The 2019-20 academic year was a year unlike any that came before. From September through early March, WCED offered its characteristically diverse global programming on pressing questions of democracy and dictatorship. The busiest and most exciting part of our year was scheduled for mid-March through mid-May: right when the COVID-19 pandemic shut down our university and torpedoed our spring programs. Nevertheless, there is so much WCED accomplished in 2019-20 that we are proud of. We are poised in 2020-21 to return full-speed in the area of programming, while our other two areas—fellowships and publications—continue to be more active and robust than ever.

The autumn and winter programming covered the entire map. We hosted expert roundtables on the themes of Bolsonaro’s Brazil, authoritarian crisis and adaptation, and perhaps the biggest question currently haunting the democratic world: is democracy promotion dead? Our lecture series included talks by outside experts on the middle-income trap in Southeast Asia, proxy wars in the Middle East after the Arab Spring, the historical roots and evolution of democracy in India, and the connection between economic development and democratization in South Korea. WCED launched a new series, “Colloquium on Authoritarianism,” which met on seven occasions to give U-M scholars from a wide range of departments and programs the opportunity to present and receive timely feedback on their cutting-edge works in progress.

Our multiyear WCED Postdoctoral Fellowship program remains strong, and is now complemented by a new program for WCED faculty, students, and visiting associates. This has given WCED a sense of internal community that we have been eager to build and are excited to continue. Our four postdocs conduct research on areas ranging from the local roots of Russian authoritarianism, to the historical purging of pro-democracy soldiers after Brazil’s coup, to the importance of social solidarity in China’s peasant and veterans’ movements, to the unintended effects of outside support for Syrian democratization protests in paving a tragic trail to the new millennium’s most brutal civil war thus far. WCED Visiting Associates discussed their expertise on Brazilian foreign policy, Turkish democratic backsliding, Maoist nostalgia in China, Islamic law in Malaysia, and populist support among mining communities in Latin America.

It is in our third area, publications, where our strides forward were perhaps the greatest in 2019-20. Our WCED Book Series at U-M Press entered its second year and added new and forthcoming titles on economic shocks and authoritarian durability in countries ranging from Iran to Russia to China, Ukrainian corruption, and the politics of social media and protest in Thailand. WCED also assumed leadership over the official newsletter of the American Political Science Association’s newly renamed organized section on Democracy & Autocracy. Our first two issues, “Is Democracy Promotion Dead?” (February 2020) and “Economic Shocks and Authoritarian Stability” (June 2020), drew directly from WCED’s public programming, and offered vital new insights for the policy community in addition to their academic impact. We will have much more exciting material to report from both our growing WCED Book Series and our ongoing, triannual Democracy & Autocracy newsletter in 2020-21.

Despite rising threats and hardships to the health of the world’s democracies—and now, with the novel coronavirus, to the health of all the world’s citizens—WCED remains steadfastly committed to its role as a leading interdisciplinary center on emerging democracies, enduring dictatorships, and everything that lies in between. Our work may have been interrupted, but our mission remains unaltered.

Dan Slater
Ronald and Eileen Weiser Professor of Emerging Democracies
WCED Director
Emerging Democracies Postdoctoral Fellows
Awarded to postdoctoral scholars in support of research on the broad historical, political, economic, and societal conditions under which democracies emerge—and autocracies endure. Fellows focus on their own research, participate in WCED workshops and events, and present one public lecture during their fellowship, while in residence at U-M.

Matthew Cebul (2019-21), PhD Political Science, Yale University. “Repression and Rebellion in the Shadow of Foreign Intervention.”

Marília Corrêa (2019-21), PhD History, University of Illinois. “Military Outcasts: Expelled Servicemen, Dictatorship, Gender, and Trauma in Brazil.”

Natalia Forrat (2018-20), PhD Sociology, Northwestern University. “Cooperate or Resist? State-Society Relations and Authoritarianism in Russia and Beyond.”

Jundai Liu (2019-21), PhD Sociology, Harvard University. “Claiming Legitimacy and Building Solidarity: Chinese Veterans’ Political Participation under Regime Control.”

WCED Graduate Student Fellows
Awarded to U-M students who focus their work around the theme of emerging democracies past or present.

Katherine Downs, MA MIRS-Middle Eastern & North African Studies/MSW Social Work. Trauma resulting from colonilist policies, attitudes, and doctrines in the Middle East, particularly among Palestinian women.

Cem Emrence, PhD Political Science. Civilian political preferences in conflict settings, political consequences of emergency rule, and determinants of informing during wartime.

Hilary Izatt, PhD Political Science. Elections in authoritarian regimes, democratic transitions, and impacts of electoral geography on voters and other stakeholders.

Ethan Johnston, PhD Sociology. Culture and politics, influence of cultural cognition on solidarity and division in the public sphere.

Christian Pfengler, LLM Law. Comparative constitutional law, role of committees in parliamentary rule.

Berkay Uluc, PhD Comparative Literature. Relationship between aesthetics and politics, Middle Eastern literatures, and critical theory.

WCED Student Associates
WCED Student Associates are past graduate fellows invited to continue as mentors for the incoming cohort and actively contribute to the WCED community of scholars.

Jeremy Boo, PhD Political Science. Adelina Pinzaru, PhD Asian Languages and Cultures.

WCED Visiting Associates
WCED Visiting Associates are invited to be part of the center’s academic community during their time at U-M. This diverse group of interdisciplinary scholars come from different regions of the world and offer invaluable expertise on emerging democracy and authoritarianism in their homelands and beyond. They actively participate in WCED events, workshops, and networking opportunities.

Guilherme Casarões, Fundação Getúlio Vargas São Paulo Business School.

Veronica Hurtado, University of British Columbia.

Hanisah Binte Abdullah Sani, National University of Singapore.

Şebnem Yardımcı-Geyikçi, Hacettepe University.

WCED Faculty Grants
Awarded to U-M faculty for research projects that address themes related to democracy, broadly understood.


Yuki Shiraito, Political Science. “Autocratic Legislative Speeches: Evidence from Kyrgyzstan.”


William Zimmerman, Political Science. “Russian Elite Attitudes to Foreign Policy.”
WCED Graduate Student Research Grants
Awarded to U-M graduate students for research projects related to authoritarianism and democracy, broadly understood.

Sahin Acikgoz, PhD Comparative Literature. "Authoritarianism and Its Ontological Others in Turkey."

James Allen IV, PhD Public Policy & Economics, and Jon Denton-Schneider, PhD Economics. "Blood Taxes: Colonial Conscription and the Political Economy of French West Africa."


Deanna Kolberg, PhD Political Science. "Local Leaders as Foot Soldiers for the Party and the State: How Does Brokerage Influence Grassroots Governance?" and "Accountable Governance in Contested Communities."


Promise McEntire, PhD Anthropology. "Gender Equity, Multilingualism, and Technologies of Persuasion in Burkina Faso."


Thomas O’Mealia, PhD Political Science. "The Origin and Evolution of the Security Apparatus."

Roya Talibova, PhD Political Science. "Why Fight? Causes and Consequences of Joining a Tyrant’s Army."

Michael Thompson-Brusstar, PhD Political Science. "Supervising the State: Authoritarian Anticorruption in China."


WCED EVENTS
SEPTEMBER


EVENTS CANCELLED — COVID-19

OCTOBER


NOVEMBER


Nov 19 WCED Lecture. “Informal Cooperation or Failure to Cooperate? Explaining Low Levels of Formal Cooperation between Certain Authoritarian States.” Barbara Keremenos, U-M.


JANUARY

Jan 14 WCED Colloquium on Authoritarianism. “Supervisor and Struggle in 1950s China.” Michael Thompson-Brusstar, U-M.

FEBRUARY

Feb 4 WCED Panel. “Is Democracy Promotion Dead?” Moderator: Dan Slater, WCED director. Panelists: Jeffrey Conroy-Krutz, Michigan State University; Jennifer Raymond Dresden, Georgetown University; Thomas Flores, George Mason University; Erica Frantz, Michigan State University; David Waldner, University of Virginia.


MARCH

Mar 12 WCED Panel. “Democratic Survival in the Muslim World.” Moderator: Mark Tessler, U-M. Panelists: Jaime Bleck, University of Notre Dame; Pauline Jones, U-M; Lily Zubaidah Sani, Georgetown University; Hanish Binte Abdullah Sani, National University of Singapore and WCED Visiting Associate; Şebnem Yardımcı-Geyikçi, WCED Visiting Associate and Fulbright Visiting Scholar, U-M. Co-sponsors: ASC, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, CMENAS, DISC, GISC.


Mar 24 WCED Lecture. “Putin v. the People: The Perilous Politics of a Divided Russia.” Authors: Samuel A. Greene, King’s College London; Graeme B. Robertson, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Discussants: Natalia Forrat, WCED Postdoctoral Fellow; Ronald G. Suny, U-M. Co-sponsor: CREES.


APRIL

Apr 7 WCED Lecture. “Starting, Stopping, and Restarting State Repression: An Analysis of Spells.” Christian Davenport, U-M.


May 8-9 WCED Conference. “Varieties of Communism.” Organizers: Iza Ding, University of Pittsburgh and WCED Visiting Associate; Dan Slater, WCED Director.

Acronym Key:
ASC - African Studies Center
CES - Center for European Studies
CMENAS - Center for Middle Eastern & North African Studies
CREES - Center for Russian, East European, & Eurasian Studies
DISC - Digital Islamic Studies Curriculum
GISC - Global Islamic Studies Center
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