

Democratic Backsliding

PLSC S361

Instructor: Milan Svolik, Elizabeth S. & A. Varick Stout Professor of Political Science

Class Meetings: TTh 1pm-4:15pm

Office Hours: TBD, 2-3pm in RKZ 330, and by appointment

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Course Description: This class examines the process of democratic backsliding, including its causes and consequences. Our analysis will build on prominent contemporary and historical cases of democratic backsliding, especially Hungary, Poland, Turkey, and Venezuela. Implications for democratic stability in the United States will be considered.

Assignments and Requirements: Students are required to attend weekly classes, read the assigned material, discuss assigned research articles, and complete class assignments. Most assignments will be brief case studies or quantitative analyses.

- Assignment 1: An analysis of a contemporary case of democratic backsliding (case study, 5 double-spaced pages max.)
 - Due Date: TBD
- Assignment 2: Analytical book review (analytical essay, 5 double-spaced pages max.)
 - Due Date: TBD
- Final project: a research paper on a topic approved by the instructor
 - Due Date: TBD

The final grade will be composed as follows: class participation (10%), a paragraph-per-reading summary of the readings assigned for each meeting (10%), assignments 1 and 2 (20% each), final research paper proposal (10%), final research paper (30%). Class participation includes serving as a discussion leader of an assigned/chosen article (and includes preparing a brief summary or slides shared with the rest of the class).

Course Outline:

1) Introduction

2) Democratic Backsliding: Patterns and Exemplars

- Chapter 4 in Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Crown.
- Two of the following:
 - Cheeseman, Nic. "How Zambia's long-stable democracy ended up in a political crisis in 2017." *Quartz*. July 7, 2017.
 - Faleiro, Sonia. "Absent Opposition, Modi Makes India His Hindu Nation." *The New York Review of Books*. July 29, 2019.

- Shifter, Michael. "Nicaragua Is Turning into a Real-Life House of Cards." *Foreign Policy*. September 5, 2016.
- McCarthy, Michael. "6 things you need to know about Venezuela's political and economic crisis." *The Washington Post*. May 18, 2016.
- Marcinkiewicz, Kamil and Mary Stegmaier. "Poland appears to be dismantling its own hard-won democracy." *The Washington Post*. July 21, 2017.

3) **Democratic Backsliding: Historical Parallels**

- Chapter 1 in Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Crown.
- Elster, Jon. 2018. "The Resistible Rise of Louis Bonaparte" in Cass R. Sunstein, Ed., *Can it Happen Here?* New York: Dey St.
- Cornell, Agnes, Møller, Jørgen, and Skaaning, Svend-Erik. 2017. "The Real Lessons of the Interwar Years." *Journal of Democracy*, 28(3):14–28

4) **Democracy and Dictatorship: Empirical Patterns**

- Chapter 2 in Przeworski, Adam. 2019. *Crises of Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Friedman, Thomas. 2009. "The First Law of Petropolitics." *Foreign Policy* 154: 28-36.

5) **Democracy and Dictatorship: Explanations**

- Przeworski, Adam. 1999. "Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A Defense" In *Democracy's Value*, edited by Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordón. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999
- Chapters 1-2 in Acemoglu, Daron and James A. Robinson. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.

6) **Democratic Backsliding: Concepts & Measurement**

- Dahl, Robert. 1972. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Chapter 1.
- Little, Andrew and Anne Meng. 2024. "Measuring Democratic Backsliding." *PS: Political Science & Politics*, plus one response article in the "Comment and Controversy" section at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ps-political-science-and-politics/firstview>

7) **Case Study: The United States**

- 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.
- Graham, Matthew 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* 114(2), 392-409.
- Arceneaux, Kevin and Rory Truex. 2023. "Donald Trump and the Lie." *Perspectives on Politics* 21(3): 863-879.

8) **Mechanisms: Civic Culture**

- Inglehart, Ronald and Welzel, Christian. 2010. "Changing mass priorities: The link between modernization and democracy." *Perspectives on Politics* 8(2): 551-567.
- Weingast, Barry. 1997. "The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law." *American Political Science Review* 91(2): 245-263.

9) **Mechanisms: Polarization**

- Svobik, Milan. 2019. "Polarization versus Democracy." *Journal of Democracy*.
- Finkel, Eli J. et al. 2020. "Political Sectarianism in America." *Science* 370(6516): 533-536
- Voelkel, Jan G, et al. 2023. "Interventions Reducing Affective Polarization Do Not Necessarily Improve Anti-democratic Attitudes. " *Nature Human Behavior* 7: 55-64.

10) **Mechanisms: Populism and the Far Right**

- Zerofsky, Elisabeth. "Victor Orbán's far-right vision for Europe." *The New Yorker*. January 14, 2019.
- Introduction and Chapter 1 from Müller, Jan-Werner. 2016. *What Is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Chapter 7 in Bartels, Larry. 2023. *Democracy Erodes from the Top*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

11) **Mechanisms: Defective Voters?**

- Chapters 1 in Achen and Bartels. 2016. *Democracy for Realists*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Krishnarajan, Suthan. 2023. "Rationalizing Democracy: The Perceptual Bias and (Un)Democratic Behavior." *American Political Science Review* 117(2): 474-496.
- Svobik, Milan. 2023. "Voting against Autocracy." *World Politics*.

12) **Mechanisms: Institutions**

- Chapter 5 in Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Crown.
- Ginsburg, Tom and Aziz Huq. 2018. "Democracy's "Near Misses"." *Journal of Democracy* 29(4): 16-30.
- Gandhi, Jennifer and Elvin Ong, "Committed or Conditional Democrats? Opposition Dynamics in Electoral Autocracies", *American Journal of Political Science* 63(4): 948-963.

13) **Book Reviews: Discussion**

14) **Interventions**

- Voelkel, Jan G, et al. 2023. "Megastudy Identifying Effective Interventions to Strengthen American's Democratic Attitudes"
- Chapters 4-5 in Hyde, Susan D. 2011. *The Pseudo-Democrat's Dilemma: Why Election Observation Became an International Norm*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.