

PSC/IR 260 Democratic Erosion

University of Rochester
Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:05am-12:20pm, via Zoom
Fall 2020

Professor Gretchen Helmke
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Office hours: Mondays 1-2pm via Zoom, or by appointment.

Course Description

Politics in the new millennium belies the idea that any democracy is ever fully safe. Still, we are only beginning to grasp the multitude of ways in which a democracy may die. This upper-level undergraduate seminar is based on a cross-university collaboration, [Democratic Erosion](#), which is aimed at evaluating threats to democracy both in the United States and abroad. Importantly, the class is not intended as a partisan critique, but rather teaches students how to analyze and help address the challenges of democratic erosion.

The course requires and encourages each and every student to actively participate throughout the semester. In addition to reading and discussing political science scholarship on democracy, the course will offer a number of opportunities for students to creatively engage in making democracy work better. Assignments range from contributing to weekly class discussions and analyzing polling data from Bright Line Watch, to writing blog posts about the 2020 election and creating public service announcements on voting in America, to developing case study materials for the Democratic Erosion Event Dataset, or pitching new ideas for improving democracy in America and abroad.

Course Requirements

- **Attendance and Participation (25%):** Your active participation in the seminar is required. This means attending each and every seminar having read and outlined the readings and having identified questions and important points that you can bring to the discussion. In the interest of facilitating discussion, students will be required to keep their cameras on during class time.

In addition to your regular participation in class, each student will be required to present two of the readings to initiate the class discussion. Your presentation memo should be emailed to me by midnight the day before the class. It should be approximately two pages long, with a brief summary of the main thesis, and a brief discussion of what you found convincing or unconvincing about the reading. You will then use the memo as the basis for leading the class discussion for that reading the following day. A sign-up sheet for discussion leaders is available.

If you cannot attend the class discussion via zoom due to time differences, or other logistical challenges related to the pandemic and remote learning, you will be asked to submit a 1-2 page response paper to the readings for each class, which is due midnight before each class. This paper will

satisfy your regular participation requirement; for the classes in which you would serve as a discussion leader, please submit a 2-3 page response paper that includes both a summary of the main points of the reading, as well as three questions for generating class discussion.

Please note that if you need to miss class due to illness, please notify me via email prior to the class. If you miss more than one class during the semester, a doctor's note will be required.

- **Assignment #1 (15%):** Students will be asked to work in groups of 2-3 people (randomly assigned) to prepare short presentations (8-10 minutes) about voting in the 2020 election for class on September 10th. Additional instructions about the assignment will be provided at the beginning of the semester.
- **Assignment #2 (15%):** Students will be asked to work in groups of 2-3 people (randomly assigned) to prepare short presentations (8-10 minutes) based on reviewing survey reports and/or data from Bright Line Watch for the class on September 24th. Additional instructions about the assignment will be provided at the beginning of the semester.
- **Assignment #3 (15%):** Students will be asked to prepare a blog post and share it with the class on November 5th following the U.S. presidential election. Additional instructions about the assignment will be provided at the beginning of the semester.
- **Case Study (30%):** Students will have the option to write either a 10 page case study of a country that has recently experienced democratic erosion, or write a 10 page case study about how to improve one or more aspects of American democracy. Additional instructions about the case study will be provided at the beginning of the semester, including instructions about in-class presentations which will take place during the last two weeks of the semester. The final draft should be proofread and emailed to me by noon on the date of the final exam that is scheduled for this class.

Academic Honesty Policy and Flexibility During the Pandemic

All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester's [Academic Honesty Policy](#).

In light of the many challenges posed by the pandemic, I encourage all students to communicate as promptly as possible any concerns they have about meeting class deadlines. The goal of this class is to remain as rigorous and fair as possible, while also allowing for enough flexibility for students to do their best work despite the difficult circumstances.

Course Schedule and Readings

Please purchase:

- *How Democracies Die* (2018) by Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt
- *What Is Populism?* (2016) by Müller, Jan-Werner.
- *Election Meltdown-Dirty Tricks, Distrust, and the Threat to American Democracy* (2020) by Hasen, RL

- *Why Bother?: Rethinking Participation in Elections and Protests* (2019) by Aytaç, S.E. and Stokes, S.C.
- *Why We Are Polarized* (2020) by Klein, Ezra.
- *On tyranny: Twenty lessons from the twentieth century* (2017) by Snyder, T.

All of the other readings are available via drop box.

Deadlines

- Dates vary for individual reading presentations. See sign-up sheet.
- September 10th: Assignment #1
- September 24th: Assignment #2
- November 5th: Assignment #3
- December 1st-10th: Student presentations of case study
- December 17th at 4pm: Final case study paper

Week 1: Introduction

Thursday, August 27st

Class overview

Week 2: Theories of Democracy and Democratic Breakdown

Tuesday, September 1st

Dahl, Robert. 1972. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Chapter 1.

Przeworski, Adam, and Fernando Limongi. "Modernization: Theories and Facts." *World Politics* 49.2 (1997): 155-183.

Thursday, September 3rd

Weingast, Barry R. "The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of The Law." *American Political Science Review* 91.2 (1997): 245-263.

Acemoglu, Daron and James Robinson. 2006. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2.

Week 3: Defining and Measuring Democratic Erosion

Tuesday, September 8th

Bermeo, Nancy. 2016. "On Democratic Backsliding." *Journal of Democracy* 27(1): pp. 5-19.

V-Dem. 2020. "Autocratization Surges—Resistance Grows: Democracy Report 2020." pp. 1-40.
(https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/f0/5d/f05d46d8-626f-4b20-8e4e-53d4b134bfcf/democracy_report_2020_low.pdf)

Thursday, September 10th

Assignment #1: student presentations

Week 4: Theories of Democratic Erosion

Tuesday, September 15th

Lust, Ellen and David Waldner. 2015. *Unwelcome Change: Understanding, Evaluating, and Extending Theories of Democratic Backsliding*. Washington, DC: USAID.

Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Crown. Chapters 1,4, and 5.

Thursday, September 17th

Svolik, Milan W. 2019. "Polarization Versus Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 30(3): pp. 20-32.

Mettler, Suzanne and Robert C. Lieberman. 2020. *Four Threats: The Recurring Crises of American Democracy*. St. Martin's Press. Selected chapters Ch.3. pp.62-91

Week 5: Bright Line Watch and Assignment #1

Tuesday, September 22nd

Carey, J. M., Helmke, G., Nyhan, B., Sanders, M., & Stokes, S. 2019. "Searching for bright lines in the trump presidency." *Perspectives on Politics*, 17(3), 699-718.

Bright Line Watch. Survey Reports. <http://brightlinewatch.org/our-work/>

Thursday, September 24th

Assignment #2: student presentations

Week 6: Institutions Against Democracy

Tuesday, September 29th

Linz, Juan J. "The Perils of Presidentialism." *Journal of Democracy* 1.1 (1990): 51-69.

Helmke, Gretchen. 2020. "Presidential Crises in Contemporary Latin America" (Chapter in Brinks, Daniel M., Steven Levitsky, and Maria Murillo, eds. *The Politics of Institutional Weakness in Latin America*)

Thursday, October 1st

Varol, Ozan. 2015. "Stealth Authoritarianism." *Iowa Law Review* 100(4): pp. 1673-1742. Parts I, II and III.

Huq, Aziz and Tom Ginsburg. 2017. "How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy." *UCLA Law Review* 65(78): pp. 80-169. Parts 1 and 4; skim part 3.

Week 7: Accountability and Information

Tuesday, October 6th

Weitz-Shapiro, Rebecca and Matthew Winters. 2016. "Can Citizens Discern? Information Credibility, Political Sophistication, and the Punishment of Corruption in Brazil." *Journal of Politics* 79(1): pp. 60-74.

Ferraz, Claudio and Fred Finan. 2006. "Exposing Corrupt Politicians." J-Pal Policy Brief.

Thursday, October 8th

Mercieca, Jennifer R. 2019. "Dangerous Demagogues and Weaponized Communication." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 49(3): pp. 264-279.

Siegal, Alexandra A. and Joshua A. Tucker. 2018. "The Islamic State's Information Warfare: Measuring the Success of ISIS's Online Strategy." *Journal of Language and Politics* 17(2): pp. 258-280.

Week 8: Populism and Demagogues

Tuesday, October 13th

Müller, Jan-Werner. 2016. *What Is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Berman, Sheri. 2017. "The Pipe Dream of Undemocratic Liberalism." *Journal of Democracy* 28(3): 29-38.

Thursday, October 15th

Hahl, O., Kim, M. and Zuckerman Sivan, E.W., 2018. "The authentic appeal of the lying demagogue: Proclaiming the deeper truth about political illegitimacy." *American Sociological Review*, 83(1), pp.1-33.

Mudde, C. (2015). "Populist radical right parties in Europe today." *Transformations of populism in Europe and the Americas: History and recent trends*, 295-307.

Week 9: Polarization

Tuesday, October 20th

Mason, Lilliana. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1 and 3.

Iyengar, Shanto and Masha Krupenkin. 2018. "The Strengthening of Partisan Affect." *Political Psychology* 39(S1): pp. 201-218.

Thursday, October 22nd

Klein, Ezra. 2020. *Why We Are Polarized*. Avid Reader Press. Selected readings TBD.

Hacker, Jacob and Paul Pierson. 2020. *Let them Eat Tweets: How the Right Rules in an Age of Extreme Inequality*. Selections TBD.

Week 10: Elections

Tuesday, October 27th

Hasen, R.L., 2020. *Election Meltdown-Dirty Tricks, Distrust, and the Threat to American Democracy*. Yale University Press. Selected chapters TBD.

Thursday, October 29th

Foley, E.B., 2019. "Preparing for a Disputed Presidential Election: An Exercise in Election Risk Assessment and Management." *Loyola University Chicago Law Journal*, 51, p.309.

Transition Integrity Project. 2020. "Preventing a Disrupted Presidential Election and Transition." <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/7013152/Preventing-a-Disrupted-Presidential-Election-and.pdf?referringSource=articleShare>

Week 11: Election 2020

Tuesday, November 3rd

No Class. Vote.

Thursday, November 5th

Assignment #3: student presentations

Week 12: Protests and Social Movements

Tuesday, November 10th

Gamboa, Laura. 2017. "Opposition at the Margins: Strategies Against the Erosion of Democracy in Colombia and Venezuela." *Comparative Politics* 49(4): pp. 457-477.

Berman, Sheri. 1997. "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic." *World Politics* 49(3): pp. 401–429.

Thursday, November 12th

Aytaç, S.E. and Stokes, S.C., 2019. *Why Bother?: Rethinking Participation in Elections and Protests*. Cambridge University Press. Selected chapters TBD.

Week 13: Meeting the Challenges of Democratic Erosion

Tuesday, November 17th

Clayton, Katherine, et al. "Real Solutions for Fake News? Measuring the Effectiveness of General Warnings and Fact-Check Tags in Reducing Belief in False Stories on Social Media." *Political Behavior* (2019): 1-23.

Pozen, David E. "Hardball and/as Anti-Hardball." *NYUJ Legis. & Pub. Pol'y* 21 (2018): 949.

Thursday, November 19th

Snyder, T., 2017. *On tyranny: Twenty lessons from the twentieth century*. Tim Duggan Books. All chapters.

Week 14: Thanksgiving Break

Week 15: December 1st – 3rd, Student Presentations I

Week 16: December 8th – 10th, Student Presentations II