



***Comparing and Contrasting Democracies:  
The United States of America and the Hispanic Countries in Latin America***

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:  
Spanish Novice Level Learners at the High School Level

**Keywords:** Spanish, Democracy, Hispanic, Latino, Spanish Speaking Countries, Student Research, Project Based Learning

**Teaching Standards:** See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

**Synopsis:**

This curriculum unit looks at the similarities between democracies across the American continents with a focus on the United States and Spanish speaking countries. At times students might not see the connections between the United States and other countries but students should be aware that there is more than language that binds the nations together. With this curriculum unit students will have the opportunity to learn about Spanish speaking countries in English with a focus on democratic governments. Students will have an opportunity to build connections based on the research that they have done and work on a few specific topics. A simple goal to have in mind is for a student in the United States to be able to come up with more similarities than differences when it comes to Spanish speaking countries in the Americas. The curriculum unit can be taught over the course and introduced in segments or it can be a 2-3 day project depending on how it is taught.

*I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 190 students in Spanish One.*

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## **Comparing and Contrasting Democracies:**

### **The United States of America and the Hispanic Countries in Latin America**

*Mayra García*

#### **Curriculum Introduction**

As a teacher I want students to be able to learn real life skills. And as a teacher I know Spanish might be my life but it is not necessarily theirs. As my journey of teaching continues I find that I search for more ways for students to connect with the subject material. In the past I have used media including murals, music, commercials, film clips, and short passages. With this curriculum unit I have found a new sense of inspiration in that I am looking for students to connect with the political environment. I want students to be able to think on their own and be able to come up with their own opinion on the facts – not a repetition of what is out there to begin with. With this curriculum unit students will have the opportunity to learn about Spanish speaking countries in English, with a focus democratic governments. Students will have an opportunity build connections based on the research that they have done and work on a few specific topics.

#### **Rationale**

Relating to a person that you have never met before can be challenging and possible terrifying. People search for common ground whether that be an interest, idea, belief or even their favorite color. Sometimes all it takes is the topic of food, an art, or experiencing the mist of the ocean on your face to realize that we are all citizens of a global community.

To me, being part of a global community comes with an expectation to make a difference in our enormous community. With that in mind, I choose as most teachers do, to educate a small portion of the students a different language and culture. In Spanish class, the students are expected to conjugate, write essays, give directions, and describe who they are. The challenge is always that Spanish is a foreign language; Spanish is something different and odd.

Since students can sometimes see Spanish as a foreign concept, it is not seen as applicable to their lives. This perception can be detrimental, not only to the class, but to the place that Spanish takes in their schema of humanity; they have a perception of ‘other’ associated with the language and its speakers. Given that there are twenty one countries that officially have Spanish as their national, or one of their national, languages and Spanish is spoken on the majority of the continents, it is essential that students build a knowledge base for the future.

According to my students, Spanish is one the easiest language to learn for English speakers due to the cognates. Cognates are words that sounds similar to words in your native language. With this curriculum unit, I hope that students will see that there are cognates in not only

language, but also in what we as United States citizens hold most dear, democracy. If we can teach our students that others have fought for rights both on paper and on the battlefield, as we have, then just maybe they will see that we have more common with the Spanish-speaking world than they think.

I hope with the Curriculum Unit students will look for patterns and similarities within the cultures they study. Additionally, students will discover differences that can change how they view the world, and how they are viewed by others.

### School /Student Demographics

William A. Hough High School is located in the North Learning Community of Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools. The school currently has more than 2700 students. The student population comes from the mostly suburban and rural areas of Cornelius, Davidson, and Lake Norman.

Hough High School has a graduation rate of 93% with about 83% attending a postsecondary institution and about 16% joining the military or workforce. Our school has 26 AP classes that students can choose to take as well as other courses outlined by the NC Department of Public Instruction and Charlotte Mecklenburg School District.

Students are introduced to a hybrid schedule that consists of semester courses as well as yearlong courses. Students attend ninety-minute 'block' classes. The school also offers an enrichment period that allows students to choose either extracurricular topics or tutoring.

As for a Spanish, a level one class this year can have anywhere from 22 to 37 students at one time. Students in my current classes encompass all grade levels from freshmen to seniors. This means that students in my classes can have very different levels of background knowledge on the topics of government, history or geography. Since my students' experiences range from the beginning to the end of their high school career, I create this so that every student has the opportunity to bring something new to their team and the class.

### Unit Goals

Students will be able to reach and perform the following essential standards that will, in turn, align with the goals that will pertain to the curriculum unit. The North Carolina World Language Essential Standards will be NL.CMT.4.3, NM.COD.4.2, NM.CMT.4.1, and NM.CMT.4.4.

The unit will focus on the following objectives:

1. To be able to locate and label a map of countries of what was colonized by which countries
2. To be able to define what a democracy is
3. To be able to compare and contrast the different types of democracies between the United States and across the Spanish speaking world

4. To be able to have a discussion on the similarities and difference in governments

For the first objective, the student will have to locate and label countries that were colonized to show the historical similarities that certain regions have with each other. This will encompass all the Americas. Students will also have to label certain regions within the United States to be able to recognize that, at different points in history, parts of the United States were not in fact part of the United States.

The second objective will focus on defining what a democracy is from the perspective of the individual. Democracy has been defined in different ways in the past, therefore the students, in their groups, will have to be able to create a definition and say whether the countries the students encounter in the research have fit the definition of a democracy.

The third objective will focus on comparing and contrasting two different democracies; one being the United States, and the other being a Spanish speaking country. This will have to be done by researching both of the countries.

In the fourth objective, the students will have the opportunity to learn from others and not only discuss the two countries that they have learned about during the curriculum unit. With these discussions on governments, the students will acquire some awareness of current global situations, only to be able to come back and end with the question of whether or not the United States is in fact a democracy.

With these objectives I hope that in the short term students will be able to have educated discussions about the countries that they are learning about. Perhaps if the students see the government they will have a greater appreciation for the culture and language of the people that exist within it.

## **Content Research**

Students will be expected to conduct responsible research on their own with guidance. As a student in this seminar I also had the opportunity to conduct research to better acquaint myself with information to create the curriculum unit.

### Hispanic Countries in Latin America

This curriculum unit could not be possible without the civilizations of Mesoamerica, but it is the infusion of cultures that brought about the decisive changes that allowed for the development of the modern day democracies. The decisions that Isabel and Ferdinand made after the

Reconquista in 1492 was monumental. After taking Granada it was only logical to expand on what they had.<sup>1</sup> With the discoveries of the Americas and the push for colonization conversion would become a priority for the Spanish monarchy and the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> As the efforts grew so did the land that was being colonized by Spain. Even though Columbus arrived in 1492 it did not take long for the Spanish to reach the other side of the continent. Balboa, a Spanish explorer would make his way to the Pacific Ocean in 1513.<sup>3</sup> The simple fact is that it only took 21 years to cross what is now the modern day United States. The empire expanded at an alarming rate. That expansion prompted the monarchy to make extra efforts to ensure that its interests and authority were being implemented. The crown had to send officials to minimize the threat of any insurgents.<sup>4</sup> From the perspective of any Catholic monarch in the age of renaissance and reformation, the acts that they took seem logical: expand and convert.

## **Influence of External Factors on Hispanic Democracies in Latin America**

### *The United States Constitution*

There are similarities among the Constitutions of the United States and those of Spanish Speaking Latin America. This is due in part to the fact that the constitutions were greatly influenced and based on the United States version.<sup>5</sup> The most obvious of the similarities is that most of the constitutions have a place for a presidential government.<sup>6</sup> In addition, there is judicial review which can be found in the U.S. Constitution. Judicial review is a rare aspect to find in modern day governments, but it still has a place in most Hispanic Latin American constitutions.<sup>7</sup> Given the fact that most Hispanic nations based their constitutions on the United States version the similarities are abundant, but the constitutions do not stay that way for too long.

### *Growing Apart from the United States*

The United States is not the only the contributing factor shaping the democracies of Hispanic Latin America. Beginning with the effects of World War II, the United States took a different role than other countries in the Americas.<sup>8</sup> Naturally, a war such as that one will affect the self-image of a country and its citizens. On one hand there is a major player and part of the “winning side” while another plays the part of a “bystander.”

The Hispanic nations of Latin America all have a common ancestor, Spain. The people of Hispanic Latin America can connect themselves with those of Spain through language and culture. During the building of countries and constitutions the architects looked not only at the United States due to proximity of age and location but also to the 1812 constitution of Cádiz of Spain.<sup>9</sup> A similar situation occurred during the third wave of democratizations in the 1970s and ‘80s, when many countries entered the global community of democracies. One of the earliest democratic transitions in this wave occurred when Spain changed from a dictatorship to a constitutional monarchy. This change in the Iberian Peninsula, an ocean away, had a very large impact on the Hispanic Latin America.<sup>10</sup>

## *Democracy in Latin America*

Although most countries in Latin America that were once Spanish colonies were able to become independent and create their own constitutions in the 1800s, gaining independence did not mean that these nations were democratic.<sup>11</sup> It took another a hundred years or so to begin seeing a resemblance between United States and the nations it has as neighbors. There were only about 3 countries in 1977 whose governments were democratically elected, but by the 2000s democracy was the norm in both North and South America.<sup>12</sup>

## *Defining and Developing Democracies*

Democracies were able to come about due to free elections becoming more popular.<sup>13</sup> But simply having free elections does not mean that a country is a democracy. Sometimes, a simple definition can be challenging to find and explain. A simple definition of democracy is a country whose political institutions come to decisions based on free and competitive elections.<sup>14</sup> Democracies at this point do not appear at all once. There were a number of factors that contributed to the development of democracy in the Hispanic nations of Latin America, including legitimacy problems, economic growth and change, changes in the Catholic Church resulting from the Second Vatican Council, a shift in the policies of countries held in high esteem in the international community, and the “contagion” effect of democracy spreading worldwide.<sup>15</sup>

## *Effects of Democracy in Hispanic Latin America*

The form of government a country uses affects it in many ways. Some of the most visible of these effects are economic. For instance, economic growth allowed the middle class to significantly expand in Latin America.<sup>16</sup> The population moving from the low income and below poverty line categories into the middle class have begun to increase, although there is still much work to do. Unfortunately, there are many factors that prevent democracy from continuing to move forward. Some the external factors influence the prospects for democratization within countries. Those factors include diversity-based social divisions, economics, and interference in Latin American politics by actors inside and outside the region.<sup>17</sup>

## **Resources for Teachers**

### *The Third Wave*, Samuel Huntington

This book offers a detailed explanation of the wave of democratizations that happened around the world in the 1970s and '80s. As a teacher with a background in psychology and criminal justice not in history, political science, or government I was able to understand the backbone information that was needed such as lists, graphs, and concise examples.

### *Presidentialism in Latin America: For and Against*

This is a quick article for teachers that are considering teaching this unit. The article outlines some points to bring up to get the students thinking about whether or not having a president is crucial for a democracy or even just a government.

*Latin American Presidentialism in Comparative and Historical Perspective*

This paper is excellent for comparing the United States with Latin American countries for those of us that have a limited background in the politics of the region.

*The State of Democracy in Latin America*

This article describes current democratic situations in Latin America from a Latin American perspective. The article is from Costa Rica and has been translated into English.

*Building Democracy ... Which Democracy? Ideology and Models of Democracy in Post-Transition Latin America*

This article lists some cases for teachers to be aware of if teachers or students are looking for particular cases of democratization and trying to understand the different perspectives on democracy and types of democracy that exist in Latin America today.

*Think Pair Share*

Although most teachers are familiar with this teaching strategy, there are many websites that suggest methods to interact with students that can be applied for discussion.

*Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830*

This book has topics of colonization of both Spain and Britain. It can also be used for further research and comparison on the part of the teacher.

**Student Resources**

*The World Factbook*

This website hold basic facts and statistics that are relevant for both teachers and the students. It allows students not only to research other countries but the United States of America as well. Students will need access to this site to complete page 1 of the graphic organizer.

### *Constituteproject*

The curriculum unit asks the students describe some of the similarities and differences in governments. One of the easier way to do this by having students compare constitutions of the different nations side by side, which is what this website does. The site also allows students to choose a topic of their choice and see how each of the constitutions handle the subject. Students will need to access this site to complete page 2 of the graphic organizer.

### *World Values Survey*

The World Values Survey collects information from people all over the world about how they feel about social, economic, and political issues. One of the topics covered is how well a country's democracy is functioning. If students are interested in further research they can access search for certain aspects of democratization from the perspective of the people in one or more nations of Hispanic Latin America. Unfortunately, data is not available for all the Spanish speaking nations, but the website covers a number of the countries students will research in the unit. It also is useful for creating reflection or assessment questions for the end of the class period or the end of the curriculum unit. Students should have access to this site in case they need more information for their infographic.

## **Teaching Strategies**

Students have different methods of learning and hopefully using a variety of different strategies will be the key to the students learning to the best of their abilities.

### *Think/Pair/Share*

Using this method students will have to interact and discuss a topic with each other. Students will have to come up with ideas within their group as well as with other students that have been researching democracies in other nations.

### *Socratic Seminar*

Using this method the students will be able to discuss any new information with the class that students might have questions. And if they feel that they have limited perspective on the knowledge the students might ask for assistance from other student groups that might have had similar situations with their research.



### *Online Discussions*

With this method students can relay their thoughts of the day towards the end of the class period as an assessment and a reflection on what they have researched. It will also be used to facilitate discussions when students have been able to access other students' projects relating to democracies in other Spanish speaking countries.

### *Infographics*

Students will have the opportunity to demonstrate part of the knowledge that they have acquired visually. Infographics not only aid the researcher in demonstrating knowledge but also help the researcher teach others about the topic.

### *Project Based Learning*

This project can either be done at one time or it can be spread throughout the course. Students will learn based on the research that either they or their group will do. With that they can apply what they have learned either in classes or any life situations to come.

### **Instructional Implementation**

This curriculum unit can be covered in about 2 class blocks, or it can be spread throughout a semester. I will create three basic lesson plans that teachers can adapt and use to best fit their students. I think it would be possible to implement the activities within units – especially for an International Week or during unit four of the CMS curriculum, which talks about places in the city.

#### Lesson Part One

Goal: Students will be able to locate and label a map of the Americas of what was colonized by certain countries.

Time: 10-15 minutes

#### Directions:

1. Teacher will begin conversation with the topic of colonies.
2. Teacher will state that modern nations have come from colonies. And then ask, “Where did the colonists come from?”

3. Teacher and students can engage in conversation about the questions. It will allow teacher to grasp the students' background.
4. Teacher can write what students have said so that other students can use what is written on the board as options.
5. Students will be given a worksheet of a map of the Americas, both North and South America. And then state, "Label what areas were colonized by which countries."
6. Student will give students about 2-5 minutes.
7. Teacher will the go over the answers with the students. Then the teacher will ask how the students did.

### Lesson Part Two

Goal: To be able to define "democracy."

Time: Time varies

#### Directions:

1. Teacher will pass out sticky notes or place the sticky notes on the desks.
2. Teacher will begin by writing democracy on the board.
3. Invite students to write the names of democratic countries on the sticky notes.
4. Teacher can offer examples just in case the class might be confused as to what may be a good answer. Teacher will give instructions for when students complete this task.
5. Teachers will state, "Once you've brainstormed as many as you can in 2 minutes, turn to your partner, per sitting arrangement, and share your lists. Create a combined list of democracies around the world, then write them on the white board with a dry erase marker."
6. After students have had a chance to create a list, teacher can begin the discussion.
7. Teacher can ask the students what type of responses they came up with.
8. Discuss what the countries students have identified as democratic have in common – what makes them democracies?
9. Then move to discuss how students would define democracy, based on the shared characteristics of the countries they named.
10. The goal would be to create a definition for the class.

### Lesson Part Three

Goal: To be able to compare and contrast the different types of democracies between the United States and across the Spanish Speaking world.

Time: 30-45 minutes

#### Directions:

1. Teacher will create a list of Spanish Speaking countries. Teacher will cut them out and be ready to pass out to groups of students.
2. Teachers will pass out Chromebooks or individual technology as well as the compare and contrast graphic organizer.

3. Students will have access to the internet and Canvas.
4. Canvas will have resources that can be used for the assignment as well as for further reading.
5. Teacher will pass out strips of paper to groups of two. Each slip of paper will have the name of a Spanish speaking country.
6. Students will use the online resources fill in the graphic organizer.

#### Lesson Part Four

Goal: To be able to have a discussion on the similarities and differences in governments.

Time 30-45 minutes

#### Directions:

1. Teachers will have students write their own individual thoughts about the similarities and differences among the countries they have researched.
2. Students will take a separate sheet of paper about 10 minutes to write about their thoughts and feelings about each section they wrote about. Student must be prepared to present to the class.
3. Teacher will lead a 2-5 minute discussion on what the students found most interesting. All groups should have different countries to go along with the United States.
4. Students will then create an infographic that illustrates the information learned by doing this assignment.
5. Students will have to do the following
  - a. Create an infographic with eight out of ten of the information listed on the front side of the infographic as well as two similarities and two differences with each of the students thought under it.
  - b. Students are to be creative and use good common sense.
6. Students can have a discussion or go around the room and take notes about what they have learned before the discussion
7. Students can turn this assignment for a grade

## **Appendix 1**

### Essential Standards

NL.CMT.4.3

Recognize simple patterns of behavior or interaction from the target culture.

NM.COD.4.2

Identify information about target culture perspectives and practices.

NM.CMT.4.1

Recognize aspects of the target culture and language in the students' culture and language.

NM.CMT.4.4

Identify how knowledge of the target language is useful in a global economy.

## **Appendix 2**

### Materials List

A map of the Americas <https://www.eduplace.com/ss/maps/pdf/americas.pdf>

Sticky notes

White board

Dry erase marker

Compare and Contrast Graphic Organizer

White Paper or Constructions Paper

Coloring Utensils

Hispanic countries in Latin America list

### Appendix 3

#### Compare and Contrast Country Organizer

	1. Full name of the country	
	2. Conventional long form of name	
	3. Type of government	
	4. Does the government use the parliamentary or presidential system	
	5. If presidential is there an Electoral College or popular vote?	
	6. Does it border other democratic nations? If so, which ones?	
	7. Which continent is it currently located on?	
	8. Are there different branches of government?	
	9. When did they declare independence?	
	10. Most interesting fact so far.	

What are some of the similarities and the differences dealing with the same topics?

Name of Country:	Name of Country:
1 <sup>st</sup> Similarity	1 <sup>st</sup> Similarity
2 <sup>nd</sup> Similarity	2 <sup>nd</sup> Similarity
1 <sup>st</sup> Difference	1 <sup>st</sup> Difference
Reflect on the differences. Reflect on the similarities.	Effects of democratic ideas in Hispanic Latin America

## Appendix 4

### Hispanic Countries in Latin America List

<b>Argentina</b>	<b>Honduras</b>
<b>Bolivia</b>	<b>Mexico</b>
<b>Chile</b>	<b>Nicaragua</b>
<b>Colombia</b>	<b>Panama</b>
<b>Costa Rica</b>	<b>Paraguay</b>
<b>Cuba</b>	<b>Peru</b>
<b>Dominican Republic</b>	<b>Puerto Rico</b>
<b>Ecuador</b>	<b>Uruguay</b>
<b>El Salvador</b>	<b>Venezuela</b>
<b>Guatemala</b>	



## Bibliography

Cheibub J.A, Elkins Z, and Ginsburg T. 2011. "Latin American Presidentialism in Comparative and Historical Perspective." *Texas Law Review* 89 (7): 1707–39.

This article compares and contrast the building of the United States. It can be useful for more in depth comparison of the constitutions.

"Contact CIA." Central Intelligence Agency. April 01, 2016. Accessed September 23, 2017.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>.

This contains a list of different nations and governments. It can be used to answer the graphic organizers.

"Constitute.". Accessed September 23, 2017. <https://www.constituteproject.org/>.

This contains a library of constitutions that include those of the countries in this project.

Elliott, John H. *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830*. Yale University Press, 2008.

This contains history of colonization in the Americas. It can be used for more in depth reading or clarification on specific events.

Filkins Scott. "Socratic Seminars – ReadWriteThink." *Readwritethink.org* NCTE, n.d. Accessed 28 October. 2017

This is a guide as to how to conduct this type of activity. It can be used as a refresher for students. It can also be used as an example to introduce the activity.

Huntington, Samuel P. *The third wave: democratization in the late twentieth century*. Norman u.a.: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

This book goes into depth about democracy in the modern era. It can be used for examples of other nations that a democratic era in this new age.

Munck, Gerardo L. 2015. "Building Democracy . . . Which Democracy? Ideology and Models of Democracy in Post-Transition Latin America." *Government and Opposition* 50 (03): 364–93. doi:10.1017/gov.2015.2.

This article contains aspect of political governments. It covers right, centrist, and left ideological views.

"Presidentialism in Latin America: For and Against." BristoLatino. October 31, 2013. Accessed September 23, 2017. <https://bristolatino.wordpress.com/2013/06/27/presidentialism-in-latin-america-for-and-against/>.

This can be used to introduce the topic to students or can be done as a pre –reading to prepare for the topic.

Simon, Cathy. "Using the Think-Pair-Share Technique – ReadWriteThink." *Readwritethink.org* NCTE, n.d. Accessed 28 October. 2017

This is a guide as to how to conduct this type of activity. It can be used as a refresher for students. It can also be used as an example to introduce the activity.

Database. Accessed September 23, 2017. <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>.

This can be used as part of the reflection questions at the end of the graphic organizer if students need more support. It does not list all countries but can add more depth to the students' research.

Zovatto, Daniel. "The State of Democracy in Latin America." Brookings. July 28, 2016. Accessed September 23, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-state-of-democracy-in-latin-america/>.

This article is written from the perspective of a Latin American. It was translated into English from Spanish in Costa Rica.

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<sup>1</sup> John H. Elliot. *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830*, 19

<sup>2</sup> Elliot, *Empire of the Atlantic World*, 19

<sup>3</sup> Elliot, *Empire of the Atlantic World*, 31

<sup>4</sup> Elliot, *Empire of the Atlantic World*, 22

<sup>5</sup> J.A Cheibub, Z. Elkins, and T. Ginsburg. "Latin American Presidentialism in Comparative and Historical Perspective." *Texas Law Review* 89 7. (2011): 1707–39. (3)

<sup>6</sup> "Presidentialism in Latin America: For and Against." BristoLatino.

<sup>7</sup> J.A Cheibub, Z. Elkins, and T. Ginsburg, "Latin American Presidentialism" (5)

<sup>8</sup> J.A Cheibub, Z. Elkins, and T. Ginsburg, "Latin American Presidentialism" (13)

<sup>9</sup> J.A Cheibub, Z. Elkins, and T. Ginsburg, "Latin American Presidentialism" (4)

<sup>10</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The third wave: democratization in the late twentieth century*. (103)

<sup>11</sup> J.A Cheibub, Z. Elkins, and T. Ginsburg, "Latin American Presidentialism" (4)

<sup>12</sup> Gerardo L. Munck "Building Democracy . . . Which Democracy? Ideology and Models of Democracy in Post-Transition Latin America." (366)

<sup>13</sup> Gerardo L. Munck "Building Democracy . . . Which Democracy? Ideology and Models of Democracy in Post-Transition Latin America." (368)

<sup>14</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The third wave* (106)

<sup>15</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The third wave* (45-46)

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Zovatto, "The State of Democracy in Latin America."

<sup>17</sup> "Presidentialism in Latin America: For and Against." BristoLatino.