Výzkumné sympózium: Proč demokracie selhávají různě: Autokratizace a odpor ve Střední Americe

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Současné demokracie se méně často hroutí prostřednictvím převratů, častěji postupně erodují zevnitř. Jak probíhá dnešní autokratizace ve Střední Americe a proč má v jednotlivých zemích regionu odlišné podoby? Co nám lídři jako Nayib Bukele a Daniel Ortega odhalují o posilování moci výkonné moci – a kde se rodí odpor? Sympózium představí různé náhledy na eroze demokracie, ovládnutí institucí a právní i občanské strategie, které usilují o obranu demokratického řádu.

Program

- **Prof. Mariana Llanos (GIGA, University of Erfurt, ERA-AREAS)**
  Výzvy pro demokracii v Latinské Americe
- **Dr. Radek Buben & Doc. Karel Kouba (Faculty of Arts, Charles University, ERA-AREAS)**
  Různé podoby úpadku demokracie ve Střední Americe
- **Alina Maria Ripplinger (GIGA, University of Erfurt)**
  Jak je právo využíváno k odporu vůči autokratům? Mapování právního odporu v Guatemale a Nikaragui
- Diskuse

Vystupující a abstrakty

Alina Maria Ripplinger, GIGA, University of Erfurt

Presentation: *How is the law invoked to defy autocrats? Tracing Legal Resistance in Guatemala and Nicaragua*

Around the globe, autocrats increasingly govern by legal means: They impose repressive laws, manipulate elections, change the constitution, coopt judges, and prosecute or imprison dissident voices without access to justice. This trend is evidenced in Central America and beyond. Is the law left to autocrats' power grabs?

The lecture will make three main contributions:

- It conceptualizes legal resistance (LR) to help understand how and when civil and political actors defend democratic rights and institutions.
- It presents empirical findings from Nicaragua and Guatemala, which are considered highly adverse contexts for LR to take roots.
- It distinguishes the law as a key political arena for both autocrats and resisters alike.

About Alina Ripplinger: Alina Ripplinger is a Doctoral Researcher at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies, Hamburg (GIGA), and at the University of Erfurt. She is a Researcher of

the DEMINGS project, which is led by Prof. Mariana Llanos and deals with Democratic Institutions in the Global South. Previously, Alina Ripplinger was a Research Fellow and Project Assistant at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, Heidelberg (MPIL), with a focus on constitutional and HR law in Central America. She holds a Master of Arts in Political Science (M.A.) from the University of Heidelberg and a Bachelor of Social Sciences (B.A.) from the University of Göttingen. In her doctoral project, she researches Legal Resistance to autocratization in Guatemala and Nicaragua.

Prof. Dr. Mariana Llanos, GIGA, University of Erfurt

Presentation: *Challenges to Democracy in Latin America*

According to V-dem data, the global outlook for democracy is the bleakest in the past 25 years, and the "third wave of autocratization" continues to deepen and expand worldwide. This presentation situates Latin America within this broader trend. Although Latin America is still one of the most democratic regions in the world, it has not escaped democratic decline. In a region used to military coups in the past, autocratization today differs from previous waves: it rather advances through elected executives who gradually erode institutional checks from within. The presentation will explain how this process typically unfolds, highlighting the central role of institutions and rules, as autocratic presidents use their positions to manipulate electoral frameworks, change constitutions, co-opt judiciaries and oversight bodies, and restrict media and social dissent.

About Mariana Llanos: Mariana Llanos is a Lead Research Fellow at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) and holds an extraordinary professorship in Democratic Institutions in the Global South at the University of Erfurt. She previously served as Head of GIGA's Research Program "Accountability and Participation" (2015–2022) and was co-Director of the GIGA Institute of Latin American Studies (ad interim, 2023–2025).

She earned her D.Phil in Politics from the University of Oxford and has published extensively on Latin American comparative political institutions, presidentialism, judicial politics, and executive–legislative relations. Her most recent research focuses on court-president relations and the personalization of political power. She is the recipient of two APSA awards for her work on comparative politics and executive institutions.

Dr. Radek Buben & Doc. Karel Kouba, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, ERA-AREAS project

Presentation: *Variations of Democratic Decline in Central America*

Central America has long been a hard place for liberal democracy. Unsurprisingly, in recent years, it has become an even more troublesome region for this type of bargained system, based on pragmatic political competition and mutual acceptance of democratic rules. What *is* surprising, however, is that the regional pattern diverges in important ways from the dominant global trend, in which illiberalism and autocratization are typically driven by elected leaders and power-hungry incumbents.

The presentation traces the trajectories of four Central American countries and reveals four distinct paths toward illiberalism, democratic erosion, and full autocratization. In Honduras and Guatemala, democratic erosion was triggered by electoral losers' refusal to accept the legitimacy of winners, with supposedly independent state actors – such as the judiciary and the military – playing a decisive role. In El Salvador, democratic erosion stemmed primarily from the collapse of opposition parties

rather than from government aggrandizement alone. Only in Nicaragua's sultanistic endgame was the incumbent fully in control of dismantling the democratic bargain, launching brutal attacks first on democratic institutions and later on political opponents.

About Karel Kouba: Karel Kouba is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the Center for Ibero-American Studies, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague. He holds an M.A. from Miami University (2006) and a Ph.D. from Palacký University in Olomouc (2011). Karel's research centers on comparative politics of Latin America and Central Europe, with a particular focus on the origins and effects of political institutions – especially electoral rules. He also studies unconventional forms of political behavior, such as election boycotts or invalid voting. His broader concern is the health of democracy. He has examined the collapse of democracy in Nicaragua, democratic stability in Latin America, the challenges to democracy in Central Europe and the trade-offs involved in sustaining robust local democracy. He was a visiting scholar at several universities around the world, including the position of Fernand Braudel Fellow at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. His work has appeared in leading political science journals including Government and Opposition, European Political Science Review, Democratization, and Electoral Studies, as well as in area studies journals such as Latin American Politics and Society, Journal of Politics in Latin America and East European Politics and Societies.

About Radek Buben: PhDr. Radek Buben, Ph.D. is Head of the Center for Ibero-American Studies at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, where he also teaches and supervises master's and doctoral theses. His research focuses on contemporary Latin American history, the transformation of political regimes in the region, and the history of political science. He has completed several research stays in Latin America and spent a year as a Visiting Research Fellow at Queen Mary University of London. He is currently involved in two major projects: ERA-AREAS, aimed at strengthening area studies at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, and the CoRe project.

https://www.ff.cuni.cz/2026/02/vyzkumne-sympozium-proc-demokracie-selhavaji-ruzne-autokratizace-a-odpor-ve-stredni-americe