developers to support Chinese carbon markets. A sociological explanation emphasizing transnational norm diffusion through social interaction should be considered, as the establishment of a cap-and-trade system may embody China’s response to international pressures. While Lo briefly mentions such pressures in chapter 1, the influences of other countries or international organizations disappear in his subsequent analyses. Exploring these forces is worthwhile, as Beijing endeavors to build its normative power in global governance, which is also helpful to legitimizing the regime’s domestic rule.

In sum, Carbon Trading in China gives an excellent overview of the development of Chinese carbon markets. Lo’s critical account illustrates the complexity of climate politics in China, and thereby advances our understanding of the political economy of carbon trading. Through its original perspective, putting climate policy into broader historical-political contexts, the book opens a new research agenda focused on the agency of China, as well as other emerging economies, in global governance.


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The politics of climate change is an underdeveloped topic, despite its growing relevance for the future of humanity. This is the first—and main—merit of A Fragmented Continent: to dare to navigate the waters of climate behavior in the region.

Edwards and Roberts’ research effort is guided by two main questions: How are Latin American countries dealing, or not dealing, with climate change? And what drives them to act or not to act on the issue? Both questions are pursued under a political economy approach, which “focuses on the comparative politics of climate change across the region” (p. 14), problematizing—correctly—the inclination of the literature on this topic to focus on multilateral agreements and states as unitary actors, without opening the “black box” of domestic politics. The research presented here is grounded in official documents, frequent participation in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conferences of the Parties (COPs), and interviews with specialists from academia, civil society, and government, particularly from inside the region.

Both the research questions and approach are substantive and innovative, since they are scarce for Latin American countries, as the authors appropriately document. However, given the work’s level of ambition—to describe and explain complex processes at the state level—some weaknesses inevitably surface, on both the descriptive and causal-inference levels.

On the descriptive flank, the one that occupies more space in the book, the main argument is that Latin America is a neglected region, since its “central” role in global climate governance (p. 36) is not correctly acknowledged. According
to the authors, Latin American countries have a sound trajectory of low carbon development, grounded in a clean energy matrix based on hydropower. They have played a diverse and “crucial” role in the UNFCCC, from Brazil’s historic role in negotiations, to Mexico “resurrecting” the process in COP 16, and the countries of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) “resisting” for climate justice; these countries are advancing significant steps to tackle climate change and have committed “striking” voluntary emissions commitment pledges (p. 62). In sum, “the region is a bellwether on how humanity will square the desire and need for development while staying within the limits of planetary boundaries” (p. xv).

This image, however, seems excessively optimistic, or even romantic. The major economies of the region alternate low carbon features with high emissions in some sectors, like deforestation or transportation. Others, like Venezuela, are simply carbon-intensive. As the authors recognize, emissions in the region are on the rise. On the policy side, only few Latin American countries have advanced—partially—and only Brazil and Mexico among the major ones. The optimistic image of the region seems to understate some negative features highlighted in the book: the fragmentation of Latin American countries when dealing with climate change, especially within the UNFCCC negotiations, where they “have very rarely spoken with one voice” (p. 37); the climate policy implementation problems, including the voluntary pledges; and the deep contradictions between international discourse and domestic climate action.

At points in the book the political economy focus is abandoned, to rely excessively on the negotiating process within the UNFCCC. This problem seems evident in the case selection, as the authors present specific chapters on the “most important” states on the global stage: Brazil, Mexico, the socialist and social-democratic ALBA countries, and the seven countries of the Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC). While the focus on Brazil is reasonable, the importance of the ALBA countries is exaggerated, Mexico’s importance is undervalued, and there is no specific focus on Argentina or Colombia, which are major climate powers in the region.

The UNFCCC focus seems also to permeate the authors’ assessment of the cases: They correctly criticize the Brazilian conservative position, but are excessively lauding in their assessment of AILAC and Mexico, and overestimate the positive role of the ALBA countries in the fight for climate justice, understating the fact that they are extractive economies with no discernable climate policy developments, especially in the case of Venezuela.

The authors systematize the fragmented literature on climate politics and develop a conceptual matrix to “understand what explains … the contrasting positions and inconsistent policies that Latin American nations have taken” (p. 170). This matrix is based on four categories: nature (the impact of natural resources and vulnerabilities to climate change), development (the impacts of pressures on governments related to economic growth and jobs), foreign policy (the impact of regional integration, international alliances, and trade), and civil society.
This is a comprehensive approach, useful for highlighting some broad, relevant drivers for climate action in Latin American countries. It should not, however, be interpreted as a unified theory of climate politics. The case studies do not provide a systematic test of the framework, but rather some general conclusions regarding each of the regions. Worrying signs for low carbon development appear in almost all four of the categories, such as the boom of extractive activities driven by China’s demand, the dependence on high carbon exports, the lack of regional coordination on climate issues, and the gap between high climate concern and low climate action in Latin American societies.

For those interested in the political economy of climate change in Latin American countries, this is a must-read book. It has valuable information on the past, present, and future of low carbon development in this fragmented region. It is also a relevant contribution for those focused on more theoretical concerns—for instance, the overall drivers of climate action. A work this ambitious has its weaknesses, but they can best be seen as triggers for needed research on climate politics, both inside and outside Latin America.