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GOVT/LAST 382
Wesleyan University
Spring 2021

Office Hours:
By appointment
Online (send an email)

Class Meetings:
Weds. 1:00-3:50 PM
Online

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 (2016-2020; Trump), Czech Republic (2013-; Zeman), Brazil (2014-; Rousseff, Temer, Bolsonaro), India 2014-; Modi), Poland (2015-; Kaczynski), 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 (2021) 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 proclivities 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 legal and/or constitutional changes that allow 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). To explain a regime's underlying vulnerability to democratic erosion, some scholars have pointed to deep social cleavages (class, race, religion, ethnicity, region, language) that lead to societal polarization, which leads in turn to voters placing "partisan" interests (ideology, fealty to a particular leader) above democratic principles. Others have singled out poorly designed institutions, such as presidential regimes susceptible to personalism and legislative gridlock, or constitutions that are

too easy to amend. 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.

Assignments: Weekly Moodle Posts and Term Paper

Each student in the seminar will be asked to choose a country that has experienced recent democratic erosion and to write a paper describing the characteristics, causes, and consequences of the erosion, including for pandemic response. Seminar participants will cover together weekly topics, listed below, related to democratic erosion. Individually, each student will be asked each week to identify and read carefully one or more (previously unconsulted) country-specific books or articles relating to democratic erosion in the student's chosen country. Try to find country-specific books or articles that are particularly relevant to the week's topic. In each week, students will write an (approximately) 500-word Moodle post connecting the weekly readings assigned for the seminar as a whole to the new country-specific book(s) or article(s) identified. These posts should be uploaded to the course Moodle by 5 PM Tuesday, the day before the seminar meets over Zoom. A week after the last meeting of the seminar, students should submit a final paper on democratic erosion in their country (~15 pp.), incorporating the information from their weekly Moodle posts but revising it, adding to it, and polishing the structure and the writing. A suggested outline for the final paper will be distributed in the first few weeks of the semester.

No books are required for this course. All readings are on the course Moodle. Course grades will be based on the weekly Moodle posts (12 assignments, 4% each), a term paper (30%), and class participation (22%). Your class participation grade will be based on (1) your participation in class sessions, (2) your timeliness in completing Moodle posts, (3) the evidence you provide in your class participation and in your Moodle posts of having completed and thought carefully about the assigned reading, and (4) the quality of the country-specific sources you find yourself and the extent to which you draw on them in your Moodle posts and contributions to class discussion.

Class Sessions

The class sessions will be live over Zoom. We'll take a couple of breaks to fight Zoom fatigue, so we'll most likely have three consecutive 50 minute sessions (for example, 1:00 to 1:50, 2:00 to 2:50, 3:00 to 3:50). In many weeks, one session will involve class discussion of the assigned readings, one will involve student elaboration of their Moodle posts, and one will involve a lecture on the next week's topic, with a powerpoint presentation that I'll post after the class session on the course Moodle. If there's a consensus that it might be useful, I can record the class session and post a link to the recording on the week's Moodle segment. In the first class session we'll establish a norm about whether students will be expected to participate in the seminar with their video cameras on.

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.

Summary of Course Schedule

Wed Feb 10	Introduction to the Seminar
Wed Feb 17	Democracy: Conceptualization and Justification
Wed Feb 24	Democracy: Measurement
Wed Mar 3	The Right to Vote
Wed Mar 10	Electoral Integrity
Wed Mar 17	Liberalism and Individual Rights
Wed Mar 31	The Rule of Law and Constraints on Arbitrary Authority
Wed Apr 7	Processes and Sequences of Democratic Erosion
Wed Apr 14	Causes of Democratic Erosion
Wed Apr 21	Populism and Democracy
Wed Apr 28	Democracy: Effects on Pandemic Response
Wed May 5	Pandemic: Effects on Democracy
Wed May 12	Resisting Democratic Erosion
<hr/> Wed May 19	Term paper due

- Wed Feb 10 **Introduction to the Seminar**
- No assigned readings
- Wed Feb 17 **Democracy: Conceptualization and Justification**
- Dahl, Robert (1998). *On Democracy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 35-43, 83-99.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo (1998). "Horizontal Accountability in New Democracies." *Journal of Democracy* 9 No. 3, 112-126.
- Sen, Amartya (1999). "Democracy as a Universal Value." *Journal of Democracy* 10 No. 3 (July), 3-17.
- Wed Feb 24 **Democracy: Measurement**
- Clark, William Roberts, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder (2018). "Democracy and Dictatorship: Conceptualization and Measurement." Chapter 5 in Clark, Golder, and Golder, *Principles of Comparative Politics*. 3rd ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 145-174.
- Lührmann, Anna et al. (2020). *Autocratization Surges – Resistance Grows: Democracy Report 2020*. Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy Institute.
- Wed Mar 3 **The Right to Vote**
- 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).
- Koenig-Archibugi, Mathias (2020). "Who are the People? Defining the *Demos* in the Measurement of Democracy." *Political Studies* online before print (19 November). <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0032321720966481>
- Wed Mar 10 **Electoral Integrity**
- Norris, Pippa, Richard W. Frank, and Ferran Martínez i Coma (2014). "Measuring Electoral Integrity Around the World: A New Dataset." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 47 No. 4, 789-798.
- Norris, Pippa (2020). "Electoral Integrity in the 2020 U.S. Elections." Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School, Electoral Integrity Project. Accessed December 20, 2020, at <https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/peius2020>

Wed Mar 17 Liberalism and Individual Rights

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

Scheppele, Kim Lane (2018). "Autocratic Legalism." *The University of Chicago Law Review* 85 No. 2 (March), 545-584.

Wed Mar 31 The Rule of Law and Constraints on Arbitrary Authority

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

Wed Apr 7 Processes and Sequences of Democratic Erosion

Haggard, Stephan, and Robert R. Kaufman (2021). *Backsliding: Democratic Regress in the Contemporary World*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Online Appendix with country narratives at https://www.cambridge.org/download_file/1022289

Wed Apr 14 Causes of Democratic Erosion

Plattner, Marc F. (2016). "Is Democracy in Decline?" *Democracy & Society* 1 No. 4, 1-7.

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

Mettler, Suzanne, and Robert Lieberman (2020). "The Fragile Republic." *Foreign Affairs*, September/October, 182-195.

Wed Apr 21 Populism and Democracy

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.

Kyle, Jordan, and Yascha Mounk (2018). "The Populist Harm to Democracy: An Empirical Assessment." Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. December 26. Accessed December 20, 2020, at <https://institute.global/policy/populist-harm-democracy-empirical-assessment>

Wed Apr 28 Democracy: Effects on Pandemic Response

Bosancianu, Constantin M., et al. (2020). "Political and Social Correlates of Covid-19 Mortality." Accessed December 19, 2020, at SocArXiv. June 16. <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/ub3zd/>

Stasavage, David (2020). "Democracy, Autocracy, and Emergency Threats: Lessons for COVID-19 from the Last Thousand Years." *International Organization*, 19 August, E1-E17.

Wed May 5 Pandemic: Effects on Democracy

Maerz, Seraphine F., et al. (2020). "Worth the Sacrifice? Illiberal and Authoritarian Practices During Covid-19." V-Dem Working Paper 110 (September). Gothenburg: The Varieties of Democracy Institute. Accessed December 20, 2020, at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3701720

Scheppele, Kim Lane, and David Pozen (2020). "Executive Overreach and Underreach in the Pandemic." Chapter 2 in Miguel Poiars Maduro and Paul W. Kahn, eds., *Democracy in Times of Pandemic: Different Futures Imagined*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 38-53.

Wed May 12 Resisting Democratic Erosion

Huq, Aziz Z., and Tom Ginsburg (2020). "Democracy without Democrats." *Constitutional Studies* 6 (2020), 165-188.

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

Wed May 19 Term Paper Due

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