

Government 384L (39075)/Latin American Studies 384L (40620)

## **LATIN AMERICAN URBAN POLITICS**

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Spring 2013  
Offices: Batts 3.124  
Office hours: T and W 9:30-12:00; others by appointment

This course is designed to offer a first glimpse into a huge area with a correspondingly huge literature - Latin American cities and their politics. The term "politics" is interpreted very broadly so as to include students whose major interests may be sociology, anthropology, history, economics, public affairs, or any other social sciences and humanities. The focus of the course is politics, but almost anything else is grist for the mill.

The course is designed as a research seminar, and as such concentrates in its readings and class discussions not only on the substantive materials dealing with Latin American cities but also with the question of how this topic can be investigated. All seminar members will be expected to make an effort to develop a research question that has some theoretical importance as well as empirical interest. To do this, we will take time to go through some of the basics in social science research.

Weekly topics include early urban theory as developed in the US and then transported to Latin America; macro urban theory and urban structure; rural-urban migration and its repercussions (the informal urban sector, squatter settlements); urban social movements; urban electoral politics; and the move since the 1980's toward municipal autonomy and decentralization.

### **To be purchased**

Packets of duplicated readings from Abel's Packets (715 D West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, 472-5353)

### **Assignments (see below)**

Two short (4-5 pp. double-spaced) analytic essays over a week's readings: roughly 25%  
A major (18-20 pp.) research paper, including the preparation of a proposal: roughly 50%  
Class participation, including in-class presentation: roughly 25%

## Requirements

### The Short Essay

The short essay should be a synthetic and/or analytic summation, examination and comparison of the required readings for a selected week. Let me make a couple of suggestions as to how to go about this paper.

1. Do the several authors address a central question, problem, area, concept or concern? What is it? How are the readings different in their approaches, treatments and conclusions?
2. What do the readings tell us about a topic? What do we end up knowing and not knowing? What new avenues/questions are suggested?
3. Are there major points of agreement/disagreement either among the authors or with previous weeks' readings?

*Avoid making a summary of the readings.* Instead, integrate them and discuss them in comparison with one another. Summarize or quote briefly when necessary, but then go ahead and synthesize (“combine or compose parts of elements so as to form a whole”) or analyze (“separate the parts of the whole so as to reveal their relation to it or to one another”).

Feel free to inject your own opinions and evaluations and to provide justification for them. If there are more than four readings in a week, you are free to limit your comments to four selections. However, you should make it clear why you have selected the four you did.

For the weeks you select, you will serve as a facilitator of class discussion. This does *not* mean that others do not do the readings, or that you have some formal presentation to make. It does mean that you have some questions prepared to provoke discussion/debate/argument and to lead that discussion as necessary. **Everyone is expected to be prepared for each week's discussions.**

The short essays are due the week following the assignment so that you can (if you wish) incorporate some of the class discussion into your essay.

## The Research Paper

The paper is the main task of the semester. Ideally it will combine two basic elements: first, the identification of a general theoretical or analytical problem, statement, proposition or hypothesis; and second, the examination of a case that is appropriate for the theoretical problem. As we do the readings, I will try to point out – and to have you all point out as well – the sort of analytical problem I have in mind. The whole point of such an exercise is to produce a paper that goes beyond being a case study of a particular city or event and becomes a paper of interest to readers who may not know anything about your case study but who may have a strong interest in the global topic you have selected.

For example: let us assume that your case deals with how poor people in Mexico City voted in the 2000 presidential elections. This is a fine topic for your case study. But I would expect you to frame this case study in a larger, theoretical statement. To do so, you might begin by asking in general how low-income voters behave, or even more generally whether there is a correlation between social class and political behavior. This opening would say nothing about Mexico City, but would have sketched in a topic that might be of interest to people who could care little about Mexico City but a lot about how/when/if social status affects political behavior.

We shall have a good deal more to say about how such research is carried out. Papers should be about 18-20 pages. A paper can be a traditional research paper; it can also be a research design or proposal, a bibliographical essay, an in-depth critical analysis of a set of readings, or something else. If two students wish to write a joint paper, that's fine.

One last point: you are due to hand in to me on or before **25 February** a proposal for your paper. This proposal should contain three elements: first, a brief (2-3 pages double-spaced) description of your theoretical problem and the case study you intend to use; second, an outline of your paper that shows how you intend to do what you say you want to do in Part I; and third, a working bibliography, which contains 1) items you have read; 2) items you have identified but not read; and 3) areas where you need sources but don't yet have them.

Prior to handing in your proposal I will expect to meet with each of you during office hours at least a couple of times. If you have a firm idea, let me know; if you have no idea at all, let me know as well.

## Class participation

Not much to say here. The success of any seminar depends on involvement of everyone, and so live your lives accordingly. I will have things to say throughout the course, but I will expect participation from all. If after a couple of weeks you are not involved in the class, I will see to it that you are – fair warning!

## **Reading Assignments**

Readings come from a variety of sources and time periods. A few selections are from the 1970s and 1980s, while most of the others are more contemporary. What I try to do as much as is feasible is to offer some of the “classic” readings and thereby let you see how research on a topic has changed (or perhaps stagnated) over time. The older readings indicate what themes were current at the time but which may have been replaced by newer topics. For example, in the 1970s no one talked about social movements; in contrast, there are far fewer studies of rural-urban migration today than there were twenty or thirty years ago. For your paper you might want to consider going back to an older study and updating it.

I suggest a set of questions for each week as something to think about. These are meant to be suggestive and nothing more; they do not necessarily define what is important for that week.

**Read each selection not only for information about the case but also for how the research was done. What sort of theoretical question drives the reading? What sorts of data are used? Are the data adequate to address the question? Does the reading provide you with ideas for your own work, not only in terms of subject-matter, but also in terms of how a question can be addressed or approached?**

I have included readings that I not only think are strong but also from time to time readings that perhaps are weak in one way or another, the idea being that as we do the readings we can start to appreciate what makes a strong article/chapter (and how to emulate it) and what doesn't (and how to avoid it).

14 January – **Introduction to the Course**

No assignments

21 January – **MLK Day – no classes**

## 28 January – **Rapid Urbanization: An Overview**

Roberts – “Urbanization and Underdevelopment”, Urbanization and Underdevelopment before the Modern Period”, “Urbanization and Industrialization”  
 Gilbert, “The Latin American Mega-City...”, “Demographic Trends...”

The main idea here with these readings is to be on the look-out for ideas that you could use to develop a topic for your own paper. These could be theoretical/analytic notions and/or case study ideas, so always read with this in mind.

The readings for this week are general, so as you go through them identify the different levels on which arguments and research are case. These range from global capitalism to individual behavior.

Which of these various levels is the most useful for your own interests? Why? What sorts of problems might you encounter in trying to combine or cross over from one level to another? To what extent can you concentrate on one level and exclude others?

As you do the readings, try to become self-conscious about identifying dependent and independent variables, propositions and hypotheses, even if you don't use this vocabulary yourself.

In Roberts:

Be self-conscious about identifying propositions and hypotheses and then think about how you might set about testing or examining them. What sorts of information would you need? Do they seem intuitively to make sense?

Early on in Chapter 1 Roberts states his basic premise for the entire book. What is it? And as you move through the various chapters, does he stick to that premise and to his fundamental explanatory variable? What are the strengths and weaknesses of his approach/premise?

In the Gilbert book:

These two chapters are fairly straight-forward and descriptive. Nevertheless, as you read them, think about how/why you might update them, what sorts of changes you might expect if you did, and how or why a particular city might either support or modify or reject some of the generalizations that Gilbert makes.

Gay:

I include Gay as an example of a review essay; if writing something in this format might be useful to you, then think about it and let's talk.

#### 4 February – **Social and Political Effects of Urbanization: Some Older Generalizations and Criticisms**

Marx and Engels selections

L. Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life”

L. Pye, “Some Political Implications of Urbanization ...”

O. Lewis, “Further Observations on the Folk-Urban Continuum ...”

P. Hauser, “Observations on the Urban-Folk and Urban-Rural Dichotomies...”

W. Cornelius, “The Political Sociology of Cityward Migration...”

In what ways has the older literature on cities and urbanization in the United States and Europe affected attempts to examine Latin America? Have these effects been for the good or bad?

Critics sometimes argue that the US literature is hopelessly ethnocentric. Is such a claim valid? Is there nothing to be rescued from the older literature? Are some of the questions still worth considering? Why or why not?

Marx and Engels selections in particular: What sorts of arguments do these readings make? What sorts of evidence do they use? What sorts of alternative explanations might be offered? Are there ideas/claims/propositions in these readings that can be useful today? How? Why?

Wirth: Wirth has been accused of being US-centric; do you see this as a valid criticism? Why or why not? He has also been accused of making arguments that “all cities everywhere do or are XYZ” – is this a valid criticism? How might it be overcome?

Lewis and Hauser: What is the nature of the criticisms that these two offer about (then) existing urban theory and its application to the Third World? In what ways do both authors propose a research agenda?

Cornelius: This chapter is an example of a bibliographic essay. What does it do, and how does it do it?

## 11 February – **Macro Urban Theory and Urban Structures**

Review/reread Roberts, chapters 2, 3  
Smith and Tardanico, “Urban Theory Reconsidered ...”  
Wilson, “Lima and the New International Division of Labor”  
Roberts and Portes, “The Free Market City”  
Plaza and Stromquist, “Consequences of Structural Adjustment ...”

This week’s readings focus on a macro or global scale of analysis, and in some ways constitute a follow-up to the previous week’s readings. This week’s cover materials generated in the 1980’s through the 1990’s and the Washington Consensus and neo-liberal economics.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach? That is, what is lost or gained in terms of conceptual clarity/precision?

What sorts of data are necessary to do such research? How can such data be gathered, and what are their strengths and weaknesses?

How does this approach facilitate or hinder cross-national research? Roberts and Portes is cross-national and comparative; what are the strengths and weaknesses of their approach? Plaza and Stromquist focus on a single country, but how can their study also be seen as comparative?

## 18 February – **Urban Poverty and the Urban Informal Sector**

Roberts, “Urban Poverty, the Household ...”  
 Gilbert, “The World of Work”  
 Bromley, “The Urban Informal Sector...”  
 Bromley, “Organization, Regulation and Exploitation ...”  
 Portes and Schauffer, “Competing Perspectives ...”  
 Gonzalez de la Rocha, “Vanishing Assets...”  
 Jacobi, “Public and Private Responses ...”

Urban poverty is a theme that permeates all of the readings in one form or another. As we get into this week’s readings (and subsequent weeks as well), what sorts of problems arise when conceptualizing and measuring urban poverty? In what ways is urban poverty a distinct concept and different from poverty in general and/or rural poverty?

All sorts of conceptual, definitional and operational questions abound in this week’s readings. What are the sources of these problems? Are they in fact conceptual? Ideological? Do they have to do with data and information?

On what grounds might you suggest that one conceptualization or treatment or definition might be more satisfactory than another?

While it could be either, do you think that the urban informal sector is more of an independent variable (something that explains something else) than a dependent variable?

You might consider going back and rereading the brief Marx and (especially) Engels selections from the week of 5 February and see whether any of their explanations/descriptions from nineteenth century Europe have utility here.

25 February – **Squatters, Squatter Settlements, and Urban Housing**

Gilbert, “The Move to the City”, “Housing Strategies”

Roberts, “The Nature of Urban Stratification”

Turner, “Housing Priorities, Settlement Patterns and Urban Development...”

Klak and Holtzclaw, “The Housing, Geography and Mobility ...”

Dosh, Tactical Innovation...”

Perlman, “The Metamorphosis of Marginality...”

The readings for this week come from materials written in the 1970s as well as more recently. What sorts of questions or concepts seem to have lasting value, and what sorts are more evanescent? Why do some “last” better than others?

What sorts of data and information have been used to address the question of housing? What sorts of data are more successful/useful than others? Which data seem to be more appropriate for comparative research?

How are some of the readings from the previous week dealing with poverty and informality useful here?

Turner’s work was considered to be a breakthrough in many ways when it first appeared. In what ways did it depart from the earlier literature in some of the readings for 4 February?

Ward’s piece is one of the early efforts to look at inner-city problems in Latin America, an area that has been given relatively little consideration to date.

**All proposals are due today – no exceptions!**

#### 4 March – **Non-Electoral Responses to Urban Problems: Social Movements**

Escobar and Alvarez, “Introduction: Theory and Practice ...”

Schneider, “Radical Opposition Parties ...”

Ellner, “Obstacles to Consolidation ...”

Roberts, Kenneth, “Beyond Romanticism ...”

Roberts and Portes, “Coping With the Free Market City”

The hey-day of the social movement literature was probably during the 1990’s, although that literature continues to grow. As the transition to electoral democracy occurred, under what conditions did the relevance of social movements decline? Did political parties replace social movements? What about elected leader who used anti-neo-liberal platforms?

The literature on social movements is rife with methodological arguments as well as lightly veiled ideological disputes. How are these two intertwined? Does a specific ideological perspective seem to use one kind of data or methodology?

How and in what ways is (or isn’t) the social movement literature related to informality?

#### **11-16 March – Spring Break**

## 18 March – **Municipal Governance in Latin American Cities**

Selee, “Exploring the Link Between Decentralization ...”

Rojas, “The Metropolitan Regions of LA ...”

Wampler, “When Does Participatory Democracy ...?”

Cuadrado-Roura and Fernandez-Guell, “The Long Road ...”

### **Case studies:**

Gilbert and Dávila, “Bogotá ...”

Siavelis et al., “Santiago ...”

Since the 1980s one of the most crucial changes that has occurred in Latin American cities has been the combination decentralization and elections. Mayors who were previously appointed by presidents now have their own constituencies, and presidents no longer hire and fire mayors at will.

In addition, decentralization has meant in some instances more direct citizen involvement in policy-making. However, Wampler argues that the likelihood that such initiative will succeed depends on a variety of factors. What are these? To what extent do you think that the Brazilian case can be generalized further to LA?

How have some of these changes played out in specific settings? What sorts of institutional arrangements have been put into place to encourage or discourage municipal autonomy? What sorts of additional political skills are needed as these new arrangements come on line? What new political actors must now be taken into account?

## 25 March – Electoral Politics in the City

### **Social Class and Voting**

Portes, “Leftist Radicalism in Chile ...”

Schoultz, “Urbanization and Changing Voting Patterns ...”

Dietz, “Political Participation in the Barriadas ...”

Roberts and Arce, “Neoliberalism and Lower-Class Voting ...”

### **Local-level electoral politics**

Rankin, “Why Are There No Local Politics ...?”

Gamarra, “Municipal Elections in Bolivia”

While a few of these readings go way back, they are still useful as ways of doing research. The Portes piece, for example, deals with Santiago in the 1960’s. Even so, how did Portes frame his study? What are some strengths and limitation of what is known as secondary analysis? The same questions hold for the Schoultz and Roberts and Arce articles.

This week’s readings use a variety of methodologies to get at the question of voting and voting contexts. Which of these methodologies seems most appropriate for addressing certain kinds of questions concerning electoral behavior?

Here as in many other weeks’ readings, levels of analysis are important. What different levels are used here? That is, what are the various authors actually trying to explain – individual behavior and/or aggregate behavior? Structural behavior and/or legal rules and institutions and their effects on behavior?

As municipal elections have become more important, what sorts of new problems have emerged for local leaders and their constituents? And what sorts of limits or constraints are becoming apparent as elections take hold on local levels?

## I April – **Violence and Citizen Security**

Ungar, “Crime and Citizen Security...”  
Desmond Arias, “Network Approach to Criminal Politics”  
Gaviria and Pages, “Patterns of Criminal Victimization ...”  
Sanchez, “Insecurity and Violence as a New Power...”

The literature on citizen security has become enormous as urban violence has in several countries escalated due to drugs and drug trafficking as well as the weakness of the state to respond to that and other problems. As we go through the readings, what kinds of approaches do the various authors take, and how successful are they – and why?

8, 15, 22 April – **In-class presentations**

3 May – **All papers due**