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Russell Crandall, Guadalupe Paz, and Riordan Roett, eds. *The Andes in Focus: Security, Democracy, and Economic Reform*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005. Tables, figures, chronologies, bibliography, index, 237 pp; hardcover \$49.95, paperback \$19.95.

It should hardly come as a surprise that *The Andes in Focus* makes for sobering reading. After all, the five countries that make up the Andean region, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, are, in distinctive **[End Page 195]** ways, wrestling with profound problems. Their struggles have led to considerable turmoil and highly uncertain scenarios. A confident, optimistic outlook does not come easily.

This edited volume offers a judicious, clear-headed appraisal of a region that is a veritable laboratory for challenging social and political analysis. The book contains separate chapters on each of the Andean countries, along with a pair of essays on U.S. policy toward the region and a concluding chapter. The chapters are coherent, crisply written, mercifully free of jargon, and admirably accessible to both policymakers and academics. The generally lucid, excellent accounts are, in most cases, followed by a helpful chronology of key events.

Any volume dealing with the Andes, of course, presents a major difficulty. Given the particular characteristics and explanatory factors that account for the problems in each country and the various manifestations of such problems, to what extent does it even make sense to refer to the Andean region as a single unit? Is it perhaps more fruitful to analyze each country in turn and eschew a regional focus? Russell Crandall, the principal editor, deals with the difficulty head-on and sensibly. He acknowledges the sharp and significant variations among countries, yet argues for considering the region as well, because of the common phenomena present. His framework recognizes the pillars necessary for stability in the region: national security, democracy, and economic health, reflected in the volume's subtitle. What he terms the "elusive trinity" actually becomes the shared reference point for all the authors.

To be sure, these pillar issues contain substantial overlap. However, it is not clear whether they have similar weight or, even though the preface argues that a "focus on one will often subvert the others," whether they can realistically be pursued simultaneously. With the exception of Colombia—which, after all, has the only ongoing internal armed conflict in the hemisphere and therefore continues to accord security the highest priority—an examination of the other four countries underlines the primacy of democracy or, more specifically, the poor quality and low efficacy of political institutions.

Peru features perhaps the most striking coexistence of relatively strong economics, on the one hand, and notably precarious politics, on the other. Even though he presides over an impressive macroeconomic performance, President Alejandro Toledo has the lowest level of public support of any president in Latin America. The sharp disappointment with Toledo has contributed to the widespread revulsion of the entire political class. The antipolitical sentiment can be discerned in the nostalgia in some sectors for exiled former president Alberto Fujimori, who, from 1990 to 2000, led an outrageously corrupt regime. In the Peru chapter, "The Trauma of Postdemocratic Consolidation," Ramiro Orias Arredondo correctly maintains that "one of the main challenges facing **[End Page 196]** democratic reconstruction in Peru is to strengthen the political parties and make them credible once again" (p. 84). True enough, though such a statement could justifiably have

been made roughly 15 years ago. Despite Peru's political and institutional troubles, however, Orias's prognosis seems a bit hyperbolic: "The economic hardship and disillusion with government that fuels street protests and local outbursts of violence has the potential of turning far more antisystemic and of propelling Peru once again into civil war" (p. 83).

The Ecuador chapter, "Democracy and Economy in Crisis," by Fredy Rivera Vélez and Franklin Ramírez Gallegos, would have been even more pessimistic had it been written after the ouster of President Lucio Gutiérrez on April 20, 2005. In contrast to the previous crises, in 1997 and 2000, when presidents Abdala Bucaram and Jamil Mahuad, respectively, were forced from office, this time (and echoing the Peruvian experience) the entire political establishment was severely repudiated. Also unlike the previous situations, Ecuador's macroeconomic picture—thanks in large measure to high oil prices—was fairly robust, and probably helped prevent even further disruption of what the authors describe, in the context of an often rough neighborhood, as an "island of peace" (p. 121).

The Bolivia chapter, also by Orias, bears a title that seems increasingly understated: "Democracy Under Pressure." Profound questions are being raised about the country's governability—indeed, its very viability. Nowhere else in the Andes do such intense social pressures and strains exist, reflecting sharply conflicting nationalisms. While Orias pays due attention to the mounting political mobilization of the indigenous population, he might be exaggerating its "antisystemic" character. More important, though, he barely mentions the heightened pressures toward autonomy and secession from the more modern business sectors based in the lowlands of Santa Cruz. Bolivia and Ecuador most clearly illustrate what Crandall refers to in the introduction as the "democratic paradox" (p. 3): the notion, famously formulated in Samuel P. Huntington's 1968 classic, that increased mobilization and demands (today called "empowerment") can, in markedly weak institutional settings, seriously hurt and eventually topple governments, resulting in considerable disorder.

Until August 15, 2004, when a referendum on President Hugo Chávez's rule was held, Venezuela, too, had been a highly mobilized society, polarized between Chávez supporters and fierce, albeit inchoate, opposition forces. Juan Carlos Sainz Borgo and Guadalupe Paz, authors of "Revolutionary Changes Under Chávez," offer a commendably balanced and valuable account of the Venezuelan situation with an especially lucid appraisal of the April 2002 coup, the oil strike later that year, and the recall referendum attempt. With Chávez's power consolidated, the political system virtually devoid of checks and balances, and oil at record prices, it is hard to be sanguine about the country's [End Page 197] democratic prospects in the near term. Although the authors rightly argue that Venezuela's being "an important supplier to the United States is an incentive for improved relations" (p. 116), it would be a mistake to underestimate incentives in Washington and Caracas to sustain confrontational rhetoric and postures on both sides and to separate economic from political relations.

Although the Venezuelan dilemma has recently taken prominence for U.S. policymakers, it had been eclipsed for the past half-dozen years by an overriding concern for the situation in Colombia. After all, that country is by far the largest recipient of U.S. security aid outside the Middle East. As a result, the volume contains three chapters that deal with the Colombia question, two of them exclusively. In "Staving Off Partial Collapse," authors Julia Sweig and Michael McCarthy concentrate on Colombia's national challenges, offering very useful background and deftly spelling out the various dimensions and threads of the country's current crisis. They are on the mark in asserting that President Alvaro Uribe's legacy should be judged at least partly by the "government's ability to legitimately assert state authority throughout the country" (p. 12).

On that score there has been some undeniable progress, reflected at least in police presence in more and more municipalities and the resultant impressive drop in such indicators as homicides and kidnappings. Still, the conflict is far from resolved; these welcome, documented trends are hard to square with the authors' assertion that, since Uribe's inauguration in August 2002, "Colombia's war has gotten worse" (p. 16). This chapter makes plain that, despite the continued gravity of the country's security situation, Colombia's political institutions appear notably more resilient and resourceful than those in the other four Andean countries. In this sense, even "partial collapse" seems a highly remote, even implausible prospect.

Such a dire thesis is, however, plainly held by Mark Eric Williams, who, despite the slightly deceptive title of his chapter, "U.S. Policy in the Andes: Commitments and Commitment Traps," deals mainly, and understandably, with U.S. policy toward Colombia. Williams makes a compelling case why the Andean region matters, or should matter, to the United States. It is questionable, however, whether Colombia, at least in 2006, can properly be characterized as a "failing state" in desperate need of a "nation-building" initiative. Williams argues, "If states can be said to exist on a spectrum of viability whose benchmarks read successful, weak, failing, and failed, several Andean states already are clustered between the second and third markers; Colombia hovers perilously close to its endpoint" (p. 160). True, Colombia requires significant institutional reform and renewal, and violence remains pervasive; but the imagery fails to capture the country's core paradox of impressive economic and political development existing alongside extensive insecurity. **[End Page 198]**

Although Williams advances a number of provocative original ideas about "policy offsetting" between liberal trade and the drug trade, moreover, he might have explored the contradiction of the United States' activating Latin American militaries to fight drugs while professing civilian control over the armed forces in the name of bolstering democracy.

In another chapter, "From Drugs to Security: A New U.S. Policy Toward Colombia," Crandall argues persuasively that despite the manifest failures of the drug war and the growing salience of security concerns after September 11, 2001, Washington is unlikely to depart from its traditional, longstanding preoccupation with drugs. Political realities dictate that that question will continue to trump other U.S. interests. Crandall's prediction seems on target:

Although increasingly looking for ways its aid can be used for both antidrug and counterinsurgent efforts, the United States will continue to place drugs before terrorism. This has been the nature of U.S. assistance in the 1990s and the early twenty-first century. The bureaucratic inertia of the drug war and political risks of a counterinsurgency effort will ensure that it continues. (p. 182)

Sadly, Crandall's recipe for a more balanced, sensible approach toward Colombia is unlikely to gain much traction in a political environment with no appetite or pressure to revamp existing policy.

In his concluding chapter, "The Andean Crisis in Context," Riordan Roett nicely complements the others by focusing on the social and economic challenges the Andean countries face and by synthesizing the volume's main insights and contributions. Data derived from the Global Competitiveness Report reflect rather dimly on much of the Andean region, particularly its shamefully deficient education systems. In a valuable section titled "Is Colombia the Exception?" Roett recognizes Colombia's recent accomplishments and its comparatively higher scores on key dimensions, yet acknowledges the risks of regressing in democracy and human rights safeguards. In assessing Uribe, and especially in contrasting him with Venezuela's Chávez and Peru's Toledo, Roett wisely concludes that "leadership counts" (p. 200).

All the volume's authors, however, are skeptical that leadership from Washington that responds constructively to multiple Andean challenges will be forthcoming. Their doubts are amply warranted; the recent record of U.S. policy in the region is not reassuring. Indeed, one could imagine extending Crandall's "elusive trinity" of national security, democracy, and economic health to include yet a fourth pillar: U.S. engagement. In that quartet, U.S. engagement could well prove to be the most elusive pillar of all.

Michael Shifter, *Inter-American Dialogue* [*End Page 199*]

Reference

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