McGill University

POLI648
Winter 2018

LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS

Professor Manuel Balán
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Class meets: Thurs 1.35-4.25pm
Class location: LEACOK 520
Office hours: Thur-Fri: 10-11am

Course Description:
This course is a graduate-level introduction to Latin American politics. We will discuss both historical and contemporary issues, analyzing methodological strategies developed for the study of Latin America and comparative politics more generally. The course is designed to provide a foundation for fostering original research questions and innovative theoretical approaches that can contribute to Latin American scholarship. The debates and theoretical currents that we will examine have been central not only in the study of Latin American politics but also in the development of the sub-discipline of Comparative Politics over the last thirty years.

Objectives:
The aims of this course are three-fold:
1. To acquaint students with some of the most important recent debates and analyses of Latin American politics
2. To teach students how to critically evaluate and design theoretically-oriented research
3. To train students to carry out several types of writing assignments that political scientists are frequently required to perform.

On Readings:
This is a reading-intensive seminar, and students are expected to come to class having completed the readings beforehand. The reading load is substantial. For each theme, I have selected a set of articles and book chapters. Of course, there is a lot more to read on each of the topics, and I can suggest further reading on these issues if you are interested.
Here is a list of Books available for purchase at Paragraph:

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Course Requirements:
- Participation (20%): This is a discussion seminar, and the success of the seminar will depend first and foremost upon the active engagement of students. You will be required to participate regularly in class discussions. Each week, 1-2 students will be responsible for helping facilitate the discussion of that week’s readings. During class we will critique each book or article assigned for that week. You must contact me ahead of time if you plan to miss a session.
* Iron law of participation: Every student has to make at least one substantive comment in each class session; I will call on students in case that should be required.
- 3 sentence summaries (5%): One of the fundamental capabilities that political scientists need is finding out the basic argument and theoretical contribution of a text and summarizing it in three sentences—literally! Therefore, you will write 3-sentence “summaries” of the basic argument and contribution of three of the readings for week one. If all three "summaries" are good, you will get an "A" for the exercise and be done. If any of the three "summaries" is not that good, you will write three “summaries” for week two; if all three of those summaries are good, you will get an "A-" and be done. If not, you will try again, and get a B+ if you succeed; if not, you’ll continue.
- A 3-4 page peer review (15%): this assignment should provide an analysis of one of the articles assigned for week 8. Students should write the analysis as if they were refereeing the article for a major political science journal. You should evaluate the importance of the theoretical and empirical contribution, the soundness of the methodology, and the persuasiveness of the empirical evidence. Due in class on March 1st.
- A 4-5 page Book Review of Handlin’s new book: State Crisis in Fragile Democracies: Polarization and Political Regimes in South America (15%): the review should summarize and analyze the theoretical arguments and empirical evidence presented in the book and it should assess the book’s main strengths and weaknesses. You should write this review as if it were for publication in an academic journal. Due in class on March 15th.
- An 8-10 page review essay (15%): this assignment should analyze at least 5 of the readings assigned for one of the following weeks: 12, 13, or 14. The essays should compare and contrast the articles assigned for that week, pointing out theoretical, methodological, and empirical problems. It should assess the strengths and weaknesses of the literature on the topic in question, and identify a research agenda for the future. Look at LARR review essays for reference. The essay is due in class on the session for which you are writing.
- A 15-20 page Research Proposal (30%): The proposals should identify a research question, discuss the theoretical literature on this topic, present some plausible hypotheses, and describe a feasible means of testing these hypotheses. With my permission, students may write a research paper instead of the research proposal. Students will also need to prepare a 1-2 page summary of their research proposal and distribute it to the class via e-mail by XXX. This summary, which will not be graded, should identify your research question and present some preliminary hypotheses. Due on April 26th.
- Mock Comprehensive Exam (extra credit, but mandatory): This exercise is a rehearsal of the comprehensive exams taken by PhD students in Political Science. You will be provided a set of 3/4 questions, and you will choose one of these questions and answer it in a 1.5-hour period. This “exam” is closed book, no notes, no internet. You answer will be graded as a comp answer: high pass, pass, fail. This is a mandatory exercise that everyone in the class has to complete, but it is only worth extra credit. The mock exam will take place on April 19th.

Please remember: grades are NOT an evaluation of your intelligence/worth. They are simply an assessment of how well you did in the assignments. Nothing more, nothing less.
Course and University Policies:

**Integrity:** McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

**Special Needs:** As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009.

**Language:** “In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.” (approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 - see also the section in this document on Assignments and evaluation.)/ “Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté.”

**Course-Evaluations:** End-of-course evaluations are one of the ways that McGill works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student’s learning experience. You will be notified by e-mail when the evaluations are available. Please note that a minimum number of responses must be received for results to be available to students.

**Use of Technology:** I have a strong preference for a computer free environment in seminars and lecture courses. That said, I recognize that some of you may want to consult the readings during the seminar. Therefore, I will not ban computers in the classroom. Rather, their use is limited to course related purposes such as consulting the readings or looking for information related to the ongoing discussion. Please, no email, social media, etc. during seminars.

**Note:** In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.
SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1

Thursday January 11th. INTRODUCTION
Readings:
- The Economist. 2010. “So near and yet so far: a special report on Latin America,” Sept. 11. 5

WEEK 2

Thursday January 18th. STATE FORMATION
Readings:

WEEK 3

Thursday January 25th. DEVELOPMENT, DEPENDENCY, AND ISI
Readings:

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**WEEK 4**  
*Thursday February 1st. REGIME CHANGE: AUTHORITARIANISM AND DEMOCRATIZATION*

Readings:

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**WEEK 5**  
*Thursday February 8th. ECONOMIC CHANGE: NEOLIBERALISM AND ITS CRITICS*

Readings:

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**WEEK 6**

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Thursday February 15th. **INSTITUTIONS, PARTIES, AND PARTY SYSTEMS**

Readings:

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WEEK 7

Thursday February 22nd. **DEMOCRATIC PERFORMANCE AND INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS**

Readings:

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WEEK 8

Thursday March 1st. **THE NEW LEFT IN LATIN AMERICA**

Readings:

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WEEK 9
Thursday March 8th. READING WEEK. NO CLASS!

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WEEK 10
Thursday March 15th. STATE CRISIS IN FRAGILE DEMOCRACIES?
Readings:

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WEEK 11
Thursday March 22nd. INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL WELFARE
Readings:

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WEEK 12
Thursday March 29th. CLIENTELISM, VOTE BUYING, AND PATRONAGE,
Readings:

WEEK 13
Thursday April 5th. GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Readings:

WEEK 14
Thursday April 12th. ETHNIC AND RACIAL POLITICS