

Democratic Erosion¹

Spring 2026

Instructor:	Dr. Brett Ryan Bessen
Dates:	Tuesday, March 17 – Friday, March 20, 2026
Location:	Room A1-417
Section 101:	P1002S.101 11 am–2 pm
Section 102:	P12002S.102 2 pm–5 pm
Email:	brettbessen@tec.mx
Office Hours:	After class or by appointment

Course Overview

Democracy flourished in the 20th century, spreading across much of the world by the end of the Cold War. Yet its momentum has stalled. In the past 25 years, many countries once considered solidly democratic have become much less so, and some have reverted to authoritarianism. What explains this wave of democratic erosion? And what, if anything, can be done to stop it? This one-week short course examines the gradual dismantling of the institutions that sustain democracy. We begin by analyzing global trends, identifying the symptoms, and examining the causes of erosion. We then explore how opposition forces can resist backsliding before turning to the case of Mexico. By the end of the course, you will be able to identify the patterns of democratic erosion and evaluate strategies for democratic resilience.

Course Goals

- Identify the main patterns of democratic erosion.
- Analyze its causes and prospects for democratic resilience.
- Practice critical thinking, research, and writing skills.

Assignments and Grading

Erosion Case Study (30%) — Analyze a country experiencing democratic erosion using concepts from the readings.

Erosion or Resilience Blog Post (30%) — Write a short reflection connecting current events to course themes.

¹Tecnológico de Monterrey designates the official course title "*Liberales vs conservadores: cómo reparar las democracias en descomposición.*"

Reading Quizzes (25%) — Brief comprehension quizzes on Days 2–4. Quizzes will be given in the first 10 minutes of class. *Make-ups are not permitted.*

Participation (15%) — Active contribution to discussions and in-class activities.

Course Policies

Attendance. Attendance will be taken within the first 30 minutes of each class. Because this is a short, discussion-based course, full participation each day is essential to your success.

Cell Phones. Phones must be silenced and stored away during class to minimize distractions.

Late Work. Assignments should be submitted on the assigned date. Late work will be penalized 10 percentage points per day and will not be accepted after Friday at 11:59 p.m.

Academic Integrity. All work must be your own. Plagiarism or uncredited use of others' ideas will result in a failing grade.

Use of Artificial Intelligence. AI tools may be used for grammar and copy editing only. Using AI to generate or analyze content for assignments is not permitted and will be treated as a violation of academic integrity.

Inclusive Excellence. This course values diverse perspectives and experiences. Respectful engagement and openness to differing viewpoints are essential to our collective learning.

Schedule and Readings

March 17: Global Trends and Symptoms of Erosion

Readings

- Bermeo, Nancy (2016). "On Democratic Backsliding." *Journal of Democracy*.
- Stokes, Susan (2025). *The Backsliders: Why Leaders Undermine Their Own Democracies*, Chapter 1: "What is Democratic Erosion?"

Recommended

- Lührmann, Anna and Staffan I. Lindberg (2019). "A Third Wave of Autocratization Is Here: What Is New about It?" *Democratization*.
- V-Dem Institute (2025). *Democracy Report: 25 Years of Autocratization*
- Anria, Santiago (2016). "Delegative Democracy Revisited: More Inclusion, Less Liberalism in Bolivia." *Journal of Democracy*.
- Anghel, Veronica, and Erik Jones (2024). "What Went Wrong in Hungary." *Journal of Democracy*.

Activity: *Freedom House Coding*

March 18: Causes of Erosion

Readings

- Stokes, Susan (2025). *The Backsliders: Why Leaders Undermine Their Own Democracies*, Chapters 2–4. (Read Chapter 2; Skim 3 and 4)
- Bessen, Brett R. (2024). "Populist Discourse and Public Support for Executive Aggrandizement in Latin America." *Comparative Political Studies*.
- Graham, Matthew H. and Milan W. Svobik (2020). "Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States." *American Political Science Review*. (skim)

Recommended

- Rau, Eli G. and Susan Stokes (2025). "Income Inequality and the Erosion of Democracy in the Twenty-First Century." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.
- Carothers, Thomas and Brendan Hartnett (2024). "Misunderstanding Democratic Backsliding." *Journal of Democracy*.

Activity: *Erosion Case Study*

March 19: Resisting Erosion

Readings

- Stokes, Susan (2025). *The Backsliders: Why Leaders Undermine Their Own Democracies*, Chapter 8: "Resistance and Repair."
- Bessen, Brett; Susan Stokes; and Andrés Uribe (2025). "Can Rebuttals Restore Confidence in Eroding Democracies?" *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (forthcoming)*.
- Gamboa, Laura (2023). "How Oppositions Fight Back." *Journal of Democracy*.

Activity: *Erosion Case Study Due*

March 20: Democratic Erosion in Mexico

Readings

- Aguiar Aguilar, Azul A.; Rodrigo Castro Cornejo; and Alejandro Monsiváis-Carrillo (2025). "Is Mexico at the Gates of Authoritarianism?" *Journal of Democracy*.
- [Alejandro Monsiváis-Carrillo](#). "Por qué México es una autocracia."
- Castro Cornejo, Rodrigo (2023). "The AMLO Voter: Affective Polarization and the Rise of the Left in Mexico." *Journal of Politics in Latin America*.

Assignment: *Erosion or Resilience Blog Post Due*.