

PSCI/INTR 260 Democratic Erosion
University of Rochester
Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30pm-13:45pm
Harkness 329
Spring 2023

Professor Gretchen Helmke
gretchen.helmke@rochester.edu
Office hours: Wednesdays 10am - 11am, or by appointment.
Harkness 331

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 leading weekly class discussions, to group projects on identifying threats to democracy, as well as proposing interventions to improve the quality and stability of democracy in America and abroad.

Course Requirements

- **Attendance and Participation (30%):** 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 addition to your regular participation in class, each student will be required to present readings to initiate the class discussion. You should prepare a PowerPoint that briefly summarizes the readings, discusses what you find convincing or unconvincing about the reading, and raises questions or topics for 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 identifying current or recent threats to democracy either in the United States or in another country. To identify such threats, students will follow *The Authoritarian Playbook* by Protect Democracy (linked below). Additional instructions about the assignment will be provided at the beginning of the semester. Due Week 6 (Feb 14th and 16th).

- **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 the [Strengthening Democracy Challenge](#) at Stanford University. Additional instructions about the assignment will be provided at the beginning of the semester. Due Week 15 and 16 (April 20th and 25th).
- **Case Study for W requirement (20%):** Students will have the option to write either a 13-15 page case study of a country that has recently experienced democratic erosion, or write a 13-15 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 and descriptions can be found in the dropbox. **A draft of the W paper is due March 23rd. The final draft should be proofread and emailed to me by midnight on April 20th. For each day that the paper is late, half a grade will be deducted.**
- **Cumulative In-class Midterm Exam (40% for non-W students; 20% for W students):** The midterm exam will consist of identification terms, short answers, and an essay question. Students will be given a study guide the week before the midterm exam, which will take place on April 13th.

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](#).

Course Schedule and Readings

Please purchase:

- *Resisting Backsliding: Opposition Strategies against the Erosion of Democracy* (2022) by Laura Gamboa.

Books available online at UR Library:

- *How Democracies Die* (2018) by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt. [Link](#)
- *What Is Populism?* (2016) by Jan-Werner Müller. [Link](#)
- *How Civil Wars Start: And How to Stop Them* (2022) by Barbara F Walter. [Link](#)
- *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop: The Case for Multiparty Democracy in America* (2020) by Lee Drutman. [Link](#)

Deadlines and Important Dates

- Dates vary for individual reading presentations. See sign-up sheet.
- February 14th and 16th: Assignment #1
- April 13th: In-class Midterm Exam
- March 23rd: Draft of W paper
- April 20th: Final W paper
- April 20th and 25th: Assignment #2

Week 1: Introduction

Thursday, January 12th

Class overview and sign-up

Week 2: The Challenge of Democratic Erosion

Tuesday, January 17th

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

V-Dem. 2022. Democracy Report.

Thursday, January 19th

Protect Democracy. 2022. *The Authoritarian Playbook*.

Voelkel, Jan. G. et al. 2022. "Megastudy Identifying Successful Interventions to Strengthen Americans' Democratic Attitudes." *Preprint*.

Week 3: Conceptualizing Democracy

Tuesday, January 24th

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

Przeworski, Adam. 1991. *Democracy and the Market*. Ch. 1.

Thursday, January 26th

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

Week 4: Theories of Democratic Erosion

Tuesday, January 31st

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

Thursday, February 2nd

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.

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

Week 5: Constitutional Hardball

Tuesday, February 7th

Helmke, Gretchen. 2017. *Institutions on the Edge: The Origins and Consequences of Inter-Branch Crises in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Thursday, February 9th

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

Helmke, Gretchen and Jack Paine. 2022. "When Strong Institutions Undermine Strong Democracies." Working Paper.

Little, Andrew, and Anne Meng. 2023. "Subjective and Objective Measurement of Democratic Backsliding."

Week 6: The Authoritarian Playbook (Assignment #1)

Tuesday, February 14th

In-class presentations

Thursday, February 16th

In-class presentations (continued)

Week 7: Populism

Tuesday, February 21st

Riker, William H. 1988. *Liberalism against Populism: A Confrontation between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice*. Waveland Press. Chapter 1 and 10.

Müller, Jan-Werner. 2016. *What Is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Introduction and Chapter 1.

Thursday, February 23rd

Müller, Jan-Werner. 2016. *What Is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Chapter 2, 3 and Conclusion.

Week 8: The Rule of Law

Tuesday, February 28th

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

Bahry, D., & Kim, Y. H. (2021). Executive Turnover and the Investigation of Former Leaders in New Democracies. *Political Research Quarterly*, 74(1), 199–211.

Thursday, March 2nd

Gretchen Helmke, YeonKyung Jeong, Jae-Eun Kim, and Seda Ozturk. 2019. "Upending Impunity: Explaining Post-Tenure Presidential Prosecutions in Latin America." Working Paper.

Goldsmith, Jack. 2022. "Opinion." *The New York Times*, June 20, 2022.

Hasen, Richard L. 2022. "Opinion." *The New York Times*, June 24, 2022.

**Week 9: Spring Break
(March 7th and 9th)**

Week 10: Democratic Norms

Tuesday, March 14th

Bicchieri, Cristina. 2016. *Norms in the Wild: How to Diagnose, Measure, and Change Social Norms*. Oxford University Press. Selections TBD

Azari, J. R., and J. K. Smith. 2012. "Unwritten Rules: Informal Institutions in Established Democracies." *Perspectives on Politics*.

Thursday, March 16th

Gretchen Helmke, Jae-Eun Kim, and Seda Ozturk. 2021. "Sounding the Alarm: Transgressing Democratic Norms and the Effects of Political Pushback." Working Paper.

Clayton, Katie. 2022. "The Public's Response to Democratic Backsliding." Working Paper.

Week 11: Identity Politics and Polarization:

Tuesday, March 21st

Hacker, Jacob and Paul Pierson. 2020. *Let them Eat Tweets: How the Right Rules in an Age of Extreme Inequality*. pp. 109-140.

Thursday, March 23rd

Mason, Lilliana. 2013. "The Rise of Uncivil Agreement: Issue Versus Behavioral Polarization in the American Electorate." *The American Behavioral Scientist* 57 (1): 140–59.

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.

Week 12: Opposition and Resilience

Tuesday, March 28th

Gamboa, Laura. 2022. *Resisting Backsliding: Opposition Strategies against the Erosion of Democracy*. Cambridge University Press. Selections TBD.

Thursday, March 30th

Gamboa, Laura. 2022. *Resisting Backsliding: Opposition Strategies against the Erosion of Democracy*. Cambridge University Press. Selections TBD.

Week 13: Political Violence

Tuesday, April 4th

Walter, Barbara F. 2022. *How Civil Wars Start: And How to Stop Them*. Crown. Selections TBD.

Kleinfeld, Rachel. 2022. "The Rise in Political Violence in the United States and Damage to Our Democracy." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Thursday, April 6th

Kalmoe, Nathan P., and Lilliana Mason. 2022. *Radical American Partisanship: Mapping Violent Hostility, Its Causes, and the Consequences for Democracy*. University of Chicago Press. Selections TBD.

Westwood, Sean J., Justin Grimmer, Matthew Tyler, and Clayton Nall. 2022. "Current Research Overstates American Support for Political Violence." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 119.

Week 14: Cumulative Midterm

Tuesday, April 11th

Midterm Review

Thursday, April 13th

In-class Midterm

**Week 15: Solutions and
Strengthening Democracy Challenge (Assignment #2)**

Tuesday April 18th

Drutman, Lee. 2020. *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop: The Case for Multiparty Democracy in America*. Oxford University Press. Selections TBD.

Thursday– 20th

In-class Presentation

Week 16: Strengthening Democracy Challenge (Assignment #2 continued)

April 25th Tuesday

In-class Presentation (continued)