Latin American Politics and Society

POL 502 | Fall 2027 | Department of Political Science

Instructor: Clemente T. Sánchez

Class Time: Wednesdays 2:00 PM - 4:30 PM | Location TBD
Recitation Time: Fridays (Various times—please attend your registered section) | Locations TBD
Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:00 PM - 2:00 PM (or by appointment) | E53-418
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1 Course Description

This course introduces students to the politics of Latin America and the social forces that shape it. Some questions we will address include: Why has the region swung between democracy and authoritarianism? Why is Latin America among the most unequal regions in the world, and how does inequality shape political competition? Why do some states struggle to enforce the law across their own territory? During the semester, we will trace the region's political development from the independence era through import-substitution industrialization, the military regimes of the 1960s and 1970s, the democratic transitions of the 1980s, and the market reforms of the 1990s. We will then examine more recent developments, such as the "left turn" of the 2000s, the rise of anti-establishment and populist leaders, and the challenges posed by organized crime, corruption, and environmental degradation. Throughout, we will review contemporary scholarship on the region to understand how political scientists study these questions and what Latin America has contributed to the discipline as a whole. This course is aimed at **both political science majors and students without prior exposure to political science or Latin America**.

By the end of this course, you will be able to identify potential explanations for why some Latin American democracies have endured while others have eroded, why social movements and political parties have played such different roles across countries, and how states' capacity to tax, regulate, and provide services shapes citizens' relationship with government. Moreover, by studying Latin America, you will also have gained deeper insight into what makes the United States different from, but at the same time similar to, its neighbors in the hemisphere, from presidential systems and federalism to polarization and debates over immigration, trade, and security. Learning about politics in Latin America will make you a more informed citizen, a better consumer of news and political messaging about the region, and a more critical observer of your own democracy. In your own professional life, you might be asked to weigh in on events in a region that is closely linked to the United States through trade, migration, and shared environmental challenges. By being able

to analyze Latin American politics in its historical and institutional context, you will be able to provide the necessary context to your coworkers, bosses, employees, clients, or students. In addition, the skills that you will exercise throughout this course, such as analyzing current events through theoretical lenses and engaging in public speaking, will be of use well after you have completed the course.

Prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for this course.

Course Materials: All course material will be available on Canvas.

1.1 Learning Objectives

By the end of this term, students will be able to:

- Explain the main historical, economic, and institutional forces that have shaped political development in Latin America.
- Apply the theoretical and methodological tools of comparative politics to analyze contemporary political and social events in the region.
- Identify the foundational work on Latin American politics and its contributions to political science as a whole.
- Describe how politics and society in Latin America have changed since the democratic transitions of the 1980s.

1.2 What to Expect

This class will have two components. First, during lectures, I will guide the class through key arguments and traditions within the study of Latin American politics. While the readings will be referenced, the main point of the lectures will not be to summarize them, but rather to contextualize them and provide the necessary background information to understand their significance. Although student participation during lecture time is not only appreciated but also encouraged, the size of the class and its introductory nature prevent us from implementing a seminar-style discussion approach. Still, lectures will very much involve active learning. While each week will have both required and optional readings, **students are only expected to be familiar with the former**. Some optional readings might be referenced by the instructor or the TAs, but, as the label indicates, they are truly optional.

Second, students will be divided into smaller groups and assigned to recitations. These will rely more actively on discussion and debate. The teaching assistants will run most recitations in a seminar style, and you will be expected to have done the readings in advance and come prepared for in-depth discussion as a group. Moreover, as the schedule notes, some of these recitations will revolve around specific exercises. For this reason, as the guidelines state, participation is not only expected but required. This combination of lecture time, during which I will provide the necessary scaffolding to understand the readings, and seminar-style recitations, where you will discuss arguments and methods in depth, is intended to maximize learning during the course. Some of the readings that we will be discussing this semester are relatively old, and therefore require additional context in order to fully comprehend them. Lectures will be crucial to carry out this task of "translation," while recitations will allow you to apply your knowledge.

2 Course Expectations and Policies

2.1 Attendance and Participation

I expect that students will attend lectures and recitations. If you cannot make it to one session, please reach out in advance. Additionally, I expect students to take an active role during class time. As stated in the assessment section below, part of your grade will be based on attendance and participation. The reason for this policy is that in-person participation from students is fundamental for this class to work. Both lectures and recitations include substantive portions that will be debate- and discussion-based, and without the involvement from everyone in the classroom, the intended learning outcomes will not be achieved. I believe every student has something valuable to say, and when voices are silent, the whole class misses out on a richer learning experience. Furthermore, class participation is a form of public speaking. During your professional career, you will be asked to speak in front of others. Use this class as a safe space to practice this skill.

2.2 Collaboration

Students are encouraged to study together and strategize on the best ways to approach the readings as a group. Sometimes the best way of understanding a confusing argument or paper is by asking your friends or classmates about it. However, other than the case studies, the assignments in this class are individual. Therefore, I ask students to try to limit their discussions on those individual assignments as much as possible. I am interested in your ideas and your knowledge of the literature, not someone else's. Please consult the academic integrity statement for further details.

2.3 Policy on the Use of Technology

No laptops, tablets, phones, or any other electronic devices will be allowed during class time. Exceptions to this policy can be granted based on needed academic accommodations from Student Disability Services. I apologize in advance if this conflicts with your note-taking systems, but research has shown that students learn much better when they write things down using pen and paper. It will feel weird at first, but trust me: over time you will find the absence of a machine built to draw your attention freeing. While we all use laptops and tablets for our work and our daily routines, I aim to create a space where our attention can be focused on class material. If you want to have the readings with you, print them or the notes you took while reading. Turn off your electronics when you come to class and enjoy an hour and a half without competing pulls on your attention.

2.4 Late Assignments and Rescheduling Oral Exam

The deadlines for assignments have been chosen for pedagogical purposes: each assignment helps you to develop skills and engage with content from particular units of the course. Several of the assignments are also timed so that you come to recitation prepared for in-person discussion. For these reasons, you should aim to complete all assignments on time; late assignments can also pile up, making the class more stressful for you. I understand, however, that this course is not the only thing on your plate. If you need an extension on one of your assignments, you can automatically

get one for 24 hours by filling out [this form]. I will grant one no-questions-asked extension per semester. For other extensions, or if you need to reschedule the oral exam, please talk to me. Unexcused late assignments automatically lose one-third of a letter grade (A to A-, etc.) for each day late.

2.5 AI Policy

The use of AI tools is ONLY permitted for light editorial tasks like proofreading and formatting citations. They may not be used for generative tasks like writing, coming up with arguments, or organizing your text. When you use AI tools, you must cite their use in a separate statement and specify how you have used them. Moreover, I reserve the right to request an impromptu meeting after class to discuss an assignment in greater detail if I suspect that there has been an inappropriate use of artificial intelligence or other breaches of course policies.

Becoming a thoughtful and effective scholar requires reflecting on your past experiences and applying research-based principles and practices to solve new and often messy problems. Learning and growth require productive struggle, and AI, by removing the struggle, stunts your growth. This also applies to struggling with old papers and essays. These are rites of passage in an introductory course, and I do not want you to be robbed of them. AI's responses are not your answers, and therefore they do not reflect your understanding. Delegating the hard work of learning will not allow you to grow into an independent and savvy thinker, and submitting AI output as your own is a clear breach of academic integrity. Yes, staring at a blank page can be daunting. But it can also be freeing. Every single reading that we will be reviewing this semester started as a blank page. Embrace it and exercise your critical thinking skills.

2.6 Inclusivity Statement

MIT values an inclusive environment, and so do I. I hope to foster a sense of community in this classroom and consider this to be a place where you will be treated with respect. I welcome individuals of all backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, religious and political affiliations, and any other visible and non-visible differences.

All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the class. The study of politics can sometimes be polarizing. I do not shy away from disagreement; on the contrary, I encourage it. However, all arguments and discussions in this class must be conducted in an environment of mutual respect. I will make myself personally responsible for enforcing this principle. If you believe this standard is not being upheld, please feel free to speak with me or send me an email.

2.7 Academic Integrity Statement

In this course, I will hold you to the high standard of academic integrity expected of all students at the Institute. I do this for two reasons. First, it is essential to the learning process that you are the one doing the work. I have structured the assignments in this course to enable you to gain a mastery of the course material. Failing to do the work yourself will result in a lesser understanding of the content, and therefore a less meaningful education for you. Second, it is important that

there be a level playing field for all students in this course and at the Institute so that the rigor and integrity of the Institute's educational program are maintained.

Violating the Academic Integrity policy in any way (e.g., plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, cheating, etc.) will result in official Institute sanction. Possible sanctions include receiving a failing grade on the assignment or exam, being assigned a failing grade in the course, having a formal notation of disciplinary action placed on your MIT record, suspension from the Institute, and expulsion from the Institute for very serious cases. Please review the Academic Integrity policy and related resources (e.g., working under pressure; how to paraphrase, summarize, and quote; etc.) and contact me if you have any questions about appropriate citation methods, the degree of collaboration that is permitted, or anything else related to the Academic Integrity of this course.

2.8 Special Accommodations and Disability Support Services

If you need disability-related accommodations, I encourage you to meet with me early in the semester, either after class or during office hours. If you have not yet been approved for accommodations, please contact Student Disability Services at **sds-all@mit.edu**. I look forward to working with you to assist with your approved accommodations.

2.9 Mental Health

As a student, you may experience a range of challenges that can interfere with learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating, and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may impact your ability to attend class, concentrate, complete work, take an exam, or participate in daily activities.

If you feel like you are struggling, I encourage you to reach out to Student Support Services (S3). You may consult with them in person in Building 5-104 or at 617-253-4861. For urgent or after-hours concerns, please contact MIT Police.

3 Grading and Assessment

Class participation and active intellectual engagement are paramount. To that end, this course combines different types of assignments that are meant to ensure that students engage with the assigned readings and with current events in the region. Additionally, I include periodic assessments of progress at key moments throughout the semester. The table below summarizes each of the assessment instruments that will be utilized in this course, as well as their relative weights for your final grade and their due dates.

Component	Weight	Deadline	Description
Participation	20%	-	Attendance and participation across lectures and recitations.
Case study I	15%	9/24	Three-page case study of state capacity in a Latin American country.

Component	Weight	Deadline	Description
Mid-term report	25%	10/13	Six-page report on two contrasting cases of democratic breakdown or survival in Latin America.
Case study II	15%	11/19	Three-page case study of a social movement or political party in the region.
Final report	25%	12/3	Six-page report on a contemporary event in Latin America or peer review of a recent paper on the region.

4 Course Schedule

4.1 Is There Such a Thing as Latin American Politics?

This unit will introduce you to Latin America both as a region and as an object of study within political science. Aside from describing the main themes of this class and logistics, we will discuss what, if anything, makes Latin America a coherent unit of analysis, how the study of its politics emerged in the United States, and the competing theoretical lenses that scholars first used to make sense of the region's political and economic trajectory. These early debates continue to shape how we study the region today, and we will return to them throughout the semester.

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- *Identify the origins of the study of Latin American politics in the context of the Cold War and United States engagement with the region.*
- *Compare the main theoretical perspectives, such as modernization and dependency theories, that scholars have used to explain the region's political and economic development.*

Session 1 - Introduction and overview (Sept 8)

We will go over the expectations, discuss some logistical details, and present some common themes of the course. We will also begin to ask what it means to study Latin America as a region. What do countries as different as Brazil, Bolivia, and Uruguay have in common? **Skidmore, Smith, and Green** provide a brief overview of the region and make the case for why it deserves our attention, highlighting the contrasts and paradoxes that characterize it. We then turn to how scholars in the United States first approached the region. Following the Cuban Revolution of 1959, interest in Latin America grew rapidly, and with it, competing explanations for why the region had lagged behind in terms of economic development and political stability. **Valenzuela and Valenzuela** contrast the two dominant perspectives of the time: modernization theory, which located the causes of underdevelopment in the region's traditional values and institutions, and dependency theory, which located them in the region's subordinate position within the global economy. Finally, **Hirschman** warns against the temptation, common to both camps, of explaining a region's trajectory through a single overarching paradigm. This session, as a result, provides a picture of the questions that animated the study of Latin American politics as it was first conceived, and of the debates that we will revisit throughout the semester.

- Skidmore, T. E., Smith, P. H., & Green, J. N. (2014). "Why Latin America?" In *Modern Latin America* (8th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 1.
- Valenzuela, J. S., & Valenzuela, A. (1978). "Modernization and Dependency: Alternative Perspectives in the Study of Latin American Underdevelopment." *Comparative Politics*, 10(4), 535-557.
- Hirschman, A. O. (1970). "The Search for Paradigms as a Hindrance to Understanding." *World Politics*, 22(3), 329-343.

Additional optional readings

- If this is your first political science course, I recommend you read Amelia Hoover Green's excellent How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps, which provides tips on how to approach some of the readings in this class.
- Wiarda, H. J. (1973). "Toward a Framework for the Study of Political Change in the Iberic-Latin Tradition: The Corporative Model." *World Politics*, 25(2), 206-235.
- Snyder, R. (2001). "Scaling Down: The Subnational Comparative Method." *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 36(1), 93-110.

No recitation this week

4.2 State Formation and State Capacity

This unit will unpack the institution that sits at the center of many of the region's political challenges: the state. After independence, the new Latin American republics faced the daunting task of building states almost from scratch: of consolidating their territories, collecting taxes, and imposing their authority over local elites. Some succeeded much more than others, and these differences persist to this day. Why are some Latin American states stronger than others? Does the European experience of state building help us understand the region, or does it lead us astray? Aside from addressing these questions, we will examine one of the most notable features of politics in the region: the persistent gap between the law as it is written and the law as it is enforced. As we will see, this gap is not always a product of the state's inability to enforce the law. Sometimes it is a choice.

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- *Explain why state-building trajectories in Latin America diverged from those of Western Europe, and identify common explanations of why some Latin American states are stronger than others.*
- *Distinguish between the inability and the unwillingness of states to enforce the law as explanations for institutional weakness in the region.*

Session 2 - Did war make the state in Latin America? (Sept 15)

The canonical account of state building revolves around Charles Tilly's bellicist hypothesis: war made the state, and the state made war. In Western Europe, the constant threat of interstate conflict forced rulers to extract resources from their populations, which led them to build tax collection systems, standing armies, and bureaucracies. Latin America experienced plenty of violence in the nineteenth century, yet the states that emerged from this period were often unable to tax their populations or control their own territories. Why? **Centeno** argues that Latin America fought the

wrong kind of wars: limited conflicts that were financed through foreign debt and customs revenues rather than through domestic taxation. The result was "blood and debt" rather than strong states. **Soifer** asks why, given these common circumstances, some states like Chile developed much greater capacity than others like Peru. He points to the political geography of the region's elites and to the strategies that state builders used to administer their territories. Finally, **Mazzuca** argues that we need to distinguish between state *formation*, the consolidation of a territory under a single authority, and state *building*, the development of administrative capacity. In his account, Latin American states were formed through trade-led processes in which national leaders struck bargains with peripheral elites, and these bargains trapped many countries in a cycle of low capacity. Is the bellicist hypothesis simply wrong, or does it just fail to travel outside of Europe?

- Centeno, M. A. (1997). "Blood and Debt: War and Taxation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America." *American Journal of Sociology*, 102(6), 1565-1605.
- Soifer, H. D. (2015). "The Origins of State Capacity in Latin America." In *State Building in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-23.
- Mazzuca, S. (2021). *Latecomer State Formation: Political Geography and Capacity Failure in Latin America*. Yale University Press. Pp. 1-47.

Additional optional readings

- Tilly, C. (1985). "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime." In *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge University Press: 169–87.
- Schenoni, L. L. (2021). "Bringing war back in: Victory and state formation in Latin America." *American Journal of Political Science*, 65(2), 405-421.
- Mahoney, J. (2010). *Colonialism and Postcolonial Development: Spanish America in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.

Recitation 1: State formation in Latin America (Sept 17)

- Pick a Latin American country and do some cursory research on the development of its state during the nineteenth century.
- Use this opportunity to select a case that you might be interested in exploring for your first case study.
- Discussion during recitation will revolve around which explanation (war, trade, or the geography of elites) best fits the case you selected.

Session 3 - Weak states or weak enforcement? (Sept 22)

Latin American countries have some of the most ambitious constitutions and legal codes in the world. Yet many of these laws are only partially enforced, if they are enforced at all. This session examines the gap between the law on the books and the law in practice. **O'Donnell** provides us with a description of what the state often looks like across the region. Pay special attention to his conceptualization of 'brown areas' as places where the state is present through its buildings and officials but where the rule of law is largely absent. **Levitsky and Murillo** then provide us with a framework to think about institutional strength along two dimensions: whether institutions are enforced, and whether they are stable over time. In their account, many Latin American institutions are weak not because they were poorly designed, but because they are not enforced or because they are constantly rewritten. Finally, **Holland** pushes this argument further. Drawing on the cases of

Bogotá, Lima, and Santiago, she shows that non-enforcement is often not a matter of capacity, but a deliberate choice by politicians who tolerate violations of the law by the poor, such as squatting and street vending, in exchange for electoral support. As you read through these papers, consider the following question: when we observe that a law is not enforced, how can we tell whether the state cannot enforce it or whether it chooses not to?

- O'Donnell, G. (1993). "On the state, democratization and some conceptual problems: A Latin American view with glances at some post-communist countries." *World Development*, 21(8), 1355-1369.
- Levitsky, S., & Murillo, M. V. (2009). "Variation in Institutional Strength." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12, 115-133.
- Holland, A. C. (2016). "Forbearance." *American Political Science Review*, 110(2), 232-246.

Additional optional readings

- Soifer, H. D. (2008). "State Infrastructural Power: Approaches to Conceptualization and Measurement." *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 43(3-4), 231-251.
- Brinks, D. M., Levitsky, S., & Murillo, M. V. (2019). *Understanding Institutional Weakness: Power and Design in Latin American Institutions.* Cambridge Elements in Politics and Society in Latin America. Cambridge University Press.
- Amengual, M. (2016). *Politicized Enforcement in Argentina: Labor and Environmental Regulation.* New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.

Recitation 2: A case study of state capacity (Sept 24)

- *Your three-page case study is due before recitation.*
- Discussion in recitation will revolve around your findings and contrasts across cases.

4.3 Development, Dictatorship, and Democratization

For much of the twentieth century, Latin American countries oscillated between democracy and authoritarianism. Between the 1930s and the 1970s, governments across the region pursued ambitious projects of state-led industrialization that transformed their economies and brought new social actors, such as industrial workers and the urban middle classes, into politics. Yet these transformations did not produce the stable democracies that many observers expected. Instead, the 1960s and 1970s saw a wave of military coups in some of the most economically advanced countries of the region. Then, starting in the late 1970s, these same regimes began returning power to civilians. This unit will go over some common explanations for these swings. We will discuss the politics of import-substitution industrialization, analyze why democracies broke down, and examine how and why the military regimes that replaced them eventually gave way to democracy.

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- *Explain how the politics of import-substitution industrialization shaped class coalitions and political conflict in Latin America.*
- *Evaluate structural and actor-centered explanations for democratic breakdowns and transitions in the region.*

Session 4 - Development and the politics of import substitution (Sept 29)

The Great Depression devastated Latin America's export economies, and in its aftermath many governments in the region turned inward. Rather than relying on exports of primary commodities, they sought to industrialize by producing domestically the manufactured goods that they had previously imported. This strategy, known as import-substitution industrialization (ISI), was given an intellectual foundation by **Prebisch**, who, as head of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, argued that the terms of trade between primary commodities and manufactured goods tended to deteriorate over time, trapping the 'periphery' in a subordinate position relative to the industrialized 'center.' **Hirschman** then examines how ISI unfolded in practice. He explains why it lost momentum after its 'easy' first phase, and why the industrialists it created did not become the driving force for further development that many had hoped for. Finally, **Collier and Collier** shift our attention from economic policy to politics. As industrialization created a growing working class, political leaders across the region had to decide how to incorporate labor into the political system, whether by controlling it through the state or by mobilizing it through political parties, as Perón did in Argentina. In their account, these choices constituted critical junctures that left lasting legacies for party systems and regime stability in each country. As you read, consider the following question: was ISI an economic policy with political consequences, or a political project with economic consequences?

- [Excerpts] Prebisch, R. (1962 [1950]). "The Economic Development of Latin America and its Principal Problems." *Economic Bulletin for Latin America*, 7(1), 1-22.
- Hirschman, A. O. (1968). "The Political Economy of Import-Substituting Industrialization in Latin America." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 82(1), 1-32.
- Collier, R. B., & Collier, D. (1991). "Framework: Critical Junctures and Historical Legacies." In *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1.

Additional optional readings

- Baer, W. (1972). "Import Substitution and Industrialization in Latin America: Experiences and Interpretations." *Latin American Research Review*, 7(1), 95-122.
- Sikkink, K. (1991). *Ideas and Institutions: Developmentalism in Brazil and Argentina*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Chapter 1.
- Kohli, A. (2004). *State-Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Introduction.

Recitation 3: Was import substitution a failure? (Oct 1)

- Discussion during recitation will revolve around the legacy of import-substitution industrialization in Latin America.
- Was ISI a failure? If so, were its shortcomings primarily economic or political? Would you have recommended a different strategy to Latin American governments in the 1950s?

Session 5 - Why did democracies break down? (Oct 6)

Between 1964 and 1976, military coups overthrew elected governments in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. These were not the personalist dictatorships of earlier decades. Rather, they were

regimes run by the armed forces as institutions, in alliance with civilian technocrats, that sought to fundamentally transform their societies. Strikingly, these breakdowns occurred in some of the most economically developed countries of the region, which posed a direct challenge to modernization theory. **O'Donnell** coined the term 'bureaucratic-authoritarianism' to describe these regimes. In his account, the exhaustion of the 'easy' phase of ISI, combined with the growing mobilization of the popular sectors, led military officers, technocrats, and international capital to coalesce around the exclusion of these sectors from politics. In other words, it was precisely higher levels of development that brought about the breakdown of democracy. Conversely, **Stepan** presents a case study of the 1964 coup in Brazil that reveals the importance of contingency and political leadership in the key moments that lead to the breakdown of a democracy. Finally, **Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán** analyze the emergence and fall of political regimes across the region since 1900. They argue that the normative preferences of powerful actors for democracy, their degree of policy radicalism, and the regional political environment explain regime outcomes better than structural factors such as the level of economic development. Who is right? Were the breakdowns of the 1960s and 1970s the product of structural economic pressures, or of the choices made by political actors?

- [Excerpts] O'Donnell, G. (1973). *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics*. Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California. Chapter 2.
- Stepan, A. (1978). "Political Leadership and Regime Breakdown: Brazil," in Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Latin America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 110-137.
- Mainwaring, S., & Pérez-Liñán, A. (2013). "Introduction." In *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-28.

Additional optional readings

- Collier, D. (1979). "Overview of the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian Model." In David Collier, ed., *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, pp. 19-32.
- Remmer, K. L., & Merkx, G. W. (1982). "Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism Revisited." *Latin American Research Review*, 17(2), 3-40.
- Valenzuela, A. (1978). *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Chile*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Chapter 1.

Recitation 4: Democratic breakdown and survival in Latin America (Oct 8)

- Choose two contrasting cases: one democracy that broke down during the 1960s and 1970s and one that survived (for instance, Chile and Costa Rica, or Uruguay and Venezuela). Do some preliminary research on the similarities and differences between these two cases.
- Use this opportunity to select cases that you might be interested in exploring for your mid-term report.
- Discussion in recitation will revolve around structural vs actor-centered explanations of democratic breakdown.

Session 6 - Transitions to democracy (Oct 13)

Starting with Ecuador in 1979 and Peru in 1980, military regimes across the region began returning power to civilians. By 1990, with the end of the Pinochet regime in Chile, nearly every country in Latin America was governed by elected leaders. How did these transitions happen? And does the way in which a country democratizes shape the kind of democracy that results? **O'Donnell and Schmitter** provide the foundational text of the 'transitology' literature. In their account, transitions are periods of high uncertainty that begin with divisions within the authoritarian regime, between 'hardliners' and 'softliners,' and that unfold through a series of negotiations, or pacts, between regime and opposition elites. **Karl** builds on this framework to develop a typology of modes of transition, distinguishing between those led by elites and those driven by the masses, and between those based on compromise and those based on force. She argues that while 'pacted' transitions tend to produce more stable democracies, they can also 'freeze' the privileges of the actors who negotiated them. **Hagopian** illustrates this dynamic with the case of Brazil, showing how the negotiated nature of the transition allowed traditional political elites to survive the end of military rule and retain much of their power under democracy. As you read through these papers, consider how the circumstances under which these democracies were born might help explain some of the challenges they have faced since. We will return to this question at the end of the semester.

- [Excerpts] O'Donnell, G., & Schmitter, P. C. (1986). *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Chapters 2-3.
- Karl, T. L. (1990). "Dilemmas of democratization in Latin America." *Comparative Politics*, 23(1), 1-21.
- Hagopian, F. (1990). "Democracy by Undemocratic Means? Elites, Political Pacts, and Regime Transition in Brazil." *Comparative Political Studies*, 23(2), 147-170.

Additional optional readings

- Huntington, S. P. (1991). "Democracy's third wave." *Journal of Democracy*, 2(2), 12-34.
- Haggard, S., & Kaufman, R. R. (1995). *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. Introduction.
- Riedl, R. B., Slater, D., Wong, J., & Ziblatt, D. (2020). "Authoritarian-Led Democratization." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 23, 315-332.

Six-page mid-term report is due (Oct 13)

No recitation this week

4.4 Institutions and Representation

The democracies that emerged from the transitions of the 1980s did not have to start from scratch. Most of them restored or rewrote constitutions that combined two features shared with the United States: a directly elected president and, in the region's largest countries, a federal system. Yet these institutions operate very differently in Latin America than they do in the United States. Presidents often face fragmented legislatures in which their own parties hold only a small share of the seats, and governors can wield enormous power over national politics. This unit examines how Latin American democracies distribute power across branches of government and across levels of government, and how these choices shape whose voices are represented. As we will see, institutional design has

consequences that are not always immediately obvious, and the same institution can have very different effects depending on the context in which it operates.

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- *Explain how presidentialism and federalism operate in Latin America and how they differ from their counterparts in the United States.*
- *Appraise how the horizontal and vertical distribution of power shapes democratic stability and political representation in the region.*

Session 7 - Presidents, legislatures, and coalitions (Oct 20)

With very few exceptions, Latin American democracies are presidential. Is this a problem? **Linz** presents a strong case that the lack of 'safety valves' in presidential democracies makes them particularly susceptible to inter-branch conflicts, which can devolve into regime crises. In his account, the fixed terms of presidents and the 'winner-take-all' nature of presidential elections help explain why so many Latin American democracies broke down in the twentieth century. **Mainwaring** refines this argument by pointing out that the problem is not presidentialism per se, but rather the combination of presidentialism with multiparty systems, which is common across the region. When presidents lack legislative majorities, they must build coalitions, and the incentives to do so are weaker than in parliamentary systems. Finally, **Pérez-Liñán** shows that, since the 1990s, inter-branch conflicts in the region have taken a different form. Rather than ending in military coups, presidential crises increasingly end in impeachments, as illustrated by the removal of presidents in Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Venezuela. In other words, presidents fall, but democracies survive. Was Linz wrong about the perils of presidentialism? Or has political instability in the region simply changed its form?

- Linz, J. J. (1990). "The perils of presidentialism." *Journal of Democracy*, 1(1), 51-69.
- Mainwaring, S. (1993). "Presidentialism, multipartism, and democracy: The difficult combination." *Comparative Political Studies*, 26(2), 198-228.
- Pérez-Liñán, A. (2007). *Presidential Impeachment and the New Political Instability in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.

Additional optional readings

- Mainwaring, S., & Shugart, M. S. (1997). "Juan Linz, presidentialism, and democracy: a critical appraisal." *Comparative Politics*, 29(4), 449-471.
- Figueiredo, A. C., & Limongi, F. (2000). "Presidential power, legislative organization, and party behavior in Brazil." *Comparative Politics*, 32(2), 151-170.
- Cheibub, J. A., Przeworski, A., & Saiegh, S. M. (2004). "Government coalitions and legislative success under presidentialism and parliamentarism." *British Journal of Political Science*, 34(4), 565-587.

Recitation 5: Who won? (Oct 22)

- Recitation will be organized as a debate session around the question of whether Latin American democracies should transition into parliamentary systems or not.
- Come prepared with at least one example from the region that supports your assigned position.

Session 8 - Federalism, decentralization, and subnational politics (Oct 27)

The four largest countries in the region, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and Venezuela, are federal. Moreover, since the 1980s nearly every country in Latin America has transferred responsibilities, resources, and authority to subnational governments, often in the name of bringing government closer to citizens. Yet decentralization has not always delivered on its promises. **Falleti** argues that what matters is not just whether countries decentralize, but the *sequence* in which they do so. When administrative responsibilities are transferred before fiscal resources and political autonomy, as happened in many countries, governors and mayors end up with new obligations but little power to fulfill them. In turn, **Samuels and Snyder** examine a less visible feature of territorial representation: malapportionment. Latin American legislatures are among the most malapportioned in the world, which means that the votes of citizens in sparsely populated, often rural, regions count for much more than those in large urban centers. Finally, **Gibson** explains how subnational authoritarian regimes can persist within national democracies. Local incumbents who control their provinces, such as those in Oaxaca in Mexico or Santiago del Estero in Argentina, can 'control the boundaries' of local conflict by preventing opponents from reaching out to national allies. As you read through these papers, consider how they relate to O'Donnell's discussion of 'brown areas' from earlier in the semester. Is the unevenness of democracy within countries a product of weak states, or of the way power is distributed across levels of government?

- Falleti, T. G. (2005). "A sequential theory of decentralization: Latin American cases in comparative perspective." *American Political Science Review*, 99(3), 327-346.
- Samuels, D., & Snyder, R. (2001). "The value of a vote: Malapportionment in comparative perspective." *British Journal of Political Science*, 31(4), 651-671.
- Gibson, E. L. (2005). "Boundary control: Subnational authoritarianism in democratic countries." *World Politics*, 58(1), 101-132.

Additional optional readings

- Stepan, A. C. (1999). "Federalism and democracy: Beyond the US model." *Journal of Democracy*, 10(4), 19-34.
- Montero, A. P., & Samuels, D. J. (2004). "The Political Determinants of Decentralization in Latin America: Causes and Consequences." In *Decentralization and Democracy in Latin America*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. Chapter 1.
- Giraudy, A. (2015). *Democrats and Autocrats: Pathways of Subnational Undemocratic Regime Continuity within Democratic Countries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 1.

Recitation 6: Designing a political system (Oct 29)

- Students will be divided into groups. Each group will be assigned a hypothetical Latin American country emerging from a transition to democracy. The first half of the recitation will be spent designing a political system for that country based on the previous weeks.
- The second half of the recitation will be an assessment of how well that political system would address a potential crisis, such as a president who loses their legislative majority or a governor who defies the national government.

4.5 Markets, Inequality, Parties, and Social Movements

The debt crisis of 1982 brought the era of import-substitution industrialization to an abrupt end. Over the course of what came to be known as the 'lost decade,' governments across the region faced hyperinflation, mounting foreign debt, and pressure from international financial institutions to reform their economies. By the late 1990s, nearly every country in Latin America had liberalized trade, privatized state-owned enterprises, and cut public spending. Notably, these reforms were implemented by the same democracies that had emerged from the transitions we studied earlier in the semester. Moreover, they were adopted in the most unequal region in the world, and they transformed the social structures on which political representation had been built. In this unit, we will first examine the politics of market reforms and inequality, and then turn to how these transformations reshaped the two main channels through which citizens make their voices heard: political parties and social movements. As we will see, these changes set the stage for many of the developments that we will discuss in the final unit of the course.

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- *Explain the origins of Latin America's high levels of inequality and the political dynamics behind the market reforms of the 1980s and 1990s.*
- *Assess how market reforms reshaped political representation through parties and social movements across the region.*

Session 9 - Market reforms and the politics of inequality (Nov 3)

The market reforms of the 1980s and 1990s posed a puzzle for political scientists. How could democratically elected governments implement policies that imposed such significant costs on their own voters? **Stokes** examines a particularly striking version of this puzzle. Several presidents, most famously Carlos Menem in Argentina and Alberto Fujimori in Peru, campaigned *against* market reforms only to implement them once in office. In her account, these policy switches raise uncomfortable questions about the meaning of electoral mandates and about whether voters can hold politicians accountable for their promises. Yet these reforms did not occur in a vacuum. **Hoffman and Centeno** remind us that Latin America has long been among the most unequal regions in the world, and they trace how inequalities rooted in the colonial period have been reproduced along the lines of class, race, gender, and region ever since. Standard political economy models predict that in such unequal societies, the poor should demand more redistribution. **Holland**, however, shows that this is often not the case in Latin America. Because the region's welfare states are 'truncated,' meaning that social insurance benefits flow mostly to formal-sector workers, many poor citizens doubt that they would benefit from greater social spending, which dampens their support for redistribution. As you read through these papers, consider the following question: why has extreme inequality not produced stronger demands for redistribution in the region?

- Stokes, S. C. (2001). *Mandates and Democracy: Neoliberalism by Surprise in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.
- Hoffman, K., & Centeno, M. A. (2003). "The Lopsided Continent: Inequality in Latin America." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29, 363-390.
- Holland, A. C. (2018). "Diminished Expectations: Redistributive Preferences in Truncated Welfare States." *World Politics*, 70(4), 555-594.

Additional optional readings

- Williamson, J. (1990). "What Washington Means by Policy Reform." In John Williamson, ed., *Latin American Adjustment: How Much Has Happened?* Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics.
- Weyland, K. (1998). "Swallowing the Bitter Pill: Sources of Popular Support for Neoliberal Reform in Latin America." *Comparative Political Studies*, 31(5), 539-568.
- Fairfield, T. (2015). *Private Wealth and Public Revenue in Latin America: Business Power and Tax Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.

Recitation 7: Market reforms and the reaction from below (Nov 5)

- Pick a political party or social movement that emerged or gained strength in response to the market reforms of the 1980s and 1990s (for instance, the Zapatistas in Mexico, the *piqueteros* in Argentina, CONAIE in Ecuador, or the MAS in Bolivia). Do some cursory research on its origins and demands.
- Use this opportunity to select a case that you might be interested in exploring for your second case study.
- Discussion during recitation will revolve around whether economic grievances are sufficient to explain why some groups mobilized and others did not.

Session 10 - Parties and social movements (Nov 10)

Political parties are central to the functioning of representative democracy, yet parties in Latin America vary enormously in their strength and durability. **Mainwaring and Scully** provide us with a framework to understand this variation through the concept of 'party system institutionalization.' In institutionalized systems, such as those of Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay at the time of their writing, parties have stable patterns of competition, deep roots in society, and solid organizations. In 'inchoate' systems, by contrast, parties come and go, and voters attach themselves to personalities rather than to labels. **Roberts** then explains how market reforms eroded the foundations on which many parties had been built. As unions weakened and the informal sector grew, Latin American societies remained deeply unequal, but these inequalities no longer translated into class-based political cleavages. Parties that had once mobilized workers, such as those that emerged from the critical junctures of labor incorporation we studied in Unit III, lost their bases of support. Finally, **Yashar** shows how these same transformations gave rise to new forms of mobilization outside of parties. In her account, the shift from corporatist to neoliberal citizenship regimes threatened the local autonomy that indigenous communities had enjoyed, and where these communities had access to organizational networks and political space to mobilize, they built powerful movements, as in Ecuador and Bolivia. As you read through these papers, consider whether social movements can substitute for political parties as vehicles of representation, or whether they are better understood as a symptom of parties' failure to represent.

- Mainwaring, S., & Scully, T. R. (1995). "Introduction: Party Systems in Latin America." In *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 1-34.
- Roberts, K. M. (2002). "Social Inequalities without Class Cleavages in Latin America's Neoliberal Era." *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 36(4), 3-33.

- Yashar, D. J. (1998). "Contesting Citizenship: Indigenous Movements and Democracy in Latin America." *Comparative Politics*, 31(1), 23-42.

Additional optional readings

- Levitsky, S., Loxton, J., & Van Dyck, B. (2016). "Introduction: Challenges of Party-Building in Latin America." In Steven Levitsky, James Loxton, Brandon Van Dyck, and Jorge I. Domínguez, eds., *Challenges of Party-Building in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-48.
- Lupu, N. (2016). *Party Brands in Crisis: Partisanship, Brand Dilution, and the Breakdown of Political Parties in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.
- Anria, S. (2018). *When Movements Become Parties: The Bolivian MAS in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.

No recitation this week (Veterans Day long weekend)

4.6 Contemporary Topics in Latin American Politics

In this final unit, we will review a few contemporary topics that are active in the study of Latin American politics today. Earlier in the semester we traced the region's political development from independence to the market reforms of the 1990s, and we reviewed many of the 'classics' that defined how scholars understood the region. In the last two decades, however, Latin America has experienced new and sometimes surprising developments, from the electoral success of the left to the rise of populist leaders who erode democracy from within, and from the explosion of criminal violence to the accelerating destruction of the Amazon. At the same time, the study of the region has followed the rest of the discipline in its turn towards causal identification, subnational comparisons, and individual-level analyses. As you make your way through each of the papers, pay attention to how these recent works differ from (or are similar to) the pieces that we reviewed in the previous units. Have the questions that animate the study of Latin American politics changed, or only the tools that we use to answer them?

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- *Explain how recent works on Latin American politics differ from the foundational works reviewed earlier in the semester.*
- *Utilize the concepts from contemporary works to analyze recent events in the region, such as democratic backsliding, criminal violence, and environmental degradation.*

Session 11 - The left turn, populism, and democratic backsliding (Nov 17)

The 2000s brought a dramatic shift in the region's political landscape. Following the election of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1998, left-of-center candidates won the presidency in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile, and elsewhere. **Levitsky and Roberts** provide us with a framework to understand this 'left turn.' In their account, the turn was in part a response to the persistent inequality and the unfulfilled promises of the market reforms that we discussed in the previous unit. Yet the left that came to power was far from uniform. Leftist governments varied according to whether they emerged from established party organizations or from new political movements, and according to whether authority was concentrated in the hands of a single leader

or dispersed. Several of these leaders were populist outsiders, a figure with a long history in the region. **Levitsky and Loxton** explain how outsiders such as Alberto Fujimori in Peru, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and Evo Morales in Bolivia came to power amid the collapse of traditional party systems. Armed with a mandate to sweep away the establishment, they used plebiscitary tools such as constituent assemblies to weaken the institutions that checked their power. The result was not a return to the military regimes of the 1970s, but rather competitive authoritarianism: regimes in which elections are held but the playing field is heavily tilted in favor of the incumbent. Finally, **Pérez-Liñán, Schmidt, and Vairo** draw on data spanning nearly a century to show that democracies in the region are more likely to erode when presidents achieve 'hegemony,' that is, when they come to control both the legislature and the courts, regardless of their ideology. Indeed, more recent cases such as Nayib Bukele in El Salvador illustrate that backsliding in the region is not exclusive to the left. As you read through these papers, consider how they speak to the debate over the perils of presidentialism, as well as our discussions of party system institutionalization and the erosion of class cleavages.

- Levitsky, S., & Roberts, K. M. (2011). "Introduction: Latin America's 'Left Turn': A Framework for Analysis." In *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 1-28.
- Levitsky, S., & Loxton, J. (2013). "Populism and competitive authoritarianism in the Andes." *Democratization*, 20(1), 107-136.
- Pérez-Liñán, A., Schmidt, N., & Vairo, D. (2019). "Presidential hegemony and democratic backsliding in Latin America, 1925–2016." *Democratization*, 26(4), 606-625.

Additional optional readings

- Weyland, K. (2001). "Clarifying a contested concept: Populism in the study of Latin American politics." *Comparative Politics*, 34(1), 1-22.
- Baker, A., & Greene, K. F. (2011). "The Latin American left's mandate: Free-market policies and issue voting in new democracies." *World Politics*, 63(1), 43-77.
- Hunter, W., & Power, T. J. (2019). "Bolsonaro and Brazil's illiberal backlash." *Journal of Democracy*, 30(1), 68-82.

Recitation 8: A case study of a party or social movement (Nov 19)

- *Your three-page case study is due before recitation.*
- Discussion in recitation will revolve around your findings and contrasts across cases.

No class on Nov 24 (Thanksgiving)

No recitation this week

Session 12 - Crime, corruption, and the environment (Dec 1)

For our final class, we turn to three challenges that dominate public debate across the region today: organized crime, corruption, and environmental degradation. While these might seem like distinct problems, they share a common thread that has run throughout this course: the gap between the law on the books and the law in practice. Latin America accounts for a disproportionate share of the world's homicides, and in many places criminal organizations directly challenge the state's monopoly of violence. **Trejo and Ley** ask why drug cartels in Mexico went to war with each other and with

the state in the late 2000s. They argue that the answer lies in subnational party alternation. When opposition parties won governorships, the informal networks of protection between state authorities and criminal organizations broke down, which led cartels to arm themselves to defend their territories. In turn, **Ferraz and Finan** examine whether voters punish corrupt politicians. Leveraging a Brazilian anti-corruption program that randomly selected municipalities for audits and publicly released the results, they show that the disclosure of corruption reduced the reelection chances of incumbent mayors, particularly where local radio stations helped spread the information. Finally, **Harding et al.** turn our attention to the environment. Studying Colombian municipalities, they show that campaign donations can buy politicians' tolerance of environmental violations, which leads to greater deforestation. As you read through these papers, consider how they relate to Weber's definition of the state and O'Donnell's 'brown areas,' to Holland's discussion of forbearance, and to our discussion of federalism and decentralization. Can elections solve these problems, or do they sometimes make them worse?

- Trejo, G., & Ley, S. (2018). "Why did drug cartels go to war in Mexico? Subnational party alternation, the breakdown of criminal protection, and the onset of large-scale violence." *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(7), 900-937.
- Ferraz, C., & Finan, F. (2008). "Exposing corrupt politicians: The effects of Brazil's publicly released audits on electoral outcomes." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 123(2), 703-745.
- Harding, R., Prem, M., Ruiz, N. A., & Vargas, D. L. (2024). "Buying a blind eye: Campaign donations, regulatory enforcement, and deforestation." *American Political Science Review*, 118(2), 635-653.

Additional optional readings

- Lessing, B. (2015). "Logics of violence in criminal war." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59(8), 1486-1516.
- Xu, A. Z. (2025). "Bureaucratic packing in the Brazilian Amazon: how political competition drives deforestation." *The Journal of Politics*, 87(4), 1350-1364.
- Sánchez, C. T. "Forbearance Forgone: The Electoral Cost of Enforcing the Law." Revise and resubmit at the *American Journal of Political Science*.

Recitation 9: Discussion of final report (Dec 3)

- *Your six-page final report is due before recitation.*
- Students will be divided based on whether they selected the Scholar or Policymaker option for their final report. Discussion in recitation will revolve around your assessment of the event or paper.

No class on Dec 8 (Reading period)

No recitation this week