Narco-Politics

Corruption, Drug Trafficking, & the Rule of Law

Spring 2017, Monday and Wednesday 3:30 – 4:50
Mandel G12

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Description and Objectives

Plata o Plomo, literally “money or lead,” describes the choices available to police officers, government officials, and common citizens: they can either accept bribes for taking part in illegal activities (or for looking the other way) or a bullet if they fail to do so. The phrase conveys the dangers faced by those enmeshed in deadly narcotic networks. The vast wealth and chronic violence generated by the drug trade is an egregious example of how criminal behavior undermines efforts to establish the rule of law and effective government institutions.

How can we best understand the illegal drug trade? What policies are most promising for minimizing drug consumption and the criminality that it engenders? Is limiting consumption even desirable? This course will investigate these questions in order to improve our understanding of the issues and our options for addressing them. We will focus on the drug trade in the Americas, but students are encouraged to examine other cases as well. While easy answers are unlikely, we hope to establish facts to inform our positions on such puzzles.

To do so, we will apply the tools of political science to improve our understanding of the trade in illicit drugs, its causes, and its effects. We will also examine the literature on corruption and conflict to see if anticorruption and conflict resolution efforts, which often are tied to the trade in illicit drugs, can provide useful insights. A complementary goal will be 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. Thus, this will be a discussion-based and writing intensive course, with regular opportunities develop your skills in these areas. The first part of the course provides an overview. We then investigate drug production in the Americas and the organizations in the Americas that engage in these activities. After that, we will look at the costs of narcopolitics in the developing world, in terms of corruption and violence. Next, we will shift our attention to the U.S. and examine both drug trafficking and
counternarcotic efforts and the impact of the “War on Drugs.” The final part of the class will examine the effect of recent and proposed reforms to drug policies.

**Course Dynamics and Requirements**
Grading will be based on participation (5% for attendance, 5% for discussion questions, 10% for participation as discussed below), analytical essays (10%, 10%, and 20% for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd essay), and a final paper (5% for the annotated bibliography, 10% for the literature review, 10% for the empirical/case study, and 20% for the final paper).

**Readings**
Most readings will be available electronically via the dropbox link found in the announcements on the Latte course page. In addition, to the electronic readings, all students will be expected to read *Bruno: Conversations with a Brazilian Drug Dealer*, by Robert Gay. This book is available on Amazon. Different chapters from the book are assigned below with the other readings.

**Discussion Questions/Reading Response**
You should submit study questions and/or reading responses that exhibit your reflections on the readings on a weekly bases. These responses should be posted on Latte by noon of the day that we will discuss the readings.

**Participation**
You should be prepared to critically engage in the assigned readings during class. You also will be expected to participate in debates and group projects, such as presenting a video clip that illustrates an idea of theme from the course.

**Guest Panels**
I have invited guests who have firsthand experience dealing with different aspects of narcopolitics to join our class. The tentative schedule for these guests are as follows:

- February 1: The Criminal Justice System
- March 9: Narcotrafficking Today – Colombia and Beyond
- March 15: Narcotrafficking and U.S. Policy
- March 22: Social and Community Welfare
- April 26: Healthcare & Harm Reduction

**ALL STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO PREPARE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND PARTICIPATE IN CLASS DURING THESE VISITS.**
Analytical Essays
Your 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 one reading’s thesis by incorporating your analysis with that offered by the other readings. Or you might suggest a better way to analyze the question that the author addresses. We will devote some class time towards preparing you to do this, and you should see me during office hours for additional help.

Each essay should begin with an outline that contains your thesis and the main supports for your argument; the main text of the essay should begin 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.

The following assignments are designed to develop your writing ability and prepare you for your final project:

- **Essay 1** (due January 29): 2 pages
- **Essay 2** (due February 19): 2 pages
- **Essay 3 on the topic of your final project** (due March 3): 4 pages

Please note: **I expect that you will read and revise your essays before submitting a clean, polished final version**. Unless instructed otherwise, the essays should be submitted via Latte by noon on the day when they are due.

Final Project
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. You are expected to contribute to an annotated bibliography and produce two preliminary papers that will prepare you for the final paper.

The annotated bibliography will allow you to explore the relevant literature with the class. I will encourage groups to coordinate and jointly investigate topics of mutual interest, but expect that
everyone will individually provide five annotated sources, three of which must be of academic quality. This bibliography will be explained in greater detail in class.

The first paper is a five-page literature review that will allow you to explore what scholars are saying about your topic of interest. The second five-page paper is an empirical assessment (such of a case study) of how your topic plays out in the real world. For example, if you were interested in the effect of decriminalization on consumption or incarceration, you could present data from a jurisdiction where decriminalization occurred (and perhaps compare it to one where it did not occur). The due dates for these papers are as follows:

Research Theme incorporated into Essay 3: March 3  
Annotated Bibliography: March 17  
Literature Review: March 31  
Empirical Assessment: April 21  
Final Paper: May 5

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 will 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 or a librarian 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). At Brandeis, success in a 4 credit course is based on the expectation that you will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion questions and reading responses, etc.). 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 let me know.
Learning Goals

Learning Goals: Core Skills

By the end of the course, you should have developed your capacities and skills in these areas:

- **Question-asking and questioning assumptions** – you should be able to:
  - Ask thoughtful questions (especially why and how questions)
  - Evaluate evidence behind the many claims that you read and hear
  - Recognize and appraise causal (and spurious) social science relationships

- **Empirical skills & your “Nonsense Detector”** – you should be able to:
  - Analyze academic and popular media and be able to detect mistakes, misleading statements and omissions, and outright lies
  - Assess others’ and develop your own social science hypotheses
  - Identify and analyze data to test these hypotheses

- **Reading skills and class participation:** you should be better able to understand what you read and improve your ability to participate in small-group and entire-class discussions

- **Writing skills:** you should develop your ability to clearly and concisely convey a social science argument in writing. Such writing includes:
  - A thesis that states the paper's position
  - Support for your thesis (including why your argument is more convincing than alternative explanations)
  - Strong, succinct, and polished prose

> We will focus on these skills so that you are able to use them in other settings for years to come.

Learning Goals: Knowledge

By the end of the course we want you to deepen your understanding of:

- Drug trafficking and its relationship with corruption and violence in Latin America.
- The relationship between drug policies, politics, and domestic and international outcomes.
- Understand the likely ramifications of alternative drug policy regimes.

Learning Goals: Social Justice, Values, and Behaviors

By the end of the course we want you to deepen your understanding of:

- The causes and consequences of poorly functioning democratic institutions
- The international ramifications of U.S. policy
- The ability of social science tools to identify policies that can lead to better socioeconomic outcomes and a more just society
This class is not for everyone

- This is the second time that this course has been taught and I am making substantial modifications to the syllabus to build upon last years’ success. I will further adjust the syllabus as I identify new high quality treatments of the course material and in response to class dynamics. These adjustments will allow us to go into greater depth in the topics of interest to you and the class, but will require some attention to changes and flexibility on your part.
- I expect that students actively participate in the course and devote substantial time and effort towards fulfilling the course’s learning goals. I look forward to sharing a fun, non-standard learning experience with you. If you are up for it, we are really excited to work with you. If you are hoping to do minimal work in this course…maybe this isn’t the best class for you.
Part I: Framing the Issues
Session 1 (January 18): Introduction
Submit a response to “what is narcopolitics?” by noon.
Read the introduction from Bruno.

Session 2 (January 23): What’s at stake
Read Chapter 1 from Bruno.

Session 3 (January 25): Drug Use and Individual Outcomes

Upload Essay 1 to Latte by noon on January 29.
Session 4 (January 30): Regional & International Dimensions

Read Chapter 2 from Bruno.

Session 5 (February 1): The Criminal Justice System with Guests


Session 6 (February 6): Effects on Developing Countries – Theory and Reality


Part II: Drug Production, Transit, and Organizations

Session 7 (February 8): Producing Nations – The Case of Colombia

Session 8 (February 13): Transit Nations – The Case of Mexico

Read Chapter 3 from Bruno.


Session 9 (February 15): Drug trafficking organizations I


Upload Essay 2 by noon on February 17

February Recess

Session 10 (February 27): Drug trafficking organizations II

Read Chapter 4 from Bruno.
Session 11 (March 1): DTO/TCO Wrap Up


Upload Essay 3 (on topic of final project!) to Latte by noon on March 3.

**Part III: Corruption, Violence, and Trafficking**

Session 12 (March 6): Drugs, Violence, and the State


Session 13 (March 8): Why do some illegal markets turn violent?


Read Chapter 5 from *Bruno*.

Session 14 (March 13): Gangs and Drugs in the U.S.


Session 15 (March 15): Understanding Corruption


Upload annotated bibliography to Latte by noon on March 17.

Session 16 (March 20): Drugs and Corruption


Session 17 (March 22): Guest Visit Readings TBA

Session 18 (March 27): Clientelism, State Building, & Drug Trafficking I


Session 19 (March 29): Clientelism, State Building, & Drug Trafficking II

Read Chapter 6 from *Bruno*.

Upload Literature Review to Latte by March 31.

**Part IV: Policymaking & Reform**

Session 20 (April 3): Anti-Corruption as Cure?


Session 21 (April 5): Conflict Resolution & Drug Trafficking


**Passover Recess**

Session 22 (April 19): Evidence on Decriminalization (& Simulation)

**Readings Assigned by Group**


**Upload Empirical Assessment to Latte by April 21.**

Session 23 (April 24): Legalization

Session 24 (April 26): Healthcare & Harm Reduction **with Guests**

Session 25 (May 1): Final Project Presentation & Conclusion

May 3: Extra Office Hours; Mandatory visit to discuss final project

**Final Paper due on May 5.**
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 (or sub-region of a country) and develop a report about the (evolving?) policies towards the drug trade. Examine sources of corruption and violence, analyze their political and socioeconomic effects, and consider efforts to fight the illegal trade in drugs and whether or not they have been successful in your chosen country or region. Based on your findings, analyze the extent to which your case study confirms or disconfirms the conclusions of readings 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.