

# Avoiding Governors: Federalism, Democracy, and Poverty Alleviation in Brazil (ND Kellogg Inst Int'l Studies)

Tracy Beck Fenwick

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With the goal of showing the effect of domestic factors on the performance of poverty alleviation strategies in Latin America, Tracy Beck Fenwick explores the origins and rise of conditional cash transfer programs (CCTs) in the region, and then traces the politics and evolution of specific programs in Brazil and Argentina. Utilizing extensive field research and empirical analysis, Fenwick analyzes how federalism affects the ability of a national government to deliver CCTs.

One of Fenwick's key findings is that broad institutional, structural, and political variables are more important in the success or failure of CCTs than the technical design of programs. Contrary to the mainstream interpretations of Brazilian federalism, her analysis shows that municipalities have contributed to the relative success of Bolsa Familia and its ability to be implemented territory-wide. Avoiding Governors probes the contrast with Argentina, where the structural, political, and fiscal incentives for national-local policy cooperation have not been adequate, at least this far, to sustain a CCT program that is conditional on human capital investments. She thus challenges the virtue of what is considered to be a mainly majoritarian democratic system.

By laying out the key factors that condition whether mayors either promote or undermine national policy objectives, Fenwick concludes that municipalities can either facilitate or block a national government's ability to deliver targeted social policy goods and to pursue a poverty alleviation strategy. By distinguishing municipalities as separate actors, she presents a dynamic intergovernmental relationship; indeed, she identifies a power struggle between multiple levels of government and their electorates, not just a dichotomously framed two-level game of national versus subnational.

"Tracy Beck Fenwick makes a compelling argument about the conditions that either facilitate or retard one of the most important social policy innovations of the contemporary period, which is the turn toward the use of conditional cash transfers to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Her core interest in how different levels of government interact in the provision of social services has become a question of great import. With respect to the recent literatures on decentralization, federalism, and subnational governments in Latin America more generally, Avoiding Governors is by far the most sophisticated attempt yet to integrate municipal governments more directly into the theoretical frameworks we use to study intergovernmental relations." —Kent Eaton, professor of politics, University of California, Santa Cruz



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