The Comparative Politics of Latin America

Democracy, Decay, & Renewal

Fall 2016, M/W/ 3:30-4:50
[Room TBA]

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Description and Objectives
This course will introduce you to central puzzles and themes of Latin American politics. We will seek answers to questions such as: What do we mean by democracy, and does it mean the same thing to Latin Americans as it does in the U.S. or elsewhere? What explains transitions away from and back to democracy and market economies in Latin America, and what have its results been? How well does democracy currently function? We will devote a portion of this course to discussing current events in order to critically examine how well the theories we learn explain present-day issues faced by countries in Latin America. This approach will tie in to the second primary objective of the course: In addition to introducing you to issues facing Latin America and developing countries more broadly, it also will develop your ability to make, assess, and support causal claims. This skill will serve you well both in your academic pursuits and throughout life – whether you ever think about Latin America upon completing this course.

Course Dynamics and Requirements
This course combines both knowledge and skill-based elements. You will improve your understanding of Latin America, its politics and history, and the challenges faced by countries in the region and developing countries more broadly. Just as importantly, you are expected to improve your ability to develop and defend causal arguments both orally and in writing.

The first part of the course introduces Latin America and a number of prominent issues facing its residents. The second part deepens our understanding of these issues by establishing a foundation in the history and politics of Latin America. Key topics include past episodes of authoritarian rule and their present-day impact, the related issue of the quality of democracy in
Latin America, and the challenges of balancing social needs with economic performance in an increasingly globalized economy. The third part will introduce additional topics of interest to students of Latin America and developing countries more broadly. (You will be offered the opportunity to help determine which topics we discuss.) While this course places greater emphasis on concepts and ideas than facts, a basic understanding of the region is necessary in order to assess the theories presented. As such, you will be required to display knowledge of the regions’ geography and an understanding of the key concepts covered in the course. The former will be displayed in a brief map test, and the latter in the midterm exam. We also will monitor current events in the region and devote class time to analyzing events that we find interesting or important. (You will be expected to help identify such events.)

Grading will be based on participation (25%, 5% for attendance, 10% for reading and current events responses/discussion questions, 5% for participation, and 5% for self- and peer-review of essays), a map test (5% of final grade), 2 analytical essays (15% of grade), a mid-term exam (20% of grade), and a final paper (flit review 5% of grade, empirical section 10% of grade, final paper 20% of grade).

Material from your analytical essays and other work can be incorporated into your final paper, as relevant.

Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

**Participation**
You will be expected to critically engage in the assigned readings during class. In addition, you will be asked to submit articles on Latin America that you find interesting along with a few discussion questions when we discuss current events in class.

**Reading Response/Discussion Questions**
You also will be expected to submit a brief (paragraph-length) reading response on a weekly basis. These should be posted on Latte by midnight the day before we discuss the readings. You also will regularly be asked to submit current events articles for discussion in class and to comment on other students’ articles via Latte.

**Map test (September 21)**
A list of Latin American countries, cities, and important geographical features will be made available. You will also be given a pdf of a blank map of the region. To prepare for the map test, use any map of the region you wish and fill in the items on the blank map. Then memorize the items and locations. The actual map test will consist of your locating some of these items on a blank map.
Analytical Essays (October 10 & November 16)
The analytical essays should build upon the readings to briefly develop a thesis of your choice. For example, you could pull in multiple readings to make your own argument or point out limitations to the analysis in one argument by incorporating your analysis with that offered by the other readings. Or you might suggest a better way to analyze the question the author addresses. Some class time will be devoted towards preparing you to do this, and you also should visit me during office hours as you prepare to write your essay. THE MAXIMUM LENGTH FOR THIS ESSAY IS FOUR DOUBLE-SPACED PAGES. This means you cannot use up much space summarizing the reading. The responses must be submitted electronically or turned in prior to the beginning of class on the days they are due.

Each essay should begin with an outline that contains your thesis and the main supports for your argument, and follow with your essay on the second page. Note: Only the text of the body (from the first sentence of the introductory paragraph to the last sentence of the conclusion) counts towards page requirements for any and all assigned writing, which should be double-spaced with standard (1-inch) margins and (10-12 point) font. Outlines, figures, tables, and the bibliography do not count towards this requirement.

You also should be prepared to conduct a review of one of your essays and of one of your peers’ essays.

The Midterm (October 19)
The midterm will include both ID’s and short essays. You will be asked to identify a set of terms and phrases from lectures and the readings. You will also be asked to write two essays in response to questions provided. The questions address topics covered during the first part of the course, with an emphasis on theories of development, democracy, and regime change. The midterm exam will be closed-book and closed-note.

Final Project
First Submission due December 5
Final Submission due December 16
For the final project, you will address a theme of your choice from the course. The final paper should consist of 12 pages of text, plus a bibliography and any figures or tables that you deem appropriate. You are welcome to use material from your analytical essays, but also should engage in original research. Please see the end of the syllabus for different approaches to the final project. We will discuss this project in class and you will be expected to attend office hours in order to further develop and refine your ideas.
The final project represents the culmination of your learning in this class and thus consists of a large share of your final grade. Your analytical essays will help prepare you for the final paper, and you are welcome to incorporate material from your essays into your final project.

**Readings**
The primary textbook for the class is:


This edition is available at a discount from Amazon so I have not ordered it from the bookstore. PLEASE NOTE THAT WE WILL BE WORKING FROM THE 8TH EDITION, WHICH HAS BEEN REVISED AND EXPANDED FROM PREVIOUS EDITIONS. Unfortunately, previous editions will not allow you to keep up with the readings and class.

We also will be reading from the following book, which I encourage you to consider purchasing. (It is available for a reasonable price on Amazon; I’ve also put a copy on reserve at the library.):


All other readings will be available electronically.

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University’s *Rights and Responsibilities* for policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students’ work may be submitted to TurnItIn.com to help verify originality. If suspicions of academic dishonesty arise, they will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS - Library guides. Proper citation is extremely important; please see me if you have any additional questions about how to cite others’ work. This is a four-credit course (with three hours of class-time per week).
Part I: Why Latin America

Introductions
August 29

Contemporary issues in Latin American politics
August 31
Reading: read Ch. 1 from MLA & Economist article on the “Central American Spring”
Mini-writing assignment (1 paragraph): Why do people protest?

NO CLASS September 5

Key Topics in Latin American Politics
September 7
Assignment: Reading Response

Overview Redux and 1st Current Events
September 8
Assignment: Prepare for current events discussion by a) identifying and sharing an article that addresses an important issue for Latin America (or a Latin American country) and b) read two other articles (either those shared by your classmates or by me).

Foundations
September 12
Theoretical foundations: What is democracy? Why might we want one?
Latin America: the basics
Reading: Polyarchy, Chapters 1 and 2; MLA Chapter 2, Sen “What do we want from a Theory of Justice” (read conclusion and skim the rest)
Political Transitions
September 14
Reading: MLA Chapter 13 and 15; O’Donnel & Schmitter Chapters 1-3
Assignment: prepare for Map Test (I’ll provide some study materials)
Current Events discussion!
Prepare a brief presentation on a key topic or theme that has been introduced in the course.
Prepare for current events discussion by a) identifying and sharing an article that addresses an important issue for Latin America (or a Latin American country) and b) read two other articles (either those shared by your classmates or by me).

Economic Development and Democracy
September 19
Reading: MLA Chapter 5 & 12; O’Donnel & Schmitter Chapters 5-7

Economic Development II & Map Test
September 21
Reading: “Does Land Inequality Block Democratization”; “Factor Endowments and Development”
Current Events article!

Overview of Key Themes & Student Presentations of 1st Essay Topic
September 26
Reading: MLA Ch. 8 and “An Economic History of 20th Century Latin America”

Part II: Democracy, Decay, & Renewal in Latin America
Mexico: Historical Legacies
September 28
Reading: MLA Ch. 3 and Mexico’s Pivotal 2000 Election Ch. 2 and 3
Current Events article!

NO CLASS October 3
**Mexico: Contemporary Challenges**  
October 5 (visit office hours!)  
Reading: Fried et al. 2010; Smith *Labyrinths of Power*, selections.

**Law & Justice cont., Review, & Current Events Discussion**  
October 10  
Reading: Power & Taylor Chapters 4 and 8  
Current Events discussion!  
Assignment: Prepare for current events discussion by a) identifying and sharing an article that addresses an important issue for Latin America (or a Latin American country) and b) read two other articles (either those shared by your classmates or by me).  
**Analytical Essay I due**

NO CLASS October 12 or October 17

**Introduction to Chile & Midterm**  
October 19  
Reading: MLA Ch. 10, Pinochet File *Introduction*  
Current Events discussion!

NO CLASS October 24

**The Breakdown of Democracy in Chile & Writing in The Social Sciences**  
October 25: BRANDEIS MONDAY (visit office hours!)  
Reading: Arturo Valenzuela, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Chile*, Chapters 1-2  
Assignment: Brainstorm and submit a potential research question or topic prior to class.
Authoritarian Rule & Library Visit
October 26
Reading: Pinochet File Ch. 1-3
Current Events discussion!

The Transition in Chile
October 31
Reading: Pinochet File Ch. 7, Americas Watch, Human Rights and the “Politics of Agreements”: Chile During President Aylwin’s First Year, pp. 36-68, 1991.

The Long Shadow of Uncle Sam
November 2
Reading: MLA Chapter 7 and either Chapter 4 or Chapter 6; Pinochet File Ch. 4
Current Events discussion!

Flex Day
November 7 (visit office hours to discuss essay )

Post Election Special
November 9 (visit office hours to discuss essay )
Assignment: Current events article that connects U.S. foreign policy to Latin America

Legacies of Authoritarian Rule
November 14 (visit office hours to discuss essay)
Current Events discussion!

Part III: Special Topics & Contemporary Issues

Political Systems – Cause or Effect?
Legislatures
November 16
Analytical Essay II Due

Political Systems – Cause or Effect?
Executives
November 21
Scott Mainwaring, “Presidentialism, Multipartism, and Democracy,” Comparative Political Studies 26(2):198-228, 1993; Perez-Linan Ch. 7.

Economic Policy: Neoliberalism and its discontents
& Current Events
November 28
Literature Review Due
Reading: MLA Ch. 11; “Skills, Exports, and the Wages of Seven Million Latin American Workers.”
Assignment: Prepare for current events discussion by a) identifying and sharing an article that addresses an important issue for Latin America (or a Latin American country) and b) read two other articles (either those shared by your classmates or by me).
Crime, Insurgency, and Societal Violence
November 30

Student Presentations of Research

December 5
Analytical Section Due

Student Presentations of Research
Student Defined Topics (see list below for possibilities)

December 7
Student Presentations of Research
Student Defined Topics (see list below for possibilities)

Final Paper Due Dec. 16

Student Defined Topics could include organized crime, education policy, identity politics (race/ethnicity and/or gender), environmental policy, health policy, populism, poverty reduction, and a more detailed investigation of one of the other topics broached in the class.

Disabilities:
If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.
Possible Approaches for the Final Project

Possible types of research papers include, but are not limited to, the following:

**Literature Review:** Write a critical literature review on one of the topics from the course. A critical literature review, drawing on multiple sources, highlights key debates in a research agenda, the positions of prominent scholars in these debates, the extent to which debates have been settled, and areas for future research. Although a literature review involves a summary of existing works, a good review also includes *original critical analysis*. Such analysis may critique specific studies, present an original way of classifying or organizing an ongoing debate, or offer insights on important avenues of future research.

**Article or Book Critique:** Identify a specific study with which you strongly disagree or find lacking, and conduct research to support your critique. This research may draw on other scholars who agree with your position vis-à-vis the scholarship you are critiquing, or it may utilize historical work, case studies, or quantitative data that support your claims.

**Country Study:** Choose a country and examine how one of the theories from the course help us understand events in this country. You also could compare a pair of countries and a pair of theories. For example, which theory best explains the breakdown of democracy in Argentina and Brazil? Or how can we best understand the historical pattern of economic development in Mexico. Based on your findings, analyze the extent to which your case study confirms or disconfirms the conclusions of readings that we will be doing for the course.

**Data Analysis:** Choose a claim from the literature and examine the empirical support for this claim. Offer a critique of the sources of data and methodological approaches used in various studies. Address how types of data and methodological approaches affect each study’s findings and offer conclusions about which studies are most methodologically convincing.