example, China’s leaders are preoccupied with fears of stability, but many outside observers think their worries are out of proportion to the threats they actually face. There is also a tendency to accept statements at face value, not distinguishing personal insights from hyperbole, figures of speech, or paying lip service to the party line when meeting with foreign visitors. Lampton lets the reader make those calls, but he misses the opportunity to give his assessment of them.

In the last chapter, Lampton switches from evaluating the past to offering his conjectures about the future, emphasizing what China’s leaders should do, not necessarily what they are likely to do. The book ends on a wistful note: if the United States hopes to influence China’s future, it should first solve its own problems.

The book is intended for general readers more than China specialists, but even specialists will benefit from Lampton’s insights and themes, and especially the numerous interview excerpts that are the highlight of the book. In addition, the book will be valuable as a supplemental text for courses on Chinese politics.

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Despite recent problems of economic stagnation and social unrest, Brazil, in the last 20 years, has undergone a striking reversal of fortune. Policymaking institutions have improved, and better economic and social policies have resulted, leading to sustained low inflation, a long economic boom, and significant reductions in Brazil’s notoriously high levels of poverty and inequality. These advances in governability and policy quality confounded the pessimistic predictions that dominated analyses of Brazil during the country’s first decade of democracy (1985–1995). Yet they have also generated a degree of optimism about Brazil’s economic and political future that probably is not warranted. Precisely how—and how much—has Brazil changed for the better since the early 1990s? Can we find a reasonable middle ground between the excessive pessimism of early analyses and the excessive optimism of more recent ones? For a reader interested in these questions, there are few better places to look than Alfred P. Montero’s clear, wide-ranging, and consistently interesting new book.

Montero identifies three dimensions of possible turnaround: governability, the quality of policy, and the quality of democracy. The most significant
turnarounds, Montero argues, have come in the first two areas. First, Brazilian
governability notably improved after the breakdown of presidential–legislative
relations under President Fernando Collor de Mello, who was impeached in
all Brazilian presidents since have made it a fundamental priority to
forge multiparty governing coalitions. This unwritten rule of contemporary
Brazilian politics, known as “coalitional presidentialism,” has stabilized presi-
dential–legislative relations, and as a result, the country has become more
governable. Partly because of this improved governability, Brazilian policy
outcomes have also improved. Over the last 20 years, Brazil’s democratic
governments have produced smart and innovative economic and social policies,
including Cardoso’s foundational Real Plan, which has kept inflation down for
decades, new industrial policies associated with the National Development
Bank, and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s highly successful Family Grant (Bolsa
Família), the largest conditional cash transfer program in the world. Montero
cautions that these improvements in governability and policy quality should not
be overstated. Patronage remains the dominant currency of Brazilian politics
(underwriting coalitional presidentialism), and the Brazilian economy remains
inefficient in numerous respects. Still, the overall turnaround in governability
and policy quality is unmistakable, and this turnaround, Montero judges, is
clearly a product of the strategic choices made by Cardoso and his successor Da

It is a positive sign that, in recent years, scholars have stopped asking
whether Brazil can function democratically and instead have turned their
attention to the issue of democratic quality—the last of Montero’s three
dimensions. Have Brazilian elites become more accountable and responsive
to citizens? Has voting become an effective tool for public oversight of
the political class? Unfortunately, the answer is mixed instead of resound-
ingly affirmative. According to Montero, Brazil, in the area of democratic
quality, has made marginal progress but not yet experienced a turnaround.
In particular, despite the strengthening and proliferation of watchdog orga-
nizations in both government and civil society, other, more persistent as-
psects of Brazilian democracy—corruption, pro-incumbent bias, and endemic
patronage and clientelism—continue to limit elites’ responsiveness to voters’
policy.

Montero describes and analyzes the foregoing shifts (and continuities) with
clarity, thoroughness, and methodological sophistication. The result is one of
the best books currently available on the evolving politics and political economy
of Brazil’s now 30-year-old democracy.

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