
Politicized Enforcement in Argentina: Labor and Environmental Regulation. By Matthew Amengual. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 286 pp. ISBN 978-1-1071-3583-3, \$99.99. (Cloth).

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Democratic states tend to be ambitious in their promises to their citizens, and low- and middle-income states often seem to be doubly so. To attract voters and to quell social mobilizations, these governments develop and pass capacious laws that entail extensive regulations, significant protections, or even investment in benefits targeted on issues around which citizens are engaged. Middle-income countries, riding the upward wave of development, are especially prone to these sorts of promises, aiming to mimic advanced industrial economies and to meet the rising expectations of their burgeoning middle-class citizens, especially in the areas of labor and the environment.

Both practitioners and scholars have long recognized that such promises, though made “on the books” and accompanied by great fanfare, are frequently not enforced in practice. After many years in which such non-enforcement went acknowledged yet unstudied, an emerging

wave of research by scholars such as Alisha Holland and Lucas Ronconi is breaking new ground by analyzing how enforcement varies across contexts and countries. Matthew Amengual makes a seminal contribution to this research agenda with his *Politicized Enforcement in Argentina: Labor and Environmental Regulation*. With a close analysis of enforcement practices across labor and environmental realms in Argentina, he traces out how political influence can, in some cases, penetrate state structures and thus encourage governments to live up to their promises.

Amengual focuses his inquiry on Argentina, a country whose extensive legal framework governing both labor and environmental protections has long seen widespread noncompliance and variation in enforcement. For example, labor market informality reached nearly 50% following the 2001 crisis, and violations of both labor and environmental protections continued to be significant even amid a push for better monitoring and enforcement in the early 2000s. Nevertheless, Argentina's bureaucracy is not so underdeveloped that enforcement would be unthinkable, as would be the case in many low-income countries. Rather, "weak institutions" (p. 5) exist, which allow for considerable discretion in the ways that rules are applied between agencies, policy areas, and regions.

To analyze this selective enforcement, Amengual turns his attention to the subnational level, taking as his unit of analysis "the enforcement of a policy, in an industry, in a jurisdiction, at a specific time" (p. 43). This fine-grained specificity allows him to constructively exploit multiple levels of variation in labor and environmental enforcement across four Argentine provinces—including Córdoba, the Federal Capital, Santa Fe, and Tucumán—and across multiple industries, including some exposed to global markets, such as metal manufacturing, garment production, and citrus and others that are wholly domestic, such as construction and sugar. He relies on a truly impressive set of original data generated for his analysis: 260 in-depth interviews with bureaucratic officials, leaders of interested labor and environmental groups in civil society, and politicians; a survey of 166 labor inspectors in six provinces; newspaper archives and media reports on enforcement activity and violations; and documents and databases gathered from regulatory agencies and local governments. Taken together, this material provides a novel, close-up analysis of how enforcement happens (or sometimes fails to happen) at the ground level.

Amengual's main contribution is to help us to better see and understand how this ground-level enforcement happens, and especially to appreciate that it is not merely a matter of state activity (in terms of either capacity or selective choice). Instead, he argues that the state is often "porous" to political influence by social actors, and that this is especially true in the policy areas of labor and the environment. Both policy areas are characterized by significant citizen mobilization and organization around enforcement; labor unions and environmental interest groups tend to forcefully speak up for their respective interests. Amengual argues that actors from these groups can form important linkages with bureaucratic officials, serving as providers of support, political pressure, and information—for example, about violations or about alternative policy measures. To the extent these linkages are employed, even resource-poor and reluctant bureaucracies can be made more effective and efficient in their enforcement efforts; societal groups help carry some of the burden of information gathering and reporting.

This state-society approach allows Amengual to describe a conceptual typology of enforcement patterns. Beyond the traditional "state-driven enforcement," which has dominated thinking by emphasizing "formalized planning processes" and "capabilities internal to the state" (p. 9), he observes two additional patterns in which societal actors make important contributions. The first of these he labels "society-dependent enforcement," as it sees "demands of linked groups outside the state apparatus" driving the process of enforcement (p. 8). Unions or environmental groups mobilize to trigger action and to provide resources to aid state officials as they carry out enforcement. As a result, enforcement tends to be narrowly focused on issues or policy areas in which concentrated societal organizations exist and have power, and in which state bureaucracies tend to be particularly weak. Alternatively, Amengual identifies a pattern of "co-produced enforcement," in which decisions to enforce are "triggered both by societal groups and bureaucrats" (p. 8). He holds that such enforcement is likely to have greater breadth, higher intensity, and be more even-handed since it capitalizes on the resources of both state and society without the bureaucracies being dependent on the societal groups.

This approach provides remarkable insight into enforcement behavior across the two quite-different policy areas of labor and environmental regulation. Labor enforcement, when it happens, tends to rely heavily on strong unions, whose high levels of affiliations, traditional alliance with the Peronist party, and linkages with the bureaucracy translate into action for enforcement of regulations at the provincial level in industries such as

construction and metal manufacturing in Córdoba and the citrus industry in Tucumán. By contrast, environmental enforcement does not derive its impetus from large, well-organized, and partisan societal groups. Rather, enforcement tends to occur in cases like that of Santa Fe, where neighborhood environmental groups have created ties with regulators, providing critical local information on violations to street-level enforcers. Alternatively, Tucumán has shown an increase in its environmental enforcement following a series of court decisions and popular protests; these brought new state resources to the regulators, and environmental groups brought their expertise to newly hired staff as the agencies expanded. In both cases—labor and the environment—Amengual shows how linkages between societal actors and the state were leveraged, in a variety of ways, to shape the pattern of enforcement at the local level.

Amengual closes the book by making intriguing comparisons beyond the case of Argentina, briefly examining the enforcement of environmental regulation in Vietnam and labor regulation in Indonesia and the United States. Although these constitute no more than preliminary inquiries into enforcement in these countries, they compellingly show that the insights of the book can be adapted to apply to contexts where the “porousness” of the state and the strength of societal groups vary considerably. It thus sets an exciting and ambitious agenda for future scholarship, which will need to probe more deeply, across countries and policy areas, into how state and society interact not simply in the production of laws and regulation but also in their enforcement. And beyond scholars, *Politicized Enforcement in Argentina* is likely to have significant impact for policy practitioners, both inside and outside government bureaucracies. With its insights on how enforcement emerges through linkages and resource mobilization, the book provides templates for how interested citizens, organizations, and officials might jointly make states live up to their promises in the vitally important areas of labor and environmental policy.

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