

Seminar in Comparative Politics: Democratic Erosion

POL SCI 333
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Spring 2022
TR 2-3:15
Room: BOL 657

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Office Hours: Wednesday 1-3 pm or by
appointment
Mode of Delivery: In-person

Prerequisites: Junior standing, Comparative Politics course

Course Description:

For most of the past two hundred years the world has been becoming more democratic. But in recent years there are signs that democracy may be in decline. Democratic breakdowns are becoming more common and the quality of democracy appears to be eroding in a number of established democracies. This course analyzes these trends. Specifically, this course addresses the symptoms, causes and consequences of democratic erosion in the contemporary world. The course will help students evaluate threats to democracy in the United States and around the world.

We will begin the course with an investigation of core concepts: democracy, liberalism, populism, and democratic erosion. After establishing key concepts, the course then introduces students to the historical and geographic patterns in democratic erosion, as well as to individual cases and markers of democratic erosion. The bulk of the course then turns to analysis. We examine key explanations for democratic erosion, including: institutional weakness, norm breaking, polarization, mass support for illiberalism, elite strategy, social capital and inequality.

Course Objectives:

In this course you will:

1. gain a firm understanding of what democracy is
2. learn how to diagnose democratic erosion
3. become familiar with key historical and contemporary instances of democratic erosion
4. come to recognize the warning signs of democratic deterioration
5. learn about the causes of democratic erosion
6. use the analytic toolkit of social science to study cases of democratic erosion

Requirements:

1) Attend class sessions and participate

The format of this class will be discussion. Your participation includes both attendance and engagement in class discussion.

I will lecture at times, but most of our class time will be spent discussing the themes and arguments presented in our readings. Everyone should be ready to contribute something in every class. Your comments need not dazzle every time. Often times, the most productive contributions to class discussions are questions. If you don't understand something in the

readings, say so. The authors we read are not perfect; their prose may not always be clear and their arguments will never be bulletproof. Speak up and air your grievances if you are confused. We will all be better for it and you will be rewarded come evaluation time.

Attendance is mandatory. Our class is small, and therefore, you cannot free ride on your fellow classmates. Your absences will be noticed by all and have a palpable impact on our sessions. Each unexcused absence will result in the reduction of your attendance grade by 1/3 of a letter grade. Absences will only be excused for illness, family crises, religious observances etc. Late Policy: You are expected to arrive to class on time unless you have a valid excuse.

Your class participation grade will be based upon two equal components: participation and attendance.

2) Complete assigned readings before the date indicated on the syllabus

In order to participate effectively in discussion, you will need to have done the required readings for that day.

3) Case Report

On February 10, I will ask each of you to prepare a 3 page case report on a recent (within the past 20 years) case of democratic backsliding. In these case reports you will be asked to 1) identify a case of democratic backsliding and 2) describe the symptoms and indicators of democratic backsliding in that country. You will present these case reports to the class (using powerpoint) and we will ask you questions about that case. You may choose any country you like, but here are some suggestions: Nicaragua, Brazil, Zambia, Hungary, Poland, Honduras, Bolivia, Serbia (since 2010), Benin, India, Mauritius. Please discuss your case with me beforehand.

4) Four 2-3 page reaction papers/presentation

Over the course of the semester, you will write four brief reaction papers on a reading (or readings) of your choice from a class session.

These papers should have three components:

1) The paper should briefly (one paragraph) sum up the main argument made by the author and the evidence provided.

2) It should contain an evaluation and critique of the author's argument and evidence. Does the author's argument make sense? Why or why not? Does the evidence (if any) comport with his/her argument? Why or why not? Do you know of other evidence that undermines (or supports) the author's argument? Does one of the other readings for that day offer a perspective that is discordant with the perspective offered by the author? This section should constitute the lion's share of the paper.

3) The paper should conclude with some questions for the class that flow from your evaluation/critique.

You will give a short 5-minute presentation on your paper to kick off our discussion of that reading. Your questions should help us in our discussion.

Each week we will determine who will write reaction papers for the following week. I will ask for volunteers.

All papers are due on the day that we cover the reading in class.

Note: Graduate students are responsible for five reaction papers over the course of the semester. Graduate students should write five of their six papers on the supplemental graduate readings marked[G] on the syllabus. For their presentations on these articles, graduate students will be asked to tell the class how the given reading related to the other articles read that day. Did it resolve any debates in those readings? Did it use an innovative methodology to answer a question posed in those readings? Did it offer a new theory to explain empirical phenomena in the main readings? These are the types of questions that should be addressed in these presentations.

4) Two 4-5 page integrative essays

There are no exams in this class. In lieu of this, you will be asked to write two take-home essays that integrate the themes, arguments and topics that we have covered in the class. These essays will be composed in response to prompts that I will distribute on March 17 and May 10.

5) One 10-page analytic report

Your capstone assignment in this class will be a 10 page analytic report. In this paper, you will analyze a case of democratic erosion over the past 20 years. The report will go beyond describing the case to achieve two goals 1) analyze the key reasons for democratic backsliding in that country and 2) propose how these trends could be arrested. More information on structure will be provided later in the semester. A complete draft of the paper is due on April 26. At that point you will receive feedback from me and one other student. You will then integrate that feedback and turn in the final version by email on May 18.

6) Critique and evaluation of a peer analytic report.

You will write one critique and evaluation (~2 pages) of one of your classmates' analytic reports. This will be due on May 3.

7) Presentation of final analytic report.

You will present your analytic report in class on May 12

Evaluation Scheme for Undergraduate Students:

Case Description: 10%
Class Participation: 25%
Reflection Papers: 20%
Integrative Essay #1: 10%
Integrative Essay #2: 10%
Analytic Report: 15%
Peer Critique of Analytic Report: 5%
Presentation on Analytic Report: 5%

Late Assignment Policy

All assignments are due on the assigned date. Response papers are due on the day that a reading is covered in class. I do not accept late assignments. Exceptions are made only in extraordinary circumstances.

Readings:

Required readings can be accessed either through our CANVAS site (except for the graduate article readings which can be accessed through UWM libraries). See the exception for graduate students.

Expected Time Commitment:

This is a three-credit course, so the expected time commitment from students is approximately 144 hours. Students will spend 36 hours in class over the course of the semester. Approximately 60% of the remaining time will be spent preparing for class by doing assigned readings and reviewing previous lecture notes. Students should expect to allocate the remaining 40% to completing written assignments.

Academic Honesty:

All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's academic misconduct policy. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course and any plagiarism on any assignment will result in a failing grade for the course.

When in doubt, cite. If you have questions about attribution, please see me. I am here to help! More information is available at http://www.uwm.edu/acad_aff/policy/academicmisconduct.cfm

January 25—Introduction and Overview

January 27—What is democracy?

Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl. 1991. "What Democracy Is...and Is Not," *Journal of Democracy*. 2(3): 75-88

Zakaria, Fareed. 1997. "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy." *Foreign Affairs* 76(6): 22-43.

February 1—What is democratic erosion?

Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. Chapter 4.

Luhrmann, Anna and Staffan Lindberg. 2019. "A Third Wave of Autocratization is Here: What is New about It?" *Democratization*

February 3—What is populism?

Muller, Jan-Werner. *What is Populism?* pp 1-74

February 8—Case Examples

Esen, Berk and Sebnem Gumuscu. 2016. "Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey" *Third World Quarterly*

February 10: Student Case Presentations

February 15—Formal Institutions

Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. Chapter 5.

Gibler, Douglas and Kirk Randazzo. 2011. "Testing the Effect of Independent Judiciaries on the Likelihood of Democratic Backsliding" *American Journal of Political Science*.

[G] Graham, Benjamin, Michael Miller, and Kaare Strøm. 2017. "Safeguarding Democracy: Powersharing and Democratic Survival," *American Political Science Review* 111(4).

February 17—Presidentialism

Stepan, Alfred and Cindy Skach. 1993. "Constitutional Frameworks and Democratic Consolidation: Parliamentarism versus Presidentialism." *World Politics*

Perez-Linan, Anibal. 2019. "Presidential Hegemony and Democratic Backsliding in Latin America, 1925-2016." *Democratization*.

February 22—Norms

Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. Chapters 6 and 7. (Also skim Chapter 8 if you don't recall some details of the Trump era)

February 24—Mass Support for Democracy

Voeten, Erik. 2017. "Are People Really Turning Away from Democracy?" *Journal of Democracy* Web Exchange.

Claassen, Christopher. 2019. "Does Public Support Help Democracy Survive?" *American Journal of Political Science*

[G] Claassen, Christopher. 2020. "In the Mood for Democracy? Democratic Support as Thermostatic Opinion" *American Political Science Review*.

March 1—Polarization: Effects on Democracy

Svolik, Milan. 2020. "Polarization versus Democracy." *Journal of Democracy*.

Sasmaz, Aytug, Alper Yagci, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2022. "How Voters Respond to Presidential Assaults on Checks and Balances: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Turkey" *Comparative Political Studies*

[G] Graham, Matthew and Milan Svolik. 2020. "Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States" *American Political Science Review*

March 3—Polarization: Origins

Klein, Ezra. 2020. *Why We're Polarized*. Chapters 1 and 2

March 8—Polarization as Identity Sorting

Mason, Liliana. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* Selections

[G] Mason, Liliana. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* Additional Selection

March 10: No Class

March 15—Polarization: Affective and Ideological

Klein, Ezra. 2020. *Why We're Polarized*. Chapter 3.

Whitt, Sam, Alixandra Yanus, Brian McDonald, John Graeber, Mark Setzler, Gordon Ballingrud, and Martin Kifer. 2021. "Tribalism in America: Behavioral Experiments on Affective Polarization in the Trump Era" *Journal of Experimental Political Science*.

[G]Abramowitz, Alan and Steven Webster. 2018. "Negative Partisanship: Why Americans Dislike Parties But Behave Like Rabid Partisans" *Advances in Political Psychology*.

March 17—Polarization: Alternative Views

Lebas, Adrienne. 2018. "Can Polarization Be Positive?" Conflict and Institutional Development in Africa" *American Behavioral Scientist*.

Reuter, Ora John and David Szakonyi. 2021. "Electoral Manipulation and Regime Support: Survey Evidence from Russia." *World Politics*.

March 29—Ethnopolulist Appeals

Vachudova, Milada. 2020. "Ethnopolulism and Democratic Backsliding in Central Europe" *East European Politics*.

Dinas, Elias, Konstantinos Matakos, Dimitrios Xeftaris and Dominik Hangartner. 2019. "Waking up the Golden Dawn: Does Exposure to the Refugee Crisis Increase Support for Extreme-Right Parties?" *Political Analysis*

March 31—Culture and Anxiety

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2015. *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. Chapters 1, 9, and 15.

[G]Cramer, Katherine. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. Selections.

April 5---The Limits of Social Explanations

Bermeo, Nancy. 2003. *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*. Chapter 2.

Moller, Jorgen, Svend-Erik Skaaning, and Agness Cornell. 2017. "The Real Lessons of the Interwar Years" *Journal of Democracy*

April 7— Parties and Elites: Gatekeeping and Alliances

Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. Chapters 2 and 3.

[G] Ziblatt, Daniel. 2017. *Conservative Parties and the Birth of Democracy*. Selections.

April 12—Parties and Elites: Elite-led Polarization

Haggard, Stephan and Robert Kaufman. 2021. “The Anatomy of Democratic Backsliding” *Journal of Democracy*.

McCoy, Jennifer and Murat Somer. 2018. “Toward a Theory of Pernicious Polarization and How it Harms Democracies: Comparative Evidence and Possible Remedies” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*.

April 14—The Media and Information

Klein, Ezra. 2020. *Why We’re Polarized*. Chapters 4 and 6.

[G] Bail et al. 2018. “Exposure to Opposing Views On Social Media Can Increase Political Polarization” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

April 19—Social Capital and Civil Society: Theories

Robert Putnam reading TBD

April 21 — Social Capital and Civil Society: Evidence

Sumaktoyo, Nathanael. 2019. “Friends from Across the Aisle: The Effects of Partisan Bonding, Partisan Bridging, and Network Disagreement on Outparty Attitudes and Political Engagement.” *Political Behavior*.

Santoro, Erik and David Broockman. 2022. “The Short-Term, Circumscribed, and Conditional Effects of Cross-Partisan Conversation” Working Paper.

April 26—The Promise and Peril of Civil Society

Gamboa, Laura. 2017. “Opposition at the Margins: Strategies Against the Erosion of Democracy in Colombia and Venezuela.” *Comparative Politics*

Berman, Sheri. 1997. “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic.” *World Politics*

April 28—Inequality

Bartels, Larry. 2018. *Unequal Democracy*. Selections.

[G] Bonica, Adam, Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. 2013. “Why Hasn’t Democracy Slowed Rising Inequality?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*.*

May 3—Inequality, Part 2

Gilens, Martin and Benjamin Page. 2014. “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens” *Perspectives on Politics*.

Page, Benjamin, Larry Bartels, and Jason Seawright. 2013. “Democracy and the Policy Preferences of Wealthy Americans” *Perspectives on Politics*.

[G] Gimpelson, Vladimir and Daniel Treisman. 2018. “Misperceiving Inequality” *Economics and Politics**

May 5---Special Topics: Climate Change and the Future of Democracy

Mittiga, Ross. 2021. “Political Legitimacy, Authoritarianism and Climate Change” *American Political Science Review*.

Berman, Sheri. 2017. “The Pipe Dream of Undemocratic Liberalism” *Journal of Democracy*.

May 10---Special Topics: COVID and the Future of Democracy

Edgell, Amanda, Jean Lachapelle, Anna Luhrmann, and Seraphine Maerz. 2021. “Pandemic Backsliding: Violations of Democratic Standards During COVID-19” *Social Science and Medicine*

TBD