

GOV 312L – **in-person course**
Unique 38470
MWF 1-2 pm, BUR 106

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Issues and Policies in American Government: The U.S. in Comparative Perspective

This course analyzes the United States as a prototype of liberal democracy and contrasts the U.S. model with other versions of democracy and with alternative types of political regimes, especially Communist totalitarianism and authoritarian rule. The basic assumption of the course is that we can only appreciate the distinctive nature of the U.S. political system by contrasting it with other ways of organizing politics. Thus, one needs a comparative perspective to understand one's own country. Such a comparative analysis also raises an obvious question: Which one of those different ways of organizing politics is best suited for advancing the variegated goals that people pursue in and through politics, especially political freedom, social justice, and economic development?

To perform such a comparative analysis and assessment in a systematic fashion, we will first clarify the concept of democracy and examine some of its different versions on a theoretical level. Then the course will contrast the two most influential models of democracy in the contemporary West, namely liberal democracy (as practiced in the U.S.) and social democracy (as practiced in Sweden); we will also analyze Great Britain as a country that moved from social to liberal democracy. In the second half of the course, we will analyze alternatives to modern democracy, namely the Communist system of the former USSR and the authoritarian system prevailing for decades in Mexico. After analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of those regime types by contrast to Western democracy, we will examine the (temporary) transitions to democracy in both of these countries, discuss their causes, and assess the future prospects of these challenged democracies (Mexico) or increasingly authoritarian regimes (Russia).

Thus, by starting at home and then venturing out into the world, the course will make you familiar with the major types of political rule prevailing in the contemporary world and provide a broad overview of politics in the advanced industrialized countries, the previously Communist countries, and the Global South of “developing” countries. Such a wide-ranging comparative perspective will give you a better understanding of politics in today’s increasingly interdependent world. For citizens of a country as deeply involved in global politics as the U.S., such knowledge is indispensable.

This course will train you to think independently and critically about politics. Politics is by nature controversial. The course deliberately covers issues and discusses readings that are controversial. We will first see that there are several different models of democracy that may diverge considerably from the form of democracy established in the U.S. We will analyze the major models in theory and practice, and then assess and compare their advantages and disadvantages. In the second half of the course, we will discuss issues of great relevance for our future, such as the prospects for democracy in the former USSR and the economic and political fate of the Global South. The course tries to teach you how to make up your own mind on these issues and how to advance your position persuasively.

The textbooks for this course are available for purchase in the textbook section of the University Co-op Bookstore. **Please make sure you are buying the correct edition, especially if you buy from another source!**

David Held. *Models of Democracy, 3rd edition.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

Benjamin Ginsberg and Martin Shefter. *Politics by Other Means, 3rd edition.* New York: W.W. Norton, 2002.

Daniel Levy and Kathleen Bruhn, Mexico: *The Struggle for Democratic Development, 2nd edition.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

A number of xeroxed articles and book chapters are required reading as well and are available electronically on Canvas, MODULES, where they are posted sequentially, following this syllabus. Since the lectures will complement these texts, you need to do the readings **before** the week for which they are assigned. In order to guide your reading and thinking, weekly sets of study questions are attached to this syllabus.

Four exams will measure your progress. Keep in mind that I want to assess your depth of understanding as well as your knowledge of relevant concepts, issues, institutions, political forces, etc. Each exam counts 25% towards the course grade. Please note: Grading is on a 100-point scale (100-93.1=A; 93-90.1=A-; 90-87.1=B+; 87-83.1=B; 83-80.1=B-; 80-77.1=C+; 77-73.1=C; 73-70.1=C-; 70-67.1=D+; 67-63.1=D; 63-60.1=D-; 60-0=F). Thus, failure to take an exam (without an immediately announced excuse attesting to covid symptoms or another serious, well-documented problem) will result in 0 points. Also, attendance in class is mandatory.

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from UT's Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/. All rules established by SSD (e.g., 5 business days prior notice for accommodations) will be followed strictly.

UT's honor code governs all work in this course. Students are encouraged to discuss the issues analyzed in this course among each other and to study together before exams, but are not allowed to cooperate or to receive any kind of "help" when taking exams. Please re-read the honor code carefully and ask me in case of any doubt. Violations, which are not that difficult to detect, will be sanctioned rigorously.

NOTE: No laptop usage in class, for pedagogical reasons.

This course has a Government PhD student as teaching assistant & grader: Matthew Martin, who will hold office hours in BAT 1.118 – times to be announced). Matt will also hold two voluntary discussion sessions per week (parallel – same content; time & place to be announced), which are HIGHLY recommended.

My own office hours will be in Batts 4.126 on Mon. and Wed., 2:00 – 3:30 pm; and Wed., 9:30 – 10:30 am. I will be happy to talk to you about any aspect related to the course. If you want to talk in person, pls. call (512) 497-1032 upon arrival and I will meet you inside or outside Batts Hall. You can also email me kweyland@austin.utexas.edu your questions or make an appointment to talk via Zoom.

Special Covid Rules, Spring 2021 (mandated by the UT administration)

Safety and Class Participation/Masks: We will all need to make some adjustments in order to benefit from in-person classroom interactions in a safe and healthy manner. Our best protections against spreading COVID-19 on campus are masks (defined as cloth face coverings) and staying home if you are showing symptoms. Therefore, for the benefit of everyone, this means that all students are required to follow these important rules.

- **Every student must wear a cloth face-covering properly in class and in all campus buildings at all times.**
- **Students are encouraged to participate in documented daily symptom screening.** This means that each class day in which on-campus activities occur, students must upload certification from the symptom tracking app and confirm that they completed their symptom screening for that day to Canvas. Students should not upload the results of that screening, just the certificate that they completed it. If the symptom tracking app recommends that the student isolate rather than coming to class, then students must not return to class until cleared by a medical professional.
- Information regarding [safety protocols with and without symptoms](#) can be [found here](#).

If a student is not wearing a cloth face-covering properly in the classroom (or any UT building), that student must leave the classroom (and building). If the student refuses to wear a cloth face covering, class will be dismissed for the remainder of the period, and the student will be subject to disciplinary action as set forth in the university's Institutional Rules/General Conduct 11-404(a)(3). Students who have a condition that precludes the wearing of a cloth face covering must follow the procedures for [obtaining an accommodation](#) working with [Services for Students with Disabilities](#).

Sharing of Course Materials is Prohibited: No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class unless you have my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. It is a violation of the University's Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty. I am well aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to Student Conduct and Academic Integrity in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in sanctions, including failure in the course.

Class Recordings: Class recordings are reserved only for students in this class for educational purposes and are protected under FERPA. The recordings should not be shared outside the class in any form. Violation of this restriction by a student could lead to Student Misconduct proceedings. Guidance on public access to class recordings can be found [here](#).

Possibility of Future Syllabus Adjustments: Due to covid-related challenges and possible emergencies, this syllabus may need to be changed during the semester. I will keep these changes to the necessary minimum.

I. CONCEPTS AND MODELS OF DEMOCRACY

1. Democracy: Basic Principles and Historical Origins

Friday - Monday, January 22 - 25:

David Held. Models of Democracy (3rd ed.), Introduction and chs. 1-2, pp. 1 - 55.
[You can read ch. 2 “quickly;” for us, it serves as historical background only]

2. Liberal Democracy - Promise and Problems

Wednesday - Friday, January 27 – 29:

David Held. Models of Democracy, ch. 3; pp. 56 – 95.

3. Alternative Models: Marxian Democracy and Social Democracy

Monday - Wednesday, February 1 – 3:

David Held. Models of Democracy, ch. 4; pp. 96 - 122.
Sheri Berman. Understanding Social Democracy (in Canvas).
Thomas Meyer. Libertarian & Social Democracies Compared, in idem, *The Theory of Social Democracy*, pp. 209-215 (Canvas).

II. WESTERN DEMOCRACY

1. Liberal Democracy - the U.S.

Friday - Wednesday, February 5 - 10:

Samuel Huntington. American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony, ch. 2, pp. 13 – 30
(Canvas).
Benjamin Ginsberg and Martin Shefter. Politics by Other Means, chs. 1-3, pp. 1 - 101.

Friday - Friday, February 12 – 19:

Benjamin Ginsberg and Martin Shefter. Politics by Other Means, chs. 4-6, pp. 102 – 170,
212 - 231.
Steven Levitsky & D. Ziblatt. Is Donald Trump a Threat to Democracy? (canvas).

Wednesday, February 17: Exam

2. Social Democracy - Sweden

Monday - Monday, February 22 – March 1:

M. Donald Hancock. Sweden, in Hancock, Politics in Europe, pp. 451 – 516 (**Canvas**).

3. From Social to Liberal Democracy - Great Britain

Wednesday – Friday, March 3 – 12:

B. Guy Peters & Christopher Carman. United Kingdom, in M. Donald Hancock ed., Politics in Europe, pp. 3 – 72, 88 – 96 (only – on **Canvas**).

Wednesday, March 10: Exam

III. ALTERNATIVES TO WESTERN DEMOCRACY

1. Communist Rule and Its Demise: The Soviet Union & Russia

a. The Establishment of Communism

Monday - Friday, March 22 - 26:

Leszek Kolakowski. Marxist Roots of Stalinism. pp. 283 – 298 (**Canvas**).
Joan DeBardeleben. Russian Politics in Transition, chs. 1-2, pp. 1-84 (**Canvas**).

b. The Demise of Communism and the Process of Democratization

Monday - Friday, March 29 - April 2:

Stephen White. Russia, in M. Donald Hancock, ed., Politics in Europe (**Canvas**).

c. Political Prospects in Russia and Other Successor States: An Authoritarian Future?

Monday - Friday, April 5 - 9:

Richard Sakwa. The Dual State in Russia (Canvas).

M. Steven Fish. What Is Putinism? (Canvas).

Charles Fairbanks. Disillusionment in the Caucasus and Central Asia (Canvas)

Michael McFaul. Transitions from Postcommunism (Canvas).

Monday, April 12: Exam

2. Authoritarian Rule and Its Demise? Mexico as an Example of the Global South

a. Deficient Development and the Establishment of Authoritarian Rule in Mexico

Wednesday - Friday, April 14 – 16:

Daniel Levy and Kathleen Bruhn. Mexico: The Struggle for Democratic Development,
chs. 1-2, pp. 1 – 65.

b. The Decline of Authoritarian Rule and Democratization in Mexico

Monday - Friday, April 19 - 23:

Levy and Bruhn. chs. 3-4, pp. 66 - 148.

c. Mexican Democracy in the Era of Globalization

Monday-Wednesday, April 26 – 28:

Levy & Bruhn. Read chs. 5, 8, pp. 149 – 179, 258 – 278, skim pp. 180 – 257.

Denise Dresser. Can Mexico Be Saved? (Canvas).

3. The Future of Democracy in the World

Global Advance of Democracy & Regional Obstacles

Friday - Monday, April 30 – May 3:

Samir Makdisi, Autocracies, Democratization, and Development in the Arab Region (Canvas).

Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds. Tracking the “Arab Spring:” Why the Modest Harvest? (Canvas).

Wednesday, May 5: Review: Major Themes of the Course

Friday, May 7: Exam

NO Final Exam. If any student is, exceptionally, approved for a make-up exam, that test will be held on the day and hour designated by the university in case we were to have a final exam in this course: Thursday, May 13, 9:00 – 11:59 am (no exceptions). [NOTE: Inconvenient. Best to take tests as scheduled during the semester]

Study Questions

I. CONCEPTS AND MODELS OF DEMOCRACY

1. Democracy: Basic Principles and Historical Origins

- 1) What IS democracy? How would you define this concept in a way that includes all the different models and that covers both ancient Athens and the contemporary U.S.?
- 2) What are the basic principles and institutional features of direct democracy à la Athens? In what ways are they similar, in what ways do they differ from modern democracy, e.g. as instituted in the U.S.?
- 3) In your view, should the U.S. try to re-establish (aspects of) direct democracy à la Athens? Why or why not? How could this be done? And which aspects?

2. Liberal Democracy - Promise and Problems

- 1) In your view, is representative democracy really democratic? Can citizens effectively guide and control what their representatives are doing? For example, are you informed about your Congress(wo)man's activities?
- 2) What are the basic principles and institutional features of liberal democracy?
- 3) Liberal democracy is inspired by a distrust of concentrated political authority and skepticism towards “the state” and therefore seeks to limit the sphere of political action and regulation. Do you agree with this basic effort? Why or why not?
- 4) Some models of democracy assume that citizens grow intellectually and morally through political participation. In your view, how realistic is this hope? For example, do election campaigns clarify candidates' positions on issues, or are they dominated by sound-bites and scandal stories about candidates' private lives?
- 5) Democracy is based on the principle of popular sovereignty. But experts, whose recommendations most citizens do not even understand, play an ever greater role in policy-making. Does this undermine the basic principles of democracy? What could be done to mitigate the growing power of experts?
- 6) In your view, are democratic principles valid only for politics, or should they also be applied to social and economic institutions, such as business firms, universities or families? Why (not)? How could this be done (if at all)?

3. Alternative Models of Democracy

- 1) While democracy requires political equality, all societies in advanced industrial countries are characterized by considerable social and economic inequality. Is this a problem for democracy? Why or why not?
- 2) What are the basic divergences of Marx's view of democracy from the other models of democracy analyzed by Held?
- 3) In your view, how valid is the Marxian criticism of representative democracy and liberal democracy? Do you agree with Marx's alternative model of democracy? Why or why not?
- 4) In what ways is social democracy similar to Marx's theories, in what ways is it different? In what ways is it similar to liberal democracy, in what ways is it different?

5) Of all the principles listed by Berman and the criteria listed by Mayer, which points do you regard as the most important & distinctive characteristics of social democracy?

6) The early advocates of social democracy wanted to transform the market economy profoundly, e.g. by nationalizing big business. Is social democracy therefore a threat to economic prosperity and political liberty? Why or why not?

7) Which one of the models of democracy that we have examined do you consider best? Why? In general terms, how feasible is the model you prefer?

8) In your view, would it be feasible to institute the model of democracy that you prefer in the U.S.? Why or why not?

II. WESTERN DEMOCRACY

1. Liberal Democracy - the U.S.

1) What do you think about Huntington's thesis that liberal values have had unchallenged predominance in the U.S.? Has this been true for the whole course of U.S. history? Is it still true today, after 9/11 and Pres. Trump's rise? Why or why not?

2) According to Ginsberg and Shefter, why exactly have elections become less important in American politics? Why has "institutional combat" become more important? Do you find their explanations convincing?

3) In your view, have the Democratic party and the Republican Party really pursued coherent long-term strategies, as Ginsberg & Shefter suggest in chaps. 3 and 4?

4) Do you find Ginsberg & Shefter's emphasis on partisan self-interests – rather than on policy goals or ideology – valid? That is, is U.S. politics driven primarily by partisan self-interests?

5) What characteristics of liberal democracy in the U.S. do the developments analyzed by Ginsberg and Shefter accentuate and exacerbate, and how?

6) In your view, does "RIP" enhance or weaken democratic accountability in the U.S.? Why?

7) Do the developments analyzed by Ginsberg and Shefter make American democracy better or worse? Specifically, how do these developments affect the responsiveness and accountability of "the government" to the people?

8) Are Ginsberg & Shefter's arguments still valid today? What light do they shed on the election victory of Donald Trump and the politics surrounding his presidency?

9) What are the likely repercussions of the Trump presidency on the problems highlighted by Ginsberg & Shefter? Are institutional combat, RIP, etc. likely to get better or worse? Why?

10) Considering the political patterns analyzed by Ginsberg & Shefter and recent developments under President Trump, how good is liberal democracy as practiced in the U.S.? Do its advantages significantly outweigh its disadvantages? Why or why not?

11) How persuasive do you find Levitsky & Ziblatt's concern that liberal democracy in the U.S. may be threatened by the rise of populism? Do you see a risk of authoritarian backsliding? Why or why not?

12) In your view, how could U.S. democracy be protected (even) better? What additional safeguards would you advocate, if any? Why?

2. Social Democracy - Sweden

- 1) What are the values and principles underlying Sweden's social democracy? In what aspects are they similar and in what aspects do they differ from the "liberal tradition in America"?
- 2) What are the social-structural and organizational roots and preconditions of social democracy in Sweden?
- 3) In what ways has Sweden's parliamentary system of government facilitated the development of social democracy (by contrast to the obstacles posed by U.S. presidentialism)?
- 4) What have been the main socio-political forces pushing for social democracy in Sweden? Why was the opposition to social democracy not more successful in hindering its advance? Why did it, in fact, accept many social-democratic policies once they were enacted?
- 5) What have been the principal policy programs of social democracy in Sweden? In your view, how successful have these programs been?
- 6) What are the benefits and advantages of social democracy in Sweden, what are its costs and problems? Compare with liberal democracy in the USA.
- 7) For what reasons has Swedish social democracy run into political and economic difficulties in the last few decades?
- 8) In your view, do these problems doom social democracy, or can it recover? I.e., does the "Swedish model" continue to be viable? Why or why not?
- 9) In your view, could -- and should? -- the "Swedish model" be emulated by other countries, especially the U.S.? Why or why not?

3. From Social to Liberal Democracy - Great Britain

- 1) Ch.1.1: What elements of the context of British politics furthered the advance of social democracy up to the 1970s, and what elements hindered this advance? And in what ways did the context of British politics influence the country's move to liberal democracy from 1979 onward?
 - 2) Ch.1.2: What are the basic principles of Britain's parliamentary system of government? Where is power effectively concentrated in the British system? And how did this influence the initial advance towards social democracy, and the later move away from it? How does all of this differ from the presidential system in the U.S.?
 - 3) Ch.1.3: Where have, over the course of recent history, Britain's major socio-political forces stood on the issues that distinguish liberal democracy from social democracy? How much effective power do the various socio-political forces have and how has this changed over time?
 - 4) Ch.1.5: In your view, will Britain stay fairly close to liberal democracy or do you foresee another round of change? Why? And how do you expect the influence of the various socio-political forces to change in the foreseeable future? Why?
- Overarching issues: 6) How did Margaret Thatcher manage to transform Britain from a social to a liberal democracy? In particular, how did she maintain sufficient power and win reelections although her tough economic and social policies hurt many people?

7) In your view, did Britain's move from social democracy to liberal democracy improve the country's prospects for economic, social, and political development? And was this transformation worth the costs?

8) How is Brexit likely to affect the processes of British politics and the outputs of policy-making?

III. ALTERNATIVES TO WESTERN DEMOCRACY?

1. Communist Rule and Its Demise: The former Soviet Union

a. The Establishment of Communism

1) The Soviet leaders claimed to implement Marx's vision of direct democracy and socialism (cf. Held ch.4), but they installed a type of Communist despotism that looks very different from Marx's idyllic idea. How come? Was there any problem in Marx's vision that made this "perversion" possible or likely?

2) Was Stalin's despotism the logical outcome of Marx' vision, as Kolakowski claims, or did it emerge from an unfortunate coincidence of unfavorable circumstances, as De Bardeleben suggests?

3) What were Lenin's main modifications of Marxism? How did they affect Marx's vision of direct democracy in a classless society?

4) Did the Russian Revolution of 1917 correspond to or differ from the predictions of classical Marxist theory? What were the similarities, what were the differences?

5) What were the main causes and motives of Stalin's "revolution from above"? In what ways did it advance Communism and fulfill tasks which Lenin had left unfinished?

6) Where was power concentrated in the political system of the USSR between the 1950s and the early 1980s?

7) Were a) terror or b) the economic advances and social benefits of socialist development more important for the stability of Communism in the USSR between the 1950s and the early 1980s?

8) Why, exactly, did Soviet Communism end up so inefficient in economic terms?

b. The Demise of Communism and the Process of Democratization

1) Ch.6.1: In your view, to what extent do historical legacies continue to burden Russia (for instance, by shaping its political culture)? In particular, to what extent do these legacies pose obstacles to the development of a functioning market economy and a real democracy?

2) Ch.6.2: Is there any effective separation of powers ("checks and balances") in contemporary Russian politics? What institutions are particularly powerful, what institutions are comparatively weak? Why?

3) Ch.6.2: To what extent do institutions really guide and determine politics in contemporary Russia, and to what extent can personal leaders or personalistic cliques bend, override, or constantly reshape institutions?

4) Ch.6.3: How does Russia's contemporary party system differ from that of Sweden and Great Britain? Why?

5) Ch.6.4: Why has it been so difficult to institute a properly functioning market economy in Russia? What are the prospects for the future, in your view?

6) Ch.6.4: How has Russia coped with the collapse of its “empire,” i.e., the dissolution of the USSR? What are the domestic repercussions of this big loss?

7) Ch.6.5: Why, in your view, did democracy remain so “incomplete” in post-Communist Russia? Why has the country slid into authoritarian rule?

c. Political Prospects in Russia & Other Successor States: An Authoritarian Future?

1) How would you classify the political regime type of contemporary Russia? What aspects look or are democratic, what aspects are undemocratic – and what regime type does this “add up to,” overall? Why?

2) What are the positions of Sakwa and Fish on these questions? Which assessment do you regard as more convincing, and why?

3) Institutions are supposed to constrain what individual political leaders can do. To what extent is this happening in contemporary Russia? Why?

4) Different from both presidentialism and parliamentarism, Russia’s executive branch has two heads – a prime minister and a president. In your view, is this a formula for political success? Why or why not?

5) How similar is Russia’s type of economic development to a market economy as practiced in the U.S.?

6) What are the main reasons for the serious deficiencies plaguing the (market?) economies, political regimes, and even the states of the Caucasus and Central Asia? Do you see any chance of improvement in the foreseeable future? From where could such change emerge?

7) What are the crucial factors that drove the second wave of democratization in part of the post-Communist world (“color revolutions,” see McFaul’s article)? Have these changes installed true democracies? Why or why not?

8) What are the prospects that a new wave of democratization could eventually reach Russia, reversing the concentration of power promoted under President Putin and returning the country to democracy?

9) Can and should the U.S. do anything to promote democracy in Russia and the rest of the former Soviet Union? Why or why not? And if so, how? What will the prospects for success be?

2. Authoritarian Rule and Its Demise? Mexico as an Example of the Global South

a. Deficient development and the Establishment of Authoritarian Rule in Mexico

1) What do Levy and Bruhn mean by characterizing Mexico during the last two decades of the 20th century as a “semi-democracy”? In your view, does it make sense to use such “half-way” terms?

2) What are the main obstacles that economic and social underdevelopment has posed to democracy in Mexico? In what ways did underdevelopment prop up the undemocratic, authoritarian regime prevailing in Mexico until the 1980s?

3) For decades, scholars have debated whether U.S. involvement in Mexico furthers or hinders that country's economic and political development. What is your view on this controversial issue?

4) What are the historical origins of Mexico's undemocratic development? In your view, to what extent did these legacies hinder the advance of democracy during the last three decades?

5) Why did the Mexican Revolution have a very different outcome than the Russian Revolution (authoritarianism – not totalitarianism; capitalism with significant state intervention – not Communism)?

6) How did Mexico manage to maintain such a surprising degree of political stability (compared to other developing countries, which suffered frequent military coups)? In your view, will Mexico manage to maintain political stability in the foreseeable future? Why or why not?

b. The Decline of Authoritarian Rule and Democratization in Mexico

1) According to Levy and Bruhn, what role did different social sectors play during the 1980s and 1990s in pushing for greater political competitiveness in Mexico?

2) What are the main characteristics of Mexico's party system (by comparison to other countries we have studied)?

3) How did the Mexican state change during the 1980s and 1990s? Which ones of these changes will enhance democracy and governability in Mexico, which changes pose potential problems or threats? Why?

4) What role did the media play during Mexico's lengthy process of democratization? In your view, can they now fulfill their important functions for democracy?

5) What are the chances for Mexican citizens to hold their political leaders and governing institutions accountable? In your view, could anything be done to improve these chances?

6) How do the striking status differences prevailing in Mexico affect the quality of the country's democracy? Essentially, can democracy persist in a highly unequal society? Why or why not?

7) In sum, what are the prospects for a well-functioning democracy in Mexico in the foreseeable future? Why?

c. Mexican Democracy in the Era of Globalization

1) According to Levy and Bruhn, what were the central features of Mexico's development and its economic policies from the 1940s to the 1970s? What were the accomplishments and limitations of this model?

2) What were the main changes in economic development policy enacted during the 1970s and early 1980s? Did they bring more improvements or more problems?

3) Were Mexico's market-oriented ("neoliberal") reforms successful? Why or why not?

4) Neoliberal reforms impose high short-term costs on important sectors of the population. What allowed the Mexican government to enact such costly policies?

5) In your view, has the market-oriented development model, which includes close integration with the U.S., opened up a promising avenue of economic development for Mexico? Why or why not?

6) In your view, how effectively did President Vicente Fox manage to govern? Why? Why did his party win the presidential contest of July 2006?

7) In your view, what are the chances for the survival of democracy in Mexico and for future improvements in its quality? What impact does the wave of crime and violence in the country have? Do you think that Mexican democracy will effectively cope with these problems? Or will the country slide back into authoritarian rule?

9) What are the main reasons that Manuel Andrés López Obrador (AMLO) won the presidential election of 2018? Do you think that AMLO can resolve Mexico's problems? Is he more likely to make the country's situation better or worse? Why?

3. The Future of Democracy in the World: Global Advances & Regional Obstacles

1) What are the most important factors that scholars have invoked to explain the advance of democracy in different regions of the world? Which one of these factors do you regard as most “powerful” and important, and why?

2) To what extent can these arguments account for the longstanding and continuing democracy deficit in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)? Which factor seems to be most important?

3) Does the wave of anti-authoritarian uprisings that swept across MENA after December 2010 (the “Arab Spring”) confirm or disprove these theories?

4) In your view, why was there such a strong contagion effect? I.e., why did the initial uprising in Tunisia find so many imitators in other countries?

5) According to Brownlee et al., have the Arab Spring protests brought substantial progress toward democracy? Do you agree with their assessment?

6) What are the main explanations that Brownlee et al. invoke? Do you find their reasoning convincing? Why or why not?

7) How should the U.S. (have) respond(ed) to these uprisings and their aftermath? In particular, how should the advancement of U.S. interests (which often privilege “stability”) be balanced against the promotion of U.S. values and the push for democratic change – which can cause instability?