

Problems in Contemporary Democratic Theory

This course considers central questions in contemporary democratic theory using a variety of methodological tools. The course begins by providing a brief picture of the historical and institutional context of debates about democracy by reviewing ancient and pre-modern understandings of democracy, with a particular focus on ancient Athens. Thereafter, the course is divided into four major sections. The first section, “The Legitimacy of Democratic Government,” examines the main normative arguments prominent in the literature today and will consider how the different views of democracy’s value respond to and critique each other. The second section, “Democratic Representation,” focuses on the quintessential modern addition to the democratic form of government: representation. We will assess rival accounts of the proper role of democratic representatives as well as some empirical evidence about the role that elected representatives play in the formation of public opinion, with an eye to assessing whether representatives’ behavior is consistent with the normative accounts. In the third section, “Democratic Competence,” we ask: how good is government guided by average citizens likely to be? Is the public too poorly informed to make good decisions or are there mechanisms of collective wisdom which allow it to perform well? We will consider major arguments and empirical evidence both in favor and against the quality of democratic decision making. In the fourth and final section, “Toward Better Democratic Institutions,” we will look at actual and imagined proposals for reforming democratic institutions and critically assess what contribution they can make.

Because of the nature of the subject and the variety of approaches taken by scholars studying it, the readings for the class involve multiple methodological approaches. They range from pure normative analysis to social choice theory to behavioral and statistical analysis. No familiarity with these methods is required. The course will not examine or require statistical survey methodology, though we will analyze some non-mathematical methodological issues. We focus instead on what the conclusions of these studies mean for our understanding of democratic government. Though we consult classic texts—often at length—at key points in the course, the focus will be on relating them to contemporary debates in democratic theory.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the historical and institutional context of theoretical debates about democracy.
- Students will be able to organize and assess conflicting theories of the value of democracy.
- Students will be able to assess the proper role of representatives in a democracy.

- Students will be able to evaluate evidence for and against the competence of mass publics.
- Students will be able to imaginatively grasp and assess alternative institutional mechanisms for realizing democratic ideals.

Course Expectations and Grading:

Attendance is mandatory. Class may not be missed except in case of emergency or illness with a doctor's note. The format of the course will involve both lectures and class discussions. The discussion portion of the course is meant to be a collaborative discourse, involving the close reading of texts and addressing each others' thoughts and questions. For this reason, you must be prepared to participate every day. This means you must bring your texts to class every day, having read, annotated and thought about them. Naturally, this applies to online texts as well. Your participation grade will be based on your contributions to discussions.

20% Participation

Participation is based on attendance, preparedness and contribution to the class.

20% Forum (blog)

Forum assessment is based on regular use of the forum, and at a minimum requires the completion of two randomly assigned postings to the forum and two weekly responses to others' postings.

30% Paper assignment

The paper assignment will answer a provided question in 5-6 pages.

30% Final exam

The exam consists of three parts: identifications and two essay questions. There will be choice in the IDs and one of the essay questions.

Academic Integrity and University Resources:

There is a zero tolerance policy on plagiarism. All incidents will be brought to the administration without exception.

Please let me know if you need information about university resources, such as library resources or disability services.

Required Texts:

- Aristotle. Politics. Ernest Barker, trans. Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1995.
- Rousseau, Basic Political Writings, Hackett edition.
- Dahl, Robert A. Democracy and Its Critics. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

All other readings will be made available through Courseworks.

Schedule of Sessions

5/28 – Introduction: The Development of Democratic Theory

Jon Elster, “The Market and the Forum: Three Varieties of Political Theory.” In Thomas Christiano, ed., Philosophy and Democracy: An Anthology. (25 pages)

6/2 – Democracy’s Past: What did democracy mean in the ancient and pre-modern world?

Plato, Republic. Book VIII. (27 pages)

Aristotle, Politics.

Book III: (Chs. 1, 4-13)

Book IV: (Chs. 3-4, 9) (28 pages)

Dahl, Robert. Democracy and its Discontents. Chs. 1-2. (20 pages)

6/4 – The Legitimacy of Democratic Government I: From Will to Deliberation

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. Social Contract.

Book I: (Intro, Chs. I, III, V-VIII)

Book II: (Chs. I, III, IV, VI, VII)

Book III: (Ch. XV)

Book IV: (Chs. I, II) (25 pages)

Manin, Bernard. “On Legitimacy and Political Deliberation.” *Political Theory*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (August 1987), pp. 338-368. (30 pages)

Read all of the day’s forum postings

6/9 – The Legitimacy of Democratic Government II: Minimalism and Epistemic Democracy

Przeworski, Adam. “Minimalist conception of democracy: a defense.” In Democracy’s Value eds. Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordon. (27 pages)

Mill, John Stuart. Considerations on Representative Government. Ch. 3: “That the Ideally Best Form of Government is Representative Government;” pp. 55-80. (25 pages)

Estlund, David. Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework. Ch. VI: “Epistemic Proceduralism.” (18 pages)

Read all of the day’s forum postings

6/11 – Democratic Representation I: What should democratic representatives do?

Burke, Edmund. "Speech to the Electors of Bristol." (<http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch13s7.html>) (2 pages)

Madison, James. *Federalist 10*. (8 pages)

Rehfeld, Andrew. "Representation Rethought: On Trustees, Delegates, and Gyroscopes in the Study of Political Representation and Democracy." *American Political Science Review (APSR)*, Vol. 103, No. 2 (May 2009), pp. 214-230. (16 pages)

Read all of the day's forum postings

6/16 – Democratic Representation II: Revising the meaning of representation

Jacobs, Lawrence R. and Robert Y. Shapiro. Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness. Part of Ch. 2: "Crafted Talk and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness." Pp. 44-71. (27 pages)

Page, Benjamin I. and Robert Y. Shapiro. "Effects of Public Opinion on Policy." *APSR*, Vol. 77, No. 1 (March 1983); pp. 175-190. (14 pages)

Disch, Lisa. "Toward a Mobilization Conception of Democratic Representation." *APSR*, Vol. 105, No. 1 (February 2011); pp. 100-114. (13 pages)

Read all of the day's forum postings

(Paper assignment handed out)

6/18 – Democratic Competence I: Are citizens too foolish for democracy to work? (Social Choice and Response Instability)

Converse, Philip E. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." *Critical Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1-3 (2006). Intro, Sections I-III, VII, pp. 1-18, 44-52. (26 pages)

Riker, William. "Social Choice Theory and Constitutional Democracy." In Christiano (ed), Philosophy and Democracy: An Anthology. Pp. 161-194. (30 pages)

Dahl, Robert. Democracy and its Discontents. Ch. 10: "Majority Rule and the Democratic Process." (17 pages)

Delli Carpini, Michael X. and Scott Keeter. What Americans Know About Politics And Why It Matters. Ch. 2: "What Americans Know about Politics." Pp. 62-104. (42 pages)

Read all of the day's forum postings

6/20 – Democratic Competence II: Improving public opinion

Page, Benjamin I. and Robert Y. Shapiro. The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences. Chs. 1-2. Pp. 1-66. (66 pages)

Lupia, Arthur. "Shortcuts versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections." *APSR*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (Mar., 1994), pp. 63-76. (14 pages)

Lau and Redlawsk, "Advantages and Disadvantages of Cognitive Heuristics in Political Decision Making." *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Oct. 2001), pp. 951-971. (17 pages)

Read all of the day's forum postings

(Paper assignment DUE)

6/23 – Democratic Competence III: Correlated Errors and Polarization

Abramowitz, Alan I. and Kyle L. Saunders. "Is Polarization a Myth?" *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (April 2008), pp. 542-555. (13 pages)

Jacobson, Gary C. "Perception, Memory, and Partisan Polarization on the Iraq War." *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 125, No. 1 (2010), pp. 31-56. (20 pages)

Sunstein, Cass R. "The Law of Group Polarization." *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2002), pp. 175-195. (20 pages)

Read all of the day's forum postings

6/25 – Toward Better Democratic Institutions I: Electoral Systems

Clark, William Roberts, et al. Principles of Comparative Politics. Ch. 11: "Parliamentary, Presidential, and Mixed Democracies." Selections (18 pages)

Mill, John Stuart. Considerations on Representative Government. Ch. VII: "Of True and False Democracy; Representation of All, and Representation of the Majority Only." (24 pages)

Rehfeld, Andrew. The Concept of Constituency. Ch. 9: "Random Constituencies." (30 pages)

Powell, G. Bingham. "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective." *APSR*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (March 1986), pp. 17-43. (26 pages)

Read all of the day's forum postings

6/30 – Toward Better Democratic Institutions II: Deliberative Mini-publics

Fung, Archon. "Recipes for Public Spheres: Eight Institutional Design Choices and Their Consequences." *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2003), pp. 338-367. (28 pages)

Warren, Mark E. and Hilary Pearse. *Designing Deliberative Democracy: The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly*. "Introduction." Pp. 1-19. (19 pages)

Baiocchi, Gianpaolo. "Participation, Activism, and Politics: The Porto Alegre Experiment and Deliberative Democratic Theory." *Politics & Society*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (March 2001), pp. 43-72. (29 pages)

Read all of the day's forum postings

7/2 – Toward Better Democratic Institutions III: Improving Public Opinion

Fishkin, James S. "The Televised Deliberative Poll: An Experiment in Democracy." *Annals of the Amer. Academy of Pol. and Social Science*, Vol. 546, (July 1996), pp. 132-140. (9 pages)

Ackerman, Bruce and James S. Fishkin. "Deliberation Day." *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 10, No.2 (June 2002), 129-152. (23 pages)

Read all of the day's forum postings

In-class film: Deliberative Polling: By the People

Final Exam