Authors' Response

Our memo was read by a distinguished group of sympathetic colleagues, all of whom have contributed to the study of Latin American political economy and most of whom share our concerns but helpfully push us for further clarification. For instance, Evelyne Huber and John Stephens "are in full agreement with the basic argument" we advance. Tulia Faletti endorses both our diagnosis and our recommendations. And Ben Ross Schneider thinks we are "onto something here," though—like the other contributors—he offers caveats, suggestions, and amendments. While Ken Roberts also welcomes our call for "a more 'grounded' political economy," he wonders just what the term means. Is "political economy" a method, a paradigm, or a substantive focus of inquiry? Our own view is that it is a focus of inquiry, one that involves the "substantive and theoretical recoupling of political and economic spheres" he describes, and in so doing analyzes how economic interests and processes shape the political agendas and actions of individual and collective agents, and vice versa.[1]

To the extent that there is disagreement among the contributors, it begins with the status (or value) of the "alien theories and methods" we decried in the original memo. For instance, Tulia Falleti finds our emphasis on the geographic origins of theories and methods "unwarranted." Huber and Stephens "are convinced that there is much to be gained from taking good theory developed in other contexts and adapting or modifying such theory to the Latin American context." And Fernando Limongi shares their views but dismisses "the distinction between imported and nonimported theories and methods" in the first place. "If rational choice (or any other method) works in Europe, then it works in Latin America," he argues. "If any of these approaches fails to explain relevant topics of the U.S. political economy, it fails in Latin America as well."

Our own view is twofold. First, we believe that these approaches are a mixed blessing for current efforts to understand U.S. politics as well. (We are less familiar with the literature on European politics and therefore remain agnostic in that regard.) While behavioral and rational choice approaches have contributed much to our knowledge of public opinion, institutions, and interest groups, for example, they are partly responsible for "the peculiar blindness among scholars of American politics to contemporary issues of political economy" (Hacker and Pierson 2010, 279). After all, the field of U.S. politics emphasizes institutions, attitudes, and processes (e.g., Congress, public opinion, electoral behavior) to the exclusion of substantive political and economic problems (e.g., inequality), and we therefore share Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson's sense that "mainstream Americanists have paid a huge, largely unacknowledged price for their particular pattern of intellectual specialization"; to wit, the marginalization of a political economy that has, at least until recently, remained a "vibrant part of the subfields of comparative politics and international relations" (Hacker and Pierson 2010, 279).[2]

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Second, we worry that the relative costs of these theories and methods are likely to be even higher in Latin America, where inequality is greater (Muñoz 2013), institutions are weaker (Levitsky and Murillo forthcoming), and cultural norms are in many ways different from those in the United States.[3] In fact, Ethan Watters notes that there are literally "hundreds of cultural differences that individually and in endless combinations influence our conceptions of fairness, how we categorize things, our method of judging and decisionmaking, and our deeply held beliefs about the nature of the self, among other aspects of our psychological makeup. We are just at the beginning of learning how these fine-grained cultural differences affect our thinking" (Watters 2013).

Why have Latin Americanists begun to ignore these social, institutional, and cultural differences at precisely the moment they are being recognized elsewhere in the social sciences? Is the problem one of "systemic tendencies in the larger discipline of political science," as we allegedly suggested in the original memo, or an "inside job" perpetrated by scholars like ourselves, as implied by Al Montero?

We believe that this is a false dichotomy, and that the perpetrators are responding to (and reproducing) incentives that are shaped not only by their larger disciplines but by the societies they study. Take, for example, democratization. By abandoning dictatorship in the midst of an overwhelming economic crisis, Latin America underscored the "relative autonomy of political institutions" discussed by Roberts and opened the door to the rediscovery of contingency. Only by taking the "autonomy of politics" seriously, after all, could scholars like O'Donnell and Schmitter (1985) understand the emergence of democracy in an otherwise inhospitable environment, one that more structural accounts would have portrayed as incompatible with free and fair elections (e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). Whereas Latin America criticisms of "structuralism" emerged in response to the political violence that characterized much of the region in the 1960s and 1970s, they gained force in 1989, when the fall of the Berlin Wall arguably gave them their coup de grâce.

But the Third Wave of democratization not only bolstered scholarly faith in the autonomy of politics. It brought Latin America back into the mainstream of political science more generally, for Latin America boasts more than a dozen presidential democracies, more than any other world region, and their consolidation opened the door to the study of institutions, elections, and political parties in new and distinct environments. The prevalence of presidentialism, in particular, allowed scholars to import theories from the United States without necessarily paying attention to contextual factors—like the different design and enforcement of Latin American presidential and legislative powers, the prevalence of clientelism and nonprogrammatic linkages, and the "serial replacement" of institutions as well as leaders (Levitsky and Murillo forthcoming; Hochstetler 2006)—that limited or altered their relevance or interpretation.[4] Consider, for example, roll-call votes of legislators. They have different implications in the United States and Latin America, but they are frequently analyzed and interpreted in the same way.

Analyses like these are made easier by the existence and proliferation of large-scale datasets (e.g., public opinion surveys, governance indicators, and the like) that

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are themselves, at least in part, the endogenous products of social and disciplinary transformations. The second culprit, therefore, is the professionalization of the social sciences themselves, and the incentive structure thereby created, on both sides of the Rio Grande. Our memo describes the incentive structure in the United States in terms of pressure to complete a Ph.D., publish in mainstream outlets, build a successful academic career, and obtain funding, all of which are easier with the aid of "off the shelf" datasets and theories that resonate with those used to understanding a U.S. "case" that is itself treated as normative in the social sciences. (Consider the fact that Americanists—and Americanists alone—never have to present case selection criteria or defend what is, in essence, a case study approach to their research.) But the incentive structure south of the border is similarly pernicious, for publications in English-language journals, collaboration with North American institutions, and training in the United States are often valued more than publishing in the local language, engaging scholars elsewhere in Latin America, and getting Ph.D.'s at home or elsewhere in the region. Furthermore, these incentives are frequently hardwired into Latin American funding allocation decisions by means of crude performance metrics, and the focus on the formal institutional analysis of politics is therefore, if anything, more intense in the region than in the United States.

If U.S. politics gave us theories and methods that could easily make sense of the Latin American reality, these trends would be largely salutary. But given "the peculiar blindness among scholars of American politics to contemporary issues of political economy" (Hacker and Pierson 2010, 279), we are skeptical, and we therefore want to conclude by emphasizing the role of fieldwork not only in fostering data collection (which allows us to test and refine our original theories) but in fostering ties to Latin American–based scholars who—despite the aforementioned pressures—are nonetheless carrying out valuable research and theory-building efforts of their own. Unfortunately, however, U.S.-based scholars who use Latin America as a testing ground for theories derived elsewhere too often view Latin American–based scholars less as peers than as primary sources in the context of "fieldwork" visits that are growing ever briefer in the context of declining budgets and accelerating time pressures in the U.S. academy.[5] And we thus view the marginalization of political economy in contemporary Latin America less as a matter of individual choice than as the product of a perfect storm: sociopolitical changes within the region that allow for the importation of foreign approaches; institutional and budgetary pressures in the United States and Latin America that encourage the importation of foreign approaches; and individual decisions that reproduce and accelerate these trends. Political analysis has thereby been rendered increasingly disembedded from its economic, historical, and sociocultural underpinnings, and our understanding of relevant political processes and outcomes has grown increasingly simplistic and narrower as a result.

We are neither proposing a new orthodoxy nor rejecting imported theories or methods *tout court*. Indeed, we are agnostic about methodological or theoretical approaches in the abstract. Our call is for approaches that illuminate our objects of study rather than limiting our objects of study to those that are illuminated by par-

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ticular approaches. An approach that is invaluable in one context might prove counterproductive in another, after all, and methods and theories—if not epistemologies—are therefore inherently context-dependent.[6] For example, approaches that illuminate the policy preferences of citizens as such, like methodological individualism, may be less helpful to students of collective actors and organizations that tend not only to aggregate but to modify individual preferences along the way. We therefore want to reiterate that we are less interested in the origin of theories or methods per se than in a) issues of internal and external validity that allow us to understand the problems that drive our quest, b) the relevance of cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary work, and c) the importance of empirical analysis (and data collection) rather than the imposition of models onto reality.

Notes

1. In our view, therefore, "political economy" would include, but by no means be limited to, two narrower approaches: positive political economy, which is defined in terms of method; and international political economy, which is more of a theoretical paradigm.

2. An emerging literature, which includes work by Larry Bartels (2008) and Martin Gilens (2012), has begun to bring structural factors back into the analysis of politics and policymaking in the United States by focusing on segmented responsiveness. Additionally, Gilens demonstrates that the status quo bias engendered by the relative unresponsiveness of the U.S. political system influences the strength of formal rules once they are adopted. This is a crucial point that might help illuminate the conditions that make "weak institutions" more prevalent in Latin America as well.

3. By "cultural norms" we do not mean invariant cultural traits but contextual factors that change over time and space, and in so doing, contribute to causal heterogeneity (i.e., equifinality and multifinality).

4. Among the recent Latin American contributions to political science, the study of political parties has benefited from an emerging literature on clientelism and nonprogrammatic linkages that provides a nice example of the benefits we expect from more contextualized analysis.

5. The compression of fieldwork times is evident, in particular, when considering recent trends in dissertation fieldwork activities. Whereas a decade ago doctoral students would request year- (or at least semester-)long affiliations with Latin American institutions, they now request shorter periods—and requests of a month or less have become increasingly common. The nature of fieldwork activities has also changed. Primary sources and original fieldwork are being replaced by the gathering of already existing datasets, by "interviews" with local academics (who were always pivotal in providing contacts and references but are increasingly viewed as primary sources in their own right), and by requests to run experiments on university students.

6. In that sense, we are broadly sympathetic to falsificationist epistemologies, notwithstanding the many limits to their effective pursuit.

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