

--DRAFT -- Democratic Erosion Syllabus
Compiled at Brown University

We are trying to create a syllabus with two parts. First, it provides a set of topics and readings as a malleable resource for instructors, one that can be tailored according to the instructor's interests and knowledge. Second, it presents a possible set of student assignments that could be integrated across universities by way of a blog or common website. Participation would be voluntary of course but might be a fun way to create a national resource on the topic.

We imagine this as a 13-week course, which could be modified to fit different-sized semesters or quarters. Ideally there might be 5-6 weeks where all of the instructors teaching some variant of this course could assign the same reading, so that there is a common vocabulary and basis for understanding among the students at different universities who are contributing to the joint assignment.

ALL OF THIS IS STILL A WORK IN PROGRESS.

COURSE TOPICS (by week)

1. Introduction

PART I: Historical democratization and its alternatives

2. The global spread of democracy
 - a. Samuel Huntington 1991. *The Third Wave*
3. 20th century Fascism
 - a. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*
 - b. Henry Turner, 1997. *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power*
4. Why does the public let it happen?
 - a. Sebastian Haffner, *Defying Hitler*
5. Classical liberalism
 - a. Fredrich Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*
 - b. J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*

PART II: Core themes of democratic erosion

6. Democratic careening and polarization
 - a. Dan Slater 2013. "[Democratic Careening](#)" (*World Politics*)
 - b. Nancy Bermeo 2016. "[On Democratic Backsliding](#)" (*Journal of Democracy*)
7. Civil disobedience
 - a. Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stepan, 2011. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*
8. Racial and ethnic politics
 - a. Samuel Huntington, *Who are we?*
 - b. Michael Walzer, *On Toleration*
 - c. W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction*.
9. Militias and election violence
 - a. Susan Hyde 2011. *The Pseudo-Democrat's Dilemma*
10. Political paralysis as pathway to autocracy
 - a. TBD

PART III: 21st century democratic backsliding

11. Comparative cases
 - a. [TBD by instructor: 2-3 country cases]
12. 21st century backsliding
 - a. Jay Ulfelder, "Dismantling a democracy in the 21st century", <https://darthrowingchimp.wordpress.com/2011/11/30/daniel-ortega-shows-us-how-to-dismantle-a-democracy-21st-century-style/>
 - b. Jay Ulfelder, "What now?", <https://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2016/11/12/what-now/>
 - c. Ellen Lust and David Waldner 2015. "Unwelcome Change", USAID Technical Report. http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PBAAD635.pdf (read especially the Case studies p.81-90.)
 - d. Jay Ulfelder 2010. *Dilemmas of Democratic Consolidation*
13. Contemporary politics and conclusion
 - a. Mann and Ormstein, 2010. *It's Even Worse Than it Looks*.

Other topics that could substitute for the ones above

14. Media intimidation and politicization
15. Populism
16. Truth manipulation
17. Immigration politics
18. Policing and civil-military relations
19. Identity politics
20. Crisis politics
21. Judicial politics
22. Other?

COMMON ASSIGNMENT

Our goal is to design a common set of assignments that would be used for part or all of the grade at each university where this course is taught, anchored by some sort of online platform (e.g., blog or website). We want to engage students with the question: is what we are seeing in US politics (in real time as the course is going on) substantially different from the practices of America in the period 2006-2010? We aim to harness a little bit of intercollegiate competitive spirit and a little bit of geographic coverage of real-world events across different parts of the United States.

Our tentative idea is to have each course require groups of 2-4 students to report on real-world events, always addressing the question of "Is this normal for a democracy?" The instructors teaching this course would jointly agree on 3-4 topics, and the students would have to write on each one of those topics, once every four weeks. We haven't settled on the topics yet but we imagine that they might be something like:

1. Media politicization (in your state or region)
2. Attacks on minorities (in your state or region)
3. Civil disobedience / Lawlessness (in your state or region)
4. Rule violations in the federal government

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5. Political truth manipulation (in your region or in Washington DC)

How these assignments would be collected, shared, and possibly turned into a useful product for the general public is still TBD.

APPENDIX: **Other academic** reviews and articles

1. Lucan and Way 2010. "[Why Democracy Needs a Level Playing Field.](#)" (*Journal of Democracy*)
2. Kaufmann and Haggard 2012. "Inequality and Regime Change." (*APSR*)
 - a. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/inequality-and-regime-change-democratic-transitions-and-the-stability-of-democratic-rule/C39AAF4CF274445555FF41F7CC896AE3>
3. Mainwaring and Perez-Linan 2013. "Democratic Breakdown and Survival" (*Journal of Democracy*)
 - a. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/504624/summary>
4. Kapstein and Converse 2008. "[Why democracies fail](#)" (*Journal of Democracy*)
5. Maeda 2010 – "Two Modes of Democratic Breakdown" (*Journal of Politics*)
 - a. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ko_Maeda/publication/231823944_Two_Modes_of_Democratic_Breakdown_A_Competing_Risks_Analysis_of_Democratic_Durability/links/544a5b4e0cf2fc851ede73a9.pdf

Note that democratic consolidation and breakdown is a HUGE academic field, and this only scrapes the surface.