

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

NUMBER: INTL 4780
TITLE: Democratic Erosion

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Cas Mudde (mudde@uga.edu)
OFFICE: Candler 324
OFFICE HOURS: Wednesdays 10:00-12.00, or by appointment

TERM: Spring 2019
DATE & TIME: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:30-13:45
ROOM: MLC 207
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Introduction:

In 1989, Francis Fukuyama published his famous essay “The End of History,” in which he argued, simply stated, that liberal democracy was now without enemies and would reign supreme. The essay was illustrative of the democratic optimism in the wake of the fall of communism, as democracy spread throughout Europe and beyond. But at the beginning of the 21st century this optimism was challenged by a series of events, including the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the consequent US invasion of Iraq, and the failure of the democratic domino strategy of the neoconservatives. Colored Revolutions in postcommunist countries (like Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine) as well as the Iranian “Green Revolution” and the Arab Spring rekindled the democratic optimism, but it was often short-lived, as most of the democratic uprising failed or took an authoritarian turn shortly after their initial success.

As the Great Recession hit the world, there was already a growing academic debate on democratic stagnation, or even backsliding, but it was really the victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 US presidential elections that brought this to the heart of the academic and public debate. Hardly a day goes by without an op-ed on the dangers of populism and the threat of democratic erosion, not just far away, in countries long associated with weak democracies, but even in the self-perceived cradle of democracy, the United States. Book after book shoots to the top of the New York Times Bestseller List, which proclaims a democratic crisis or even claims that “the democratic era” is coming to an end.

This course looks at the truths and myths of the crisis of democracy debate. It starts with an analysis of its conceptual and theoretical foundations and then moves to discussions of populism and “how

democracies die.” Throughout the course we will assess the state of democracy, and of democratic erosion, around the world; from the Czech Republic to Thailand and from Ecuador to Zambia. In the end, we will be able to provide a better informed answer to one of the crucial questions of today, namely: (1) is democracy in crisis? And (2) Is democracy in the US eroding?

Readings:

Many of the readings are articles and book chapter, which will be posted on the ELC course page well before the relevant class. In addition, we use two (short) books that you are strongly encouraged to buy.

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2018) *How Democracies Die*. New York: Crown.

Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Course objectives:

- To provide students with a conceptual and theoretical foundation to the topic of democracy.
- To discover and explain the differences and similarities among forms of democracy.
- To analyze and compare different processes of democratic erosion across the globe.
- To think more critically about the strengths and weakness of liberal democracy in theory and practice.
- To prepare students better for the ongoing debate about democratic erosion in the United States.

Teaching Methodology:

- Lectures
- Class discussions
- Video presentations
- Film presentations

Classroom Attendance and Activity

This class meets twice a week and attendance is **mandatory**. You can miss a maximum of **three** classes (no excuses or notes are necessary,

although a heads-up will be appreciated). All further documented absences will lead to a lower class participation grade (**10 points** per missed class).

You are expected to have **read and reflected upon** the compulsory readings before the relevant class, *to follow key events in terms of democratic erosion* in the media, and to **participate actively** in the discussions in class *and* on the ELC-discussion board.

Course Evaluation:

- Participation (15%)
- Midterm exam (25%)
- Individual paper (15%)
- Group video (20%)
- Final essay (25%)

Participation (15%): you are expected to prepare, i.e. read of (and reflect on) the required readings for each class, and participate in class in an active, civilized, and well-informed manner. You can also participate in discussions on the ELC course page.

Midterm Exam (25%): you will have an in-class midterm exam with will consist of 10 multiple choice, 3 short-answer questions, and 1 one-page essay question. The exam will be on **February, 14**.

Individual Paper (15%)

One week before the group video each student should submit a short paper (max. 1.500 words) on the topic of the group video, which includes **at least six academic sources**, of which at least three are not compulsory readings.

Group video (20%): you will make one video (in a group of 2-3 students) that analyzes democratic erosion in a specific country and provides an updated account (schedule to be announced in the third or fourth week of the course). The video should not be longer than **15 minutes**, be well-produced and well-researched – that means going well beyond the compulsory reading that all students have to do.

Final Essay (25%): you will write a final essay on a prompted question (which you will receive three weeks before the deadline) of max. 2.000 words. The essay should be draw upon **at least six academic sources**, of which at least three are not compulsory readings. **Deadline is May 2**, at noon. You can submit in person or upload to ELC (Assignments).

Academic Integrity:

As a University of Georgia student, you have agreed to abide by the University’s academic honesty policy, “A Culture of Honesty,” and the Student Honor Code. All academic work must meet the standards described in “A Culture of Honesty” found at: <http://www.uga.edu/honesty>. Lack of knowledge of the academic honesty policy is not a reasonable explanation for a violation. Questions related to course assignments and the academic honesty policy should be directed to the instructor.

Grading:

Letter Grade	Points
A	93 – 100 points
A-	90 – 92 points
B+	87 – 89 points
B	83 – 86 points
B-	80 – 82 points
C+	77 – 79 points
C	73 – 76 points
C-	70 – 72 points
D+	67 – 69 points
D	63 – 66 points
D-	60 – 62 points
F	59 and below

Disability Statement:

UGA is committed to the success of all learners, and we strive to create an inclusive and accessible online environment. In collaboration with the [Disability Resource Center](#), we work with students who have documented disabilities to access reasonable accommodations and academic supports. For more information or to speak with a Disability coordinator, please call the Disability Resource Center at (706) 542-8719, TTY only phone (706) 542-8778.

Other Important Resources for Students

UGA has a vast array of resources to support students facing a variety of challenges. Please don't hesitate to come speak with me or contact these resources directly:

Office of Student Care & Outreach (coordinate assistance for students experiencing hardship/unforeseen circumstances) – 706-542-7774 or by email sco@uga.edu

Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS) - 706-542-2273 (during regular business hours) *After Hour Mental Health Crisis:* 706-542-2200 (UGA Police—ask to speak to the CAPS on-call clinician).

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention – 706-542-SAFE (Please note, faculty and staff are obligated to report any knowledge of sexual assault/relationship violence to UGA's Equal Opportunity Office. The advocates at RSVP can provide student confidentially).

Third-Party Software and FERPA:

During this course you might have the opportunity to use public online services and/or software applications sometimes called third-party software such as a blog or wiki. While some of these are required assignments, you need **not** make any personally identifying information on a public site. Do not post or provide any private information about yourself or your classmates. Where appropriate you may use a pseudonym or nickname. Some written assignments posted publicly may require personal reflection/comments, but the assignments will not require you to disclose any personally identifiable/sensitive information. If you have any concerns about this, please contact your instructor.

Some Ground Rules:

1. **It is not my practice to give incompletes.** However, if there is suitable reason – subject to my approval and supported with appropriate written documentation – an exception to the “no incompletes” rule may be possible. With respect to these first ground rules, *if you have problems in completing assigned work, please let me know about it.*
2. **Laptops, tablets, phones, etc. are not allowed!** Be ready with pen and paper to make notes during the class. If you use any of these banned devices in class, you will be punished with a deduction of **10 points** of your *final grade!*
3. **You will be expected to attend class regularly, on time, and for the entirety of each class period.** Do not sign up for this class if you have

social or other engagements (sports classes, meets, etc) that interfere with the time length of this course.

4. I do not expect that your views and perceptions of these controversial themes are identical with those of your classmates or me, either now or at the completion of the course. This course is a place for the free (and perhaps even heated) exchange of ideas. Thus I expect you to **challenge viewpoints** that differ from your own, but I also expect you to **substantiate your arguments** on the basis of the readings, lectures and discussions.
5. If you need to use outside **reference works**, please consult Joel Krieger, et. al., *Oxford Companion to Politics of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) as a place to start for political terms or concepts – **do not use Webster or other dictionaries** for political science definitions. For outside research sources, please use Galileo. Please **do not use the notoriously unreliable Wikipedia** until or unless this source emphasizes accuracy as much as it does volume and speed.
6. If you believe that you should have received a better grade, please provide **an explanation** to me *in writing* and *within a week* of receiving the grade. I will then grade your *whole* exam/paper again and I will issue a “new” grade, which will be either the same, a higher, or a lower grade.

Important Dates:

January, 10	First Class
February, 5	No Class
February, 14	Midterm Exam
March, 11-15	Spring Break
April, 30	Last Class
May, 2	Final essay due (at noon)

Finally:

THE COURSE SYLLABUS IS A GENERAL PLAN FOR THE COURSE; DEVIATIONS ANNOUNCED TO THE CLASS BY THE INSTRUCTOR MAY (AND MOST PROBABLY WILL) BE NECESSARY!

THEMATIC OUTLINE

01/10 – Introduction

In this introductory class we will discuss the intentions and outline of the course as well as the mutual expectations. We will also assess the students' backgrounds in the politics of western democracies in general, and challenges to it in particular.

01/15 – The Paradigmatic Case: Weimar Germany

Much of the western understanding of democratic erosion, and more extremely democratic breakdown, is based on the experience of Weimar Republic, the short-lived democratic regime in Germany in the Interbellum. What should be our main lessons from that experience?

Compulsory Reading:

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

PART I – DEFINING DEMOCRACY

01/17 – What Is Democracy?

Democracy is a crucial term in political discussions and life, but while everyone uses the term, few define it and people hold wildly different understandings of its meaning. What does democracy mean as a generic model? What are crucial democratic institutions and values?

Compulsory Readings:

Dahl, Robert A. (1998) *On Democracy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, chs.4-5.

01/22 – Models of Democracy

Although we often use democracy in a unitary way, as if there is just one democracy, there are different models of democracy. The dominant model, at least within the so-called "Western World", is that of liberal democracy. What does it mean?

Compulsory Readings:

Diamond, Larry (2003) "Defining and Developing Democracy", in Robert A. Dahl, Ian Shapiro and José Antonio Cheibub (eds.), *The Democracy Sourcebook*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 29-39.

Plattner, Marc F. (1998) "Liberalism and Democracy: Can't Have One without the Other", *Foreign Affairs* 77(2): 171-180.

01/24 – Illiberal Democracy or Competitive Authoritarianism?

We often differentiate between “democracies” and “autocracies”, as if the two are perfect opposites and encompass all theoretically possible and real existing regimes. As the number of (liberal) democracies have increased significantly in the 20th century, and of (pure) autocracies has decreased a lot, more and more regimes combine aspects of both. This has led to a lively debate on the best terms to describe these so-called “hybrid” regimes.

Compulsory Reading:

Berman, Sheri (2017). “The Pipe Dream of Illiberal Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 28(3): 29-38.

Levitsky, Steven and Lucan Way (2002). “Elections without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13(2): 51-65.

Further Reading:

Diamond, Larry (2002). “Thinking About Hybrid Regimes,” *Journal of Democracy* 13(2): 21-35.

01/24 – The Economics of Democracy

In the US discussion democracy and capitalism are often combined, and sometimes even conflated. The economic rise of China, as well as the Great Recession, have seriously undermined the previously widely held belief that capitalism is essential to democracy. At the same time, one of the most dominant theories of democracy holds that its success is, first and foremost, based on the level of economic development of a country.

Compulsory Reading:

Lipset, Seymour Martin (1959). “Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy,” *American Political Science Review* 53(1): 69-105.

PART II – POPULISM

01/31 – Populism Around the World

The debate on “the rise of populism” and “the decline of democracy” are closely related, given that in most cases of democratic backsliding, populist actors are identified as the main culprit. However, the discussion about populism is highly contentious, largely because very different answers to the two crucial questions: (1) what is populism? And (2) who are the populists?

Compulsory Reading:

Populism: A Very Short Introduction, chs.1-2.

02/05 – The Fall of Fujimori – No Class

Alberto Fujimori was a total outsider when he shocked domestic and foreign observers by winning the presidential elections in Peru in 1990. The son of Japanese immigrants, and

questionably dubbed “El Chino, Fujimori was the perfect outsider. He initially gained popularity with neoliberal economic reforms (“Fujishock”) and the fight against the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso before gaining international (in)fame for his autogolpe (self-coup).

There is no class. Instead you have to watch the movie [The Fall of Fujimori](#) (USA, 2005) at home and post your reflections on ELC (Discussions).

Compulsory Reading:

Levitsky, Steven and James Loxton, “Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism: The Case of Fujimori’s Peru”, in Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (eds.), *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 160-181.

02/07 – Mobilization and Organization

Populists mobilize in many different ways. While we often associate populism with charismatic leaders, rather than well-organized political parties, there are important regional differences. Particularly within (Western) Europe, populist parties and longevity, rather than individual leaders and episodic success, are the norm.

Compulsory Reading:

Populism: A Very Short Introduction, chs.3-4.

02/12 – Populism and (De-)Democratization

For many populism is a “pathology” of democracy, while some others argue instead that populism is the ultimate form of democracy. In reality, the relationship between populism and democracy is complex and depends on many factors.

Compulsory Reading:

Populism: A Very Short Introduction, chs.5-6.

02/14 MIDTERM EXAM

PART III – DEMOCRATIC EROSION

02/19 – Democratic Breakdown

The topic of democratic breakdown has long been at the center of the agenda of researchers of democracy and democratization, particularly with a focus on Latin America. What can we learn from experiences of democratic breakdown in the 20th century?

Compulsory Readings:

Linz, Juan J. and Alfred Stepan (1989). *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, ch.2.

02/21 – Manipulating Democracy

All politicians try to influence the political system in which they operate, to give themselves an advantage. Many of these measures are not just legal, they are considered legitimate and even democratic. So, how are democratic politicians “manipulating” democracy and how problematic are these measures?

Compulsory Readings:

Schedler, Andreas (2010). “Authoritarianism’s Last Line of Defense”, *Journal of Democracy* 21(1): 69-80.

Scheppele, Kim Lane (2013). “The Rule of Law and the Frankenstate: Why Governance Checklists Do Not Work”, *Governance* 26(4): 559-562.

02/26 – Democratic Backsliding

Before diving into the individual cases of democratic erosion, or less dramatic: democratic backsliding, we have to get some conceptual clarity. What do all these different terms mean? And what is the actual situation at the beginning of the 21st century?

Compulsory Reading:

Mechkova, Valeriya, Anna Lührmann and Staffan I. Lindberg (2017). “How Much Democratic Backsliding?”, *Journal of Democracy* 28(4): 162-169.

Waldner, David and Ellen Lust (2018). “Unwelcoming Change: Comping to Terms with Democratic Backsliding”, *Annual Review of Political Science* 21: 93-113.

Further Reading:

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

Slater, Dan (2013). “Democratic Careening”, *World Politics* 65(4): 729-763.

PART IV – DEMOCRATIC EROSION AROUND THE WORLD

02/28 – Russia

Russia has become the model of democratic backsliding in the 21st century, with President Vladimir Putin as the favorite bogeyman of the West. While it is doubtful Russia was ever truly a liberal democracy, Putin has consistently eroded the democratic system. Moreover, many strongmen in other countries look at him with admiration and for inspiration.

Compulsory Reading:

McFaul, Michael (2018). “Choosing Autocracy: Actors, Institutions and Revolution in the Erosion of Russian Democracy?”, *Comparative Politics* 50(3): 305-325.

03/05 – Hungary

One of the most remarkable, and upsetting, cases of democratic erosion is Hungary. First, it is a member state of the European Union, the biggest liberal democratic project in world history. Second, Hungary was considered the frontrunner of postcommunist democratization. Third, it has become an inspiration for politicians across Europe, some of whom have started to implement “the Budapest Model” in their own countries.

Compulsory Reading:

Bánkuti, Miklós, Gábor Halmai and Kim-Lane Scheppele (2013). “Disabling the Constitution”, *Journal of Democracy* 23(3): 121-131.

Jenne, Erin and Cas Mudde (2013). “Can Outsiders Help”, *Journal of Democracy* 23(3): 147-155.

Way, Lucan Ahmad and Steven Levitsky (2019). “[How Autocrats Can Rig the Game and Damage Democracy](#)”, *Washington Post*, 4 January.

03/07 – Czech Republic

Another darling of the postcommunist world, the Czech Republic was associated with humanitarian Václav Havel (president) and neoliberal Václav Klaus (premier) in the 1990s. But while the country has not seen democratic erosion to the level of Poland or Hungary, there is significant worry about recent developments.

Compulsory Reading:

Hanley, Séan and Milada Anna Vachudova (2018). “Understanding the Illiberal Turn: Democratic Backsliding in the Czech Republic”, *East European Politics* 34(3): 276-296.

11-15 MARCH – SPRING BREAK

03/19 – Turkey

At the turn of the century Turkey was heralded as the example of Islamic democracy. Recep Erdogan and his AKP party were showing that Islamic parties could be good defenders and stewards of liberal democracy. Today, Erdogan is increasingly seen as an authoritarian leader, who is personally responsible for the democratic erosion in the country.

Compulsory Reading:

Esen, Berk and Sebnem Gumuscu (2016). “Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey”, *Third World Quarterly* 37(9): 1581-1606.

03/21 – The Philippines

The Philippines have long been associated with corrupt elites and strongmen, including long-term president Ferdinand Marcos and his wife Imelda (who allegedly owned some 3,000 pairs

of shoes). Recently, the country has gained international attention because of its outspoken president, Rodrigo Duterte, who is considered a major threat to democracy.

Compulsory Reading:

Arugay, Aries and Dan Slater (2019). “Polarization Without Poles: Machiavellian Conflicts and the Philippines’ Lost Decade of Democracy, 2000-2010”, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681(1).

Curato, Nicole (2017). “Flirting with Authoritarian Fantasies? Rodrigo Duterte and the New Terms of Philippine Populism”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47(1): 142-153.

03/26 – Thailand

Thailand has a long history of undemocratic rule and even after democratization the royal family and the military always loomed large over its politics. In the 21st century the country was rocked by a succession of massive demonstrations, counter-demonstrations, coups and counter-coups.

Compulsory Reading:

Kongkirati, Prajak (2016). “Thailand’s Failed 2014 Election: The Anti-Election Movement, Violence and Democratic Breakdown”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 46(3): 467-485.

03/28 – Ecuador

Latin America has a long history of democratization and de-democratization, i.e. democratic erosion and even breakdown. In the early 21st century the region saw a wave of left-wing populists come to power, including Rafael Correa in Ecuador, which challenged the political status quo both nationally and internationally.

Compulsory Reading:

De la Torre, Carlos and Andrés Ortiz Lemos (2016). “Populist Polarization and the Slow Death of Democracy in Ecuador”, *Democratization* 23(2): 221-241.

04/02 – Venezuela

The heart of the third wave of Latin American populism is Venezuela, one of the few regional countries considered a consolidated liberal democracy at the turn of the century. Hugo Chávez challenged the system first by an failed coup and later by a successful election campaign. But Chávismo did not bring the “Bolivarian democracy” it had promised.

Compulsory Reading:

Corrales, Javier (2015). “Autocratic Legalism in Venezuela”, *Journal of Democracy* 26(2): 37-51.

Hawkins, Kirk (2016). “Responding to Radical Populism: Chavismo in Venezuela”, *Democratization* 23(2): 242-262.

04/04 – Senegal

Africa is seldom linked to democracy, or anything else considered positive for that matter, but democratization has impacted the region significantly too. But some of what was won in the late 20th century, is being lost in the early 21st century.

Compulsory Reading:

Kelly, Catherine Lena (2012). “Senegal: What Will Turnover Bring?”, *Journal of Democracy* 23(3): 121-131.

Samba Diallo, El Hadji and Catherine Lena Kelly, “Sufi Turuq and the Politics of Democratization in Senegal”, *Journal of Religious and Political Practice*, 2(2); 193-211.

04/09 – Zambia

One of the few African leaders who is consistently linked to populism is Michael Sata, who was president of Zambia for only three years, but has left an important legacy.

Compulsory Reading:

Fraser, Alastair (2017). “Post-Populism in Zambia: Michael Sata’s Rise, Demise and Legacy”, *International Political Science Review* 38(4): 456-472.

PART V – HOW DEMOCRACIES DIE

How Democracies Die is a direct response to Trump’s election to the US presidency. It became a New York Times bestseller and has been broadly debated in the national and international media. Drawing on their collective expertise on (de-)democratization in early-20th century Europe and late-20th century Latin America, Ziblatt and Levitsky look at how, in the past, democracies have died and what lessons the U.S. can draw from that.

04/11 – Lessons From the Past

Compulsory Reading:

How Democracies Die, introduction and ch.1

04/16 – The U.S. in the 20th Century

Compulsory Reading:

How Democracies Die, chs.2-3

04/18 – Subverting Democracy

Compulsory Reading:

How Democracies Die, ch.4

04/23 – The U.S. Institutional and Normative Framework

Compulsory Reading:

How Democracies Die, chs.5-6

04/25 – The (Trump) Challenge

Compulsory Reading:

How Democracies Die, chs.7-8

04/30 – Democracy in Crisis?

Compulsory Reading:

How Democracies Die, ch.9

How Democracies Die – PoP Symposium

Levitsky, Steven (2018). “Democratic Survival and Weakness,” *Journal of Democracy* 29(4): 102-113.