

Latin American Politics
Political Science 3702-001
Fall 2025

Instructor: Dr. Glen Biglaiser
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Office Hours: T, R: 11:00 am– 12:00 pm (oba)
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Different types of political rule have marked the Latin American landscape in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This course attempts to understand these differences. The course begins by examining the democracies in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay from the end of World War II to the onset of authoritarian rule in the 1960s and 1970s. It next compares explanations for the emergence of authoritarian rule and for the return of democratization in these countries. The effects of economic policy choice under military rule are highlighted here. The course then examines countries that remained democratic for more than fifty years, including Colombia and Venezuela. From this, relations between the United States and Central America and Mexico are discussed, with issues of revolution in Cuba coming to the forefront. The course concludes by examining the government and politics in Latin America in the 1990s – 2025.

Grades will be based on a midterm (25%), term paper (25%), and final (35%). Class participation (including an oral debate) is strongly encouraged and is worth 15% of your final grade.

Grade Scale

A=90-100%; B=80-89%; C=70-79%; D=60-69; F=less than 60%

Required Texts

Biglaiser, Glen. 2002. *Guardians of the Nation? Economists, Generals, and Economic Reform in Latin America*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Booth, John A., Christine J. Wade, and Thomas W. Walker. 2020. *Understanding Central America, 7th ed.* Boulder: Westview Press.

Wynia, Gary. 1990. *The Politics of Latin American Economic Development, 3rd ed.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The books are available on e-reserve: <https://iii.library.unt.edu/search/r?SEARCH=PSCI+3702>

Required Class Reader

Assigned readings not in the required texts are available on Canvas.

Attendance. Attendance is expected in the course. Attending class will help improve your course performance and participation grade.

Canvas. Please check Canvas regularly, as I will provide important course information here.

Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences. According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

ADA Accommodation Statement. UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time; however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu.

Use of Artificial Intelligence for Assignments According to the UNT Academic Integrity Policy ([UNT Policy 6.003](#)), any form of "unauthorized assistance" constitutes cheating. As a result, use of any artificial intelligence is not authorized for assignments in this course.

Emergency Notification & Procedures. UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency. In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Acceptable Student Behavior. Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct.

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

Week 1: August 18-22

The Political and Economic History of Latin America

Skidmore and Smith. (2005) *Modern Latin America*. New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 13-41, on Canvas.

Week 2: August 25-29

Theories of Economic Development in Latin America

Wynia, 24-136.

Week 3: September 2-5

Antecedents to the Rise of Authoritarianism in the Southern Cone and Peru

Biglaiser, 21-46.

Wynia, 167-192; 214-224; 249-259.

Week 4: September 8-12

Theories of Policy Choice under Military Rule in Latin America

Biglaiser, 1-20; 47-109.

Supplemental Reading: Wynia, 225-248; 260-283.

Movie: “*The Americas: Brazil (Capital Sins)*,” discussion afterward.

<https://web.microsoftstream.com/video/0cbc9616-5436-49b6-ba27-9c3990773701>

Week 5: September 15-19

The Fall of Authoritarianism in the Southern Cone and Peru

Biglaiser, 159-183.

Diamond, et al. (1999). *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America, 2nd ed.* Boulder: Lynne Rienner. Ch. 1 on Canvas.

Week 6: Sept. 22-26

Redemocratization in the Southern Cone and Peru

Ellner (2001). “Latin American Democracy in “Post-Consolidation” Literature: Optimism and Pessimism.” *Latin American Politics and Society*, on Canvas.

Piscopo and Siavelis (2021). “Chile’s Constitutional Moment.” *Current History*, on Canvas.

McNulty (2018). “Peru’s Struggle with the Fujimori Legacy.” *Current History*, on Canvas.

Perelman (2024). “Living with Inflation in Argentina.” *Current History*, on Canvas.

Week 7: Sept. 29 – Oct. 3

Exceptions to the Rule: Democracy in Colombia and Venezuela

Wynia, 193-213.

Vanden and Prevost. *Politics of Latin America: The Power Game*, pp. 438-485, on Canvas.

Posada-Carbo (2017). “The Difficult Road to Peace in Colombia.” *Current History*, on Canvas.

Velasco (2025). “Rhyme and Repetition in Venezuela’s Upheavals.” *Current History*, on Canvas.

October 2: Handout Study Guide for Midterm

Week 8: October 6-10

Central America and the US (I): Monroe Doctrine through Good Neighbor Policy

Skidmore and Smith (2001). *Modern Latin America*, 355-368, on Canvas.

Drake (1991). “From Good Men to Good Neighbors: 1912-1932,” in Lowenthal, ed., *Exporting Democracy*, 3-40, on Canvas.

October 7: Midterm Exam.

Week 9: October 13-17

Central America and the US (II): The Cold War and Political Exclusion

Booth, Wade, and Walker, ch. 1-4.

Week 10: October 20-24

Central America and the US (III): The Rise and Decline of the Revolutionary Option

Booth, Wade, and Walker, ch. 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 11.

Délano Alonso (2024). "Migrants in Waiting in Mexico." *Current History*, on Canvas.

Lehoucq (2014). "Central America's Violent Legacy." *Current History*, on Canvas.

Wolf (2021). "A Populist President Tests El Salvador's Democracy." *Current History*, on Canvas.

Week 11: Oct. 27-31

Mexico-US: An Evolving Relationship

Skidmore, Smith, and Green (2014). *Modern Latin America*, 47-78, on Canvas.

Camp (2014). *Politics in Mexico*, 263-294, on Canvas.

Week 12: November 3-7

Mexico: Economic and Political Liberalization, Migration, and Drug Trafficking

Camp (2014). *Politics in Mexico*, 295-317, on Canvas.

Staudt (2018). "How NAFTA Has Changed Mexico." *Current History*, on Canvas.

Beck (2025). "López Obrador's Transformation of Mexican Democracy." *Current History*, on Canvas.

Week 13: November 10-14

Cuba: Its Political and Economic History

Wynia, ch. 11.

Week 14: November 17-21

Contemporary Cuba

Sweig and Bustamante (2013). "Cuba After Communism: The Economic Reforms That Are Transforming the Island," *Foreign Affairs*, on Canvas.

Henken, et al. (2015). "Overcoming Cuba's Internal Embargo." *Current History*, on Canvas.

Movie: "The Fidel Castro Tapes." discussion afterward.

Final Paper Due: Tuesday, November 18th (submit using Turnitin on Canvas).

November 20: Handout Final Exam Study Guide

Thanksgiving Break Nov. 24-28

Week 15: Dec. 1-5

Politics of Latin America into the Twenty-First Century

Castañeda and Navia (2007). "The Year of the Ballot." *Current History*, on Canvas.

Hunt (2022). "Why Latin America Has Embraced Ecotourism." *Current History*, on Canvas.

Arias. (2020). "How Criminals Govern in Latin America and the Caribbean." *Current History*, on Canvas.

Lustig and Trasberg. (2021). "How Brazil and Mexico Diverged on Social Protection in the Pandemic." *Current History*, on Canvas.

Final Exam: Thursday, December 11, 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.