

Challenges for Developing Democracies

Political Science

Fall 2025

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Why do many new democracies suffer from poor governance and weak accountability? What are the central challenges facing developing democracies from South Asia to Latin America to sub-Saharan Africa? Since World War II, the number of electoral democracies has increased dramatically with many new democracies being established in poorer, non-western countries with different histories of institutional and economic development than was the case with the first wave of democratization in Europe. The challenges (amid substantial progress and some backsliding) of these cases reminds us of the difficulties of providing accountable democratic governance in countries where state and political institutions can be weak, corruption can be rampant, and inequalities in wealth and information pose challenges for voters to hold their governments accountable.

This course examines the challenges developing democracies face to provide good governance to their people and considers strategies for addressing these problems. We will also contrast politics and political accountability in these contexts with those in our own country. We begin the course considering the consequences of weak electoral, party, and state institutions. Then we move onto implications of weak institutions on outcomes including corruption, political manipulation of public policy, ethnic conflict, and democratic accountability. After spending a

week diagnosing these problems (or challenges) and examining them in particular countries, we examine research on policies and social changes that address these problems in the subsequent week.

The goals of the course are as follows. First, the course is designed to encourage students to think critically about the course's overarching questions. The reading assignments are not particularly heavy, but students will be expected to have reflected carefully on all required readings and on the broad themes and applications they introduce. Second, the organization of the course—alternating between diagnosing problems and solutions—is designed to push students to think about how a conceptual understanding of the “challenges” we discuss can be employed to critically assess plausible policy solutions. Third, students will learn to connect theory to country cases through presentations that cover a course theme with attention to one country. By the end of the course, students will not only develop a vocabulary for understanding the range of difficult challenges for good governance in developing democracies but will be able to participate in debates over how to address them. Intended outcomes are provided below.

Goals/Objectives of the Course (intended outcomes):

1. Students will come to understand major debates underlying comparative politics.
2. Students will engage in effective written expression.
3. Students will learn about the politics of different cultures across the globe.
4. Students will learn to analyze complex political phenomena through careful engagement with theory and evidence

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your final grade will be based on the following components:

20% - Class Participation. Since this is a seminar course, attendance is obligatory. An active role in discussions and class activities by everyone enrolled in the course is expected, as is the completion of required readings before the class session for which they are assigned. Each student is permitted one unexcused absence (i.e. without a written note from a doctor or a dean). Additional unexcused absences will affect the participation grade.

5% - Progress in the News. You will be asked to search for news that documents efforts to improve governance/democracy/ethnic reconciliation, etc. in a particular country. You will present your news (related to a particular class theme) in class and post your articles on sakai. In your short (2-3 minutes) presentation, be sure to explain not only what progress you have found but why it represents progress and how you define progress on that issue. Class sessions for this assignment will be assigned in Week 2.

15% - Country Case Study Presentations –Each student will complete a presentation that applies a class session theme to a country case. The presentation should last 10 minutes and include slides in power point or another presentation program. I will ask you to propose a country and a ranking of preferences for three class session by email before the third week's session. You may choose any class session from sessions 8 to 26. Email me a specific research question and one theory that you think addresses the research question no less than 2 weeks before the date of your presentation. All students should discuss the presentation with me in office hours no later than one week before the presentation. That means you will need to read ahead for your assigned topic.

The goal of the presentation is to get you to think about the theoretical arguments addressed in a class session and to apply this to a country case. All presentations should address one argument from a required (or a relevant outside) reading that explains an issue we address that week; and apply that argument through a case study. Presentations will be graded on their ability to connect a political science argument to the real-world case study and issue you choose.

25% - Take-Home Midterm. Students will be required to write a take-home midterm consisting of a short answer section and longer essay (7-8 pages) section.

35% - Take-Home Final. Students will be required to write a take-home midterm consisting of a short answer section and longer essay (8 pages) section. Students interested completing a research paper as an alternative to the final may do so pending approval of a 1-2 page paper proposal and timeline by the instructor.

Classroom Etiquette

To make sure that we have a hospitable learning environment, I ask students to follow three simple rules:

- 1) Arrive on time
- 2) Turn your cell phones off when you enter the class room
- 3) Unless you are speaking in groups about readings, close your laptops in class. This will help everyone focus on class discussion.
- 4) Respect your classmates. Debate is welcome but disagree respectfully by engaging ideas rather getting personal.
- 5) Coffee/beverages are fine but food is not permitted in class since it can distract your classmates.

Warning on Plagiarism and Cheating

As goes without saying, it will not be possible to pass this course if I find any evidence of plagiarism/cheating of any kind for any assignment. At minimum, this will result in a zero for that assignment and will be referred to the Dean without exceptions. If you do the work each week, and think a lot about the material, you'll do fine.

READINGS

All required readings are available online and can be downloaded from sakai. Recommended articles are optional based on your interest and may be useful for presentations. This course requires you to carefully read all required readings before class and be prepared to discuss them. Generally, two articles or book chapters are assigned for each class with occasional media pieces to illustrate course concepts.

Make sure you not only understand the basic argument of each reading, but also give yourself time to think critically about each reading before class so you will be prepared to participate in discussion. I encourage you to complete the reading worksheet provided at the end of this syllabus for each reading to make your work more efficient and intellectually active. I'll post discussion questions on the sakai to guide your reading as well.

Books

Przeworski, Adam. *Crises of democracy*. Cambridge University Press, 2019.

TOPICS AND READING LISTS

PART I: INSTITUTIONS AND CHANGE

Session 1: Course Introduction

Session 2: What is Democracy

Schmitter, Philippe C, and Terry Lynn Karl. "What Democracy Is. . . and Is Not." *Journal of democracy*. 2.3 (1991): 75–88.

Zakaria, Fareed. 1997. "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy." *Foreign Affairs*. November/December: 22-43.

Session 3: What Makes Democracy Survive?

Levitsky, Stephen. and Way, Lucian. 2023. "Democracy's Surprising Resilience." *Journal of democracy*, 34(4) 5-20.

Varshney, Ashutosh. 1998. "Why Democracy Survives." *Journal of Democracy*, 9(3), 36-50.

Berman, Sheri. 2019. *Democracy and Dictatorship in Europe: From the Ancien Régime to the present day*. Oxford University Press. Chapter 10 ("English Exceptionalism II").

Session 4: State Building

Tilly, Charles. 1985. "War-Making and State-Making as Organized Crime." In Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Eds). *Bringing the State Back In*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Herbst, Jeffrey. 2014. *States and Power in Africa: Comparative lessons in authority and control*. Princeton University Press. Chapters 1 and 5.

Session 5: State Capacity and Change

Kapur, Devesh. 2020. "Why Does the Indian State Both Fail and Succeed?." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 34 (1) 31-54.

Suryanarayan, Pavithra. 2024. "Endogenous State Capacity." *Annual Review of Political Science* 27.

Session 6: Why Do Political Parties Matter ?

Heller, Patrick. 2023. "Parties, Civil Society and Democratic Deepening: Comparing India, Brazil and South Africa." *Studies in Indian Politics* 11 (1) 10-26.

Keefer, Philip, and Stuti Khemani. 2004. "Why do the poor receive poor services?." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 935-943.

Session 7: Ethnic and Partisan Polarization

Klein, Ezra. 2020. *Why We're Polarized*. Simon & Schuster, Inc. Selection.

Ferree, Karen. 2006. "Explaining South Africa's racial census." *The Journal of Politics* 68 (4) 803-815.

Session 8: Party-Building in Developing Countries

LeBas, Adrienne. 2013. *From Protest to Parties: Party-building and democratization in Africa*. OUP Oxford. Selection.

Samuels, David. 2009. "From Socialism to Social Democracy: Party organization and the transformation of the workers' party in Brazil." *Comparative Political Studies*, 37 (9) 999-1024.

PART 2: CHALLENGES AND CHANGE

Session 9: Economic Inequality and Democracy I

Hoffman, Kelly, and Miguel Angel Centeno. 2003. "The Lopsided Continent: Inequality in Latin America." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29 (1) 363-390.

Page, Benjamin I., and Martin Gilens. 2020. *Democracy in America?: What has gone wrong and what we can do about it*. University of Chicago Press. Chapter 2.

Fisher, Max and Amanda Taub 2017. "The Social Contract Is Broken': Inequality Becomes Deadly in Mexico." *New York Times*
Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/30/world/americas/mexico-inequality-violence-security.html?_r=0

Watch: The Gilded Age | Full Documentary | AMERICAN EXPERIENCE | PBS:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjpYzFtxfjU&t=12s>

Session 10: Economic Inequality and Democracy II: Technology and Inequality

Johnson, Simon, and Daron Acemoglu. 2023. *Power and Progress: Our thousand-year struggle over technology and prosperity*. Hachette UK. Chapters 6,8,9.

Watch: AI & Inequality | Daron Acemoglu: [Big Tech poses risks as AI reshapes society](#).

Session 11: Reducing Inequality I: War and Economic Development

Kuran, Timur. 2017. "What Kills Inequality: Redistribution's Violent History." *Foreign Affairs*.

Scheidel, Walter. 2019. "[Inequality: Total War and a Great Leveler](#)." *Vox*.

Ravallion, Martin. 2009. "A Comparative Perspective on Poverty Reduction in Brazil, China and India". World Bank Policy Research Working Paper Series.

Session 12: Paths Toward Equality II: Anti-Poverty Programs

Valencia Lomelí, Enrique. 2008. "Conditional Cash Transfers as Social Policy in Latin America: An assessment of their contributions and limitations." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34: 475-499.

Hoynes, Hilary, and Jesse Rothstein. 2019. "Universal basic income in the United States and advanced countries." *Annual Review of Economics* 11 (1) 929-958.

Alesina, Alberto, and Edward Glaeser. 2004. *Fighting Poverty in the US and Europe: A World of Difference*. New York: Oxford University Press: Chapter 6.

MIDTERM DUE AT THE START OF CLASS

Session 13: Subsidized Public Services: Education and Healthcare

Krishna, Anirudh. 2017. *Broken Ladders*. Introduction

Education Reading TBD.

Session 14: Understanding Corruption

Olken, Benjamin A., and Rohini Pande. 2012. "Corruption in Developing Countries." *Annual Review of Economics* 4 (1): 479–509.

Vaishnav, Milan. 2017. *When Crime Pays*. Yale University Press, Chapter 2 ("The Rents Raj").

Bertrand, Marianne, Simeon Djankov, Rema Hanna, and Sendil Mullainathan. 2008. "Corruption in Driving Licensing Process in Delhi." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 71-76.

Session 15: Fighting Corruption: Low-Hanging Fruit

Olken, Benjamin. 2005. "Monitoring Corruption: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Indonesia." *Journal of Political Economy*, 115 (2), 200-249.

Bussell, Jennifer. 2012. *Corruption and Reform in India: Public Services in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press): "Chapter 8: Do Reforms Affect the Quality of Services?"

Session 16: Fighting Corruption: Institutional Reform

Collier, Paul. 2000. 'How to Reduce Corruption', *African Development Review*, 12 (2) 191–205.

Session 17: Democratic Backsliding I

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

Read one of the cases below:

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

India: Varshney, A., 2022. How India's Ruling Party Erodes Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 33(4), pp.104-118.

Hungary: Bogaards, Matthijs. 2018. "De-Democratization in Hungary: Diffusely defective democracy." *Democratization* 25 (8) 1481-1499.

Session 18: Polarization and Democratic Backsliding

Chandra, Kanchan. 2005. "Ethnic Parties and Democratic Stability." *Perspectives on Politics*, 3 (2) 235-252 [Focus on her discussion of the out-bidding model in the first half of the article].

Ahlquist, J.S., Ichino, N., Wittenberg, J. and Ziblatt, D., 2018. How do voters perceive changes to the rules of the game? Evidence from the 2014 Hungarian elections. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 46(4), pp.906-919.

Session 19: Democracy and Resilience in the U.S.

In-Class Debate: Is the U.S. Safe from Democratic Backsliding?

Mickey, Robert, Steven Levitsky, and Lucan Ahmad Way. 2017. "Is America Still Safe for Democracy: Why the United States is in danger of backsliding." *Foreign Affairs*.

Post-Civil War U.S.: Mickey, Rob. Paths Out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944-1972. Chapter 2.

Schedler, Andreas. 2019. "The breaching experiment. Donald Trump and the normative foundations of democracy." *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* 13, no. 4 (2019): 433-460.

Session 20: When Has Democratic Backsliding Been Resisted or Reversed?

Center for American Progress. "[Poland's Democratic Resurgence: From Backsliding to Beacon.](#)"

Session 21: Ethnic Violence

Wilkinson, Steven. 2002. "Putting Gujarat in Perspective." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1579-1583.

Kaufman, Stuart J. 1996. "Spiraling to Ethnic War: Elites, masses, and Moscow in Moldova's civil war." *International Security*, 21(2) 108-138.

Session 22: Building Ethnic Peace: Institutional Change

Lijphart, Arend. 2004. "Constitutional Design for Divided Societies." *Journal of Democracy*, 15 (2): 96-109.

Dekmejian, Richard Hrair. 1978. "Consociational Democracy in Crisis: the case of Lebanon." *Comparative Politics* 10(2) 251-265.

Reading TBA.

Session 24: Climate Change and Its Effects on Marginalized Populations

Readings TBA.

Session 25: Addressing Climate Change

Readings TBA.

FINAL EXAM HANDED OUT**Session 26: Make-Up Placeholder or Session Topic to be Selected by Class****Session 27: Improving Governance: Information and Accountabilitys**

Lieberman, Evan, Daniel Posner, and Lily Tsai. 2013. "Does Information Lead to More Active Citizenship? Evidence from an Education Intervention in Rural Kenya." *MIT Manuscript*.

Björkman, Martina, and Jakob Svensson. 2009. "Power to the People: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment on Community-Based Monitoring in Uganda." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 124 (2) 735-769.

Session 28: Conclusion and Review (12/6)

Reading Skills:

As you manage the reading for this and other graduate courses, you are likely to find, if you have not already, that there is no correlation between effort and outcome. It is entirely possible to spend several hours reading something without “getting it.” And it is equally possible to spend less than a half-hour reading something else and getting to the heart of the argument. You will have to devise for yourselves ways to read efficiently. These are some devices that may help:

1. Figure out what the heart of an argument is before you read deeply: skim, read the abstracts, the jacket blurbs, often short reviews published elsewhere. When you know where the center of gravity is, you read more efficiently.
2. Read actively: do not simply soak up the reading for what the author wants to tell you, but approach it with questions, and try to answer them for yourself as you make your way through.
3. Use other peoples’ skills: you do not have to do all the work yourself. It is not “cheating” if you talk through the argument with someone else before or after you delve in, or look at reviews for explication, or form reading groups where you can discuss the argument with each other.
4. Write in order to read. The response papers for this class and the (non-graded) worksheet attached should help.
5. Use diagrams if necessary: often, the structure of an argument can be most clearly expressed if you “draw” it, using arrows and lines, than by trying to understand it in words.
6. Organize your notes in a way that makes retention and information retrieval possible: you could use index cards, annotated bibliographies, database programmes like Filemaker Pro etc. These rules may be obvious to some and not to others. Basically do whatever works for you. But be self-conscious about the reading process as a skill that has to be learned and not necessarily as an ability that either comes naturally or does not.

Reading Worksheet

For each book, chapter, or article assigned in this course, you should fill out the following (non-graded) worksheet. Many of these points can be addressed in a sentence or two (e.g. Questions 1 and 2; in some cases answers will not need even to be full sentences (e.g., Question); and in some cases the answers may overlap. These worksheets should be retained: they will be useful for future reference.

1. State the central question that the reading addresses.
2. State the central argument(s) defended in the paper in response to this question.
3. What type of reasoning or evidence is used to support these arguments? If it is an analytical paper, what is the logic that undergirds the argument? If an empirical paper, what type of data is employed? Are there other data sources that you think might be more appropriate?
4. Do you find the claims of the reading convincing? What do you see as the main gaps that need to be filled?
5. Why (if at all) is the reading interesting?
6. Do you agree with the main claims? What are your hesitations? (This may simply involve restatement of previous points.)
7. Identify one or two implicit premises or background assumptions in the paper that you think are especially controversial or objectionable.
8. In light of your answers to the previous questions, write an abstract for the article of no more than 100 words. (Feel free to repeat formulations given in response to earlier questions.)
9. When you have done this for individual readings, take some time to think about the various readings you have been assigned in relation to each other. See if you can write or imagine a summary table for all the readings taken together which compares and contrasts them.