Selected Topics in Comparative Politics:
Latin American Politics (INTL 8300)
Fall 2025

Instructor: Dr. Natán Skigin (nskigin@uga.edu)
Class: Tuesdays 3:55-6:45 p.m.
Room: Candler Hall 117
Office hours: Thursdays 2:30 – 4:00 pm & by appt.
Office Hour Location: 304 Candler Hall

This is a graduate-level course that examines some of the most urgent political challenges faced by Latin America—one of the most violent and unequal regions in the world, but also a source of groundbreaking experiments, from democratic transitions to transitional justice and innovative social policies. The seminar explores the causes and consequences of democratization, democratic breakdown and erosion, identity mobilization, and political and criminal violence. Core motivating questions include: (1) Why do democracies break down, and how do countries democratize?; (2) How do countries reckon with their repressive histories after democratization?; (3) Why have many Latin American countries experienced armed insurgency and civil war under dictatorship, only to find themselves trapped in cycles of criminal wars and large-scale criminal violence under democracy?; (4) Why have some Latin American countries been able to escape "violence traps" and build relatively peaceful democratic societies while others have failed?; (5) When do gender and racial cleavages become salient in politics, and how were they suppressed for so long?; (6) How do states and host communities respond to immigration?

The course's primary goal is to encourage students to formulate compelling questions in comparative politics. Doing so requires both familiarity with existing scholarship and a solid grasp of political dynamics across different contexts. To that end, the readings cover diverse historical periods and methodological traditions. While the course is designed for students interested in researching Latin American politics, the issues it tackles have broader relevance. Latin America's internal diversity offers a rich setting for exploring foundational themes in comparative politics, such as regime change, gender and ethnic politics, political violence, and migration. Throughout the course, we will also reflect on methodological choices and what constitutes strong empirical evidence.

Course Structure and Grading

A major part of the course will involve closely engaging with the assigned readings, coming to class well prepared, and actively contributing to seminar discussions. In addition to participating in weekly conversations, you will serve as a discussion leader twice during the semester and, most importantly, develop an original research paper through a series of scaffolded assignments. These components are designed to help you move from identifying a research question to presenting and writing up your empirical findings.

The final grade is based on the following components:

- **Seminar participation (25%)**
  - I expect students to treat class meetings with great preparation and attention. As this is a seminar, class participation is an essential component of both the course and your grade. All students are required to complete the assigned readings each week before class begins and should be prepared to discuss them constructively. Attendance is a prerequisite for participation. If you miss more than one class (unexcused) or if you do not come prepared for class, I will lower your grade. If you do not participate in class, I might lower your grade.
- **Seminar leadership (10%)**
  - During the first class, you will sign up to serve as a discussion leader during two seminars of the semester. Every class, one seminar participant will be in charge of beginning our discussion with brief opening comments identifying key themes and questions. Your role as discussion leader is not to merely synthesize the reading but most importantly to identify the ways in which the readings are related to each other and offer a few critiques of the readings, posing thoughtful, critical, and constructive questions to steer our seminar conversation.
- **Literature search (5%)**   due September 5
  - Identify five papers related to your research topic. Provide the citation for each paper, and list: (1) its research question, (2) the dependent variable, (3) the data employed (complete this assignment in less than two pages).
- **Paper outline (5%)**   due September 26
  - In one page, identify the (1) research question for your paper, (2) the hypothesis, (3) data to be used.
- **Empirical results (10%)**   due October 24
  - In three pages, present: (1) the data, (2) the units of analysis, (3) the dependent variable, (4), the independent variables, (5) a table/s or figure/s summarizing the empirical findings, (6) a paragraph interpreting the main findings.
- **Paper introduction (5%)**   due November 1
  - Please share the introduction to your paper (2–3 pages) with the entire class. Your introduction should clearly state the objective of this paper and outline either the main argument, the research design, a review of the relevant literature, or another core component you are developing. The main goal is to provide and receive peer feedback before writing the whole paper.
- **Paper presentation (10%)**   November 18-25
  - Prepare a 10-minute presentation summarizing the argument and the findings of your paper.
- **Final research paper (30%)**   due December 5
  - Paper should develop an original hypothesis and test it with empirical data.
  - Guidelines: double-spaced, 12-point font; between 6,000 and 10,000 words maximum including notes, tables, and references. Use a consistent citation format throughout your paper. Employ citation software for consistency.
  - Co-authorship between two students (no more) is allowed.

I am open to allowing you to combine this paper with a paper for another course. Obviously, you must indicate to me and the other faculty member that this is what you are doing.

MA students: I am open to considering a different assignment in lieu of the research paper (e.g., a policy paper, a systematic review). Let me know early in the semester if this is what you want to do. I will otherwise assume you will write a standard research paper.

Letter grades correspond to the following 0-100 scale:

Grade	Percentage Range
A	≥ 93.00
A−	90.00 – 92.99
B+	87.00 – 89.99
B	83.00 – 86.99
B−	80.00 – 82.99
C+	77.00 – 79.99
C	73.00 – 76.99
C−	70.00 – 72.99
D	60.00 – 69.99
F	≤ 59.99

Course Policies

Etiquette. Our class is based on mutual respect. Please be considerate of your fellow students and your instructor: show up to class on time, refrain from talking when others are speaking, use your laptop to take notes of what has been discussed and not browse anything unrelated to the course, turn off your cell phone during our meetings, and do not leave the class early unless necessary. Communications with your instructor and classmates should be courteous and professional.

Diversity and Inclusion. The University of Georgia is committed to maintaining a fair and respectful environment for living, work and study. To that end, and in accordance with federal and state law, University System of Georgia policy, and University policy, the University prohibits harassment of or discrimination against any person because of race, color, sex (including sexual harassment and pregnancy), sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity or national origin, religion, age, genetic information, disability, or veteran status by any member of the University Community on campus, in connection with a University program or activity, or in a manner that creates a hostile environment for any member of the University Community.

Academic Honesty. As a University of Georgia student, you have agreed to follow the University's academic honesty policy ("A Culture of Honesty") and the Student Honor Code. All academic work must meet the standards contained in "A Culture of Honesty," including policies that cover plagiarism and unauthorized assistance. Students are responsible for informing themselves about these standards before performing and submitting any academic work. They may direct specific questions they have regarding the policy—or its application to course assignments—to the instructor. Please note that all suspected violations of this policy will be handled according to the guidelines set forth within the policy.

Recording Policy. Students may not audio or video record class sessions unless they have received written authorization from the UGA Disability Resource Center. If students have such an authorization, they:

- Will use the recordings only for personal academic use during the specific course.
- Understand that faculty members have copyright interest in their class lectures and that they agree not to infringe on this right in any way.
- Understand that the faculty member and students in the class have privacy rights and agree not to violate those rights by using recordings for any reason other than their own personal study.
- Will not release, digitally upload, broadcast, transcribe, or otherwise share all or any part of the recordings. They also agree that they will not profit financially and will not allow others to benefit personally or financially from lecture recordings or other course materials.
- Will erase/delete all recordings at the end of the semester.
- Understand that violation of these terms may subject them to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct or subject them to liability under copyright laws.

AI Use Policy. You are allowed to use artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT, Copilot (or Grammarly, for that matter) on assignments in this course, provided that you follow two rules:

- Use AI for tutoring, but never delegate your thinking to a machine. You must be in control of the analysis and the final product. At the end of the day, you are responsible for your work – and all related steps and decisions.
- Acknowledge the use of AI and bring your experiences to class. We want to learn how to make our work more efficient.

Note: I can request clarification of any assignment, and request that you reproduce the logical steps leading to your conclusions and results in my presence.

Accommodation for students with disabilities. If you plan to request accommodations for a disability, please register with the Disability Resource Center (DRC). The DRC can be reached by visiting Clark Howell Hall, by calling 706-542-8719 (voice) or 706-542-8778 (TTY), or by visiting http://drc.uga.edu.

Mental Health and Wellness Resources. If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit https://sco.uga.edu/. They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services. UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services (https://caps.uga.edu/wellbeing-prevention-programs-mental-health/) or crisis support (https://healthcenter.uga.edu/emergencies/). If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA (https://caps.uga.edu/well-being-preventionprograms-mental-health/) for a list of free workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center. Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.

Course Schedule

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Week 1: August 19 – Introduction and Course Overview

Learning objectives:

- Set course expectations / go over the syllabus

Week 2: August 26 – Democratic Breakdown and Authoritarianism

Learning objectives:

- Understand how and why democracies break down, and how autocrats rule.
- Conceptualize different types of autocratic regimes during the twentieth century.

Readings:

- Schamis, Hector. 1991. "Reconceptualizing Latin American Authoritarianism in the 1970s: From Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism to Neoconservatism." *Comparative Politics*, 23(2): 201–220.

- Cohen, Youssef. 1987. "Democracy from Above: The Political Origins of Military Dictatorship in Brazil." *World Politics*, 40(1), 30-54.

- Magaloni, Beatriz, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press). Introduction.

- Albertus, Michael. *Autocracy and Redistribution: The Politics of Land Reform* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), Introduction.

- Htun, Mala. 2003. *Sex and the State: Abortion, Divorce, and the Family under Latin American Dictatorships and Democracies*. Cambridge University Press, Chapter 3 ("Reforming Women's Rights Under Military Dictatorships"), pp. 58-77.

Week 3: September 2 – State Terrorism in Autocracy

Learning objectives:

- Learn about human rights abuses committed by state security forces under autocratic rule and their drivers
- Examine how victims and opposition resisted, and the role of international human rights law.

Readings:

- Pereira, Anthony. 2012. "Human Rights and Military Abuses." In *Routledge Handbook of Latin American Politics*, eds. Peter Kingstone and Deborah J. Yashar. London, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group.

- Scharpf, Adam. "Ideology and state terror: How officer beliefs shaped repression during Argentina's 'Dirty War'." *Journal of Peace Research* 55, no. 2 (2018): 206-221.

- Bouvard, M. G. (1994). *Revolutionizing motherhood: The mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC. Introduction, Chapters 3 and 7.

- Esberg, Jane. 2021. "Anticipating dissent: The repression of politicians in Pinochet's Chile." *The Journal of Politics* 83(2): 689-705.

- Bautista, Maria Angélica, Felipe González, Luis R. Martínez, Pablo Muñoz, and Mounu Prem. 2023. "The Geography of Repression and Opposition to Autocracy." *American Journal of Political Science* 67(1): 101–118.

Week 4: September 9 – Democratization

Learning objectives:

- Systematically examine how theories of democratization work in Latin America.

- Why are some dictatorships more enduring than others?

- Discuss the role of international factors, and the U.S. specifically, in prompting democratization and democratic breakdowns.

Readings:

- Mainwaring, Scott, and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán. 2014. *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emergence, Survival, and Fall*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 2.

- Karl, Terry. 1990. "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America." *Comparative Politics*, 3(1): 1-21.

- Treisman, Daniel. 2020. "Democracy by mistake: How the errors of autocrats trigger transitions to freer government." *American Political Science Review*, 114(3): 792-810

- Skigin, Natán and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán. "Preemptive Multipartism and Democratic Transitions". *Political Science Research and Methods*.

- Schenoni, Luis L., and Scott Mainwaring. 2019. "US hegemony and regime change in Latin America." *Democratization*, 26(2): 269-287.

Week 5: September 16 – Transitional Justice

Learning objectives:

- Conceptualize the ecosystem of transitional justice mechanisms

- Learn about different countries' experiences with transitional justice

- Examine theories of transitional justice and the effects of TJ policies

Readings:

- Gonzalez-Ocantos, Ezequiel (2020). *The politics of transitional justice in Latin America: Power, norms, and capacity building.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Kathryn Sikkink. 2011. *The Justice Cascade*, Introduction and Chapter 5.

- Balcells, Laia, Valeria Palanza, and Elsa Voytas. "Do transitional justice museums persuade visitors? Evidence from a field experiment." *The Journal of Politics* 84, no. 1 (2022): 496-510.

Week 6: September 23 – Democratic Erosion and Resilience

Learning objectives:

- Define democratic erosion and distinguish it from other ways that countries can transition into authoritarianism.

- Review the symptoms, observable implications, and causes of democratic erosion in the modern age.

- Identify which actors are most capable of resisting democratic backsliding.

Readings:

- Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. (2018). *How Democracies Die.* Introduction, Chapters 1, 4, and 5.

- Mainwaring, Scott, and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán. 2023. "Why Latin America's democracies are stuck." *Journal of Democracy*, 34(1), 156-170.

- Meléndez-Sánchez, Manuel. 2021. "Latin America Erupts: Millennial Authoritarianism in El Salvador." *Journal of Democracy* 32(3): 19–32.

- Gamboa, Laura (2017) "Opposition at the Margins: Strategies against the Erosion of Democracy in Colombia and Venezuela," *Comparative Politics*, 49(4): 457-477.

- Gamboa, Laura, Benjamín García-Holgado, and Ezequiel González-Ocantos. "Courts against backsliding: Lessons from Latin America." *Law & Policy* 46, no. 4 (2024): 358-379.

Week 7: September 30 – The Political Mobilization of Identities: Race, Gender, and Religion

Learning objectives:

- Conceptualize "identity politics."

- Why do sometimes identities become mobilized, whereas others they do not?

Readings:

- Van Cott, Donna Lee. 2010. "Indigenous Peoples' Politics in Latin America." *Annual Review of Political Science* 13 (1): 385–405.

- Freeman, N. C., Telles, E. E., & Goldberg, R. E. (2025). The changing relationship between racial identity and skin color in Brazil. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *122*(1), e2411495121.

- Trejo, Guillermo, "Religious Competition and Ethnic Mobilization in Latin America: Why the Catholic Church Promotes Indigenous Movements in Mexico," *American Political Science Review* 103, 3 (August 2009): 323-342.

- Corrales, Javier. 2022. *The Politics of LGBTQ Rights Expansion in Latin America and the Caribbean.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Daby, M., & Moseley, M. W. (2022). Feminist mobilization and the abortion debate in Latin America: Lessons from Argentina. *Politics & Gender*, *18*(2), 359-393.

Week 8: October 7 – Civil Wars and Rebel Governance

Learning objectives:

- Define civil war and its causes.
- What are insurgent groups' main motivations?
- How do rebels govern, and what explains variation in rebel governance?

Readings:

- Sambanis, Nicholas. 2004. "What Is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48 (6): 814–58.

- Daly, Sarah Zukerman. 2012. "Organizational Legacies of Violence: Conditions Favoring Insurgency Onset in Colombia, 1964–1984." *Journal of Peace Research* 49 (3): 473–91.

- Arjona, Ana. 2016. *Rebelocracy.* Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 2.

Week 9: October 14 – Criminal Wars and Criminal Governance

Learning objectives:

- How do criminal groups differ from rebel groups?
- Understand recent outbreaks of criminal violence in some, but not all, countries, and how criminal organization rule in parts of contemporary Latin America.
- Trace how earlier political violence shapes today's criminal violence.

Readings:

- Stathis Kalyvas. 2015. "How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime – and How They Do Not." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*.

- Barnes, Nicholas. 2017. "Criminal politics: An integrated approach to the study of organized crime, politics, and violence." *Perspectives on Politics*, 15(4): 967-987.

- Trejo, Guillermo, and Sandra Ley. 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.

- Lessing, Benjamin. 2021. "Conceptualizing Criminal Governance." *Perspectives on Politics*, *19*(3), 854-873.

- Uribe, Andres, Benjamin Lessing, Noah Schouela, and Elayne Stecher. 2025. "Criminal Governance in Latin America: Prevalence and Correlates." *Perspectives on Politics*: 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592725101849.

- Magaloni, Beatriz, Edgar Franco and Vanessa Melo "Killing in the Slums: Criminal Governance, Social Order and Police Violence in Rio de Janeiro, *American Political Science Review*, 2020.

Week 10: October 21 – Authoritarian Policing and Human Rights Abuses in Democracy

Learning objectives:

- Define "militarized policing" and examine its causes and consequences for human rights.

- Analyze why some reforms enhance civilian control of police forces whereas others prompt authoritarian policing in democracy.

Readings:

- Flores-Macías, Gustavo A., and Jessica Zarkin. 2021. "The Militarization of Law Enforcement: Evidence from Latin America." *Perspectives on Politics* 19(2): 519–38.

- González, Yanilda. *Authoritarian Police in Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), chapter 1.

- Magaloni, Beatriz and Luis Rodriguez. 2020. "Institutionalized Police Brutality: Torture, the Militarization of Security and the Reform of Inquisitorial Criminal Justice in Mexico," *American Political Science Review*.

- Trejo, Guillermo, and Natán Skigin. 2024. "Silencing the Press in Criminal Wars: Why the War on Drugs Turned Mexico into the World's Most Dangerous Country for Journalists." *Perspectives on Politics*, pp.1-22.

Week 11: October 28 – Breaking the Violence Trap

Learning objectives:

- Are there alternatives to militarized policing to reduce crime and violence? What do they look like, and what effects might they have?

Readings:

- Trejo, Guillermo, Juan Albarracín, and Lucía Tiscornia. 2018. "Breaking state impunity in post-authoritarian regimes: Why transitional justice processes deter criminal violence in new democracies." *Journal of Peace Research* 55(6): 787-809.

- Sandra Ley, Shannan Mattiace, and Guillermo Trejo. 2019. "Indigenous Resistance to Criminal Governance in Mexico: Why Regional Ethnic Autonomy Institutions Protect Communities from Narco Rule," *Latin American Research Review* 54(1).

- Trejo, Guillermo, and Camilo Nieto-Matiz. 2022. "Containing Large-Scale Criminal Violence Through Internationalized Prosecution: How the Collaboration Between the CICIG and Guatemala's Law Enforcement Contributed to a Sustained Reduction in the Murder Rate." *Comparative Political Studies* 56(9): 1328-1364.

- José Miguel Cruz. 2011. "Criminal violence and democratization in Central America." *Latin American Politics and Society* 53(4).

Week 12: November 4 – Causes of Migration and Discussion of Introductions to Papers

Read the introductions to all of your classmates' papers and come prepared to offer constructive feedback. Based on the introduction, does the argument or research design seem clear and coherent? Are the objectives well-defined and feasible within the scope of the semester? We will dedicate part of the class to this discussion.

Learning objectives:

- Provide constructive feedback to your peers to support the development of their papers.
- Understand what drives migration in Latin America today.

Readings:

- Hiskey, J.T., Córdova, A., Malone, M.F. and Orcés, D.M., 2018. "Leaving the devil you know: Crime victimization, US deterrence policy, and the emigration decision in Central America." *Latin American Research Review*, 53(3), pp.429-447.

- Clemens, M. A. (2021). Violence, development, and migration waves: Evidence from Central American child migrant apprehensions. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 124, 103355.

- Flores, Fernanda Martínez. (2020). "The Effects of Enhanced Enforcement at Mexico's Southern Border: Evidence from Central American Deportees." *Demography* 57: 1597–1623.

- Ryo, Emily. (2013). "Deciding to cross: norms and economics of unauthorized migration." *American Sociological Review*, *78*(4), 574-603.

Week 13: November 11 – Responses to Migration

Learning objectives:

- Characterize Latin America's responses to immigration flows.

- Examine natives' perceptions and misperceptions about immigration.

- Analyze the political effects of immigration.

Readings:

- Hammoud-Gallego, O., & Freier, L. F. (2023). Symbolic refugee protection: Explaining Latin America's liberal refugee laws. *American Political Science Review*, *117*(2), 454-473.

- Fernández-Rodríguez, N., Freier, L.F. Latin American immigration and refugee policies: a critical literature review. CMS 12, 15 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-024-00377-0.

- Holland, Alisha, Margaret E. Peters, and Yang-Yang Zhou. 2024. "Left Out: How Political Ideology Affects Support for Migrants in Colombia." *The Journal of Politics* 86 (4): 1291–1303. https://doi.org/10.1086/729943.

- Ajzenman, Nicolás, Patricio Dominguez, and Raimundo Undurraga. 2023. "Immigration, crime, and crime (mis)perceptions." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 15(4): 142-176.

- Rozo, S. V., & Vargas, J. F. (2021). Brothers or invaders? How crisis-driven migrants shape voting behavior. *Journal of Development Economics*, *150*, 102636.

- Lebow, Jeremy, Jonathan Moreno-Medina, Salma Mousa, and Horacio Coral. "Migrant exposure and anti-migrant sentiment: The case of the Venezuelan exodus." *Journal of Public Economics* 236 (2024): 105169.

Week 14: November 18 – Class Presentations

Week 15: November 25 – Class Presentations + Conclusion