

Dr. Brian F. Crisp
285 Seigle Hall
Office Hours: Thursdays 2:30 to 3:30 or by appointment

<http://www.crisp.wustl.edu/>
crisp@wustl.edu
Phone: 935-4724

Political Science 4231: Presidents, Legislators, and Economic Policy in Latin America

Course Description

Our primary goal in this course is to understand how variations in democratic institutions in Latin America lead to different types of representation. We will give special attention to the stark differences in interbranch relations across countries. What policies do presidents want and what tools do they have at their disposal to get them adopted? To whom do legislators feel most accountable and how does this impact their relationships with the executive.

We will begin each of five case studies with a brief historical overview, looking at the close relationship between regime type (or form of government) and economic development strategy. This will require that we address questions such as: Do certain kinds of economic policies make it difficult to sustain democratic rule? Conversely, are democratically elected politicians poor at carrying out difficult economic reforms? This historical evolution will provide us with context as we focus in greater detail on how current democracies function and the tough policy choices they face regarding how to govern their economies.

How do the institutional designs of contemporary democratic governments influence their implementation of policies that strike some type of balance between the state and markets? We will concentrate on variations in the powers granted presidents by constitutions as well as the institutional determinants of whether executives are likely to find support for their policies in the legislature. In addition, we will explore how incentives established by electoral laws influence the priorities of members of congress. Given all these variations in democratic institutional design, can voters go to the polls with the confidence that politicians will implement the economic policies for which their parties have long stood?

Political science requires a systematic form of critical thinking that emulates the scientific method. Therefore, we will not only discuss specific historical events but also ways to generalize from them to create conceptual constructs and theoretical lessons. To facilitate our goals of comparison and generalization, our approach will be thematic. We will study one theoretical question after another, and then repeat that same set of questions for the next national case. Emphasizing the same questions across five countries — Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Venezuela — should promote our ability to make connections across both topics and cases.

Assignments and Evaluations

Participation: You must keep up with the reading assignments, and they are detailed below for your convenience. These assignments are not optional, and you should bring a copy of the day's readings to class for reference purposes. Class participation is essential, and remaining current on the readings is a necessary first step toward in-class participation. If you do not voluntarily participate in our discussions, you should expect to be called-on regularly. At times readings and class discussions will be on quite distinct topics — so one cannot be substituted for the other. Once per week, Tuesday morning or Thursday morning, you must e-mail me a discussion question for that day's class. Each Friday please send me an e-mail assessing your own attendance and participation during the previous week. Feel free to comment on the attendance and participation of others if they stand out in some way. I will respond to each of your e-mails with my own assessment. Occasional quizzes may be used to evaluate your preparedness. Attendance, participation, and quizzes will determine 20% of your final grade.

In-Class Examinations: You will be evaluated with an in-class examination near the mid-term and near the end of the semester. The in-class portion of the exam will be designed to determine whether you are retaining the material covered by the reading assignments and during our discussions. Forms of questions will include true/false, multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and short essay. Each of the in-class exams will be worth 20% of your final grade. You are encouraged to submit exam questions through out the semester. We will use your suggested questions as review materials and as a means of helping you get a sense of my expectations.

Take-Home Essays: On approximately the same dates as the mid-term and the final, you will also address a topic in an essay that you complete outside the classroom. The take-home essay assignments will evaluate your ability to grapple with more complex, cause and effect relationships. We will define a page limit for each topic – typically six or seven pages (double spaced, 12 point font, 1 inch margins, etc.). You are encouraged to draw on your class notes, all readings, and films as you write your papers. Tips to keep in mind when writing your essays:

1. Be sure to state causal hypotheses clearly.
2. Define big conceptual dimensions explicitly.
3. Operationalize those dimensions concretely, thinking about the different values variables can take.
4. Choose your case specific examples such that key variables take on an array of values.

Each of the take-home essays will be worth 20% of your final grade.

Readings

Blake, Charles H. 2008. *Politics in Latin America: The Quests for Development, Liberty, and Governance*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Stein, Ernesto, and Mariano Tomassi, eds. 2008. *Policymaking in Latin America: How Politics Shapes Policies*. Washington DC: Interamerican Development Bank.

Latin America Weekly Report. Full text available on-line through the library's web page. (Specific articles TBA.)

Additional readings (denoted with an asterisk) will be provided by Professor Crisp.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Tu 1/14 No Readings Class logistics

Overview of Our Approach		
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Th 1/16	Blake 22-47 Baker* 183-210	Development and Regime Type States, Markets, and Development Models
Tu 1/21	Stein/Tomassi 1-28	Constitutional and Partisan Powers
Th 1/23	Stein/Tomassi 29-68	A Model of Policy-Making Process

Argentina		
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Tu 1/28	Blake 109-152	The Reversal of Development
Th 1/30	Stein/Tomassi 69-97	Potentially Dominant Presidents
Tu 2/4	Stein/Tomassi 97-110	Policy Instability
Th 2/6	<i>LAWR</i>	Issues Currently on the Agenda in Argentina

Brazil		
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Tu 2/11	Blake 153-195	The Triple Alliance
Th 2/13	Stein/Tomassi 111-128	Many Undisciplined Parties
Tu 2/18	Stein/Tomassi 128-153	Trading 'Pork' for Policy
Th 2/20	<i>LAWR</i>	Issues Currently on the Agenda in Brazil

Chile		
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Tu 2/25	Blake 197-235	Development Strategy Extremes
Th 2/27	Stein/Tomassi 155-178	Parties, Alliances, Discipline
Tu 3/4	Stein/Tomassi 178-198	Veto Players and Policy Outcomes
Th 3/6	<i>LAWR</i>	Issues Currently on the Agenda in Chile

SPRING BREAK

Exam I		
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Tu 3/18	No Readings	In-Class Exam
Th 3/20	No Readings	Take-Home Essay Due

Mexico		
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Tu 3/25	Blake 319-359	The State in the Economy
Th 3/27	Stein/Tomassi 287-308	No Decree+No Veto= Powerful President
Tu 4/1	Stein/Tomassi 308-328	From Partisan Power to Powerless
Th 4/3	<i>LAWR</i>	Issues Currently on the Agenda in Mexico

Venezuela		
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Tu 4/8	Blake 361-401	Petrodollars
Th 4/10	Stein/Tomassi 371-392	Two, Disciplined Parties
Tu 4/15	Stein/Tomassi 392-417	From Partisan Power to Partisan Monopoly
Th 4/17	<i>LAWR</i>	Issues Currently on the Agenda in Venezuela

Comparing Presidential Systems		
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Tu 4/24	Crisp, Desposato, Kanthak*	Pivotal Politics
Th 4/26	Johnson and Crisp*	Electoral Mandates and Policy Change

Exam II		
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Tu 5/7	No Readings	Exam (6:00 p.m.)
Tu 5/7	No Readings	Take-Home Essay Due