

1. Informations générales :

Titre du cours :	Global Challenges Facing Democracies		
NOM de l'enseignant·e :	Tevfik Murat Yildirim Visiting professor of Political Science in the Department of Media and Social Sciences at the University of Stavanger in Norway	Semestre :	Spring
Public visé :	☐ 1 ^{ère} année ☐ 2 ^{ème} année ☒ 1 ^{ère} année et 2 ^{ème} année	Langue :	English
Nombre maximal d'étudiant·es :	30	Organisation du cours :	☐ 9 x 2h

2. Summary

This course examines the major political, social, economic challenges facing contemporary democracies. Around the world, democratic institutions are under pressure from democratic backsliding, populism, polarization, inequality, misinformation, migration, identity conflicts and geopolitical instability. Rather than treating these developments as separate crises, the course asks how they interact with one another and how they reshape democratic representation, accountability, participation and legitimacy.

The course introduces students to key debates in comparative politics, democratic theory, political behavior and public policy. It examines both threats to democracy and possible sources of democratic resilience, including institutional reform, citizen participation, deliberative democracy, and democratic responses to long-term policy challenges. Students will learn to compare democratic systems, assess contemporary political developments and critically evaluate whether democracies can adapt to global challenges without undermining their own normative foundations.

By the end of the course, students will be able to identify and explain major challenges facing democracies, compare how different democratic systems respond to them, and develop evidence-based arguments about democratic crisis, adaptation and renewal.

3. Prerequisites

There are no formal prerequisites for this course. However, students are expected to have completed an introductory course in political science.

4. Assessment

20 percent: attendance and participation
10 percent: brief policy report
30 percent: student presentation
40 percent: written exam

5. Detailed course description

The course begins by introducing core concepts in democratic theory and comparative politics, including representation, accountability, participation, legitimacy, liberal democracy and democratic resilience. It then examines democratic backsliding and authoritarian pressure, focusing on how elected leaders can weaken democratic institutions through attacks on courts, media, opposition parties and electoral rules. The course also explores populism, polarization and anti-politics, asking whether these developments are causes of democratic decline, symptoms of deeper dissatisfaction, or possible corrections to unresponsive political systems.

The second part of the course turns to major social, technological and policy challenges facing democracies. It examines inequality and unequal representation, misinformation and digital democracy, migration, identity conflict and geopolitical instability. Across these topics, students will consider how democratic systems respond to pressures that are often long-term, cross-border and difficult to solve through ordinary electoral politics. Particular attention is given to the tension between short-term responsiveness and long-term democratic capacity.

Throughout the course, students will work with comparative examples and applied exercises. They will discuss cases from Europe, North America and beyond, and evaluate possible democratic responses such as institutional reform, media regulation, citizens' assemblies, participatory innovations and policies to strengthen inclusion and trust. The course concludes by asking what democratic resilience means in the twenty-first century and whether contemporary democracies can adapt to global challenges without weakening their own normative foundations.

We will use the following book as the textbook for the course:

Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. How Democracies Die. New York: Crown.

Additionally, we will read academic articles, opinion pieces and policy reports from major magazines, news outlets, and non-governmental organizations.