

PSCI 483/583
Spring Semester 2003

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POLITICS IN LATIN AMERICA

The primary emphasis of this course is not on the international relations of Latin America, but rather on the key dynamics and issues that dominate the domestic political scene in the Hemisphere (with, as will be noted later, special emphasis on certain countries). The two topics are not, of course, totally unrelated since what occurs internationally (especially with respect to relations with the United States) can have a significant influence on a country's domestic politics. Nevertheless, our key concern here will be the dynamics of domestic Latin American politics rather than international relations (a topic which is covered in PSCI 474/574).

Latin America is, of course, an extremely vast and complex place. There are, for example, roughly 35 independent nations in the region (i.e., Mexico/Central America, the Caribbean, and South America) as well as a number of territories that are still under the control of external powers (e.g., Puerto Rico). Among the main cultural traditions are Spanish, French, British, Portugese, African, Aztec, Maya, Inca, and, of course, U.S. Such diversity makes it grossly unrealistic to think that we could cover the domestic political dynamics of the entire region in a thorough and comprehensive manner. Consequently it would seem to make sense to select some key topics/issues/experiences which we can explore in-depth and which will then provide us with some insights about the larger patterns of political dynamics in the Hemisphere.

Keeping the above considerations in mind, primary emphasis in the course will be placed on:

- Latin America's experience, both historical and especially contemporary, with the process of **democratization**.

Here we will look not only at the political considerations promoting or impeding the establishment of democratic systems in Latin America, but also at such factors as socio/economic conditions and cultural traditions.

- Mexico as a case study of an emerging, but fragile democratic system.

Mexico's choice is based on two main considerations: 1) it is widely recognized (along with Brazil and Argentina) as one of the most important countries in Latin America; and 2) its proximity to the United States often means that developments there are of great interest and concern to Washington and to the larger U.S. political community.

- Cuba as a case study of a government which has demonstrated no serious interest whatsoever in embracing a Western-style democratic system, preferring instead to remain one of the few remaining countries in the world that is committed to building and protecting a radical, Marxist-inspired socialist society.

Cuba's significance to the question of democratization in Latin America is twofold. First, it can and certainly aspires to serve as a alternative model of political and socio/economic development for other hemispheric countries. And second, its dogged commitment to this alternative path represents a major challenge to Washington's aspirations to wield dominant ideological influence in Latin America.

Focusing on these three topics should provide us with a solid understanding of some of the main challenges that Latin American countries are confronting as they move into the 21st century.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

John Peeler, **Building Democracy In Latin America**, Second Edition Paper (Lynn Rienner, 2004).

Roderic Ai Camp, **Politics In Mexico: The Democratic Transformation**, Fourth Edition Paper (Oxford U. Press, 2003).

Max Azicri, **Cuba Today And Tomorrow: Reinventing Socialism**, Paper (University Press of Florida, 2000).

EXAMS/GRADES:

Undergraduates--

Each person will do three take-home essays over the course of the semester. Your grades on these three essays will be averaged and that average grade will account for 70 percent of your overall course grade.

Each person will write a term paper, the topic to be selected in consultation with the instructor. The term paper will serve as the substitute for a final exam. Details regarding the papers will be provided later. Your grade on the paper will account for 30 percent of your overall course grade.

Graduate Students--

Each person will do three take-home essays over the course of the semester (same questions as for the undergraduates). Your grades on these essays will be averaged and that average grade will account for 50 percent of your overall course grade.

Each person will submit a research proposal to the instructor. These proposals will lay the foundation for the major research paper requirement that is listed in the next section. Details regarding the format and content of the research proposals will be provided later, although essentially the proposals will follow the general outlines of a MA Thesis proposal. The proposal will provide a mechanism for consulting with the instructor to assure that your research paper project is both ambitious and realistic. These proposals will account for 10 percent of your overall course grade,

Based on the research proposal requirement noted above, each person will submit a major research paper. Your grade on the research paper will account for 40 percent of your overall course grade.

The grading in this course will operate on a 100-point scale, with the grade breakdown being as follows:

A	90-100
B+	85-89
B	80-84
C+	75-79
C	70-74
D+	65-69
D	60-64
F	Less Than 60

In the case of a borderline average when all of your grades for the course have been computed, various non-graded considerations may be utilized to determine whether you will receive a higher or a lower grade for the course. The three primary considerations here are: (1) attendance--if you miss more than **FOUR (4)** of the scheduled classes without a valid (i.e., approved by the instructor) excuse, it is extremely unlikely that a borderline grade will be raised to the next level [NOTE: There has almost inevitably been a high correlation in my courses between class attendance and student performance; if you miss a lot of classes, it is almost certain that you will not perform very well on the essay exams which constitute the largest component of your overall course grade]; (2) participation in class discussions--quality participation will increase the likelihood that a borderline grade will be raised to the next level; and (3) a pattern of significant improvement or decline in your grades over the course of the semester.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

KEY: JP = John Peeler, **Building Democracy ...**

RC = Roderic Ai Camp, **Politics In Mexico**

MA = Max Azicri, **Cuba Today...**

Some additional handout readings may be provided to expand the available information with regard to some topics on the syllabus.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

I. Introduction

A. A Brief Geopolitical Survey of Latin America

B. The Essentials Of Democratic Thought

Read: JP, Chapter 1

II. A General Overview Of Democratization In Practice In Latin America

A. Latin America's Political Cultures And Traditions: Hospitable Or Hostile To Democracy?

Read: JP, Chapter 2

B. Emergent Democratization: An Optimistic Perspective

1. A Broad Overview Of The Development Of Democracy In Latin America

Read: JP, Chapter 3

2. Key Actors And Institutions In The Democratization Process

Read: JP, Chapter 4

C. A Pessimistic Perspective On Democratization: Economic Crisis And The Impact Of NeoLiberalism

Read: JP, Chapter 5

D. Conclusion: A Balance Sheet On Latin American Democratization

1. A Qualitative Analysis Of Contemporary Latin American Democratization

Read: JP, Chapter 6

2. Global Trends And Latin American Democratization

Read: JP, Chapter 7

III. Mexico As An Emergent Democracy

A. Background

1. Mexico's Political Heritage And History

Read: RC, Chapters 1-2
and pages 205-211

2. Mexico's Political Culture: Dominant Values And Attitudes

Read: RC, Chapters 3-4

B. The Basic Dynamics Of Mexican Politics

1. Key Actors In the Political System: Elites And Various Competing Groups

Read: RC, Chapter 5-6

2. The Institutional Apparatus Of Governance: Presidential Primacy Versus Balanced Powers

Read: RC, Chapter 7

C. The Democratization Process In Mexico

1. From PRI To PAN: The New Electoral Landscape

Read: RC, Chapter 8

2. The Impact of External Factors: The Influence Of The U.S. And NeoLiberal Globalization

Read: RC, Chapters 9-10

IV. Cuba: A Bastion Of Defiance

A. Introduction

1. A Brief Overview Of Cuban History and Society

Read: Erisman, "Prelude: Setting The Cuban Stage" (handout)

MA, Chapter 1

2. Fine-Tuning The Revolution: Some Late Cold War Reforms

Read: MA, Chapter 3

B. Into The Maelstrom: The Post-Cold War World Engulfs The Cuban Revolution

Read: MA, Chapters 2 & 4

C. Cuba Responds To The Post-Cold War/NeoLiberal Challenge

1. The Cuban Political System: Authoritarian Or A Fidelista-Style Democracy?

Read: MA, Chapter 5

2. The Cuban Economic System: A Command Economy's Answer To NeoLiberal Pressures

Read: MA, Chapters 6-7

3. The Revolution's Most Adamant Challenge: US/Cuban Relations

Read: MA, Chapters 8-10

D. Conclusion: The Cuban Revolution As A Viable Alternative To The NeoLiberal Model of Political/Economic Democracy??

Read: MA, Chapter 12