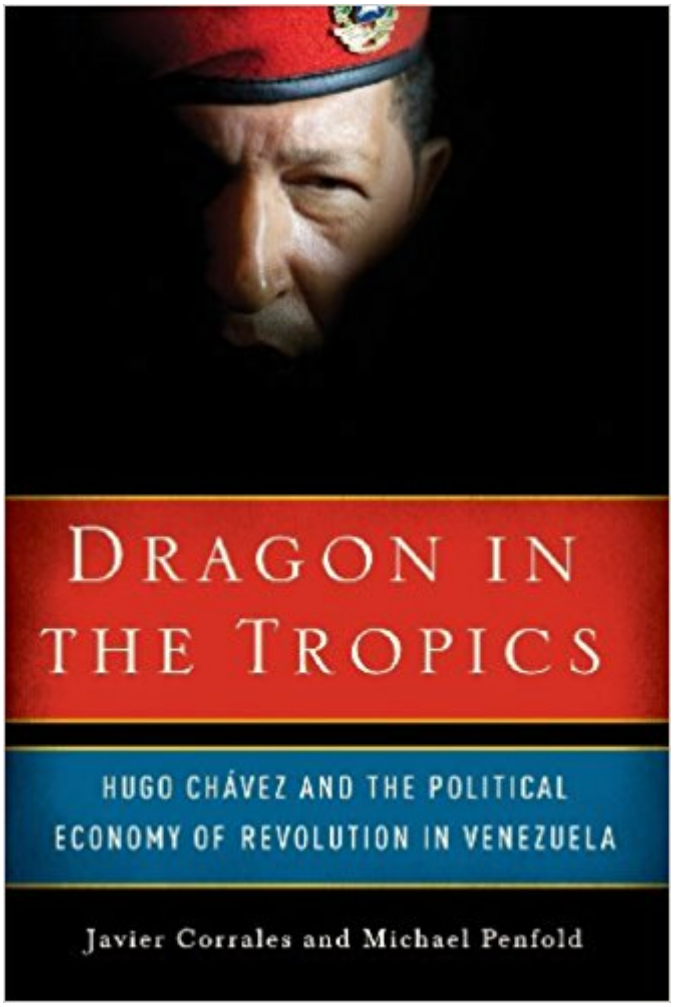
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Dragon In The Tropics: Hugo Chavez And The Political Economy Of Revolution In Venezuela (Brookings Latin America Initiative)



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Synopsis

Since he was first elected in 1999, Venezuelan President Hugo ChÃƒÂ¡vez FrÃƒÂ- as has reshaped a frail but nonetheless pluralistic democracy into a semi-authoritarian regimeÃ¢â ¬â •an outcome achieved with spectacularly high oil income and widespread electoral support. This eye-opening book illuminates one of the most sweeping and unexpected political transformations in contemporary Latin America.Based on more than fifteen years' experience in researching and writing about Venezuela, Javier Corrales and Michael Penfold have crafted a comprehensive account of how the ChÃƒÂ¡vez regime has revamped the nation, with a particular focus on its political transformation. Throughout, they take issue with conventional explanations. First, they argue persuasively that liberal democracy as an institution was not to blame for the rise of chavismo. Second, they assert that the nation's economic ailments were not caused by neoliberalism. Instead they blame other factors, including a dependence on oil, which caused macroeconomic volatility; political party fragmentation, which triggered infighting; government mismanagement of the banking crisis, which led to more centralization of power; and the Asian crisis of 1997, which devastated Venezuela's economy at the same time that ChÃƒÂ¡vez ran for president.It is perhaps on the role of oil that the authors take greatest issue with prevailing opinion. They do not dispute that dependence on oil can generate political and economic distortionsÃ¢â ¬â •the "resource curse" or "paradox of plenty" argumentsÃ¢â ¬â •but they counter that oil alone fails to explain ChÃƒÂ¡vez's rise. Instead they single out a weak framework of checks and balances that allowed the executive branch to extract oil rents and distribute them to the populace. The real culprit behind ChÃƒÂ¡vez's success, they write, was the asymmetry of political power.

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Customer Reviews

"This is the most objective, comprehensive and interesting book I have read on what has happened in Venezuela since Hugo ChÃƒÂ¡vez took power in the late 1990s. It shows why most of the common explanations of the country's social and political convulsions are superficial and often flawed. A must read."Ã¢â ¬â •MoisÃƒÂ©s NaÃƒÂ- m, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace"Hugo ChÃƒÂ¡vez and his 'Bolivarian Revolution' to construct '21st century socialism' in Venezuela and reshape the international order have attracted a great deal of polarized comment: either sycophantic praise or unmitigated condemnation, neither backed up by sound data or profound analysis. Dragon in the Tropics escapes this pattern. It provides a thoughtful, perceptive, balanced but critical, nuanced and illuminating assessment, grounded in rich and revealing data, and deep knowledge of both Venezuela and of comparative politics and political economy. Highly recommended."Ã¢â ¬â •Abraham F. Lowenthal, Professor of International Relations, University of Southern California"Corrales and Penfold have written a wide-ranging and thought-provoking interpretation of how Hugo ChÃƒÂ¡vez has shaped Venezuelan society, and the country's regional and global role, over the past decade. The book is conceptually innovative, empirically rich, and cogently argued. Its keen insights into Venezuela's evolving political economy represent an invaluable contribution."Ã¢â ¬â •Michael Shifter, President, Inter-American Dialogue"Javier Corrales and Michael Penfold are two of the most outstanding analysts of contemporary Venezuela. This accessible and clear-eyed book provides a comprehensive overview of Venezuelan politics, economics, and foreign policy over the last decade. No one interested in understanding the rise of radical populism, the distortions inherent in the oil economy, and the progressive deterioration of democratic institutions should fail to read this book."Ã¢â ¬â •Cynthia Arnson, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars"An engaging and comprehensive portrait of the ChÃƒÂ¡vez government's key economic and political features."Ã¢â ¬â • Political Science Quarterly

Javier Corrales is a professor of political science at Amherst College and the author of Presidents

Without Parties: The Politics of Economic Reform in Argentina and Venezuela in the 1990s (Penn State Press, 2002). Michael Penfold is professor of political economy and former dean of the Instituto de Estudios Superiores de Administracion in Caracas and the author of Dos Tradiciones,Un Conflicto: El Futuro de la DescentralizaciÃƒÂ n (Debate 2009).

Very good book!!!

Satisfied.

An outstanding book on the decadence and corruption in what used to be the best country in the world; Javier has an uncanny and extremely deep knowledge of the circumstances and screw ups that put this banana minded despot in the driver's seat.my only point of contention with Javier's essay is the credit he gives to Chavez, the entire country knows he is corrupt, false, not very bright and usually incurs into fraud and blackmail to push his country people into submission "not the trade of someone big i.e. Abraham Lincoln, Ronald Reagan, etc.it is well documented Chavez is a paper tiger, a coward and has ingratiated himself with other Presidents he perceives above him in every aspect via gifts and largess the country should be enjoying these instead. Proof of this is quite evident when he walked over to Obama and handed him a outdated copy of a book that he wanted to share with the USA, of course this occasion, stands in his mind as his biggest, life achievement.There are two more books, one is the silence and the scorpion by Nelson Bryan, excellent write up and the Blindspot of the USA, Chavez by Andres Cala; excellent book as well.

There is much polemic about ChÃƒÂ¡vez and what he has done in Venezuela. This book takes the position that ChÃƒÂ¡vez leads a Hybrid regime, which is an authoritarian regime that has bits and pieces of democracy.I found the book to be intelligent, well-researched and argued. I have used it as a reliable source of clear arguments that explain key aspects of ChÃƒÂ¡vez's regime.

Corrales and Penfold give a very detailed, and well-documented account of how Chavez seized power and kept it. The language is clear and the narrative is fluid and it comprises reliable research for those who want to stay in touch with recent political and social history of Venezuela under the Chavez regime.

I was looking for an accessible yet complex account of the current regime. Corrales and Penfold's

book was precisely what I needed. I found their interpretation of the situation in Venezuela to move the discussion into new ground and provide an illuminating account. The writing is clear yet masterful, their approach integrates the most recent thinking with their own research and synthetic views.

Dragon in the Tropics, written by two renowned scholar researchers is THE book everyone interested in the Venezuelan downfall should read. It explains, supported by authoritative statistics and well grounded reaearch, why Venezuela has fallen from democracy to a mix of authoritarian,demagogic, populist, anti democratic, semi comunist country. It a must read for politicians, students and all interested in avoiding the mistakes that lead to the destruction of liberties. I recommend this book to the students of countries that, in the path to development, forget to listen the claims of many who are left unatended in the process.

As the neoliberal, "free market" model which became the global craze of the 1990s now stands sick with disease in a wasteland of economic chaos and financial meltdowns, the prophets of the market are scrambling to make excuses for their miscalculations while condemning anyone who decides to take a different course. Years before the 2008 collapse Latin America had already experienced the disastrous aftershocks of neoliberal "reforms," the most glaring case being the Argentine catastrophe of 2001 so well documented in Naomi Klein’s documentary "The Take." The Hugo Chavez government in Venezuela has stood out as the most radical, revolutionary rejection of the old models in South America, proclaiming a vision of socialism for the 21st century which dumps old, decayed Stalinist trends and attempts to rediscover thinkers like Rosa Luxemburg. Javier Corrales and Michael Penfold’s "Dragon In The Tropics" is the latest attempt by status quo writers to both make excuses for a failed model and to offer a simplistic, reassuring explanation for the rise of Chavez. It pales in comparison to the excellent works of scholarship like "Changing Venezuela By Taking Power" by Gregory Wilpert and "Pirates Of The Caribbean" by Tariq Ali, two books you should most certainly read instead of this shallow attempt at political analysis. Corrales and Penfold really do see Chavez as some sort of dragon emerging out of the southern jungle lands, a fiery-tongued fluke who took advantage of the lack of checks and balances within the Venezuelan system. It is no secret that indeed Venezuela, like most of Latin America and especially neighboring Colombia, has suffered from deep corruption and a lack of oversight, but in this book it is simply a convenient excuse used to propogate the illusion that Chavez is some sort of old-school caudillo. Like most baffled neoliberals, the authors try to claim that ultra-capitalist reforms aren’t bad, they

simply weren't applied the right way or were themselves the victims of Venezuela's corrupt system. Of course the authors shy away from explaining why most of South America has suffered the same ills and why left-wing, populist leaderships in diverse forms have taken power in almost every Southern Cone country. In the late 80s and early 90s neoliberal economic reforms produced mass unemployment, a massive spike in fuel prices and eventually riots, what smashes the authors' thesis is the current reality in which the exact same reforms are producing the exact same results in advanced, disciplined Europe. The streets have even burned in London and the cradle of democracy, Greece, could soon produce a revolutionary eruption even greater than what is being seen in Venezuela today. Of course Corrales and Penfold would invent some other excuse, claiming reforms were simply not handled well even in Thatcher's old hunting grounds.Astoundingly enough, Corrales and Penfold claim that TOO MUCH power was centralized precisely in the era when DECENTRALIZATION of economic policy was producing mass chaos, if the neoliberal era was too centralized for these gentlemen, then one wonders exactly how much cutting and slashing they see as acceptable for a modern society. One need only to take a stroll through today's Athens and taste the despair to see the future the authors envision for Caracas. For Corrales and Penfold the Chavez government's control over oil resources and the use of those resources for social programs is a negative development. According to their religion of the golden calf, it's best for the majority working class and poor to depend on charity and slave away like drones, this is progress while mutual aid is a perversion.One of the great claims of the right-wing and radical capitalists is that Venezuela has become a dictatorship, sure they have elections, but according to Corrales and Penfold it's all fine but we still shouldn't give Venezuela a pass because their economic model is different. This is indeed a curious point of view considering Venezuela's parliament is almost evenly split between Chavez's PSUV party and the right-wing opposition. The current opposition candidate Capriles Radonski comes from a family which owns some of the biggest TV, newspaper and even cinema outlets in the country, but somehow Chavez has centralized and taken over too much. The authors claim Venezuela's current system is "semi-authoritarian," a bizarre play of words which theoretically could be applied to any state or institution, not least the IMF and World Bank. And Chavez's critics cannot explain why they remain silent over the nations which do continue to implement neoliberal economics, such as Honduras and Colombia, where the region's worst human rights abuses take place (do a quick search of how many activists and journalists have been assassinated in Honduras since the 2009 military coup). "Dragon In The Tropics" is not as insane as other anti-Chavez books which accuse the man of nearly every ill in the Western hemisphere, spinning plots straight out of a James Bond film, instead it is not even so much about Chavez as it is

about justifying a failed economic model and immunizing you from any alternatives being offered. It is a book that cannot survive against the rising tides of a changing world. For those who want some more detailed, clear-headed analysis I again recommend "Changing Venezuela By Taking Power" by Gregory Wilpert, "Pirates Of The Caribbean" by Tariq Ali, "The Chavez Code" by Eva Golinger and "Hugo" by Bart Jones.

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