Latin American Politics: Tradition and Modernization in Tension

Syllabus

PLSC-2700-2  
University of Denver  
Spring 2015

Location: Sturm 124  
Day and Time: Monday and Wednesday, 8:00-9:50 am  
Office Hours and Location: M & W, 10-11 am, or by appointment (location TBD)  
Instructor: Matthew Klick, PhD, matthew.klick@du.edu

Course Description

Latin American politics cannot be neatly summarized. The region, after all, is wildly diverse. It consists of over 25 countries that stretch from the Caribbean to Tierra del Fuego, hundreds of languages, an equal number of ethnic identities and cultures, autocracies and democracies, and biomes that range from coastal and tropical to pampas and high altitude altiplano. In between, countless historical episodes, pivotal figures and entrenched interests have risen and fallen, or still hang around…There are nevertheless some peculiarities that are generally unique to the region – an ardent independent streak wary of U.S. interference, novel concepts of economic and human development, organized indigenous movements, and more sadly a history of military rule and egregious human rights abuses. Each of these cut across many of the region’s countries. Latin American Politics are, much like the Gabriel García Marquez novels that have come to symbolize the region, magical in their own right, if not always pretty. This class explores some of these major themes and their relationship to regional politics before tracing their legacy through to modern Latin America – where today Maoist militia groups openly operate within a democratic regime (as in Peru), where autocratic oil regimes (like Venezuela) discuss pan-Americanism with indigenous presidents (like Morales in Bolivia), or from where emerging powerhouses send their peacekeepers to international conflicts (as Brazil has), or host the Olympics. Within Political Science, the approach will be a mix of comparative and historical analysis with some consideration of international relations and political economy.

Some questions under consideration in this course include (but are not limited to):

- How do key historical legacies continue to influence regional politics?
- What are the historical legacies that are most important anyhow – colonialism, resource extraction, class-consciousness and socialist movements, democratization or military rule and free market reforms?
- What is the role of inequality and identity politics on regional development?
- What are the implications of mobilized non-state actors throughout the region – from gangs to drug lords and Maoist revolutionaries?
Course Expectations, Structure and Assignments

Expectations

I have tailored the reading for a balance of insight and knowledge with readability and engagement. You are expected to have read 100% of the assigned reading for the day in order to be able to engage in our classroom discussions. The classroom experience will generally be a mix of introductory lecturing by the instructor in order to highlight key ideas, but otherwise seminar style in which you will be leading discussions, presenting reading reactions and working with other students in order to analyze subject matter in detail.

Students will be expected to read, think, criticize, and form balanced arguments regarding the topic. You will also be expected to write clearly and concisely on the matter for the purpose of critical analysis as well as to improve professional writing ability. The goal is to learn more about contemporary Latin American politics, along with a greater contextual understanding of the region, as well as to broaden your understanding of applied Political Science.

Structure

The course is broadly organized across several topical “themes,” or broad subjects (see below for details), under which we will compare experiences across several countries from the region for the purposes of analysis. Readings will be available on Canvas as a .pdf, or hyperlink, from which you can access the reading. There is no textbook for this class – all reading is available through Canvas or online.

Assignments and Grading

All assignments shall be formatted with 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font and single-spaced with spaces between paragraphs and appropriate headings, sub-headings, etc. Use this document for reference. Bibliographic citations can take any standard formatting style, but must be consistent and “full.”

1. Country Profile: 4-7 pages with info-graphics and references. In Week 1 you will join a group and be randomly assigned a country from the region. In Week 3 you will present a country profile, both orally and on-paper – consisting of a short narrative and key economic and human welfare statistics, including 10-year trends. The narrative should focus on the country’s modern evolution – the most salient political parties (PRI if studying Mexico, for example), social or political cleavages (agrarian elites versus Evo Morales in Bolivia for example, or President Kirchner versus the Central Bank in Argentina) and major current events (The Olympics and their backlash in Brazil, or the FARC negotiations in Colombia). These are broad brushstrokes at this point, as we will have a current events assignment next.

2. Current Events: 2-3 pages. Due Week 7. With your team, present the most salient political or economic event preoccupying the public, or government, currently. This might be a regional dispute, an anti-terrorist operation, an indigenous group’s protest, or an economic crisis. Your job will be to frame the problem, isolate key stakeholders/actors and their
positions, and then analyze the problem through a context-sensitive lens that considers the local political economy or political history. You can draw from class resources, though you may need to read ahead, or outside of class, in order to best grapple with the analysis.


4. Participation. This component consists of an evaluation of both your in-class participation as well as attendance, combined. I realize that not everyone is an extrovert, and so I am not grading on boisterousness, nor punishing shyness. But I nevertheless need an indication that the student is engaged in the reading and assignments, and thus offers comments, observations or questions throughout the quarter, or visits with me in the case of trouble or concerns of any academic kind. All students, by the way, begin with full credit in this regard, though it can be chipped away and subsequently lost over the course of the quarter.

5. Peer Evaluation: When turning in your final assignment, you will individually score your group mates on participation and contribution from 0-5. Scores less than five will be used to deduct points from individual contributions that were substandard. These scores are confidential.

Everyone is granted two excused absences before point deductions begin. These “free” absences need not be approved by me nor explained. Subsequent absences will be deducted from the grade no matter the circumstance (except in the rare case of prolonged or serious illness). The university policy regarding absence for religious observation is quoted below:

*Note* -- Please visit me during office hours, or contact me to arrange another meeting time, if you are experiencing any academic difficulty, or have special concerns that you think will inhibit your maximum potential. I ask this to avoid a situation in which a bad grade becomes irreversible later in the quarter. If this is uncomfortable at first, or if the situation is more grave, then please contact Student Services or the Political Science Department to speak with someone who can help. Contact Disability Services should other circumstances make coursework unfairly challenging. Without correspondence from Disability Services, I cannot retroactively excuse things like missed assignments, poor grades, or insufficient participation/attendance, etc.
To summarize:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points Total (oral + written)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country Profile</td>
<td>20 (5+15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Events</td>
<td>30 (5+25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Paper (w/ peer evaluation included)</td>
<td>40 (10+30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation and Attendance</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quarterly Grading Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Grading Policy**

Grades for the course will reflect student performance using the following criteria:

- **“A”** is for exceptionally excellent work, clearly better than average and reflecting special research and analytical skills, innovation, excellence, abilities, and effort.
- **“A-”** is for very good work, reflecting strong performance on all course requirements and for making regular and important contributions to course deliberations. Simply completing all the assignments is not sufficient to earn an “A” or “A-” in the course.
- **“B+ to B-”** is for finishing all the course requirements and doing a pretty good job on each of them, or an average job on some of them and a first-rate job on at least one assignment.
- **“C”** is for completing all course requirements without special distinction in terms of research, writing, analysis, or presentation.
- **“C-”** is for slightly substandard performance on all the course requirements.
- **“D”** and lower is for poor performance and generally a “D” or lower in a course means that the student is not progressing well in their program of studies.

**Miscellaneous**

We are lucky to have many on-campus events and opportunities to explore Latino culture and/or regional political experiences. One resource to consider is this one:

Week 1 – Introduction to Latin American Politics: *Whom and What Are We Talking About?*

We start with some background. What is “Latin America?” What is valuable about its study? And how can we as students of Political Science approach such a broad topic?

Class 1 (March 23): Background and Introductions

- Read: syllabus entirely and, as a group, answer all questions re: assignments

Class 2 (March 25): Some Philosophical Origins of Political Thought

- In-class we will view: “Viva Zapata” (2005)
- Group Assignments

Week 2 – The Legacy of Revolution: Peasants, Marx and Politics

What is the legacy of revolution in Latin America, and what are its origins? From the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) to the Cuban (1959), subsequent social movements, uprisings, and contemporary cells of resistance, social justice – as well as its swift crushing by political elites and *caudillos* – has an intimate place in Latin American politics. We explore how land, labor and colonialism interact, and thus continue to shape contemporary policy.

Class 1 (3/30)

- Finish “Octavio Paz” document (pp. 140-154, 264-270)
- Read: Chapters 1 and 2 in Wells and Johnson (1996) *Summer of Discontent, Seasons of Upheaval: Elite Politics and Rural Insurgency in Yucatán* (e-reserve)

Class 2 (4/1)

Week 3 – Revolution to Resistance: Evolving State and Society In Latin America

Populism, Peronism, *Caudillismo,* and the battle for popular support: Flowing from Week 2, we continue to examine popular, political and social movements with lingering significance in the region – with special emphasis on the Left-Right battleground for mass political mobilization, as well as its revolutionary-inspired backlash. *Oral presentations of Current Events plus written assignment due.*

Class 1 (4/6): Populism and *Caudillismo*: Ideological Battlegrounds


Class 1 (4/8): Revolution and Resistance: From *Sandinistas* to *Sendero Luminoso*

- Read: Excerpt from Close et al. (2012) *Sandinistas and Nicaragua Since 1979.* Boulder: Lynne Rienner (pdf in Canvas)
- In-class: Screening of *Lucanamarca*

Week 4 – Military Rule and its Recurring Influence

From virtually tip to tail, most Latin American countries have experienced military control at some point in their histories. These eras continue to reverberate through contemporary society, sparking revisionism of past regimes in the face of crises – economic or political, and dividing citizens between supporters and opposition come trials or truth and reconciliation efforts. This week we explore the political implications of military rule, and transitions away from them.

Class 1 (4/13): Chile


- Consider: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRiJ7bYhFTc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRiJ7bYhFTc)

- In-class: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1z6dRvmV2tU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1z6dRvmV2tU)

Class 2 (4/15): Argentina and Other Cases


- Recurring effects: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5ZhfmmpYz4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5ZhfmmpYz4)

- Discussion of other Cases: Guatemala, El Salvador and Brazil

**Week 5 – Transitions to Democracy and Modern Politics**

Not only the legacies of military rule (socially and culturally), but the transitions away from autocracy themselves, have important implications for how politics operate today. The nature of transitions to democracy shapes durable political settlements, bedrock institutions and state-society relations. Latin America, given its grim history, has been a key site for examining democratic transitions, consolidation of democracy and civil-military relations that have since informed political scientists everywhere.

Class 1 (4/20): Elites, Pacted Transitions and Civil-Military Relations


Class 2 (4/22): Institutionalism and Executive Leadership After the Transition


Week 6 – Development Patterns: Modernizing Feudalism?

Development in Latin America has a sordid history, careening from elite-led agrarian reform and state-led industrialization to “shock therapy” and liberalization. The region continues to wrestle with the implications of each, and remains an ideological battleground. The region, in part thanks to CEPAL as well as home-grown academics and revolutionaries, has also been a fertile ground for progressive development theorizing. We will explore both the historical experiences as well as important theoretical contributions to poverty and development.

Class 1 (4/27): Resources, Rentier States and Dependency Theory


Class 2 (4/29): Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI), and Today’s Outliers


Week 7 – Poverty Reduction and Rural Development

The riddle of human development plagues the region still, but policy continues to transform – sometimes led from within the region. We explore some the peculiarities of regional and comparative development. *Current Events assignment due.*

Class 1 (5/4): Liberalism and Poverty Reduction Strategies

Class 2 (5/6): Contemporary Challenges and Emerging Policy: Rurality, Microfinance and CCTs

- Oral presentations in class. Written-work due.

Week 8 – Identity Politics: Class, Race or Culture

As you know by now, class politics has a special place in the history of the region, and has been the source of conflict and policy. But what about the region’s history of colonization, robust indigenous movements, and large Black populations? How do they influence politics and organization? And is there such a thing as a regional “political culture?”

Class 1 (5/11): Political Culture in Latin America

- See: http://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp

Class 2 (5/13): Race Identity and Indigenous Movements: The End of Class Consciousness?

- Prof. Klick’s reply in Foreign Affairs (short): link forthcoming
- In-Class: The Black experience in Latin America: http://www.pbs.org/wnet/black-in-latin-america/category/video/ (episode TBD)
Week 9 – Violence and Corruption

Despite a history of robust states with active governments, Latin America is also infamous for its fraught state-society relationships and “ungoverned” areas. Non-state actors – from terrorist organizations and narco-traffickers to indigenous leaders and gang members – continue to shape politics and policy throughout the region. We look at the influence of non-state actors through the prism of crime, while also exploring the topic of pervasive corruption, which resonates hugely throughout the region.


Class 2 (5/20): Corruption, Patronage and Governance


Week 10 – The Emigration/Immigration Experience

Despite a sordid political history with the United States in the region, the U.S. is also a source of hope and inspiration for the poor seeking new opportunities, as well as a source of trauma and disappointment. We look briefly into the migration experience before turning it over to your presentations. *Final Projects presented and due.*

Class 1(5/25): Going North

- Read the 5 vignettes here: [http://www.pbs.org/pov/sinpais/photo_gallery_background.php?photo=1#gallery-top](http://www.pbs.org/pov/sinpais/photo_gallery_background.php?photo=1#gallery-top)
- Slideshow: [http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2015/01/15/nyregion/17NYIMMIG_ss.html?_r=0#1](http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2015/01/15/nyregion/17NYIMMIG_ss.html?_r=0#1)
- Local Experiences: [http://extras.denverpost.com/immi/aimmi2.htm](http://extras.denverpost.com/immi/aimmi2.htm)
FYI: [http://www.slvirc.org/about.php](http://www.slvirc.org/about.php)
In-Class: *Sin País* viewing and discussion (F869.S39 G827 2010 DVD)

Class 2 (5/27): Final Presentations
- No Reading
- In-class: Final Presentations

Final Exam (6/1): TBD