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GOVT/LAST 382
Wesleyan University
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Office Hours:
Tuesday, 2:00 - 4:00 PM
By appointment

Class Meetings:
Weds. 1:20-4:10 PM
PAC 104

Erosion of Democracy

In the late 1990s even newly established democracies looked secure, or at least headed toward consolidation. Since that time, democracy (or proto-democracy) had eroded in a wide range of countries, perhaps most conspicuously in Venezuela (1998-; Chávez, Maduro), Russia (1999-; Putin), Bolivia (2005-2019; Morales), Turkey (2006-; Erdogan), Ecuador (2006-2017; Correa), Nicaragua, (2006-; Ortega), Hungary (2009-; Orbán), USA (2012-; Obama, Trump), Czech Republic (2013-; Zeman), Brazil (2014-; Rousseff, Temer, Bolsonaro), India 2014-; Modi), Poland (2015-; Duda), Philippines (2015-; Duterte), and Tanzania (2015-; Magufuli).

Democratic erosion occurs whenever a political regime becomes less democratic, not suddenly and dramatically, but incrementally and stealthily. In qualitative terms, democratic erosion can transform a deep democracy into a (shallow) liberal democracy, a liberal democracy into an electoral democracy, an electoral democracy into a competitive authoritarian regime, or a competitive authoritarian regime into a fully authoritarian regime. It can also reduce the democratic qualities of any regime without replacing that regime with one of a different type. This seminar will explore the characteristics, causes, and consequences of democratic erosion in the countries identified above, as well as some other places, over the past two decades.

As Kaufman and Haggard (2019) have noted, democratic erosion often involves a three-stage process. In a first stage, *polarization*, political entrepreneurs exploit class or identity cleavages to create an "us vs. them" situation. This polarization weakens elite norms of tolerance and self-restraint, undermines support for centrist political forces, and raises the attractiveness of illiberal or autocratic electoral appeals. In a second stage, *executive encroachment*, a politician with autocratic tendencies wins a presidential or (more rarely) parliamentary election, claims a "mandate," and uses the statutory powers of the office to manipulate the legislature into agreeing to constitutional changes that permit the executive branch to dominate the legislature. In a third stage, *democratic dismantling*, the newly-empowered executives attack constraints on their authority by incrementally undermining checks and balances, subordinating the judiciary and police, stifling opposition parties and groups, and cutting back on civil and political liberties.

Scholars debate what has caused the recent proliferation of instances of democratic erosion. Clearly, a distinction needs to be made between a regime's underlying vulnerability to erosion and triggers or precipitants of specific instances (Waldner and Lust 2019). Candidate factors to explain a regime's underlying vulnerability to democratic erosion include a low level of affluence, economic inequality, dependency on natural resources, lack of previous experience with (or low initial quality of) democracy, cultural values with authoritarian elements, social heterogeneity (racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, regional, etc.), institutional design (e.g., presidential vs. parliamentary executive-legislative relations, first-past-the-post vs. proportional

electoral systems), and unfavorable or tenuous linkages to established Western democracies. Candidate factors to explain triggers or precipitants of specific instances of democratic backsliding include the authoritarian proclivities of particular leaders, economic crises, new technologies (like social media), societal stressors (like sudden refugee inflows), meddling by foreign powers, weak sanctions from established democracies when backsliding is initially detected, and democratic backsliding in the advanced industrial societies themselves.

Each student in the seminar will be asked to choose one of the fourteen countries listed above and to study democratic erosion in that country over the indicated span of years. Seminar participants will cover together weekly topics, listed below, related to democratic erosion. Individually, each student will be asked each week to identify one or more (previously unconsulted) country-specific books or articles relating to democratic erosion in the student's chosen country. In many of these weeks, students will write a brief (2-3 page) essay connecting the new country-specific book(s) or article(s) identified to the weekly readings assigned for the seminar as a whole. These short written (or, sometimes, graphical or bibliographical) assignments should be uploaded to the course Moodle by 5 PM the Monday before class. The last seminar session will give each student an opportunity to share with the class their final takes on democratic erosion in the countries being studied, and to get feedback from seminar participants in preparation for writing a final paper on their country (~15 pp.) due a week later.

No books are required for this course. All readings are on the course Moodle. Course grades will be based on the weekly assignments (10 assignments, 5% each), the research presentation (10%), and a paper about 15 pages in length on democratic erosion in a particular country (40%).

Summary of Course Schedule

Wed Jan 29	Introduction to the Seminar
Wed Feb 5	Democracy and Democratic Consolidation
Wed Feb 12	Measuring Democracy
Wed Feb 19	[work on assignment - instructor away at a conference]
Wed Feb 26	Competitive Authoritarian Regimes
Wed Mar 4	Dismantling Democracy: Sequences and Turning Points
Wed Mar 25	Democracy and the Rule of Law
Wed Apr 1	Democratic Erosion: Causes
Wed Apr 8	Democracy and Populism
Wed Apr 15	Democratic Erosion in the United States
Wed Apr 22	The Electorate in the United States
Wed Apr 29	Electoral Integrity in the United States
Wed May 6	Student presentations
Wed May 13	Term paper due

Accessibility Services

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodation, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and must provide documentation of the disability.

Accommodation may require early planning, and retroactive requests for accommodation are not usually granted. Accordingly, if you believe that you need accommodation for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Accessibility Services (accessibility@wesleyan.edu), located in North College, Room 021, or call 860/685-5581 for an appointment to discuss your needs and to review the process for requesting accommodation.

Wed Jan 29

Introduction to the Seminar

Diamond, Larry (2020). "Breaking Out of the Democratic Slump." *Journal of Democracy* 31 No. 1, 36-50.

Wed Feb 5

Democracy and Democratic Consolidation

Dahl, Robert (1998). *On Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 35-43, 83-99.

Schedler, Andreas (1998). "What is Democratic Consolidation?" *Journal of Democracy* 9 No. 2, 91-107.

O'Donnell, Guillermo (1998). "Horizontal Accountability in New Democracies." *Journal of Democracy* 9 No. 3, 112-126.

Wed Feb 12

Measuring Democracy

Doorenspleet, Renske (2018). "The Numerical Value of Democracy: League Tables, Scores and Trends." Chapter 2 (29-68) in Renske Doorenspleet, *Rethinking the Value of Democracy: A Comparative Perspective*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan.

Lührmann, Anna, Marcus Tannenberg, and Staffan I. Lindberg (2018). "Regimes of the World (RoW): Opening New Avenues for the Comparative Study of Political Regimes." *Politics & Governance* 6 No. 1, 1-18.

Wed Feb 19

[work on assignment - instructor away at a conference]

Wed Feb 26

Competitive Authoritarian Regimes

Schedler, Andreas (2002). "Elections without Democracy: The Menu of Manipulation." *Journal of Democracy* 13 No. 2, 36-50.

Wigell, Mikael (2008). "Mapping 'Hybrid Regimes': Regime Types and Concepts in Comparative Politics." *Democratisation* 15 No. 2, 230-250.

Wed Mar 4

Dismantling Democracy: Sequences and Turning Points

Bermeo, Nancy (2016). "On Democratic Backsliding." *Journal of Democracy* 27 No. 1, 5-19.

Kaufman, Robert R., and Stephan Haggard (2019). "Democratic Decline in the United States: What Can We Learn From Middle-Income Backsliding?" *Perspectives on Politics* 17 No. 2, 417-432.

Wed Mar 25 Democracy and the Rule of Law

Huq, Aziz, and Tom Ginsburg (2018). "How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy." *UCLA Law Review* 65, 78-169.

Wed Apr 1 Democratic Erosion: Causes

Svolik, Milan W. (2019). "Polarization versus Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 30 No. 3, 20-32.

Waldner, David, and Ellen Lust (2018). "Unwelcome Change: Coming to Terms with Democratic Backsliding." *Annual Review of Political Science* 21, 93-113.

Wed Apr 8 Democracy and Populism

de la Torre, Carlos (2019). "Global Populism: Histories, Trajectories, Problems, and Challenges." In Carlos de la Torre, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Global Populism*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge. Chapter 1, 1-27.

Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017). *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 5, "Populism and Democracy," 79-96.

Pappas, Takis S. (2019). "Populists in Power." *Journal of Democracy* 30 No. 2, 70-84.

Wed Apr 15 Democratic Erosion in the United States

Roberts, Kenneth M. (2019). "Parties, Populism, and Democratic Decay: A Comparative Perspective on Political Polarization in the United States." In Kurt Weyland and Raúl L. Madrid, eds., *When Democracy Trumps Populism: European and Latin American Lessons for the United States*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 5, 132-153.

Madrid, Raúl L., and Kurt Weyland (2019). "Conclusion: Why US Democracy Will Survive Trump." Chapter 6 (154-186) in Kurt Weyland and Raúl L. Madrid, eds., *When Democracy Trumps Populism: European and Latin American Lessons for the United States*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Schedler, Andreas (2019). "The Beaching Experiment. Donald Trump and the Normative Foundations of Democracy." *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* 13 No. 4, 433-460.

Wed Apr 22 The Electorate in the United States

Massicote, Louis, André Blais, and Antoine Yoshinaka (2004). "Who Has the Right to Vote?" In Massicote, Blais, and Yoshinaka, *Establishing the Rules of the Game*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Chapter 2 (15-39).

Manza, Jeff, and Christopher Uggen (2004). "Punishment and Democracy: Disenfranchisement of Nonincarcerated Felons in the United States." *Perspectives on Politics* 2 No. 3, 491-505.

Wed Apr 29 Electoral Integrity in the United States

Vickery, Chad, and Heather Szilagyi (2019). "America in Comparative Perspective." Chapter 10 (175-195) in Pippa Norris, Sarah Cameron, and Thomas Wynter, eds., *Electoral Integrity in America: Securing Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Norris, Pippa, Thomas Wynter, and Sarah Cameron (2019). "Lessons for the Reform Agenda." Chapter 11 (196-217) in Pippa Norris, Sarah Cameron, and Thomas Wynter, eds., *Electoral Integrity in America: Securing Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wed May 6 Student Presentations

No readings in common. Please prepare a 15-minute presentation on democratic erosion in your country during the time period you've identified.

Wed May 13 Term Paper Due

Please upload your research paper, in .doc or .docx format, to Moodle by 5 PM.