The Comparative Politics of Latin America

Fall 2015, M/W/Th 12-12:50
[Location]

Professor Brian Fried
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Office hours: M/W from 2:30-3:30 and by appointment; Olin Sang 111

Description and Objectives

This course will introduce you to central puzzles and themes of Latin American politics. We will seek answers to the following kinds of questions: Does economic development foster authoritarianism or democracy? 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 the wave of democratization and shift to market economies in Latin America beginning in the 1980s, and what have its results been? How well does democracy function now that it is fairly established in place in most Latin American countries? We will devote a portion of this course to discussing current events in order to critically examine how well the theories we learn help us understand to 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 Latin America and issues facing developing countries more broadly, this course is also designed to 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 or not you ever think about Latin America upon completing this course.

Course Dynamics and Requirements

As discussed in the previous section, this course combines both knowledge and skill-based requirements. Students will improve their 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 their ability to develop and defend causal arguments both orally and in writing.

The first part of the course establishes a foundation in the history and politics of Latin America. 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 in the course. As such, you will be required to display a rudimentary 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.

In the second part of the course, we will examine key issues of contemporary relevance for understanding Latin America: understanding 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. We will primarily focus on Chile, Mexico, and Brazil to address these issues. We also will look more closely at current events in the region in this part of the course and will devote much of the third class each week to analyzing events that we find interesting or important. (You will be expected to help identify such events.)

Grading will be based on participation (35%, including self- and peer-review) a map test (10% of final grade), 2 analytical essays (20% of grade), a mid-term exam (20% of grade), and a final paper (first submission 10% of grade, final submission 25% of grade).

Participation
You will be expected to have conducted and critically engage in the readings during class. You also will be expected to submit a brief (paragraph-length) reading response on a weekly basis. In addition, you will be asked to submit articles on Latin America that you find interesting along with a few discussion questions once we begin discussing current events in class.

The self-review of your and peer-review of a fellow students’ essays (discussed below) will also count towards your participation grade.

Map test (September 21)
A list of Latin American countries, cities, and important geographical features will be made available. You will also find 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 15 & 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 will be collected at the beginning of class on the days they are due.

You also should be prepared to conduct a review of one of your essays and of one of your peers essays. In addition, you will be expected to submit a revised version of one of your essays by the last day of class.

**The mid-term (October 20)**

The mid-term 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 mid-term exam will be closed-book and closed-note.

[include something about research design/essay writing?]

**Final Project (First Submission: December 3; Final Submission: December 15)**

For the final project, you will further develop a theme of your choice from the course. This paper should be between ten and twelve pages long (double-spaced) and may be in the form of a research proposal (e.g. for a senior thesis), an extended bibliographic essay on a suitable topic, or a more traditional research paper. You are welcome to use material from your analytical essays, but are also expected to engage in original research. We will discuss this project in class and you also will be expected to attend office hours in order to further develop and refine your ideas.

**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 no allow you to keep up with the readings and class. I am hoping to be able to rely on articles and scanned excerpts of books for the remaining readings but may suggest one additional book for purchase.
**Study Questions**

Study questions will be posted online. Reviewing these questions, before and after you do the reading, will help you to focus on the central arguments and information in the books and articles.