

17.55, Introduction to Latin American Studies, Fall 2006  
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**Appendix: Argentina**

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Every Argentine, and every scholar who studies Argentina, asks a simple question: What went wrong?

- As one scholar cynically remarked, Argentina is “a country underdeveloped largely through its own efforts”

In 1900, Argentina appears to be on the “British” path to democracy and development

- Cohesive oligarchy; shown ability to get along with each other (“Generation of 1880”)
- Republican and parliamentary institutions
- Gradual enfranchisement of middle and lower classes
- High living standards; even lower classes in good shape; 1/3 own houses
- Relative social equality
- Substantial foreign investment; ~50% of offers on London Exchange are Argentine
- Seems to be on same track as Canada, Australia, New Zealand

It doesn't turn out that way

- Coup after Depression
- Beginning around 1955, economy enters a slump from which it never recovers
- Politically chaotic; oscillates between quasi-fascist dictatorship, military regime, and weak civilian governments
- Socially, becomes Latin Americanized; more unequal

Hard to blame “the international economic system”; Europeans come and colonize indigenous population.

- International economy making them rich
- Canada, Australia, Scandinavia in similar circumstances
- Argentines not really victims of colonialism like indigenous peoples; most are European immigrants
- Argentina a country long before most of Europe

Hard to blame ethnic cleavages

- Traditionally, an important explanation
- There is a cleavage in Argentina, especially after migration from interior in 1930s
- But this is not much different from many countries
  - E.g., Italy, Spain
- And Argentina never faces the sort of ethnic cleavage that existed in other Latin American countries, or even the U.S. South

One possibility is culture

- “God said, “It’s a wonderful country, but I’ll fill it with Argentines”
- Possibly cultural barriers to democracy and development
  - Latin authoritarian tendencies; Catholicism; corporatism; military legacy
  - Business class lacks “killer instinct”?
- 1990: “Every Argentine man over the age of forty has, at one time in his life, backed a military coup”
- But should also apply to Italy, Spain, and other Mediterranean countries
  - “Argentine is an Italian who speaks Spanish, lives in a French house, and thinks he’s British”

- Argentines surprised when others can tell they aren't from Europe
- Most importantly, Argentina looks good for a long time

Perhaps peculiar nature of Argentine class structure

- Class structure definitely shapes political development; everyone knows this
- Huge numbers of non-citizens (Dahl)
- Working class and large chunk of urban mercantile and industrial elite are foreign
  - e.g., in 1935, 60% of industrial entrepreneurs are foreign born
- Who's left?
  - Landed oligarchy, their employees, and their clients
  - *Gauchos*
  - Middle sectors, mainly government employees
  - *Lumpen* elements
- Party system reflects that fact (Radicals vs. oligarchy)
- That said, doesn't seem to be totally disastrous
  - Expansion of franchise easier when elite knows it will take a long time before all the workers can vote
  - Eventually, working class and industrial class are enfranchised
  - Industrial elites not linked to landed class (thought to be a formula for fascism)
  - Throughout 20<sup>th</sup> century, large middle class (independent farmers, shopkeepers, white collar workers)
  - 1914, 21% of working population are white collar employees
  - During Dirty War, 40% of population was middle class

Political leadership: that is, they had the opportunity and blew it

- Not true at the beginning
  - Enlightened members of political class like Roque Sáenz Peña
  - Enlightened members of economic elite like Torcuato di Tella
- Some blame Yrigoyen
  - "mole-like", not especially smart, uncompromising
  - goal is patronage and political power, not social reform
  - operates a political machine without a coherent platform
  - "radicalismo is a sentiment, not a program"
  - still, Argentina in pretty good shape after World War II
- Perón: the Carlos Waisman explanation in reduced form
  - Politics of hate
  - State-corporatist legacy
  - Personalism rather than building of institutions
- Frondizi in the 1950s, when the discourse changed
- A lot of potential truth to this explanation
- Corradi: "In more fortunate countries substantial, sometimes radical, social and economic changes have been brought about through relatively peaceful and orderly means. In more tragic lands, change has come through violence. Argentines have, for their part, time and again resorted to unscrupulous methods in pursuit of modest goals....structural strains did not by themselves warrant the conclusion that all-out internecine war was inevitable. Other societies have either managed or transcended worse 'contradictions' without the political cannibalism, the terror, the futile bloodshed of Argentina." (*The Fitful Republic*, 1985: 100-101)

Timing and sequencing

- Argentina not quite politically developed when Depression comes along
- Hits at just the wrong time; workers not yet properly organized

- Workers still fragmented at a time when in Europe they're mostly in one party
- Perón has chance to organize it, and Argentina never recovers

Funny political institutions

- Some of rules definitely make a restoration of democracy more difficult during 1955-75
  - presidential system
  - electoral rules
- Helps keep Argentina in a bad spiral?

I'll leave the issue up to you, but it is the central issue in Argentine history

- Argentines would be grateful for clear answer

### ***What is Peronism?\_Was Peron a fascist?***

Fascist dream come true or populism? Peronism has elements of both

Fascist elements, especially left fascism

- Union of some elements of far right and far left
- Concentration of power in single leader
- Hostile to liberalism and undemocratic
- Not Marxist

On the other hand, may have more in common with populism

- Pro-labor, stronger working class support than most fascist regimes
- Opposed by landed elite; coalition similar to populists; pro-industry
- Not revolutionary; Peron doesn't want to create a new man
- Accepts many formal republican institutions
  - Perhaps for international purposes, but nevertheless not like fascism
  - Holds elections

Probably, true fascist state was his goal, but he was forced to compromise

- Preexisting unions retain autonomy; labor had been organized before
  - Communists
  - Socialists
  - Anarchists
- Church still powerful
- Republican tradition fairly strong
- International environment and trade ties require modification

### **What was Peron's economic policy?**

As it was, coalition proves very cumbersome

- Works while there is growth and reserves
- Afterward, begins to fall apart
- Army, Church, and industrial elites vs. labor unions
- Refuses to move decisively to Left or Right
  - Left: revolutionary regime, arm workers or purge army; nationalize landholdings
  - Right: traditional dictatorship (e.g., Spain)
- In 1970, Perón calls *montoneros* "the marvelous youth that struggles against military dictatorship with weapons in their hands and who know how to give their lives for the Fatherland"
- In 1974: "stupid, smooth-chinned and mercenary youths"

### **"The Impossible Game: Democracy in Argentina, 1955-76"**

**Why did Guillermo O'Donnell call this period "the impossible game"?**

Cavarozzi readings cover this well

- Politics becomes polarized
- Actors learn, but learn harsh lessons
- No way to integrate well-mobilized working class into political system
- Peronists can win clean election for president (up to 40% of vote)
- **Why is opposition afraid of Peronist victory?**
- Opposition afraid of Peronism: one person, one vote, one time
- Radicals divided over how to deal with Perón
- Liberals totally opposed. **What does “Liberal” mean in this context?**
- Result is alteration between military and civilian rule
  - Politics polarize
  - Military rule grows increasingly harsh

Economy deteriorates

- International economic conditions less attractive
- Political chaos undermines investment and growth
- Foreign corporations play larger role, but continuation of ISI

Various economic policies

- 1955-58: Liberal restoration
- 1958-66: Different approaches
- 1966-70: Economic liberalization under Onganía
- 1970-76: More nationalistic economic policy
- 1976-82: Mixed economic policy
- 1982-89: Heterodox economic policy
- 1990-present: belief that fundamental change is necessary; neoliberal reform

### The Dirty War

Military interventions in 1966 and 1976 different from previous interventions

- used to be *poder moderador*
  - expectation was fairly rapid return to civilian rule
- this time, military was in power to stay
  - goal was to remake Argentine society
  - suspension of constitution *sine die*
- why was it different?
  - Bigger threat
  - Influence of Cold War
  - U.S. training

What Argentina experienced in 1970s was civil war

- Guerrillas setting off bombs, kidnapping people; assassinating people, including their own supporters
- Substantial popular support for repressive tactics in beginning
  - “If they had just lined everyone up against the wall...”
- Military conduct of dirty war disgusts everyone
- Torture widespread; attacks become increasingly indiscriminate; all political opponents in danger
  - “Tree of subversion”
- By 1980, over 50 intelligence agencies, many become involved in crime
  - Kidnapping (disguised as guerrillas)
  - Assassinations
  - Robberies
  - Terrorism to justify military rule itself

- Corradi: "Terrorism was abolished, but terror became part of the art of governing" (p. 116)

Whatever you think of political record, economic record terrible

- Economic mismanagement was disastrous
- Claim that regime was conservative is questionable, claim that it was neoliberal is totally wrong
  - Military refuses to privatize 700 state-owned companies
  - Minor reductions in employment
  - State continues to provide ½ of all investment
  - Spending high, revenues low
  - Prints money, so inflation continues at three-digits
  - High indebtedness
  - Capital flight

### **What's a military government to do?**

Whatever you think of economic policies, foreign policy even worse

- Diversionary warfare in Falklands
- Military no good at fighting a real war
- Total defeat in Falklands; incidents of cowardice, incompetence, and inter-service rivalry
  - Long history of factionalism
  - Blues and Whites
  - Inter-service warfare
  - Personalistic cleavages
- Totally discredited; navy and air force withdraw from junta
- Regime basically collapses; fails to get much reassurance of pardon

### **Democratic Consolidation and Economic Reform**

In new elections, Radicals win

- Raul Alfonsín
- Attempts to put military on trial
- Somewhat successful
- Terrible mismanagement of economy
  - hyperinflation
  - no solutions work
- Forced to turn over power early to renewed Peronists, under Menem

Menem government launches full-fledged program of economic reform

- Total opposite of Peronist platform
- Inflation solved by dollarizing economy
- Privatization
- Opening up to foreign investment
- Growth, but increasing inequality
- Latin Americanization of Argentina

Menem reelected

- Corruption
- Abuse of power
- Tries to get reelected a third time

Finally, Peronists defeated

- Argentine democracy clearly consolidated

- Economic agenda seems on track
- Political reforms and anti-corruption
- Many economic problems remain
- Useful reexamination of past

### **Argentina, Reprise**

The big question: What went wrong in Argentina?

- Was it a result of strange class coalitions? (di Tella)
- Was it a crisis of development? (Huntington, O'Donnell)
- Did Peronism poison the atmosphere? (Waisman)

A good answer should explain not only what went wrong 1930-1982, but also what went right 1880-1920 and (in terms of democracy) since 1982.

- Should also predict the future
  - Has "ghost of Perón" been exorcised?
  - Has Argentine political culture become more civic?
  - Is Argentina's class structure "modern"?
- There was a big change in political rhetoric with democratization
- But class alignments may not be more conducive to democracy
- And are there still problems of political culture?

Up to you to decide whether Argentina is on track, or whether it remains the hemisphere's longest running soap opera

What's happening today?

1. Slow economic growth (previous growth 5.8)
2. Erosion of democratic governance?
3. Move to the Left (Chavez, Kirchner, Lula, Tabaré, etc.)