

DEMOCRATIC EROSION

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
WEDNESDAYS 2-4:30 PM
441 GIBSON HALL
FALL 2022

PROFESSOR ANNE MENG
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OFFICE HOURS: WEDNESDAYS AFTER CLASS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is democratic erosion (also called democratic backsliding) and how does it occur? In this course we will study the ways in which democratic institutions can lose power and examine the ways in which leaders try to strengthen their personal authority. However, in order to do so, we will also re-evaluate fundamental ideas about democracy and how countries successfully democratize (or not).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance and Participation – 25%

One of the things I love about this course is that our discussions are largely student-led! Please try your best to attend class and complete all the readings each week. Our discussions are fun, lively, and interesting when everyone has done the work.

However, if you're feeling sick, please stay home and rest. If you can't make class, it's no problem at all - just send me a quick email. Let's take care of each other, and please be considerate of your classmates: don't come to class sick.

I completely understand that issues and challenges sometimes come up during the semester. I fully support all of you and want you to prioritize your (physical and mental) health and well-being above everything else. If you ever need anything at all, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me. I'm happy to help with anything, whether it's related to this class or not.

2. Discussion Questions and Memos – 25%

Discussion Questions (15%): Each student should email me 2 discussion questions every week by 11:59 PM on Tuesday before each class.

Memos (10%): Each student is required to write 2 memos throughout the semester. Memos should be emailed to me by 11:59 PM on Tuesday before the class. Students can pick any 2 weeks where there are readings.

Please write your memo on academic articles, and **not** short news pieces.

Memos should be 2 pages in length and focus on 1 article assigned for that week.

- The first page of the memo should be a short summary of the key points of the article.
- The second page of the memo should discuss your *opinions* about the article. You can highlight things like:
 - What surprised you most in the article? What did you find most interesting?
 - Are there any potential problems with the argument? What are some other things the author could have discussed that were not covered in the article?

Students who wrote memos will be the point person for the seminar that week. We will open the discussion with brief presentations where the student will highlight *three* items from the *second* half of the memo they wrote (i.e. I do not want you to summarize the article, I want you to tell us your opinions about it!).

If you write a memo, you do **not** have to submit discussion questions for that week. In other words, each week you will send me an email with **either** discussion questions or a memo.

The discussion questions and memos are graded on a Pass/No Pass basis. If you did the assignment, you will receive full credit.

4. Case Study – 50%

Initial Draft (5%) – due November 9

Peer Review (5%) – due November 16

Final Paper (40%) – due December 12

Each student will produce a case study that analyzes the state of democracy in that country, and whether the country has experienced democratic erosion. The instructor will provide a list of countries to choose from, and students will each pick a country to write their report on.

Each case study should be around 15 pages long, and should address the following questions:

- What was the status of democracy in the country at the end of the Cold War in the 1990s?
 - How did the country democratize?
- Has the country undergone democratic erosion in the last 5 to 10 years?
 - If democracy eroded, what are the key indicators of backsliding that occurred?
 - If there was no backsliding, did democracy strengthen or stay the same? Were there events that were *mis-interpreted* as backsliding?
- What is the future of democracy for this country?

We will write this report in stages: Students will exchange early drafts (around 5 pages) of their case study with another student on **November 9**. Each student should provide 1-2

pages of feedback for their partner and email them this feedback by **November 16**. The final case studies are due to the instructor on **December 12**.

COURSE POLICIES

Late assignments

Please do your best to plan ahead and complete all assignments on time. However, if anything does come up, please get in touch with me.

Re-grade policy

If a grade dispute arises, please provide a one-page memo explaining why you believe the grade you received is incorrect. Please submit re-grade requests within a week from the time the grade was first received. I'm always happy to check-in with you if you have questions about your grade throughout the semester!

Classroom etiquette

Since this class is discussion (rather than lecture) based, I encourage you to take notes by hand to remain better engaged with our discussions. Please keep other electronic devices stowed away during class.

Academic Honor Code

Please properly cite published sources in your work! I'm happy to answer any questions or give feedback on good citation practices. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course.

SCHEDULE

All the readings will be available as PDFs on Collab.

Week 1 (August 24): Introduction

Week 2 (August 31): Defining “Democracy”: Concepts and Challenges

Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi. 2000. *Democracy and Development*. Chapter 1 (Democracy and Dictatorship)

Tom Ginsburg and Aziz Huq. 2018. *How to Save a Constitutional Democracy*. Chapter 1 (Liberal Constitutional Democracy and Its Alternatives)

Pamela Paxton. 2000. “Women’s suffrage in the measurement of democracy: Problems of operationalization.” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 35(3): 92-111.

Week 3 (September 7): Rethinking Democratization

Michael Albertus and Victor Menaldo. 2018. *Authoritarianism and the Elite Origins of Democracy*. Chapter 1 (Introduction).

Jaimie Bleck and Nicolas van de Walle. 2019. *Electoral Politics in Africa Since 1990*. Chapter 1 (The Puzzle of Electoral Continuity).

Edward Gibson. 2013. *Boundary Control*. Chapter 3 (Subnational Authoritarianism in the United States: Boundary Control and the ‘Solid South’)

Week 4 (September 14): No class! Instructor at conference.

Week 5 (September 21): Rethinking Dictatorship

Dan Slater. 2006. “Iron Cage in an Iron Fist: Authoritarian Institutions and the Personalization of Power in Malaysia,” *Comparative Politics* 36(1): 81-101.

Ellen Lust-Okar. 2006. “Elections Under Authoritarianism: Preliminary Lessons from Jordan,” *Democratization* 13(3): 456-471.

Rosenfeld, Bryn. 2021. *The Autocratic Middle Class: How State Dependency Reduces the Demand for Democracy*. Chapter 1 (Introduction)

Week 6 (September 28): What is democratic erosion and how does it happen?

Nancy Bermeo. 2016. “On Democratic Backsliding.” *Journal of Democracy* 27(1): 5-19.

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. Chapter 1 (Fateful Alliances), Chapter 2 (Gatekeeping in America), Chapter 4 (Subverting Democracy), Chapter 5 (The Guardrails of Democracy), and Chapter 6 (The Unwritten Rules of American Politics).

Week 7 (October 5): Undermining Democratic Institutions from the Inside

Tim Horley, Anne Meng, and Mila Versteeg. 2020. “The World is Experiencing A New Form of Autocracy.” *The Atlantic*.

Aziz Huq and Tom Ginsburg. 2017. “How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy.” *UCLA Law Review* 65(78): 80-169. Section III.

Ozan Varol. 2015. “Stealth Authoritarianism.” *Iowa Law Review* 100(4): 1673-1742. Parts I, II, and III.

Week 8 (October 12): Populism

Jan-Werner Müller. 2016. *What is Populism?* Introduction (Is Everyone A Populist?), Chapter 1 (What Populists Say), Chapter 2 (What Populists Do).

William Howell and Terry Moe. 2020. *Presidents, Populism, and the Crisis of Democracy*. Chapter 1 (The Drivers of Populist Policies)

Week 9 (October 19): *In-Class Debate!* Topic TBD

Week 10 (October 26): Polarization

Milan Svoblik. 2019. “Polarization Versus Democracy.” *Journal of Democracy* 30(3): 20-32.

Lilliana Mason. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. Chapter 1 (Introduction)

Adrienne Lebas. 2018. "Can Polarization Be Positive? Conflict and Institutional Development in Africa." *American Behavioral Scientist* 62(1): 59-74.

Week 11 (November 2): Identity Politics, Race, and Institutions in the United States

Keith Bentele and Erin O'Brien. 2013. "Jim Crow 2.0? Why States Consider and Adopt Restrictive Voter Access Policies." *Perspectives on Politics* 11(4): 1088-1116.

Paul Frymer and Jacob Grumbach. 2020. "Labor Union and White Racial Politics." *American Journal of Political Science* 65(1): 225-240.

Katherine Cramer. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. Chapter 1 (Introduction).

Week 12 (November 9): Media and Disinformation

Initial draft due

Danny Hayes and Jennifer Lawless. 2015. "As Local News Goes, So Goes Citizen Engagement: Media, Knowledge, and Participation in US House Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 77(2): 447-462.

Oscar Barrera, Sergei Guriev, Emeric Henry, and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya. 2020. "Facts, Alternative Facts, and Fact Checking in Times of Post-Truth Politics." *Journal of Public Economics* 182: 1-19.

Peter Pomerantsev. 2019. "The Disinformation Age: A Revolution in Propaganda." *The Guardian*.

Week 13 (November 16): What now? Safe-guarding Against Democratic Erosion in the United States

Peer exchange feedback due

William Howell and Terry Moe. 2020. *Presidents, Populism, and the Crisis of Democracy*. Chapter 4 (A Presidency for Modern Times)

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. Chapter 9 (Saving Democracy)

Week 14 (November 23): No class! Thanksgiving Break

Week 15 (November 30): Overflow week/ Extra Office Hours with Professor Meng

[December 12: Final Case Studies Due]