

## Book Review

Prakash Kashwan. 2017. *Democracy in the Woods: Environmental Conservation and Social Justice in India, Tanzania, and Mexico*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

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Frances Fukuyama's magisterial survey *Political Order and Political Decay* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014) is a sweeping comparative tour of the emergence or failure of democratic political institutions from the Industrial Revolution to the contemporary period. Among many other countries, India and Mexico are mentioned as cases where class issues were diffused by long-lasting political parties recruiting emerging social actors into clientelistic political machines, while Tanzania is classified as a country relatively successful in nation-building, but one that pursued disastrous economic policies.

In the volume reviewed here, Prakash Kashwan sets a more modest, but still ambitious goal of drilling down deeper into the India, Tanzania, and Mexico comparison in the specific domain of "forestland regimes". He takes up the challenge of analyzing how forestland conflicts around peasant land rights are influenced by political and economic factors in the three countries, chosen as important examples from each of the three continents. He finds more commonalities between these three developmentalist states led by dominant political parties and influenced by socialism than Fukuyama. However, he also finds sharp divergences in the political dimensions of colonial and post-colonial histories that have led to very different outcomes in the institutions shaping forests. Kashwan addresses a frequent criticism of institutional theory, that it is largely apolitical, through application of a "political economy of institutions" framework, that places both popular mobilization and exclusionary political elites as central to the analysis of the evolution of forest land rights.

He shows that the divergences between the three countries, and particularly between India and Tanzania on the one hand, and Mexico on the other, are first of all clearly rooted in their colonial histories. Colonial rule did not end in the first two countries until after World War II, while Mexico gained its independence in the early 19th century. One result was a particularly dominant forest bureaucracy in India and a relatively strong central government in Tanzania that was able to muscle through a sweeping resettlement of nearly 70% of the rural population into villages. However, in Mexico, the government struggled for a century to exercise any control at all over forest areas, and only achieved a degree of it through large-scale land and forest redistribution after the Mexican Revolution (1911–1917).

There are some unexpected parallels between the three countries. For example, laws that strengthened elected village councils in Tanzania in the 1980s and 1990s echoed the national laws that govern agrarian community governance in Mexico. However, village governance in Mexico was tied to actual land and forest grants, authority over which was strengthened in a 1992 constitutional reform intended to open the door to privatization. In Tanzania, the promising sounding Village Land Act of 1999 was manipulated to keep most rural areas in the hands of commercial interests and the government, with 40% of the national territory today controlled by state and parastatal forest and wildlife agencies. India followed a path of exclusion, adopting a protectionist conservation stance as a “geo-strategic bargain” with international conservation groups while Mexico, after a pioneering burst of multiple use protected areas in the 1930s, reverted to a more traditional approach by the 1970s, and was more open to finding ways to use conservation to improve peasant welfare, both in rhetoric and in practice.

Kashwan then approaches the broader issue of “land conflicts in the hinterlands”, and how political intermediation between the state and mobilizations over lands rights have played out in the contemporary period. In India, Adivasi (indigenous peoples) leaders became incorporated into patron-client relations that allowed political elites to quash grassroots efforts for radical reforms, while radical movements like the Jharkhand Liberation Front eventually ended up serving regional elites. In Tanzania, the effective creation of a one-party state has averted peasant political mobilizations, despite policies that favor rent-seeking wildlife tourism. In Mexico, peasant demands emerged more forcefully, but were historically adroitly managed by responding favorably to some demands and by the ability of peasant leaders to create “parallel pathways” of engagement with economic alternatives and political structures. However, the state also managed these interactions with the occasional assassination of local leaders (a factor Kashwan does not mention).

An entire chapter is then devoted to political intermediation in the enactment of India’s 2006 Forest Rights Act. Although progressive in its elements, its implementation has been severely weakened by entrenched national and local elites. The comparison with Tanzania and Mexico yields the observation that in India and Tanzania forestry and wildlife agencies are able to “demonstrate a rather blatant disregard for statutory provisions” (168) with respect to forest people’s land

rights, while in Mexico community mobilizations and more respectful policies have limited abuses.

Bringing the analysis up to date with the most recent relevant global forest initiatives, Kashwan's penultimate chapter looks at the links between tenure security and the disposition of national governments to share REDD+ benefits. Once again, the comparison is more favorable to Mexico in that "Governments in India and to a lesser extent Tanzania are evidently not interesting in extending significant REDD+ benefits to forest-dependent groups" (204).

Kashwan has taken on a bewildering mass of empirical detail in his cross-temporal and cross-scale analysis and is largely successful in his goal of analyzing the "structures of political intermediation" in the comparative case studies. However, generalizations from such disparate case studies can be hazardous. For example, his conclusion that "a rights-based spontaneous order can be built only on the strong foundations of political spaces that need to be carved out from the bottom up...." (221) is only partially true of the Mexican case, where top-down policies were crucial in creating the spaces for rural organization. Nonetheless, carving out spaces from below seems to be the only option in India and Tanzania given enduring intransigence of elites to reform. A final comment is that while there is a substantial focus on environmental conservation, the broader focus on forest rights suggests that a more accurate subtitle to the book would have been "Forest Policy and Social Justice".