

**LEFT BEHIND:
The Ends of Latin America's Left Turns**

December 5, 2016
Room 2050, SFU Harbour Centre, Vancouver

9:00am-9:30am: Coffee and Introductions

9:30am-10:00am: Questions and Debates

With Jon Beasley-Murray, Max Cameron, and Alec Dawson

10:00am-11:50am: Burying the Left

Chair: Alejandro Rojas. Discussant: Hannah Wittman

Max Cameron, "Cycles of Political Change in Latin America"

Leslie Elliott Armijo, "Economic Policies of the Left in Power: Legacies in Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela"

Alejandro Velasco, "Oil, Socialism, and Revolution in Venezuela: A Reckoning"

12:00-1:00pm: Lunch

1:00pm-2:50pm: An Unquiet Corpse

Chair: Alessandra Santos. Discussant: Pilar Riaño

Efe Can Gürcan and Gerardo Otero, "Was There a Left Turn in Latin America? Measuring Government Leftism Immersion"

Zaraí Toledo Orozco, Dominique Rumeau Castellazzi, and Fabio Resmini, "What is Left of the Left: Analyzing Policy Endurance in Latin America"

Eric Hershberg, "Latin America's Left Turns: Domestic and External Determinants of Sustainability"

2:50-3:10pm: Coffee

3:10pm-5:00pm: Everything Old is New Again

Chair: Gastón Gordillo. Discussant: Juan Hernández

Renato Francisquini, "(Anti)Politics and Democracy: On the Road to a New Technocracy"

Gerardo Muñoz, "Posthegemonic Institutionalities: Five Theses after the End of the Latin American Progressive Cycle"

Jon Beasley-Murray, "Latency and Surprise: The Temporality of the Multitude"

5:00pm-6:30pm: Conclusion: Open Discussion

Discussants: Alejandra Bronfman, Chris Gibson, John Harriss

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Questions

We sent these questions as prompts to our speakers. They are not meant to be exhaustive, merely starting points for discussion and debate...

1) What is the legacy of the past decade or so of left-wing governments? What will endure, and what will soon pass into history? To what extent will they condition the politics of the next few years, including that of the right-wing governments that are replacing them?

2) Is the current rightward shift in Latin American politics another swing of the pendulum, which we should expect to be followed by another swing? If so, what is the region swinging toward? What have been the more enduring legacies of the Left Turns? Have there been substantive, structural, and long-term legacies, pendular shifts notwithstanding?

3) Is the Latin American Right a coherent idea, or should we think of it as many different rights? In either case, what is the Latin American Right today? Is it more democratic, more middle class? Historically, the Right has not been effective in building political parties—is the current conjuncture promising for right-wing parties?

4) How should we relate both the Left Turns and subsequent shifts to the Right to the recent commodity boom in the region, and globalization more generally?

5) What has happened to the social movements that were so important to the Left Turns? What spaces are available for non-traditional political actors in the current climate?

Left Behind: The Ends of Latin America's Left Turns Abstracts

Jon Beasley-Murray, "Latency and Surprise: The Temporality of the Multitude"

This presentation begins with some observations on the gap between the social mobilizations that presaged the Left Turns (such as Venezuela's 1989 *Caracazo* or Argentina's December 2001 disturbances) and the electoral victories that followed. In each case, the initial revolt took the established system by surprise, and time had to pass before unrest could be transformed or translated into recognizable political demands. This lag then leads us to consider the temporality of constituent power, as it differs from that of representational politics (and constituted power), drawing on the classical distinction between *chronos* and *aiôn*. In the current conjuncture, even as the official organs of the Left seem to have reached a point of exhaustion, the multitude retains its capacity to surprise, not least in its irreverence towards conventional discourses of timetables and timing.

Max Cameron, "Cycles of Political Change in Latin America"

Variations in the new politics of inclusion reflect divergent trajectories of institutional change. Three major critical junctures have forged state-society relations in modern Latin America. First, the construction of oligarchic states following periods of anarchy after independence set the stage for polarization between oligarchies and "*lo popular*." Second, the incorporation of organized labor during the emergence of the popular sectors resulted in partial inclusion via corporatism and mass parties. Third, popular movements against neoliberalism led, in some cases, to Left Turns. Radical popular and participatory inclusion has emerged in those regions and countries that are the focus of the new extractivism—particularly where, historically, labor-repressive agriculture drew on an indigenous labor force, or

where extractivist development encouraged despotic forms of oligarchic rule. In these cases, labor incorporation neglected much of the popular sectors (for example, rural or informal labor). As new social (especially indigenous) movements arose, the unfinished business of popular inclusion sustained *lo popular* as a state-society mediation. Where oligarchic states were more constitutional, labor incorporation more encompassing, and there were early twentieth-century investments in citizenship and infrastructural state capacity, the new politics of inclusion has emphasized universal citizenship and social programs.

Efe Can Gürcan and Gerardo Otero, "Was There a Left Turn in Latin America? Measuring Government Leftism Immersion"

The "Left Turn" in Latin America was postulated on a discourse rejecting neoliberalism. But the Left's setbacks in Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, and Argentina since 2015 have rekindled debates about how leftist Latin America's governments really were and whether they presented a genuine challenge to neoliberalism. How leftist are governments in countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, compared to their counterparts in countries such as Chile and Brazil? Is this variation consistent with the literature's categorization of Latin American leftist governments into "moderate" and "radical" left? Our research contributes to this debate with a comparative analysis to assess the degree of leftist immersion. Our assessment adjudicates two main hypotheses in the debate based on the construction of a "leftism" index, which consists of the mean of a set of thirteen variables. These variables were inductively derived from the literature on the Latin American left since the early 2000s: economic de-globalization, minimum real wages, tax revenues, social spending, proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments, income equality, employment, external debt reduction, contraction of private health expenditure, reduction of

military expenditure, contraction of total natural resources rents, voice and accountability, and control of corruption.

Leslie Elliott Armijo, “Economic Policies of the Left in Power: Legacies in Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela”

Left-leaning Presidents came to power at the turn of the twenty-first century in three of South America’s largest countries—Argentina (January 2002 Duhalde), Brazil (January 2003 Lula), and Venezuela (January 1999 Chávez)—lasting approximately a decade and a half in Argentina and Brazil, and still in office in Venezuela. In each case, incoming presidents promised significant decreases in inequality while continuing economic growth. As recently as 2014, observers agreed that Brazil had delivered best on this ambitious agenda, followed by Argentina, whose successes were tempered by erratic policy shifts under President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, and trailed by Venezuela, where the government nonetheless maintained popularity distributing petroleum earnings to its mostly lower-income supporters. With Brazil’s mounting economic and political troubles since, Argentines have enjoyed being citizens of a suddenly steady, successful country. Center-right governments took power in Argentina and Brazil, while Venezuela’s Maduro barely governs a polity riven by food riots and an economy in free fall. What of the “structural redistribution with growth” agenda was achieved? What will endure under successor governments whose priority is promoting private business investment? Preliminary assessment suggests substantial and likely lasting accomplishments of left governments in Argentina and Brazil, but the resurgence of the “natural resource curse” in Venezuela.

Renato Francisquini, “(Anti)Politics and Democracy: On the Road to a New Technocracy”

Contradictory though it may seem, one of the most notable trends in recent Brazilian politics is the valorization of anti-

politics. Following the controversial impeachment of elected president Dilma Rousseff, institutions such as the Federal Policy and the Judiciary have been prominent in deciding the goals the country should follow. Moreover, municipal elections have seen the rise of candidates that present themselves as “non-politicians,” as though the problems we must solve as a collectivity—which, in a democracy, can only be handled through debate and bargaining—could be decided technically. A similar direction has been indicated by the president in charge, Temer, to justify policies that aim to decrease the scope of Brazil’s (already insufficient) welfare state and to reduce the role of the state in regulating markets. The establishment of an expenditure ceiling, the reform of social security, and budget cuts in areas that were central to the Workers’ Party government, are only a few examples of the 180 degrees turn we have seen in the last few months. In this context, this paper will discuss the main actors and their role in the symbolic and political construction of Rousseff’s removal and its consequences for the country. In the name of de-politicizing politics, the right-wing administration is rapidly jeopardizing the legacy of a government that took Brazil out of the UN’s misery index.

Eric Hershberg, “Latin America’s Left Turns: Domestic and External Determinants of Sustainability”

This presentation revisits the effort to classify cases of Latin America’s twenty-first-century Left Turns, building on the 2010 volume edited by Cameron and Hershberg. Seen from today’s vantage point, one way to distinguish the various left projects is in terms of their sustainability. Were progressive governments able to manage the economy effectively, and to position countries to better withstand a deterioration in commodity prices or key external markets? Were their programs undermined by mismanagement, corruption, or inattention to citizen security, and did they have the will or capacity to manage the inevitable challenge of leadership succession? Did they alter the socio-political landscape in

such a way as to foster enduring coalitions that would underpin a long-term project of social transformation? The presentation concludes that there were meaningful differences across the region regarding each of these variables and that this should inform our understanding of success or failure.

Gerardo Muñoz, "Posthegemonic Institutionalality: Five Theses after the End of the Latin American Progressive Cycle"

In this position paper I return to some of the theoretical wagers at the center of a recently edited dossier on the "Crisis of Latin America's Progressive Cycle." By considering the limits of populism and the notion of "movement," I advance a preliminary sketch for a posthegemonic institutionalality as a political reflection in times of interregnum and planetary subsumption of the capitalist general equivalent. Against populism and communitarianism as identitarian machines, this paper will reflect on the potentiality of rethinking the category of institution beyond hegemonic closure.

Zaraí Toledo Orozco, Dominique Rumeau Castellazzi, and Fabio Resmini: "What is Left of the Left: Analyzing Policy Endurance in Latin America"

We take issue with the first question suggested as a potential topic. We believe that it is remarkable that for the first time in Latin America government alternation from the left to the right occurs in democracy. Given this unprecedented context, we look at the conditions and factors that influence the endurance of inclusionary policies developed during the Left Turn despite attempts to reverse them by right-wing governments. Drawing on the case of Argentina, the paper analyzes the menu of policy-making tools with which a government is endowed to push its programmatic agenda.

Alejandro Velasco, "Oil, Socialism, and Revolution in Venezuela: A Reckoning"

Seventeen years ago Hugo Chávez's election as President of Venezuela heralded a wave of leftist governance in Latin America that seemed to upend long-since established neoliberal hegemony. Facing bitter opposition at home and major tension with the US abroad, Chávez managed to stay in power on the basis of deep support among the poor and a massive distribution of oil rents, in the process reducing poverty dramatically and empowering local expressions of political organization as never before. Today, little remains of the promise of revolutionary transformation, as Chávez's successor Nicolás Maduro battles the country's worst economic crisis in recent memory, threatening to explode into a major humanitarian crisis as food and medicines grow scarce. What went right, and what went wrong, in Venezuela's experiment with *chavismo*? In what ways were its failures particular to the Venezuelan experience, and in what ways did they reflect larger regional trends? And what if anything could have transpired differently, with an eye towards avoiding similar mistakes in the future? Ultimately, what lessons can we draw from the example of Venezuela in order to refine strategy and tactics going forward, in Venezuela and in Latin America more broadly?

Left Behind: The Ends of Latin America's Left Turns Biographical Notes

Jon Beasley-Murray teaches in the Department of French, Hispanic, and Latin American Studies at UBC. He is the author of *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*.

Alejandra Bronfman teaches in the Department of History at UBC. She is the author of *Isles of Noise: Sonic Media in the Caribbean*.

Maxwell A. Cameron teaches in the Department of Political Science at UBC. He is the author of *Strong Constitutions: Social-Cognitive Origins of the Separation of Powers*.

Alec Dawson teaches in the Department of History and in the School for International Studies at SFU. He is the author of the forthcoming *The Peyote Effect: Marking Race Across the US/Mexican Border*.

Leslie Elliott Armijo teaches Political Economy and Development Studies in the School for International Studies at SFU. Her research focuses on politics and policy in emerging economies, with special interests in Brazil, India, the BRICS countries, South American regional politics, and the public policy arenas of financial regulation, the nexus of infrastructure and environment, and migration. Her most recent books are *Unexpected Outcomes: How Emerging Economies Survived the Global Financial Crisis* (ed. with C. Wise and S. N. Katada, 2015) and *The Financial Statecraft of Emerging Powers: Shield and Sword in Asia and Latin America* (ed. with S. N. Katada, 2014), and her latest article is "Can International Relations and Comparative Politics be Policy Relevant? Theory and Methods for Incorporating Political Context" (with S. Rhodes, *Politics & Policy*, October 2015). Visit her website at: <http://www.lesliearmijo.org>.

Renato Francisquini teaches in the Department of Sociology and Political Science at the Federal University of Santa Catarina. He graduated with a doctorate in Political Science from the University of São Paulo.

Chris Gibson teaches in the School for International Studies at SFU. He is the author of the forthcoming *Developing Health: Social Movements and Development in Urban Brazil*.

Gastón Gordillo teaches in the Department of Anthropology at UBC. He is the author of *Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction*.

Efe Can Gürcan is a PhD student in Sociology at SFU. He is the author of *Challenging Neoliberalism at Turkey's Gezi Park*.

John Harriss teaches in the School for International Studies at SFU. He is the author (with Craig Jeffrey) of *Keywords for Modern India*.

Juan Hernández is a PhD student in Hispanic Studies at UBC, working on Latin America's literature of extraction.

Eric Hershberg is the Director of the Center for Latin American & Latino Studies and Professor of Government at American University. Previously, he has taught at Simon Fraser University, New York University, Southern Illinois University, Columbia, Princeton, and the New School. He was a Program Director at the Social Science Research Council from 1990 to 2005, and was President of the Latin American Studies Association from 2007-2009. He writes frequently on the political economy of Latin America, the comparative politics of democracy in the region, and on U.S.-Latin American relations. He is co-editor, with William M. LeoGrande, of *A New Chapter of U.S. Cuba Relations: Social, Political and Economic Implications* (2016). His most recent books include *Latin American Left Turns: Politics, Policies, and Trajectories of Change* (co-edited with Maxwell A. Cameron,

2010) and *New Institutions for Participatory Democracy in Latin America: Voice and Consequence* (co-edited with Maxwell A. Cameron and Kenneth E. Sharpe, 2012).

Gerardo Muñoz is a PhD candidate at Princeton University working on Latin American literature and political philosophy. His dissertation, "Fissures of the State," studies the crisis and decline of political principles in Latin American State form in literature and culture during the twentieth century. He has translated into Spanish essays by Giorgio Agamben and Gayatri Spivak. He writes frequently for *Lobo Suelto*, an Argentine portal, and is also a member of the academic collective Infrapolitical Deconstruction.

Gerardo Otero is Professor of International Studies and Sociology at SFU. Author of *Farewell to the Peasantry? Political Class Formation in Rural Mexico* (Westview 1999), he has published over a hundred scholarly articles, chapters, and books about the political economy of agriculture and food, civil society and the state in Mexico and Latin America. His latest article, with Anelyse Weiler and Hannah Wittman (2016) is "Rock Stars and Bad Apples: Moral Economies of Alternative Food Networks and Precarious Farm Work Regimes" (*Antipode*, 48(4): 1-23). E-mail: otero@sfu.ca. Web: <http://www.sfu.ca/people/otero.html>.

Fabio Resmini is a PhD student at the Department of Political Science at UBC. His research focuses on political parties and personalism in Latin America and post-Soviet countries.

Pilar Riaño teaches in the School of Social Work at UBC. She has published widely on displacement, memory, and transitional justice in Latin America.

Alejandro Rojas is Emeritus Professor in the Faculty of Land and Food Systems at UBC. He has published widely on public health and food security. In the early 1970s he was President

of the Student Union at the University of Chile, and went on to be a parliamentary deputy for the Communist Party during the epoch of Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government.

Dominique Rumeau is a PhD student of Political Science at the University of British Columbia. Her current research focuses on the political economy of redistribution in Latin America, and participatory innovations in comparative perspective.

Zaraí Toledo Orozco is a PhD student in the department of Political Science at UBC. Her research focuses on social exclusion, extractive industries and state capacities in Andean countries. She also collaborates with the Norman B. Keevil Institute of Mining Engineering researching on artisanal gold mining conflicts in Latin America.

Alessandra Santos teaches in the Department of French, Hispanic, and Italian Studies at UBC. She is the author of *Arnaldo Canibal Antunes*.

Alejandro Velasco is Associate Professor of Modern Latin America at New York University's Gallatin School and Department of History. An interdisciplinary scholar of urban space, politics, and their interplay, Velasco's work has appeared in journals like HAHR, Labor, and LARR. In 2016 his book *Barrio Rising: Urban Popular Politics and the Making of Modern Venezuela* (2015) won the Fernando Coronil Book Prize awarded by the Section on Venezuelan Studies of the Latin American Studies Association. He offers frequent commentary on Venezuelan and Latin American politics to radio, television, and print media outlets like NPR, MSNBC, CNN, the New York Times, and in 2015, he was named Executive Editor of *NACLA Report on the Americas*.

Hannah Wittman teaches in the Faculty of Land and Food Systems at UBC. She is the co-editor of *Environment and Citizenship in Latin America: Natures, Subjects, and Struggles*.