GOVERNMENT 94dt: Authoritarian turn in East Central Europe and what can be done about it

This seminar is an experiment. It will culminate in a set of team projects that will constitute the main course requirement. Over the course of the semester, we are going to develop strategies for combating democratic backsliding in new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. We will use ideas, advanced in comparative politics and specifically in the study of democratization, to come up with practical political solutions for how to defend democracy and make it less vulnerable to authoritarian takeover. We will consult with a number of experts who are involved in the defense of democracy in the region. We will also read extensively about the historical context and experiences of these nations, as well as the regions current developments.

Throughout this semester, we will explore some of the most enduring and complex questions of comparative political and sociological analysis: 1) what makes democracies work, 2) what challenges new democracies are facing today, 3) what makes them vulnerable to the rise of demagogues and authoritarian leaders, 4) what leads to democratic disappointment and disaffection? We will explore what lessons can be learned from contemporary cases of democratic breakthrough and backsliding in East Central Europe, but most importantly we will try to discern strategies for protecting democracy and preventing democratic backsliding.

During class, on March 9th, students will be divided into three groups of 4-5 students. They will start working on developing the set of policy proposals designed to prevent and combat democratic backsliding. These policies will be developed on the basis of the existing literature in comparative politics and in consultations with experts who will be invited to participate in class meetings.

Course Requirements:

1. **Attendance** of all Zoom meetings and active participation in class discussions and in collaborative group assignments during the course of the semester. Unless technical problems arise, you are expected to join by AUDIO & VIDEO.

2. **Outline** of a final team policy proposal (2-3 pages including bibliography) due in class on **Monday, March 23**.

3. **Team policy proposal** (20-25 pages, double spaced) to be presented and discussed in the final meetings of the course and are due by 5:00pm on **Tuesday, May 4**.
The final policy proposal constitutes 50% of the grade for all members of the team, and class participation constitutes the other 50%.

**Note:** if, for any (non-medical) reason, you need to miss a class, you must submit a response paper for that week’s reading, attached in an email, before class.

**Course Material:** Required readings are available on the course website.

**Statement of Academic Integrity and Collaboration Policy**

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you have received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc), you must also acknowledge this assistance.
Discussion Topics and Readings:  
(Readings may be added or dropped during the semester.)

Week 1 (Jan. 26): Introduction: Seminar Themes and Requirements

Recommended Readings:


Week 2 (Feb. 2): East Central Europe three decades after democratic breakthrough

Class will be divided into three groups focusing on: (1) political developments and the state of democracy; (2) economic developments and economic indicators; (3) social developments and welfare indicators. Each group will investigate and present only one case. Members of teams are encouraged to find and consult other sources as well

Freedom House, report Nations in Transit 2020 and reports from previous years – download directly http://freedomhouse.org/

Also consult websites of Bertelsmann Foundation on political developments; Freedom House, Freedom of Press; Transparency International on corruption; USAID on NGO Sustainability; Heritage Foundation on economic freedom; and World Bank on governance; Cato Institute, The Human Freedom Index 2019; Reporters without Borders, 2019 World Press Freedom Index, Eurostat data, UN Human development indicators, SEDA ranking of wellbeing, public opinion polls (Pew surveys, Eurobarometer)

Week 3 (Feb. 9): What was communism and why it matters

Required readings:


**Recommended readings:**

Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, HarperCollins, 2009, chap. 6 (What Do We Mean by a Communist System?) and chap. 7 (The Appeals of Communism).

**Week 4 (Feb. 16): What went wrong after 1989 – Variety of post-communism**

**Readings:**


**Recommended readings:**

Week 5 (Feb. 23): Populism and illiberal democracy

Readings:


Slawomir Sierakowski, How Eastern European Populism is Different, Project-sindicate.org, Feb 1, 2018.

Janos Kis, The Puzzle of ‘Illiberal Democracy” 179-193 in: Michael Ignatieff and Stefan Roch (eds), Rethinking Open Society, CEU Press 2018


Recommended readings


Jan Werner Muller, What is Populism? University of Pennsylvania Press 2016 (selection)

Foreign Affairs, November/December 2016, papers by Fareed Zakaria, Michael Kazin, Cas Mudde, Sheri Berman, Pankaj Mishra and interview with Marine Le Pen.

Cas Mudde, On Extremism and Democracy, Routledge 2016 (selection)

Week 6 (March 2): How Democracies Die

Readings:

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, How Democracies Die, Crown 2018, Introduction, Chapters 1, 4 and 6.

Juan Linz, The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes,

Nancy Bermeo, Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times, Princeton 2003, Chapter 2, pp. 21-63.


Recommended Readings:

Timothy Snyder, The Road to Unfreedom, Tim Duggan Books 2018,

Timothy Snyder, On Tyranny,

Andrew Nathan, The puzzle of authoritarian legitimacy, Journal of Democracy, January 2020,
31, 1, 158-168.

**Week 7** (March 6): Setting up the final collaborative projects

Readings:


**Week 8** (March 16): **No Class – wellness day**

**Week 9** (March 23): **Expert consultations - constitutions, law and institutions**

Readings:


Recommended Readings:

Kim Sheppele, *Autocratic Legalism*,

**Week 10 (March 30): Expert consultations – civil society, protest and resistance**

Readings:

Ekiert and Kubik, *Myths and Realities*, Journal of Democracy
Ekiert, *Is civil society a threat to democracy*, CES Forum Working Papers

Recommended Readings:


**Week 11 (April 6): Expert consultations – EU and international actors**

Readings:

Guy Verhofstadt, The EU Must Stop Funding Illiberalism, Project Syndicate April 30, 2018
Ulrich Sedelmeier, Political safeguards against democratic backsliding in the EU: the limits of material sanctions and the scope of social pressure, Journal of European Public Policy 2016.
David Kelemen and Jacob Soll, The EU is undermining its democracies while funding its autocracies, Politico, May 13, 2020.

Recommended Readings:


Week 12 (April 13): Student Project Presentations and Discussion

Week 13 (April 20): Student Project Presentations and Discussion

Week 14 (April 27): Student Project Presentations and Discussion