

**PSCI 552**  
**Dictatorship and Democracy**  
Fall 2024  
Thursday 12:30 pm-3:15 pm

**Professor Gretchen Helmke**  
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Office hours: 2-3:30 pm Tuesdays  
or by appointment

### **Course Description**

Why are some political regimes more stable than others? Why do democracies endure or unravel? Why do dictatorships succeed or fail? To answer these questions, this course offers a survey of the empirical and theoretical literatures on democracy and dictatorship in comparative politics. The first part of the course focuses on the emergence and instantiation of democracy and dictatorship. The second part of the course examines competing theories about the conditions and causes of democratic backsliding. Class will be conducted in a weekly discussion format.

### **Objectives**

The two goals of the course are 1) to introduce students to the classic and the cutting-edge literature on democracy and dictatorship, 2) and to stimulate original research ideas. Actively engaging with the readings and the class discussions is a core part of achieving both objectives. Original research aims to advance the literature and thus requires a careful understanding of the contributions other scholars have made; students must be familiar with the literature to identify extant gaps and puzzles. The weekly class discussions and written assignments are geared towards helping graduate students realize these objectives.

### **Course Requirements**

Students must do all required readings before the class and come to class prepared to discuss and debate the merits of each and every reading. All of the readings will be located in a common Dropbox folder designated for the course.

On the first day of the course, students will be asked to sign up for the readings in pairs. For each of the readings, one student will be responsible for summarizing the reading and for discussing its positive influence on the field. The other student will be responsible for critiquing the reading and/or identifying ways to build on the reading to advance the field.

Throughout the semester, students will then choose one or more of the readings to develop short research proposals. Research proposals should be a maximum of 500 words in length and should outline: 1) An existing theoretical or empirical puzzle, 2) an intuition as to a solution to this puzzle, 3) either existing or ideal data needed to test this puzzle, and 4) the identification strategy

to be used. All proposals must be original and unique to this class (in other words, no recycled research proposals). The first proposal is due on Friday of Week 6; the second proposal is due on Friday of Week 10; and the third proposal is due on Friday of Week 13.

As a final assignment, students must present an original research proposal during the last week of class, which develops one of their shorter proposals. A final written version of the research proposal is due TBD. This proposal (maximum of 3000 words) should include a more detailed literature review, a discussion of the proposed theoretical framework, and the empirical hypotheses it implies, as well as serious discussion of how to obtain data to carry out the project. For projects with publicly available data, successful projects will include a rough preliminary analysis.

## **Grading**

Class Participation and Presentations 45%  
Three short research proposals (10% each) 30%  
Final Research Proposal 25%

## **Course Policies**

All work must be original, and all citations must be properly attributed. Extensions to deadlines must be negotiated in advance of the deadline. For late work submitted without an extension, half of a letter grade will be deducted for each day the paper is late.

## **Schedule**

### **Week 1. Themes and Organization of the Course**

August 29<sup>th</sup>

### **Week 2. No Class due to APSA**

September 5<sup>th</sup>

### **Week 3. Foundations: Conceptualizing Democracy**

September 12<sup>th</sup>

- Dahl, Robert. 1956. *A Preface to Democratic Theory*. University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1-3.
- Przeworski, Adam. 1991. *Democracy and the Market*. Ch. 1.
- Achen, Christopher H., and Larry M. Bartels. 2016. *Democracy for Realists*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 1-2.

#### **Week 4. Modernization Theory**

September 19<sup>th</sup>

- Przeworski, Adam, R. Michael Alvarez, Michael E. Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, Fernando Limongi. 2000. *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2.
- Boix, Carles, and Susan C. Stokes. 2003. "Endogenous Democratization." *World Politics* 55 (4): 517–49.
- Olson, Mancur. 1993. "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development." *The American Political Science Review* 87 (3): 567–76.
- North, Douglass C. and Barry R. Weingast. 1989. "Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England" *Journal of Economic History*.

#### **Week 5. Democracy and Inequality**

September 26<sup>th</sup>

- Acemoglu, Daron and James A. Robinson. 2006. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Cambridge University Press. Ch. 1-2.
- Ansell, Ben W., and David J. Samuels. 2014. *Inequality and democratization*. Cambridge University Press. Chs. 1-6.

#### **Week 6. Democratization and Elites**

October 3<sup>rd</sup>

- Ziblatt, Daniel. 2017. *Conservative Parties and the Birth of Democracy*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. Chs 1, 2, 6, and 7.
- Albertus, Michael, and Victor Menaldo. 2018. *Authoritarianism and the elite origins of democracy*. Cambridge University Press, 2018. Chs. 1-5.

#### **Week 7. The Origins of Authoritarianism**

October 10<sup>th</sup>

- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press. Chs. 1, 2, 4, 6, and 8.
- Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. 2018. *How dictatorships work: Power, personalization, and collapse*. Cambridge University Press. Ch 1-5, and appendix.

#### **Week 8. How Dictatorships Survive (re-schedule class due to conference)**

October 17<sup>th</sup>

- Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. 2018. *How dictatorships work: Power, personalization, and collapse*. Cambridge University Press. Ch 6-9
- Gandhi, Jennifer. 2008. *Political Institutions under Dictatorship*. Cambridge University Press. Skim Introduction and ch 1, read ch 3 and 6.
- Svobik, Milan W. 2009. "Power Sharing and Leadership Dynamics in Authoritarian Regimes." *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (2): 477–94.

## **Week 9. Democracy and Accountability**

October 24<sup>th</sup>

- Achen, Christopher H., and Larry M. Bartels. 2016. *Democracy for Realists*. Princeton University Press. Chapters 4-5.
- Stokes, Susan C. 2001. *Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics: Mandates and Democracy: Neoliberalism by Surprise in Latin America*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 3.
- Powell, G. 2000. "Elections as Instruments of Democracy : Majoritarian and Proportional Visions." Chapter 2-5.

## **Week 10. Theories of Democratic Backsliding**

October 31<sup>st</sup>

- Graham, Matthew H., and Milan W. Svobik. 2020. "Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States." *American Political Science Review*.
- Luo, Zhaotian and Adam Przeworski. 2020. "Democracy and Its Vulnerabilities: Dynamics of Democratic Backsliding." Working paper.
- Grillo, Edoardo, and Carlo Prato. 2021. "Reference Points and Democratic Backsliding." *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Chiopris, Caterina, Monika Nalepa, and Georg Vanberg. 2021. "A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: Citizen Uncertainty and Democratic Backsliding."

## **Week 11. Experiments on Democratic Backsliding**

November 7<sup>th</sup>

- Voelkel, Jan G., et al. 2023. "Megastudy identifying effective interventions to strengthen Americans' democratic attitudes." *OSF Preprints*.  
<https://www.strengtheningdemocracychallenge.org/paper>
- Druckman, James N. 2024. "How to Study Democratic Backsliding." *Political Psychology* 45 (S1): 3–42.
- Krishnarajan, Suthan. 2023. "Rationalizing Democracy: The Perceptual Bias and (Un)Democratic Behavior." *The American Political Science Review* 117 (2): 474–96.
- Braley, Alia, Gabriel S. Lenz, Dhaval Adjudah, Hossein Rahnama, and Alex Pentland. n.d. "The Subversion Dilemma: Why Voters Who Cherish Democracy Vote It Away."

## **Week 12. Democratic Backsliding, Elites, and Norms**

November 14<sup>th</sup>

- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2019. *How Democracies Die*. Crown. Chapters TBD.
- Helmke, G., M. Kroeger, and J. Paine. 2022. "Democracy by Deterrence: Norms, Constitutions, and Electoral Tilting." *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Howell, William G., Kenneth Shepsle, and Stephane Wolton. 2020. "Executive Absolutism: The Dynamics of Authority Acquisition in a System of Separated Powers." Working paper.

### **Week 13. Democratic Backsliding and Social Norms**

November 21<sup>st</sup>

- Helmke, Gretchen and Josiah Rath. 2024. “Democratic Norms.” Working Paper.
- Alvarez-Benjumea, Amalia, and Vicente Valentim. 2024. “The Enforcement of Political Norms.” *British Journal of Political Science*, May, 1–24.
- Goldstein, Daniel A. N. 2022. “The Social Foundations of Democratic Norms.” *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4314977>.
- Dinas, Elias, Sergi Martínez, and Vicente Valentim. 2024. “Social Norm Change, Political Symbols, and Expression of Stigmatized Preferences.” *The Journal of Politics* 86 (2): 488–506.

### **Week 14. Thanksgiving Holiday**

November 28<sup>th</sup>

### **Week 15.**

December 5<sup>th</sup>

- In class presentations of students’ research proposals
- Final research proposal due TBD