



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Faculty of Arts

POLITICAL SCIENCE 332-A

Politics and Government of Latin America

Fall 2025

Class meeting time and location: Mon/Wed, 12:30-2:00PM, LASR 105

Instructor

Dr. Sally Sharif

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Office Hours: After class on Monday

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Teaching Assistant

Camila Scheidegger Farias

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Course Description

Latin America is one of the most unequal and violent regions in the world. Yet it is also home to important democratic experiments and innovations, including transitions to democracy, transitional justice, and innovative social policies. What are some of the political and economic problems faced by Latin America? What are the limitations and challenges of its governments in addressing these problems?

This course explores some of the most pressing problems faced by Latin American countries over the past century. We will pay special attention to their global determinants and the role of other countries and regions in shaping Latin America. We will explore the historical determinants of development and state capacity, the breakdown of democracy and transitions to democratic regimes. We will also learn about corruption and vote-buying, human rights and violence, mechanisms of transitional justice, the war on drugs, the role of citizen mobilization in pushing for LGBTQ and racial policies, and Latin America's relationship with Canada and the US.

Course Objectives

1. **Learning about** the main political problems and challenges in Latin American societies of the last century.
2. **Becoming familiar** with major arguments and theoretical debates about development, political institutions, regime change, corruption, human rights, and transitional justice, among others, applied to the Latin American context.
3. **Understanding how the politics** of Latin America has evolved in the past three decades. Newer

works on the syllabus test earlier theories, occasionally challenging or affirming initial interpretations. This chronological approach reflects the dynamic and responsive nature of scholarship on Latin America within shifting socio-political contexts.

4. **Critically assessing arguments**, methods, and conclusions. This course provides an opportunity to think about some key questions in analyzing academic literature: What are the authors' argument? What type of evidence does the text provide in support for the claims? How compelling is it? Is there a better and more convincing method to answer the research question? What are the implications of the argument to understanding other time periods, regions of the world, and other phenomena?
5. **Writing and thinking more critically**: The course will provide the tools to discuss, debate, and write about complex phenomena in a more clear and effective way.

Required Course Texts

- Munck, Gerardo L., and Juan Pablo Luna. *Latin American Politics and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.
- All other materials will be available on Canvas.

Course Assignments, Due Dates and Grading

Students are responsible for material covered in class discussions as well as in the assigned readings. Regular attendance in class is expected. Grades will be determined on the basis of the following:

Weekly tests (30%)

This course emphasizes continuous assessment to ensure consistent engagement with the material. Each week, a multiple-choice test will be administered during the lecture via Canvas to evaluate your understanding of the readings and your attention to the lecture content. These tests are designed to reinforce your learning and provide regular feedback on your progress.

- **Timing**: The tests will take place during class time. You must be present to complete them.
- **Access**: You will need a computer or smartphone with internet access to participate. Ensure your device is ready before class begins.
- **No Make-Ups**: Because these tests are part of our continuous assessment approach, they must be completed in class. There are no opportunities to make up for missed tests.

Your performance on these tests will contribute 30% to your final grade. To succeed, stay up-to-date with the readings and come prepared to engage with the lectures. This assessment format reflects the importance of consistent participation and active learning throughout the course.

Midterm exams (2 x 25%)

The midterm exam is a closed-book assessment designed to evaluate your understanding of the material covered in class lectures, assigned readings, and audio-visual content outlined in the syllabus. The exams will test your ability to engage with the course concepts critically and apply them in a thoughtful and analytical manner.

To help you prepare, the Teaching Assistant will lead a review session before the exam. During this session, they will clarify key concepts and discuss potential essay-style questions, providing guidance on how to construct strong, evidence-based responses.

Your answers should reflect a clear comprehension of the course material and demonstrate original thought. Responses must be grounded in the theories, ideas, and examples discussed throughout the course, and should not rely on external tools or online sources like Google or ChatGPT. The focus is on your ability to synthesize and articulate the knowledge you have gained through the course content. The exam is an opportunity to showcase your critical thinking, analytical skills, and mastery of the syllabus material.

Final review essay (20%)

The final review essay is an opportunity for you to critically engage with the material covered in this course and apply the theories and concepts to an ongoing conflict of your choice. The essay should be 3-5 pages with normal (1-inch) margins, text font size 12 in Times New Roman. Students can use the referencing style of their choice. In this essay, you will analyze the conflict through the lens of the theories discussed in class, demonstrating how these theoretical frameworks enhance your understanding of the conflict's dynamics, causes, and possible resolutions.

You are encouraged to draw connections between course material and real-world events, using the theories as tools to interpret and explain the complexities of the chosen conflict. While the focus should be on applying course theories, you may also incorporate additional scholarly sources to deepen your analysis and provide context.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Understanding of Theories (10%): Demonstrates a clear and accurate understanding of the course material and theoretical frameworks.
- Application to the Conflict (5%): Effectively applies theories to analyze the chosen conflict, using evidence to support claims.
- Critical Reflection (5%): Engages in thoughtful critique of the theories, discussing their relevance and limitations.

Late Submission Policy

Late assignments will be penalized 3% per 24-hour period beginning with the start of class on the due date. To be considered for extensions for papers, make-up exams, and/or being excused for an absence, Arts Students must contact [Arts Advising](#) (Buchanan D111) as soon as you are aware you may need an [in-term concession](#). Please review [their website](#) for concession criteria as well as process to follow. Students in other Faculties should contact their Faculty advising office for direction.

Use of Generative AI

If you make use of generative artificial intelligence tools, such as ChatGPT, to complete any project deliverables or other course-related work, the generated material must be clearly and correctly indicated and cited/referenced. Failure to clearly indicate and reference AI-generated material will be reported as academic misconduct.

Extra credit

I believe in continuous assessment and grade students based on their progress throughout the semester. Since mastering the field requires sustained effort rather than last-minute assignments, I do not offer extra credit.

Course Outline and Readings

Week 1 Introduction

September 3

Introduction to the syllabus: no reading required

Week 2 State and State Capacity

September 8



Munck, Ch. 1



Watch: Inside Rio's favelas, the city's neglected neighborhoods.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3BRTlHFpBU>.

September 10

- No class [Instructor attending APSA conference]

Week 3 Nation Building, Race, and Ethnicity

September 15



Munck, Ch. 2

September 17



Watch: Divided Island: How Haiti and the DR Became Two Worlds.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WvKeYuwife>.



Watch: Movie: Even the rain - Available on Netflix.

Week 4 Political Regimes and Democracy

September 22



Munck Ch. 3



Watch: The collapse of Venezuela, explained.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1gUR8wM5vA>.

September 24



Watch: Documentary: The edge of democracy - Available on Netflix

Week 5 States, Nations, and Regime: Empirical Evidence

September 29



Carter, Christopher L. "Extraction, Assimilation, and Accommodation: The Historical Foundations of Indigenous-State Relations in Latin America." *American Political Science Review* 118, no. 1 (2024): 38–53.

October 1



Paglayan, Agustina S. "Education or Indoctrination? The Violent Origins of Public School Systems in an Era of State-Building." *American Political Science Review* 116, no. 4 (2022): 1242–57.

Week 6 The Quality of Democracy

October 6

- Midterm Exam 1

October 8

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- Munck Ch. 5

Week 7 Political Parties and the Citizen-Politician Link

October 13

- No class: Statutory holiday (Thanksgiving)

October 15

-  Munck Ch. 7
 Watch: The biggest corruption scandal in Latin America's history.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMXumMJZYI&t=50s>.

Week 8 Polarization and Democratic Backsliding

October 20

-  Handling, Samuel. 2017. *State Crisis in Fragile Democracies: Polarization and Political Regimes in South America*. New York, NY. Cambridge University Press.
- [Part 1] Puzzles and Theoretical Explanations.

October 22

-  Handling, Samuel. 2017. *State Crisis in Fragile Democracies: Polarization and Political Regimes in South America*. New York, NY. Cambridge University Press.
[Chapter 6] Bolivia and Ecuador: High Polarization and Democratic Erosion.
[Chapter 7] Chile and Uruguay: Low Polarization and Representative Democracy.

Week 9

The New Violence

October 27

-  Munck Ch. 11
 Watch: Why Colombia is losing the cocaine war.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDa_SpvbeCQ&t=218s.

October 29

-  Nieto-Matiz, Camilo. 2023. “When the State Becomes Complicit: Mayors, Criminal Actors, and the Deliberate Weakening of the Local State in Colombia.” *Comparative Political Studies*, 56(9), 1295-1327.

Week 10 **Citizens, Politicians, and Violence: Empirical Evidence**

November 3

-  Uribe, Andres, Benjamin Lessing, Noah Schouela, and Elayne Stecher. “Criminal Governance in Latin America: Prevalence and Correlates.” *Perspectives on Politics*, 2025, 1–19.

November 5

-  Palacios, Irene. 2025. “How Democratic Backsliding and Populism Affect Trust in Democratic Institutions.” *Democratization*, April, 1–24.

Week 11 **Midterm Break**

November 10

- No class: Statutory holiday (Remembrance Day)

November 12

- No class: UBC midterm break

Week 12 **Social Rights and Dilemmas of Democracy**

November 17

- Midterm Exam 2

November 19

 Munck Ch. 12

Week 13 **The Paradox of Political Equality and Social Inequality**

November 24

 Munck Ch. 15

November 26

-  Watch: Inside the Sinaloa Cartel: Secrets of Mexico's Drug Empire.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Qq33CIP5Ok>.

Week 14 **Economic Growth and Environment**

December 1

 Munck Ch. 13

-  Watch: The global coffee crisis is coming.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IN4ZcZAUBA>.

-  The destruction of the Amazon, explained.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAZAKPUQMw0>.

Acknowledgement

UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people. The land it is situated on has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed on in their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site.

General Academic Policies

Regular attendance in class meetings is expected. All assignments must be completed and handed in.

Read the university calendar so that you are aware of no-penalty drop dates, requirements for medical authorization (to defer an exam, for example) and other procedures that may affect you.

Students who wish to appeal grades assigned to their academic work may do so. The initial appeal should be made to the course instructor. If the student remains unsatisfied with this process, he/she may proceed to the head of the department or further to a formal committee established in accordance with University policies.

Religious holidays – UBC permits students who are scheduled to attend classes or write examinations on holy days of their religions to notify their instructor in advance of these days and their wish to observe them by absenting themselves from class or examination. Instructors provide opportunity for students to make up work or examinations missed without penalty. (Policy # 65.)

UBC is committed to the academic success of students with disabilities. UBC's policy on Academic Accommodations for students with disabilities aims to remove barriers and provide equal access to University services, ensure fair and consistent treatment of all students, and to create a welcoming environment. Students with a disability should first meet with an Access and Diversity advisor to determine what accommodations/services you are eligible for.

Academic Integrity and Responsibility

As a member of this class, you are responsible for contributing to the course objectives through your participation in class activities and your work on essays and other projects. In the process of coming into your own as an independent, responsible participant in the academic community, you are encouraged to seek advice, clarification, and guidance in your learning from your instructor. If you decide to seek help beyond the resources of this course, you are responsible for ensuring that this help does not lead you to submit others' work as your own. If an outside tutor or other person helps you, show this policy to your tutor or helper: make sure you both understand the limits of this person's permissible contribution. If you are uncertain, consult your instructor.

Academic communities depend on their members' honesty and integrity in representing the sources of reasoning, claims, and wordings that appear in their work. Like any other member of the academic community, you will be held responsible for the accurate representation of your sources: the means by which you produced the work you are submitting. If you are found to have misrepresented your sources and to have submitted others' work as your own, penalties may follow. Your case may be forwarded to the Head of the department, who may decide that you should receive zero for the assignment. The Head will report your case to the Dean's Office, where the report will remain on file. The Head may decide, in consultation with your instructor, that a greater penalty is called for, and will forward your case to the Dean's Office. After an interview in the Dean's Office, your case may be forwarded to the President's Advisory Committee on Academic Misconduct. Following a hearing in which you will be asked to account for your actions, the President may apply penalties including zero for the assignment; zero for the course; suspension from the university for a period ranging from 4 to 24 months; a notation on your permanent record. The penalty may be a combination of these.

Academic communities also depend on their members' living up to the commitments they make. By enrolling in this course, you make commitments to an academic community: you are responsible for meeting deadlines, and attending class and engaging in class activities. If you find that you cannot meet a deadline or cannot participate in a course activity, discuss your situation with your instructor before the deadline or before your absence.

Like any academic author submitting work for review and evaluation, you are guaranteeing that the work you submit for this course has not already been submitted for credit in another course. Your submitting work from another course, without your instructor's prior agreement, may result in penalties such as those applied to the misrepresentation of sources.

Use of Generative AI

If you make use of generative artificial intelligence tools, such as ChatGPT, to complete any project deliverables or other course-related work, the generated material must be clearly and correctly indicated, and cited/referenced.

Failure to clearly indicate and reference AI-generated material will be reported as academic misconduct.

COVID-19 Safety

If you are sick, it is important that you stay home. Complete a self-assessment for COVID-19 symptoms here: <https://bc.thrive.health/covid19/en>. Meet with the teaching assistants once you feel better to catch up on class material.

If I (the instructor) am feeling ill: If I am unwell, I will not come to class. I will make every reasonable attempt to communicate plans for the class as soon as possible by email. If I am well enough to teach, but am taking precautions to avoid infecting others, we may hold

the class online. If this happens, you will receive an email informing you how to join the class.

Reach out and ask for help if you need it

University students often encounter setbacks from time to time that can impact academic performance. If you run into difficulties and need assistance, I encourage you to contact me by email. I will do my best to support your success during the term. This includes identifying concerns I may have about your academic progress or wellbeing through Early Alert. With Early Alert, faculty members can connect you with advisors who offer student's support and assistance getting back on track to success. Only specialized UBC advisors are able to access any concerns I may identify, and Early Alert does not affect your academic record.

For more information: <https://facultystaff.students.ubc.ca/systems-tools/early-alert>

For information about addressing mental or physical health concerns, including seeing a UBC counselor or doctor, visit: <https://students.ubc.ca/health-wellness>

Respectful University Environment

UBC recognizes that “the best possible environment for working, learning and living is one in which respect, civility, diversity, opportunity and inclusion are valued.” The full *UBC Statement on Respectful Environment for Students, Faculty and Staff* can be found at <http://www.hr.ubc.ca/respectful-environment/files/UBC-Statement-on-Respectful-Environment-2014.pdf>. Students should read this statement carefully and take note of both the protections and the responsibilities that it outlines for all members of the UBC community. Students should also review the Student Code of Conduct, at: <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,750,0>

This course values frank discussion, healthy debate, and the free and respectful exchange of ideas. Students are welcome to voice and defend their views, which may differ from those of other students or of the instructor. However, disrespectful behavior, including bullying and harassment, will not be tolerated. The instructor will be professional and respectful in all their exchanges with students, and students will exercise similar professionalism and respect in their interactions with each other and with the instructor.

I expect us all to respect the preferred personal pronouns of all students. Using the right pronoun, like using someone's correct name, is a way to show respect. Please advise me of your pronoun preference early in the semester so I can respond as appropriate.

If you have any concerns about the class environment, please raise them with the instructor. You also have the options of contacting the Head of the Political Science Department, UBC's Equity and Inclusion Office (<http://equity.ubc.ca>), or the UBC Ombudsperson for Students: <https://ombudsoffice.ubc.ca>

Equity and Harassment

UBC is committed to equity (including but not limited to gender equity) and fostering a safe learning environment for everyone. All peoples should be able to study, work, and learn in a supportive environment that is free from sexual violence, harassment, and discrimination. UBC's Policy #3 on Discrimination and Harassment defines harassment as: "unwanted and unwelcome attention from a person who knows, or ought to know, that the behaviour is unwelcome. Harassment can range from written or spoken comments to unwanted jokes, gifts, and physical assault, and may be accompanied by threats or promises regarding work or study opportunities and conditions. Harassment can be either a single incident or a series of related incidents." Such behavior is not acceptable and will not be tolerated at UBC. If you or someone you know has encountered sexual violence or harassment, you can find confidential support and resources at the AMS Sexual Assault Support Centre, (SASC), and the Equity and Inclusion Office. The SASC is an all-genders service that serves the UBC-Vancouver campus community and is committed to creating a safer campus community, free from sexualized violence. Their work is informed by feminism, anti-oppression and recognition of intersectionality. The Equity and Inclusion Office is committed to fostering a community in which human rights are respected and equity and diversity are integral to university life.

Resources are available at:

Sexual Assault Support Centre, (SASC)
 249M, Student Union Building, UBC
 604-827-5180
sasc@ams.ubc.ca
<http://amssasc.ca>

Equity and Inclusion Office
 2306 – 1874 East Mall (Brock Hall)
 604.822.6353
equity@equity.ubc.ca
<http://equity.ubc.ca>