This course discusses basic issues of political sociology, an inter-disciplinary field that examines the interrelationships between society and the polity. We will begin by addressing basic issues, such as what is a nation, what is a state, and what do we mean by political regimes. We will discuss the major political regimes in the contemporary world, i.e. democracy, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism. The second part focuses on democratic institutions and on the different types of democracy: parliamentary vs. presidentialist, types of electoral regimes, party systems, and civil society, and political culture. A central concern will be the analysis of the quality of democracy.

The third part of the syllabus deals with one of the central processes in recent history: the collapse of Communism in Europe and of authoritarian regimes in Latin America and East Asia. Given the location of the seminar, the focus is on Latin American transitions. We will discuss the causes, both domestic and international, of the downfall of military dictatorships and other non-democratic regimes in the region in the 1980s and 1990s, the construction of democratic institutions, and the variable outcomes of this process. Most countries in the region are democracies, but these democracies vary a great deal in terms of their quality.

Finally, the course will discuss Argentina’s experience with democracy: the very coercive military regime of the 1970s and early 80s, the causes of its demise, and the quality of the democratic institutions currently in place. I plan to take the class to visit institutions such as the Congress and the courts, political parties, and social movements representing the poor and the victims of human rights violations. I will also invite leaders of different political parties to address the class and discuss, from their perspective, the major issues the country faces.

This course has no pre-requisites. It is one of the 12 upper-division electives required for the major in Sociology, and it can also be used for the minor. Students majoring in International Studies could take this course for either a primary or a secondary track in Sociology. Finally, this class could be of interest, as an elective, to students in Political Science.
The formation of political communities. The state. State and society. State and government. The question of state capacity.

Political regimes: the institutions that organize the exercise of power in a society.

Andrew Heywood, Politics, 4th edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), Ch. 3-5

3. Political regimes in the contemporary world. Democratic and non-democratic regimes: Inclusiveness, contestation, institutionalization of civil and political rights. Degrees of concentration of power.

Heywood, Ch. 4, 12

II. THE DEMOCRATIC POLITY


Heywood, Ch. 13-15

5. Society and politics: political culture and political participation. Civil society. Parties and party systems.

Heywood, Ch. 8, 10-11

6. Society and politics: elections and electoral systems.

Heywood, Ch. 9

III. FROM AUTHORITARIANISM TO DEMOCRACY: THE CASE OF LATIN AMERICA


Larry Diamond, The Spirit of Democracy (New York: Times Books, 2008), Ch. 4-8


Peter H. Smith, Democracy in Latin America (Oxford University Press, 2005), Ch. 2-4


Smith, Ch. 8-10

IV. DEMOCRATIZATION AND DEMOCRACY IN ARGENTINA

10. The context: the Argentine experience with democracy.


Lewis, Paul H., Guerrillas and Generals: The “Dirty War” in Argentina (Westport: Praeger, 2002), Ch. 7-12

12. The quality of contemporary Argentine democracy: Inclusiveness, contestation, and civil and political rights.

Steven Levitsky and Maria Victoria Murillo (eds.), The Politics of Institutional Weakness: Argentine Democracy (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), Ch. 1, 5, 8, 11

NOTES:

1. Diamond, Lewis, and Levitsky and Murillo are available as Amazon digital books.

2. The grade will be based on a written final exam and class participation.