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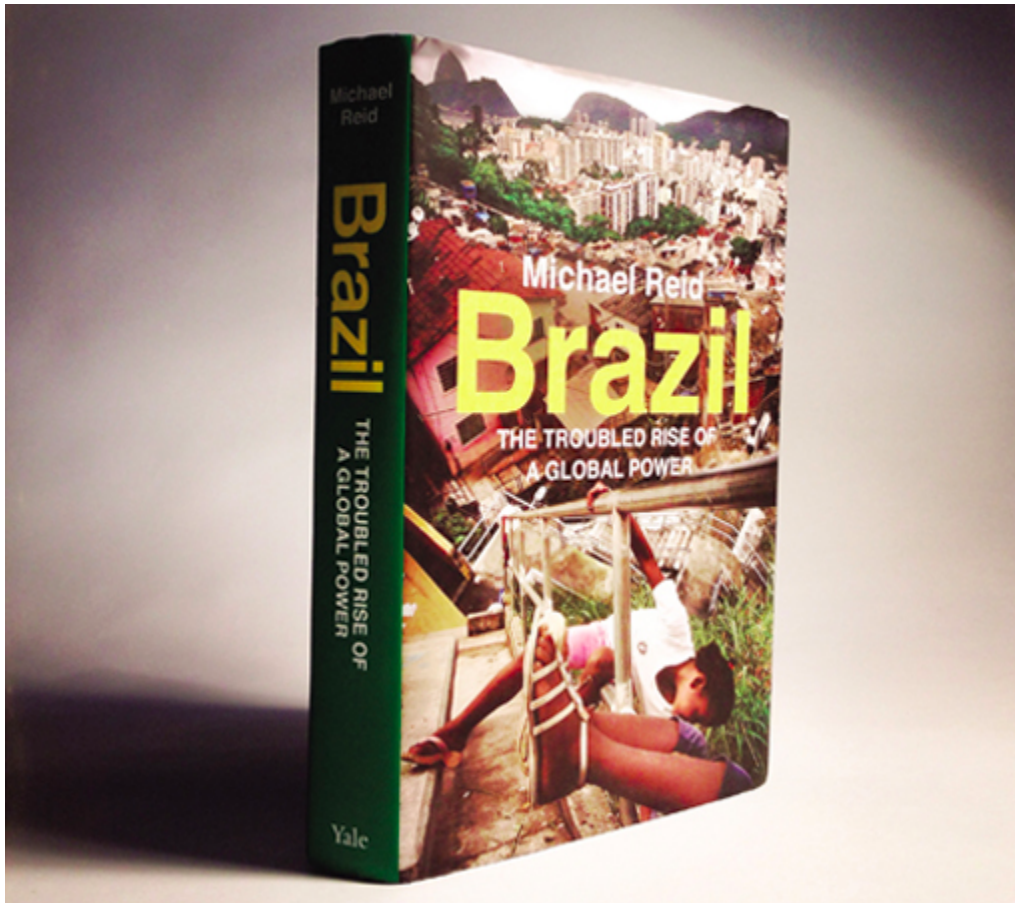


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[The Resilience of the Latin American Right](#)

BY

[Timothy J. Power](#)

Edited by Juan Pablo Luna and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser: Paperback, 392 pages

Unlike the internationalist left over the past century, the Latin American right has never been united by a single symbol or slogan. This was not accidental. In a region that only recently abandoned military dictatorship, why would political parties openly identify with repressive authoritarian regimes? And with 165 million people still living in poverty, hoisting the banner of laissez-faire capitalism against popular demands for redistribution seems politically unwise. For many conservative political actors in Latin America, political survival has usually required hiding their ideological roots, especially during the region's on-again, off-again experiments with democracy prior to the 1980s. As the Latin American electorate veered left in the late 1990s, one might expect the right

to be both invisible and impotent.

That expectation would be wrong. An exciting new collection of essays, *The Resilience of the Latin American Right*, makes clear that rumors of the Latin American right's demise have been greatly exaggerated. The editors of the collection, Juan Pablo Luna of the *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile* (Catholic University of Chile) and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser of Chile's *Universidad Diego Portales*, wisely do not try to speculate about the right's electoral prospects. Instead, they write that they are more concerned with the "mechanisms of political action of right-of-center forces in the region."

Thus, this edited volume analyzes how the Latin American political right is organized "on the ground," using a mix of country studies and thematic cross-national research to describe the structure and influence of the contemporary right. As the editors note, "That the left is in power in most countries of the region does not preclude the right from having considerable maneuvering room to influence governments [...] by building political parties that are well represented in congress, using the mass media to shape the public agenda, mobilizing experts and technocrats to shape the policy-making process, funding electoral campaigns, or lobbying elected officials."

The intellectual approach of the volume is clear from the opening essay, a thoughtful theoretical analysis by Luna and Rovira Kaltwasser that attempts to move the definition of right-wing politics away from specific economic policies or social values, and the notion that the right draws its votes largely from the upper strata of society. Instead, the editors argue, what unifies the region's right is the belief that the state is not responsible for inequality. They point out that rightist parties have often been very successful at winning votes from social sectors other than the upper class.

One interesting theme covered in this volume is the emergence of new arenas of engagement for the right. Kent Eaton of the University of California, Santa Cruz, shows that the traditional political crutches of the right, such as corporatist structures and the military, have clearly faded in importance; the right's locus of action has necessarily been displaced into legislative and/or subnational politics. James Bowen of St. Louis University builds on this by showing that right-wing resistance to the so-called "left turn" in the region's political makeup has sometimes been regional or territorial, demonstrated by the examples of Guayaquil, Ecuador, and Santa Cruz, Bolivia, where private-sector opposition to national reforms played out locally.

The book is at its most innovative in the second section, when exploring the contours of the new "movement" politics of the right. Rovira Kaltwasser returns to three game-changing examples from the 1990s: the administrations led by Presidents Fernando Collor in Brazil, Carlos Menem in Argentina and Alberto Fujimori in Peru. These three politicians redefined the Latin American right, he argues, by adopting anti-party strategies and mimicking the populist rhetoric of the anti-establishment left. In another essay, Carlos Meléndez of the University of Notre Dame makes the point that the only modern personalistic movement that has managed to span generations is *fujimorismo* in Peru, now led by Fujimori's daughter Keiko.

Laura Wills-Otero of the *Universidad de los Andes* provides an interesting take on the case of Colombia, where the mainstream civilian left has long been marginalized and delegitimized by ongoing conflict with the FARC. She points out that the repeated failures of traditional parties to

resolve the conflict opened space for a political entrepreneur who could combine an anti-party discourse with a hard line on public security: former President Álvaro Uribe.

The scarcity of serious academic analyses of conservative parties in the region makes the case studies in the third section of the book extremely valuable. The chapters on Mexico (by University of Redlands' Steven Wuhs), Chile (by Peter Siavelis of Wake Forest University), and El Salvador (by Riitta-Ilona Koivumaeki of the University of Texas at Austin) illustrate the advantages of long-standing and readily identifiable conservative parties, yet the studies of Brazil (by Alfred Montero of Carleton College) and Argentina (by Sergio Morresi and Gabriel Vommaro of the University of General Sarmiento) have less to draw on and are more diffuse.

Montero focuses on how the socioeconomic modernization of the Brazilian northeast has undercut traditional clientelistic networks in the region. Morresi and Vommaro face the challenge of identifying any viable right-wing opposition to the Kirchner machine in Argentina, and focus their efforts on Buenos Aires Mayor Mauricio Macri and his *Propuesta Republicana* party. The case studies are uniformly well done, and they return to the theme of ideology proposed by the volume's co-editors.

Nevertheless, the book raises many questions. Generally, the authors posit that democracy in Latin America is mostly secure, and that the region has come a long way from the anti-democratic, *golpista* right of the past. Some readers might have preferred to see more attention given to the right's (presumed) conversion to democracy. Another question concerns the shelf life of a definition of the right that is so reliant on the concept of inequality. Inequality in the region has been falling for a decade, inducing interesting realignments. The conservative Sebastián Piñera government in Chile did not reverse the equity-enhancing reforms of earlier *Concertación* administrations, and several conservative parties in Brazil have given strong backing to the conditional cash transfers of the left-wing *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Worker's Party—PT) government. In those cases, the Latin American right has shown itself to be pragmatic in ways that challenge the conventional understanding of the right as relentlessly hostile to the reduction of inequality.

What is also implied, but never fully explored, is that the traditional struggle between left and right in Latin America has shifted to an entirely new plane. Intriguingly, both sides borrow from each other's strategic toolkits. In Brazil, for example, the PT has increasingly begun to rely on mainstream political consultants and modern fundraising techniques, just as the anti-PT right has recently resorted to street mobilizations. Clearly, any understanding of contemporary Latin American politics requires a re-examination of the traditional left-right divide—and this book fills a gaping hole.

Democracy is built on the notion of alternation in power, and the tide is bound to turn. When, and if, the right again becomes a dominant force in the region, this book makes clear that it will be spearheaded by increasingly sophisticated conservative actors who have closely studied the tools and methods of the left.

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[Brazil: The Troubled Rise of a Global Power](#)

BY**Marcos Troyjo**

Michael Reid: Hardcover, 352 pages

Brazil's most well-known cartoonist, Ziraldo Alves Pinto, said in 2010 that his country ought to have an exclamation point after its name, considering the excitement that accompanied most discussions of the southern hemisphere's powerhouse economy at the time. The euphoric approach was matched by the international media: a November 2009 cover of *The Economist* magazine showed the Christ the Redeemer statue taking off like a rocket from the Corcovado mountain. It anticipated an era of "Brazilmania." Brazil's 2010 economic growth of 7.5 percent seemed to confirm it all.

But over the past four years, perceptions of Brazil have changed. The average annual growth rate under current President Dilma Rousseff has plummeted to less than 2 percent, revealing some of the limits of Brazil's economic strategies since 2003, when her predecessor, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, began his first term. The perceptual change was underlined by an *Economist* cover in September 2013 that showed the Redeemer "rocket" spiraling out of control. From exclamation point to question mark—sentiment shifted from "Brazil!" to "Brazil?"

What happened? Some of the answers can be found in *Brazil: The Troubled Rise of a Global Power* by Michael Reid, who served as *The Economist's* Americas editor from 1999 to 2013 and is now its Latin America ("Bello") columnist. His book provides insights into the country's oscillations between great promise and underperformance. But it also goes beyond most journalistic analyses by couching its account of Brazil's political economy within a concise and useful history of the country. Reid not only quotes classical Brazilian sociological analysts, such as Gilberto Freyre and Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda, and examines Brazil's Portuguese heritage; he also examines more contemporary "institutions" that help unify Brazil, such as the *telenovelas*—television soap operas—that reach an audience of up to 80 million people every night.

The result is a rich, detailed account of Brazil's tug-of-war between hope and disappointment. It highlights some of the original sources of "Brazilmania," such as the country's huge energy potential and the macroeconomic management by Henrique de Campos Meirelles, president of the Central Bank during the Lula years, which strengthened the minimum wage policies that have improved the lives of millions; fueled the rise of agribusiness; spurred Brazil's membership of the BRICS group of emerging powers; and catapulted the country into the ranks of the world's largest economies. This responsible management gave Brazil resilience during the economic crises of 2008 and 2011.

But Reid also severely criticizes excessive government intervention, stressing that "partly because it was broadly successful for so long in developing the economy, the 'national developmentalist' state put down deep roots in Brazil's collective consciousness." Brazil's meager appetite for necessary structural reform, its third-world-ish diplomatic blunders in recent years and its decision to avoid interaction with markets in Europe and the U.S. lead the author to conclude that "Brazil has an allergy to liberalism."

Reid suggests that Brazil must raise domestic savings and investment as a percentage of GDP and

direct more resources to education, science and technology—indispensable tools to fight economic crises and promote sustained prosperity. He rightfully argues that promoting much-needed structural reforms—including fiscal, social security and labor reforms—would free Brazil from the current microeconomic straitjacket.

The book is particularly useful to students of Brazil for its examination of the social and economic accomplishments of the past two decades. It highlights the successful stabilization of Brazil's macroeconomics under President Fernando Henrique Cardoso and his *Real Plan*, and the social inclusion and anti-poverty measures implemented under Lula. The author's interpretation is enriched by his interviews with the leading players of the past quarter century, including President Cardoso and former Central Bank President Arminio Fraga. But Reid's critical analysis also contains a lesson: by chronicling the history of successful Brazilian companies such as Embraer—the world's third-largest producer of commercial jets—he shows that Brazil can indeed fulfill its original economic promise by harnessing the creativity of its people in world-class, market-oriented innovation.

As Reid suggests, Brazil's rise is most impressive when compared with its own recent past or with its Latin American neighbors. It is much less so when compared with other emerging global players, especially in Asia. Reid characterizes Brazil's current industrial and trade policies as a “drift to state capitalism” set in motion during Lula's second term (2007–2010). He points out that the country never made the necessary parallel investments in training, education, and research and development, and instead tended toward protectionism. As a result, while the lives of the poorest have certainly improved, the low productivity of the Brazilian worker sets lower ceilings for future income gains. Such poor performance has no doubt contributed to what the author calls “the disappointments of Dilma.” Reid indicates that Lula's successor “had set as one of her objectives improving public services. But she has done too little to achieve this.”

When millions took to the streets in June 2013 in Brazil's largest-ever wave of protests, the shortcomings of its economic model could no longer be ignored. The demonstrators complained about public transit fare hikes and the poor quality of public services offered by a state that collects 36 percent of national income but invests only 3 percent. As Reid points out, the protests represented a cry of frustration about Brazil's current model of state capitalism and its self-serving appetite. “The question raised by the protests was whether the beneficiaries of the existing system would be capable of changing it,” he notes.

Reid puts forth a key question: what's next for Brazil—inertia or change? Will Brazil remain, as Reid puts it, an “Unreformed Leviathan”?

For those who believe Brazil made great strides in the Lula-Dilma years, the future should feature more state, less capitalism. That might make sense if Brazil's most productive sectors continue to generate the surplus resources to compensate for state-led inefficiencies. But it would also leave Brazil far short of its potential, and Reid convincingly argues for an agenda that includes labor, tax and social security reform. If Brazil's leadership is willing to take such bold steps, the exclamation point after Brazil might return.

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