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The Environmental State in Latin America: Challenges and Dynamics in a Persistent Extractive Context

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While “Environmental states” began to emerge in Latin American countries in the 1980s, studies have only sporadically explored the emergence and dynamics of specific environmental institutions and organizations in the region. The book project presented in this talk provides a systematic, theory-guided, and comparative perspective on the environmental state in Latin America. We argue that extractivism is one of the most critical forces influencing Latin American environmental states, because: 1) Extractivism exerts direct control over nature and natural resources; 2) Political elites in various Latin American countries have historically relied on extractivism as an economic development strategy; 3) Extractive economies give rise to a specific political economy characterized by politicians and business elites’ rent-seeking and weakened state agencies; 4) The influence from non-domestic actors in environmental governance. The Latin American region provides a unique opportunity to explore how environmental states can originate and perform under these specific conditions.

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