

Politics and Public Policy in Latin America

STEVEN W. HUGHES & KENNETH J. MIJESKI

WITH CASE STUDIES BY
STEPHEN G. BUNKER, JUAN M. DEL AGUILA,
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To
Kris, Lisa, Jonathan,
Kendra, Keith, and Kara

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About the Book and Authors

POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY IN LATIN AMERICA

Steven W. Hughes and Kenneth J. Mijeski

This innovative textbook focuses on the policy approach as a systematic tool for understanding Latin American political life and then outlines policymaking variations among the Latin American regimes.

The authors introduce the student to the study of policymaking by examining various theoretical perspectives and then grounding those perspectives in the practice of Latin American politics. Rather than endorse one approach over another, they encourage students to critically examine the methods of making policy.

The book then discusses the main groups and institutions involved in Latin American politics and shows how those institutions interact in the policy process. The text offers penetrating case studies of policy formation in six countries that represent three types of regimes. The final chapters consider the impact of policy. The authors assess the principal tendencies of economic, social, political, and civil rights policies and challenge the student to consider whether these policies have had an impact on the social systems of the six countries analyzed. These chapters point out the utility, as well as the limits, of the policy approach as a means of understanding Latin American politics.

STEVEN W. HUGHES is a professor in the Department of Politics and Public Administration at California State College, Stanislaus. KENNETH J. MIJESKI is an associate professor of political science at East Tennessee State University. They are the coauthors of *Legislative-Executive Policy-Making: The Cases of Chile and Costa Rica* (1973).

Preface

Searching for the appropriate textbook for a course in Latin American politics preoccupies scholars often as much as the search for the appropriate theoretical perspective through which one can gain an understanding of the political life of that region. As students of Latin American politics, we have seen various textbook trends come and go and, sometimes, return again in new forms: texts that focus on the pathological state of democracy in various Latin American countries; those that urge the student to perceive Latin America's options as either reform or revolution, development or decay, dependence or independence, socialist or capitalist; still others that, eschewing theoretical alternatives, offer the student the option of learning about Latin American politics via either a "country-by-country" approach or a more general approach to the common experiences, problems, and possibilities of Latin America "as a whole."

What we offer in this book is not "the" answer to these intellectual and pedagogical dilemmas. Instead, we more humbly suggest that many of the perspectives expressed by other observers of Latin American politics might usefully be considered by focusing on a characteristic common to all political systems and their governments: the effort to formulate, promulgate, and implement public policy. If politics and political actors make a difference in Latin American countries, it should somehow be reflected in the process by which policies are made, the substance of those policies, and their impact.

To examine the public policymaking process in all the Latin American republics would, of course, be a task of monumental proportions. We have not sought such an undertaking. Instead, we suggest (tentatively) that it is helpful to think of many of the Latin American nations as belonging to one of three categories based on government structure and the nature of the policy process: democratic, military, or postrevolutionary. For each of these three categories, we have selected two countries that we believe represent interesting variations of the general type. Venezuela is a democracy of quite recent vintage and also one blessed with valuable natural resources. Costa Rica is a somewhat older democracy (though not greatly so) and one not so well endowed; moreover, Costa Rica is tiny, both in land mass and population,

and for all practical purposes an agricultural society, while Venezuela is substantially larger and more industrialized.

Brazil and Peru have been selected to represent the military category. In the case of Peru we have chosen to focus our analysis on an earlier period of time—1968–1975—because during those years Peru experienced rule by a “leftist” military government; since military regimes tend to be quite conservative, at least insofar as social policy and economic redistribution are concerned, 1968–1975 Peru provides a very exciting case study. Brazil, since the military coup of 1964, is an example of a country containing a government that seeks rapid economic growth while behaving in a typically authoritarian and conservative fashion.

Finally, our postrevolutionary category contains two very interesting types. Mexico is a country that experienced a revolution in the early twentieth century, while Cuba’s revolution occurred in mid-century. What is instructive in the contrast between the two lies in the interests that successfully captured the revolution and dominated the country’s reconstruction. In the Mexican case, urban bourgeois interests came to control the revolutionary outcome while in Cuba the revolution came to be dominated by socialist interests.

Through both general overviews and detailed case studies, we seek to provide you with a thorough familiarization of the contours of policymaking and policy impact in six countries and, by generalization, of three common types of regime. We do not suggest that this exercise will provide you with a thorough understanding of all of Latin America. That will require many years and a good many books.

Our debts to others, intellectual and otherwise, would take another book to outline adequately. By his early encouragement and continuing support for the project, John D. Martz of Pennsylvania State University has been a sustaining force. Glen T. Broach, chairman of the Political Science Department at East Tennessee State University, and William Neeley and John Wold of the Department of Politics and Public Administration of California State College, Stanislaus, offered insightful comments on various drafts. For typing and retyping and for their general skill in juggling numerous and often conflicting obligations to see that this manuscript eventually got to the publishers, Jean Haskell and Jean Wright of the CSCS Department of Politics and Public Administration and Betty Wagner of the ETSU political science department have been invaluable; thanks are due also to the several student workers who added much by way of typing at different stages of manuscript preparation. A special thank you is owed to the Department of Politics and Public Administration at Stanislaus State and to its chairman, Professor Kenneth Entin, for encouragement, hand holding, criticism, and other, more tangible, forms of support. We are deeply indebted to Lynne Rienner, formerly of Westview Press, for her commitment to the project; thanks also to her staff, especially

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STEVEN W. HUGHES

KENNETH J. MIJESKI

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[1]

Approaches to the Study of Policymaking

Politics, and thus the study of politics, involves a wide range of activity. Particularly on a national scale, politics includes individuals and groups and conflict and power and leadership. It sometimes involves speeches and coups d'état and revolutions. But eventually all these people and all these activities are about getting something done or preventing something from getting done. Whether we are interested in understanding politics in the United States or Mexico or Brazil or Cuba, politics ultimately leads to the making of choices about things like the printing of money, the building of houses, the growing of wheat, the taxing of income, the paving of roads, and the shooting of guns. All these choices and actions are referred to as public policy. The making of public policy thus can be said to be at the heart of the political process.

The chapters of this book deal with several aspects of public policy in Latin America. In particular, they focus on the question of how governments make decisions. Chapters 2 through 5 provide various kinds of information that address this question. Besides the making of policy, the other major area of concern for students of public policy is the impact (consequences) of policy. Chapters 6 and 7 provide some information on this subject. Before we turn to the substance of our discussion, however, it is necessary to spend a bit more effort exploring the meaning of the term *public policy* and some of the ways by which policy analysts study the making of policy.

Go to the university library and pick up ten books on the study of public policy and the odds are that you will find at least eight different definitions of public policy. Some of the definitions are long and some are short. Some are very carefully worded and seem to make a lot of sense. Others seem to be an exercise in “mumbo jumbo.” Although some of the more elaborate definitions offer helpful hints about what to look for in the study of policy, in the end we must agree with political scientist Thomas Dye, who wrote that discussions of definitions of policy tend to be exasperating, often divert us

from the primary task at hand, and, “upon close examination, seem to boil down to the same thing. . . .”—“public policy is whatever governments choose to do or not to do” (1981:1). Although it would not be too difficult to quibble with Professor Dye’s definition, including some things he left unsaid, we accept the wisdom of this straightforward definition and employ it in this book.

The two points made by Dye’s definition need some emphasizing. First, public policy consists of what government does, not simply what it says it is going to do. We are all familiar with the phenomenon of government officials making promises and then actually doing nothing. Only somewhat less frequent is the phenomenon of government passing a law but failing to act. When this is the case, we cannot say the law constitutes policy. Policy certainly includes promises and laws, but it especially includes what government actually does. Let us consider two examples of situations where governments made promises that were intended to convey a particular policy, but where inaction or subsequent modification of the initial promises rendered them meaningless.

In the early 1970s, President Luís Echeverría of Mexico announced a policy of electoral reforms to make the Mexican system more democratic; the policy became known as the democratic opening (*apertura democrática*). Though some modifications were made—the voting age was lowered to 18, for instance (Johnson 1978:150)—the same dominant party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), remained in control of the party and electoral systems, and authoritarian policymaking continued as the norm (Eckstein 1977:24). Statements by the Mexican president and other officials notwithstanding, it clearly was not the policy of the government to allow more democracy.

A similar series of events seems to have occurred in Brazil in the early 1980s. In November 1981 the military government of Brazil announced a package of reforms of the electoral system to allow for the direct, popular election of several officials, including state governors, congress, and members of an electoral college for choosing the next president in 1984. Through these reforms of the military’s accepted way of controlling political institutions, Brazil appeared to be on a direct road back to democracy. However, in the first real test of its democratic inclinations, the military failed. When the congress refused to pass a bill lowering workers’ wages, the executive ignored that legislative body and enacted the bill through decree. As of early 1984, one must still wonder when Brazil will return to a more democratic political system.

The second part of the definition of public policy consists of what government chooses not to do. What the Cuban government chooses not to do about creating political competition is just as important an indicator of Cuban public policy as what it chooses to do to repress dissent. This part of the concept of public policy gets a little tricky. We must realize that it is not always easy to determine whether something is *not* done because of conscious choice or because of insufficient power to get it done. For instance, Fidel

Castro on numerous occasions has spoken of the need for greater sexual equality in Cuba. But, as in the United States, the rhetoric of equality and its practice are quite different. It may very well be that the Cuban government (which is more than Fidel) simply is not yet prepared to bring about full-scale sexual equality. It also may be that sexism (particularly in the form of machismo) is so ingrained in Cuban society that no government effort could achieve sexual equality. Even though it is not always easy to determine exactly what government chooses to do, it is even more difficult to determine what it chooses not to do. Nevertheless, to understand fully the nature of a government's policy, one must do both.

Models for Policymaking

In order to cope with some of the complexities of political life and make the study of it more meaningful, academicians have developed a number of analytic approaches and models. Because several of these have been found to be of particular help in the study of public policy, we briefly review them here. The first three models to be reviewed, the stages approach, the rational model, and incrementalism, are used commonly in analyzing decisionmaking. The language and insights of these three models are so common, in fact, that most of the policy literature makes little sense without at least a brief introduction to them. The fourth model reviewed, the policy perception model, has been employed on a comparative basis and found quite useful (Smith 1975). Of even greater importance for our purposes, the model has been utilized in the study of a Latin American country, Mexico (Purcell and Purcell 1977). The final two models, corporatism and dependency, are not ones you will find in the literature on public policy in the United States. In fact, as will be noted later, neither corporatism nor dependency were designed as tools for the study of public policy. We offer them because they are used frequently in the study of Latin American politics and suggest potentially important characteristics of the Latin American policy process.

The Stages Approach

One of the most common approaches used in the study of public policy is to view the policy process as a series of sequential steps or stages. Although different scholars use different forms of the stages approach, in general they employ something similar to the following six stages. First, people must recognize that they have a problem and that government can do something about

it. Policy is always a response to something, and that something is the expression of needs or demands. Until a problem is expressed, it simply does not exist. However, the mere expression of a problem is insufficient. If I tell my wife that I don't think the government is spending enough resources on education, I have not exactly created a public problem. But if my wife can convince me to express that complaint to my representative in congress, I am closer to creating a public problem. Better yet, if I can get my wife and a number of other people to support my complaint, the odds are even higher that I will have formed a public problem. Thus, this first step, usually called *problem formation* or *issue formation*, involves the expression of a need or demand to government, usually by a number of people. Several important questions in the study of public policy are suggested by this notion of problem formation. Who makes demands? How are demands made? What demands are being made?

Two fairly typical characteristics of problem formation in Latin America can be noted at this point. A significant percentage of the population in most countries, notably the rural poor, rarely get involved (or are allowed to get involved) in making demands. When they do, their involvement often takes the form either of supplication to a local official (to ameliorate some limited problem) or of poorly organized but large-scale protest, including land seizures and, in extremis, guerrilla warfare. Conversely, those problems that are articulated in a well-organized fashion tend to come most frequently from individuals and groups representing urban upper- and middle-class interests. In other words, one way in which the powerful remain powerful (and keep the weak powerless) is by dominating the very beginning of the policy process. Moreover, and this is the second characteristic, in many countries and particularly in the more authoritarian ones, government officials constitute one of the most important sets of demand makers. For instance, most of the policy initiatives in Costa Rica to expand and reform the Social Security System in the 1970s came not from interest groups but from government officials—especially the technocrats within the Social Insurance Institute (Rosenberg 1979:126–130). A classic case of government demand making has been provided by Merilee Grindle in her study of CONASUPO (National Company of Popular Subsistence—a staple goods distribution system), the Mexican agency responsible for a wide variety of programs of direct relevance to the poor and to rural development. As she notes in her study, many of the changes in agricultural policy in Mexico in the 1970s occurred not so much because of demands by farmers but because of government officials' concern about declining agricultural productivity and the potential for rural violence (Grindle 1977:70–90).

Simply because demands are made, there is no guarantee that decision-makers will pay attention to them. Getting the attention of government is the next step in the policy process. This may be accomplished by a variety of

means, including personal contact with government officials, newspaper articles, demonstrations—in other words, by the utilization of power resources. When a policy demand has received government notice, we say that it has been placed on the *government agenda*. Anyone who has ever participated on committees, such as a student council or a personnel or budget committee, will recognize the importance of setting the agenda. To control the agenda is to control the problems or demands to be considered.

Why the government considers some demands and not others, then, is an important question in the study of public policy. The leaders of all the countries of Latin America are interested, to some extent, in the economic growth of their countries. Because businesspeople and industrialists play such crucial roles in the economic systems of these countries, except of course in Cuba, their demands usually get on the government's agenda. There is another reason that upper- and middle-class demands frequently receive government attention. Much that is accomplished in Latin America, as, to some extent, everywhere else, is done so via personal contacts. These are very important, far more so than, for instance, in the United States. Obviously, the ability to establish personal contact is greatly aided by such factors as kinship, friendship, or, at the least, similarity of behavior and speech, which, in turn, is often a function of similarity of class and locale of residence. Since most decisionmakers are of the upper and middle classes, citizens from these classes are much more likely to be able to establish personal contact with them. Though certainly not the only reasons, government desire for economic growth and the opportunities for personal contact go a long way toward explaining why some demands are attended to and others are not.

The fact that government, or more accurately certain government officials, takes note of a demand and pays some attention to it does not mean that anything concrete necessarily will occur. For the policy process to continue it is necessary for government to consider ways to deal with the problem. This stage is called *policy formulation*. In Latin America, in contrast with the United States, virtually all policy formulation activity occurs somewhere within the executive branch; the legislature plays no meaningful role. Of course, there are exceptions. Costa Rica and, to some extent, Venezuela possess legislative bodies that do engage in the consideration of alternative solutions to problems. More typical are Brazil and Mexico, where the legislatures do not play a significant part in offering and debating policy alternatives.

Another fairly common feature of the policy formulation stage in Latin America is that it tends to be based upon limited and distorted information. As Charles Anderson noted (1967:111–119), the political process in Latin America tends to “constrict and distort” information from society as it winds its way to policymakers. This problem is particularly acute when decisionmakers are considering a problem of a community quite different from the ones with which they have some personal familiarity. As a consequence, government

policies for such areas as impoverished rural communities or urban squatter settlements often have little relevance to actual conditions.

Policy adoption, the fourth stage, refers to the process of getting government to choose one of the options it is considering. Why governments select one course of action and not an alternative is the question with which we are concerned at this point. Many of the answers to our questions about the earlier stages help provide answers to the question of why one proposal is adopted over another. Personal contact, similarity of viewpoint between those making the demands and the decisionmaker, and government concern for economic growth are all factors that help explain policy adoption. In highly centralized and authoritarian systems like Cuba and Mexico, much of the answer has to do with the personal preference of top-level government leaders, such as Fidel Castro in Cuba or the president in Mexico. Finally, several of the other models we review below seek to provide answers to why some options are adopted and not others. For instance, the rationality model argues that the option with the highest ratio of benefits to costs should be chosen, and the incremental model suggests that options offering only marginal change from past decisions should be chosen.

Public policies rarely are self-executing. The government's choice of a policy option means nothing unless that decision can be put into effect. So, for the policy process to continue, the adoption stage must be followed by *policy execution* or *implementation*. One dismaying characteristic of many Latin American governments is their frequent inability to carry out policy decisions. From the collection of income taxes to attempts to direct business investments, from policies designed to eliminate corruption in government to policies to improve agricultural production, executives and bureaucrats in Latin America have not been very effective in implementing policy. Even military regimes, often brought into existence in part because of the administrative shortcomings of civilian regimes, find there are policies that cannot be implemented. Peru's attempt, under General Juan Velasco Alvarado, to restructure its institutions of participation, specifically, to create a new organ of mobilization and participation, SINAMOS (National Social Mobilization Support System), met with far more failure than success (Philip 1978:127-131 and Collier 1976:106-116).

Many factors that are responsible for the problem of implementation are certainly not unique to Latin America. Difficulties in the collection of income taxes, for instance, are universal and are just as acute in France or Italy as in Brazil or Mexico. However, in comparison to the United States, the problem of policy execution is noteworthy. Fundamentally, the causes of the problem are two. First, the agencies responsible for execution usually possess an insufficient number of well-trained personnel and inadequate financial and information resources to get the job done. The second factor has to do with the existence in so many Latin American countries of a bifurcated, or dual, culture. According to one prominent scholar, "the most critical barrier to