

DEMOCRATIC EROSION

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
MONDAYS 2:00 - 4:30 PM
415 NEW CABELL HALL
FALL 2023

PROFESSOR ANNE MENG
AMENG@VIRGINIA.EDU
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. 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 Sunday 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 Sunday before the class. Students can pick any 2 weeks where there are readings.

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 20

Peer Review (5%) – due November 27

Final Paper (40%) – due December 11

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 20**. Each student should provide 1-2 pages of feedback for their partner and email them this feedback by **November 27**. The final case studies are due to the instructor on **December 11**.

SCHEDULE

All the readings will be available as PDFs on Canvas.

Week 1 (August 28): Introduction

Week 2 (September 4): Class canceled! (Instructor traveling)

Week 3 (September 11): 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 4 (September 18): 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 5 (September 25): 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 (October 2): No class (Fall break!)

Week 7 (October 9): 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).

Andrew Little and Anne Meng. 2023. "Measuring Democratic Backsliding." *PS: Political Science & Politics*.

Week 8 (October 16): Undermining Democratic Institutions from the Inside

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. Chapter 2 (Gatekeeping in America), Chapter 3 (The Great Republican Abdication), Chapter 4 (Subverting Democracy).

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

Week 9 (October 23): 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 10 (October 30): Polarization

Milan Svobik. 2019. "Polarization Versus Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 30(3): 20-32.

Lilliana Mason. 2018. "Losing Common Ground: Social Sorting and Polarization." *The Forum* 16(1).

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

Week 11 (November 6): *In class debate!* [Topic TBD]

Week 12 (November 13): Identity Politics, Race, and Immigration

Ashley Jardina and Robert Mickey. 2022. "White Racial Solidarity and Opposition to American Democracy." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 699(1).

Katherine Cramer. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. Chapter 1 (Introduction), Chapter 3 (The Contours of Rural Consciousness).

Mudde, Cas. 2016. "Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe Today." *Transformations of Populism in Europe and the Americas: History and Recent Tendencies*.

Week 13 (November 20): Media and Disinformation

Initial draft due

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*.

Kaitlyn Tiffany. 2023. "So Maybe Facebook *Didn't* Ruin Politics." *The Atlantic*.

Week 14 (November 27): What now? Safe-guarding Against Democratic Erosion

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 5 (The Guardrails of Democracy) and Chapter 9 (Saving Democracy)

Week 15 (December 4): No class – Instructor holding extra office hours this week

Please take advantage of these extra office hours to come talk to me about your case studies if you have any questions!

[December 11: Final Case Studies Due]