

MEXICAN POLITICS CLASS SYLLABUS

Spring 2013

Day and Time: Tuesday-Thursday, 5-6:20

SSL-140

Instructor: Ricardo Chavira

Office Hours: By Appointment

Office: SST 705

Official address: chavirar@uci.edu

TA: Zabu Tufail: ztufail@uci.edu

Course Overview

This class is founded on an important premise: Mexico is the country that most affects the United States. Israel, Iran, Syria or North Korea, to name but a few, all seem to constantly hold our collective attention. Yet, ask yourself what country but Mexico has such intertwined history, geography, trade and demography?

For seventy years Mexico functioned as the “perfect dictatorship” and a model of national stability. The mega-political machine, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), masterfully stage managed its long hold on power.

However, in one of the hemisphere’s most dramatic and important shifts, the unique dictatorship that Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa so aptly described lost its grip on the presidency. The election of 2000 saw the first opposition candidate, the National Action Party’s (PAN) Vicente Fox, win in a largely unforeseen landslide.

Another PAN member, Felipe Calderon, eked out a narrow victory in the 2006 election. Calderon lost little time in launching a full-scale war against the drug mafias. An estimated 60,000 were killed and another 20,000 officially disappeared in the resulting violence that consumed his six-year presidency.

Against that backdrop, the PRI did not did not fade away, as many political observers confidently predicted.

Far from it, the PRI and candidate Enrique Pena Nieto swept back into the presidency in July 2012.

Today, the young and sometimes controversial president is striving to lead Mexico out of the drug war's bloody chaos toward economic vibrancy. There are indications he's having success. The economy is projected to expand by a respectable 3.5% in 2013

Meanwhile, the Mexican left has fallen into disarray. The Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), which narrowly lost the presidential race to Calderon, a vote marked by allegations of irregularities, had been a powerful counterpoint to the conservative PAN.

One thing is indisputable:

We are witnessing Mexico's incipient transition to democracy, even as the country battles endemic corruption, lack of solid institutions and economic underdevelopment.

This course will trace the origins of today's transition and describe the forces reshaping Mexico. We will also conduct comparative analysis, examining and discussing similarities to other noteworthy democratic transitions, among them those of South Korea, Brazil and Chile.

Mexico's political system is highly complex and the product of a rich and turbulent history. By quarter's end, you should enjoy a full and profound understanding of the country's continuing political transformation and of the challenges it has yet to overcome

Course Requirements and Expectations

Much of what you learn in this class will depend on the extent of your participation in discussions. Regular attendance, consequently, is highly important. Lectures and resulting discussions will enrich text readings. I do not post my lecture notes, as they are constantly updated, and frequently I extemporaneously add information to my chats.

Supplemental readings will be posted. Often you will find news stories. These will help us keep abreast of what is a dynamic, contemporary and evolving field. Initially, we will explore the historical events and trends that have shaped the Mexican political system. By the third week we will be examining the recent and current scene.

The grading criteria will be based on a midterm exam, a research paper and the final exam. We will use a point system as follows:

Midterm exam 100 points

Research paper 150 points

Final exam 200 points

TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS: 450

There are no extra credit opportunities, and your course grade will be based entirely on points accumulated.

The prompt for the paper is available on the class site. We will conduct reviews for the exams.

If you believe you will not be able to attend class on the day of an exam, I must be informed and approve of other arrangements for you to complete the test. Plainly, in the event of an extreme emergency, I will be flexible. We all are quite busy; however completion of other commitments does not justify not fulfilling the requirements of this class.

Please do not go online during class; laptops should be used for taking notes.

I will do my utmost to make the course exceptionally beneficial and enjoyable. To that end, I will be as available as humanly possible. The surest way to reach me is at either of the email addresses listed above. My job is to do whatever is necessary to enhance your education. Your job is to put forth your best effort.

My teaching style is somewhat informal, but you will find this a fairly challenging class.

TEXT

Contemporary Mexican Politics, Edmonds and Shirk

****Note: This text is not available at the bookstore. You may buy on Amazon or any other vendor.***

Optional Text: The Wind that Swept Mexico

OTHER READINGS

Please consult class website for additional readings organized by week. These readings offer valuable supplemental information.

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE

April 2nd: Introduction and Course Overview

April 4th: Mexico: Not Just a Neighbor

Readings: Text, Chapter One

WEEK TWO

April 9th: Mexican Pre-Columbian history

April 11th: Mexican Colonial History

Readings: Text, Chapter Two

WEEK THREE

April 16th: Mexican Independence and Early politics in Latin America's context

April 18th: The significance of Mexico-United States relations

Readings, Text, Chapter 13

WEEK FOUR

April 23rd: Overview of Mexico's Political Transition and the Challenge of the War on Drugs

***Research proposals due**

April 25th: Electoral competition: The PRD

Readings: Text, Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six

WEEK FIVE

April 30th: Midterm Review

May 2nd: Midterm Exam

WEEK SIX

May 7th: Why Mexicans voted for change and then went back to the future: The National Action Party; a devalued presidency and decentralization

May 9th: Economic development and crisis

***Research paper due**

Readings: Text, Chapters Seven and Eight

WEEK SEVEN

May 14th: The media and political change

Readings: Text, Chapters Nine and Ten

May 16th: The military and human rights

Readings: Text, Chapter II

WEEK EIGHT

May 21st: Indigenous Mexico

May 23rd: Drugs, Mexico and the U.S.

Readings: Posted reports on Mexican drug trade

WEEK NINE

May 28th: *Los Narcos* as political actors

May 30th: The politics of immigration

WEEK TEN

June 4th: Rule of law and civil society

June 7th: Comparative analysis of democratic transitions

FINAL EXAM REVIEW AND CLASS SUMMARY

Final Exam: TBA