
REPORTS

THE STUDY OF LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS IN BRITISH UNIVERSITIES*

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THE STUDY OF POLITICS IN BRITISH UNIVERSITIES HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN HISTORICAL in approach and parochial in scope. It is only recently that the teaching and research interests of British political scientists have spread beyond the Anglo-European parliamentary tradition to the more 'exotic' areas of what is inaccurately called the 'Third World'.¹ In the first half of this century the observation and analysis of political activity in the non-European parts of the world were the unchallenged concerns of travellers, diplomats, and journalists; and their writings found few serious readers in the universities. Their work was regarded, and often conceived, as a species of adventurers' tales describing quaint but essentially pre-political societies.

As always, however, there were exceptions—most particularly amongst those writing on Africa. Anthropologists working on the tribal political systems operating within British colonies and colonial civil servants describing the problems involved in administering the Empire produced serious and scholarly books, of interest not only to their own professional readerships, but also to political scientists.²

The exceptions in the case of Latin America are fewer. Strong commercial links did not make up for the lack of a formal colonial relationship. James Bryce's *South America: Some Observations and Impressions* stands almost alone.³ Interestingly it is also probably better known in the U.S.A. than in the U.K.. Nevertheless it was the first serious comparative study of the contemporary politics of the sub-continent, and although today it reads as a superficial and at times condescending account, it

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was in 1913 a pioneering and original book. Beyond a few racy travelogues, however, it did not inspire much interest in Britain. Indeed until the work of the prolific businessman-scholar George Pendle began to appear in the 1950's the politics of Latin America went largely ignored in Britain. A number of historians developed their interests in the colonial and independence periods, like Humphreys, Boxer, and Parry, but few seemed willing to take up where Bryce left off in analyzing contemporary political events.

The first institutional support for the study of Latin America came from the semi-official Royal Institute for International Affairs (R.I.I.A.), and in 1937 it published the report of one of its specialist study-groups as *The Republics of South America*.⁴ However, apart from building up a collection of war-time press cuttings on and from the area, its main impact was delayed until several years after the end of World War II. In 1952 a study of the historical evolution of Uruguay by George Pendle inaugurated the R.I.I.A.-sponsored series of monographs.⁵ By 1968 the series had covered eleven other republics.⁶ Although the series was characterized by a clear preference for the historical approach, each volume included at least one chapter on contemporary political structures and processes. Almost invariably these chapters were out-of-date and 'unsystematic' when compared with the styles of analysis being applied to the political systems of Europe and the U.S.A. by British political scientists. It should also be noted that approximately half of the series was written by non-British authors, presumably because of a lack of suitably qualified people in the U.K. Despite its limitations the series was a start, and even today volumes from it appear in bibliographies for courses in Latin American politics on both sides of the Atlantic.

By the 1960s, largely as a result of the drama of the Cuban Revolution and the subsequent 'missile crisis,' public interest in Latin America was increasing. The R.I.I.A. was also stepping up its commitment to the area. In conjunction with St. Antony's College, Oxford, it established a Research Fellowship in Latin American Affairs and began a regular series of seminars on Latin American topics. It also arranged an international conference, the papers for which were later published under the editorship of the then Research Fellow, the Chilean Claudio Véliz.⁷

Official Foreign Office interest in Latin America was also growing—perhaps hoping to take advantage of Latin American *anti-yanquismo* generated by the Cuban revolution to recoup some of its post-war losses in the area of diplomatic influence and trade. To stimulate commercial interest it arranged a number of Trade Fairs, and, as a sure-fire way of getting the area in the British press, organized a royal tour.

A small but active group of academics with interests in Latin America—mainly historians—were not slow to take advantage of this new interest, both public and official, in 'their' area. Taking as their models the African, Asian, and East European Studies Centers established in the U.K. a few years previously,⁸ and the Latin American Studies Centers already operating in the U.S.A., these scholars launched a campaign for the creation of similar facilities for the study of Latin America. Their

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techniques *qua* pressure group was based, classically in the British context, on personal links with government departments—notably with the Foreign Office, which was already keen on developing interest in the area, and with the Ministry of Education, from which funding would have to come. They also tried to generate support from their own universities, thus giving their 'demands' an institutional base. Less important, but no less interesting, were the letters they wrote to the 'quality' newspapers in support of their position.

By 1962, sufficient government, university, and press interest had been elicited for the University Grants Committee—the governmental body responsible for university financing—to be asked by the government to examine the 'problem.' To do so it appointed a sub-committee under the chairmanship of the historian J. H. Parry to "review developments in the Universities in the field of Latin American studies and to consider and advise on proposals for future developments."⁹ The results of its deliberations were published in August 1964, in what is now known as the 'Parry Report.' This report, especially in its assessment of the state of social science research on Latin America in the universities, was painfully accurate. It was especially critical of the state of political science research *vis-à-vis* Latin America:

Latin American studies in political science, government, public administration, international relations and law is virtually non-existent in our universities.¹⁰

The report therefore suggested that encouragement should be given to social science research on Latin America. The methods it recommended were related to the establishment of area studies centers, in the five universities, Cambridge, Glasgow, Liverpool, Oxford, and London, all of which already had some strength in Latin American history or literature. In these centers, it suggested, there should be established Lectureships in Latin American Politics. The centers were also encouraged to offer post-graduate courses on Latin American politics within their M.A., B.Phil., or M.Phil. degree schemes.

The main proposals of the report were accepted by the U.G.C. and the five centers began the process of staff and student recruitment. The University of Essex—a new university not much beyond the planning stage during the Parry committee's investigations—also established a Latin American Center with the aid of a large grant from the Nuffield Foundation. At Essex, unlike the five Parry centers, the center was intended to operate as much at the under-graduate level as at the post-graduate level.¹¹

Post-Parry Politics.

The under-developed state of Latin American political studies in Britain as compared with history and literature was reflected in the first academic appointments. Of the first six people appointed to the various Lectureships in Latin American Politics (five in the Parry centers and one at Essex) two were Americans and one French. Of the three Englishmen appointed, only one had a first degree and post-graduate training in political science. The other two were historians by training, if

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not inclination. It would be misleading, however, to refer only to the area study centers. They have never had a monopoly of political scientists working on Latin America. Indeed it is to be hoped that they never do. As Figure 1 shows, in 1966–67, some nine other political scientists had indicated research interest in the area.¹² By 1972, this figure had more than doubled—largely as a spin-off effect of the post-graduate training functions of the centers themselves. Their students were beginning to find appointments in the rapidly expanding Politics departments of British universities, an effect which is reflected in Figure 2 relating to university departments offering under-graduate courses in Latin American government or politics.

FIGURE 1

British Political Scientists with Research Interests in Latin America

1966–67	15
1967–68	19
1968–69	23
1969–70	16
1970–71	25
1971–72	27
1972–73	33

Source: Institute of Latin American Studies, *Latin American Studies in the Universities of the U.K.* (University of London, London), Nos. 1–7.

FIGURE 2

Universities Offering Under-graduate Courses in Latin American Politics

1966–67	3
1967–68	6
1968–69	8
1969–70	10
1970–71	11
1971–72	11
1972–73	11

Source: Institute of Latin American Studies, *Latin American Studies in the Universities of the U.K.* (University of London, London) Nos. 1–7.

Staff Research

An analysis as elaborate as that developed earlier in LARR by Peter Ranis in his survey of American research on Latin American politics would be inappropriate here.¹³ The sample of British political scientists is too small for anything more than the most general observations, and the degree of commitment to actual research, as opposed to 'interest' in the area, varies within the sample.

What is evident, however, is that there has been a steady if unspectacular growth

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in the numbers of people with Latin American interests within the British political science community. Today there are probably as many political scientists working in the U. K. on Latin America as on Africa or Asia. Although the Centers have contributed to this growth by their graduate programmes and by their seminar and conference activities, one of the main stimulants involved is unconnected to the Parry report and its institutional repercussions. Guerrilla activity, hijackings, the continuing drama of the Cuban revolution, and the Chilean experiment with parliamentary socialism all drew attention to the area, and have attracted the 'professional' interest of political scientists—sometimes on a comparative basis—with primary research interests elsewhere. It is significant, for example, that the countries 'enjoying' the attention of most British political scientists in 1972–73 were Chile, Cuba, and Argentina—the countries which have received by far the most press coverage in the U.K. during the past year. (See Fig. 3).

On the type of research being pursued it is more difficult to comment. Entries in research directories are brief, optimistic, and often little more than project titles. It would appear, however, that in the early 1960s the majority of those working on Latin America were concerned with political history and few with what we might call 'political analysis,' i.e. studies of political parties, pressure groups, political mobilization, and socialization. Research on political thought and public administration—two of the stronger sub-disciplines of British political studies—was extremely rare, and work on international relations only slightly less so.

FIGURE 3

Locations of Staff Research

Country	1968–69	1969–70	1970–71	1971–72	1972–73
General or multi-state	8	10	8	5	7
Argentina	2	4	6	5	5
Bolivia	2	1	2	2	2
Brazil	4	2	2	2	4
Central America	0	1	2	3	2
Chile	4	5	5	5	8
Colombia	1	2	2	2	2
Cuba	1	3	3	5	7
Dominican Republic	0	0	0	0	0
Ecuador	0	0	0	0	0
Haiti	0	0	0	0	0
Mexico	3	2	4	4	4
Peru	1	0	1	2	2
Puerto Rico	0	0	0	0	0
Uruguay	0	0	0	0	0
Venezuela	0	0	0	0	0

Source. Institute of Latin American Studies, *Staff Research in Progress or Recently Completed in the Humanities and the Social Sciences* (University of London, London) Nos. 1–5.

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By 1971, the pre-eminent position of the political historians had been eclipsed by those working on political analysis.¹⁴ On the other hand, political thought, international relations, and public administration remain as they had been, in quantity if not quality, the poor relations.

Post-Graduate Research

Whilst the number of professional political scientists working on Latin America has doubled over the past seven years, the number of graduate students researching on Latin American politics has increased six-fold. Although graduate student enrollment in Britain has expanded dramatically in all fields during this period, the rate of expansion in Latin American Studies is exceptional. In terms of providing facilities, that is scholarships, libraries, and supervision, the Parry report therefore would seem to have been successful. In fact, one could argue that there is now a danger of over-production. The expansion of facilities and consequently of qualified students has not been paralleled by an expansion in subsequent career opportunities. Academic posts with Latin American specifications are few, and in the main currently filled by young people a long way from retirement. It is also unlikely that there will be an increase in the numbers of these posts in the near future. The business, commercial, and banking communities have also proved either unable or unwilling to recruit from this pool of skilled people; and, despite its initial enthusiasm for the creation of the centers, the Foreign Office has been slow to take advantage of this body of expertise.¹⁵ In short, the supply looks like out-stripping the demand.¹⁶

But what of the supply? Before 1966, graduate students working in British departments of Politics on Latin American topics were extremely rare. Of the ten registered for higher degrees in the 1966–67 academic year only two had been working on Latin American topics before the Parry report and neither of them had been registered for degrees in Politics. The others were direct products of the recruitment efforts of the newly established centers. Since then the numbers have increased steadily, both in the Centers and in the other universities. It is estimated that there will be over 70 students pursuing higher degrees with a major Latin American politics component in the coming session. In terms of staff-student ratios the 'luxurious' situation of 1.5 staff for each student is now reaching a more sensible, but still privileged level compared with the U.S.A., a ratio of one staff for every two students.

The subjects chosen for research by these students have changed over time. The most important shift is the dramatic rise in popularity of 'political analysis.' Only slightly less significant has been the increasing number of students working on political history. Whilst the growth in popularity of 'political analysis' can be explained as a product of the changing emphases of British political science generally, there is, in addition, a strong institutional factor involved. A large proportion of the students in this category have been registered for degrees at the University of Essex. There the large department of Government, which is probably more committed *qua* department to modern forms of political analysis than any other in the U.K., has, in close connection with the Center for Latin American Studies, attracted and found finance for

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relatively large numbers of graduate students, both British and Latin American. With new appointments, however, the other centers have gradually begun to attract more students with interests in 'political analysis,' so that by the early 1970s the distribution is evening out.

That political history is one of the most often-chosen fields is not surprising. In fact, it is surprising to see political historians so thin on the ground in 1966. Historians have traditionally been the biggest and most influential group within British Latin American Studies, and one would have expected this to be reflected in graduate student enrollments. On the other hand British historians of Latin America, as indicated earlier, have been rather more concerned with the Colonial and Independence periods than with twentieth century developments. This would account for the fact that in 1966 the number of graduate students registered for higher degrees in History by far outnumbered those registered in Politics. Interestingly, this numerical superiority

FIGURE 4
Post-graduate Theses on Latin American Politics

By subject:	1966-7	1967-8	1968-9	1969-70	1970-1	1971-2	1972-3
Comp. Politics	1	2	5	7	8	5	8
Internat. Rels.	4	4	5	2	4	4	3
Polit. Analysis	2	8	14	20	20	29	33
Polit. History	3	6	8	12	16	17	17
Polit. Theory	0	2	2	0	1	2	2
Public. Admin.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	10	22	34	41	49	57	63
By country:							
General/multi	5	7	10	9	12	8	10
Argentina	0	4	4	5	4	3	5
Bolivia	0	1	1	2	2	2	2
Brazil	1	2	4	6	7	8	9
Central America	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
Chile	0	2	5	5	7	9	15
Colombia	0	0	0	1	1	3	3
Cuba	0	0	2	2	2	3	3
Dominican Rep.	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Ecuador	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Haiti	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mexico	2	3	5	7	7	9	9
Paraguay	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Peru	2	2	2	3	4	6	4
Puerto Rico	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Uruguay	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Venezuela	0	1	0	0	1	2	2
Totals	10	22	34	41	49	57	63

Sources. Institute of Latin American Studies, *Theses in Latin American Studies at British Universities in Progress and Completed* (University of London, London) Nos. 1-7; and Political Studies Association, *Annual Register of Research, 1966-73* (Mimeo).

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has by now almost disappeared. Of interest also is the fact that there are now almost as many historians (staff) researching on modern political history as on the Colonial and Independence periods.

In contrast, public administration and, to a lesser extent, political theory and International Relations are still very much undersubscribed, mirroring the 'weaknesses' at the staff level. More work has been done on what me might call 'comparative politics.' Theses on comparative topics, however, tend to be more popular at the Master's than at the Doctoral level, and more often chosen by students registered at non-center universities.

Over the past seven years the pattern of post-graduate research location has changed considerably. Initially, half of all students were working on problems at the multi-state or subcontinental level, with the remainder spread, with little significance, over Mexico, Brazil, and Peru. Since then a distinct pattern has emerged. As in the U.S.A., students seem to have concentrated their interests on the larger and/or more developed countries—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico.¹⁷ These countries, for obvious bibliographic reasons, are particularly popular with students unable to make research visits to the area. The recent 'flood' of students into research on Chile is undoubtedly related to the tragically aborted socialist experiment in that country. Predictably, the countries 'enjoying' the least attention are the smaller and least developed republics of Central America, Haiti, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

To a certain extent this burgeoning interest in Latin American politics at the staff and post-graduate level has found echoes in under-graduate degree schemes. Although a Bachelor's degree in Latin American Studies is available at only one university, courses on Latin American Politics are now available, as options or as integral parts of the degree scheme, in several university departments of Politics. In 1966–67, only three such courses existed. In 1972–73, eleven departments included courses in their *prospecti*. In addition, at least two Polytechnics were incorporating similar courses into their degree programmes.

CONCLUSION

The expansion of Latin American political studies in Britain over the last seven years can be explained by reference to three inter-related developments, the most important of which has been the creation of the six Latin American centers. They have generated interest and, within the limits of their resources, have provided basic facilities for research. Their establishment, however, coincided with a period of growth and re-orientation within British political studies as a whole. The middle 1960s saw the appearance of new under-graduate courses on the politics of the 'Third World,' thus increasing the number of students with an academic contact with the area, and, at the same time, creating a demand for qualified Latin Americanists to teach these courses. Interest in the area has also, if less tangibly, been influenced by the mass media. Not only have the events of the period forced themselves dramatically into the news, but also the newspapers have been served by a group of experienced and thoughtful analysts.

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Of the patterns emerging within the field the most interesting *positive* development has been the popularity of the more modern styles of 'political analysis.' That this is so is related to the close ties which exist between the political scientists in the centers and the politics departments of the universities to which the center is attached. In fact, almost all of the Lectureships in Latin American Politics are joint Center/Department appointments, with the incumbent having teaching duties in both. It has been a constant concern that the centers do not become disciplinary backwater—an all too common fate of area studies centers. As one of the Directors of a center put it:

The study of Latin American politics in Britain . . . as far as possible, despite the establishment of area centers, . . . has been kept firmly and deliberately within the discipline of political science or social science more generally. The discipline comes first; the area second.¹⁹

On the *negative* side, this nexus has had little effect on the continuing stagnation of political theory and public administration in the Latin American context, both of which have considerable potential for the researcher.

The general picture, despite this and other minor gaps, is, however, fairly promising. Where in 1964 virtually nothing existed, today there is a research community of some 90 people, whose research is already making important contributions to the understanding of what was once the almost exclusive domain of American political scientists.²⁰

FOOTNOTES

1. The introspective debates of American political science of the 1950's and 60's were slow in taking effect in British circles. The historical and parochial styles of analysis noted and criticized by Roy Macridis in the U.S.A. in the 1950's persisted in British departments of Politics and Government without serious questioning well into the 1960's and in some cases even into the 1970's.
2. See the works of such anthropologists as Gluckman, Evans-Pritchard, Radcliffe-Brown, and Mair.
3. Lord James Bryce, *South America: Some Observations and Impressions* (New York, 1913).
4. R.I.I.A., *The Republics of South America* (London, 1937).
5. G. Pendle, *Uruguay* (London, 1952).
6. W. O. Galbraith, *Colombia* (1953); H. Osborne, *Bolivia* (1954); L. Linke, *Ecuador* (1954); G. Pendle, *Paraguay* (1954); G. Pendle, *Argentina* (1955); G. Butland, *Chile* (1956); E. Lieuwen, *Venezuela* (1961); H. F. Cline, *Mexico* (1962); R. J. Owen, *Peru* (1963); F. Parker, *The Central American Republics* (1964) and R. D. Logan, *Haiti and the Dominican Republic* (1968).
7. C. Véliz, ed., *Obstacles to Change in Latin America* (London, 1965).
8. *Viz. Report of the University Grants Sub-committee on Oriental, Slavonic, East-European and African Studies* (The Hayter Report), (London, H.M.S.O., 1961).
9. *Report of the University Grants Committee Sub-committee on Latin American Studies* (The Parry Report), (London, H.M.S.O., 1965), p. iii.
10. *Ibid.* p. 44.

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11. For a detailed discussion of the establishment and early progress of the Parry centers, see H. Blakemore, "Latin American Studies in British Universities: Progress and Prospects," *Latin American Research Review*, V (3), 1970.
12. Two such people are G. Connell-Smith of the University of Hull and P. A. Calvert of the University of Southampton.
13. P. Ranis, "Trends in Research on Latin American Politics." *Latin American Research Review*, III (3), 1969.
14. For a statement on the state of such research, see P. Flynn, "Latin American Political Studies in British Universities." Paper delivered to the *Primera Asamblea Plenaria of the Consejo Europeo de Investigaciones Sociales sobre América Latina* (CEISAL). Rheda, West Germany, 1971. (Mimeo).
15. It is possible to argue that the small numbers of students joining the Foreign Office and firms and banks with Latin American interests is related to the attitudes of the students. These organizations claim that very few students actually apply for positions. Although it is true that a good many students are ideologically opposed to employment of this sort, many are not; and these organizations have made few visible attempts at recruitment from this pool of expertise.
16. I am aware of the dangers of using the terms 'supply' and 'demand' in this, as in any academic, context. There is, for instance, no shortage of 'demand' for the facilities and supervision offered by the Centers from the student community. There is also a 'demand' from the educational system as a whole, i.e. from polytechnics, colleges of commerce, and secondary schools. In these cases, however, the Latin American content of the degrees is only marginally significant.
17. A post-graduate course on public administration, which includes a large Latin American component, is taught by the department of Overseas Administrative Studies at the University of Manchester. It is, however, directed at Latin American administrators and involves little research. See W. Wood, "The Manchester Course of Public Administration Studies for Government Officials of Latin American Countries." *Bank of London and South America Review*, III (32), August, 1969.
18. Viz. P. Ranis, op. cit.
19. P. Flynn, op. cit., p. 2.
20. By 1973, approximately 20 books by members of this community had either been published or were in the late stages of publication.