

Glossary of Latin American studies terms

This is certainly not meant to be an exhaustive list, as every discipline has its own language. However, these are terms that I use in the text, and that beginning students have pointed out are problematic.

agrarian- related to agriculture

authoritarian(ism)- a rule by an un-elected government, by decree (hence authority); refers in our case to military governments

bequests- property designated for someone to inherit

bureaucratic authoritarianism- refers to the most recent wave of LA military governments (fr. 1960s), who ruled through large state bureaucracies with the hope of promoting economic growth; *see the work of Guillermo O'Donnell*

capital- money in all its forms- Capital is used in a wide variety of manners, from factory equipment to investment to financial capital in the form of lending. Of course, Marxists view capital-labour relations to be the defining dialectic of our times. See communism, below.

caudillos- think cowboy/general; a strongmen who rules by force of his personality and loyalty to him; refers both to local rulers during the 19th c. and to the strong personal dictators on a national level throughout LA history

clientelism- think mafia- a system of intertwined relationships among people tied together by both loyalty to individuals through patronage (goods or favours). Each individual in the network is tied in the same way to superiors.

communism- related to the theory of Karl Marx. The basic idea is that we are defined by our economic activity ("mode of production"). That is the ultimate basis for how our society is ordered, including which groups ("economic classes") in society make the key decisions. Depending on the particular point in history, one economic class usually exploits other(s) for an unequal share of the pie (profits from total production). Marx's hope was to instill a social order in which there would be no upper and lower classes, though it might require an initial "dictatorship of the proletariat" as an interim step to creating a classless society out of capitalism. The rest, as they say, is history.

conservative(ism)- again, a multitude of meanings, generally centered around the idea of preserving the status quo or allowing for only slow changes in society- for our purposes refers to 19th c. LA groups who were for centralized govt. and maintaining Church involvement;
generally considered the "right"

constitution- a written document laying out political rules

corporatist- a way of organizing economic policy so that society is divided into “peak” (or pyramidal) organizations based on the type of economic activity. It’s based on Central Western European models. For example all of labor will be part of one union, all of business one association, etc. This allows the government to negotiate an economic policy that it is accepted by all the main economic players. Because the PRI in Mexico organized society in this way, but was an authoritarian government, analysts called it an “authoritarian corporatist” system.

darwinism(social and neo)- Darwinism is related to the concept of evolution. Social Darwinism was the prevailing idea at the turn of this century that society had evolutionary aspects as well, so that those who were more successful were those who were naturally better. Neo means near- it can precede any idea and mean something close to, but not quite. So neo-darwinism would mean someone who believes in something along the lines of Darwinism in terms of explaining “success” in society, while not ascribing to the exact theory.

enlightenment- the historical Western idea that reason can lead to progress; when applied to politics, expects that reason can lead to a lasting peace through rational agreements

equity- does not always mean strict equality, but often is used to mean equitable treatment/opportunities, in the sense of fairness

federalism- a system of governance whereby local entities (could be states, regions, provinces, etc) have a measure of autonomy or independence from the central govt., eg Canada

Gini index- a way to measure income inequality in a country

GNP vs GDP- gross national product and gross domestic product, both are measures of the total production of all goods and services in a country. They are also used as a general measure of a country’s overall wealth. GNP includes exports and imports, GDP does not.

liberal(ism)- has a multitude of meanings; for our purposes, refers to the line of thought in LA in the 19th century that believed in natural individual rights, fought against Church involvement in politics; and wanted a decentralized government (with states’ or regional rights)

liberation theology- a group of Catholic priests and their set of ideas that arose in Latin America in the 1960s to fight for more social services and equality for the lower classes

Marxists- see Communism above

mercantilism- is the system by which a country (usually refers to a colonizing country) enriches itself by controlling its trade with another country, including the types of goods and terms of the trade. For our purposes, it refers to the fact that Spain did not allow its colonies to trade freely with anyone; all trade had to go through it. Moreover, Spain, like other colonizers, dictated what would be produced and traded in each colony for its benefit.

Mercosur model- MERCOSUR is the agreement of 1994 b/t Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, and Uruguay for free trade amongst them. I will talk about how it serves as a model for development in the chapter on economic development.

nascent industrialists- nascent means new born; industrialists are those who create industry (owners of factories that produce manufactured goods)

neoliberal(ism)- refers to the free trade and market-based policies that came into vogue internationally in the 1980s; called neo-liberalism because it modifies classical economic liberal theory along a few important lines: namely calling for government to ensure stability in markets, to provide basic infrastructure, and to ensure that the market can provide publicly-desirable goods, such as environmental protection

oligarchical democracy- an oligarchy is rule by a few; an oligarchic democracy would therefore be a democracy in which everyone might vote, but only a few people really hold the decision-making power

patronage- a gift bestowed by a superior to an inferior for loyalty, including votes (think mafia or “machnige politics”)

polarization- A pole is a concentration of something. When we talk about polarization, we might mean anything from economic polarization (a concentration of wealth at one end, and poverty at the other) to international polarization (a concentration of power in the US and the USSR during the cold war)

populist regimes- populism refers to an appeal to mass groups of people- think Evita and Juan Peron; regime can mean either a government or a type of government

positivism- refers to the 19th century line of thought that the truth can be known through experimentation; thus man can steadily accumulate knowledge about everything, in the process improving his lot; linked to the development and rise of science and industry

postmodernism- a perspective developed in the social sciences primarily after World War II, in response to skepticism about the idea of inevitable progress, and in line with earlier literary and artistic movements. Postmodernism offers various tools for examining the underlying assumptions and character of a discourse, or conversation, about something. Deconstruction seeks to reveal the inherent subjectivities that form a part of all knowledge and/or our interpretations of data and our intertwined role in understanding an event or phenomena.

radical- often linked to Communists, but really could be any person or group who wants wholesale change in society

realism- an International Relations theory that looks at nations as the main actors in politics and expects them to act according to their self-interest; unlike the liberals, does not believe we can ever have a lasting peace since no alliance of states is permanent

reformist- someone who believes in gradual social change

republican- refers of course to the US political party, but the original meaning is a form of government of elected representatives (eg MPs)

right, center and leftists(beliefs)- right = conservative- in LA, often the upper classes, the Church, the military and foreign govts/corporations;

the center= reformists, often middle/lower upper class; often Christian democratic or other types of political parties, small businessmen, some parts of organized labor that seek to include more people in politics slowly and want to do so in legal, orderly way

the left= radicals, often led by upper class-origin intellectuals, but whose main constituency is usually organized labour; usually, but not always, identified with Marxist ideas

Thermadorian- the counter-reaction from Conservatives to a revolution; usually tries to restore some semblance of the previous order; eg when the military took over from Allende after he started to move towards socialism in Chile in the early 1970s

tithes- refers to the feudal (European medieval) system in which folks would give 1/10 of their income in goods or money to the Church; not really an important term for us