

**OTHER NATIONS**

erning alliance, has muffled its criticism for the same reason. No discussion of foreign policy, write Smouts, "can be isolated from the internal political struggle."

One issue, however, may generate serious foreign policy debate: the proposed direct election of delegates to the European Parliament, which would coincide with the 1978 French presidential election. Giscard, Smouts suggests, may be tempted to use this issue to destroy the dominance of the UDR and divide the left by rallying the citizenry around the "truly Giscardian theme" of European unity. However, since the proposition is a volatile one (President Georges Pompidou failed in a similar attempt in 1972), it is likely that both Giscard and his opponents will continue to discuss foreign policy in a muted, intermittent fashion.

### *New Politics in Latin America*

"The Closeness of Elections in Latin America" by Martin C. Needler, in *Latin American Research Review* (vol. 12, no. 1, 1977), 316 Hamilton Hall, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514.

A curious feature of recent Latin American politics has been the closeness of presidential elections. In contests taking place around 1970, the two principal contenders were separated by a median gap of less than 5 percentage points. The comparable figure for 1950 was more than 15 percent.

Needler, a University of New Mexico political scientist, argues that slim margins indicate growing Latin political awareness. His analysis of half the countries holding presidential elections between 1962 and 1972 (El Salvador, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Peru, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, and Uruguay) suggests that a common pattern may partly account for the change. As parties become established and it becomes possible to calculate relative strengths, a "minimum winning coalition" strategy can be developed by the "outs."

Thus, in Costa Rica, Francisco Orlich won in 1962 with 49 percent of the vote against a divided opposition but lost in 1966 with the same percentage when his foes put forward a single opposition candidate. Salvador Allende, the Marxist, lost in Chile in 1964 with 39 percent of the vote but won in 1970 with 36 percent. Overall, Needler contends, Latin American elections have become more competitive and "less simply a device to ratify continued possession of power by those who already hold it."

The consequences, however, have been discouraging. Narrow victories carry little conviction, impair legitimacy, and underline the strength of the opposition. Close contests were followed by political disturbances in Uruguay and Colombia, by attempts to bar inauguration of the election winner in El Salvador and Chile, and by a military takeover in Peru.