

## Book Reviews

Borges, Fabián (2022) *Human Capital Versus Basic Income: Ideology and Models for Anti-Poverty Programs in Latin America*, University of Michigan Press (Ann Arbor, MI), xviii + 270 pp, \$70.00 cloth, \$34.95 paper

Public policy-making is an important field in Latin American Studies; Fabián Borges's book makes a significant contribution to the field. Conditional cash transfers (CCTs) are an endogenous social policy innovation from Latin America that aims to reduce current poverty while developing the human capital of the next generation. To do so, governments only transfer cash payments to impoverished persons or families who meet specific criteria, such as those with children at school or those receiving vaccinations.

CCTs expanded across Latin America and the Caribbean throughout the 2000s. Previous studies have concluded that left-wing governments are more likely to expand social policy, but no relationship was found between presidential ideology and the adoption of CCTs. So what is the role of government ideology in social policy-making? The book under review intends to fill this gap. Its findings clarify this confusing relationship by arguing that 'there exist two distinct models of CCTs in Latin America and the choice of model is determined by government ideology' (p. 4). Rather than treating CCT programs equally, the author dives into the often-neglected technical details and recognises the heterogeneity within CCTs. Such details reveal policymakers' diverging goals: human capital accumulation or anti-poverty basic income provision. In short, although presidential ideology does not predict the timing of policy adoption, it determines which policy model to choose. While 'the right was attracted

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to CCTs for their potential to boost human capital, the left was attracted to their potential to reduce poverty ...' (p. 4).

The argument is convincingly supported by empirical evidence. To build his argument, Borges turns to a series of case studies whose richness is a highlight of the book. In the Brazilian case, he identifies that the leftist president Lula da Silva, later a famous ambassador of CCT, was initially against the program but gradually embraced it while changing the policy design towards the left's ultimate goal of basic income for equalisation. In the Mexican case, he demonstrates how right-wing politicians started their CCT program with support from neoliberal international financial institutions, and reluctant leftist successors inherited their popular policy legacies. Based on extensive interviews collected during fieldwork in the region, the author uses comparative case studies to unveil how policy diffuses from Brazilian and Mexican innovators to the rest of the region, covering countries of different welfare arrangement types, including Argentina, Bolivia and Costa Rica.

The most distinguished theoretical contribution of the book lies in its bridging between political science and public administration. As shown in the case of CCT adoption in Latin America, ideology does not translate into social policy tools as conventionally perceived: the pro-welfare left versus the welfare-cautious right. Borges's analysis of the leftists' initial opposition but later endorsement precisely presents the interactive and fluid nature of the public policy-making process, which has usually been oversimplified or treated as a black box in Latin American studies. It demonstrates that leftist politicians counterintuitively opposed CCTs at the early stage because of their pursuit of universalism. At the same time, politicians' autonomy to choose policy tools according to their ideological preference is limited by the public response and fierce political competition. The left does not embrace every pro-redistribution tool unconditionally, nor does the right completely go against state welfare provisions. In real-world politics, compromise has to be made between constraints and ideology preference, thus resulting in technically feasible and ideologically acceptable policy solutions. It deepens our understanding of policy outcomes and the role of ideology in government behaviour. Borges' book illustrates that it is too simple to jump to the conclusion that political support exists under certain policy tools without taking a closer look at their content and design.

Now, I move to friendly criticism. Ideology holds a pivotal role in the theory-building of this book. While the author briefly mentioned centrist parties tend to be 'cross-pressured' on social policy and are usually pro-education (p. 42), the question arises: will coalition with the centre modify the left or the right's choice of CCT model? This omission is significant and may require further exploration. Also, readers may wonder to what extent the effect of presidential ideology on policy adoption travels to other social policy domains, such as non-contributory pensions. The author could have moved more towards building a general theory.

In short, the book is a must-read for Latin American political economy students, especially the politics of social policy and the policy-making process. The writing is accessible yet intellectually rigorous, making the book suitable for both academic and general readership. It represents a valuable addition to the bookshelves of anyone interested in anti-poverty endeavours in the developing world of the twenty-first century.

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