As the Cold War ended, democracy was restored in all Latin American countries (except Cuba). In the 1990s, countries embraced—with different levels of enthusiasm—the Washington Consensus neo-liberal economic reforms and electoral democracy became the norm in the region. Many believed Latin American had finally left behind a past of political instability, military coups, populism, revolutionary movements and radical political change. Democracy was “the only game in town.” However, consolidating democracy proved to be much more difficult than attaining electoral democracy. For the most part, Latin American countries have failed to develop strong institutions and a strong civil society, two characteristics that often associated with consolidated democracies. In short, electoral democracies failed to give raise to consolidated democracies. The enthusiasm of the early 1990s has been replaced by pessimism—or at least concern—in recent years.

In addition, the positive results of the economic policies (and the windfalls from the commodity boom) only partially offset the time and opportunities lost in the 1980s. The economy has not been in crisis (although 2015-2016 have been bad year for the region), but it has not grown as fast as needed. Free trade agreements were either not moving forward fast enough or they were not as free as intended (and the election of Trump in the U.S. might result in protectionist policies all around). Power asymmetries have also seemingly benefited larger economies in free trade agreements. Inequality had either worsened or become stagnant. Poverty has declined in many places, but not fast enough. In some countries that have traditionally been perceived as having created a strong middle class, poverty levels have actually increased in recent years. There were all sorts of economic problems looming in the horizon.

The period from 2003 to 2014 (financial crisis notwithstanding) brought unprecedented levels of economic growth in Latin America. The terms of trade were overwhelmingly positive for developing nations. Yet, growth did not result in substantial reductions in poverty and inequality. Why is inequality so persistent in the region? Most recently, the economic crisis that has just begun to hit the region will likely increase poverty and social exclusion in years to come. If the good years did not help consolidate democracy, can we expect democracy to fare well in bad years and in times of uncertainty?

The election of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1998 seemed to awaken many who believed that democracy was here to stay. Although there were problems of democratic consolidation in Peru, Ecuador and Argentina in the mid 1990s, the election of Chávez seemed to signal problems for insufficiently consolidated democracies in Latin America. Chávez became an ally of Fidel Castro and, it seemed, that the challenges to democracy were no longer within the framework of electoral democracy. Chávez represented an alternative (or a complement?) to electoral democracy. After
Chávez, different challenges to democratic consolidation have appeared in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Nicaragua, Colombia, Brazil and Mexico.

Are there similarities among them? Are they radically different? Are there regional patterns that we can identify? In this class, we will explore different challenges to democratic consolidation in Latin America in the last decade. We will discuss Latin America history, democratic theory and the way Latin American countries have experimented with electoral democracy since the end of the Cold War.

Finally, as the economic cycle turned negative for export-led economies in the region starting in 2014, how will the negative cycle affect political stability and the prospects for democracy in the coming years? And, most recently, how will the Trump administration affect recent improvements in U.S. Latin American relations?

Class Requirements:
Students will be required to complete 6 weekly 2-page responses to the readings selected for that week. Students can choose any six of the 14-week assigned readings. This will account for 40% of the final grade.

In addition, students are expected to submit a 6,000-word (25-doble spaced pages) case-study paper of their choice. This paper requirement is intended for students to put to use the theoretical tools learned in class and apply them to their own area of research interest. Using one of the theoretical frameworks presented in the class (or an alternative framework provided the proper substantiated theoretical basis) and some of the articles discussed here, students should test some of the hypothesis and propositions discussed in the literature and examine their relevance in the context of their own research topic. Comparative analyses (meaning comparing more than one case) are ideal, but as in the real world, not mandatory. Students interested in comparing a Latin American country with a non-Latin American country for their research paper should consult with me before proceeding, but should keep in mind that this class is not exclusively about theoretical tools. It is also intended to survey the main themes that exist in the study of Latin American politics today. (3 alternatives for paper: Academic, Policy and Journal/Magazine articles).

Required and recommended books will be on reserve in the library or posted on http://classes.nyu.edu.

Recommended Background Readings
For those with no prior knowledge of Latin American history and politics, I recommend four books as background reading materials:


**Weekly Readings**


**Historical Background.**

**Required Readings:**


For those who need to strengthen their historical background on Latin America:


For the rest:


**Week 2. Basic Methodological Issues. January 30, 2018.**

**Required Readings**


**Recommended:**


Required Reading:

Recommended Readings:

Required Readings:
Recommended Readings:


Week 5. Inequality and Democratic Consolidation. February 20, 2018.

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:

- 2016 Preliminary overview of the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean 2016 [www.cepal.cl](http://www.cepal.cl)

Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:
• Negretto, Gabriel. 2004. “Government capacities and policy making by decree in Latin America - The cases of Brazil and Argentina” *Comparative Political Studies* 37 (5): 531-562 (June).

**Week 7. Political Parties, Democratic Institutions, the Legislature and Democratic Consolidation. March 6, 2018.**

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:

Required Reading:
Special Discussion on Education and Educational Policy:


Recommended Reading:


**Week 10. Labor Unions, Social Movements and Democratic Consolidation. April 3, 2018.**

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Readings:**

**Week 11. Citizens and Democratic Consolidation. April 10, 2018.**
**Required Readings:**

**Recommended Readings:**
• *Human Development Reports* for Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. [http://www.desarrollohumano.cl/](http://www.desarrollohumano.cl/)

**Week 12. Indigenous Movements, Religious Movements and Democratic Consolidation. April 17, 2018.**

**Required Readings:**

**Recommended Readings:**
Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:

Required Readings:

**Recommended Readings:**


**Papers Due: May 15, 2018.**