

Challenges for Developing Democracies

Political Science

Revised Weekly Seminar Version
Prof. Mark Schneider

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:

15% - 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. Students should make at least one comment in every class and participate in online activities.

5% - Follow a Country in the News. You will be asked to follow the news related to governance and politics in the news throughout the term in a country in South or Southeast Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, or sub-Saharan Africa (Haiti or Jamaica is also be fine). We'll check in on what you've found relevant to the broad course themes at the start of class. I'll ask you to post one page summarizing and reacting to news in your country from every other week. Attempt to read at least one article a week to keep up with your country!

10% Response Papers. Students will be asked to complete two response papers on the readings of class sessions of their choice. Response papers should take place on class sessions when you are not presenting your case study. In each response paper (2-3 pages), student should synthesize the main conclusions of the readings and compare and contrast different readings. They should briefly synthesize the main arguments and conclusions of readings and critically ask the fundamental questions from the reading worksheet on logic and evidence and think about what the readings say about the world in terms of the problems, solutions, and institutions we discuss.

15% - Presentation – Each student has a choice of two possible types of presentations. The presentation should last 10 minutes and include slides in power point or another presentation program.

1) One option is to present an assigned or recommended article (marked on the syllabus with an *) as if it was your own. Students can also request an additional article on a region of interest in consultation with the professor. This means you will lay out the research question, argument and logic, research design and methods, and evidence and empirical conclusions. The presentation should also include a slide or two of critical engagement. Reference the reading worksheet to think of questions that might be useful for engaging with the article. If you are

interested in this option and would like to learn about a related case, I can also find a recommended reading not on the syllabus for you to use for this assignment.

2) The second option is to apply a class session concept or theme to a country case. I will ask you to propose a country and preferences for a class session by email before the fourth week of class. You may choose any class session after week 4. Email me a specific research question after reading the required readings and two readings on your case 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 (after getting some work done in advance). Presentations will be graded on their ability to connect a political science argument to a real-world application.

25% - Midterm. Students will be required to write a take-home midterm. It will involve showing an understanding and ability to apply course themes.

30% - Take-Home Final. Students will be required to write a take-home final consisting of a short answer section and longer essay (5 pages) section.

Students interested completing a 10-12 page country case study application research paper as an alternative to the final exam may do so pending approval and a B+ or better on the midterm. For this option submit a 1-2 page paper proposal and timeline for completion by week 9.

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 classroom.
- 3) Unless you are speaking in groups about readings, close your laptops in class. This will help everyone focus on class discussion and will help you focus on the discussion. Exception may apply but this will be limited to note-taking on the class.
- 4) If you need your laptop, only use it for class purposes. That is respectful to the class and will help you learn.
- 5) Respect your classmates. Debate is welcome but disagree respectfully by engaging ideas rather getting personal.
- 6) 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 will be posted on CourseWorks or via library e-reserves. 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, 3-4 articles or book chapters are assigned each week with occasional media pieces or documentaries 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 them. You should complete the reading worksheet provided at the end of this syllabus on at least one reading per week to get practice reading actively and critically.

Required Book(s):

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

TOPICS AND READINGS PART I: I INSTITUTIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Week 1: Introduction and Democracy

Dahl, Robert A. 1998. "What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?" *Political Science Quarterly* 113 (2) 187–197.

Linz, Juan J., and Alfred C. Stepan. 1996. "Toward Consolidated Democracies." *Journal of democracy* 7 (2) 14-33.

Week 2: State Building

Assignment: Complete the reading worksheet on Tilly.

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. 1990. "War and the State in Africa." *International Security* 14 (4) 117-139.

Week 3: Bureaucracy, Governance, and State Capacity

Weber, Max. 1978. "Bureaucracy" in *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Pgs. 956-963. [Read the section "Characteristics of Bureaucracy"].

Berenschot, Ward. 2010. "Everyday Mediation: The politics of public service delivery in Gujarat, India." *Development and Change* 41 (5) 883-905.

Wasserman & Madrid-Morales (2019). "Fake News and Media Trust in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa." *African Journalism Studies* 40 (1): 107–123.

* Recommended: Dasgupta, Aditya, and Devesh Kapur. 2020. "The Political Economy of Bureaucratic Overload: Evidence from rural development officials in India." *American Political Science Review* 114 (4) 1316-1334.

Week 4: Ethnic Identity and Affective Polarization

Complete the reading worksheet on Posner.

Posner, Daniel. 2004. "The political salience of cultural difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are allies in Zambia and adversaries in Malawi." *American political science review* 98 (4) 529-545.

Chandra, Kanchan. 2005. "Ethnic Parties and Democratic Stability." *Perspectives on Politics*, 3 (2) 235-39 [Only read 236–239 on the out-bidding model].

*Banaji, Shakuntala, and Ram Bhat. 2021. "Social Media and Religious Polarization in India: 'Love Jihad' and Digital Nationalism." *Communication, Culture & Critique* 14 (2): 250–269.

PART 2: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Week 5: Democratic Backsliding

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

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

Carothers, Thomas. 2025. "Democracy Recovery After Significant Backsliding." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace [1-11].

Week 6: Reversing and Resisting Democratic Backsliding

Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, Chapter 5 ("Guardrails of Democracy") and Chapter 9 (Saving Democracy).

Carothers, Thomas. 2025. "Democracy Recovery After Significant Backsliding." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace [Focus on 11-31. Skim 1-11].

MIDTERM DUE AT THE START OF CLASS

Week 7: Inequality, Poverty, and Public Policy

Complete the reading worksheet on Acemoglu and Robinson.

Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. 2012. *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*. New York: Crown. Chapter 3: “The Making of Prosperity and Poverty.”

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.

Holland, Alisha C., and Ben Ross Schneider. 2017. "Easy and hard redistribution: The political economy of welfare states in Latin America." *Perspectives on Politics* 15 (4) 988-1006.

Recommended: Krishna, Anirudh. 2010. *One Illness Away: Why people become poor and how they escape poverty*. OUP Oxford. Chapter 1.

Week 8: Clientelism and Capture

Complete the reading worksheet on Rizzo.

Hicken, Allen. 2011. “Clientelism.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 14: 289–310.

Bardhan, Pranab, and Dilip Mookherjee. 2006. “Pro-Poor Targeting and Accountability in Decentralized Governance.” *Economic Journal* 116 (508): 101–127.

Labonne, Julien, and Robert S. Chase. 2009. “Who Is at the Wheel When Communities Drive Development? Evidence from the Philippines.” *World Development* 37(1): 219–231.

Recommended: Schneider, Mark. 2019. “Do Local Leaders Know Their Voters? A Test of Guessability in India.” *Electoral Studies*.

Week 9: What Increases Responsiveness to the Poor (Beyond Clientelism)?

Rizzo, Tesalia. “Breaking the Clientelist Feedback Loop: Evidence from a Field Experiment in the Yucatán Peninsula.” Forthcoming, *American Journal of Political Science*.

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.

Recommended: Weitz-Shapiro, Rebecca. 2012. “What Wins Votes: Why Some Politicians Opt Out of Clientelism.” *American Journal of Political Science* 56(3): 568–583.

Week 10: Corruption and Anti-Corruption

Complete the reading worksheet on Bertrand et al.

Olken, Benjamin A., and Rohini Pande. 2012. "Corruption in Developing Countries." *Annual Review of Economics* 4 (1) 479–509. [Focus on the model of bureaucratic corruption and what each variable represents conceptually, 479-88]

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

Reinikka, Ritva, and Jakob Svensson. 2004. "Local Capture: Evidence from a Central Government Transfer Program in Uganda." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 119(2): 679–705.

Week 11: Explaining Ethnic and Political Violence

Complete the reading worksheet on Wilkinson

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

Beyrer, Chris, and Adeeba Kamarulzaman. 2017. "Ethnic cleansing in Myanmar: the Rohingya crisis and human rights." *The Lancet* 390 (10102) 1570-1573.

Power, Samantha. 2001. "Bystanders to Genocide." *Atlantic Monthly* 288 (2) 84-108.

Badrinathan, Sumitra, Simon Chauchard, and Niloufer Siddiqui. 2024. "Misinformation and Support for Vigilantism: An Experiment in India and Pakistan." *American Political Science Review* 118 (2): 947–965.

Week 12: Building Ethnic Peace: Constitutional Design

Complete the reading worksheet on Lijphart.

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

Miguel, Edward. 2004. "Tribe or Nation? Nation building and public goods in Kenya versus Tanzania." *World politics* 56 (3) 327-362 [Read 327-47 only].

Walter, Barbara F. 2015. "Why Bad Governance Leads to Repeat Civil War." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59 (7): 1242–1272 — Intro & Conclusion only.

Week 13: Climate Change and Climate Policy

Nixon, Rob. 2013. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. Introduction.

UNDP. "[What is climate change mitigation and why is it urgent?](#)"

Barrett, Scott. 2016. "Collective Action to Avoid Catastrophe: When Countries Succeed, When They Fail, and Why," *Global Policy*, 45-50 only.

Aklin, Michaël, and Matto Mildemberger. 2020. "Prisoners of the Wrong Dilemma: Why Distributive Conflict, Not Collective Action, Characterizes the Politics of Climate Change." *Global Environmental Politics* 20 (4): 4–27. (Intro + Conclusion)

Week 14: Conclusion

Kleinfeld, Rachel. 2018. *A Savage Order: How the World's Deadliest Countries Can Forge a Path to Security*. New York: Knopf. **Read the Introduction (pp. 1–26) or Conclusion (pp. 367–388).**

Reading Worksheet

For each book, chapter, or article assigned in this course, you should fill out the following (nongraded) 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.

Copy this worksheet as a template and use it for the reading worksheet assignments and for your own reading as a tool!

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.