International Relations 365: Politics and Democracy in Latin America

Spring 2018

When: M & W 5:00-6:20 p.m.                           Professor Gerardo Munck
Where: VKC 102                                       E-Mail: munck@usc.edu
Office Hours: M 3:30-4:50 p.m.                       Office: VKC 326A
or by appointment

1. Course Description

Latin America has undergone a sweeping political and economic transformation, from authoritarianism to democracy, and from statist to free-market economies. However, in the new context of electoral politics, Latin America continues to experience major political changes and face important political challenges. The course offers an introduction to current politics in Latin America. To begin, it puts politics in Latin America in a historical perspective. Then, it addresses a range of contemporary issues: the political ideology of presidents, the defense of democracy, the political inclusion of women, transitional justice, human rights, violence, and drugs.

The course covers Latin America as a whole, and it depicts regional patterns relying in part on quantitative data. But it also focuses on some specific countries, which are discussed in detail. Furthermore, the course identifies both positive and negative trends in Latin American politics. But it also gives attention to innovative responses to problems that have been initiated at the level of countries and within the Inter-American system.

2. Learning Objectives

The objectives of the course are: (1) to introduce basic concepts used in the study of politics and to clarify their normative content; (2) to learn how to interpret quantitative data; (3) to introduce students to the main trends in Latin American politics and to some of the key political challenges faced by countries in Latin America; and (4) to introduce students to the initiatives, at the level of countries and the Inter-American system, to respond to political challenges in Latin America.

3. Requirements

Students are expected to complete the reading assignment for each topic. Students are also responsible for mastering the additional materials that are introduced in class, in power points that will be distributed after class.

Course grades are based on the following tests: five quizzes (20% of the overall grade), a first in-class quiz-based mid-term exam (15%), a second in-class essay-type mid-term exam (30%), and an in-class essay-type final exam (35%).

With regard to the quizzes, we will have six quizzes and I will drop the lowest one. I have included provisional dates below in the syllabus, but these may change slightly. The exact dates will be announced in class.
4. Readings

All the readings are accessible through the Blackboard, under “Readings.” Below you will see which reading you are responsible for reading for each meeting of the class. Some of the electronic files include sections that do not need to be read. The specific page numbers you need to read are clearly indicated below.

The power points of each class will be uploaded to the Blackboard after each class; you will find them under “Power Points.”

Course Outline, Readings and Assignments

Meeting # 1 (1/8): Introduction

No readings

1. Background

Meeting # 2 (1/10): Transition to Democracy in the 1980s and 1990s


Meeting # 3 (1/15): Martin Luther King’s Birthday: No class.

Meeting # 4 (1/17): Transition to Neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s


Meeting # 5 (1/22): Transition to Neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s


• Quiz # 1 (1/22)
2. Ideological Trends

Meeting # 6 (1/24): Introduction

Meeting # 7 (1/29): The Radical “Chávez” Left


Meeting # 8 (1/31): The Moderate Left and the Lefts Compared
Navia, Patricio and Ignacio Walker, “Political Institutions, Populism, and Democracy in Latin America,” pp 245-65, in Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully (eds.), Democratic Governance in Latin America (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). Read only pp. 256-63 (the sections on “The neoliberal economic reforms of the nineties and their outcome” and “Populist and non-populist responses”, and pay attention to Figure 7.1 on p. 262).


Meeting # 9 (2/5): The Right and Regional Projects
Blei, Daniela, “Is the Latin American Left Dead?” The New Republic, April 16, 2016. 6 pgs.

• Quiz # 2 (2/5)

Meeting # 10 (2/7): Mid-Term I (Quiz-Type)
3. The Defense of Democracy I:
Electing Representatives

Meetings # 11 (2/12): Introduction


Meeting # 12 (2/14): The Mechanics of OAS Election Observation


Meeting # 13 (2/19): Presidents’ Day: No Class

Meeting # 14 (2/21): An Assessment of Election Observation


• Quiz # 3 (2/21)

4. The Defense of Democracy II:
Completing Electoral Terms

Meetings # 15 (2/26): Introduction


Meeting # 16 (2/28): The OAS and the Inter-American Democratic Charter

OAS AG/RES. 1080 (XXI-O/91) on Representative Democracy. (Resolution adopted at the fifth plenary session, held on June 5, 1991). 1 pg.
OAS, *Inter-American Democratic Charter*. (Adopted by the General Assembly at its special session held in Lima, Peru, on September 11, 2001). 20 pgs. Read only Ch. 4.

Meeting # 17 (3/5): The Test Cases of Honduras and Venezuela

Seelke, Clare Ribando and Rebecca M. Nelson, “Venezuela: Background and U.S. Relations,” December 11, 2017. 14 pgs. Read only the sections on “U.S. Policy” from page 22 to the top of page 26, and on “U.S. Support for Organization of American States (OAS) Efforts on Venezuela” from page 33 to the bottom of page 36.

• Quiz # 4 (3/7)

5. Overview and Conclusions

Meeting # 18 (3/7). Patterns in Post-Transition Latin America


*** Spring Recess: March 12-16 ***

Meeting # 19 (3/19): Mid-Term II (Essay-Type)
6. Political Rights and Inclusion

Meeting # 20 (3/21): Gender


Meeting # 21 (3/26): Gender, Ethnicity and Race


7. Civil Rights I: Transitional Justice

Meeting # 22 (3/28): Introduction


Meeting # 23 (4/2): Truth Commissions and Human Rights Trials (Argentina)


Meeting # 24 (4/4): Human Rights Trials (Chile)


Meeting # 25 (4/9): Human Rights Trials (Other Cases)

No readings

• Quiz # 5 (4/9)
8. Civil Rights II:
The Current Violence

Meeting # 26 (4/11): Introduction to Crime and Drugs

Meeting # 27 (4/16): Domestic Responses to Violence

Meeting # 28 (4/18): Rethinking the International War on Drugs I
OAS, The Drug Problem in the Americas (Washington, D.C.: General Secretariat of the OAS, 2013). 104 pgs. Read the “Introduction” (pages 5-9, section 10, “Contributing to the launch of a new dialogue” (pages 99 through 104), and skim the rest.

Documentary: Part of Breaking the Taboo (2012).

Meeting # 29 (44/23): Rethinking the International War on Drugs II
Class debate
• Quiz # 6 (4/25)

9. Conclusions

Meeting # 30 (4/25): A Recapitulation
No readings

*** Final Exam: Wednesday, May 3, 4:30-6:30 p.m ***
Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity http://equity.usc.edu/ or to the Department of Public Safety http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/public-safety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/ provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information http://emergency.usc.edu/ will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open from 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.