

# PSCI 6356: The Rise and Fall of Democracy

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Office Hours: 4:00PM - 6:00PM Thursday

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## Course Description

This course examines and compares the major theories and empirical patterns in democratization and democratic backsliding in the 20th and early 21st centuries. Topics include sources of authoritarian and democratic fragility, connections between economic development and democratization, and competing elite and mass-based theories of both democratization and democratic breakdown. The class is particularly suitable for doctoral students interested in developing a research project related to democracy or to advanced master's students wishing to develop their research skills on a specific topic.

## Course Objectives

1. You will be familiar with the definitional and theoretical underpinnings of the study of democratization and democratic backsliding.
2. You will be conversant with state of the art literature on the origins, dynamics, and outcomes of democratization and democratic backsliding.
3. You will conduct an original piece of publication-worthy research on a topic related to democratization or democratic backsliding.

## Required Readings

All required readings for this course are available digitally through the UTD Library or will be made available on the Course eLearning page. While I do not require you to purchase any books for this course, here are a few foundational books that, if you are interested in further research on this topic, I highly recommend you get your own copies of:

- Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, MD: JHU Press, 1996).
- Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, MD: JHU Press, 1986).
- Adam Przeworski et al. *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*, vol. 3 (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

- Milan W. Svolik *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- Michael Coppedge et al. *Why Democracies Develop and Decline* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

You must complete the following *required* readings for each week before the week's class session. I recommend you go through the readings in the order they are given in the syllabus. For each topic I include an extensive set of recommended readings. These are intended primarily as resources for you to draw on in preparing your final research papers (See the Assignments and Evaluation section below), as well as resources for those of you who wish to conduct further research or gain a more in-depth understanding of these topics than is possible in a single class session. I do not recommend attempting to read all the recommended readings before each class.

**Important:** class readings are subject to change, contingent on mitigating circumstances and the progress we make as a class. I encourage you to attend lectures and always check the course eLearning page for the most updated version of the syllabus before you do the week's reading. I will always give you at least a week's notice for changes in the required readings.

Note that several of our readings are portions of books. Make sure that you have read the appropriate chapters of the books in question.

## Class Schedule and Format

This class is a discussion-based seminar. I will begin each class session with a few brief remarks introducing the topic and situating the week's readings in the larger literature. We will then spend the bulk of the class session in more open-ended discussion of both the general topic and the specific readings. Most class sessions we will spend the full class time in discussion as a full class, but I may sometimes break the class into small groups for specific discussion exercises.

I expect each of you to come to class with your own thoughts and questions on the topic and readings, and with sufficient mastery of the material to meaningfully engage with questions that I may pose to you as an individual or to the class as a whole. I may experiment with different strategies to ensure active discussion, such as going around the class and asking each student for their input on a particular question, or having a rotating list of students that I call on to answer questions each week.

### Week 01, 08/28: What is Democracy? Why does it Matter?

In this first class session we will discuss theories of democracy, debates over the definition of democracy, different forms of democracy, and some of the evidence on how democratic institutions matter for human flourishing.

#### Required Readings

- Robert Alan Dahl *On Democracy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).
  - Read Chapters 4, 5, and 8 in detail. Skim the remaining chapters in Part II and Part III.
- John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, and Jonas Berge "Does Democracy Matter?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 25, no. 1 (May 2022): 357–75, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-060820-06091>

#### Recommended Readings

- Daron Acemoglu et al. "Democracy Does Cause Growth," *Journal of Political Economy* 127, no. 1 (February 2019): 47–100, <https://doi.org/10.1086/700936>.
- Thomas J Bollyky et al. "The Relationships Between Democratic Experience, Adult Health, and Cause-Specific Mortality in 170 Countries Between 1980 and 2016: An Observational Analysis," *The Lancet* 393, no. 10181 (April 2019): 1628–40, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)30235-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30235-1).
- Lisa Disch "Toward a Mobilization Conception of Democratic Representation," *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 1 (February 2011): 100–114, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055410000602>.
- Hristos Doucouliagos and Mehmet Ali Ulubaolu "Democracy and Economic Growth: A Meta-Analysis," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 1 (2008): 61–83, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2007.00299.x>.
- Håvard Hegre "Democracy and Armed Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 2 (March 2014): 159–72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343313512852>.
- Carl Henrik Knutsen "A Business Case for Democracy: Regime Type, Growth, and Growth Volatility," *Democratization* 28, no. 8 (2021): 1505–24.
- Gerardo L. Munck "What Is Democracy? A Reconceptualization of the Quality of Democracy," *Democratization* 23, no. 1 (January 2016): 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.918104>.
- Carole Pateman "Participatory Democracy Revisited," *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 1 (2012): 7–19.
- Tove Ahlbom Persson and Marina Povitkina "'Gimme Shelter': The Role of Democracy and Institutional Quality in Disaster Preparedness," *Political Research Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (December 2017): 833–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912917716335>.
- Philippe C Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl "What Democracy Is. . . And Is Not," *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 3 (1991): 75–88, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1991.0033>.
- Nadia Urbinati "Representation as Advocacy: A Study of Democratic Deliberation," *Political Theory* 28, no. 6 (December 2000): 758–86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591700028006003>.
- Yi-ting Wang, Valeriya Mechkova, and Frida Andersson "Does Democracy Enhance Health? New Empirical Evidence 1900–2012," *Political Research Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (September 2019): 554–69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912918798506>.

## Week 02, 09/04: How do we know what we know about democracy? And how has democracy changed?

As with much of political science, the study of democracy comes with significant challenges of measurement and operationalization. The field has significantly advanced recently through the development of several comprehensive data sources, particularly the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project. In this class session we will discuss challenges with measuring democracy, introduce the V-Dem project (to which we will return throughout the semester), and discuss some of the trends in democracy over time.

### Required Readings

- Gerardo L. Munck and Jay Verkuilen "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices," *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 1 (February 2002): 5–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001041400203500101>.
- Michael Coppedge et al. *Varieties of Democracy: Measuring Two Centuries of Political Change* (Cambridge University Press Cambridge, 2020).
  - Read Chapter 2: "Conceptual Scheme" in depth. Skim chapter 3: "Data Collection"
- Coppedge et al. *Why Democracies Develop and Decline*.
  - Read Chapter 1 "V-Dem Reconsiders Democratization" and Chapter 2 "The Ups and Downs of Democracy: 1789 - 2018"

### Recommended Readings

- Shawn Treier and Simon Jackman "Democracy as a Latent Variable," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 1 (2008): 201–17.

- *Democratization Volume 26, Issue 1: Special Issue on Methodological Trends in Democratization Research*
  - Michael Coppedge and David Kuehn “Introduction: Absorbing the Four Methodological Disruptions in Democratization Research?” *Democratization* 26, no. 1 (January 2019): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1509851>.
  - Jason Seawright “Statistical Analysis of Democratization: A Constructive Critique,” *Democratization* 26, no. 1 (January 2019): 21–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1511540>.
  - Milan W. Svolik “Democracy as an Equilibrium: Rational Choice and Formal Political Theory in Democratization Research,” *Democratization* 26, no. 1 (January 2019): 40–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1506768>.
  - Matthijs Bogaards “Case-Based Research on Democratization,” *Democratization* 26, no. 1 (January 2019): 61–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1517255>.
  - Amel Ahmed “Multi-Methodology Research and Democratization Studies: Intellectual Bridges Among Islands of Specialization,” *Democratization* 26, no. 1 (January 2019): 97–139, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1517753>.
  - Lars Pelke and Paul and Friesen “Democratization Articles Dataset: An Introduction,” *Democratization* 26, no. 1 (January 2019): 140–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1504778>.

### Week 03, 09/11: How Dictatorships Work

The first step in understanding democratization is understanding the logic of authoritarian regimes. This class session will cover some core findings on how authoritarian regimes maintain themselves, as well as recent developments in the logic of authoritarian politics.

#### Required Readings

- Svolik *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*.
  - Read Chapter 1
- Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski “Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats,” *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 11 (November 2007): 1279–1301, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414007305817>.
- Erica Frantz and Andrea Kendall-Taylor “A Dictator’s Toolkit: Understanding How Co-optation Affects Repression in Autocracies,” *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 3 (May 2014): 332–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343313519808>.
- Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman “Informational Autocrats,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33, no. 4 (November 2019): 100–127, <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.33.4.100>.

#### Recommended Readings

- Erin Baggott Carter and Brett L. Carter “Propaganda and Protest in Autocracies,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65, no. 5 (May 2021): 919–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002720975090>.
- Jennifer Gandhi *Political Institutions Under Dictatorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511510090>.
- Scott Gehlbach, Konstantin Sonin, and Milan W. Svolik “Formal Models of Nondemocratic Politics,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 19, no. 1 (May 2016): 565–84, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-042114-014927>.
- Sheena Chestnut Greitens *Dictators and Their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).
- Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts “How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression,” *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 2 (2013): 326–43.
- Jean Lachapelle et al. “Social Revolution and Authoritarian Durability,” *World Politics* 72, no. 4 (October 2020): 557–600, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887120000106>.
- Anne Meng *Constraining Dictatorship* (Cambridge University Press Cambridge, 2020).
- Anne Meng “Ruling Parties in Authoritarian Regimes: Rethinking Institutional Strength,” *British Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 2 (2021): 526–40.

- Anne Meng, Jack Paine, and Robert Powell “Authoritarian Power Sharing: Concepts, Mechanisms, and Strategies,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 26, no. Volume 26, 2023 (June 2023): 153–73, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-052121-020406>.
- Lee Morgenbesser “The Menu of Autocratic Innovation,” *Democratization* 27, no. 6 (August 2020): 1053–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1746275>.
- Bryn Rosenfeld and Jeremy Wallace “Information Politics and Propaganda in Authoritarian Societies,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 27, no. Volume 27, 2024 (July 2024): 263–81, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041322-035951>.
- Xu Xu “To Repress or to Co-opt? Authoritarian Control in the Age of Digital Surveillance,” *American Journal of Political Science* 65, no. 2 (2021): 309–25, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12514>.

## Week 04, 09/18: Modernization Theory

One of the most-studied relationships in comparative politics is the correlation between economic development and democracy. This well-established correlation is the basis for “Modernization Theory,” a body of work arguing that democracy arises due to a combined set of socio-economic transformations that come with economic development. However, this relationship is still deeply contested. In this class session we will discuss foundational works of modernization theory and state of the art knowledge on the relationship between economic development and democracy.

### Required Readings

- Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi “Modernization: Theories and Facts,” *World Politics* 49, no. 2 (1997): 155–83.
- Daron Acemoglu et al. “Income and Democracy,” *American Economic Review* 98, no. 3 (2008): 808–42.
- Carles Boix “Democracy, Development, and the International System,” *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 4 (2011): 809–28.
- Coppedge et al. *Why Democracies Develop and Decline*.  
– Read Chapter 5: “Economic Determinants”

### Recommended Readings

- Ben Ansell and David Samuels “Inequality and Democratization: A Contractarian Approach,” *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no. 12 (2010): 1543–74.
- Robert J. Barro “Determinants of Democracy,” *Journal of Political Economy* 107, no. S6 (1999): S158–83.
- Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes “Endogenous Democratization,” *World Politics* 55, no. 4 (2003): 517–49.
- Troy Saghaug Broderstad “A Meta-Analysis of Income and Democracy,” *Democratization* 25, no. 2 (2018): 293–311.
- Yi Che et al. “The Impact of Income on Democracy Revisited,” *Journal of Comparative Economics*, Symposium in Honor of Thrainn Eggertson, 41, no. 1 (February 2013): 159–69, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jce.2012.05.006>.
- Stephen Haber and Victor Menaldo “Do Natural Resources Fuel Authoritarianism? A Reappraisal of the Resource Curse,” *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 1 (2011): 1–26.
- Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel “Changing Mass Priorities: The Link Between Modernization and Democracy,” *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 2 (2010): 551–67, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25698618>.
- Ryan Kennedy “The Contradiction of Modernization: A Conditional Model of Endogenous Democratization,” *The Journal of Politics* 72, no. 3 (2010): 785–98, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381610000162>.
- Seymour Martin Lipset “Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy,” *American Political Science Review* 53, no. 1 (1959): 69–105.
- Yu Liu, Yu-Sung Su, and Wenquan Wu “How Modernization Theory Has Stumbled in China: A Political Interception Perspective,” *Democratization* 30, no. 2 (February 2023): 302–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2022.2137793>.
- Przeworski et al. *Democracy and Development*.
- Michael L. Ross “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?” *World Politics* 53, no. 3 (2001): 325–61.



## Week 05, 09/25: Transitology

The “Transitology” school of democratization theory argues that, in contrast to modernization theory, that democratization can be best understood not as an outcome arising from structural factors such as economic development, but as a strategic sequence of processes characterized by significant uncertainty and elite bargaining. In this class session we will discuss these arguments, focusing on the seminal book *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*.

### Required Readings

- O'Donnell and Schmitter *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*.  
– Skim everything up to Chapter 3. Read the rest of the book more carefully (it's a short book, and very readable)
- Thomas Carothers “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (2002): 5–21.

### Recommended Readings

- John Higley and Michael G. Burton “The Elite Variable in Democratic Transitions and Breakdowns,” *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 1 (1989): 17–32, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095659>.
- Linz and Stepan *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*.
- Gerardo L. Munck “Democratic Theory After Transitions from Authoritarian Rule,” *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 2 (June 2011): 333–43, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592711000600>.
- Dankwart A. Rustow “Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics* 2, no. 3 (1970): 337–63.

## Week 06, 10/02: Protest, Resistance, and Democracy

One of the most robust predictors of democratization is the degree of nonviolent protest in a country. In this class session we discuss protest and nonviolent resistance as democratizing forces.

### Required Readings

- Mauricio Rivera Celestino and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch “Fresh Carnations or All Thorn, No Rose? Nonviolent Campaigns and Transitions in Autocracies,” *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (2013): 385–400.
- Felix S. Bethke and Jonathan Pinckney “Nonviolent Resistance and the Quality of Democracy,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 38, no. 5 (2021): 503–23.
- Omar Garcia-Ponce and Leonard Wantchekon “Critical Junctures: Independence Movements and Democracy in Africa,” *American Journal of Political Science* OnlineFirst (2023).
- Tiago Fernandes “Rethinking Pathways to Democracy: Civil Society in Portugal and Spain, 1960s–2000s,” *Democratization* 22, no. 6 (2015): 1074–104.

### Recommended Readings

- Markus Bayer, Felix S. Bethke, and Daniel Lambach “The Democratic Dividend of Nonviolent Resistance,” *Journal of Peace Research* 53, no. 6 (2016): 758–71.
- Dawn Brancati *Democracy Protests* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
- Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011).
- Coppedge et al. *Why Democracies Develop and Decline*.  
– Chapter 7: “Democracy and Social Forces”
- Sirianne Dahlum, Carl Henrik Knutsen, and Tore Wig “Who Revolts? Empirically Revisiting the Social Origins of Democracy,” *The Journal of Politics* 81, no. 4 (October 2019): 1494–99, <https://doi.org/10.1086/704699>.

- Sirianne Dahlum "Joining Forces: Social Coalitions and Democratic Revolutions," *Journal of Peace Research* 60, no. 1 (2023): 42–57.
- Donatella Della Porta *Mobilizing for Democracy: Comparing 1989 and 2011* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- Jalal Fetrati "Non-Violent Resistance Movements and Substantive Democracy," *Democratization* 30, no. 3 (April 2023): 378–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2022.2148159>.
- Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman *Dictators and Democrats: Masses, Elites, and Regime Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).
- Mohammad Ali Kadivar "Mass Mobilization and the Durability of New Democracies," *American Sociological Review* 83, no. 2 (2018): 390–417.
- Daniel Lambach et al. *Nonviolent Resistance and Democratic Consolidation* (Springer, 2020).
- Beatriz Magaloni "The Game of Electoral Fraud and the Ousting of Authoritarian Rule," *American Journal of Political Science* 54, no. 3 (2010): 751–65, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2010.00458.x>.
- Jonathan Pinckney *From Dissent to Democracy: The Promise and Perils of Civil Resistance Transitions* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020).
- Jonathan Pinckney, Charles Butcher, and Jessica Maves Braithwaite "Organizations, Resistance, and Democracy: How Civil Society Organizations Impact Democratization," *International Studies Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2022): 1–14.
- Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (New York, NY: Cambridge Polity, 1992).

## Week 07, 10/09: Diffusion and International Influences

Domestic democratization does not occur in an international vacuum, but is closely connected to dynamics in the international system. This class session will cover what we know about international influences on democratization, including diffusion effects, democracy assistance, and great power politics.

### Required Readings

- Jon CW Pevehouse and Caileigh Glenn "International Dimensions of Democratization," *World Politics* 77, no. 1 (2025): 137–50.
- Coppedge et al. *Why Democracies Develop and Decline*.  
– Read Chapter 4: "International Influence: The Hidden Dimension"
- Sebastian Ziaja "More Donors, More Democracy," *The Journal of Politics* 82, no. 2 (April 2020): 433–47, <https://doi.org/10.1086/706111>.

### Recommended Readings

- Cassandra Birchler, Sophia Limpach, and Katharina Michaelowa "Aid Modalities Matter: The Impact of Different World Bank and IMF Programs on Democratization in Developing Countries," *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2016): 427–39.
- Alexander B. Downes and Jonathan Monten "Forced to Be Free? Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Rarely Leads to Democratization," *International Security* 37, no. 4 (2013): 90–131.
- Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Michael D. Ward "Diffusion and the International Context of Democratization," *International Organization* 60, no. 4 (2006): 911–33.
- Edward Goldring and Sheena Chestnut Greitens "Rethinking Democratic Diffusion: Bringing Regime Type Back In," *Comparative Political Studies* 53, no. 2 (February 2020): 319–53, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414019852701>.
- Seva Gunitsky "From Shocks to Waves: Hegemonic Transitions and Democratization in the Twentieth Century," *International Organization* 68, no. 3 (2014/ed): 561–97, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818314000113>.
- Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- Michael K. Miller "Democracy by Example? Why Democracy Spreads When the World's Democracies Prosper," *Comparative Politics* 49, no. 1 (2016): 83–116.
- Jonathan Pinckney and John Joseph Chin "Activists Against Autocrats: TSMO Networks and Democratic Diffusion," *Frontiers in Political Science* 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.705223>.

- Janina Isabel Steinert and Sonja Grimm “Too Good To Be True? United Nations Peacebuilding and the Democratization of War-Torn States,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 32, no. 5 (2015): 513–35.

### Week 08, 10/16: Research Proposal Workshop

In this class session each student will present and receive feedback on their research proposals. No readings are due.

### Week 09, 10/23: What is Democratic Backsliding?

Until the early 2000s, much of the literature on democracy assumed that, after a certain amount of time and economic development, democracies “consolidated” and were no longer vulnerable to reverting to authoritarianism. More recently, many scholars have identified a global wave of “democratic backsliding.” In this class session we discuss the definition of democratic backsliding, global trends in democratic backsliding, and the debate over whether democratic backsliding is actually happening on a global level.

#### Required Readings

- Nancy Bermeo “On Democratic Backsliding,” *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 1 (2016): 5–19, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0012>.
- Anna Lührmann and Staffan I. Lindberg “A Third Wave of Autocratization Is Here: What Is New about It?” *Democratization* 26, no. 7 (2019): 1095–1113.
- Andrew T. Little and Anne Meng “Measuring Democratic Backsliding,” *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 2024, 1–13.
- Daniel Treisman “How Great Is the Current Danger to Democracy? Assessing the Risk With Historical Data,” *Comparative Political Studies*, April 2023, 00104140231168363, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140231168363>.

#### Recommended Readings

- Susan D. Hyde “Democracy’s Backsliding in the International Environment,” *Science* 369, no. 6508 (September 2020): 1192–96, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abb2434>.
- David Waldner and Ellen Lust “Unwelcome Change: Coming to Terms with Democratic Backsliding,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 21 (2018): 93–113.

### Week 10, 10/30: Why does Democratic Backsliding Happen?

In this class session we focus on the causes of democratic backsliding, particularly economic inequality and pernicious polarization.

#### Required Readings

- Eli G. Rau and Susan Stokes “Income Inequality and the Erosion of Democracy in the Twenty-First Century,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 122, no. 1 (January 2025): e2422543121, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2422543121>.
- Thomas Carothers and Brendan Hartnett “Misunderstanding Democratic Backsliding,” *Journal of Democracy* 35, no. 3 (July 2024): 24–37, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2024.a930425>.
- Matthew H. Graham and Milan W. Svobik “Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States,” *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 2 (2020): 392–409.



- Yunus Emre Orhan “The Relationship Between Affective Polarization and Democratic Backsliding: Comparative Evidence,” *Democratization* 29, no. 4 (May 2022): 714–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.2008912>.

### Recommended Readings

- Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman “Inequality and Regime Change: Democratic Transitions and the Stability of Democratic Rule,” *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 3 (2012): 495–516.
- Milan W. Svolik “Authoritarian Reversals and Democratic Consolidation,” *American Political Science Review* 102, no. 2 (2008): 153–68.

### Week 11, 11/06: How does Democratic Backsliding Happen?

In this class we discuss the specific strategies that would-be autocrats employ to bring about democratic backsliding.

### Required Readings

- Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt *How Democracies Die* (New York, NY: Crown, 2019).  
– Read Chapter 4 “Subverting Democracy” and Chapter 5 “The Guardrails of Democracy”
- Rachel Beatty Riedl et al. “Pathways of Democratic Backsliding, Resistance, and (Partial) Recoveries,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 712, no. 1 (March 2024): 8–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027162251319909>.
- Suthan Krishnarajan “Rationalizing Democracy: The Perceptual Bias and (Un)Democratic Behavior,” *American Political Science Review* 117, no. 2 (May 2023): 474–96, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422000806>.

### Recommended Readings

- Larry M. Bartels *Democracy Erodes from the Top: Leaders, Citizens, and the Challenge of Populism in Europe*, vol. 41 (Princeton University Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2z861sx>.
- Caterina Chiopris, Monika Nalepa, and Georg Vanberg “A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing: Citizen Uncertainty and Democratic Backsliding,” *The Journal of Politics*, December 2024, 000–000, <https://doi.org/10.1086/734253>.
- Edoardo Grillo and Carlo Prato “Reference Points and Democratic Backsliding,” *American Journal of Political Science* 67, no. 1 (January 2023): 71–88, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12672>.
- Robert R. Kaufman and Stephan Haggard “Democratic Decline in the United States: What Can We Learn from Middle-Income Backsliding?” *Perspectives on Politics* 17, no. 2 (June 2019): 417–32, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592718003377>.
- Zhaotian Luo and Adam Przeworski “Democracy and Its Vulnerabilities: Dynamics of Democratic Backsliding,” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 18 (2023): 105–30.
- Luca Tomini *When Democracies Collapse: Assessing Transitions to Non-Democratic Regimes in the Contemporary World* (London: Routledge, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315189888>.

### Week 12, 11/13: How can Democratic Backsliding be Repaired?

How can countries come back from democratic backsliding and restore high-quality democratic institutions? In this class session we will discuss a variety of institutional, political, and civic strategies for repairing democratic backsliding.

### Required Readings

- Melis G. Laebens and Anna Lührmann “What Halts Democratic Erosion? The Changing Role of Accountability,” *Democratization* 28, no. 5 (July 2021): 908–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1897109>.
- Anna Lührmann “Disrupting the Autocratization Sequence: Towards Democratic Resilience,” *Democratization* 28, no. 5 (July 2021): 1017–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1928080>.
- Luca Tomini, Suzan Gibril, and Venelin Bochev “Standing up Against Autocratization Across Political Regimes: A Comparative Analysis of Resistance Actors and Strategies,” *Democratization* 30, no. 1 (January 2023): 119–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2022.2115480>.
- Alia Braley et al. “Why Voters Who Value Democracy Participate in Democratic Backsliding,” *Nature Human Behaviour*, May 2023, 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-023-01594-w>.

### Recommended Readings

- Assaf S. Bondy “Workers for Democracy? Trade Unions and the Struggle Against Democratic Backsliding,” *Democratization*, May 2025, 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2025.2507359>.
- Matthew R. Cleary and Aykut Öztürk “When Does Backsliding Lead to Breakdown? Uncertainty and Opposition Strategies in Democracies at Risk,” *Perspectives on Politics* 20, no. 1 (2022): 205–21.
- Marcus André Melo and Carlos Pereira “Why Didn’t Brazilian Democracy Die?” *Latin American Politics and Society* 66, no. 4 (November 2024): 133–52, <https://doi.org/10.1017/lap.2024.4>.
- Jonathan Pinckney and Claire Trilling “Breaking Down Pillars of Support for Democratic Backsliding,” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2025): 171–88.

### Week 13, 11/20: Presentations

In this class session students will present their research papers and receive feedback from their discussants. No readings are due.

### Week 14, 11/27: Fall Break

### Week 15, 12/04: Course Wrap-Up - The Future of Democracy

What does the future of democracy look like? In this class session we will sum up everything we have learned over the course of the semester with a discussion of where democracy around the world is headed in the 21st century.

### Required Readings

- Christian Welzel “Why The Future Is Democratic,” *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 2 (2021): 132–44.
- Roberto Stefan Foa, Yascha Mounk, and Andrew Klassen “Why the Future Cannot Be Predicted,” *Journal of Democracy* 33, no. 1 (2022): 147–55.
- Aviv Ovadya “Reimagining Democracy for AI,” *Journal of Democracy* 34, no. 4 (October 2023): 162–70, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2023.a907697>.

### Recommended Readings

- Jack A. Goldstone and Larry Diamond “Demography and the Future of Democracy,” *Perspectives on Politics* 18, no. 3 (September 2020): 867–80, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592719005000>.
- Richard Wike “Why the World Is Down on Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 36, no. 1 (2025): 93–108.

## Assignments and Evaluation

Your primary assignment for this course is to create a piece of publishable original research. Over the course of the semester during class sessions we will discuss research questions, designs, and

results. You will research and write a paper, and present the paper to the class at the end of the semester.

Papers may either be single-authored or co-authored between two students. I encourage co-authorship! It's one of the great pleasures of academic work. If papers are co-authored, both co-authors will receive the same grade on the research proposal, presentation, and final paper.

- **Attendance:** You are required to attend all class sessions. Any absences for health, family, professional or other reasons must be approved by me *before* the class session in question. You may have up to two unexcused absences with no grade penalty. Any additional unexcused absences will result in a 1% penalty on your final grade per absence.
- **In-Class Participation (20%):** This is a graduate seminar and thus, I have high expectations for your active participation in all class sessions. Effective participation is a matter of quality, not just quantity. You should come to each class session having done the reading, thought carefully about it, taken notes on it, and have questions for the class to discuss. To ensure a robust discussion if necessary I may call on students to answer questions on the readings. You should be prepared to answer questions if called upon.
- **Research Proposal (15%)** In our class session on **October 16th** we will workshop your research paper ideas so that you can begin working on your paper. Thus, before this class you will prepare and submit on eLearning a research proposal that outlines your research question, brief summary of relevant literature, your initial hypotheses, and ideas on how you will test those hypotheses. You will be graded both on the proposal submitted on eLearning and your engagement in discussion of your research proposal in class.
- **Final Presentation (15%):** In our class session on **November 20th** students will give a 7-10 minute presentation of their research project. We will conduct these presentations in the style of an academic conference panel, with five papers presented and then discussant comments given. Depending on the number of co-authored papers, we may need to schedule some presentations for the week prior (**November 13th**). If this turns out to be necessary, any students who volunteer to present early will receive two points of extra credit on this assignment.
- **Discussant Comments (10%):** During our final presentation session, each student will be responsible for acting as a [discussant](#) for one of the other presentations. As a discussant you will provide both verbal and written feedback to the student whose paper you are discussing. I will evaluate discussant comments based on the degree to which they show meaningful engagement with the other student's work, and the helpfulness and insightfulness of the comments. Discussants will give their verbal feedback during our final presentations on **November 20th**. Written comments will be due no later than the following day.
- **Final Paper (40%):** An original piece of research on a topic related to democratization or democratic backsliding, of roughly 8,000 to 11,000 words (inclusive of references). Outstanding papers will address a novel research question, engage with relevant literature, have a cogent and consistent theory that generates testable hypotheses, and carry out a research design that tests those hypotheses. Outstanding papers should be ready for submission to an academic journal with minimal revisions after the end of the semester. Complete drafts of your paper are due no later than **November 13th** to give your peer discussant time to read

your paper and formulate their feedback prior to our final presentations. Final drafts will be due no later than our last day of class on **December 4th**.

## Course Policies

I encourage all students to briefly review the complete list of UT Dallas's standard course policies [here](#). I highlight a few particularly important course policies below.

### Grading Scale and Policies

I do not grade on a curve. Each student's work will be evaluated independently. It is possible for every student in the class to get an A. However, getting such high marks will require hard work. Here is how grades should be interpreted, as well as how a letter grade translates to a 0-100 numeric scale.

Letter Grade	Numeric Scale	Description
<b>A</b>	94 and above	The student performed far beyond my expectations, displaying a grasp of the analytical and empirical material as well as creativity or insight beyond the material.
<b>A-</b>	90-93	I was impressed by the student's performance. The student has strong analytical, theoretical, and empirical skills.
<b>B+</b>	87-89	The student met all my expectations in the course.
<b>B</b>	84-86	The student met most expectations, but demonstrated weakness in either analytical or empirical skills.
<b>B-</b>	80-83	The student demonstrated weakness in analytical and empirical skills, but clearly attempted to prepare for assignments.
<b>C</b>	70-79	The student demonstrated disregard for the course requirements.
<b>D</b>	60-69	The student demonstrated negligence or disrespect in their assignments.
<b>F</b>	Less Than 60	The student violated a class policy, did not attend class, or did not perform to a level that I knew they were attending.

If a student wishes to dispute their grade on an assignment they must contact me within 48 hours of receiving their grade and set an appointment to discuss it. At this appointment they must bring a typed summary of the reasons why they believe the grade is unfair. I will then reevaluate the assignment based on these reasons. All revised grades are final, and they may be lower than the original grade.

All assignments must be turned in by the due date on the syllabus. An assignment turned in late at all will receive an automatic half-letter grade point deduction. Assignments turned in more than three days late may receive heavier penalties, at my discretion.

### Policy on Academic Integrity and Large Language Models

I expect students to behave with honor, honesty, and integrity when it comes to both their behavior in class and their course assignments, and to not engage in any form of academic dishonesty

(plagiarism including self-plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, or collusion). Suspected incidences of academic dishonesty will receive discipline following the procedures and potential penalties laid out in the Student Code of Conduct.

Highly skilled large language models such as ChatGPT are a particular challenge for academic integrity, and one where academic norms are still developing. In this class, you can think of the use of ChatGPT or other LLMs, how it relates to academic integrity, and how it will affect your grades in the following three categories: encouraged uses that have no impact (or possibly raise) on your grade, discouraged uses that will lower your grade, and prohibited uses that will result in a failing grade since they constitute academic dishonesty. Uses that are limited to improving technical aspects of your writing or analysis are acceptable/encouraged. Uses that ask the LLM to direct you on key parts of the research process are discouraged and will likely lower your grade. Uses that have the LLM actually conduct the research or writing constitute academic dishonesty and, if discovered, will result in you getting a failing grade. The table below summarizes a few common LLM use cases and where they fall in this framework

Status	Examples
<b>Encouraged</b>	Checking something you already wrote for spelling mistakes or to improve grammar or syntax
	Answering technical coding or analysis questions
<b>Discouraged</b>	Suggesting research questions
	Suggesting academic literature to cite in your paper
	Suggesting new methods of analysis
	Summarizing required readings that you have not read
<b>Prohibited</b>	Writing sections of your paper (or the whole paper)
	Conducting actual analysis

### Accommodation for Disability

The University of Texas at Dallas is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. The syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. If you are seeking classroom accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (2008), you are required to register with the Office of Student Accessibility, located in the Administration Building, Suite 2.224. Their phone number is 972-883-2098, email: [studentaccess@utdallas.edu](mailto:studentaccess@utdallas.edu) and website is [here](#). To receive academic accommodations for this class, please obtain the proper Office of Student Accessibility letter of accommodation and meet with me at the beginning of the semester.