

Politics of Latin America
POLS 5330.060, Summer I, 2026 Online

**Instructor
Information**

Amentahru Wahlrab, Ph.D.
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Virtual Office: [Zoom](#) (email me to set up a meeting)
Virtual Office Hours: M/W 11-Noon and by appointment via zoom

**Required
Readings**

1. Harry E. Vanden and Gary Prevost, *Politics of Latin America: The Power Game*, 8th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024):
E-book ISBN: 9780197768464
2. Alicia Partnoy, *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance & Survival in Argentina*, 2nd ed. (Pittsburgh, PA: Cleis Press, 1998).
ISBN-10: 1573440299
ISBN-13: 978-1573440295
3. Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*, 1st ed. (New York: Times Books/Henry Holt, 2006).
ISBN-10: 0805082409
ISBN-13: 978-0805082401
4. Noelle Brigden, *The Migrant Passage: Clandestine Journeys from Central America* (Ithaca New York: Cornell University Press, 2018)
ISBN-10: 150173055X
ISBN-13: 978-1501730559
5. News articles and journal articles posted on Canvas and/or in the library.

**Suggested
Readings and Office
Hours**

- *Economist* magazine, BBC,
- Greg Grandin. 2025. *America, América: a new history of the New World*. Penguin Press
- James F. Petras and Henry Veltmeyer. 2017. *Power and Resistance: US Imperialism in Latin America*. Haymarket books.
- Thomas E. Skidmore, Peter H. Smith, and James Naylor Green, *Modern Latin America*, Eighth ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- Richard S. Hillman, *Understanding Contemporary Latin America*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, Colo.: L. Rienner Publishers, 2005).
- Julie A. Charlip and E. Bradford Burns, *Latin America: An Interpretive History*, 9th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2011).
- William I. Robinson, *A Faustian Bargain: U.S. Intervention in the Nicaraguan Elections and American Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992),
- William I. Robinson, *Latin America and Global Capitalism: A Critical Globalization Perspective* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008)
- Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007).

Film Screening

We will also be watching several films during the course of the class: *The Battle of Chile*, *The Take*, *Fidel: The Untold Story*, *La Jaula de Oro: The Golden Dream* and *South of the Border*—in addition to being exceptionally good, there will be paper questions dedicated to these films.

News

Because there is already quite a bit of reading for this class, students are not required to keep up with the news regarding Latin America—although this is *highly* recommended. I will post links to good news sources on the class' Canvas website.

Office Hours

I really enjoy meeting with student during office hours and encourage all students to stop by. I have zoom office hours M-Th 11-Noon and by appointment. In addition, anyone who cannot meet me during this time should contact me via email to schedule an appointment. I am also regularly available by email and will respond to your emails within one *working* day.

Course Description

DESCRIPTION

This is a survey course on the politics of Latin American. This course thematically investigates issues of foreign policy, political economy, human rights, security, culture, and migration as they intersect in, across, and beyond the borders of many Latin American countries.

This course requires you to read and interpret texts and films in combination. You will need to use texts to help you interpret films and films to help you interpret texts to better understand historical events that continue to influence politics in the present.

OBJECTIVES

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- a) Understand and explain the quest for development, liberty, and governance in individual Latin American countries and comparatively;
- b) Understand the historical context of the politics of Latin America;
- c) Understand and explain the main political institutions, in individual Latin American countries and comparatively;
- d) Assess the prospects of democracy in the region and;
- e) Assess the US role in helping and hurting the region's prospects for all of the above

Canvas

This class will utilize Canvas. This is where your grades, your syllabus, and any extra reading material and class assignments will be posted. You will need to log in to Canvas and make sure that this course is listed as one of your courses. If this course does not appear, let me know ASAP.

Class Decorum

You are all adults, and I expect you to act as such. In short, be respectful of the professor and your classmates. Failure to do so will be considered when assigning final grades for the course.

Statements that are offensive or rude, or statements that are not relevant to the class material will not be tolerated. I expect discussion in this class to be productive. In order to achieve that, I have a few rules.

- I understand that you all have opinions, and you are encouraged to express them so long as they are grounded in something other than your ego. Any opinion you express must be grounded in evidence and fact. Just because you think something is or should be a certain way doesn't make it true. Offer evidence to support your opinion or keep it to yourself.
- Be respectful. Understand that a lot of people will never agree with you. That does not make them stupid or irrational. You're free to offer your opinion, and they are free to offer theirs.

- We will question government and elected officials in this class. It's a healthy practice in a democracy. It's not high treason (it's not even a misdemeanor) and we will not treat it as such. However, criticizing for the sake of criticizing is rarely productive. If you do point out a problem or inconsistency in the operation of government or the behavior of a public official be prepared to offer a reasonable solution as well. Focusing only on what's wrong fosters apathy and distrust. These are not healthy practices in a democracy and we won't engage in them in this class.

Evaluation and Grading

You must complete all assigned written and oral work in order to pass the course. Any student found guilty of plagiarism will fail the course.

Your three (5-7 pages) interpretive essays 50%, your three (3-4 pages) film based critical reaction papers 35 %, and your discussion board posts 15% will determine your overall grade. Thus, your course grade will reflect your discussion board posts and the overall quality of your written work. Students who distinguish themselves in discussion posts will receive *extra credit*--meaning that if you find yourself between two grades at the end of the course, you will receive the *higher grade*. A significant element in the study of politics is the ability to learn to listen to other voices.

For the purposes of this seminar, you should interpret the grades you receive in the following terms:

1) *Interpretative Essays (IE)* (5-7 pages):

In addition to treating the subject in a sophisticated and creative manner, "A" papers exhibit elegant and clear prose. Such papers draw connections between nonobvious points; they are well organized and furnish adequate citations of primary and secondary sources without losing their own unique and distinct "voice." An "A" paper in an advanced undergraduate course should add a "new wrinkle" to the existing body of literature on this topic. If this grade is to mean something, just doing a "good job" is not good enough for an "A." You must demonstrate your ability to go *beyond* the expected. Note that IE 1 and IE 4 are Required. You may choose among the remaining to fulfill the requirement for a third IE. Note that in module/week 5 there will be a LONG multiple choice exam that will count towards one IE. The topic will be comprehensive of the course and cover topics of human rights, US foreign policy towards the various governments discussed, populism, migration, and social change.

2) *Reaction Papers (RP)* (3-4 pages)

The above applies here as well. However, these are meant to provide me with further evidence of your thinking and to reward you for watching the movies and thinking about them in a more sophisticated manner. Note that RP 1 and 4 are Required. You may choose among the remaining to fulfill the requirement for a third RP. Note that in module/week 5 there will be a short multiple choice quiz that will count towards one RP. The topic will be populism.

3) *Discussion Boards (DB)* (1-4 paragraphs)

These are preliminary reactions to the films and readings. They are intended as creative exercises to stimulate your thinking about what you will ultimately write in your Reaction Papers and in your Interpretive Essays. You are highly encouraged to read your classmates' posts to get ideas, criticisms, sources, and other tips on writing. Note: all five (5) film based DBs are required.

Thus: you must complete three (3) IEs, three (3) RPs, and five (5) film based DBs. Since IE 1 & 4 and RP 1 & 4 are required, you may choose between those assignments from weeks 2, 3, and 5 (noting that in week five the assignments are replaced by a MC quiz & a MC comprehensive exam) to complete the required three RPs and three IEs.

A useful style manual will help you with citation formats. I recommend: Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* 9th Revised Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018) (~\$12)

Late paper policy

Papers will be marked down one third of a grade every (business) day they are late (i.e. 24 hours late turns a B+ into a B). If you do not turn in a paper you get zero points. If a paper is late two weeks or more you will automatically receive an F (59%). It is in your interest to turn all assignments in, even if they are late, since failing to turn in even one paper makes it almost mathematically impossible to pass the class.

NOTE: This fairly lenient late policy will be compensated for by the fact that there will be NO extensions given, except in case of an extreme emergency. If an emergency arises, documentation is required (police reports, obituaries, etc.) and I should be notified as soon as possible. Note also that all of the above is complicated by the very short summer schedule. Avoid stress by getting papers in on time.

Turing in papers

Papers must be submitted through turnitin on Canvas. *Late papers will receive grades only, no comments.*

Students should refrain from comments and behaviors that distract from the common goal of teaching and learning.

- No late or make-up assignments, exams or papers are accepted, unless previously authorized by Dr. Wahrab.

To restate:

“A” paper—provides an original, insightful, and well argued thesis which is defended systematically using significant citation; demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the course material; is elegantly written and thoroughly proofread.

“B” paper—proves a coherent thesis which is defended; uses sufficient citations; demonstrates an understanding of the course material; is well written.

“C” paper—provides a more-or-less coherent thesis; uses adequate citations; demonstrates a basic understanding of the course material; is readable.

“D” paper—provides a basic argument; uses minimal or no citations; demonstrates minimal understanding of the course material; is poorly written

“F” paper—Paper is turned in but does not meet basic requirements (too short, does not answer the question, etc.). Not turning in a paper results in a zero.

Grade Scale

100-93 = A	80-82 = B-	66-69 = D+
90-92 = A-	76-79 = C+	63-65 = D
86-89 = B+	73-75 = C	60-86 = D-
83-85 = B	70-72 = C-	0-59 = F

Academic Dishonesty

The UT Tyler community regards cheating as an extremely serious matter and deals severely with those who violate the standards of academic integrity.

Examples of academic dishonesty include (but are not limited to):

- Copying from another person’s test paper
- During a test, possession of materials not authorized by the person administering the test

- Discussing the contents of an examination with another student who will take the examination or the divulging of examination contents to another when an instructor has allowed the exam to be kept by the student
- Working with others in taking tests or preparing academic assignments when not authorized by the course instructor
- Obtaining by any means another person's work and submitting that work as one's own. This included the downloading of academic papers or the purchase of papers written by others.

If a student is suspected of academic dishonesty, the classroom instructor may ask the student to meet with him or her to discuss the incident. A student may admit to allegations of academic dishonesty, waive the right to a hearing and accept penalties imposed by the instructor. The student may also deny all allegations and ask to see the Dean of Student Affairs. An accused student may accept the decision of the Dean of Student Affairs or ask for a hearing before an impartial hearing officer appointed by the university. Witnesses may be called and evidence presented. The hearing officer will consider all evidence and make a decision. The decision of the hearing officer may be appealed to the President by either the student or the Dean of Student Affairs. For a discussion of possible penalties, please see <http://www.uttyler.edu/mainsite/conduct.html>.

University Policies

UT Tyler and Course approved policy on use of artificial intelligence (AI)

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course (see below) is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy.

For this course, **AI is not permitted in this class at all**

POLS 3380, Summer 1 2026

Course Schedule

Please note that any changes to the schedule will be announced on Canvas.

Module 1	<p>Themes: Presentation of the course, introduction to Twenty-First Century Latin America, Early History, Democracy and Dictators, The Other Americans; Society, Family, and Gender; Religion in Latin America, US Foreign Policy towards Latin America (The case of Chile), the political economy of violence in Latin America.</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">! Harry E. Vanden and Gary Prevost, <i>Politics of Latin America: The Power Game</i>, 8th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024): Chapters 1-7, & 15.! Stephen Kinzer, <i>Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq</i>. 1st ed. New York: Times Books/Henry Holt, 2006: Chapter Eight.! Christopher Hitchens, <i>The Trial of Henry Kissinger</i> (New York: Verso, 2001): Chapter 5.! Naomi Klein, <i>The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism</i>, 1st ed. (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007): Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3 (on Canvas).! Cecilia Ricciarelli, <i>The Documentary Film as Practice of Knowledge: An Introduction to the Cinema of Patricio Guzmán</i> (on Canvas) <p>Suggested Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Mike Davis, <i>Planet of Slums</i>, Paperback ed. (New York: Verso, 2007). <p>Watch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">! Movie: <i>The Battle of Chile</i> (part 1, 2, & 3) (+REQUIRED DB) <p>Assignments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Discussion Boards Due by end of day Wednesday at least 4 paragraphs. (REQUIRED)✓ First Reaction Papers Due by end of day Thursday 3-4 pages. (REQUIRED)✓ First Interpretive Essay due by end of day Sunday 1200-1500 words (REQUIRED)
Module 2	<p>Themes: Torture, Disappeared, The Political Economy of Violence in Latin America, & Human Rights Argentina, Brazil Torture, Disappeared, The Political Economy Of Violence In Latin America, Fascism, Populism, Genocide & Human Rights</p> <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">! Harry E. Vanden and Gary Prevost, <i>Politics of Latin America: The Power Game</i>, 8th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024): Chapters 7, 13 & 14! Alicia Partnoy, <i>The Little School: Tales of Disappearance & Survival in Argentina</i>, 2nd ed. (Pittsburgh, PA: Cleis Press, 1998): entire book.! Naomi Klein, <i>The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism</i>, 1st ed. (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007): Chapter 4! Carlos de la Torre, "Populism in Latin America," in <i>The Oxford Handbook of Populism</i>, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, et al. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) <p>Watch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">🎬 Film: <i>The Take</i> (+REQUIRED DB) <p>Assignments</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Discussion Boards Due by end of day Wednesday 1-4 paragraphs. (REQUIRED) ✓ Second Reaction Papers Due by end of day Thursday 3-4 pages (Option to count towards required three RPs). ✓ Second Interpretive Essay due by end of day Sunday 1200-1500 words (Option to count towards required three IEs)
Module 3		<p>Theme: Chile, Cuba, Democracy and Authoritarianism, Politics, Power, Institutions, and Actors, Social Change, U.S. –Latin American Relations.</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ! Harry E. Vanden and Gary Prevost, <i>Politics of Latin America: The Power Game</i>, 8th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024): Chapters 8-11, 15, 19 ! Stephen Kinzer, <i>Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq</i>. 1st ed. New York: Times Books/Henry Holt, 2006: 1-56. <p>Watch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📺 Movie: <i>Fidel: the Untold Story</i> (+REQUIRED DB) 📺 Movie: <i>A Force More Powerful</i> <p>Assignments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Discussion Boards Due by end of day Wednesday 1-4 paragraphs. (REQUIRED) ✓ Third Reaction Papers Due by end of day Thursday 3-4 pages. (Option to count towards required three RPs). ✓ Third Interpretive Essay due by end of day Sunday 1200-1500 words (Option to count towards required three IEs).
Module 4		<p>Theme: Guatemala, Mexico, Underground Globalization in Action (Exposition), Underground Globalization in Action (Rising Action), Underground Globalization in Action (Climax);</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ! Noelle Brigden, <i>The Migrant Passage : Clandestine Journeys from Central America</i> (Ithaca New York: Cornell University Press, 2018): (CHS 1-6). ! Harry E. Vanden and Gary Prevost, <i>Politics of Latin America: The Power Game</i>, 8th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024): Chapter 12, ! Harry E. Vanden and Gary Prevost, <i>Politics of Latin America: The Power Game</i>, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017): Chapters 18 & 20 <p>Suggested Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ TBA ~ Suggested Movie: <i>El Norte</i> <p>Watch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📺 Movie: <i>La Jaula de Oro: The Golden Dream</i>, directed by Diego Quemada-Diez (2013) [rent on Amazon] (+REQUIRED DB) <p>Assignments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Discussion Boards Due by end of day Wednesday 1-4 paragraphs. (REQUIRED) ✓ Fourth Reaction Papers Due by end of day Thursday 3-4 pages. (REQUIRED) ✓ Fourth Interpretive Essay due by end of day Sunday 1200-1500 words. (REQUIRED)
Module 5		<p>Theme: Populism, Brazil, Latin American Futures, Struggling for Change</p> <p>Read:</p>

- ! Carlos de la Torre, "Populism in Latin America," in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, et al. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- ! Felipe Burbano de Lara, "Populist Waves in Latin America: Continuities, Twists, and Ruptures," in *The Routledge Handbook of Global Populism*, ed. Carlos de la Torre (Milton Park and New York: Routledge, 2018).
- ! Luis Roniger, "The Missing Piece in Global Populism: The Role Populism Played in Central America," in *The Routledge Handbook of Global Populism*, ed. Carlos de la Torre (Milton Park and New York: Routledge, 2018).
- ! Harry E. Vanden and Gary Prevost, *Politics of Latin America: The Power Game*, 8th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024): Chapters 10-11.

Suggested Reading:

- + Castañeda, Jorge G. 2006. "Latin America's Left Turn." *Foreign Affairs*, May/June. Reference List
- + Leslie Bethell, "Populism in Brazil," in *Brazil: Essays on History and Politics* (School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2018)

Watch:

- + Movie: Oliver Stone, *South of the Border* (+**REQUIRED DB**)

Assignments

- ✓ Discussion Boards Due by end of day Wednesday 1-4 paragraphs. **(REQUIRED)**
- ✓ MC Quiz Due by end of day Thursday **(Option to count towards required three RPs).**
- ✓ MC Comprehensive exam. Due by end of day Friday **(Option to count towards required three IEs).**