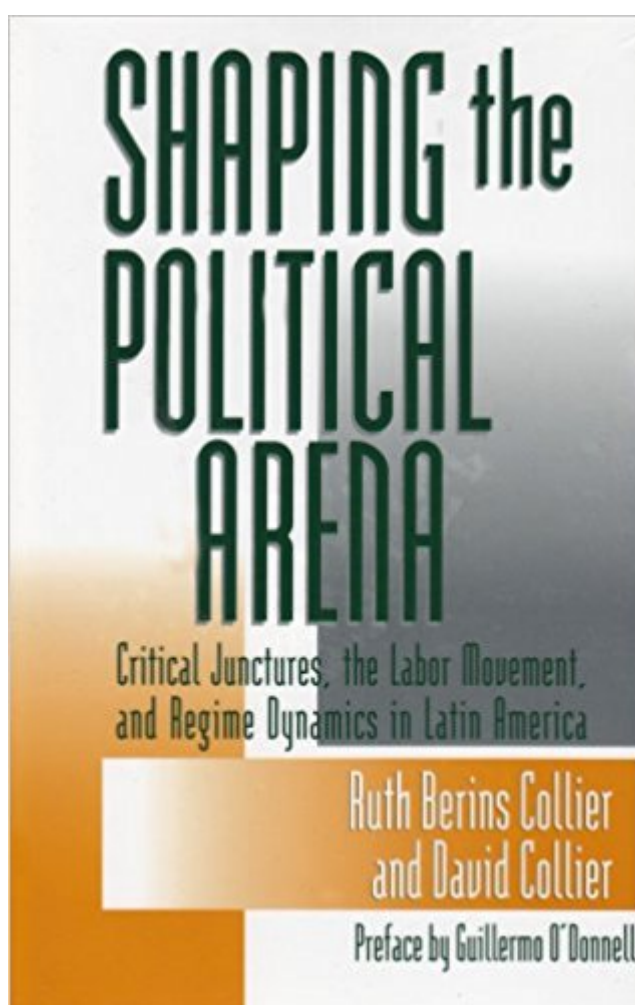


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# Shaping The Political Arena: Critical Junctures, The Labor Movement, And Regime Dynamics In Latin America (ND Kellogg Inst Int'l Studies)



## Synopsis

“This book is a disciplined, paired comparison of the eight Latin American countries with the longest history of urban commercial and industrial development—Brazil and Chile, Mexico and Venezuela, Uruguay and Colombia, Argentina and Peru. The authors show how and why state party responses to the emergence of an organized working class have been crucial in shaping political coalitions, party systems, patterns of stability or conflict and the broad contours of regimes and their changes. The argument is complex yet clear, the analysis systematic yet nuanced. The focus is on autonomous political variables within particular socioeconomic contexts, the treatment of which is lengthy but rewarding.... Overall, a path-breaking volume.”

—*Foreign Affairs*

“Excellent comparative-historical analysis of eight countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela) focuses on emergence of different forms of control and mobilization of the labor movement. By concentrating on alternative strategies of the State in shaping the labor movement, authors are able to explain different trajectories of national political change in countries with longest history of urban, commercial, and industrial development. Important and valuable work includes glossary of terms and extensive index (general and by country).”

—*Handbook of Latin American Studies*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“This is a monumental work, a tour de force. It is one of the most important books in the field of Latin American politics in several years.”

—*(American Political Science*

Review) – “This book is a disciplined, paired comparison of the eight Latin American countries with the longest history of urban commercial and industrial development—Brazil and Chile, Mexico and Venezuela, Uruguay and Colombia, Argentina and Peru. . . . Overall, a path-breaking volume.” (Foreign Affairs) – “To paraphrase the book’s title, this masterful work deserves to shape the intellectual arena for social scientists and historians for years to come.” (Political Science Quarterly) – “This massive, ambitious, and wide-ranging book advances our understanding of modern Latin American politics by identifying the historical moment when forces emerged and relations were crystallized in ways that shaped subsequent political life.” (The Review of Politics)

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This huge book was a bit overwhelming, as it presented an overview of development in Latin America. Sometimes it was confusing as the different nations didn’t always have a great deal of overlap and there were comparisons drawn between them.

Shaping the Political Arena is a massive study of state-labor relations in 20th century Latin America. It is impossible to concisely summarize all of the book’s major arguments, but the core of the argument goes as follows: In the early 20th century the relationship between the state and labor changed, as repression lessened and the state sought to institutionalize control through the recognition of some unions and the mobilization of workers as a political support base. This period marked the initial incorporation of labor, which was “the first sustained and at least partially successful attempt by the state to legitimate and shape an institutionalized labor movement” in which “institutionalized channels for resolving labor conflicts were created in order to supersede the ad hoc use of repression characteristic of earlier periods of state-labor relations, and the state came to assume a major role in institutionalizing a new system of class bargaining” (p. 7). The authors distinguish different patterns of labor incorporation. One pattern was state incorporation (Brazil and Chile), in which “the principal agency through which the incorporation period was initiated was the legal and bureaucratic apparatus of the state, and the principal goal of the leaders who initiated incorporation was the control and depoliticization of the labor movement” (p. 8). This contrasts with party incorporation in which a party sought to mobilize working class support. Party incorporation took three forms: electoral mobilization by a traditional party in which union-party links were minimal

(Uruguay and Colombia), labor populism (Argentina and Peru), and radical populism which included the mobilization of the peasantry in addition to the working class (Mexico and Venezuela). The book's central claim is that this incorporation period was a critical juncture that shaped subsequent regime dynamics and party systems, and different forms of incorporation led to different long-term legacies. In examining the long-term heritage of incorporation, the authors focus "on whether a stable majority bloc emerged roughly at the center of the electoral arena, whether unions were linked to parties of the center or parties of the left, and, relatedly, whether the union movement was generally in the governing coalition or tended to be excluded. On the basis of these dimensions, four broad types of outcomes are identified: integrative party systems, multiparty polarizing systems, systems characterized by electoral stability and social conflict, and stalemated party systems" (p. 9). Ironically, the state incorporation efforts at control ultimately resulted in polarization as labor was left without strong integrative links to parties, while radical incorporation ultimately resulted in conservatization and the integration of labor. The book has several strengths, including the authors' deep knowledge of the cases, an intriguing argument about the long-run impact of labor policy, and a discussion of critical junctures near the beginning of the book that is still useful more than twenty years later. The book's argument is not without shortcomings, such as a lack of clear justification for the cutoff points between different periods in each case (the critical juncture, aftermath, and heritage). The book also often goes into more detail than is necessary to develop the argument, and it is easy to lose the argument's thread when wading through the empirical chapters. It is also important to note for prospective readers that *Shaping the Political Arena* is not a general history, but instead focuses squarely on labor politics and their impact on party systems and political regimes; it is best read if you have some familiarity with the histories of the countries studied. *Shaping the Political Arena* is an important book for specialists of Latin American history and politics and of comparative-historical research, but it is not a leisurely read for the casual reader.

This book emphasizes the role of critical junctures, but it remains vague about the meaning of critical junctures. It seems critical junctures can be both discrete moments in history and longer processes. Yet, over time more variables could affect the outcome of interest, meaning critical junctures probably play less of a role. The first chapter defines components of a critical juncture and the baseline for comparison, but still leaves the reader unsure as to how to identify a critical juncture and distinguish it from other explanatory variables.

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