

CPO3303, LAS3930

Introduction to Latin American Politics

Fall 2025 | 3 credits

NOTE: This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see UF's "[Academic Policies and Resources](#)" web page.

I. General Information

Meeting days and times: Tuesday 10:40 AM - 11:30 AM, Thursday 10:40 AM - 12:35 PM

Class location: FLG 0220

Instructor(s):

Name: Dr. Juliana Restrepo Sanín

Office Building/Number: Anderson Hall, Room 210

Contact: via Canvas

Office Hours: Thursday 2:00-3:30 or by appointment.

Course Description

Introductory overview of political patterns and political behavior in Latin America within comparative and developmental perspectives. Emphasizes the social, economic, and political factors shaping contemporary political structures and processes.

This course delves into the political transformations that have shaped Latin America from the late 20th century to the present. We begin by examining the autocratic rule of military dictatorships that seized power in the 1960s and 1970s, exploring the mechanisms of their control and the societal fissures they exploited. The course then pivots to the painstaking, often fraught, journey towards democracy. In this process we analyze the role of political elites and mobilized citizens in constructing new democratic institutions. The course then focuses on the adoption of neoliberal economic policies and how these reforms exacerbated existing inequalities, fueling social unrest and increasing crime. Subsequent modules investigate the "left turn" in the region, dissecting its origins, development, and its varied impacts on democratic consolidation and the struggle against inequality. In the final module we analyze the rise of populist illiberal governments and movements, as well as the way different groups -including women, indigenous, and Afrolatinx- have resisted autocratization. This course combines theoretical frameworks with case studies, integrating current events and documentaries to illuminate the enduring legacies of authoritarianism and the ongoing challenges to achieving equitable and democratic societies.

Prerequisites

Prereq: CPO 2001.

General Education Designation: none.

Course Materials

Materials will be available through the following means:

All materials will be available on Canvas

Materials Fee: N/A

II. Course Goals

Course Objectives

In this course we will:

- Understand the nature of political change in the last forty years in Latin America
- Interpret the nature of political change in Latin America and how the adoption of neoliberal policies in the 1980s and 1990 led to the rise of populism in the 2000s
- Examine the role of civil society activism and citizen participation in promoting social and political change

Student Learning Outcomes

A student who successfully completes this course will be able to:

- Describe relevant concepts and ideas associated with autocracy and democracy in Latin America
- Analyze the relationship between inequality, economic policies, and democratic quality
- Compare previous experiences with autocracy, with contemporary autocratic regimes in Latin America

III. Graded Work

Graded Components

Current events (5% each, 15% total): We will begin each class with a discussion of current events in Latin America. Each student should bring news reports related to the topics discussed in class at least **three times** during the semester. It is not enough to read the headline, you should be able to tell the class the details of the event, the main actors, and analyze how this is connected to the topics we have discussed in class. Please use reliable sources, such as:

- PBS
- NPR
- The Conversation
- The New York Times
- The Washington Post

- The BBC (Has great coverage on Latin America and the Caribbean)
- The Guardian
- <http://www.americasquarterly.org/>
- <https://nacla.org>
- The Miami Herald
- Foreign Affairs

You can also listen to podcasts specializing in Latin American politics or current events. Some recommendations include:

- The Washington Office in Latin America: <https://www.wola.org/format/podcast/>
- Americas Society / Council of the Americas <https://www.as-coa.org/content-type/podcasts>
- El Hilo [en Español] <https://elhilo.audio/episodios/>

In-class group activities (40%): There will be different in-class, small group activities during the semester. The instructions will be provided in class for each activity. Participation in these in-class activities requires your physical presence. Due to their interactive nature, they cannot be made up for any reason, including excused absences. To account for unavoidable conflicts or illnesses, multiple activities of this type will be offered throughout the semester, providing several opportunities to earn credit.

Reading exams (15% each, 45% total): There will be three in-class, closed-book reading exams. These exams will be based on a small set of class readings (i.e. they are non-cumulative) and will test your knowledge of the readings. Each exam will be 15 points. The dates for each exam are: **September 18, October 23, December 2.**

TOTAL: 100%

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Number Grade
A	100-92.5
A-	92.4-89.5
B+	89.4-86.5
B	86.4-82.5
B-	82.4-79.5
C+	79.4-76.5
C	76.4-72.5
C-	72.4-69.5
D+	69.4-66.5
D	66.4-62.5
D-	62.4-59.5
E	59.4-0

Note: A minimum grade of C is required to earn General Education credit.

Policy on AI use

You might be tempted to use generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT to do your readings for you. Though those tools are helpful in some circumstances, they do not replace your capacity to think, create, make sense, criticize, and otherwise meaningfully engage with the class readings. Even the most advance AI tools often provide false, inaccurate, or incomplete information, even when they 'read' a PDF. It is also unethical to provide content that is not yours to these tools as they use the content to train the models without the original author's consent and appropriate compensation.

The readings assigned in this course are academic readings and thus are hard. It is normal to struggle with them and that struggle is part of the learning process as it helps you develop critical thinking and research skills. If you want to do well in your exams, you should do the readings yourself. If you struggle with the readings, bring questions to class or discuss them during office hours.

IV. Calendar

Introduction

Thursday, August 21, 2025

Latin America today

Tuesday, August 26, 2025

February 8, Adriana Arreaza Coll | and 2023. n.d. "Latin America's Inequality Is Taking a Toll on Governance." *Americas Quarterly*. Accessed August 11, 2025.

<https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/latin-americas-inequality-is-taking-a-toll-on-governance/>.

Thursday, August 28, 2025

Hoffman, Kelly; Centeno, Miguel Angel. 2003. "The Lopsided Continent: Inequality in Latin America". *Annual Review of Sociology*. 29 (1):363-390

Authoritarian regimes

Tuesday, September 2, 2025

Kinzer, Stephen. 2006. "Get rid of this stinker". In *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*.

Thursday, September 4, 2025

Bouvard, Marguerite. *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*. Ch 1. The Dirty War.

Recommended

- <https://open.spotify.com/episode/2B5geUHVNYyshxpUnEpGpW?si=yNDrEoXTQXyaofn6w281oQ>
- [En Español] <https://radioambulante.org/audio/helicoptero-silencio-balazo-huida>
[English transcript] <https://radioambulante.org/en/translation/the-helicopter-the-silence-the-gunshot-the-escape-translation>

Neoliberalism and the "Lost Decade"

Tuesday, September 9, 2025

Weyland, Kurt. 2004. "Neoliberalism and Democracy in Latin America: A Mixed Record" *Latin American Politics & Society* - Volume 46, Number 1, Spring 2004, pp. 135- 157.

Thursday, September 11, 2025 – no class APSA

Rodríguez, Juan Pablo. 2021. "The Politics of Neoliberalism in Latin America: Dynamics of Resilience and Contestation." *Sociology Compass* 15 (3): e12854.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12854>.

Democratization & Democracy

Tuesday, September 16, 2025

Munck, Gerardo L. 2015. "Building Democracy . . . Which Democracy? Ideology and Models of Democracy in Post-Transition Latin America." *Government and Opposition* 50 (3): 364–93. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2015.2>.

Thursday, September 18, 2025

Review & Exam 1

Tuesday, September 23, 2025 – No class

Thursday, September 25, 2025 - Online Class

Waylen, Georgina. 1993. "Women's Movements and Democratisation in Latin America". *Third World Quarterly*. 14 (3):573-587

Political Institutions

Tuesday, September 30, 2025

Executives and legislative branches

Jones, Mark P. 2012. "Presidentialism and Legislatures." In *Routledge Handbook of Latin American Politics*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203860267.ch2>.

Thursday, October 2, 2025

Judicial institutions and the rule of law

Botero, Sandra, Daniel M. Brinks, and Ezequiel A. Gonzalez-Ocantos, eds. 2022. *The Limits of Judicialization: From Progress to Backlash in Latin America*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009093859>. Introduction.

Tuesday, October 7, 2025

Hilbink, Lisa, Valentina Salas, Janice K. Gallagher, and Juliana Restrepo Sanín. "Why People Turn to Institutions They Detest: Institutional Mistrust and Justice System Engagement in Uneven Democratic States." *Comparative Political Studies* 55, no. 1 (2022): 3-31.

Thursday, October 9, 2025

Aguiar Aguilar, Azul A. 2023. "Courts and the Judicial Erosion of Democracy in Latin America." *Politics & Policy* 51 (1): 7-25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12516>.

Inclusive democracies?

Tuesday, October 14, 2025

Kapiszewski, D., Levitsky, S., & Yashar, D. (2021). Inequality, Democracy, and the Inclusionary Turn in Latin America. In D. Kapiszewski, S. Levitsky, & D. Yashar (Eds.), *The Inclusionary Turn in Latin American Democracies* (pp. 1-56). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781108895835.002

Thursday, October 16, 2025

Piscopo, Jennifer M. 2015. "Democracy as Gender Balance: The Shift from Quotas to Parity in Latin America." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 4 (2): 214-30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2015.1084936>.

Tuesday, October 21, 2025

Hooker, Julie. 2005. "Indigenous inclusion/Black exclusion: race, ethnicity and multicultural citizenship in Latin America"

Thursday, October 23, 2025

Review

Exam 2

Crime and Violence

Tuesday, October 28, 2025

Cruz, José Miguel. 2016. "State and Criminal Violence in Latin America." *Crime, Law and Social Change* 66 (4): 375–96. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-016-9631-9>.

Thursday, October 30, 2025

Arias, Enrique Desmond. 2018. "Criminal Organizations and the Policymaking Process." *Global Crime* 19 (3–4): 339–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2018.1471990>.

Populism in Latin America – Left and Right

Tuesday, November 4, 2025

De la Torre, Carlos. Populism in Latin America. In: Rovira Kaltwasser, Cristóbal, Paul A. Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy. 2019. *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. Oxford Handbooks. Oxford University Press.

Thursday, November 6, 2025

Maya, Margarita López. 2024. "Left-Wing Populists in Power: Venezuela's Experience." In *Still the Age of Populism?* Routledge.

Tuesday, November 11, 2025 – Veteran's day – No class

Thursday, November 13, 2025

Wendy Hunter and Timothy Power. 2019. "Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash." *Journal of Democracy* 30(1): 68-82

Tuesday, November 18, 2025

Biroli, Flávia, and Mariana Caminotti. 2020. "The Conservative Backlash against Gender in Latin America." *Politics & Gender* 16 (1): E1. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000045>.

Thursday, November 20, 2025

De La Torre, Carlos. 2025. "A Populist Wave in the Making? The Radical Right's Attack on 'Gender Ideology' in Latin America." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 26 (1): 150–56. <https://doi.org/10.1353/gia.2025.a965789>.

Bentancur, Verónica Pérez, and Cecilia Rocha-Carpiuc. 2020. "The Postreform Stage: Understanding Backlash against Sexual Policies in Latin America." *Politics & Gender* 16 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000069>.

Tuesday, November 25, and Thursday, November 27 Thanksgiving break – No Class

Tuesday, December 2, 2025

Final exam

V. Procedure for Conflict Resolution

Any classroom issues, disagreements or grade disputes should be discussed first between the instructor and the student. If the problem cannot be resolved, please contact Dr. Benjamin Smith (bbsmith@ufl.edu, [352.392.0262](tel:352.392.0262)). Be prepared to provide documentation of the problem, as well as all graded materials for the semester. Issues that cannot be resolved departmentally will be referred to the University Ombuds Office (<http://www.ombuds.ufl.edu>; [352-392-1308](tel:352-392-1308)) or the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu>; [352-392-1261](tel:352-392-1261)).