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GOVT/LAST 382
Wesleyan University
Spring 2024

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

Class Meetings:
Weds. 1:20-4:10 PM
PAC 116

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 (2013-2022; Babiš), Brazil (2014-2022; Rousseff, Temer, Bolsonaro), India (2014-; Modi), Poland (2015-2023; Kaczynski), the USA (2016-2020; Trump), the Philippines (2016-2022; 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.

Autocratization often involves four stages. In a first, *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*, an illiberal populist takes advantage of societal polarization to inflame the "people" against the elite. If this appeal is successful, illiberal populist parties gain vote share. In a third stage, the *election of an autocrat*, an illiberal populist is elected to head the executive and allied personnel are elected to the legislature. In a fourth stage, *democratic dismantling*, the illiberal populist leader and his (always his) allies incrementally repress the mass media and civil society organizations, restrict political rights and civil liberties, capture the judiciary and legislature, and gain the support or quiescence of the security forces.

What has caused the recent proliferation of autocratization, including in many democratic regimes? Here it is important to distinguish (1) a regime's underlying vulnerability to autocratization, (2) catalysts of instances of autocratization, and (3) the capacity of an autocratizing 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 societal and political polarization. Candidate factors to explain the catalysts of *specific instances* of democratic erosion include financial meltdowns, refugee surges, the Covid-19

pandemic, and contested elections. Such "shocks" exacerbate polarization and give illiberal populists an opportunity to win support, often by fulminating against the incompetence of traditional politicians and proclaiming that they alone can resolve the crisis. 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 make a presentation and then to submit a term paper that ties together and expands upon the analyses in the weekly Moodle posts. The paper should assess the characteristics, causes, and reasons or prospects for reversal of an autocratization process in their country of choice. In the last class meeting of the semester each student will make a short (~10 minute) in-class presentation of their findings. The [Presentation Studio](#) at the Wesleyan Center for Pedagogical Innovation "offers free, one-on-one consultations for students and faculty in support of any presentation project."

Course Requirements

No books are required for this course. All readings are on the course Moodle. The course requirements are 11 weekly Moodle posts, an in-class presentation on May 8, a term paper due May 15, and class participation. The class participation grade will be based on (1) attendance (+) and lateness (-), (2) completion of the Moodle posts by the due date, (3) evidence from class participation and Moodle posts of having completed and thought through the assigned reading, and (4) quality of the country-specific sources located and utilized and the extent to which those sources inform Moodle posts and seminar interventions.

Summary of Due Dates and Final Grade Weightings

11 Moodle posts	Each Tuesday (5% each)	55%
In-class presentation	May 8	5%
Research Paper	May 15 (Wed.)	25%
Class participation		15%

Honor Code

Any instance of cheating or plagiarism will suffice for a grade of "F" for the entire course.

Use of Artificial Intelligence for Moodle Posts and Term Paper

On the Moodle posts and term paper, you may use AI for insight (if you think it will help) but not in the writing. When you upload your 500-word weekly posts to the course Moodle, you will be able to see a "similarity report" (plagiarism detector). The upload process also provides me, but not you, a figure for the percentage of the post that appears to have been generated by AI. I have no idea how this works but if the software detects evidence that AI has done any of your writing, I will be in touch with you. All students must include a statement indicating whether AI was used at any point in all assignments. If you didn't use AI, just write "I didn't use AI at any point in this assignment." If you did use AI for insight, describe how. The first student to have read this far should send me an email for a free course pack (students who have taken a previous course with me are not eligible).

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 disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you have a disability, or think that you might have a disability, please contact [Accessibility Services](#) to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. Accessibility Services is in North College 021. You can also contact Accessibility Services by email (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, start by working 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 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, or your class dean. Additionally, and if you are comfortable, you may work directly with your professor to make reasonable arrangements.

Summary of Seminar Schedule

Wed Jan 31	Introduction
Wed Feb 7	Conceptualizing Democracy
Wed Feb 14	Measuring Democracy, Autocracy, Democratization, and Autocratization
Wed Feb 21	The Right to Vote
Wed Feb 28	Liberalism and Individual Rights
Wed Mar 6	Rule of Law and Constraints on the Executive
Wed Mar 27	Processes and Sequences of Autocratization
Wed Apr 3	Causes of Autocratization
Wed Apr 10	Polarization and Autocratization
Wed Apr 17	Misinformation, Disinformation, and Autocratization
Wed Apr 24	Populism and Autocratization
Wed May 1	Resisting Autocratization
Wed May 8	Student Presentations
<hr/> Wed May 15	Term paper should be uploaded to the course Moodle by 5 PM

Wed Jan 31 **Introduction**

No assigned readings

Wed Feb 7 **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 14 **Measuring Democracy, Autocracy, Democratization, and Autocratization**

Boese, Vanessa A. (2019) "How (not) to Measure Democracy." *International Area Studies Review* 22 No. 2, 95-127.

Wiebrecht, Felix, et al. (2023) "State of the World 2022: Defiance in the Face of Autocratization." *Democratization* 30 No. 5, 769-793.

Baron, Hannah, et al. (2024). "An Events-Based Approach to Understanding Democratic Erosion." *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 1-8.

Wed Feb 21 **The Right to Vote**

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

Koenig-Archibugi, Mathias (2022). "Who are the People? Defining the *Demos* in the Measurement of Democracy." *Political Studies* 70 No. 2, 402-424.

Wed Feb 28 **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 6 **The Rule of Law and Constraints on the Executive**
- Huq, Aziz, and Tom Ginsburg (2018). "How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy." *UCLA Law Review* 65, 78-169.
- Wed Mar 27 **Processes and Sequences of Autocratization**
- 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 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.
- Norris, Pippa (2021). "Voters Against Democracy: The Roots of Autocratic Resurgence." *Foreign Affairs* 100 No. 3 (May/June), 175-178. Short review of Haggard and Kaufman (2021), with a response by Haggard and Kaufman and a response to the response by Norris (recommended).
- Wed Apr 3 **Causes of Autocratization**
- Berman, Sheri (2021). "The Causes of Populism in the West." *Annual Review of Political Science* 24, 71-88.
- Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart (2019). *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 10, 331-367.
- Carothers, Thomas, and Benjamin Press (2022). "Understanding and Responding to Global Democratic Backsliding." Working Paper, October. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1-18.
- Wed Apr 10 **Polarization and Autocratization**
- Iyengar, Shanto, et al (2019). "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22, 129-146.
- Svolik, Milan W. (2019). "Polarization versus Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 30 No. 3, 20-32.
- McCoy, Jennifer. (2023). "Hyper-Polarization and the Security of Democracy." In Nicholas A. Seltzer and Steven Lloyd Wilson, eds., *Handbook on Democracy and Security*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar. Chapter 10, 165-187.

Wed Apr 17

Misinformation, Disinformation, and Autocratization

Sato, Yuko, Felix Wiebrecht, and Staffan I. Lindberg (2023). "Disinformation and Episodes of Regime Transformation." V-Dem Working Paper Series 2023: 144 (September). https://www.v-dem.net/media/publications/wp_144.pdf

Van der Linden, Sander (2023). *Foolproof: Why Misinformation Infects our Minds and How to Build Immunity*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1-9, 169-194.

Wed Apr 24

Populism and Autocratization

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.

Cole, Wade M., and Evan Schofer (2023). "Destroying Democracy for the People: The Economic, Social, and Political Consequences of Populist Rule, 1990 to 2017." *Social Problems* online before print
<https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spac060>

Wed May 1

Resisting Autocratization

Boese, Vanessa, et al. (2021). "How Democracies Prevail: Democratic Resilience as a Two-stage Process." *Democratization* 28 No. 5, 885-907.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1891413>

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

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

Wed May 8

Student Presentations

Wed May 15

Term Paper Due

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