

Zsuzsanna Végh

How Democracies Die: Democratic Erosion and Autocratization

BA-Seminar

Moduls: Vergleichende Sozialwissenschaften: Vertiefung // Modul III.1.: Recht und Politik im nationalen Kontext (Vertiefung)

6/9 ECTS

Tuesday, 11.15-12.45

Start date: April 18, 2023

The end of the Cold War was believed to bring the victory of liberal democracy, and it was often assumed that once a country achieves a certain level of political and economic development, democratic consolidation would be inevitable and lasting. Developments over the past decades have however not only shown that post-authoritarian transitions do not necessarily lead to democratization but also that democratization is not a one-way street. Recent trends – like the rise of populism, the abuse of governmental power, the spread of ‘fake news’ and disinformation – show that democracy is never safe even in the West. In this course, we explore the causes and consequences of democratic erosion from a comparative and historical perspective. Discussions will deal with topics like the use and abuse of institutions, populism, the role of propaganda and disinformation, polarization and exclusion, clientelism and corruption as well as resistance to the erosion of democracy. We will conclude with case studies from Europe and America. The course draws on the syllabus developed in the framework of the American cross-university collaboration around contemporary themes of democratic erosion: <https://www.democratic-erosion.com/>.

Literature: Recommended readings: Juan J. Linz (1978) *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*. Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press; Jan-Werner Müller (2016) *What is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; Steven Levitsky & Daniel Ziblatt (2018) *How Democracies Die*. New York: Penguin Random House. The complete list of readings will be provided at the beginning of the semester. Readings will be made available via Moodle.

Learning outcomes: The course will introduce students to the most important issues and debates surrounding democratic (de)consolidation and erosion around the world while familiarizing them with basic epistemological underpinnings of social science. Active participation in the course will strengthen students’ critical thinking and analytical skills, enabling them to further deepen their knowledge and express their views in both written and verbal forms on various aspects of democratic erosion.

Language requirement: The language of the seminar is English. Students are expected to read assigned texts, participate in class discussion, and complete writing assignments, therefore a very good command of both written and spoken English is necessary to take this course.

Requirements: regular attendance and class participation; presentation; research paper