¡Bienvenidos! Welcome to Latin American Politics! The politics of Latin America confront students with stark contrasts. The region has suffered from several persistent social miseries: poverty and vast inequalities of wealth, recurrent authoritarian episodes, civil war and criminal violence, and economic instability. Yet Latin American nations have also established one of the world’s most enduring—if frequently broken—democratic traditions, forged multi-ethnic and mass-based—if not always inclusive—political systems, and embarked on transformative—if often unsuccessful—experiments in governance and social justice.

We will begin by briefly considering Latin America’s colonial heritage. Turning to the 20th century, we will examine the development of democracy, the incorporation of different social sectors, and the pursuit of economic growth through interventionist measures. We will examine the puzzles of the latter 20th century: why did many Latin American democracies break down in the 1960s and 1970s? How did authoritarian governments organize and justify their regimes? And critically, what explains the “third wave” (Huntington 1991) of democratization in the 1980s, during which most Latin American countries transitioned—in most cases durably so—to democracy once more?

The second half of the course tackles crucial contemporary questions. Democratization has not cured Latin America’s social ills, including rampant inequality, a vast informal sector, and weak rule of law. Facing challenges from entrenched interests, countries across the region embraced neoliberal market reforms. What explains the successes, the failures, and the reversals of these reforms? What new manifestations of protest and mechanisms of incorporation emerged in response? How has globalization—and the ever-present specter of the United States’ economic and military strength—affecting Latin American politics? How durable are Latin America’s “third wave” democracies, and how authoritarian are its recent Left and Right “turns”? This course exposes students not only to the main conceptual and theoretical approaches used by scholars to understand Latin American politics, but should also help them understand political change over time in the Global South and—increasingly—the Global North as well. Students will also develop their research, analytic, and writing skills.

Class Slack

You can use the link below to join our Slack workspace — it only takes a minute to create an account!

https://join.slack.com/t/carletonlatin-tvg5440/shared_invite/zt-dd8ab5s1-RtDaJWey0aYaHvu7yLhkDA

Student drop-in hours (optional)

Monday & Wednesday, 11-12:30 CDT or by appointment

Eric Mosinger’s Personal Meeting Room (on Zoom): Details available on class Moodle

News from Latin America

Your daily assignment: read the news from Latin America at https://latindispatch.com/. Make sure to read the Feature story and the Today in Latin America news roundup every weekday.
What This Course Will Look Like

I’m very sad that I won’t get to meet most of you in person until this fall, but I’ve been working hard to design a course that transports you to different times and places in Latin America.

Let me start off with a quick note about my expectations of you for spring trimester: Your first priority is to stay home and to not get sick. Your second priority is, don’t get other people sick. Your third priority is to make sure your family and friends are ok. **This class, and all your classes at Carleton, are at most your fourth priority.**

From me you can expect a course designed to put as little unnecessary stress on you as possible. In contrast to many political science courses, we will be focusing less on abstract theory and more on lived experiences of politics, on memoirs (the celebrated Latin American testimonio), and even on aesthetics. You will write three short response papers (no more than 3 pages each), and put together a creative group project. There will be no nerve-wracking final exam or long, high stakes research papers. I will not be giving you letter grades on any assignment. If you complete the assignments, you will pass the class. You can assume maximum flexibility from me in terms of deadlines and in accommodating whatever challenges you face.

This means that you will get out of this course whatever you can afford to put into it. I hope that is a lot, but I understand if it is only a little.

Each week will be organized around a film or documentary about Latin American politics. These films can be rented through Amazon Prime or streamed through Netflix or one of Carleton’s streaming services like Kanopy. If you can’t access any of these films for any reason, please send me an email and I’ll find a way to get the film to you.

This will be an asynchronous course. We won’t try to hold a thirty student Zoom session (sorry, not sorry). I’ll post two or three short lectures per week. These will generally last between 10 to 25 minutes. The Moodle contains your readings and presents the order in which you should read articles, view lectures, and watch the films.

That doesn’t mean there won’t be lots of opportunities for classroom engagement (note: opportunities, not requirements)! First, I’m setting up a Slack page for the course. I’ve never used Slack before, so this might be a bit bumpy. I hope you use it for discussing the readings and films, and for asking questions that I will answer in the recorded lectures (like a Reddit AMA). I’ll also put you together for small group projects, and I’ll help facilitate video chats for your groups.

I’ll also host student drop-in hours on Zoom twice a week. I’m currently homeschooling my very rambunctious four-year old twins, Rose and Lucía, so you are likely to hear shouts, temper-tantrums, and the thunderous pitter-patter of little feet during drop-in hours.

Finally, you can expect this course to change and adapt to changing circumstances. I’ve never given an online course before and many of you have never taken an online course before. While I’ve nailed down the first four weeks of the syllabus, my plans for the latter half are more fluid. Let me know what works and what doesn’t, and my course plan will adapt accordingly.
**Required Book**


**Assignments**

For this course you will write **three short response papers** and conduct a **final group project**.

The response papers should be three pages double-spaced and thesis-driven. All three response papers are due by Thursday, June 4. I recommend spreading these out: turn one in on week 2 or 3, another on week 6, and a third on week 9.

Your final project will be a creative group project. Start thinking about what sorts of interesting creative skills you have. Do you write poetry, sing, dance, sew, film, meme, do improv or stand-up, paint, sculpt, code, quilt, or anything else under the sun? I'll put you into groups of four, and it'll be up to you to decide what kind of project you'd like to create together and share with the rest of the class on week 9. It could be a poetry anthology, a comic book, or a TikTok opera.

**Course Schedule**

**5 April - 11 April: Introduction to Latin American Politics**

**Introduction to the Course video**


**Lecture 1: Stereotypes and Agency**


**Film:** [The Motorcycle Diaries](https://www.amazon.com/Motorcycle-Diaries-English-Subtitled/dp/B005KGPHZC)

**Lecture 2: Dependency Theory and Postcolonial Development**

**12 April - 18 April: Democratic Breakdown in Chile**

Vanden & Prevost, read on democracy and dictators, pp. 55-75; skim timeline on pp. 76-82, and read background on Chile, pp. 413-419.
**Lecture 3: Domestic Explanations of Chile’s Coup**


**Lecture 4: External Causes of Chile’s Coup**

**Lecture 5: 1973 Coup Wrap-up**

19 April - 25 April: Overcoming Bureaucratic Authoritarianism


**Lecture 6: Explaining Chile’s Transition to Democracy**

**Film:** No ([https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/amzn1.dv.gti.74a9f74f-6551-d132-f48e-10c6b5b4b285](https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/amzn1.dv.gti.74a9f74f-6551-d132-f48e-10c6b5b4b285))


Vanden & Prevost, pp. 166-177.


**Lecture 7: Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) and Neoliberalism**

26 April - 2 May: The Aftershocks

Vanden & Prevost, pp. 419-427.

**Watch on your own:** El Pepe: A Supreme Life (Netflix)


**Film:** El abrazo de la serpiente

**3 May - 9 May: Indigenous Resistance in Bolivia and Beyond**


Vanden & Prevost pp. 503-513.

Farthing, L. (2020). In Bolivia, the Right Returns with a Vengeance. NACLA Report on the Americas, 52(1), 5–12. [https://doi.org/10/ggs2zx](https://doi.org/10/ggs2zx)

**Film:** También la lluvia

**10 May - 16 May: Clientalism and the Perfect Dictatorship**


Vanden & Prevost pp. 521-530.

**Film:** La ley de Herodes

**17 May - 23 May: The Venezuelan Petro-State**


**Film:** Once Upon a Time in Venezuela

**24 May - 30 May: Remembering the Sandinista Revolution**

Vanden & Prevost pp. 585-600, 601-2, and timeline on p. 610.


**Film:** ¡Las Sandinistas!

**31 May - 6 June: The Crucible of Brazilian Democracy**

No reading.

Creative Group Project presentations.

**Film:** The Edge of Democracy (Netflix)