# Challenges for Developing Democracies

Political Science

Revised for Fall 2026

**Prof. Mark Schneider** mark.schneider@lmu.edu
Office: 4201 University Hall
Office Hours: M 5:30-6:30PM or by appt.

Saint Robert's Hall 239
3:40PM to 5:20PM

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. 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 about what you are reading and how it relates to class themes on Brightspace once every 2 weeks.

10% **Response Papers.** Students will be asked to complete two response papers on the readings of class sessions of their choice. In each response paper (2-3 pages), student should synthesize the main conclusions of the readings and compare and contrast different readings. They should also 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% - **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 preferences for a class session by email before the fourth week of class. 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. Presentations will be graded on their ability to connect a political science argument to the real-world case study and issue you choose.

25% - **Midterm.** Students will be required to write an in-class midterm consisting of a short answer section and longer essay (5 pages) section.

30% - **Take-Home Final**. Students will be required to write a take-home midterm consisting of a short answer section and longer essay (5 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 will be available online and can be downloaded from the course site or a shared dropbox folder. 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.

Required Book(s):

Levitsky, Steven and Ziblatt. *How Democracies Die.*

## TOPICS AND READING LISTS PART I: INSTITUTIONS AND CHANGE

### 8/25: Course Introduction

### 8/27: What is Democracy

Robert Dahl. 1971. Polyarchy. New Haven: Yale University Press: Chapter 1.

Read Freedom in the World Reports on the U.S. and Turkey.

### 9/1: No Class. Labor Day.

### 9/3: Democratic Consolidation: What Makes Democracy Survive?

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

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

### 9/8: State Building in Europe

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.

### 9/10: State Making in the Developing World

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

Robinson, James A., and Daron Acemoglu. 2012. *Why nations fail: The origins of power, prosperity and poverty*. London: Profile.

### 9/12: State Capacity and the Bureaucracy

Weber, Max. 1978. "Bureaucracy" in Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Pgs. 956-963.

Dasgupta, Aditya, and Devesh Kapur. "The political economy of bureaucratic overload: Evidence from rural development officials in India." *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 4 (2020): 1316-1334.

**9/15: Why Do Political Parties Matter?**

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

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.

Recommended: Mainwaring, Scott and Timothy Scully (Eds). 1995. *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America*. Chapter 1 (Introduction).

**9/17: Ethnic Identity and Polarization**

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 [Focus on her discussion of the out-bidding model].

**9/22 Media, Misinformation, and Democracy**

Bennett, W. Lance, and Steven Livingston. 2018. "The disinformation order: Disruptive communication and the decline of democratic institutions." *European journal of communication* 33 (2) 122-139.

Brookings. 2022. "Russian disinformation in Africa: What's sticking and what's not."

Recommended: Sánchez del Vas, R. and Tuñón Navarro, J., 2024. "Disinformation on the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine War: Two sides of the same coin?" *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, *11*(1).

**9/24: Can Foreign Aid Build Capable States?**

Boot, Max and Michael Miklaucic. 2016. "Reconfiguring USAID for State-Building." Council on Foreign Relations. [Read the executive summary]

Edwards, Lucy Morgan. 2010. "State-Building in Afghanistan: a case showing the limits?." *International review of the Red Cross* 92 (880) 967-991.

PART 2: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

**9/29: Economic Inequality and Poverty**

Van de Walle, Nicolas. 2009. "The institutional origins of inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (1) 307-327.

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

Knight, John. 2014. "Inequality in China: an overview." *The World Bank Research Observer* 29 (1) 1-19.

**10/1: Economic Inequality: Consequences for Politics and Society**

Scott, James C. 2016. "Everyday Forms of Resistance." In *Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. 3-25.

Dasgupta, Aditya. 2018. "Technological change and political turnover: The democratizing effects of the green revolution in India." *American Political Science Review* 112 (4) 918-938.

**10/6: Does Growth Reduce Poverty?**

Bardhan, Pranab. Awakening Giants, Feet of Clay: Assessing the Economic Rise of China and India. Princeton University Press Chapter 7 ("Poverty and Inequality: How Is the Growth Shared?").

**10/8: Reducing Inequality: Social Policies**

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.

Sandbrook, Richard, Marc Edelman, Patrick Heller, and Judith Teichman. 2007. *Social democracy in the global periphery: Origins, challenges, prospects*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 3 [Read 123-139 closely and skim the rest].

MIDTERM DUE AT THE START OF CLASS

**10/13: Bureaucratic 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 how existing research applies to it].

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

**10/15: Fighting Corruption: Monitoring and Transparency**

Olken, Benjamin. 2005. “Monitoring Corruption: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Indonesia.” *Journal of Political Economy,* 115 (2) 200-239.

Avis, Eric, Claudio Ferraz, and Frederico Finan. 2018. "Do government audits reduce corruption? Estimating the impacts of exposing corrupt politicians." *Journal of Political Economy* 126 (5) 1912-1964. [Read for the main idea of the audit and its impacts]

**10/20: Fighting Corruption: Institutional Reform**

Persson, Anna, Bo Rothstein, and Jan Teorell. 2013. "Why anticorruption reforms fail—systemic corruption as a collective action problem." *Governance* 26 (3) 449-471.

Bauhr, Monika, and Marcia Grimes. 2014. “Indignation or Resignation: The Implications of Transparency for Societal Accountability.” *Governance* 27 (2): 291–320.

**10/22: 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.

**10/27: Democratic Backsliding in the U.S.**

Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2025. "The Path to American Authoritarianism: What Comes after the Democratic Breakdown." *Foreign Aff.* 104 (36).

Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. **2018. *How Democracies Die.* Crown.** Chapter 3 (“Guardrails of Democracy”).

Kleinfeld, Rachel. 2021. "The Rise of Political Violence in the United States." *Journal of Democracy* 32 (4) 160-176.

*Recommended*: Mickey, Robert. 2015. Paths Out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944-1972. Chapter 2.

**10/29: Fighting Democratic Backsliding**

Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (Epilogue: "Saving Democracy").

Carothers, Thomas. 2025. "Democracy Recover After Significant Backsliding." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace [Read pages 11-31starting with "The Turnaround"].

Recommended: Mickey, Robert. 2015. Paths Out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944-1972. Chapter 9 [read pages 259-76].

**11/3: Explaining Ethnic and Political Violence**

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

Hafner-Burton, Emilie M., Susan D. Hyde, and Ryan S. Jablonski. 2014. "When Do Governments Resort to Election Violence?" *British Journal of Political Science* 44 (1) 149–170.

**11/5: Civil War**

Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. 2003. "Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war." *American political science review* 97 (1) 75-90.

Mueller, John. 2000. "The Banality of" Ethnic War"." *International Security* 25 (1) 42-70.

**11/10: Building Ethnic Peace: Constitutional Design**

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.

2014. "Was Biden Right?" Politico.

**11/12: Reducing Ethnic Discrimination**

Paluck, Elizabeth Levy, and Donald P. Green**.** 2009. "Prejudice Reduction: What Works? A Review and Assessment of Research and Practice." *Annual Review of Psychology* 60: 39–360.

Chauchard, Simon. 2014. "Can descriptive representation change beliefs about a stigmatized group? Evidence from rural India." American Political Science Review, 108 (2) 403-422.

**11/17: Climate Change and Its Human Effects**

Koubi, Vally. 2019. "Climate Change and Conflict." *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 22: 343-360.

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

**11/19: Combatting Climate Change**

Fairbrother, Malcolm, Ingemar Johansson Sevä, and Joakim Kulin. 2025. "How do Europeans want to fight climate change? Comparing and explaining public support for a wide variety of policies." *Journal of Public Policy*: 1-25.

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

UNDP. "What is climate change mitigation and why is it urgent?"

**11/24: Gender Representation and Discrimination**

Duflo, Esther. 2012. "Women empowerment and economic development." *Journal of Economic literature* 50 (4)1051-1079.

Jayachandran, Seema. 2021. "Social Norms as a Barrier to Women's Employment in Developing Economies." *American Economic Review: Papers & Proceedings* 111: 57–61.

**11/26: No Class. Thanksgiving.**

**12/1: Improving Service Delivery**

Björkman, Martina, and Jakob Svensson. "Power to the people: evidence from a randomized field experiment on community-based monitoring in Uganda." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 124, no. 2 (2009): 735-769.

Lieberman, Evan S., Daniel N. Posner, and Lily L. Tsai. 2014. "Does information lead to more active citizenship? Evidence from an education intervention in rural Kenya." *World Development* 60: 69-83.

**12/3: Conclusion and Review**

**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 (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.*

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.