Government and politics of Latin America

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I. Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to some of the most important problems and debates with regard to democratic consolidation in Latin America. After the Cold war ended, in 1990, most of Latin America's countries (with the exception of Cuba) embraced the Washington Consensus, and move from authoritarian regimes to electoral democracies. However, after almost 30 years some countries have experienced a wide range of impediments to reach democratic consolidation. For the most part, Latin American governments have failed to create, develop and consolidate strong and durable institutions, as well as in building a strong and effective civil society. After three decades, enthusiasm have been replaced by concern among Latin Americans, which calls into question the desirability of this system of government in the region (Diamond & Plattner, 2015).

The purpose of this course is to train students to understand how the initial democratic transitions occurred and to explore the current nature of political dynamics in the region as Latin Americans face numerous challenges (considering case analysis of specific countries). One of the main objectives is to challenge students to analyze complex problems in Latin American politics, encourage them to provide informed arguments on these matters and to think critically about the Latin American reality. In addition to reading and classroom presentations, this class will invite students to write and orally communicate their observations about the substantive questions and topics. The course has no specific academic requirements (i.e. if the student do not have any background in political science or Latin American studies). However, the students should be proactive throughout the semester in asking questions and seeking clarification either in class or during my office hours. The only requirement is to be undergraduate/graduate student at USACH.

II. Class Requirements

Students will be required to submit one academic paper (either in English or Spanish) at the end of semester (this will account for 50% of the final grade). Students must choose any six of the assigned readings (as a minimum). During the first week of evaluations, students must submit a first version of the paper with significant progress. This will account for 30% of the final grade. In addition, this course requires compulsory attendance, which will account for 10% of the final grade (70% of the sessions as a minimum = 4.0).

Students are expected to submit a 6,000-word (25-doble spaced pages) case-study paper of their choice. This paper requirement is intended for students to put to use the theoretical tools learned in class and apply them to their own area of research interest. Using one of the theoretical frameworks presented in the class (or an alternative framework provided the proper substantiated theoretical basis) and some of the articles discussed here, students
should test some of the hypothesis and propositions discussed in the literature and examine their relevance in the context of their own research topic.

**Required and recommended books will be posted on U-Cursos**

## III. Recommended Background Readings

For those with no prior knowledge of Latin American history and politics, I recommend four books as background reading materials:


### Weekly Readings

**Week 1. Latin American Politics Today: An Overview. Historical Background.**

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**

(For those who need to strengthen their historical background on Latin America).


**Week 2. Basic Methodological Issues.**

**Required Readings**

Recommended Readings


Week 3. Economic Development and Democratic Consolidation.

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


Week 4. Economic Reform and Democratic Consolidation.

Required Readings


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 5. Inequality and Democratic Consolidation.**

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**

2016 Preliminary overview of the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean 2016 www.cepal.cl
Week 6. Presidentialism and Democratic Consolidation.

Required Readings


Recommended Readings

- Negretto, Gabriel. 2004. “Government capacities and policy making by decree in Latin America - The cases of Brazil and Argentina” Comparative Political Studies 37 (5): 531-562 (June).

Week 7. Political Parties, Democratic Institutions, the Legislature and Democratic Consolidation.

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


**Week 8. Accountability, Democratic Consolidation, Judicial System.**

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


**Week 9. The Military and Democratic Consolidation (and transition to democracy in Cuba).**

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**

Week 10. Labor Unions, Social Movements and Democratic Consolidation.

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings:**

Week 11. Citizens and Democratic Consolidation.

Required Readings


Recommended Readings

- Human Development Reports for Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. http://www.desarrollohumano.cl/


Required Readings

Recommended Readings


Week 13. Women, Gender Rights and Democratic Consolidation.

Required Readings

Recommended Readings


Week 14. The Left and Democratic Consolidation.

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


**Papers Due: During the last week of the semester.**