Unit 7 contains a wealth of information about the revolutions and dictatorships in twentieth-century Latin America. It is not possible to completely encapsulate all of the information from Unit 7, but what follows are overviews of the major features of each nation’s government during the mid-twentieth century. Your essay does not need to include all the following information to be excellent, and if your essay includes information that does not appear here, that does not mean it is incorrect. What is most important to be able to identify in both your essay and the overviews below are the major similarities and differences among these case studies.

**Argentina**
In Argentina, the most influential midcentury ruler was Juan Perón. Like many Latin American leaders at this time, Perón had a military background, as he attained the rank of colonel in the Argentine army. Perón’s regime depended on the support of organized labor more than any other group, although he was initially supported by the army. Although organized labor supported Perón, he was not a Marxist or socialist. Perón constructed a unique coalition and ideology, giving rise to the term Perónism, which he saw as an alternative to capitalism or communism that took the best features of each to control workers’ unrest. Although Perón was sympathetic to fascism, as Professor Steven Volk notes, his rule is best characterized as authoritarian populism. Perón obtained power in a fair and freely contested democratic election in 1946 and was reelected in 1951, although he would not finish his second term. Perón came to power as a result of increasing political instability in Argentina stemming from economic problems caused by the Great Depression. In 1943, the Argentine military overthrew the civilian government. At the time, Perón was appointed as head of the Department of Labor, a position he used to vault into the political spotlight and ultimately the presidency. Although freely elected, Perón’s rule resembled a dictatorship in that he censored political opponents, fired university professors who opposed him, and arrested and jailed dissenters, especially conservatives and socialists. Other noteworthy features of Perón’s rule included the incorporation of organized labor into the government bureaucracy, support for unions, and initial economic success that made Argentina one of the most industrialized nations in Latin America by the early 1950s. A final feature to consider is that Perón strengthened the autocratic power of the state in the name of nationalism, a recurring theme in Latin American dictatorships.

**Bolivia**
Bolivia is perhaps the most difficult of the six case studies because of the nation’s political instability. In this case, it is not as important to remember the names of individual leaders (although if you can, that is great!) but rather to understand the larger trends in Bolivian politics. During the period that began with the “Sexenio,” from 1946—
1952, followed by the rule of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) from 1952–1964, and then the military dictatorship from 1964 until 1982, Bolivia was one of the most unstable nations in the world. This very instability is one of the most unique features of Bolivia's history. Despite the constant political turmoil, there are several features about Bolivian politics common to much of Latin America, including the involvement of the military in civilian government, the agitation by workers and peasants for better political and economic rights, and nationalism as a crucial component of political and economic decisions. The individual who held power the longest during this era was Hugo Banzer, a colonel in the army who came to power via a coup in 1971 and managed to maintain control of Bolivia until he was deposed in 1978. As with almost every other Latin American nation, Bolivia in general and the Banzer dictatorship in particular struggled to achieve sustained economic growth, which led to further political chaos. Bolivia’s military dictatorship was hostile to organized labor and the peasantry and did not attempt to incorporate them into the structure of government, unlike some other totalitarian governments. Under pressure from the United States, the military dictatorship slowly began a process of democratization in 1978 that took four years to complete.

**Brazil**

Getúlio Vargas was the dominant figure in Brazilian politics during the twentieth century. During his rule, first as dictator from 1930–1945 and then as democratically elected president from 1951–1954, Brazil began a process of economic, political, and military modernization that has helped the sole Portuguese-speaking nation in Latin America become a regional and emerging world power. Vargas, unlike many other dictators during this time, did not come to power as a result of his own military prowess. Instead, he was a shrewd politician. Vargas had a law degree and a respected political career before the closely contested elections of 1930. Although Vargas narrowly lost, he had the support of the military, which installed him in power. During his rule, Vargas was able to balance the competing social interests in Brazil by strengthening the federal state. Vargas’s Estado Novo gave the central Brazilian state (backed by the military) direct control over the country. Although Vargas earned the reputation of “Father of the Poor,” he outlawed strikes, jailed dissidents, and only allowed workers to participate in government-controlled unions. Vargas was not a communist, although he did open diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Vargas was deposed by the military in 1945 because the military feared his rule was threatening to upset the social order by becoming too populist. Vargas is unique as a ruler because he was not a military officer and he did not claim a military title. He managed to obtain power by appealing to the military, but once his rule started to drift away from what the military saw as a desirable path for Brazil, he was removed from office. Vargas returned to power in 1951 as Brazil’s democratically elected president and remained in office until the military once again removed him in 1954. During this second stint in power, Vargas nationalized the oil and electric industries, creating Petrobrás and later Electrobrás, paralleling developments in other Latin American countries. After he was finally removed from
power, Vargas shot himself in the heart, ending his life but not his lasting influence on Brazilian development in the twentieth century.

Chile
During the mid-twentieth century, Chile was a rare example of a successful democracy in Latin America. Chile at first bears little resemblance to the other case studies because it had (until 1973—a tragedy you will learn about in the next unit) a stable representative democracy throughout the middle of the century which saw peaceful transitions of power among elected officials. This was due in part to the strength of Chilean organized labor, which created powerful institutions, such as unions and political parties. However, the period preceding the 1930s in Chile does bear many resemblances to other trends in Latin America. During the earlier part of the twentieth century, Chilean workers struggled to organize, but unlike other nations, no leader or dictator ever co-opted their support. Instead, Chilean workers developed their own political parties to represent their own interests. Nevertheless, Chile experienced a brief military dictatorship under Carlos Ibáñez del Campo, from 1927 to 1931. As with many other instances of military dictatorship, Ibáñez took power to ostensibly provide stability to Chile. Likewise, economic problems caused by the Great Depression prompted another regime change, although for Chile, that meant a return to democracy. Although Chile was fortunate to have a functioning democracy during the middle decades of the twentieth century, the experience of dictatorship under Ibáñez was a dark foreshadow for what would come later under Pinochet. As with nearly every other Latin American nation, the inability to reconcile the needs of workers and peasants with the desire for the elites and military to maintain control would lead to revolution and dictatorship.

Cuba
The Cuban Revolution is one of the most influential in history. Fidel Castro came to power in 1959 at the expense of another dictator, Fulgencio Batista. Cuba is a unique case, because Castro became the Western hemisphere’s only sustained communist ruler. As Professor Steven Volk points out, Cuba is also unique because it had a weak middle class and was heavily dominated by foreign political and economic interests, particularly the United States, which actually ruled Cuba militarily in the early twentieth century. Thus there was not a powerful set of Cuban elites to oppose Castro and his fellow revolutionaries like there was in other Latin American nations. The relationship between the military and Castro is complex; on the one hand, Castro was not an army officer and so the revolution was not strictly speaking a military coup. On the other hand, contrary to popular belief, the Cuban Revolution was not solely a guerilla war. The Cuban rebels fought traditional battles and obtained power when they successfully forced Batista to flee Havana. Although the Cuban Revolution and ensuing Castro dictatorship were communist and concerned with the welfare of the poor and workers, there are several interesting similarities to other dictatorships of this period. First, Castro “socialized” larger sugar plantations, placing them under government control. Although this was done in the name of the people, it had a similar practical effect to the nationalization of industries occurring in other Latin American nations. Likewise, for
reasons internal and external to Cuba, Castro was unable to significantly improve the lot of poor peasants and workers. In this respect, his rule is reminiscent of other dictators who relied upon the support of the poorer masses in the working class and in agriculture. While the sincerity of Castro’s concern for the poor is up for historical debate (along with that of other dictators), it is worth noting that Castro and others did rely upon their appearance as a champion of the downtrodden to legitimate their rule in the absence of constitutional rule.

**Dominican Republic**
The Dominican Republic’s midcentury dictator, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, was infamous for his brutality and paranoia. As was the case with so many other dictators, Trujillo used his position as commander of the Dominican Army to lead a revolt that enabled him to seize power in 1930. Trujillo was able to consolidate his rule quickly because of a freak accident: a terrible hurricane that killed two thousand people. Trujillo became something of a national hero for organizing relief work and helping the nation rebuild. Trujillo was able to secure economic concessions for the Dominican sugar industry from the United States which enabled the island nation to gain some prosperity; however, Trujillo’s dictatorship was responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of people. Trujillo maintained his power with an iron fist, killing or jailing anyone who opposed him. Similar to Cuba, the Dominican Republic had a long history of U.S. involvement, a single cash-crop economy dependent on sugar, and a weak ruling class which enabled a single strongman, Trujillo, to rule for decades. Unlike Cuba, Trujillo was ardently anti-communist, and as a result he enjoyed tremendous support from the United States, which all but condoned the atrocities he committed to stay in power. Trujillo helped modernize the Dominican Republic, but he did not nationalize any industries on the scale of other Latin American nations for fear of upsetting his U.S. allies. Unlike many other dictators, who at the very least sought to keep up an appearance of appealing to the common man, Trujillo ruled through fear, power, and a cult of personality. Most of the economic prosperity during his reign accrued to himself, his family, and his closest followers. Trujillo’s reign of terror ended in 1961, when, after thirty-one years of rule, he was ambushed while driving in his car and shot to death.