Democracy in Recent Latin America

OSHER 431-001

Times: 9:30 AM – 11:00 AM
Location: Commander's House, Fort Douglas
Instructor: Edward Epstein

Course Overview

This class looks at democratic politics in Latin America by focusing on two of the most successful cases. The present democracies in Brazil and Chile are of fairly recent origin, 1985 and 1990 respectively, quite similar to much of the rest of the region. We will examine their accomplishments amid continuing problems.

Two paperbacks are suggested reading:

Alfred Montero, Brazilian Politics, ISBN 0745633617; and
Lois Oppenheim, Politics in Chile, ISBN 9780813342276.

Session 1: Brazil and Chile as examples of current Latin American politics

a. Democratic transition from previous authoritarian regimes (i.e., dictatorships).
b. Patrimonialism & neoliberalism.
c. Federalism vs. centralism.
d. Economic success of both Brazil and Chile.

Session 2: Democracy in theory and in reality

a. Public opinion in Brazil and Chile in comparison to other Latin American countries.
b. Public confidence in political institutions.
c. How representative are the political parties?
d. Social problems like poverty and inequality.
Session 3: Brazil (part 1)

- The patrimonial elite.
- Hyper multi-party democracy.
- Curbing runaway-inflation.
- Continuing poverty and inequality.

Session 4: Brazil (part 2)

- Politics with Lula (da Silva) and Dilma (Rousseff).
- Recent corruption scandals.
- Social Reform with the “Bolsa Escola”.
- Life in the city slums (“favelas”) and in the countryside under the “Colonels.”

Session 5: Chile (part 1)

- The inherited Pinochet constitution.
- “Growth with equity” under the Concertación.
- Political stability almost at all costs.
- Human rights and continuing relations with the military.

Session 6: Chile (part 2)

- Political reforms under neoliberalism.
- Democracy and the political alienation of the young.
- Student protests in the streets (the “march of the penguins”).
- Elections: the Concertación vs. the Alliance for Chile.