Description and objectives

This course will focus on two fundamental sets of problems in Latin American politics: The first is the struggle to build democratic societies, and to overcome the legacies of colonialism, exclusion, and authoritarianism. Democracy has historically had a precarious hold in the region, yet in recent decades the bulk of the continent has become at least formally democratic. How strongly rooted is democracy in Latin America? Is there a single model of democracy or is democracy different from country to country? To what extent have democratic regimes overcome legacies of authoritarianism and exclusion? The second problem is insecurity, in the form of political and criminal violence. Although inter-state wars have been rare, intra-state violence has been all-too common. What are the historical roots and contemporary dimensions of violence? Why has it been so pervasive, and can it be overcome?

We will address these questions from a comparative perspective by exploring the connections among different sets of literatures, including on military rule and democracy in Chile, on the civil war in Colombia, on the problems of criminal violence throughout the continent, and on the struggle to create more inclusive democracies.

By the end of this course, you certainly won’t know everything there is to know about Latin American politics. (No one does.) Instead, if you do your part through careful study, you will emerge with something simpler but also more powerful: a better understanding of some of the region’s fundamental political challenges, along with a comparative framework for making sense of them.

Required readings are available for download from D2L, either directly from the course site or as external links to other sites. The suggested readings will be helpful for more in-depth research in the specific area. Other readings beyond the syllabus may be suggested as appropriate.
Course requirements and procedures

This course presumes some background in political science, and some familiarity with Latin America. In addition, you would be well advised to keep track of current events in Latin America in the national and international press. Reading knowledge of Spanish is an asset, though not required.

We will use D2L, where I will post messages and grades, along with relevant course materials (such as PowerPoint presentations and background readings). We will also use Top Hat, for quizzes and to participate in some discussions.

You will be required to complete a closed-book in-class mid-term and 3-hour final exam, along with a research paper. The mid-term and final exams will contain brief identification and multiple-choice questions. The final exam will also likely contain an essay question, from among a set of choices.

For the research paper, you may work on a topic of your own choosing, but which meets the following conditions:

- It must be clearly connected to the themes of the course. This is not your chance to write on a topic you’ve always wanted to write about but which has no connection to the course. It is your chance to explore the themes of the course in greater depth. The suggested readings are a good place to start.

- Because this is a course in comparative politics, the project must also be comparative in some way: by focusing on more than one case. I will explain this in greater detail in class.

- It must be clearly analytical—in the sense of explaining or making better sense of a problem—rather than descriptive. Again, I will explain this in class.

The research paper should be between 3,500-5,000 words in length, submitted in digital format, as a Word file or PDF, through D2L.

You are required to submit a proposal of the research project (roughly 600-1,000 words) to me by February 16. The proposal should clearly state the main question you will focus on, the argument you will formulate, and how you plan to do what you propose. I will provide further details in class.

Finally, a participation mark will assess the quantity and quality of your contributions to class discussions. A person who makes a small number of intelligent comments in class will receive a higher grade than one who makes more frequent but less intelligent remarks. At the same time, a person who makes intelligent contributions with higher frequency will receive a higher mark than one who participates less frequently.

Your final grade will be distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-class mid-term exam (February 26)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research paper (due April 13)</td>
<td>35% (including proposal 5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam (during exam period)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>15% (10% in class, 5% Top Hat)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please note that the lectures, discussions, and readings are connected but distinct streams. The lectures will comment on the readings, but will not necessarily follow them precisely: listening to the lectures is not a substitute for doing the readings. All course material—including lectures, discussions, and readings—are fair game for the exams.

There may be an opportunity to have a guest speaker during the term. I will confirm the details if and when that opportunity arises.

You are expected to attend all the classes, do all the required readings, write the exams, and complete the assignments on time. A late assignment or paper without a valid medical excuse (i.e. one supported by a doctor’s note) will not be accepted.

If you attend the lectures, do the assigned readings carefully, understand the main ideas, and are able to comment on them critically in the research project, in the exams, and in class, you will be well on your way to succeeding in the course.

I will be available for consultation by email, during office hours, after class or by appointment.

**Grading criteria**

A- (80-84%) → A (85-89%) → A+ (90%+)

*Exceptional performance:* strong evidence of original thinking; good organization; capacity to analyze and synthesize; superior grasp of subject matter with sound critical evaluations; evidence of extensive knowledge base. Work at this level is clearly written, with no spelling or grammar faults.

B- (70-73%) → B (74-76%) → B+ (77-79%)

*Competent performance:* evidence of grasp of subject matter; some evidence of critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; evidence of familiarity with the literature. Work at this level is generally clearly written, containing at most a few, if any, spelling or grammar faults.

D (50-54%) → D+ (55-59%) → C- (60-62%) → C (63-66%) → C+ (67-69%)

*Adequate performance:* understanding of the subject matter; ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material; acceptable but uninspired work, not seriously faulty but lacking style and vigour. Work at this level is sometimes or often unclear, and contains from some to many spelling and/or grammar problems.

F (0-49%)

*Inadequate performance:* little or no evidence of understanding of the subject matter; weakness in critical and analytic skills; limited or irrelevant use of the literature. Work at this level is usually poorly written, with numerous spelling and grammar problems.
Electronic devices in class

Because we will use Top Hat in class, laptops and cellphones are permitted, strictly for this purpose, and for taking notes.

You should keep in mind, however, that a growing body of evidence suggests that it’s far more effective to take notes by hand: that “even when laptops are used solely to take notes, they may still be impairing learning because their use results in shallower processing”\(^1\).\(^2\) Even more seriously, evidence also suggests that laptops in class have an effect similar to second-hand smoke: they not only hurt you, the user, but also those around you, even if they’re not using one.\(^2\) My very strong suggestion is that after using Top Hat, you close the laptop, pick up a pen and paper, and pay full attention to the lecture and the discussion. You and those around you will do much better if you listen actively and write sparingly, than if you try to transcribe everything, or worse, get distracted by email, social media, the web, etc.

If you choose to use a laptop beyond Top Hat, you must do so with courtesy to others and consideration for the aims of the course. That means using it strictly to take notes or consult course-related material, and not for checking email or social media, surfing the web, or any other purpose that distracts from the class. The class is small enough that we will notice—and get annoyed by—any distractions. Similarly, cellphones should be put away after using them for Top Hat.

Reading and writing skills\(^3\)

Learning an academic discipline such as political science requires immersing yourself in and critically engaging a substantial body of work. In other words, it requires quite a bit of reading and writing.

As you manage the reading for this course, you are likely to find that there is little correlation between effort and outcome. It’s possible to spend hours reading something without “getting it,” and equally possible to spend very little time reading something else and getting quickly to the heart of it. Reading is not an ability that either comes naturally or does not—it’s a skill that has to be learned. Figure out the heart of the argument before you read deeply. When you know the article’s centre of gravity, you read more efficiently. Read actively. Be skeptical, approach the text with questions, and try to answer these for yourself as you make your way through it. The more actively you read, the more you will retain, and the easier it will be to write about it.

You should also keep in mind that it’s not only what you write that matters in how you will be evaluated, but also how you write it. Crisp, clear, effective writing counts. That includes such things as grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, clarity, citation, and organization. As George Orwell noted, “the slovenliness of our language

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\(^1\) [http://pss.sagepub.com/content/25/6/1159](http://pss.sagepub.com/content/25/6/1159)


\(^3\) Adapted from K. Chandra and D. Woodruff, MIT.
makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.”⁴ The advice in these articles should help you avoid slovenly writing, at least:

- William Zinsser, “Writing English as a Second Language”:
  [https://theamericanscholar.org/writing-english-as-a-second-language/](https://theamericanscholar.org/writing-english-as-a-second-language/)
- Steven Pinker, “Why Academics Stink at Writing”:

And beyond Pinker’s article, I would very strongly recommend his book _The Sense of Style_:

If after all this advice you still need help with writing, it is available through Writing Support Services in the Student Success Centre (3rd floor of the Taylor Family Digital Library): [http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support](http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support).

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Course schedule

January 8
Introduction and overview

January 10
The comparative method

January 12-17
Basic concepts: state and regime

January 19-24
States and regimes in Latin America


Suggested:


**January 24-Feb 2**

**From democracy to dictatorship in Chile**


February 5-14

The political economy of democracy and inequality


Suggested:


February 16
Film: “The Battle of Chile”
Research proposals due (via D2L)

February 19-23
Reading week – no class

February 26
Mid-term exam (in class)

February 28-March 12
Democracy and violence in Colombia

Suggested:

March 14-26

**Political and criminal violence**


Suggested:


March 28

Film: “Neighbouring Sounds”
March 30

**Good Friday** – no class

April 2-11

**Democracy and inclusion**


Suggested:


April 13
Review
Research project due via D2L
IMPORTANT POLICIES AND INFORMATION

Absence from a Mid-term Examination
Students who are absent from a scheduled term test or quiz for legitimate reasons (e.g. illness with the appropriate documentation) are responsible for contacting the instructor via email within 48 hours of the missed test to discuss alternative arrangements. A copy of this email may be requested as proof of the attempt to contact the instructor. Any student who fails to do so forfeits the right to a makeup test.

Deferral of a Final Examination
Deferral of a final examination can be granted for reasons of illness, domestic affliction, and unforeseen circumstances, as well as to those with three (3) final exams scheduled within a 24-hour period. Deferred final exams will not be granted to those who sit the exam, who have made travel arrangements that conflict with their exam, or who have misread the examination timetable. The decision to allow a deferred final exam rests not with the instructor but with Enrolment Services. Instructors should, however, be notified if you will be absent during the examination. The Application for Deferred Final Exam, deadlines, requirements and submission instructions can be found on the Enrolment Services website at https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/exams/deferred-exams.

Appeals
If a student has a concern about the course or a grade they have been assigned, they must first discuss their concerns with the instructor. If this does not resolve the matter, the student can then proceed with an academic appeal. The first step in an academic appeal is to set up a meeting with the Department Head.

University Regulations
Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the University policies found in the Academic Regulations sections of the Calendar at www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/academic-regs.html.

Student Accommodations
Students seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services. SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For additional information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit www.ucalgary.ca/access/.

Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor.

The full policy on Student Accommodations is available at http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy.pdf.

Plagiarism and Other Forms Of Academic Misconduct
Academic misconduct in any form (e.g. cheating, plagiarism) is a serious academic offence that can lead to disciplinary probation, suspension or expulsion from the University. Students are expected to be familiar with the standards surrounding academic honesty; these can be found in the University of Calgary calendar at http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k-5.html. Such offences will be taken seriously and reported immediately, as required by Faculty of Arts policy.

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP)
FOIP legislation requires that instructors maintain the confidentiality of student information. In practice, this means that student assignments and tests cannot be left for collection in any public place without the consent of the student. It also means that grades cannot be distributed via email. Final exams are kept by instructors but can be viewed by contacting them or the main office in the
Department of Political Science. Any uncollected assignments and tests will be destroyed after three months; final examinations are destroyed after one year.

**Evacuation Assembly Points**
In the event of an emergency evacuation from class, students are required to gather in designated assembly points. Please check the list found at [www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints](http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints) and note the assembly point nearest to your classroom.

**Faculty of Arts Program Advising and Student Information Resources**
For program planning and advice, visit the Arts Students’ Centre in Social Sciences 102, call 403-220-3580 or email artsads@ucalgary.ca. You can also visit [arts.ucalgary.ca/advising](http://arts.ucalgary.ca/advising) for program assistance.

For registration (add/drop/swap), paying fees and assistance with your Student Centre, contact Enrolment Services at (403) 210-ROCK [7625] or visit their office in the MacKimmie Library Block.

**Important Contact Information**
Campus Security and Safewalk (24 hours a day/7 days a week/365 days a year)
Phone: 403-220-5333

Faculty of Arts Undergraduate Students’ Union Representatives
Phone: 403-220-6551
Email: arts1@su.ucalgary.ca, arts2@su.ucalgary.ca, arts3@su.ucalgary.ca, arts4@su.ucalgary.ca
Students’ Union URL: [www.su.ucalgary.ca](http://www.su.ucalgary.ca)

Graduate Students’ Association
Phone: 403-220-5997
Email: ask@gsa.ucalgary.ca
URL: [www.ucalgary.ca/gsa](http://www.ucalgary.ca/gsa)

Student Ombudsman
Phone: 403-220-6420
Email: ombuds@ucalgary.ca