

POLS4930/5930  
Special Topics: Democratic Erosion  
McGannon Hall 122 (Please meet in conference room)  
R 4:15-7pm  
Spring 2019

Instructor: Dr. Eric Royer  
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Office Hours: 3:30-5:30pm MW, other times by appointment

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION

The 2016 presidential election represents a watershed moment in American political history; a real estate tycoon with no prior military or political experience assumed the highest mantle in American society-- the American presidency. Almost immediately, political commentators wondered whether President Donald Trump would respect the norms of office, abide by constitutional restraints placed on presidential power, and divorce himself from key conflicts of interest arising from his sprawling real estate empire. More importantly, some scholars and commentators wondered whether Trump represented and continues to represent a potential threat to American democracy due to perceived autocratic tendencies.

Since 2016 other Western democracies have also experienced dramatic shifts in their political stenti

This course is not intended as a partisan critique of any particular politician, political party, or popular movement in the US or elsewhere. Instead it is designed to provide an opportunity for you to engage, critically and carefully, with the claims you have doubtlessly already heard about the state of democracy domestically and abroad; to evaluate whether those claims are valid; and, if they are, to consider strategies for mitigating the risk of democratic erosion here and abroad. Readings will address both empirical and normative questions, and will be gleaned from a combination of academic and media sources.

On a side note this course is not intended as a partisan critique of any particular politician, political party, or popular movement in the US or elsewhere. Instead it is designed to provide an opportunity for you to engage, critically and carefully, with the claims you have doubtlessly already heard about the state of democracy domestically and abroad; to evaluate whether those claims are valid; and, if they are, to consider strategies for mitigating the risk of democratic erosion here and abroad. Readings will address both empirical and normative questions, and will be gleaned from a combination of academic and media sources.

subsequent missed classes will be reflected in your participation score. Expect to do well in the course if you do not regularly attend.

### Contributions to Cross-University Blog (Posts & Comments) (10 points)

Over the course of the semester you are required to write blog posts (3.5 points each) for a cross-university blog, accessible [here](http://democraticerosion.com/blogs) (democraticerosion.com/blogs). You will need to create an account for this cross-university blog. I encourage you to write down your username and password, since retrieving one or both is accompanied by lag periods on the website. There are instructions for posting your blogs on the website and the document posted on Blackboard. Please pay attention to the formatting requirements for the blog posts

For each post, you need to analyze some recent or current event (a) in the US and (b) your assigned case study (see below) through the lens of materials we have read and discussed in class. Posts should be short- between 800 and 1,200 words and you have free rein for deciding what current event you wish to frame or structure your blog posts around.

1. Blog Post on the USA: Analyze a recent or current event in the US through the lens of materials we have read and discussed in class; deadline: February 21, 2019.
2. Country Case Blog Post: Analyze a recent or current event in your assigned country through the lens of materials we have read and discussed in class; deadline: March 28, 2019.

Your blogs are accessible to the public, and you should write for a broad (and potentially non-academic) audience: short, punchy sentences devoid of jargon are preferred to long, meandering ones, and short paragraphs are preferable to long ones. In both blog posts, you must cite any information you include and you are encouraged to directly link your blogs to other themes, puzzles, debates, and discussions in seminar (with citations included).

You are also responsible for commenting on the blog posts written by other students enrolled in the class. Two of these comments must be made on a post from a student enrolled at one of the other participating universities; you will be able to see university affiliations on the website. Comments should be short as well no longer than 300 words but, again, should be analytical rather than merely descriptive or opinionated. (R X U F R P P H Q W V P X D V W H J R E R I U R Q B X 1 U H W R W D O C about Putin!) Although the blog is accessible to the public, only students enrolled in the course will be able to post or comment. These three comments must be completed by April 4, 2019 and each comment is worth 1 point for a total of three points.

### Reflection on Political Event (10 points)

You are tasked with attending a political event of your choice in the St. Louis region where possible. The type of event you attend is up to you: it could be a protest, anti-Trump rally, a town hall meeting with local or state representatives, a Board of Aldermen meeting, a DACA rally, etc. We will share possibilities for these events at the beginning of the semester.

After attending the political event of your choosing, you will then write a 800-1,200 word blog post reflecting on your experience, again drawing on major themes, puzzles, debates, and discussions we have in seminar (with citations included where relevant). The deadline for attending the event is February 21, 2019. The deadline for submitting the blog post is February 28, 2019. More instructions are provided in class.

Country Case Study Assignment (20 points)

The major research component of the course is a 15 country case study assessing the state of democracy in a specific country due on April 25, 2019 (graduate students enrolled in the course are

## GRADING

Your overall grade for the course is comprised of the following:

Cross



## Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

The University is a community of learning, whose effectiveness requires an environment of mutual trust and integrity. Academic integrity is violated by any dishonesty such as soliciting, receiving, or providing any unauthorized assistance in the completion of work submitted toward academic credit. While not all forms of academic dishonesty can be listed here, examples include copying from another student, copying from a book or class notes during a closed book exam, submitting materials directly from a published source without appropriately citing or recognizing that source, taking a test or doing an assignment or other academic work for another student, securing or supplying in advance a copy of an examination or quiz without the knowledge or consent of the instructor, sharing or receiving the questions from an online quiz with another student, taking an online quiz with the help of another student, and colluding with another student or students to engage in academic dishonesty.

All clear violations of academic integrity will be met with appropriate sanctions in this course, academic dishonesty on an assignment will result in an automatic grade of 0 for that assignment and a report of academic dishonesty sent to the Academic Honesty Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences. In the case of Class B violations, the Academic Honesty Committee may impose a large sanction including, but not limited to, assigning a failing grade in the course, disciplinary probation, suspension, and dismissal from the University.

Students should refer to the following SLU website for more information about Class A and B violations and the procedures following a report of academic dishonesty:  
<http://www.slu.edu/x12657.xml>

## Title IX

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of sexual misconduct (e.g., sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic or dating violence), we encourage you to report this to the University. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident of sexual misconduct, please contact the Title IX coordinator at (314) 977-3886; [akratky@slu.edu](mailto:akratky@slu.edu) and share the basic fact of your experience with her. The Title IX coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at (314) 977-7511. Please visit the following web address: <https://www.slu.edu/about/safety/sexualassault/resources.php>

## Student Learning & Student Success Center

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. The Student Success Center, a workshop, which assists students with academic and career related services, is located in the Busch Student Center (Suite, 331) and the School of Nursing (Suite, 114). Students who think they might benefit from these resources can find out more about:

- x Courselevel support (e.g., faculty member, peer resources, etc.) by asking your course instructor.

x University-



understand what is theorized to condition democracy and democratic consolidation; understand the distinction between liberal and illiberal democracy; understand how the design of democratic institutions can affect inclusion in, and the equity of, democratic rule.

Read: 6FKXPSHWHU<sup>3</sup> &DSLWDOLVP (Bb) FLSVOHLWP<sup>3</sup> DQPH 'GIRIFEDD F5HTXLV  
'HPRFUDF\ (FRQRPLF 'HYHORSPH (Bb) 210035) G 5 (ORUQ) S (LFC) 8 (H) 11 10 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100  
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<sup>3</sup> (FRQRPLF 2ULJLQV RI 'LFW (Bb) R U D NDSJ 150VH7 R R R 0 DEHU DO 'HPRFU  
(Bb)

### Week Three (1/31): Definitions & Theories of Democratic Erosion

Learning objectives Define democratic erosion and distinguish it from other ways that countries can transition into authoritarianism; review the symptoms, observable implications, and causes of democratic erosion; begin our discussion on the possibility of democratic erosion in the US (what might cause this, what would this mean, and the implications).

Read: /LQ] \$OIUHG<sup>3</sup> 7KH %UHDNGLRZ (Bb) RIX'VWRF:DDVGLFH 5H J 8QZHOFRF  
&KDQJH 8QGHUVWDQGLQJ (YDOXDWLQJ DQG ([Bb) QGLQJ 7KHRULH

3DWKZD\ WR \$XWRFUDF\`

Week Eight (3/7): Midterm Exam & Country Cases

Week Thirteen (4/18) Fighting the Erosion of Democracy (Resistance)

Learning objectives Describe what resistance to undemocratic institutions looks like, learn to identify and articulate a variety of resistance strategies, consider the conditions under which different strategies are more likely to be used, and more likely to be successful.

Read: \* LQVEXUJ DQG +XT 3'HPRFUDF\1V 1HDU 0LVVHV' %E \*DPERD 6WUDWHJLHV DJDLQVW WKH (URVLRQ RI 'HRRFUDF\1V 1HDU 0LVVHV' & R30HRSOLD Are in the Streets Protesting Donald Trump. BKHQ 'RHV 3URWHVWBS) Stephen DQG &KHQRZHWK 3:K\ &LYLO 5HVLVWDQFH :RUNV (B7)KH 6WUDWHJL \*HUNHQ 3:H1UH DERXW WR 6HH 6WDWHV1 (B5); Klemm and SVHG 'HIHQVLYI 3HFK 33RODQG1NWB3DQ RI ,QGHSHQGHW -XGJHV KDV -XVW +LW D )DKP\ 3\*DWHNNHHSLQJ DQG &LWLJHQ -RXUQDOLVP' %E

Documentary Bringing Down a Dictator

Week Fourteen (4/25) Country Case Study Presentations

Theme: Student presentations & discussion on unifying themes/links across cases.

Case study papers due by 4:15pm

Week Fifteen (5/2) Conclusion: What Now?

Learning objectives Review the symptoms, observable implications and causes of democratic erosion, review our cases/data on democratic erosion, conclude our discussion on the possibility of democratic backsliding in the US.

Readings: /HYLVWN\ =LEODWW 3+RZ 'H(BB); BUDFDCVHULH'(B5)W 1RZ"´ Hughes, 'What Now?' (Bb); Levistk\ =LEODWW 3,V 'RQDOG 7UXPS D 7KUHDW WR 5LGGHO0UXPSWHIW D 7KUHDW WR(B5)P&BDEDDQ 'HPRFUDF\1V 1HDU 0LVVHV' 7KH \*RRG WKH %DG DQG WKH 8JO\´ %E

Final Exam -- Thursday, May 9, 2019 4-5:50pm