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Militarization, Democracy, and Development: The Perils of Praetorianism in Latin America

Kirk S. Bowman

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Do Third World countries benefit from having large militaries, or does this impede their development? In the face of conflicting evidence from prior quantitative research and case studies, Kirk Bowman sets out to explore just what effect militarization has had on development in Latin America.

Identifying distinctive features of the military as an institution in Latin America, Kirk Bowman uses statistical analysis to demonstrate that militarization has had a particularly malignant impact in this region of the world on three key measures of development: democracy, economic growth, and equity. For this quantitative comparison he draws on longitudinal data for a sample of 76 developing countries and for 18 Latin American nations.

To illuminate the causal mechanisms at work--how agency and sequence operate in the relationship between militarization and these three areas of development--Bowman offers a detailed comparison of Costa Rica and Honduras between 1948 and 1998. The case studies not only serve to bolster his general argument about the harmful effects of militarization but also provide many new insights into the processes of democratic consolidation and economic transformation in these two Central American countries.

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