Newly elected presidents established constituent assemblies to respond to popular concerns and heterodox economic policies were, to varying degrees, adopted in both cases.⁵⁷ Traditional elite groups used an array of tactics to limit the left-led processes, ruling parties and leaders boosted executive powers, and tensions between the party and sectors of the organized popular base emerged. As such, while these cases are often analyzed via the mainstream competitive authoritarian lens, given that in both cases illiberal behaviors were accompanied by efforts to deepen and extend democratic quality for popular sectors and that opposition-blocs used institutional and extra-institutional tactics to hinder the processes, the cases are in fact key sites to evaluate via the progressive/regressive/authoritarian centralization lens and the relative power framework. Moreover, given the emergence of party-base tensions over the course of the processes, the cases are ideal sites to examine how leftist forces from above and below interact and how such relations may shape the direction and outcomes of post-neoliberal processes.

Overview of the book

In Chapter 1, I discuss the ways that progressive, outsider-led post-neoliberal democratization processes may impact on democratic quality and the novel progressive/regressive/authoritarian centralization continuum is developed. Next, I outline the historical analytic framework. The framework calls for analysis of factors present before the elections of outsiders that may influence not only the type of outsider that is elected, but that may also feedback onto the processes following election such as the histories of popular sector mobilization and the early relationships between progressive-outsiders and grassroots protesters. While antecedent factors matter for the directions that

processes take, the framework calls for analysis of how historical factors interact with emergent relative power struggles between the left-led government, opposition-blocs, and popular sector organizations, shaping the pathways and outcomes of progressive-outsider-led processes.

In Chapters 2 and 5, I analyze the antecedent eras to the election of progressive-outsiders in the Venezuelan and Bolivian cases. The chapters outline how crises of democracy in both cases fostered unstable democratic equilibria in which the legitimacy of mainstream parties was eroded. However, as the chapters detail, there were variances between the cases in terms of the histories of popular sector organizing which in turn influenced the nature of anti-neoliberal protest and the linkages between outsiders and the base. In Venezuela, ad hoc eruptions of popular anger were common, but protests were generally uncoordinated with no popular organization or movement playing a unifying role. In this scenario, Hugo Chávez and his electoral vehicle, the *Movimiento V República* (Fifth Republic Movement- MVR), emerged independently of popular movements, playing a vanguardist-type role that represented myriad popular grievances. In Bolivia, there is a long history of popular sector organization and the anti-neoliberal protests built on decades of coordinated mobilization. In this scenario, Evo Morales emerged organically from the anti-neoliberal protests at the head of a movement-based party, the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement toward Socialism(MAS)).

In Chapters 3 and 4, I trace the evolution of Venezuela's outsider-led process under Hugo Chávez highlighting how it evolved from a period of progressive centralization to regressive centralization and, under Chávez' successor Nicolás Maduro, to authoritarian centralization. To contextualize this evolution, I analyze the changing relative balance of powers between the left-led government and an oppositional-bloc comprising domestic and transnational forces, both of whom used an array of institutional and extra-institutional tactics to achieve their agendas/limit their opponents. Moreover, the chapters discuss how a general lack of popular sector autonomy from the newly created left-party meant that bottom-up critique of illiberal behaviors by party-officials was limited. However, despite the slide toward authoritarian centralization, I discuss how the party's organizational structure and the local spaces of popular sector organizing forged during the process may survive a transition in party leadership, indicating that a full return to market democracy is unlikely.

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss how the Bolivian process moved through a period of progressive centralization toward regressive centralization. Despite initial successes in boosting popular sector incorporation, I discuss how Morales sought to weaken the power of contestatory organizations. Such party-base tensions arose due to the government's incapacity to overcome the opposition-bloc's resistance to more radical elements of the post-neoliberal project. When Morales sought to change the constitution to allow repeated re-election, he was ousted in a right-wing coup. While some sectors of the MAS base took to the streets in support of Morales, others remained quiet, and others still participated in anti-Morales protests, thereby helping prevent

a drift from regressive centralization to authoritarian centralization. The chapters conclude with a discussion of the longer-term legacies of Bolivia's outsider-led post-neoliberal process, suggesting they will be defined by the capacity of organized popular sectors to re-group and overcome internal divisions fostered by the MAS, to reclaim and strengthen participatory spaces opened under Morales' leadership, and, via these spaces, to defend and advance the socio-economic gains achieved during the process.

In Chapter 8, I compare and contrast the two cases, emphasizing how varying formulations of relative powers and transnational leverage shaped the kind of opposition-government tensions that emerged, which in turn shaped and were shaped by party-base tensions. The chapter also discusses the sticky issue of the simultaneous de-democratizing and democratizing features of both processes whereby illiberal executive actions in response to oppositional tactics (institutional and extra-institutional) were accompanied by efforts to boost popular incorporation. When the projects diverged from popular demands due to the power of opposition-blocs, and when the processes drifted toward regressive centralization (Bolivia) and even authoritarian centralization (Venezuela), party-base tensions emerged. However, the chapter notes that the extent of these tensions and the capacity of the base to hold the left-governments to account varied between the cases due to the differences in histories of mobilization, the nature of how the outsider-party was formed, and how popular sectors were incorporated over the duration of the processes.

Finally, in the Conclusion, I discuss the more general lessons from the case studies regarding the crisis of democracy facing society today. I reflect on the need for left-parties to offer a genuine alternative to market democracy to prevent the nativist-right from capturing popular discontent with democracy. Furthermore, I emphasize the importance of popular sector organizations and movements in the struggle to overcome the crisis of market democracy. As the Andean cases highlight, if a progressive leader is elected to power, the popular base must maintain critical support. They should engage in defensive mobilization when neoliberal proponents seek to limit progressive reforms or topple the democratization process, while at the same time retaining sufficient autonomy to engage in offensive mobilization if and when the party veers from a progressive path and where leaders abuse executive power.

Notes

- 1 Based on fieldwork interviews in both countries in 2016 and 2017 as well as electronic contacts in 2018–21. See Chapter 1 for details.
- 2 For example, see Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2018); Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy. Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).
- 3 For a discussion of hybrid regimes and competitive authoritarianism, see Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 4 There is an enormous literature regarding the terms “populism” and “populist” and while there are distinctions between right- and left-forms or exclusionary- and

- inclusionary forms in academia, several issues with the concept persist. The term remains conceptually loose and is used so widely in the media and by politicians in a variety of incompatible ways that the concept has been stretched. Indeed, analyses of populism and populist leaders are often underpinned by an unacknowledged bias toward liberal democracy. Despite there being many populisms, in the public conscience, the term populism has become associated primarily with right-wing leaders like Donald Trump. The terms “outsider” and “anti-system” avoid the normative bias underpinning common, and often-times academic, usage of the concept of populism. For an excellent analysis on the (mis)use of the concept of populism, see Barry Cannon, “Must We Talk about Populism? Interrogating Populism’s Conceptual Utility in a Context of Crisis,” *New Political Science* 40, no. 3 (2018): 477–96.
- 5 Michael Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York: New York University Press, 1975).
 - 6 For a discussion, see Wolfgang Merkel, “Democracies and their Crises Reconsidered,” *WZB Democracy Blog*, (May 29th, 2015).
 - 7 Jorge Nef and Bernd Reiter, *The Democratic Challenge: Rethinking Democracy and Democratization* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 138.
 - 8 Alison Ayers and Alfredo Saad-Filho, “Democracy against Neoliberalism: Paradoxes, Limitations, Transcendence,” *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 4–5 (2015): 598.
 - 9 See for example Friedrich Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (London: Routledge, 1960); Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London: Routledge, 1976); Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974).
 - 10 Jamie Peck, Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, “Actually Existing Neoliberalism,” in Damien Cahill, Melinda Cooper, and Marijn Konings (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Neoliberalism* (London: Sage, 2018): 6.
 - 11 Stephen Gill, “New Constitutionalism, Democratization and Global Political Economy,” *Global Change, Peace and Security* 10, no. 1 (1998): 23.
 - 12 Nef and Reiter, *The Democratic Challenge*, 139.
 - 13 Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy* (New York: Verso, 2013).
 - 14 Gill, “New Constitutionalism,” 79.
 - 15 Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).
 - 16 See for example Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018); Merike Blofield (ed.), *The Great Gap: Inequality and the Politics of Redistribution in Latin America* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State Press, 2011).
 - 17 Ronaldo Munck, “Neoliberalism and Politics, and the Politics of Neoliberalism,” in Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (eds), *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader* (London: Pluto Press, 2005): 60.
 - 18 Mair, *Ruling the Void*.
 - 19 Philippe Schmitter, “‘Real-existing’ Democracy and Its Discontents: Sources, Conditions, Causes, Symptoms, and Prospects,” *Chinese Political Science Review* 4, no. 2 (2019): 152.
 - 20 John Dunn, “The Challenge of Populism: Why Populist Politics Spreads in the World,” *Populism* 2 no. 1 (2019): 56.
 - 21 It is beyond the scope of this introduction to detail in full the varying contextual factors that shape what type of outsider emerges. For analyses see Jonathan Hopkin, *Anti-System Politics: The Crisis of Market Liberalism in Rich Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Jonathan Hopkin and Mark Blyth, “The Global Economics of European Populism: Growth Regimes and Party System Change in Europe,” *Government and Opposition* 54, no. 2 (2019): 193–225; and

- Kenneth Roberts, "Crises of Representation and Populist Challenges to Liberal Democracy," *Chinese Political Science Review* 4, no. 2 (2019): 188–99.
- 22 Roberts, "Crises of Representation," 197.
 - 23 Ibid., 198.
 - 24 Hopkin and Blyth, "The Global Economics of European Populism," 209.
 - 25 Roberts, "Crises of Representation," 197.
 - 26 Hopkin and Blyth, "The Global Economics of European Populism," Hopkin, *Anti-System Politics*; Roberts "Crises of Representation," Kenneth Roberts, *Changing Course: Party Systems in Latin America's Neoliberal Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
 - 27 For a study of the European context see Hanspeter Pappas and Takis S. Kriesi (eds.), *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2015). For the Latin American scenario see Roberts, *Changing Course*.
 - 28 See Eduardo Silva and Federico Rossi (eds.), *Reshaping the Political Arena in Latin America: From Resisting Neoliberalism to the Second Incorporation* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018); Roberts, "Crises of Representation."
 - 29 Hopkin and Blyth, "The Global Economics of European Populism," 208.
 - 30 I return to this issue in the conclusion to the book where I outline future avenues of cross-regional comparison.
 - 31 Roberts, *Changing Course*.
 - 32 Ibid.
 - 33 David Smilde, "Introduction: Participation, Politics and Culture – Emerging fragments of Venezuela's Bolivarian Democracy," in David Smilde and Daniel Hellinger (eds.), *Venezuela's Bolivarian Democracy: Participation, Politics, and Culture under Chávez* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2011).
 - 34 Kenneth Roberts, "Bipolar Disorders: Varieties of Capitalism and Populist Outflanking on the Left and Right," *Polity* 54, no. 4 (2019): 641–653.
 - 35 See for example Jorge G. Castañeda, "Latin America's Left Turn," *Foreign Affairs* 65, no. 3 (2006): 28–43; Kurt Weyland, "Latin America's Authoritarian Drift: The Threat from the Populist Left," *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 3 (2013): 18–32.
 - 36 Weyland, "Latin America's Authoritarian Drift."
 - 37 Steven Levitsky and James Loxton, "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in the Andes," *Democratization* 20, no. 1 (2013): 107–36.
 - 38 Daniel Hellinger, "Bolivarian Democracy from Five Perspectives," *Latin American Perspectives* 47, no. 4 (2020): 247.
 - 39 Gerardo Munck, "Building Democracy... Which Democracy? Ideology and Models of Democracy in Post-Transition Latin America," *Government and Opposition* 50, no. 3 (2015): 374.
 - 40 Steve Ellner (ed.), *Latin America's Pink Tide: Breakthroughs and Shortcomings* (Maryland and London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2020): 1.
 - 41 Joe Foweraker, *Polity: Demystifying Democracy in Latin America and Beyond* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2018).
 - 42 Ibid., 2–3.
 - 43 Ibid., 91.
 - 44 Ibid., 100.
 - 45 Ellner, *Latin America's Pink Tide*, 15–16.
 - 46 Weyland, "Latin America's Authoritarian Drift."
 - 47 These concepts are discussed at greater length in the following chapter.
 - 48 Jean Grugel and Pía Riggirozzi, "Neoliberal Disruption and Neoliberalism's Afterlife: What is left of Post-neoliberalism," *Critical Social Policy* 38, no. 3 (2018): 561.
 - 49 John Brown, "Party-base Linkages and Contestatory Mobilization in Bolivia's El Alto: Subduing the Ciudad Rebelde," *Latin American Perspectives* 47, no. 4 (2020): 40–57; Barry Cannon and Peadar Kirby (eds.), *Civil Society and the State in Left-led Latin America* (London, New York: Zed Books, 2012).

- 50 Robert Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).
- 51 Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (New York: Verso Books, 2018).
- 52 Richard Locke and Kathleen Thelen, "Apples and Oranges Revisited: Contextualized Comparisons and the Study of Comparative Labor Politics," *Politics & Society* 23, no. 3 (1995): 337–67.
- 53 Roberts, *Changing Course*.
- 54 Eduardo Silva, *Challenging Neoliberalism in Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- 55 Roberts, *Changing Course*, 5.
- 56 Steven Levitsky and Kenneth Roberts "Introduction: Latin America's 'Left Turn': A Framework for Analysis," in Steven Levitsky and Kenneth Roberts (eds.), *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011): 19.
- 57 Eduardo Silva, "Reorganizing Popular Sector Incorporation: Propositions from Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela," *Politics & Society* 45, no. 1 (2017): 93.