

**Topics in Latin American Politics:  
Political Ecology and Extractivism in the Americas**

**POL 360  
Winter 2024**

**Tuesday 1-3:00pm  
Sidney Smith Hall Rm 2108**

**Donald V. Kingsbury, PhD**  
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**Office Hours:**  
**Th 12:30-2:30p (and by appointment)**  
**1 Devonshire Avenue, Room 366-S**  
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**Political Ecology and Extractivism in the Americas**

This third year course introduces students to Political Ecology approaches to the study of Latin American politics. The course examines historical and contemporary state-society-nature relations, with an emphasis on extractivism, development, and attempts to resist exclusion, inequality, and environmental racism. Case studies of note include the formation of the petrostate in Venezuela and Ecuador, mining sectors in Chile and Bolivia, and agribusiness in Brazil and Argentina.

**Learning Objectives**

This course introduce students to key concepts and dynamics in Latin American politics through the lens of political ecology. Our work this semester aims to:

- Highlight the specificity of political ecology against other disciplinary, methodological, and ethical approaches in the social sciences;
- Introduce, contextualize, and problematize approaches to development that rely on resource extraction and export;
- Enhance our deep and critical reading skills;
- Build research skills through independent archival research;
- Practice and hone written communication skills through a research paper.

## Assessment

Marks for this course will be determined via a combination of response papers, a midterm exam, and a final exam. Exams will be conducted via quercus.

Assignment	Due Date(s)	Weight
Response paper 1	<i>Before</i> 6 February	10 pts
Response paper 2	<i>Before</i> 19 March	10 pts
Midterm Exam	February 13	40 pts
Final Exam	TBA	40 pts

**Response Papers** (1-2 pages, double spaced, 12-point font) critical engagements with one or more of the assigned readings from a specific class meeting, to be submitted to quercus no later than the start of lecture (ie., no later than 10:59 am) for the selected week. Response papers should only offer minimal summary but should instead discuss the implications, errors and oversights, or further applications of a given article's arguments.

Please note that the Faculty of Arts and Sciences requires students receive marks a percentage of their marks prior to the drop date. As such, the first response paper must be handed in prior to our meeting on 5 February.

Responses papers can earn:

**No Credit (0 points):** Papers do not engage with an assigned reading (ie., no citations), are based on hearsay or unsubstantiated opinion, or are otherwise unsatisfactory (hard to read, logically flawed)

**Half Credit (5 points):** Papers engage with an assigned reading, but in a superficial fashion. These papers may engage with the general idea of a selected text, but fail to adequately cite ideas or lack direct discussion of concepts, historical events, or stakeholders.

**Credit (10 points):** Papers engage with, cite from, and discuss a selected week's readings in a direct, clear, and compelling manner.

On your responses, please be sure to indicate which week's readings you are addressing. Failure to do so will result in partial credit.

Please note, as there are nine opportunities to submit these response papers, no requests for extension will be granted.

**Midterm** Based on the readings, lectures, and other materials from the first half of the course. The midterm will be made up of identification and short answer questions. A study guide will be circulated the week before the exam.

**Final** Based on the readings, lectures, and other materials from the second half of the course. The final will be made up of identification and short answer questions. A study guide will be circulated the week before the exam.

### **Note on Attendance**

While we will not be taking attendance in lectures, please note that important announcements and adjustments to the course schedule will be announced in class and might not be replicated in other venues.

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### **Grading Rubric**

A: Excellent work, with clear, challenging, original ideas supported by sufficient, appropriate, logically interpreted evidence. 'A' quality work should engage the reader in the inquiry, convincingly answer opposing views, be well organized, and free of significant flaws. An 'A' paper should be not just good but outstanding in ideas and presentation.

B: Good to very good work, with a clear thesis supported by sufficient, appropriate evidence, organized and interpreted logically. The 'B' paper may have some outstanding qualities but be marked by significant flaws which keep it from being an 'A'; or it may be all-around good work, free of major problems but lacking the deeper insight necessary for excellence.

C: Satisfactory work, but not yet good. The 'C' paper meets the basic requirements of a thesis supported by interpretation of specific evidence, but it needs work in thinking and/or presentation. There may be a lack of clarity, the evidence may not always be sufficient and appropriate, or the interpretation may have logical flaws. The paper may have organizational or mechanical problems that keep it from being good. The 'C' paper may be good in some respects but poor in others, or it may simply be adequate but not noteworthy overall.

D: Barely passing work that shows effort but is so marred by serious problems that it cannot be considered a satisfactory paper. Papers without a readily identifiable thesis are liable to be graded 'D'.

No Pass: Failing work—for example, a hasty, sloppy paper that shows little or no thought, effort, or familiarity with the text.

Please Note: Poor mechanics detract from your grades, but good mechanics by themselves do not make a good paper. Sloppy grammar, punctuation, and spelling tax the goodwill of your reader, which all effective writing is careful to respect. These problems won't be overlooked, since they affect the communication of thought— but thoughtful work is the most important.

### **Email Policy**

For the purposes of this course, the primary use of email will be to share information such as announcements of events of note or news stories relevant to the course material and to schedule meetings for more individualized matters. Email is a poor medium for discussing or clarifying substantive questions that come up in lectures or reading. Face to face (even if on-screen) interactions are much better for this sort of work. Please ask substantive questions in class or during office hours.

I do my best to respond in a timely fashion (usually within 48 hours) to all student emails. Please do not expect an immediate response, especially on evenings and weekends. Please be sure that any questions you have are not already answered in the syllabus. I will neither respond to nor acknowledge questions that can be answered in the syllabus.

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### **Background and Refreshers**

Ideally students will arrive prepared with a degree of background in Latin American politics and history. Advanced knowledge of Latin American history is a much-encouraged plus, but not a prerequisite for enrollment. Readings and lectures are intended to be accessible to newcomers and specialists alike. As always, the best way to get around any problems that might arise due to gaps in the knowledge we come to the course with is to ask questions, to ask them often, and to ask them without fear.

Students less familiar might consider referencing general histories of Latin America such as:

John C. Chasteen (2011) *Born in Blood and Fire* (New York: W.W. Norton)

Tulio Halperin Donghi (1993) *The Contemporary History of Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press)

Eduardo Galeano (1997) *Open Veins of Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press)

Robert Gwynne and Cristobal Kay (1999) *Latin America Transformed* (New York: Routledge)

### **Additional Resources**

A very (very, very) partial list of potentially useful links for more information on the history and present of extractivism and research in political ecology. I expect many of you have your own preferred sources, which I encourage you to share on the course Discussion Board this semester.

University of Toronto's United Nations and Intergovernmental Organization Research Guide – <https://guides.library.utoronto.ca/igo> -- your one-stop source for NGO and IGO reports, datasets, and agreements (includes a Google custom search!).

Environmental Conflict Atlas – <https://ejatlas.org/> – crowd-sourced global resource on ongoing and resolved environmental conflicts.

Mining.com – <https://mining.com> – comprehensive and global mining industry journal.

Mining Watch Canada – <https://miningwatch.ca> – activist website and organization focusing on the impact of Canadian mining companies throughout the world.

Mining Injustice Solidarity Network – <https://mininginjustice.org/> -- Toronto-based organization working to educate the public on the impact of mining on peoples and places in Canada and throughout the world.

Washington Office on Latin America – [www.wola.org](http://www.wola.org) – US-based think tank and lobbying organization focusing on human rights issues in the Americas.

North American Council on Latin America – [www.nacla.org](http://www.nacla.org) – Academic and non-Academic journal dedicated to news and analysis on contemporary Latin American affairs.

Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, FLACSO – <http://www.flacso.org> – network of Latin American researchers and research institutions.

General Readers on Political Ecology:

Raymond L. Bryant, ed. (2015) *The International Handbook of Political Ecology*

Malden, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, James McCarthy, eds. (2015) *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*. New York: Routledge.

### **Schedule of Readings and Topics**

Please note that all readings are available on the U of T library website, or through a search on Google Scholar.

This schedule is subject to revision in response to current events.

#### **1. January 9**

**Intro to the seminar, its themes, and its participants (and a very brief intro to the Latin American region)**

#### **2. January 16**

**Political Ecology Approaches (I)**

Enrique Leff (2015) “Encountering Political Ecology: Epistemology and Emancipation” in *The International Handbook of Political Ecology*, Raymond L Bryant, ed. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 44-56. (Ebook available through library website).

Rebecca Elmhirst (2015) “Feminist Political Ecology” in *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*. Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, James McCarthy, eds. New York: Routledge (Ebook available through library website).

Joan Martínez-Alier (2012) Environmental Justice and Economic Degrowth: An Alliance between Two Movements. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 23:1, 51-73.

*Suggested:*

Andrea Spikin and Jorge Rojas Hernández (2016) “Climate Change in Latin America: Inequality, Conflict, and Social Movements of Adaptation” *Latin American Perspectives* 43(4): 4-11.

Juanita Sundberg (2008) “Placing Race in Environmental Justice Research in Latin America” *Society and Natural Resources* 21: 569-582.

Arturo Escobar (2006) “Difference and Conflict in the Struggle over Natural Resources: A Political Ecology Framework” *Development* 49(3): 6-13.

#### **3. January 23**

**Dependent Development and/as Extraction**

Linda Farthing and Nicole Fabricant (2018) “Open Veins Revisited: Charting the Social, Economic, and Political Contours of the New Extractivism in Latin America” *Latin American Perspectives* 45(5): 4-17.

Cristóbal Kay (2018) Modernization and Dependency Theory. From *The Routledge Handbook of Latin American Development* Julie Cupples, Marcel Palomino-Schalscha, and Manuel Prieto, eds. New York: Routledge, pp 15-28.

*Suggested*

Interview with Arturo Escobar on post-development in Latin America

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/openeconomy/latin-america-in-post-development-era-interview-with-artu/>

**4. January 30**

**Extractivism**

Murat Arsel, et al (2016) “The Extractive Imperative in Latin America” *The Extractive Industries and Society* 3(4): 880-887.

Thea Riofrancos (2017) “*Extractivismo* Unearthed: A Genealogy of a Radical Discourse” *Cultural Studies* 31(2-3): 277-306.

Working Group on Mining and Human Rights in Latin America (2014) *The Impact of Canadian Mining in Latin America and Canada’s Responsibility: Executive Summary*.  
[http://www.dplf.org/sites/default/files/report\\_canadian\\_mining\\_executive\\_summary.pdf](http://www.dplf.org/sites/default/files/report_canadian_mining_executive_summary.pdf)

**5. February 6**

**Political Ecology (II): The coloniality of nature**

Héctor Alimonda (2019) “The Coloniality of Nature: An Approach to Latin American Political Ecology” <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2019/6/10/the-coloniality-of-nature-an-approach-to-latin-american-political-ecology>

**6. February 13**

**Midterm Exam (on Quercus)**

**Film:**

*Hija de la Laguna* (Daughter of the Lake – Ernesto Cabellos, 2015)

[https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO\\_INST/14bjeso/alma991106209670806196](https://librarysearch.library.utoronto.ca/permalink/01UTORONTO_INST/14bjeso/alma991106209670806196)

**February 20 – Reading Week**

**7. March 5**

\*\*\*Space being held for out of the classroom event. Details or alternatives TBA\*\*\*

### **8. March 12**

#### **Extractive Cities and the Urbanization of Nature**

Martín Arboleda (2016) “In the Nature of the Non-City: Expanded Infrastructural Networks and the Political Ecology of Planetary Urbanisation” *Antipode* 48(2): 233-251.

Niko Block (2017) “Toronto’s Buried History: The Dark Story of How Mining Built a City” *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/mar/03/toronto-hidden-history-how-city-built-mining>

### **9. March 19**

\*\*\*To Be Confirmed\*\*\*

Tour of Extractivist Toronto with the Mining Injustice Solidarity Network – Meeting place TBD

### **10. March 26**

#### **‘Progressive’ Extractivism**

Maristella Svampa (2015) Commodities Consensus: Neoextractivism and Enclosure of the Commons in Latin America *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 114(1): 65-82.

Gudynas, Eduardo (2010) ‘The New Extractivism of the 21st Century: Ten Urgent Theses about Extractivism in Relation to Current South American Progressivism.’ *Americas Program Report*. Washington, DC: Center for International Policy. <http://postdevelopment.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NewExtractivism10ThesesGudynas10.pdf>

*Suggested*

Karen Siegel (2016) “Fulfilling Promises of More Substantive Democracy?: Post-Neoliberalism and Natural Resource Governance in South America. *Development and Change*. 47(3): 495-516.

### **11. April 2**

**Make-up/Wrap-up class (at instructor’s discretion)**