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

Office Hours:
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Th 12:30-2:30p (and by appointment)
1 Devonshire Avenue, Room 366-S
Munk School of Global Affairs and 
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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.

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date(s)</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response paper 1</td>
<td><em>Before</em> 6 February</td>
<td>10 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response paper 2</td>
<td><em>Before</em> 19 March</td>
<td>10 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>February 13</td>
<td>40 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>40 pts</td>
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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 than 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:


**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](https://guides.library.utoronto.ca/igo) -- your one-stop source for NGO and IGO reports, datasets, and agreements (includes a Google custom search!).


Mining Watch Canada – [https://miningwatch.ca](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/](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.


General Readers on Political Ecology:

Malden, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing.


**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)


   **Suggested:**


3. **January 23**
   Dependent Development and/as Extraction


*Suggested*

Interview with Arturo Escobar on post-development in Latin America

4. January 30

**Extractivism**


5. February 6

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


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

**February 20 – Reading Week**

7. March 5
8. March 12
Extractive Cities and the Urbanization of Nature


9. March 19

***To Be Confirmed***
Tour of Extractivist Toronto with the Mining Injustice Solidarity Network – Meeting place TBD

10. March 26

‘Progressive’ Extractivism


Suggested


11. April 2

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

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