

DEMOCRATIC EROSION

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
MONDAYS 3-5:30 PM, ONLINE
SPRING 2021

PROFESSOR ANNE MENG
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OFFICE HOURS: MONDAYS 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. We will consider topics such as polarization, media, populism, identity politics, and how institutions can be used and abused. We will root theories of democratic erosion in current events as well as historical case studies and consider modern day cases in places such as Russia, Africa, Europe, and the United States.

CLASS LOGISTICS

We will meet over Zoom every week. Our seminars will **not** be recorded. If you can, please turn your camera on during class – we will have a lot of student-led discussions and it's helpful to see each other in our conversations.

My office hours will be held over Zoom immediately after class ends every week, although you're welcome to email me if you cannot meet then.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance and Participation – 25%**

Attendance and participation are especially important in seminars, and we will take advantage of the small class size to have many student-led discussions of the material. Attendance for this class is mandatory. Students are expected to have completed all the assigned readings before class and be prepared to engage in critical discussions of the works.

**The paragraph above describes my attendance and participation requirements during “normal” times. Obviously, things are very different and often times, much more challenging, right now. I fully support all of you and want you to prioritize your (physical and mental) health and well-being above everything else. Having said that, I will be very flexible on attendance and participation this semester. If you can't make a class, it's no problem, just send me a quick email. If you 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.

Just try your best this semester. Obviously, I encourage everyone to complete all the readings each week - our discussions are fun, lively, and interesting when everyone has done the work. However, if you weren't able to complete all the readings for a particular week, please still come to class anyways. I understand that unanticipated issues might come up this semester.

2. Discussion Questions and Memos – 25%

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

Memos (10%): Each student is required to write 2 discussion papers throughout the semester. Discussion papers should be emailed to me by 11:59 PM on Sunday before the class. Students can pick any 2 weeks between Feb 1 and April 26.

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 succinct summary of the key points of the article:

- What is the puzzle the author is trying to explain?
- What is the argument?
- What kinds of evidence does the author provide that supports her/his thesis?

The second page of the memo should discuss your *opinions* about the article:

- What surprised you most about the discussion in the article? What did you find most interesting?
- Are there any potential problems with the author's argument?
- What are some other things that 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 – it's basically just whether you did the assignment.

4. Case Study – 50%

Initial Draft (5%) – due April 5

Peer Review (5%) – due April 12

Final Paper (40%) – due May 12

Each student will produce a case study that analyzes whether a particular country has or is recently undergoing 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 is the state of democracy in the country since the end of the Cold War in 1990?
- Has the country undergone democratic erosion in the last 5 to 10 years? If so, when did the country start to backslide? What was the timeline of events? If not, what were some events that we may have mis-interpreted as erosion?
- What were the symptoms of erosion?
- What were the causes of erosion in that particular country?
- What were the responses to erosion?
- Do you think backsliding will get better or worse in the future?

We will write this report in stages: Students will exchange early drafts (around 5 pages) of their case study with another student on **April 5**. Each student should provide 1-2 pages of feedback for their partner and email them this feedback by **April 12**. The final case studies are due to the instructor on **May 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. A copy of the graded assignment should be included along with the memo. Re-grade requests must be submitted within a week from the time the grade was first received. Note that re-grade requests may result in a higher *or lower* grade, so utilize this option carefully. I'm always happy to check-in with you if you have questions about your grade throughout the semester.

Classroom etiquette

Since we will be using our computers to meet over Zoom, I encourage you to take notes by hand. Please keep other electronic devices stowed away during class.

Academic Honor Code

All students are expected to submit work that is a reflection of their own ideas and to properly cite published sources when referencing the ideas of others. If you have any questions about proper citation practices or what constitutes plagiarism, please come talk to me. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course.

SCHEDULE

All the readings will be available as PDFs on Collab.

Week 1 (2/1): Introduction

Week 2 (2/8): 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 (2/15): 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 (2/22): 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 5 (3/1): Undermining Democratic Institutions from the Inside

Kamil Marcinkiewicz and Mary Stegmaier. “Poland appears to be dismantling its own hard-won democracy.” *The Washington Post*. July 21, 2017.

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 6 (3/8): *In-Class Debate* National Emergencies & Constitutional Constraints

Dale Fisher and Annelies Wilder-Smith. 2020. "The global community needs to swiftly ramp up the response to contain COVID-19." *The Lancet*.

Shana Kushner Gadarian, Sara Wallace Goodman, and Thomas Pepinsky. 2020. "Partisanship, Health Behavior, and Policy Attitudes in the Early Stages of the COVID-19 Pandemic." Working Paper.

Adam Chilton, Kevin Cope, Charles Crabtree, Mila Versteeg. 2020. "Red and Blue America agree that now is the time to violate the Constitution." *The Atlantic*.

Selam Gebrekidan. "For Autocrats, and Others, Coronavirus is a Chance to Grab Even More Power." *New York Times*.

Week 7 (3/15): 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 8 (3/22): 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 9 (3/29): Break! *No class*

Please work on your initial draft, which is due next week.

Week 10 (4/5): Identity Politics, Race, and Immigration

Initial draft due

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.

Marisa Abrajano and Zoltan Hajnal. 2015. *White Backlash: Immigration, Race, and American Politics*. Intro.

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

Week 11 (4/12): Civil-Military Relations – Guest lecture Professor Erica De Bruin
Peer exchange feedback due

Erica De Bruin. 2020. “No, Trump is not attempting a ‘coup’. Here’s why the distinction matters.” *Washington Post*.

Kristen Harkness. 2017. “Military loyalty and the failure of democratization in Africa: how ethnic armies shape the capacity of presidents to defy term limits.” *Democratization* 24(5): 801-818.

Erica De Bruin. 2020. “International Trends in Militarized Policing: New Data and Puzzles.” *Political Violence at a Glance*.

Week 12 (4/19): (Dis)Information, Communication, and Media

Rebecca Weitz-Shapiro and Matthew Winters. 2016. “Can Citizens Discern? Information Credibility, Political Sophistication, and the Punishment of Corruption in Brazil.” *Journal of Politics* 79(1): 60-74.

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 (4/26): What now? Safe-guarding Against Democratic Erosion in the United States

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 (5/3): Extra Office Hours with Professor Meng

[May 12: Final Case Studies Due]