

Brief Course Outline

Course Title: Contemporary Challenges to Democracy

Course Number and Section

POLISCI

3397F 550

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Disclaimer: Information in the brief course outline is subject to change. The syllabus posted on OWL Brightspace is the official and authoritative source of information for the course.

Course Description:

Following several waves of democratization, the world is experiencing a democratic rollback. Over the last two decades, countries have experienced erosion in their democratic institutions and practices – some democratic regimes have been stifled or even displaced by nondemocratic forms of governance. The goal of this course is to help students understand how and to what extent modern democracies are under threat. It will do so by furnishing students with the tools for examining and evaluating the contemporary assault on democracies. The course will explore the scope and causes of this democratic erosion by drawing on theoretical ideas, examining empirical evidence, and by adopting a comparative approach. To this end, we will be guided by key questions such as: What does democratic erosion look like? How do we know when democratic institutions are under attack? What are the main causes and who are the main actors undermining democracy? What are the main lessons for democracies that are facing pressure from nondemocratic forces?

Learning Outcomes: one outcome per entry

Describe the main features of democracy and authoritarianism;

Critically evaluate the causes and factors contributing to the erosion of democracy;

Identify and explain the role of domestic and international actors in undermining democracy;

Identify and describe the contemporary challenges facing democracies;

Outline the factors that contribute to successful democratic consolidation;

Develop the ability to critically evaluate academic and non-academic sources related to democracy and democratic erosion; and

Develop the ability and skills to critically assess information and to clearly communicate your knowledge in written and oral form.

Textbooks and Course Materials:

The required readings (journal articles and book chapters) will be made available to students (at no cost) on the course website through Brightspace.

Methods of Evaluation: one assignment per entry

Assignment	Due Date mm/dd/yy	Weight - %
Attendance and Participation	Ongoing	35
Seminar Presentation	TBD	20
Research Paper Proposal	September 25, 2026	10
Research Paper 1	October 30, 2026	25

Wednesday, August 12, 2026

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In-course Costs \$000.00

For Textbooks and Course Materials (below), you are required to include the cost of each textbook or other learning material.

Note whether there are any restrictions that would prevent a student from using a second-hand copy. Here is some suggested text:

- Required textbook: [author, title, edition, publisher, date]. Cost: [insert amount].
 - Or include the weblink of the textbook’s publisher site that includes the cost information.
- Students need to purchase this edition. Second-hand or older editions will not be sufficient.
- OR Students are welcome to purchase second-hand or earlier editions of this textbook.
- This course has an optional field trip that costs [insert amount].
- This course has a required field component that costs [insert amount].

In solidarity with the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton peoples on whose traditional treaty and unceded territories this course is shared.