

Violence, Drug Trafficking and Crime in Latin America

Course focus (50 words):

The aim of this course is to examine the historical factors behind Latin America's contemporary security crisis. With a particular focus on the region's process of modernization, state building and democratization, the course examines the linkages between political and criminal, as well as between past and present forms of violence.

Learning outcomes (30 words)

Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the main institutional, cultural, and political reasons behind the prevalence of violence and crime in the Latin American region.

Course description:

Despite having experienced a process of democratic consolidation and economic stability over the last three decades, Latin America is considered one of the most violent and insecure regions in the world today. The aim of this course is to examine the historical factors behind Latin America's current levels of insecurity. With a particular focus on the twentieth-century history of modernization, state building and democratization in the region, the course will analyze the impact that institutional, cultural and political processes have had in the organization and legitimation of crime and violence across the region. The use of extralegal forms of violence by political actors and economic elites, social constructions of masculinity and honor, and the moral economy of subaltern groups, among other phenomena, will be examined as historical drivers that contributed shaping the region's particular criminal and violent landscape. In an effort to understand the political underpinnings of violence and crime, the course will highlight the relation between the history of crime (including drug-trafficking, street crime, and gender violence) and the history of political violence (particularly, political repression and extrajudicial killings).

Assessment:

Class participation and attendance: 10%
Pop quizzes (4 during the semester): 20%
Mid-term exam: 30%
Final exam: 40%

Reading materials

Salvatorre, Ricardo, Carlos Aguirre and Gilbert Joseph (eds.) *Crime and Punishment in Latin America*. Duke University Press, 2001.

Santamaría, Gema and Carey, David (eds.) *Violence and Crime in Latin America: Representations and Politics*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017.

Arias, Enrique Desmond and Daniel Goldstein (eds.) *Violent Democracy in Latin America: Toward an Interdisciplinary Reconceptualization*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Schedule

Week 1 Crime and violence in Latin America today

- Overview of Latin America's current levels of violence and crime: similarities and differences between countries and within countries
- Beyond drug-trafficking: assessing the impact of drug-related violence in the region vis-à-vis other crimes

Week 2 Violence and state building in Latin America

- The role of violence in the makings of Latin American states (nineteenth and twentieth-century)
- Riots and popular forms of resistance towards the processes of state formation in the region

Week 3 Crime and punishment in modern Latin America

- The birth of the prison in Latin America: criminological debates about modernity and social dangers
- From the death penalty to more 'humane' forms of punishment

Week 4 Crime in twentieth-century Latin American cities

- The emergence of an urban underclass
- Police detectives and their encounters with urban dwellers

Week 5 Social constructions of crime: gender, race, and ethnicity

- Honor, masculinity and the 'male' offender
- Racialized representations of deviancy in Latin America

Week 6 Political violence: Part 1 (revolutions)

- Mexican Revolution: thugs, caciques, and social bandits
- Guerrilla warfare: Cuban Revolution and Central America

Week 7 Political violence: Part 2 (dictatorships)

- Military repression: a view of the Southern Cone
- Repression under the 'perfect' dictatorship: the case of Mexico

Week 8 Legacies of the Cold War

- Anti-communism in comparative perspective

- The rise of paramilitaries and death squads

Week 9 Drug-trafficking in the Americas

- The Andean region (1960s-1980s)
- Mexico and the new war on drugs (1980s-present)

Week 10 Violence and Democratization

- Electoral transitions and failed institutional reforms
- Economic inequality and crime

Week 11 Vigilantism and popular forms of justice

- Self-defense forces in Latin America
- Lynching: Guatemala, Bolivia, and Mexico

Week 12 Transnational youth gangs (*maras*)

- The emergence of *maras* in the Central American northern triangle
- Why there are no *maras* in Nicaragua and Mexico?

Week 13 Femicides

- Violence against women: an overview of the region
- Mexico and Guatemala (1990s-present)

Week 14 State responses to violence and crime

- 'Mano dura' policies: Brazil, Central America, and Mexico
- Towards an integral approach