

# The Academy of Political Science

475 Riverside Drive · Suite 1274 · New York, New York 10115-1274  
(212) 870-2500 · FAX: (212) 870-2202 · [aps@psqonline.org](mailto:aps@psqonline.org) · <http://www.psqonline.org>

## POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

---

Volume 116 · Number 3 · Fall 2001

---

No part of this article may be copied, downloaded, stored, further transmitted, transferred, distributed, altered, or otherwise used, in any form or by any means, except:

- one stored electronic and one paper copy of any article solely for your personal, non-commercial use, or
- with prior written permission of The Academy of Political Science.

*Political Science Quarterly* is published by The Academy of Political Science. Contact the Academy for further permission regarding the use of this work.

---

*Political Science Quarterly*  
Copyright © 2001 by The Academy of Political Science. All rights reserved.

**Cuba's Foreign Relations in a Post-Soviet World** by *H. Michael Erisman*. Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2000. 271 pp. \$49.95.

This book describes the history of Cuba's international relations, principally during the years since the 1959 revolution. It features two empirical chapters on Cuba's foreign relations from 1959 to the mid-1980s and two other empirical chapters covering subsequent years to the end of the 1990s. The author also provides an abbreviated history of Cuban affairs prior to the 1959 revolution and a helpful account of the principal perspectives employed prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union to understand Cuba's then significant international role. The book's title somewhat mischaracterizes its content, because only about half of the book covers the post-Soviet world.

Erisman makes two principal contributions. First, he develops the proposition, found in his earlier work, that the Cuban government's approach to foreign policy since 1959 is best understood in terms of "counterdependency." "The government assigns top priority to cultivating the capacity to prevent exogenous penetration of its decision-making processes and thereby reduce its vulnerability to external power centers" (p. 42). A counterdependency strategy has two principal aspects. Through the diversification of international relationships, it seeks to create political and economic space for the Cuban government's actions at home and abroad. And through assertive international bargaining, a counterdependency strategy seeks to influence the milieu well beyond Cuba's boundaries and obtain resources to sustain Cuba's sovereignty and foster its domestic development. Erisman is probably right that this view provides a general guide to the Cuban government's policy since 1959; it well translates the diffuse but vibrant nationalism of Cuban leaders into more concrete behaviors. Second, Erisman provides a narrative chronology of Cuba's international experience during four decades. Although he relies principally on secondary sources to cover this well-trod ground, his survey is accessible and comprehensive.

The book is short on explanation, however. It remains unclear why Cuba acts as it does in circumstances more specific than those suggested by counterdependency preferences or responses to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The text portrays Cuban foreign policy generally as reasonable, coherent, and responsible. Whether that is the case would require greater analytical work to assess, test, and account for varying interpretations of the Cuban government's international behavior. This book does not undertake that task.

The author also underestimates the Cuban government's responsibility for some of its own misfortunes. The extensive and informative discussion of Cuban international economic travails never comes to grips with one of its causes—the Cuban government's persistently ineffective macroeconomic and microeconomic policies. The valuable account of various limited successes of Cuban foreign policy in the 1990s does not explain why Cuban leaders impeded the further improvement of relations with the European Union and Canada and why

they got into disputes with Latin American governments that ordinarily had correct relations with Cuba. As the 1990s ended, Cuba had quarreled publicly with several (Argentina, Canada, Mexico, and Spain) of its key economic partners.

Finally, there are opportunities missed. Every mention of the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay emphasizes U.S.–Cuban conflict. It fails to note the confidence-building measures developed around the base between the U.S. and Cuban armed forces in the 1990s. Moreover, the author does not discuss U.S.–Cuban counter-drug traffic cooperation, developed also in the 1990s. Had the author focused more on these topics, he would have shed light on the often-hidden but noteworthy bilateral collaboration that the United States and Cuba developed during the 1990s. That, indeed, marks a post-Soviet world in the Caribbean.

JORGE I. DOMÍNGUEZ  
*Harvard University*

**Audacious Reforms: Institutional Invention and Democracy in Latin America** by Merilee S. Grindle. *Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. 269 pp. Paper, \$17.95.*

Across the Latin American region, reformers have been calling for decentralization as the solution for countries' struggles to extend democratization and increase efficiency. In this timely, well-researched, and clearly written book, Merilee S. Grindle examines the politics of the "audacious reforms" that have brought about significant devolution of power from traditionally highly-centralized governments in three Latin American countries: Venezuela, Bolivia, and Argentina. In all cases, the very existence of such reforms presents a paradox: why would politicians promote reforms that limit their power? But Grindle is not just satisfied with answering that paradox; she delves further into questions of institutional reform by also asking how the choices of institutional reform are made, as well as what impact such reforms have on the political process. She breaks new ground in three ways. First, she expands the democratization literature by turning her attention from the politics of economic reform to the politics of political reform. Second, she deepens research on political institutions by focusing on the creation rather than the evolution of institutions. Third, she uses her case study materials to assess two dominant theoretical approaches whose use is highly debated in comparative politics today: economic (rational choice) vs. sociological/ historical (comparative institutionalism).

After Chapter 1 explains the book's purpose, Chapter 2 develops alternative hypotheses generated by the two theories to answer each question about the inception, choice, and consequences of institutional reform. To fully address the second two questions, Grindle also includes the "new institutionalism" approach, developed to address the failure of rational choice to explain