

to curb corruption and improve transparency actually destabilized the policymaking arena by making the formation of ghost coalitions more difficult, leading to a period of political crisis in the country. As Mejía Acosta indicates, the Ecuadorian case offers important insights to scholars and policymakers advocating formal institutional change about the importance of taking informal institutions and practices into account.

Mejía Acosta provides impressive empirical evidence to support his thesis. Chapter 1 introduces the concept of ghost coalitions and its utility in explaining policy outcomes in fluid political systems. Chapter 2 models legislative cooperation as a nested bargaining game between the president, a party leader, and an individual legislator. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 further develop the bargaining game by way of regression analyses to test for presidential policy success, party support for the president, and party discipline. Chapter 6 provides a more qualitative account of the policymaking process in Ecuador.

To illustrate the main concepts of the book, Mejía Acosta briefly discusses the institutional mechanisms that led to the adoption of modernization laws during the Durán Ballén administration (1992–95) and the dollarization reforms during the Mahuad and Noboa administrations (1998–2002). A deeper examination of the ghost coalitions that formed around these policy issues would have strengthened the narrative. The concluding chapter takes up the issue of ghost coalitions and democratic accountability. Mejía Acosta suggests that the breakdown in ghost coalitions in the post-1995 reform period may have contributed to the subsequent ouster of three presidents and one vice president.

Although a more extensive analysis is beyond the scope of his study, Mejía Acosta's institutional and rational choice perspective fails to account for the role of mass mobilization in thwarting the implementation of market reforms and in destabilizing governments throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Nevertheless, both Roitman's and Mejía Acosta's fascinating accounts of Ecuadorian politics and society merit a close read by regional specialists.

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Jeffrey K. Staton, *Judicial Power and Strategic Communication in Mexico*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Tables, figures, bibliography, index, 221 pp.; hardcover \$75.

With less than a week to go before the midterm election, María del Carmen Alanís, chief magistrate of the Mexican Federal Electoral Tribunal, publicly predicted that the abstention rate in 2009 would reach a dispiriting 70 percent. Amid a vocal antiparty campaign by civic organizations and leading intellectuals, her forecast (which actually overesti-

mated abstention by 15 points) naturally caught the attention of the national media. It came as a reprimand to generously tax-funded parties and elected officeholders. And it is but one example of a more general trend among Mexican judges to address the public directly in regular press conferences and interviews.

From the U.S. perspective, this apparent obsession by Mexican judges with the media is striking. U.S. judges, who are held to a very strict standard of behavior, adhere to informal norms of self-censorship that prevent them from pursuing extrajudicial activities and communicating by means other than written legal opinion. Supreme Court justices reportedly even hesitate to join in a unanimous round of applause by the audience at the State of the Union address, fearing that it might be perceived as inappropriate.

Jeffrey Staton's new book confronts the puzzle of why Mexican constitutional judges go public. His answer is that courts promote key decisions strategically in the media "to construct conditions favorable to the exercise of independent judicial power" (7). The notion of independence brings the reader's attention to what Staton calls the fundamental problem of judicial policymaking. An independent court is both willing to strike down important government policy it opposes and able to force compliance with such a decision. Ability feeds back onto willingness through the mechanism of anticipation: a court expecting defiance ought to refrain from ruling in the first place. The Mexican court, Staton argues, manages public relations strategically to expand the boundaries of its policy influence.

The monograph builds on and extends work by Georg Vanberg that shows how German constitutional judges systematically exploit public sympathy in conflicts with the government. When public opinion supports the court in the engagement (the "legitimacy" condition) and the case is not too abstruse to merit media coverage (the "transparency" condition), court decisions have been systematically more daring against the government. The key here is that the negative electoral consequences of a showdown with both the judges and the voters also make the government more likely to comply. Staton borrows this intuition and takes it one step further, turning legitimacy and transparency into endogenous variables over which judges have agency through public relations. In this manner, Mexican constitutional judges (and presumably others as well) attempt to influence and capitalize on the public mood. Framing the dense legal argument in language that shows the court's position unambiguously while still conveying the image of an impartial and apolitical court becomes an investment that, under proper conditions, pays off in a different currency—policy.

The model's premises and formalization ground the book firmly in the rational choice tradition of political analysis. Mexican judges, like

elected officeholders, are portrayed as goal-oriented actors, motivated by policy concerns. Court and government are treated as unitary actors that negotiate in front of an audience—the analogy for the citizenry. In the main game, a court at odds with government policy can strike it down, but is then led straight to the fundamental problem. If noncompliance were cost-free, any government would be tempted to defy rulings that jeopardize its policy. But then again, courts, which lack the purse of the legislative branch as well as the sword of the executive, in the right circumstances can rely on the public enforcement mechanism to make defiance costly.

Those circumstances boil down to the legitimacy and transparency conditions: the audience values the independence of legitimate courts in cases it has heard of. The reader might note that milder conditions suffice: the audience values the outcome produced by the ruling, and would side with the court if informed. When public opinion is sympathetic to the court's position, defiance may backfire, so governments will avoid electoral penalties exceeding the value of policy foregone. Courts play at this margin to manipulate the boundaries of influence.

The book is theoretically rich and methodologically sophisticated. It relies on copious game theory (nearly one-quarter of the work is devoted to formal models) to reveal the interactions between the court's propensity to strike down policy, the court's choice of promoting a case in the media, and the government's likelihood of compliance with judgments. A secondary model exposes the relation between public support for the court, transparency, and restraint.

Furthermore, the book is supported with abundant evidence. A number of hypotheses are derived from the theoretical models and tested for empirical accuracy. The argument is substantiated in three steps, quantitative and qualitative alike. The first is the construction of an original dataset of all constitutional decisions on judicial review between 1997 and 2003 ($N = 1,005$). Bivariate probit regression is used to unravel the complex relation between the direction of the ruling, case promotion with the media, newspaper coverage, and policy importance. A sample is then analyzed to investigate the time it took to achieve compliance with the court's rulings. (The appendix to chapter 4, on coding choices, is an excellent primer for anyone interested in conducting empirical work on the Mexican Supreme Court.)

The second step involves a reanalysis of cross-national survey data, showing that support for the court is contingent on awareness, provided that the court is also relatively independent. The third form of substantiation is anecdotal evidence from well-documented case studies. This complement to the coldness of statistical evidence shows humans concerned with the Mexican constitutional court's public relations in action. The general patterns in the evidence conform to the models' predictions.

The book has threads left loose. A substantial gap separates court legitimacy and public sympathy for certain ruling outcomes. The formal model elaborates on the latter, but the lengthy discussion gravitates around the former concept. Quite different equilibria are treated as equal. In one, the relevant political actors abide by the court's rulings *a priori*, regardless of the outcome. The United States seems to have reached such an equilibrium early on. In the other, coincident with the author's, politicians defy the court unless an electoral penalty larger than the policy gain materializes. How to migrate from one equilibrium to the other is arguably the single most interesting question in interbranch relations involving the judicial branch. The book's framing leads the reader to expect a resolution that, in the end, is not quite satisfactory, at least for an outsider to the law and politics literature, such as this reviewer.

A related problem with the argument is that it demands extremely sophisticated citizens, who routinely pay attention to judicial activity in the press but also value a legitimate court's independence *per se*. A more plausible—and, in the context of the formal model, sufficient—premise has citizens taking sides in the policy debate and occasionally with the court, if the defied ruling favors the outcome to their liking. It is really judges and politicians who should care for court independence, not citizens directly. The audience in the model should really be a clique of legal observers—or even different branches or levels of government, if the unitary actor assumption were relaxed—who take sides in the policy debate and occasionally emit cues that engage the broader public. Portraying the government as a unitary actor misses the key point that it is the opposition that mediates public anger in politics.

The book is a welcome addition to the small but fast-growing theoretical and empirical literature on the judiciary in new democracies. Staton's analysis, by combining theoretical and methodological rigor in the study of judicial politics, provides the reader with a well-articulated and fairly comprehensive tour of one of the most obscure layers of contemporary Mexican politics.

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Leslie E. Anderson, *Social Capital in Developing Democracies: Nicaragua and Argentina Compared*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Tables, figures, bibliography, index, 320 pp.; hardcover \$85, paperback \$27.99.

Leslie Anderson's book is a stimulating and daring exploration of the relationship between social capital and democracy. On the basis of economic development, Argentina should have a much richer democratic