Democratic Erosion

Spring 2021

INTL 8300

Department of International Affairs
University of Georgia

Professor Megan Turnbull
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Class Meeting: Thursdays, 6:40pm-9:25pm, Room 117, 202 Herty Drive
Office Hours: by appointment via zoom

Course Description

It is often assumed that once a country achieves a certain level of economic and political development, democratic consolidation is permanent. A recent global trend of democratic backsliding has led political scientists to question this assumption. In this course we will explore the causes and consequences of democratic erosion in comparative and historical perspective.

This course aims to introduce you to some of the most important issues and debates surrounding democratic consolidation and erosion in political science. Readings have been selected to deepen your knowledge of specific cases while also building more general critical thinking and analytical skills that you will use to form your own understanding of democratic consolidation and erosion, and to present your views in both verbal and written formats.

Importantly, this course is not intended as a partisan critique of any particular American politician or political party. Nor is it focused on American politics. Rather, this is a comparative politics course that is designed to provide an opportunity for you to engage, critically and carefully, with the claims you have doubtlessly already heard about the state of democracy in the US and elsewhere; to evaluate whether those claims are valid; and, if they are, to consider strategies for mitigating the risk of democratic erosion here and abroad. Readings will address both empirical and normative questions, and will be gleaned from foundational and recent political science studies.

Readings & Course Material

With the exception of How Democracies Die (available for ~$13 on amazon), all readings will be accessible through eLearning Commons (eLC).
### REQUIREMENTS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>% of Final Grade</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Active and regular contributions to the class discussion</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion leader</td>
<td>2 classes</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>Research paper, critical literature review, or prospectus/pre-analysis plan</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>May 12</td>
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**Participation**

This is a graduate seminar, and everyone is expected to attend every class having done all of the readings and ready to actively participate by asking questions and offering critical reflections on the readings.

Because of the current COVID-19 pandemic, you are not required to attend class in person. You will not be penalized in any way for participating virtually for the entire semester. If you have any concerns about participation (such as a stable internet connection), please get in touch with me sooner rather than later.

If you would like to attend class in person, then please sign up for one of three groups and attend only on the days which your group is eligible to attend. We must rotate attendance because of physical distancing requirements. When in the classroom, please join over zoom as well, and mute and silence your computer except when you wish to speak. When on zoom, please have your cameras on. Everyone having their cameras on helps to facilitate discussion.

Finally, everyone must wear an adequate mask that covers their mouth and nose and maintain six feet of distance when attending class in person.

**Discussion Leader**

Everyone will sign up to be a discussion leader for two classes. Your responsibilities as discussion leader include a ~20 minute summary and critique of the week’s readings. You should think of this as a chance to set the agenda for the class discussion. Your introduction should address the main questions raised by the articles, and outline any additional questions, concerns, or issues that you would like to discuss with your classmates.

Discussion leaders will submit a 2-3 page memo (single-spaced) to me on the days that you lead discussion. It should address the main questions raised by the assigned readings, with a mind towards the theories that are presented and how these fit into larger literatures on the topic. How is the theory operationalized: how are variables measured, coded, or conceptualized? What is the
unit of analysis? How are alternative explanations addressed or accounted for? You should focus your critiques on the theoretical and empirical aspects of each paper, and strive to make constructive comments. Try to avoid criticizing a paper too harshly unless you can present a better way to address their research question. **Memos are due to me via email by 3pm on the day of class.**

**Final Paper**

For the final paper, you have the option of writing (1) an original research paper (broadly on democratic erosion) with the aim of submitting it to a peer-reviewed journal; (2) a critical overview and assessment of the democratic erosion literature, along the lines of a review that would appear in the *Annual Review of Political Science*; or (3) a prospectus or pre-analysis plan. We will discuss these options in greater detail in class.

**Office Hours**

Office hours are the time that professors specifically designate to meet with students for help with assignments, questions about the lecture or reading, answer questions, or just to chat. In other words, office hours are your time. You are encouraged to come to office hours with questions about the class, comparative politics, political science, or just to introduce yourself. Professor Clare Brock provides a more thorough description of office hours if you would like more information: [http://www.clarebrock.com/blog/office-hours](http://www.clarebrock.com/blog/office-hours)

**Assessment and Grading**

Grades are assigned on the following basis:

A: 93-100   A-: 90-92   B+: 87-89   B: 83-86   B-: 80-82   C+: 77-79

C: 73-76   C-: 70-72   D+: 67-69   D: 60-66   F: <60

**Class Recordings**

In the absence of written authorization from the UGA Disability Resource Center, students may not make a visual or audio recording of any aspect of this course or share any other material, including but not limited to readings, assignments, handouts, class activities, and emails. The syllabus is considered a public document, is available on SPIA’s website, and may be shared publicly.

There may be instances where the lecture portion of this course is recorded under Section 504 and Title II of the ADA ACT. Students who have a recording accommodation with the UGA Disability Resource Center agree in writing that they:

a) Will use the records only for personal academic use during the specific course;
b) Understand that faculty members have copyright interest in their class lectures and that they agree not to infringe on this right in any way;

c) Understand that the faculty member and students in the class have privacy rights and agree not to violate those rights by using recordings for any reason other than their own personal study;

d) Will not release, digitally upload, broadcast, transcribe, or otherwise share all or any part of the recordings. They also agree that they will not profit financially and will not allow others to benefit personally or financially from lecture recordings or other course materials;

e) Will erase/delete all recordings at the end of the semester; and

f) Understand that violation of these terms may subject them to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct or subject them to liability under copyright laws.

If you have questions or concerns about recordings under Section 504 and Title II of the ADA ACT, please contact the Director of the Disability Resource Center at eew@uga.edu.

**Students will lose a full letter grade on their final grade for each instance that they share course material outside of class or violate any of the above terms.**

**University Honor Code and Academic Honesty Policy**

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: https://honesty.uga.edu/Academic-Honesty-Policy/. 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.

**Mental Health and Wellness Resources**

If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit https://sco.uga.edu. They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services.

UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services (https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga) or crisis support (https://www.uhs.uga.edu/info/emergencies).

If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA (https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga) for a list of FREE workshops, classes,
mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center. Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.

**Course Schedule**

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

**Thursday, January 14:** Introduction (Group 1)
- We will go over the syllabus and plan for the upcoming semester

**Thursday, January 21:** Concepts – Political Regimes, Transitions, and Backsliding (Group 2)

**Thursday, January 28:** Definitions and theories of democracy and democratic transitions (Group 3)

**Thursday, February 4:** Definitions and theories of democratic erosion (Group 1)
- Waldner, David and Ellen Lust. 2018. “Unwelcoming Change: Coming to Terms with

Thursday, February 11: Using democratic institutions to undermine democracy (Group 2)

Thursday, February 18: Populism (Group 3)

Thursday, February 25: Information, communication, and accountability (Group 1)
Remaining readings TBD

Thursday, March 4: Disinformation and fake news (Group 2)
- Remaining readings TBD

Thursday, March 11: Final paper workshop (Group 3)
- No readings this week; we will start to workshop final papers

Thursday, March 18: Clientelism, corruption, and money in politics (Group 1)

Thursday, March 25: Polarization (Group 2)

Thursday, April 1: Scapegoating, paranoia, and exclusion (Group 3)
Thursday, April 8: No class, instructional break

Thursday, April 15: Civil society, resistance, and social movements (Group 1)


Thursday, April 22: Identity politics, democratization, and democratic erosion (Group 2)

- Remaining readings TBD

Thursday, April 29: Wrap up; no readings (Group 3)