



Democracy in Central America: an ongoing question

INTRODUCTION

This course explores Central American politics, human rights and development both from a historical and contemporary perspective, with the idea of showing the links between an unstable past and an uncertain future. The course is mainly focused on how historical events in Central American nations have shaped the changing relations between the state, the economy and society and have impacted the settling of democracy in the region, particularly in terms of human rights and development in the region.

Central America¹ has an important historical and strategic relation with the United States, thus, one section of the course will examine the current political dynamics between the United States and Central American countries, mainly in terms of the two most important topics in this agenda: immigration and the war on drugs.

As an introduction, main concepts related to political science, such as power, state, political systems and democracy will be studied, while the last part of the course will focus on the relations of the region with the rest of the world, particularly with the United States.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) Identify key aspects of Central American geography, both natural and human (political, economical and cultural);
- 2) Review the main historical patterns followed by the Central American countries in achieving democratic consolidation;
- 3) Analyze the main contemporary problems, challenges, and perspectives of the Central American region, especially those linked to the political systems, democratic performance, and development goals;
- 4) Develop basic understanding of the Central American region in terms of its current challenges and perspectives in the context of a dynamic and global international system, with special emphasis on the relations between the region and the United States.

¹ Because of both historical and geopolitical reasons, Belize has been excluded from the course's contents, although this might be reconsidered if students show interest in reviewing it.

Course Contents

Unit I: BASIC CONCEPTS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

The first unit provides a basic concept framework as a working tool to understand the political reality of Central America.

- Why politics matter: politics and power
- Features of the State and political systems
- Geopolitics – Central American geography: natural and human (political, economical and cultural)

Unit II: CENTRAL AMERICAN POLITICS THROUGHOUT HISTORY

This unit focuses on understanding the link between current Central American realities and the region's historical evolution, with a special highlight on the role of the military and other social actors (such as civil society and the church) in Central American history.

- Brief review of the pre-colonial period, colony and independence until 1838: Dissolution of the Central American Federation
- Period 1838—1945: Expansion of US influence in the region
- Period 1954—1990: Cold War and authoritarian regimes
- Period 1990—2013: Democratic consolidation

Unit III: PRESENT POLITICAL CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES OF CENTRAL AMERICAN NATIONS

This unit reviews Central America as a current interesting political laboratory, with diverse changes and challenges to the traditional ruling systems.

- Central America: current political fragmentation – Northern triangle (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador) vs. Southern countries (Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panamá).
- Main problems of Latin American societies: a country-by-country panorama with special accent on poverty and security issues (including “maras” or gangs)
- Central America-USA relationships overview: immigration and the war on drugs as main features of this foreign policy agenda

METHODOLOGY

As an introductory course, no previous knowledge of Central America is required. The course combines lectures/seminars, special assignments, field activities and essay tests. Previous reading is essential and class participation is strongly encouraged.

Due to the dynamics and subjects covered throughout the course, special guests might also be invited for discussing specific topics.

EVALUATION:

Attendance and participation:	10%
Presentations and quizzes (5):	25%
Exam 1:	20%
Country case study: <i>(based on textbook and case choice)</i>	25%
Exam 2:	20%
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TOTAL :	100%

Course's Main Textbook:

Booth, J., Wade, C., Walker, T. (2011). *Understanding Central America*. Fifth edition. Westview Press.

ADDITIONAL READING REFERENCES:

Bowen, G. (n.d.). *Concepts of political science: the system model*. Retrieved from <http://www.mbc.edu/faculty/gbowen/conceptsSystem.htm>

Briscoe, I. (2008). Trouble on the borders: Latin America's new conflict zones. FRIDE Comments, Retrieved from http://www.cries.org/boletin/COM_Borderlands_Americas_ENG_jul081.pdf

Crandell, R. (2011). The Post American Hemisphere. *Foreign Affairs*, 90 (3), 83-95. Retrieved from http://www3.davidson.edu/cms/documents/Academics/Departments/PoliticalScience/Crandall_ThePost-AmericanHemisphere.pdf

Detmer, J., Cussen, C; Lillie, A. (n.d.) The Republic of Panama: Past, Present, and Future Regarding the Panama Canal. EDGE (online journal) – Ethics of development in a global environment. Stanford University. Retrieved from http://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/war_peace/americas/hpanama.html

Dooley, K. L., & Patten, J. N. (2012). *Why politics matter: An introduction to political science*. Boston: Cengage learning. Chapter 1 “Why politics matter?”

Hakim, P. (2011). Latin America: from an unhappy past to a promising future. *América Economía*, Retrieved from <http://www.thedialogue.org/page.cfm?pageID=32&pubID=2688>

- Hakim, P. (2006). Is Washington losing Latin America? *Foreign Affairs*, 85 (1), 39. Retrieved from <http://tomweston.net/LosingLatinAm.pdf>
- Hiskey, J., Malone, M., Orcés, D. (2014). Violence and migration in Central America. America's Barometer Insights 2014. Number 101. Online publication. Retrieved from: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/IO901en.pdf>
- Hodger, A. (April, 11 2012). *Remaking the relationship: the United States and Latin America*. Retrieved from <http://www.thedialogue.org/page.cfm?pageID=32&pubID=2937>
- Mabry, D. (2002). Colonial Latin America. Llumina Press. Retrieved from <http://historicaltextarchive.com/latin/colonial.pdf>
- Paige, J. (1997). *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America*. Harvard University Press.
- Ramírez, S. (2010, February). *Nicaragua: a lost revolution*. Paper presented at Latin American and Caribbean Center at Florida International University Latin America and Caribbean Center 1979-2009: Celebrating 30 years, University Park, DM.
- Scartascini, C., Stein, E., & Tommasi, M. (2010). Political institutions, actors and arenas in Latin America policymaking. In C. Scartascini, E. Stein & M. Tommasi (Eds.). *How democracy works: political institutions, actors and arenas in Latin America policymaking* (pp. 1-19). Cambridge, MA: IDB Office of External Relations.
- Shifter, M. (2011). Central America's predicament. *Current History*, February 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/news/020111.CurrentHistory.pdf>
- Washington Office on Latin America – WOLA and the Jesuits Service. (2014). Myths and Facts on Central American Migration Surge. Online publication. Retrieved from: <http://www.jesuits.org/Assets/Publications/File/Myths%20and%20Facts%20on%20Central%20American%20Migration%20Surge.pdf>
- Wiarda, H., Kline, H. (2009). *A Concise Introduction to Latin American Politics and Development*. Second edition. Westview Press.
- Wolf, S. (n.d). Central American Gangs: Foregrounding the silences. Online publication. Retrieved from: <http://centralamericasecurity.thedialogue.org/wp-content/themes/iad/download-file.php?filename=Central-American-Gang-Violence-Foregrounding-the-Silences.pdf&filepath=http://centralamericasecurity.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Central-American-Gang-Violence-Foregrounding-the-Silences.pdf>

ICDS Academic Policy

Special Needs: In case of requiring additional time for taking exams, or if experiencing any circumstance during the course of the term that would interfere with the student's ability to complete his/her work or take a test, students should let the professor know ahead of time.

Academic Integrity: Students in this course are expected to abide by common sense and normal regulations on Academic Integrity. Violations of the Academic Integrity policy include, but are not limited to plagiarism, fabrication, cheating, and academic misconduct, including dishonest acts such as tampering with grades or taking part in obtaining or distributing any part of an administered or unadministered test/assignment. The intent to violate this policy also represents a violation of this policy.

Possible Sanctions for Violating Academic Integrity Policy: If an act of academic dishonesty is determined to have occurred, one or more of the following sanctions will be imposed, depending on the severity of a first-time offense:

- Reduction of a course grade
- Obtention of an "F" grade for the assignment or exam
- Failure for the entire course
- Other action deemed appropriate by the faculty member
- Any of the above sanctions with the inability to withdraw.

The decision about the sanction to apply will be made jointly by the course's professor and ICDS' Academic Director, in consultation with home university on-site Director for the program, if applicable. The incident will be reported to the home university and may result in an official conduct record for the student(s).

Second violation: A second violation will result in suspension or expulsion from the program, in addition to any sanction issued from the list above.

Changes to Syllabus: The student acknowledges receipt of this syllabus and the information herein by continuing to attend this course. The Instructor reserves the right to make changes to this syllabus if circumstances warrant such change, with previous approval of ICDS' Academic Director. All major changes will be provided to the student in writing.