
In the spate of scholarly studies on the role of the Latin American armed forces in politics, Ecuador, despite its record of political instability, has been relatively overlooked. John Samuel Fitch's systematic study of the military coup in contemporary Ecuador contributes significantly to our understanding of political dynamics during a period when coups d'état overthrew three of that Andean country's six governments. An epilogue covers the golpes of 1972 and 1976. His research is notable for the structured interviews he conducted with seventy-two retired officers who, according to the author, represent about three-fourths of the key military actors in the events that he studied. He is probably correct in stating that "this is to date the largest systematically interviewed research sample of military officers in any Third World country" (p. 78).

Although Fitch integrates a host of nonmilitary as well as military factors into his analysis of a series of successful and abortive coups, his most revealing data deal with the relationships between the level of military professionalization, the degree of officer identification with the military institution, and officer propensity for intervening in politics. Although a political scientist, Fitch maintains a historical perspective, recognizing that the primary motives for intervention changed as Ecuadorian society and institutions changed over time.

To the author, the "institutionalized coup" is significant in that it is not merely a symptom of a low level of political development, but is in itself a conservative force that serves to maintain the status quo. That is, the overthrowing of unpopular regimes periodically permits the releasing of mass tensions without confronting the structural deformities that produced those tensions.

Overall, this is a well argued case study of civil–military relations in Latin America. More testing in other countries needs to be done, however, before I am convinced that the author's conclusions about the coup process in Ecuador are as applicable to the region in general as he contends.

University of Missouri

WINFIELD J. BURGGRAAFF