Each student is required to research a selected American state to study whether there is evidence of democratic erosion at the sub-national level. (Your state assignments are available on BlackBoard). Can democratic backsliding occur within a state in the United States? If there is evidence of backsliding, then what form(s) does it take in an American state? One of the objectives of your research is to consider whether the results from the American states can be generalized to sub-national units of other federal democracies around the world?

Remember that it is quite possible there will be little or no obvious/visible evidence of democratic erosion in your state; some states may exhibit democratic stress while others may reflect democratic resilience. One of the objectives is to compare the results of your research across the states at the end of the semester to look for patterns of resiliency or erosion in our sample.

Your state-level analyses should follow these steps.

The time period for your analysis is 2000-2018. The purpose of the time series is to look for trend or patterns in democratic backsliding or resiliency. Your papers should be approximately 10 pages, typed, double-spaced, and proper citations.

1. What is the overall national context for your study? This is a macro-level evaluation of forces that have been changing in the United States since 2000 and how they influence politics and the quality of democracy. Some examples include:

   - Demographic and economic change
   - Inequality
   - Partisan change and polarization
   - Party composition of Congress
   - Salient issues

This should not be a simple litany of issues and changes over the past 20 years but those events that can be connected to the concepts raised by authors such as Lipset, Dahl, Bermeo, Inglehart, etc.).
2. What is the state-level context for your study? In other words, do any of these national-level factors penetrate to your state? In what ways? Are there other factors unique to your state that are relevant to its democratic performance?

- Manufacturing versus new economy jobs
- Urban versus rural divisions
- Demographic changes
- Percent of the population in poverty, SNAP, college graduates, in various parts of the state
- Is the economy growing, stagnant, or declining?
- Percent of the population minority

Again, this section should be driven by the concepts related to the quality of democracy

3. Describe the political environment/institutions in your state. What is the relationship between the governor and the legislature? How strong is the legislature relative to the governor? What is the representation of minority groups in politics? . . . in the legislature? Have there been changes in political inclusion (voter registration laws, convenience voting, changes in representation systems in communities, turnout rates, etc.). What is the party balance in the state and legislature? Has it changed since 2000? You might try to determine what is the intent behind the design of new electoral laws or limits on the institutions.

4. What types of campaigns did the gubernatorial candidates run (e.g. populist)? What were their appeals? Have extremist groups emerged in the state? Do they appear to influence politics?

5. Give your state a subjective ranking of the quality of democracy (0-4) scale where,

0: No backsliding, and weak threat of future backsliding
1: There are worrisome indicators of backsliding, e.g. the emergence of a populist governor or faction in the legislature, but erosion of democratic institutions has not taken place
2: There is weak erosion of democratic institutions such as political inclusion but perhaps the institutions being eroded are not critical for the functioning of democracy
3: There is moderate erosion of democratic institutions
4: There is severe erosion of democratic institutions;

(N.B. It is unlikely that any American state would score a 4).
What is the outcome in your state? In other words, if your state exhibits signs of democratic erosion then did resistance occur? Was the resistance effective? What was the most worrisome indicator of democratic erosion? Why? Or perhaps your state did not manifest any signs of erosion? Why do you think your state is stable or resilient?

Suggestions on Organization:
It might be helpful to organize your paper around the major concepts discussed in class. For example, evaluate your state for evidence of backsliding in the electoral democracy arena, executive (i.e., gubernatorial) aggrandizement, how do you evaluate your state in terms of political inclusion/exclusion and competition.

Suggested resources:
- Local news media
- Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law School
- National Conference of State Legislatures

Citations: Be sure to accurately cite your sources for the information in your papers.

States in the Study:

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<th>California</th>
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