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GOVT/LAST 382  
Wesleyan University  
Spring 2022

Office Hours:  
Tuesday, 2:00 - 3:30 PM  
or by appointment

Class Meetings:  
Weds. 1:20-4:10 PM  
116 Mt Vernon Rm 102

### **Erosion of Democracy**

In the late 1990s even newly established democracies looked secure, or at least headed toward consolidation. Since that time, democracy or near-democracy has eroded in a wide range of countries, including Venezuela (1998-; Chávez, Maduro), Russia (2000-; Putin), Bolivia (2005-2019; Morales), Turkey (2006-; Erdogan), Ecuador (2006-2017; Correa), Nicaragua (2006-; Ortega), Hungary (2009-; Orbán), the Czech Republic (2013-; Babiš, Zeman), Brazil (2014-; Rousseff, Temer, Bolsonaro), India (2014-; Modi), Poland (2015-; Kaczynski), the USA (2016-2020; Trump), the Philippines (2016-; Duterte), and Tanzania (2015-2021; Magufuli).

Democratic erosion occurs whenever a democratic country becomes less democratic, not suddenly and dramatically, but incrementally and stealthily. In qualitative terms, democratic erosion can diminish the quality of a liberal democracy, possibly transforming it into a lower-quality "electoral" democracy. Democratic breakdown occurs when a democracy (liberal or electoral) becomes an autocracy (competitive or full). Autocratization involves the reduction of the democratic qualities of any type of regime. This seminar will explore the characteristics, causes, and consequences of democratic erosion, democratic breakdown, and autocratization in the countries identified above, as well as some other places, over the past quarter-century.

Democratic erosion often involves a five-stage process. In a first stage, *societal polarization*, class or identity cleavages contribute to an "us vs. them" situation that weakens elite norms of tolerance and self-restraint, discredits democracy, and raises the attractiveness of illiberal or autocratic electoral appeals. In a second stage, *political polarization*, illiberal populists take advantage of societal polarization to inflame the "people" vs. the elite and extremist parties gain vote share. In a third stage, the *election of an autocrat*, an illiberal populist is elected to head the executive branch, and members of an extremist party, or of a formerly moderate party that has become extremist, are elected to the legislature. In a fourth stage, *legislative capture*, the autocrat uses mostly legal techniques to manipulate the legislature into authorizing legal or constitutional changes that subordinate it to the executive branch. In a fifth stage, *democratic dismantling*, powerful executives go beyond legislative capture to attack other constraints on their range of action by incrementally dismantling checks and balances, subordinating the judiciary and police, stifling opposition parties and groups, and cutting back on political rights and civil liberties.

What has caused the recent proliferation of democratic erosion in so many countries? Here it is important to distinguish (1) a democracy's underlying vulnerability to erosion, (2) catalysts of instances of erosion, and (3) the capacity of an eroding democracy to avoid breakdown (Waldner and Lust 2019; Boese et al. 2021). Candidate factors to explain a democracy's *underlying vulnerability* to erosion include its regional "neighborhood" (democratic or autocratic), its institutional setup (presidentialism has come in for criticism), its constitution (especially the ease

of amending or replacing it), and its degree of polarization (when a democracy is highly polarized, citizens must decide between their partisan loyalties and any democratic principles they may have). Candidate factors to explain the catalysts of *specific instances* of democratic erosion include financial meltdowns, refugee surges, infectious disease pandemics, and contested close elections. "Shocks" of this type exacerbate polarization and provide would-be autocrats an opportunity to win support, often by fulminating against the incompetence of traditional politicians and by promising to resolve the crisis by any means necessary. Candidate factors to explain whether democratic erosion will culminate in democratic breakdown include how long the erosion has persisted, how long the country has been democratic, and whether domestic and foreign actors intervene to encourage or discourage autocratization.

### Assignments: Weekly Moodle Posts and Term Paper

Each student in the seminar will be asked to choose a country that has experienced recent autocratization. Each week, each student is asked to post on the Moodle a roughly 500-word essay, accessible to all seminar participants, connecting the readings assigned for the week's session to at least one previously unconsulted academic book or article on their chosen country. These posts should be uploaded to the course Moodle by 5 PM Tuesday, the day before the seminar meets. At the end of the semester each student is asked to submit a paper (length guideline: 15 pages) that ties together and expands upon the analyses in the weekly Moodle posts, assessing the causes, characteristics, and consequences (for pandemic response) of the autocratization process in their chosen country. 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%). The class participation grade will be based on (1) your participation in class sessions, (2) your completion of the Moodle posts by the due date, (3) the evidence you provide in your class participation and in your Moodle posts of having completed and thought through the assigned reading, and (4) the quality of the country-specific sources you find yourself, and the extent to which you draw on these sources in your Moodle posts and in your seminar contributions.

### Class Sessions

The class sessions will be in the Writing Center, 116 Mt Vernon, Seminar Room, Wednesdays from 1:20 to 4:10, starting February 2 and ending on May 4, except March 16 during spring break.

## 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 accommodations, a student must have a disability as defined by the ADA. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

If you have a disability, or think that you might have a disability, please contact [Accessibility Services](#) in order to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. Accessibility Services is located in North College, rooms 021 or can be reached by email ([accessibility@wesleyan.edu](mailto:accessibility@wesleyan.edu)) or phone (860-685-2332).

## Religious/Spiritual Observance Resources:

If you anticipate that your religious/spiritual observance may conflict with academic obligations such as attending class, taking examinations, or submitting assignments, you can work directly with your professor to make reasonable arrangements. Should you require additional support or guidance, please feel free to reach out to Rabbi David Teva, Director of the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at [dleipziger@wesleyan.edu](mailto:dleipziger@wesleyan.edu) or any of the chaplains in the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at <https://www.wesleyan.edu/orsl/index.html>.

For a list of a religious holidays celebrated by members of the Wesleyan community, go to Wesleyan's Multifaith calendar which can be found at: <https://www.wesleyan.edu/orsl/multifaith-calendar.html>.

## Title IX Resources

If trauma inhibits your ability to fully participate in class, please contact Debbie Colucci, Title IX Coordinator, at [dcolucci@wesleyan.edu](mailto:dcolucci@wesleyan.edu), or your class dean. Additionally, and if you are comfortable, you can work directly with your professor to make reasonable arrangements.

## Summary of Seminar Schedule

Wed Feb 2	Introduction
Wed Feb 9	Conceptualizing Democracy
Wed Feb 16	Measuring Democracy
Wed Feb 23	The Right to Vote
Wed Mar 2	Electoral Integrity
Wed Mar 9	Liberalism and Individual Rights
Wed Mar 23	Rule of Law and Constraints on the Executive
Wed Mar 30	Processes and Sequences of Democratic Erosion
Wed Apr 6	Causes of Democratic Erosion
Wed Apr 13	Populism and Democracy
Wed Apr 20	Democracy: Effects on Pandemic Response
Wed Apr 27	Pandemic: Effects on Democracy
Wed May 4	Resisting Democratic Erosion
<hr/> Wed May 11	Term paper due

Wed Feb 2

## **Introduction**

No assigned readings

Wed Feb 9

## **Conceptualizing Democracy**

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.

Skaaning, Svend-Erik (2021). "Democracy: Contested Concept with a Common Core." Chapter 1 in Gordon Crawford and Abdul-Gafaru Abdulai, eds., *Research Handbook on Democracy and Development*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 27-43.

Wed Feb 16

## **Measuring Democracy**

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.

V-Dem (2021). *Autocratization Turns Viral: Democracy Report 2021*. Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy Institute.

Wed Feb 23

## **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 2

### **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.

Hasen, Richard L. (2021). "Identifying and Minimizing the Risk of Election Subversion and Stolen Elections in the Contemporary United States." University of California, Irvine School of Law Legal Studies Research Paper Series No. 2021-50. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3926381>

(Recommended). Third Way (2022), "The Plot to Steal the Presidency" (.pptx) <https://www.thirdway.org/presentation/the-plot-to-steal-the-presidency>

Wed Mar 9

### **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 23

### **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 Mar 30

### **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.

Read the short book and consult the online appendix with country narratives at [https://www.cambridge.org/download\\_file/1022289](https://www.cambridge.org/download_file/1022289) There are 17 country narratives. If you are working on one of the 17 countries, you may count the narrative as this week's required country-specific article.

Wed Apr 6

### **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.

Boese, Vanessa, et al. (2021). "How Democracies Prevail: Democratic Resilience as a Two-stage Process." *Democratization* online before print, 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1891413>

Wed Apr 13

### **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.

Weyland, Kurt (2020). "Populism's Threat to Democracy: Comparative Lessons for the United States." *Perspectives on Politics* 18 (2), 389-406.

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 20

### **Democracy: Effects on Pandemic Response**

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

Allen, Danielle (2021). *Democracy in the Time of Coronavirus*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 1, 1-31.

Wed Apr 27

### **Pandemic: Effects on Democracy**

Edgell, Amanda B., et al. (2021). "Pandemic Backsliding: Violations of Democratic Standards During Covid-19." *Social Science & Medicine* 285, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114244>

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

Wed May 4

### **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 11

### **Term Paper Due**

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