

Contemporary Latin American Politics
POL 325
Fall 2025

Instructor:

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Office Hours:

TW 11:30-12:30 Sid Smith 6024
(and by appointment)

Course Description

The twenty first century in Latin American Politics has been characterized by shifts from left to right governments, unexpected openings in entrenched regimes, endings to decades' long conflicts, and beginnings of new ones. The region has also been characterized by renewed mobilizations against persistent inequalities and an increasing attention to the promises and challenges of development. Our approach in the course will address themes through pan-regional hopes and challenges in the pursuit of social justice, and case studies – offering students in-depth investigations into individual country cases. Key questions addressed include: understanding the meaning of left and right political formations in the twenty-first century; development, sustainable development, and the critique of development; and the relationship between states and social movements in Bolivia, Brazil, Venezuela, Chile, and Cuba in the aftermaths of the so-called Washington Consensus of the 1990s and early century 'Left Turn.'

Course Learning Objectives

The specific learning objectives of this course will be:

1. To read, understand, and compare a number of interdisciplinary approaches to contemporary Latin American politics and national development;
2. To develop a critical appreciation of recent trends in Latin America, as well as their historical roots;
3. To introduce students to a range of contemporary social theory concepts and their global and local applications;
4. To improve and refine writing and research skills through the composition of a research essay and response papers;

Students are expected to have finished the day's assigned readings before lecture, and are encouraged to bring questions and concerns to class. Lectures will compliment but not necessarily replicate assigned readings. Our aim is to develop not only a critical repertoire on the key debates surrounding Latin American Politics, but to also hone our own abilities as researchers, writers, and colleagues.

Assessment

Marks for this course will be determined via a combination of response papers, a midterm exam, and a final exam. Quizzes will be conducted in class.

Assignment	Weight	Due Date(s)
Podcast Group Project		
Meeting w/Prof	10 total (5 pts each)	First and second half of semester
Proposal	10 points	September 30
Revised Proposal	10 points	October 14
Script	15 points	November 4
Final Recording	10 points	December 2
Debrief	5 points	December 2
Midterm Quiz	15 points	October 7
Response Paper	10 points	October 21
Final Exam	15 points	TBD

Please see details on **Podcast Group Project** attached to this syllabus.

Optional Extra Credit Opportunities: The instructor may choose to offer periodic *in-class only* ‘pop quizzes’ for 1-5 points of extra credit. These will exclusively be based on the assigned readings for a given day.

Response Paper (10 pts, 5 pages double spaced)

Prompts for the midterm essay will be distributed a week prior to the due date. Topics for the essay will cover all course material covered until October 21st. Students will be required to cite their sources, drawing only from assigned texts. While lectures can be cited as sources, students are encouraged to do so sparingly.

Midterm Quiz Based on the readings, lectures, and other materials from the first half of the course. The midterm will be made up of identification and short answer questions and will be taken in person, in class. A study guide will be circulated the week before the exam.

Final Exam Based on the readings, lectures, and other materials from the second half of the course. The final will be made up of identification and short answer questions and will be taken in person, during the exam period. A study guide will be circulated the week before the exam.

Citations For all written work in this course, please use the Chicago Manual of Style's in-text author-date format as you cite your sources. You should also include a Works Cited list at the end of your work. The Works Cited section will not count in length/word count restrictions.

For a guide to the Chicago Manual of Style, please see:

https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html

Late Policy While it is our intention to be as understanding as possible, excessively late work hinders your progress and makes life difficult for the professor and TA. Barring *previously identified* extenuating circumstances, papers will be deducted 5% for each day late, effective immediately after the initial due date.

Note on Attendance

While we will not be taking attendance in lectures, please note that success in this course depends on your full presence and participation. You are expected to attend lectures and cordially invited to visit office hours. Important announcements and adjustments to the course schedule will be announced in class and might not be replicated in other venues.

Email Policy

For the purposes of this course, the primary use of email will be to share information such as announcements of events of note or news stories relevant to the course material and to schedule meetings for more individualized matters. Email is a poor medium for discussing or clarifying substantive questions that come up in lectures or reading. Face to face (even if on-screen) interactions are much better for this sort of work. Please ask substantive questions in class or during office hours.

I do my best to respond in a timely fashion (usually within 48 hours) to all student emails. Please do not expect an immediate response, especially on evenings and weekends. Please be sure that any questions you have are not already answered in the syllabus. I will neither respond to nor acknowledge questions that can be answered in the syllabus.

Current Events and Further Reading

Coverage of Latin American Political, Economic, and Social happenings in the US and Canada are often poor at best, and usually absent from the news cycle entirely. I encourage students to do their best to keep abreast of regional happenings by following local newspapers, language skills permitting, or by periodically checking in with the work of think tanks, development agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations, and scholarly associations. For example:

The Washington Office on Latin America is a policy lobbying organization focusing on issues of human rights, security and justice. <http://www.wola.org>

NACLA Report offers analysis of Latin American conditions from a critical perspective. <http://www.nacla.org>

Good analysis on regional trends in crime and public insecurity. <http://www.insightcrime.org>

Inter-American Dialogue (analysis of political and economic trends) <http://thediologue.org>

The United States Institute of Peace (conflict resolution, includes database of peace accord documents) <http://www.usip.org>

Also offering excellent analysis of regional trends is the Canadian Foundation for the Americas, FOCAL. <http://www.focal.ca>

Among Latin American based research centers, for wide-ranging and timely scholarship see FLACSO (with sites in several LA countries) <http://www.flacso.org>

Course Schedule

Note: As this is a course on *contemporary* Latin American Politics, we will likely be interrupted by current events. Please feel invited to come to class ready to discuss pressing issues as they arise. We will adjust our schedules for lecture and discussion accordingly.

Unless otherwise noted all readings are accessible online via the U of T Library system <https://oneseach.library.utoronto.ca/>

Part I. Concepts and Questions

1. September 2

Introduction to the Course, Syllabus, and Themes

2. September 9

Development and its Alternatives

Cristóbal Kay (2018) Modernization and Dependency Theory. From *The Routledge Handbook of Latin American Development* Julie Cupples, Marcel Palomino-Schalscha, and Manuel Prieto, eds. New York: Routledge, pp 15-28.

*the full handbook is available online via the library website

Laura Zapata-Cantu and Fernando González (2021) Challenges for Innovation and Sustainable Development in Latin America: The Significance of Institutions and Human Capital. *Sustainability* 14 <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13074077>

Eduardo Gudynas (2013) Debates on Development and its Alternatives in Latin America: A Brief Heterodox Guide, in *Beyond Development: Alternative Visions from Latin America*, M. Lang and D. Mokrani, eds. Quito: Fundación Rosa Luxemburg, pp.15-39

Available at: <http://www.rosalux.org.ec/pdfs/BeyondDevelopment.pdf#page=16>

*Please Note: The entire collection is definitely worth checking out.

Reference:

World Bank Group (2021) *Recovering Growth: Rebuilding Dynamic Post-Covid-19 Economies Amid Fiscal Constraints*. Washington DC.

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/36331/9781464818066.pdf>

Julian Yates and Karen Bakker (2014) “Debating the ‘Post-Neoliberal Turn’ in Latin America.” *Human Geography* 38(1): 62-90.

3. September 16

Governance and Protest in the Twenty First Century

****sign up for podcast groups before class on quercus. Prof will assign those without groups after class****

Rosalía Cortés (2009) Social Policy in Latin America in the Post-neoliberal Era. In: Jean Grugel and Pía Ruggirozzi (eds) *Governance after Neoliberalism in Latin America*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Marie-Christine Doran (2017) The Hidden Face of Violence in Latin America: Assessing the Criminalization of Protest in Comparative Perspective. *Latin American Perspectives* 44(216): 183-2016.

Adriana Piatti-Crocker (2021) Diffusion of #NiUnaMenos in Latin America: Social Protests Amid a Pandemic. *Journal of International Women's Studies* 22(12) (in press).

4. September 23

The Changing Left-Right Divide and the Durability of Elite Power

Thomas Chiasson-LaBel and Manel Larrabure (2019) Elite and Popular Responses to a Left in Crisis. *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 108: 87-107.

*Please Note: This is an introduction to a journal special issue. All of the articles are worth your time, if you have it.

Luis Bonilla (2018) *Captured Democracy: Government for the Few (Executive Summary)*. OXFAM International.
https://oi-files-d8-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/file_attachments/captured_democracy_executive_summary.pdf

Supplemental Background:

Barry Cannon (2016) *The Right in Latin America: Elite Power, Hegemony, and the Struggle for the State*. New York: Routledge.

Fernando Coronil (2011) “The Future in Question: History and Utopia in Latin America (1989-2010)” in *Business as Usual: The Roots of the Global Financial Crisis*. Craig Calhoun and Georgi Derluguian, eds. (New York: NYU Press). p.231-265.

II. Case Studies

5. September 30

****Podcast proposal due before class on Quercus****

Bolivia: Continuities and Change during the MAS Era

Linda Farthing and Benjamin Kohl (2014) The Land of Unintended Consequences. In *Evo's Bolivia: Continuity and Change*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, Ch. 2.

Gabriel Hetland (2019) Understanding Bolivia's Nightmare. *NACLA Report of the Americas* <https://nacla.org/news/2019/11/19/bolivia-morales-coup>

Alina Duarte (2020) Bolivia and Necessary Self-Critique: ‘In it not enough to have the government, we have to have people’s power’ *Council on Hemispheric Affairs*. <https://www.coha.org/bolivia-and-necessary-self-critique-it-is-not-enough-to-have-the-government-we-have-to-have-peoples-power/>

Supplemental Background:

Miriam Tola (2018) Between Pachamama and Mother Earth: Gender, Political Ontology, and the Rights of Nature in Contemporary Bolivia. *Feminist Review* 118: 25-40.

Bret Gustafson (2020) *Bolivia in the Age of Gas*. Durham: Duke University Press.

6. October 7

Midterm Quiz (in class)

7. October 14

Venezuela: The Long Arc of Chavismo

****Revised proposal due before class on Quercus****

Marsílea Gombata and Maxwell A. Cameron (2021) Endogenous Hybridity: Regime Change in Venezuela (1998–2020). *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revue canadienne des études latino-américaines et caraïbes*, DOI: [10.1080/08263663.2022.2002666](https://doi.org/10.1080/08263663.2022.2002666)

Steve Ellner (2018) Class Struggles in Chavista Venezuela: Pragmatic and Populist Policies in a Broader Context. *Latin American Perspectives* 46(1): 167-189.

Supplemental Background:

Behind the News (2018) Alejandro Velasco on Venezuela

<http://www.leftbusinessobserver.com/Radio.html#S180503>

**part 1 of the program, though many of you will also be interested in part 2's discussion of race and the origins of Political Science as a discipline.

8. October 21

Brazil after the Workers' Party (and back)

****Response paper due before class on Quercus****

Adam Bledsoe (2019) "Racial Antagonism and the 2018 Brazilian Presidential Election" *Journal of Latin American Geography* 18(2): 165-170.

Wendy Hunter and Timothy Power (2019) "Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash" *Journal of Democracy* 30(1): 68-82.

Diana Roy (2022) Lula is Back, What does that Mean for Brazil? *Council on Foreign Affairs* December 22, 2022.

<https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/lula-back-what-does-mean-brazil>

Supplemental Background:

Dan LaBotz (2015) "Brazil: Lula, Rouseff, and the Workers Party Establishment in Power" *New Politics* 15(2): 53-60.

****October 28: Reading Week, No Class**

9. November 4

Chile: Emerging from the Shadow of Pinochet

****Podcast Script due before class on Quercus****

Maria Cristina Escudero (2021) Making a Constituent Assembly Possible in Chile: The Shifting Costs of Opposing Change *Bulletin of Latin American Research* (in Press, but preprints available via U of T library website).

Camila Vergara (2021) Chilean Stalemate? *Sidecar*
<https://newleftreview.org/sidecar/posts/chilean-stalemate>

Supplemental Background:

Clark, Timothy (2018) The Paradox of the Neoliberal Developmentalist State: Reconstructing the Capitalist Elite in Pinochet's Chile. In, *Dominant Elites in Latin America: From Neo-Liberalism to the 'Pink Tide'*, Liisa North and Timothy Clark, eds. New York: Palgrave. Pp. 23-56

10. November 11

Cuba: Updating and Adapting a Socialism in the Twenty First Century

Emily Morris (2014) "Unexpected Cuba" *New Left Review* 88: 5-45.

Camila Piñero Harnecker (2014) "Nonstate Enterprises in Cuba: Building Socialism?" *Latin American Perspectives* 41(4): 113-128.

James Baer (2019) "Cuban Constitution of 2019" *Council on Hemispheric Affairs Blog*
<http://www.coha.org/cuban-constitution-of-2019/>

Supplemental Background:

Antoni Kapcia (2008) *Cuba in Revolution: A History since the Fifties*. London: Reaktion Books.

11. November 18

No class

12. November 25

The United States and the Americas: Post Imperial Challenges and Opportunities

Greg Grandin (2011) *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 1-17.

Ron Pineo (2013) Latin American's Backyard. Council on Hemispheric Affairs.
<https://www.coha.org/latin-americas-backyard/>

Timothy Gill (2021) Diminishing Global Power, Downgrading Human Rights: Making Sense of American Foreign Policy under Donald Trump. *Societies without Borders* 13(1).

Watch:

Inside Story America (2012) The School of the Americas: Class Over?
<https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story-america/2012/9/20/the-school-of-the-americas-class-over>

Final Exam (during exam period)

Podcast Group Project
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What: Groups of students will research, compose, and produce a 10-20 minute podcast about a topic of their choosing under assigned subject areas. The focus of each group's podcast be reasonably current (ie, 21st century), and should provide a balance of historical context and near term consequences or considerations. Final recordings should incorporate student research, a prepared script, and additional audio elements (ie, music, speeches, found sounds).

Why: This project emphasizes collaboration, communication, and an iterated editing process. Our final products will be empirically enriching and effectively delivered. While some students will come to this project with experience with podcasts and other elements of audio production, all will have the opportunity to explore different considerations, aspects, and roles in the medium.

How: Students should meet with their groups as soon as possible. There will be brief in class discussion on podcasts and producing a podcast throughout the first half of the semester. We will explore roles and responsibilities of effective group research and writing, as well as necessary elements in preparing for oral presentations. At the outset of your collaboration it may help to assign roles (I would also suggest rotating these roles as the semester progresses so everyone has an equal opportunity). Some sample roles:

- Facilitator
- Note taker
- Task master
- Vibe checker
- Devil's advocate

*while you will all be responsible for research, it may be beneficial during meetings to assign specific tech-workers and screen users in order to minimize screen distractions

Teams may use whichever platform they choose (in class we will work through tutorials using Audacity). Final products must be submitted on quercus in mp3 format no later than the last day of the semester.

When: due dates and key milestones

1. Two meetings with prof (5 pts each, 10 pts total)

At least one member of each group is required to meet with the professor at two points during the project. First, during crafting of the proposal, groups should consult with the professor on topics, concepts, and cases in order to get started on the best foot possible. Then, during the second half of the semester (after reading week), group representatives are required to provide the professor with a status report on research, writing, and group dynamics.

The mark for this will be assigned to the group as a whole.

2. Proposal (10 pts due September 30)

Proposals should be ~3 pages, double spaced. At a *minimum*, these should include the following elements:

- a. identify a country or process and context of the topic
- b. identify the key event, issue, or conflict or involved
- c. provide (at least) 3 concepts from class that will help interpret the case and be utilized in the project
- d. list (at least) 5 peer-reviewed, academic sources that will be utilized in the project
- e. provide a timeline with key dates and deliverables

The mark for this will be assigned to the group as a whole.

3. Revised Proposal (10 points, due October 14)

The revised proposal should respond to comments made in the original proposal, with an emphasis on refining the theme and/or event, concepts employed from the class, and timeline. The goal of the revised proposal is to give each group an opportunity to make concrete plans and attainable goals for the remainder of the project.

4. Script (15 pts, due November 4)

The script is part one of the major deliverable for this project. A script for a 10-20 minute podcast should be around 8-9 pages, double spaced. Scripts should be engaging, follow a narrative arc, and convey concepts and contexts in a clear and digestible fashion. There should be clearly identifiable sections, and while these constituent elements will vary according to topic, all final podcasts should cover or *at a minimum* introduce background and context; stakeholders and power relations; stakes and potential outcomes or consequences; and expert analyses.

Sections of the script should include footnoted citations using Chicago style (link in syllabus) and must identify the authors responsible for its composition. While all members of the group should be involved in each part of the script, marks for this part of the project will balance group and individual contributions based on which part they were primarily tasked with composing.

5. Final recording (10 pts, due December 2)

This is it! Recordings should be submitted to quercus on the last day of the semester. Final recordings should incorporate student research, a prepared script, and additional audio elements (ie, music, speeches, found sounds). Please make sure you troubleshoot: listen through the recording to ensure the file works, sounds as you intended, and is

clear for the listener (enlisting friends as sample audiences is both a great way to test run the legibility of the project and to get outside notes).

The mark for this will be assigned to the group as a whole.

6. Debrief (5 points, due December 2)

The professor will circulate a template for you to assess and reflect upon your research, your work, and the work of your group in this project. This is not a simple response paper, but is rather your chance to tie up your work, extend any points you were not able to include in previously submitted materials, and account for the labour you have invested in the finished podcast. Please note that debrief papers may also be used to weigh group members' contributions to the project as a whole.

The mark for this will be assigned to group members on an individual basis.

Project Resources:

Download Audacity for free:

<https://www.audacityteam.org/download/>

Tutorials for Audacity:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Im2W7pokfpw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlzOb4OLj94&t=10s>

UofT Library Tips on Podcasting

<https://guides.library.utoronto.ca/c.php?g=734017&p=5284623>