

BOOK REVIEW

## Inclusive Citizenship as the Horizon of Leftwing Governments in Latin America

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(BALÁN, Manuel and MONTAMBEAULT, Françoise (eds) *Legacies of the Left in Latin America: The Promise of Inclusive Citizenship*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020)

In the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the left reached power in various regions of Latin America, remaining there for around 15 years – a period known as the 'pink tide'. There was an expectation that the leftwing governments would stimulate social inclusion and the expansion of citizenship rights. However, the scenario began to change with the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in Brazil in 2016 and the election of presidents more aligned with the ideas of the right, such as Macri in Argentina (2015) and Kuczynski in Peru (2016).

It was in this context – the beginning of the defeat of the left – that the collection *Legacies of the Left in Latin America* (2020) was organized by Manuel Balán and Françoise Montambeault, researchers in political science in McGill University and Université de Montréal, respectively. Both are members of *Réseau d'études latino-américaines* de Montréal/Latin American Studies Network of Montreal (RELAM), founded in 2014.

In its fourteen chapters the book presents texts from researchers from North America, Europe, and Latin America in various stages of their careers who analyze the legacies of the left. The themes are analyzed through comparison between the different countries and the observation of their internal dynamics, paying attention to the diversity of ideological inclinations of the governments involved.

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The central concept guiding the work is inclusive citizenship, discussed in the first chapter by Manuel Balán, Françoise Montambeault, and Philip Oxhor. They problematize the merely formal meaning of the concept as a guarantee of rights and in its place propose the incorporation of the inclusive dimension, in other words, citizenship should guarantee rights to groups who were historically denied these rights. The inclusion of these groups formed the core of the proposals and discourses of the leftwing governments in power during the period in question, in close connection with the demands of social movements.

The concept of inclusive citizenship guides the choice of the analyzed areas, determines the analytical focus, and traces the common horizon of leftwing governments in Latin America. The concept also helps understanding the challenges of the region, as well as identifying the areas in which advances should be expected – at least in leftwing governments.

Analyses of the legacies of leftwing governments show some advances and many limitations. According to what Jared Abbott and Steven Levitsky (2020) wrote in the final chapter of the book, the 'pink tide' produced both signs of progress in some areas and the deepening of historic problems in others.

More specifically, there were advances in the rights of female domestic workers (according to the analysis of Merike Blofield), as well as in the field of human rights and memory policies, which gained importance in the leftwing governments, as Elizabeth Jelin and Celina Van Den Broucke have shown.

On the other hand, as Roberta Rice evidences in her chapter, despite the importance of constitutional changes in the last decade, the relations between the state and indigenous peoples are still characterized by a unidirectional logic which is inefficient in stimulating empowerment actions. In the area of sexual rights, according to Jordi Díez, the state made little and heterogeneous progress in the countries of the region. Furthermore, the advances observed are due more to the conquests of activism on the part of gays and lesbians than the efforts of governments.

Also in the sense of showing the limitations of leftwing governments, Eve Bratman argues that the area of environmental protection did not advance in a significant manner in part because of the developmentalist orientations of leftwing governments. In relation to violence, according to Gabriel Kessler, although the

social indicators improved, crimes did not fall as much as expected. Finally, going against what might be expected from income transfer policies in terms of gender equality, Nora Nagels shows that while in Bolivia there was an improvement in the levels of social inclusion, the social role of women tended to be reduced to maternity.

Generally speaking, the conclusions of the work suggest that the legacy of the 'pink tide' was quite limited. However, the results of the public policies analyzed appear to have been more positive than the skeptical conclusions presented at the end of the collection would assume. Just to indicate a few aspects pointed to in the work, the period produced a wide variety of patterns of popular participation and the representation of interests through political parties and institutions of participation (analyzed by Kenneth Roberts and Benjamin Goldfrank, respectively). The most evident effect of this interaction was the production of public policies more in line with the demands of civil society.

The legacies of the 'pink tide' can be considered even more important if we take into account the characteristics of the region. In the 2019 report of the United Nations Development Program (PNUD, 2019) Latin America was shown to be the region of the world with the highest income inequality. Linked to income inequalities are others, related to gender, race/color/ethnicity, and generation, which vary according to the different realities of the region. In this context, the discussion of social inclusion and actions to achieve it were great advances.

Furthermore, the inclusive citizenship agenda did not end with the departure of leftwing governments from the central/federal power. Social movements were created and strengthened and the governmental agenda was altered to include discussions about the various facets of social inequalities, although we do not know the results of this politicization. Before predicting the limitations of this project, it is necessary to consider that in historical terms, it is still too early to draw a definitive conclusion.

After analyzing the legacies, the work turns to questioning the explanatory power of another central concept: the left. According to the arguments of Olivier Dabène in the penultimate chapter of the collection, the concept of the left is limited both in terms of understanding the governments classified as such and to explain the successes and limits of the public policies they advocated.

The classification of governments as leftwing is limited because, the concept encompasses governments that differ considerably: some of them are close to the neoliberal model, while others adopt authoritarian practices. Moreover, some research shows that the division between left and right does not make much sense for many Latin American voters. To overcome this problem, there are many occasions in which some of the texts seem to classify governments more specifically as social democratic, center left, or radical left. Undoubtedly, this helps to indicate the difficulty of classifying the governments covered, on the other hand it also proves the lack of usefulness of the concept of the left as used by the book.

However, instead of abandoning the concept, it needs to be understood why it has lost its explanatory power. In this task it is important to consider that, on the one hand, in certain sectors of the left there is an attempt at distancing themselves from this project due to a disappointment with the periods when the left was in power and with the political system itself, which supposedly did not meet the wishes of the population. On the other hand, the lack of usefulness of the concept has been emphasized, at least discursively, by those who claim to be apolitical but advocate rightwing projects. Hence the need to construct better definitions of what left and right are, instead of abandoning the concepts.

The collection itself contains clues for the understanding of what the left is other than the imaginary lines of reformism and radicalism. As appears in the first chapter of the collection, the central points in leftwing discourses after reaching power were the promises of social inclusion and the expansion of citizenship rights for groups whose rights had been historically denied. Although this may not have been achieved in the 'pink tide', these designs can be understood as its horizon and therefore providing a basis to understand the left.

The question that goes unexplained in the work is why leftwing governments were not capable of fulfilling their promises and guaranteeing inclusive citizenship. In accordance with some passages of the book, state capacities, consolidation of democracy, and oscillations in the economy play an important role, notably the latter factor.

We argue that social, cultural, and political issues, with their variations within the region, have to be considered to understand the limits of the inclusive citizenship advocated by leftwing governments.

First, Latin America is a region historically marked by social inequalities. The fifteen years of the 'pink tide' alone were not sufficient to reverse these inequalities or to substantially advance in the sense of social inclusion – and perhaps this is not even possible in such a short period of time.

The conservative social tradition – in some regions more present than in others – hindered the advance of certain agendas and the inclusion of citizens in the field of rights. The advances of rights for gays and lesbians, for example, suffered from a very conservative position in Brazil. Although leftwing governments may have wanted to address these issues, their advances would probably be timid in the Latin American regions which share these conservative characteristics.

We should also consider the strong presence of rightwing projects in Latin America. Historically the elite has governed the region, also during dictatorial periods. These projects did not disappear under leftwing administrations, but were constantly in dispute and gained strength in some countries, such as the example of the election of Piñera in Chile (2017), Duque in Colombia (2018), and Bolsonaro in Brazil (2018).

In this context of the rise of rightwing governments, the question of the survival of the legacies of the left remains – another subject examined in the work. As Jared Abbott and Steven Levitsky have argued, advances which did not have the support of a large part of the population could be easily dismantled. This helps understanding, for example, the deconstruction of the system of social participation established in Brazil during the last two decades. On the other hand, these advances tend to remain when they are constitutionally guaranteed, as Nathalia Sandoval-Rojas and Daniel Brinks argue. This is a rich research agenda which needs more data and time for us to be able to understand why certain institutions constructed by the left remain and others fell apart.

In relation to the public at which this book is aimed, it is of most interest to academics and sympathizers with a more progressive agenda. The choice of inclusive citizenship as a theoretical and analytical focus resulted in the approach of themes of importance to the progressive field, such as rights for gays, lesbians, indigenous peoples, women, domestic workers, and Participation Institutions.

Researchers in the area of civil society, social movements, and social participation can benefit strongly from reading this book, since the analysis of inclusive citizenship includes the demands of civil society itself, as well as the permeability of the state to these demands – aspects examined throughout the work.

Generally speaking, the work is especially interesting for the Brazilian public. The analysis of the relationship between state and civil society shows that it has an affinity with what is being discussed in the Brazilian literature, which has also emphasized the socio-state interactions and relations (LAVALLE and SZWAKO, 2015; SILVA, 2006). This affinity appears in various sections which draw on the arguments of one of the best-known Brazilian authors in the field of participation, Evelina Dagnino (2016).

The emphasis on relations between state and civil society and the connection with Brazilian literature are not fortuitous. One of the organizers of the book, Françoise Montambeault, studies the theme and has published the book *The Politics of Local Participatory Democracy in Latin America* (2015), which deals with five experiences of participation in Brazil and Mexico, among them the famous Participatory Budget in Brazil. Montambeault also recently published an article with a Brazilian researcher (ROMÃO, MONTAMBEAULT and LOUAULT, 2020).

Although it deals with the past, the book is helpful in thinking about the future of the region. Despite the rightwing swing, the left has returned to power, as in the case of Argentina with the election of Alberto Fernández in 2019. In this new cycle, the criticisms presented in *Legacies of the Left in Latin America* (2020) can serve to make understandable the current period of regression, as well as to construct projects of the left which do not repeat the same errors and can advance towards inclusive citizenship. Drawing on the past will certainly help to construct proposals and narratives for the future.

Translated by Eoin Portela

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