DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION: COMPARATIVE POLITICS

4 HOURS

25 April 2019

Latin America

You must answer a total of two (2) questions for this examination. You have four (4) hours to do so. You must answer one (1) question from the core section and one (1) question from the subfield section. In your answers to any of the questions below, please be sure to present an argument and to refer to relevant readings and empirical examples.

SECTION 1. CORE QUESTIONS

1. Under what circumstances are cultural explanations for political outcomes more powerful than structural or rational-choice explanations? To what extent can these different theoretical approaches be combined to enhance their explanatory power?
2. Political scientists often emphasize features in political systems that induce institutional and policy equilibrium and stability.  At the same time, we also observe political and policy arrangements undergoing major change over time.  What analytical tools can political scientists draw on to account for major changes in political life?  Explain with detailed reference to the comparative politics literature on either institutional change or policy change, as well as empirical examples.

SECTION 2. SUBFIELD – LATIN AMERICA

1. The pendular swing in political regimes – between democracy and authoritarianism – have come to a rest in the past three decades, yet problems of democracy persist. Scholars have noted the low quality of democratic regimes, and in some cases regimes have entered a gray area between democracy and authoritarianism, if not outright authoritarian rule. Why have so many of them settled in this gray area of regime type?
2. In the 1970s, toward the end of the period of import substitution industrialization, there was a lively debate on dependency in Latin America. Since then, the region has embraced the neoliberal model of development. Starting around 2000, this model was challenged by Latin America’s left turns, which were fuelled, in part, by the commodity super-cycle of 2003-2013. Today, the region appears to be returning to more conservative politics and policies.  Has the region escaped external dependency and found a model of sustained economic growth? What does this tell us about long-term developmental trends in the region?