

Comparative Politics of Latin America
POLS 3550-001
Spring Semester 2025
M/W, 11:50am-1:10pm, Gardner Commons 3700

Instructor: Dr. David De Micheli

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Office location: Gardner Commons, Suite 3345, Office 3229 (or via Zoom)

Office hours: Fridays, 11am-12pm, or by appointment

Office hours sign-up: <https://calendly.com/ddemicheli>

Required Materials

There are **no required materials** for this course. All assigned readings are available to students via Canvas.

Course Description

This course is a survey of Latin American politics and will touch on topics related to the rise of mass politics, democratic breakdowns and military rule, democratization, economic governance, poverty and inequality, and contemporary dilemmas of democracy. We will examine these topics mostly chronologically and through close (but not exclusive) analysis of several cases: Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, and Venezuela. The course does not require prior study of Latin America, Spanish, or Portuguese, but students will be expected to familiarize themselves with country histories and contexts where needed. Prior coursework in comparative politics (POLS 2200) is recommended but not required.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- understand the major political issues and debates in Latin American politics;
- articulate and explain major comparative politics theories derived from the region;
- describe differences in political dynamics across Latin American countries;
- understand the evolution of social and political forces in the region over the past century; and
- situate the region's politics within broader international and historical contexts.

Teaching and Learning Methods

This is a participatory lecture course. I will primarily deliver the major concepts, theories, and empirical application during class meetings, but students are expected and encouraged to play an active role in the lecture by asking questions, drawing connections to current events, or challenging notions or arguments in the assigned readings. As such, ***students are expected to come to class having completed all assigned readings for the day*** and to be prepared to ask any clarification or discussion questions. Students are also encouraged to bring in lessons or connections from other courses they are taking, and on-going political phenomena or current events that relate to the course. In short, though this is a lecture-style course, I encourage students to actively dialogue with me and the course material.

University Policies

1. ***The Americans with Disabilities Act.*** The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability & Access, 162 Olpin Union Building, (801) 581-5020. CDS will work with you and the instructor to make

arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability & Access.

2. **University Safety Statement.** The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. To report suspicious activity or to request a courtesy escort, call campus police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677). You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more information regarding safety and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit <https://safeu.utah.edu>
3. **Addressing Sexual Misconduct.** Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 383 South University Street, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677(COPS).

Lauren's Promise: Lauren's Promise is a vow that anyone – faculty, staff, students, parents, and community members – can take to indicate to others that they represent a safe haven for sharing incidents of sexual assault, domestic violence, or stalking. Anyone who makes Lauren's Promise vows to: 1.) listen to and believe those individuals who are being threatened or experiencing sexual assault, dating violence or stalking; 2.) represent a safe haven for sharing incidents of sexual assault, domestic violence, or stalking; and 3.) change campus culture that responds poorly to dating violence and stalking. By making Lauren's Promise, individuals are helping to change campus cultures that respond poorly to dating violence and stalking throughout the nation.

4. **Academic Misconduct Statement.** It is expected that students adhere to University of Utah policies regarding academic honesty, including but not limited to refraining from cheating, plagiarizing, misrepresenting one's work, and/or inappropriately collaborating. This includes the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools without citation, documentation, or authorization. Students are expected to adhere to the prescribed professional and ethical standards of the profession/discipline for which they are preparing. Any student who engages in academic dishonesty or who violates the professional and ethical standards for their profession/discipline may be subject to academic sanctions as per the University of Utah's Student Code: <https://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-410.php>.
5. **Diversity Statement.** I stand in support of compassion, dignity, value-of-life, equity, inclusion and justice for all individuals regardless of color, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, language, socioeconomic status, ability, gender, gender identity or expression, immigration status, or any type of marginalization. I stand in support of making our society more inclusive, just, and equitable for all individuals. I stand against individual and systemic discrimination in all its various forms.
6. **Undocumented Student Support Statement.** Immigration is a complex phenomenon with broad impact—those who are directly affected by it, as well as those who are indirectly affected by their relationships with family members, friends, and loved ones. If your immigration status presents obstacles to engaging in specific activities or fulfilling specific course criteria, confidential arrangements may be requested from the Dream Center. Arrangements with the Dream Center will not jeopardize your student status, your financial aid, or any other part of your residence. The

Dream Center offers a wide range of resources to support undocumented students (with and without DACA) as well as students from mixed-status families. To learn more, please contact the Dream Center at 801.213.3697 or visit dream.utah.edu.

7. ***Basic Needs Student Support Statement.*** Success at The University of Utah includes learning about and using available resources. The Basic Needs Collective (BNC) is a coordinated resource referral hub. They educate about and connect students to campus and community resources to help them meet their basic needs. As a central location for resource referrals related to food, housing, health insurance, managing finances, legal services, mental health, etc., any student experiencing difficulty with basic needs is encouraged to contact them. Drop into their office located in the Union basement or schedule with them online for an in-person or virtual visit through their webpage: <https://basicneeds.utah.edu/>.
8. ***Drop/Withdrawal.*** The last day to drop (delete) this course, or elect CR/NC, is Friday, August 30, 2024. The last day to withdraw from this course is Friday, October 28, 2024.
9. ***Other important information to consider:***
 - a. Student Code: <http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.php>
 - b. Accommodation Policy (see Section Q): <http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-100.php>
10. ***The University of Utah provides resources for some students in need, including for:***
 - a. *Wellness:* <https://wellness.utah.edu/>
 - b. *Veterans:* <https://veteranscenter.utah.edu/>
 - c. *Learners of English as an Additional/Second Language:* <https://eli.utah.edu/>
 - d. *First generation and low-income students:* trio.utah.edu
 - e. *Undocumented students:* dream.utah.edu
 - f. *Students with children:* childcare.utah.edu

Course Policies

Attendance & Punctuality: Attendance is not a graded component of this course, but will be necessary to succeed on course assignments, especially the weekly quizzes. Punctuality is expected and is important to avoid distractions during the lecture. If you need to seek an ADA accommodation regarding class attendance due to a disability, please contact the Center for Disability and Access (CDA). CDA will work with us to determine what, if any, ADA accommodations are reasonable and appropriate.

Assignments: Assignments in this course will be completed via Canvas. This applies to weekly quizzes, the midterm, and final exam. For each assignment, note when you will be able to access the assignment (available date/time), when it is due in order to receive full credit (due date/time), and when you will lose access to the assignment altogether (close date/time). Unless accommodations are granted prior to the due date, grades on late assignments will be reduced by 5 percent for every 24 hours past the due date and time.

Participation and Conduct: Students are welcome to participate actively in discussion and to engage with the assigned readings in good faith. Participation can take a variety of forms, including offering critique, insight, commentary, or topics of discussion; it can also entail active listening, note-taking, asking clarifying questions, and responding to points raised by peers.

Food & Drink: Consumption of food and drink are permitted during lecture, within reason. Eating and drinking should not disturb others in the classroom with noise or smell. And students should not leave behind any trash or mess for other to clean after them.

Electronic Devices in Class: Smartphones, laptops, and other devices should be completely silenced during class. Though widespread today, I encourage students to avoid using *all* electronic devices in class. First, laptops can be distracting to students, who may use them for non-academic purposes. When this occurs, it is obvious to the instructor as well as to your peers (despite what you may think). Second, there is considerable scientific evidence showing that using computers for tasks like note-taking inhibits engagement, the absorption of facts/knowledge, and memory functions. While typing notes may be more efficient, any potential benefits can be outweighed by the costs.

Course Grading

The course grading scheme follows. When a course grade falls between integers, I apply a standard rounding procedure: any point total that ends in .0 to .49 will be rounded *down* to the nearest whole number, while any point total that ends in .50 to .99 will be rounded *up*. Letter grades will be assigned as follows:

Course Points	Letter Grade	Description (applies to written work)
97+	A+	Above and beyond expectations in terms of quality of content and communications. The work constitutes an original contribution.
93-96	A	Outstanding work in terms of content, quality, and creativity of written and oral expression.
90-92	A-	Very good work—thorough in content and generally well written, though with minor flaws and/or omissions.
87-89	B+	Good work—covers the essentials with adequate depth in substance as well as quality of written/oral expression.
83-86	B	Acceptable work—covers most of the essentials with adequate quality of written/oral expression, though lacks depth in some explanations of subject matter.
80-82	B-	Marginal work—borders on unacceptable—weak written/oral expression, coverage of subject matter lacks attention to some essential points and/or is overly vague about them.
73-79	C+/C	Below standard—lacks adequate coverage of essential points, written/oral expression is very weak.
>72	C- and below	Inadequate work/performance overall. Fails to answer questions, writing is very confusing, vague, and/or does not cover many essential points.

Course Grading and Assignments

Map Quiz	5%	Given in-class on Monday, January 13 th
Weekly quizzes	35%	Best 10 (of 13) scores, due Fridays by 11:59pm (via Canvas)
Midterm exam	30%	Due Friday, March 7 th by 11:59pm (via Canvas)
Final exam	30%	Due Monday, April 28 th by 11:59pm (via Canvas)

Weekly Quizzes. Students will be assigned thirteen multiple-choice quizzes over the course of the semester. Quizzes will test students' knowledge of the assigned readings and the material covered in lecture. These will be open-book, timed, and administered via Canvas. All quizzes are due Fridays by 5pm. Of the thirteen quizzes given, the average of your best ten scores will count toward your final grade.

Midterm Exam. The midterm exam will be given via Canvas and is due no later than March 7th at 11:59pm. The exam will be timed and must be completed within 90 minutes.

Final Exam. The final exam is due no later than April 28th at 11:59pm. Students will have two hours to complete this exam. This exam will be cumulative, but will emphasize material covered after the midterm.

Extra Credit Assignments. Students will have several opportunities to complete extra credit assignments consisting of brief reviews and reports of films, documentaries, and in-person events held on campus. Other opportunities for extra credit (attending and writing about on-campus events) will also be presented to students. Extra credit will take the form of “fudge points” on the Midterm and Final Exams. I will notify and remind you of these opportunities via Canvas and in lecture.

READING SCHEDULE

January 6 **Course Introduction and Semester Overview**

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

January 8 **Colonialism**

Smith and Green, *Modern Latin America*, pp. 14-27.

January 13 **Independence**

Smith and Green, *Modern Latin America*, pp. 27-42.

January 15 **Liberalism and New Republics**

Smith and Green, *Modern Latin America*, pp. 351-358 and 376-379.
Sokoloff and Engerman, “Institutions, Factor Endowments, and Paths of Development”

January 20 – NO CLASS (MLK Day)

THE RISE OF MASS POLITICS

January 22 **The Great Depression**

Winn, “A Second Independence?”

January 27 **The Incorporation of Popular Sectors**

Collier and Collier, “Inducements vs. Constraints”

January 29 **Dependency Theory and ISI**

Kingstone, “ISI and the Great Transformation in Latin America”

THE COLD WAR AND MILITARY RULE

February 3 **Cold War I: Rise of Urban Guerrillas**

CIA Report “The Roots of Violence”
Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*, chapter 6.

February 5 Cold War II: Specter of Communism

Immerman, "Guatemala as Cold War History"

February 10 Revolutionary Latin America: Mexico and Cuba

Smith and Green, *Modern Latin America*, pp. 45-61 and 121-135

February 12 Military Coups: Ending Democratic Experiments

CHOOSE ONE (both recommended):

Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*, chapter 3 (Brazil)

Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*, chapter 5 (Chile)

February 17 – NO CLASS (President’s Day)

February 19 Military Rule and Bureaucratic Authoritarianism

Collier, "An Overview of the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian Model"

February 24 Economic Governance under Technocracy

Constable and Valenzuela, *Nation of Enemies*, chapter 7.

February 26 Civilian Regimes and Civil Wars during the Cold War

Romero, "Venezuela: Democracy Hangs On"

THE RETURN TO DEMOCRACY

March 3 The Third Wave in Latin America: Ending Military Rule

Garretón, "Redemocratization in Chile"

March 5 - MIDTERM

March 10 – SPRING BREAK

March 12 – SPRING BREAK

March 17 Alternative Pathways: Democratization in Mexico and El Salvador

CHOOSE ONE (both recommended):

Lawson, "Mexico’s Unfinished Transition"

Wood, "An Insurgent Path to Democracy"

March 19 Human Rights and Justice after Transition

Navarro, "The Personal is Political"

Watch: "Frontline: Massacre in El Salvador"

March 24 Authoritarian Enclaves and Democratic Consolidation

Hakim and Lowenthal, "Latin America's Fragile Democracies"
Hunter, "Continuity or Change?"

DILEMMAS OF DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

March 26 Economic Crises, Neoliberal Reform, and Political Instability

Kingstone, "Neoliberalism and Its Discontents"

March 31 Inequality and Citizenship

CHOOSE ONE (both recommended):
Holston and Caldeira, "Democracy, Law, and Violence"
Hoffman and Centeno, "The Lopsided Continent"

April 2 The Pink Tide and the Inclusionary Turn

Madrid, "The Origins of the Two Lefts"

April 7 Ethnic Politics I: The Rise of Indigenous Politics

Van Cott, "Latin America's Indigenous People"
Yashar, "Does Race Matter in Latin America?"
OPTIONAL: Watch "Vice News: The Zapatista Uprising (20 Years Later)"

April 9 Ethnic Politics II: Affirmative Action and Racialized Democracy

De Micheli, *Back to Black*, chapter 2.

April 14 Democratic Erosion

Mainwaring, "From Representative Democracy to Participatory Competitive Authoritarianism"

April 16 Violence and Organized Crime

Yashar, *Homicidal Ecologies*, chapter 1.

April 21 Latin America in the Populist Wave

CHOOSE ONE:
Hunter and Power, "Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash"
Meléndez-Sánchez, "Millennial Authoritarianism in El Salvador"