

Call for Papers:

The International Dynamics of Democratic Backsliding: Multidisciplinary Perspectives from 1900 to the Present

Date: Monday, January 12 and Tuesday, January 13, 2026

Location: University of Chicago campus, Chicago, IL, USA

Across different time periods and places, democratic decay has often been driven not by dramatic coups, but rather by elected political leaders and parties who undermine political institutions from within, restrict civil and political rights, and weaponize state instruments to attack their opponents. In recent years, researchers across various fields have expanded our understanding of these global dynamics by examining the role of domestic actors and conditions. By contrast, scholars have devoted less attention to the international dynamics that facilitate these processes of democratic erosion worldwide, or to the consequences of these episodes for the international order.

This workshop examines inter- and transnational dimensions of democratic backsliding. Workshop participants will consider how ‘backsliders’ attack (and sometimes co-opt) international institutions, reject international norms and standards, and ban and persecute international NGOs that protect democracy and human rights, among other actions. We will see how such strategies have spread across borders and have resonated with groups of citizens who are distrustful of international institutions.

We invite the participation of colleagues in the fields of political science, international relations, history, economics, law, and related disciplines who are working on the international dimensions of democratic backsliding. We will convene a two-day workshop at the University of Chicago’s Chicago Center on Democracy, on January 12 and 13, 2026. The workshop is part of an international collaborative project, [Global Governance, Trust and Democratic Engagement in Past and Present](#). We invite submissions of papers that analyze these dynamics in any country or region of the world, and that use any methodological or theoretical approach. We especially welcome papers focused on how citizens and popularly elected leaders engage with international institutions in contexts of democratic erosion, either by contesting or promoting their agendas at the national level.

Submissions should include a title, an abstract of up to 300 words, and the author’s name and affiliation. Proposals should be submitted by September 15, 2025, using this [form](#).

Authors of accepted papers will be notified by October 15, 2025. Manuscripts will be pre-circulated among the workshop participants.

Please direct any questions to Simón Ballesteros at sballesteros@uchicago.edu