

PS 191: Democracy and Its Critics

Monday 10am-12pm
291 SSB

Version 10/12/2025

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732 SSB
Office Hours: Tuesday 11am-12pm
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Course Description

Democracy remains the most legitimate form of government worldwide. Only a handful of countries do not describe themselves as democratic. At the same time, there is widespread dissatisfaction with democracy even in places where it has long been established. In this seminar we will learn how democracy is supposed to work, why it usually does not work that way in practice, and various proposals for overcoming the problems. We consider everything from modest tweaks to the status quo to non-democratic alternatives through close examination of an eclectic array of scholarly and non-scholarly materials.

Course Requirements

As a seminar, this course will be quite different from the lecture classes you have been in. You will have much more contact with the professor because there will be many fewer students in the course and there is no GSI. In return, more will be expected of you than in a typical large lecture. Though I will sometimes take the lead in the discussion, I will not be delivering lectures every week from notes or slides. Thus, the course's success depends to a much greater extent on active student participation. This means not just doing the reading but engaging with the material and being prepared to discuss it during class. Ideally everyone will participate in the discussion, but if not I will intervene and, if necessary, call on people that have not spoken. There are no exams in this class, but there are a number of short writing assignments, and you will be expected to do a class presentation and complete a substantial research paper. **Please be sure to consult with me as soon as possible (but no later than Sept 23) to discuss a paper topic.**

Your grade for this course will depend on several factors (with the percentage grade weight at the end of each point):

1. The quality of your contribution to class discussion **(20%)**
2. Three 2-3 page reading response memos (double-spaced, 12pt Times Roman font, 1-inch margins), to be uploaded to bCourses no later than the Sunday before class at 5pm. The goal of these memos is to provide thoughtful comment on the readings. This might be a criticism of the argument or evidence from one reading, an attempt at comparing and contrasting different readings, or stating reasons why you agree or disagree with a particular author. I will announce which weeks these are due. **(10%)**
3. A 1-2 page paper proposal, due by Oct 6 by 5pm. This proposal should clearly state the question or puzzle or issue the paper will explore, and discuss how you propose to address it. (Poorly-written proposals will have to be rewritten and resubmitted.) **(5%)**
4. A presentation on your paper topic, on Nov 3, followed by a short question period. The length of the presentation and Q&A will be determined by enrollment. Your grade will depend on both the intellectual quality of your presentation (you need not use PowerPoint or other high tech tools) and your answers to any questions that are posed to you. **(10%)**
5. A draft of your introduction and literature review (~8 pages long), uploaded to bCourses by 10am on Nov 17. **(10%)**
6. I will distribute this draft to one of your classmates, who will (in addition to me) provide written comments. These 2-3 page comments on your classmate's draft intro/lit review should be uploaded to bCourses by 10am on Nov 24. **(5%)**
7. Your final paper is due in both electronic and paper copies by Dec 11 at 3pm. Please drop off the paper copy to the political science department front desk in 210 SSB. Please upload the electronic version to bCourses. The paper should be at least 20 pages long (double-spaced, 12pt Times Roman font, 1-inch margins), excluding any tables or graphics. There will be draconian penalties for late papers. You will lose an entire grade for each day the paper is late. If the paper is not there by 3pm it will count as an entire day late. Please plan accordingly if you need to arrange access to a printer. **(40%)**

Academic misconduct is a serious offense, so let me be clear on what that means in a course like this. You are free to use AI to do your research. You are forbidden from using AI to write the paper. This includes non-AI apps

that employ AI, such as Grammarly. You will fail the course if such misconduct is discovered. For more information on misconduct please see: <http://campuslife.berkeley.edu/conduct>

Readings: Unless otherwise noted all readings available on bCourses.

Important Note on the Readings: I am always discovering new and better material. I reserve the right to add or subtract readings as the course progresses.

Course Outline

Sept 8: Introduction: Why Democracy? What do or should we expect from a political regime? (Plus, a discussion of how to succeed in this course.)

Chambers, Simone. *Contemporary Democratic Theory*. (Polity, 2024), Ch.2 ("Justifying Democracy").

Przeworski, Adam. "A Conceptual History of Political Regimes: Democracy, Dictatorship, and Authoritarianism," in Jerzy J. Wiatr, *New Authoritarianism: Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century*. (Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2019).

Sept 15: Contemporary Liberal Democracy ("Folk Democracy")

Robert A. Dahl. *On Democracy*. (Yale University Press, 2000).

Pew Research Center. "Dissatisfaction with democracy remains widespread in many nations," June 30, 2025.

Sept 22, 29: Tweaking Rules and Practices: Voting and Deliberation

For Sept 22:

Huber, John D. and G. Bingham Powell. Jr. 1994. "Congruence Between Citizens and Policymakers in Two Visions of Liberal Democracy," *World Politics* 46 (April), pp. 291-326.

Drutman, Lee. "A new voting system could fix American Democracy: Ranked-choice ballots," [NBCnews](#), accessed 9/1/2025.

Carey, John M. and Oscar Pocasangre. 2024. "Can Proportional Representation Lead to Better Governance?," Protect America and New America White Paper, May 2024.

For Sept 29:

Landemore, Helene. *Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many*. (Princeton, 2013), Ch. 2 (Democracy as the Rule of the Dumb Many?)

Mackie, Gerry. 2018. "Deliberation and Voting Entwined," in Andre Bächtiger et al., eds., *Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy*. (Oxford University Press).

Oct 6, 13: Illiberal (or maybe less liberal) Democracy

Oct 6:

Ober, Josiah. *Demopolis: democracy before liberalism in theory and practice*. (Cambridge University Press, 2017), Chapters 1 (Basic Democracy), 3 (Founding Demopolis), and 8 (A Theory of Democracy).

Oct 13: (Connor, Ella responses)

Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. "When Should the Majority Rule?," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 36, No. 1, January 2025, pp. 5-20.

Hendriks, Frank. *Rethinking Democratic Innovation*. (Oxford, 2023), Ch. 4 (Exploring the new plebiscitary democracy).

Howell, William G. and Terry M. Moe. *Relic: How Our Constitution Undermines Effective Government and Why We Need a More Powerful Presidency*. (Basic Books, 2018), Chapters 2 and 3.

Oct 20, 27: Actual Democracy: Core and Periphery (Oct 20,27)

Oct 20: (Connor, Jessica, Marie, Alice, Maha responses)

Stasavage, David. *The Decline and Rise of Democracy*. (Princeton University Press, 2020), Ch. 1 (Origins of Democratic Rule)

Ziblatt, Daniel. "How Did Europe Democratize?" *World Politics* 58 (January 2006), 311-38.

Therborn, Göran. *Inequality and the Labyrinths of Democracy*. (Verso, 2020), Ch 1 (Dysfunctional Democracies)

Mann, Michael. "The Dark Side of Democracy: The Modern Tradition of Ethnic and Political Cleansing." *New Left Review* 235, May-June 1999, pp. 18-45.

Oct 27: (Connor, Jessica, Raghav responses)

Kymlicka, Will. "The Politics of Multiculturalism," in Will Kymlicka. *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. (Oxford, 1996), Ch. 2.

Collier, Paul. *Wars, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*. (HarperCollins, 2009), Chapters 1 (Votes and Violence) and 2 (Ethnic Politics).

Riedl, Rachel. "Africa's Democratic Outliers: Success amid Challenges in Benin and South Africa," in Scott Mainwaring and Tarek Masoud, eds., *Democracy in Hard Places*. (Oxford University Press, 2022), Chapter 4.

Varshney, Ashutosh. "India's Democratic Longevity and Its Troubled Trajectory," in Scott Mainwaring and Tarek Masoud, eds., *Democracy in Hard Places*. (Oxford University Press, 2022), Chapter 2.

Nov 3: Class Presentations on Paper Topics

Nov 10, 17, 24: Non-Liberal and Non-Democratic Solutions

Nov 10: (Jessica, Marie, Alice responses)

Meléndez-Sánchez, Manuel and Alberto Vergara. "The Bukele Model: Will It Spread?," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 35, No. 3, July 2024, pp. 84-98.

Guerrero, Alexander A. "Against Elections: The Lottocratic Alternative," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42, No. 2, 2014, pp. 135-178.

Scheppele, Kim Lane. "How Orbán Wins" *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 33, No. 3, July 2022, pp. 45-61.

Varol, Ozan O. "Stealth Authoritarianism in Turkey," in Mark A. Graber, Sanford Levinson, and Mark Tushnet, eds., *Constitutional Democracy in Crisis?*. Oxford, 2018, pp. 339-354.

Nov 17: (Ella, Maha responses) **PAPER DRAFTS DUE!**

Bell, Daniel. *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy*. (Princeton, 2016), Ch. 1 and "Concluding Thoughts."

Hazony, Yoram. *Conservatism: A Rediscovery*. Washington, D.C: Regnery Gateway, 2022, Chapters V and VIII.

Nov 24: (Alice, Marie, Ella, Raghav responses) **COMMENTS ON PAPER DRAFTS DUE!**

Brennan, Jason. *Against Democracy*. (Princeton, 2016).

Dec 1: The US: What is to be Done? (Maha, Raghav response)

Jay Willis, "The Case for Abolishing the Senate," *GQ*, October 16, 2018.

Stearns, Maxwell L., *Parliamentary America: The Least Radical Means of Radically Repairing Our Broken Democracy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, Chapters 7-8.

Wegman, Jesse and Lee Drutman, "How to Fix the Two-Party Problem," *New York Times*, Jan 26, 2025.

Grumbach, Jake. 2022. "The Deep Structure of Democratic Crisis: The real source of the threat to American democracy," *Boston Review*, January 6, 2022.

Howell, William G. and Terry M. Moe. 2025. *Trajectory of power: The rise of the strongman presidency*. Princeton University Press, Chapter 6.

Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. 2023. *Tyranny of the Minority*. New York: Crown, Chapter 8.

Dec 11: Papers due by 3pm in mailbox in 210 SSB