

**Political Science 261/261W
Latin American Politics
Monday/ Wednesday 12:30 - 1:45
Spring 2025
Harkness Hall 210**

Professor Gretchen Helmke
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Office hours: Wednesdays, 2:00pm-3:00pm, or by appointment
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This upper-level undergraduate seminar focuses on the twin processes of democratization and democratic erosion in contemporary Latin America. The first part of the class covers the region's experiences with regime instability, introducing students both to competing theories of democratization as well as in-depth case studies of democratization. The second half of the course concentrates on the performance of key democratic processes and institutions and on the challenges of democratic erosion. The course concludes by examining countries that have experienced protracted episodes of democratic backsliding, including Peru, Venezuela, Brazil, and El Salvador.

Organization and Course Requirements

For students registered to take the class without a writing credit, grades will be based on the following assignments:

Participation: 20%
First Midterm Exam: 40 %
Second Midterm Exam: 40%

For students registered with a "W," grades will be based on the following assignments:

Participation: 20%
First Midterm Exam: 25%
Second Midterm Exam: 25%
Research Paper 30%

Participation

Participation makes up a significant part of your grade for this course. This class is a discussion seminar, not a lecture course. It is essential that students be prepared to discuss all of the readings each and every class. Many of the works that we will read are intellectually demanding; be sure to leave yourself enough time to do all of the readings carefully.

Student responsibilities include being prepared to discuss news from the *Latin American Weekly Reports* at the beginning of each class each Monday. You can access the Latin American Weekly Reports from the UR Library. <https://www-latinnews->

com.ezp.lib.rochester.edu/component/k2/itemlist/category/33.html?archive=true&archive_id=33

In addition, each student will sign up to present at least two of the weekly readings during the semester. The student should prepare a 7-10 minute verbal presentation for the rest of the class (no overhead slides are required). A Google sign-up sheet is available here. Note that two people will be assigned for each reading. The first person will summarize the reading and the second person will be responsible for raising questions for class discussion and/or for critiquing the reading.

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1bCM9NX2Kz3DNv0SRGo5czahbhdbaOWNa-7CbKnTAAak/edit?usp=sharing>

Exams

There will be two in-class midterms (March 3rd and April 30th). Both exams will be based on the assigned readings and class discussion.

Absences and Make-Up Policy

Make-up exams and assignments will be given only under the most exceptional circumstances. Exams will not be re-scheduled to accommodate other courses. Missed exams or assignments due to illness require a doctor's note.

Term Paper (Only for Students Taking the Course for "W")

Each student will choose a country and topic on which they will write a 10-12 page research paper. **To qualify for a W, you must meet each deadline:**

- 2/15 2-3 paragraph statement of your research topic. Please include the question(s) that you want to focus on, the materials that you anticipate using, and your working hypotheses.
- 3/19 1-2 page annotated bibliography. Please begin with a statement of your research topic and hypotheses and then briefly describe how each of the sources on your bibliography will contribute to your paper.
- 4/15 Last day to turn in required drafts.
- 5/6 Research Papers Due by Midnight- please email them to me at Gretchen.helmke@rochester.edu. LATE PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED

Books

The following three books are required and available for purchase on Amazon:

Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter. 1986. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Susan C. Stokes. 2001. *Mandates and Democracies: Neoliberalism by Surprise in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Helmke, Gretchen. 2017. *Institutions on the Edge: The Origins and Consequences of Inter-Branch Crises in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.

Chapters from additional books and assigned articles will be photocopied and available in the Dropbox.

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/sqnregs1frjfdeaa5t869/AN2L_UR_OJ0soN3-7c9u090?rlkey=ss6dfaf516nk92sy7a6abl0f&dl=0

Weekly Class Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction and Overview of Current Politics

Wednesday, January 22

Course Introduction and Presentation Assignments

Friday, January 24

2022 Annual Report, Latin American Public Opinion Project.

<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2023/AB2023-Pulse-of-Democracy-final-20240604.pdf>

In-class activity: Discussion groups and country overviews

Week 2: Transitions to Democracy: Wealth and Inequality

Monday, January 27

Latin American Weekly Report

Przeworski, Adam and Fernando Limongi. 1997. "Modernization: Theories and Facts." *World Politics* 49: 155-83.

Wednesday, January 29

Mainwaring, S., & Pérez-Liñán, A. (2003). Level of development and democracy: Latin American exceptionalism, 1945-1996. *Comparative Political Studies*, 36(9), 1031-1067.

Week 3: Transitions to Democracy: Elites and Citizens

Monday, February 3

Latin American Weekly Report

Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter 1986. *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. (Chapters 1-4)

Wednesday, February 5:

Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter 1986. *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. (Chapters 5-6)

Przeworski, Adam. *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Cambridge university press, 1991. Chapter 2.

Week 4: Democratic Transitions, Constitutions and Former Leaders

Monday, February 10:

Latin American Weekly Report

Huntington, S. P. (1991). *The Third Wave* (Vol. 199, No. 1). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. Page 211-231.

Albertus, Michael. "The fate of former authoritarian elites under democracy." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63.3 (2019).

Wednesday, February 12

Negretto, G. L. (2006). Choosing how to choose presidents: Parties, military rulers, and presidential elections in Latin America. *The Journal of Politics*, 68(2), 421-433.

Week 5: Transitions to Democracy: Venezuela, El Salvador, and Argentina

Monday, February 17

Latin American Weekly Report

Karl, Terry Lynn. (1986). *Petroleum and political pacts: the transition to democracy in Venezuela*. Guillermo O'Donnell et al. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*.

Wednesday, February 19

Wood, E. J. (2000). *Forging democracy from below: Insurgent transitions in South Africa and El Salvador*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 3 and 4.

Levitsky, S. (2005). Argentina: Democratic survival amidst economic failure. *The third wave of democratization in Latin America: Advances and setbacks*, 63-89.

Week 6: Midterm Review and Transitions to Democracy: Mexico

Monday, February 24

Latin American Weekly Report

Magaloni, B. (2006). *Voting for autocracy: Hegemonic party survival and its demise in Mexico* (Vol. 296, p. 30). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wednesday, February 26

Midterm Review

Week 7. Midterm Week

Monday, March 3

Midterm Exam

Wednesday, March 5: No Class

Week 8: Spring Break

Week 9: Challenges of Consolidation: Accountability and Representation

Monday, March 17

Latin American Weekly Report

O'Donnell, G. A. (1994). Delegative democracy. *Journal of democracy*, 5(1), 55-69.

Stokes, Susan C. *Mandates and Democracy: Neoliberalism by Surprise in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press, 2001. Chapters 1 and 2.

Wednesday, March 19

Stokes, Susan C. *Mandates and Democracy: Neoliberalism by Surprise in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press, 2001. Chapters 3-7.

Week 10: Challenges of Consolidation: Accountability and the Rule of Law

Monday, March 24

Latin American Weekly Report

Roht-Arriaza, N. (2009). Prosecutions of heads of state in Latin America. Lutz, E. L., & Reiger, C. (Eds.). *Prosecuting heads of state*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters TBD.

Escribà-Folch, A., Muradova, L. H., & Rodon, T. (2021). The effects of autocratic characteristics on public opinion toward democracy promotion policies: A conjoint analysis. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 17(1).

Wednesday, March 26

Helmke, G., Jeong, Y., Kim, J, and Ozturk, S. (2019). Upending impunity: Prosecuting presidents in contemporary Latin America. In *Workshop Upending Impunity University of Chicago*.

Week 11: Democracy and Corruption: Lava Jato

Monday, March 31

Latin American Weekly Report

Lagunes, P. F., & Svejnar, J. (Eds.). (2020). *Corruption and the Lava Jato Scandal in Latin America*. Routledge. Page 1-17, 68-129.

Wednesday, April 2

Lagunes, P. F., & Svejnar, J. (Eds.). (2020). *Corruption and the Lava Jato Scandal in Latin America*. Routledge. Page 143-183.

Week 12: Democratic Erosion in Latin America and Beyond: An Overview

Monday, April 7

Latin American Weekly Report

Helmke, Gretchen. *Institutions on the Edge: the Origins and Consequences of Inter-Branch Crises in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press, 2017. Chapters TBD

Wednesday, April 9

Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How Democracies Die*. Crown. Chapters TBD.

Week 13: Democratic Erosion: Peru and Venezuela

Monday, April 14

Latin American Weekly Report

Charles D. Kenney. 2004. "Fujimori versus Congress and the Coup." *Fujimori's Coup and the Breakdown of Democracy in Latin America*. Chapter 6.

McMillan, J., & Zoido, P. (2002). How to subvert democracy: Montesinos in Peru. *Journal of Economic perspectives*, 18(4), 69-92.

Wednesday, April 16 Democratic Erosion: Venezuela

Corrales, J., & Penfold-Becerra, M. (2011). *Dragon in the tropics: Hugo Chávez and the political economy of revolution in Venezuela*. Brookings Institution Press. Chapters TBD.

Javier Corrales, "Authoritarian Survival: Why Maduro Hasn't Fallen," *Journal of Democracy* 31, No. 3 (July 2020): 39-53.

Week 14: Democratic Erosion: Brazil and El Salvador

Monday, April 21

Latin American Weekly Report

Wendy Hunter and Timothy J. Power, "Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash," *Journal of Democracy* 30, No. 1 (January 2019): 68-82.

Melo, M. A., & Pereira, C. (2024). Why Didn't Brazilian Democracy Die?. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 1-27.

Wednesday, April 23

Perelló, L., & Navia, P. (2022). The disruption of an institutionalised and polarised party system: Discontent with democracy and the rise of Nayib Bukele in El Salvador. *Politics*, 42(3), 267-288.

Meléndez-Sánchez, M., & Vergara, A. (2024). The Bukele Model: Will It Spread?. *Journal of Democracy*, 35(3), 84-98.

Week 15: Review and Second Midterm

Monday, April 28

Latin American Weekly Report

Second Midterm Review

Wednesday, April 30

In-class second midterm

