



Varieties of Liberalism in Central America: Nation-States as Works in Progress

Forrest D. Colburn, Arturo Cruz S.

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Why do some countries progress while others stagnate? Why does adversity strengthen some countries and weaken others? Indeed, in this era of unprecedented movement of people, goods, and ideas, just what constitutes a nation-state? Forrest Colburn and Arturo Cruz suggest how fundamental these questions are through an exploration of the evolution of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica over the last quarter of a century, a period of intriguing, often confounding, paradoxes in Central America's development.

Offering an elegant defense of empiricism, Colburn and Cruz explore the roles of geography and political choice in constructing nations and states. Countries are shown to be unique: there are a daunting number of variables. There is causality, but not the kind that can be revealed in the laboratory or on the blackboard. Liberalism—today defined as democracy and unfettered markets—may be in vogue, but it has no inherent determinants. Democracy and market economies, when welded to the messy realities of individual countries, are compatible with many different outcomes. The world is more pluralistic in both causes and effects than either academic theories or political rhetoric suggest.

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