Democracy: What's the Big Idea?

Political Science #210

A team-taught seminar offered by the members of the Political Science Department

Lead instructor: Greg Shaw, CLA #253

Overview

Democracy is messy. It is said that Winston Churchill called it the worst form of government, except for all those others. The proposition that Abraham Lincoln advanced in his Gettysburg Address – that government of the people, by the people, and for the people should not perish from the earth – rests on several assumptions that we will turn over and examine carefully throughout this semester. There are several big ideas we will consider in this course. As a routine matter, can electorates hold the elected accountable, and if so, under what circumstances? How truly may we say that ordinary citizens know what is in their best interests? What portion of the potential electorate genuinely believes that elections matter? How educative is political participation? Does participation change citizens' perspective on civic life? The evidence we will examine in this course may encourage or discourage you. That's where the messiness comes in. Considering this, one could be forgiven for thinking this whole business of politics is, for most people most of the time, a side-show that pales in importance compared to the practical business of making a living, raising kids, and trying to relax on the weekends. However, for the rest of us, understanding some of these considerations is pretty important.

Despite its manifest imperfections, some form of democracy is the water in which much of the world's population swims. Democracies come in numerous structures and styles, which means that democratic ideas and practices vary across diverse populations. In this seminar we will consider several models of democracy as we examine literature from the 19th century to the present. The Western canon of democratic literature covers a lot of ground, and we will sample generously from it. Students will gain an understanding of some of the big ideas that motivated the American Founders to write the Constitution as they did. We will grapple with the ideas that some observers refer to as protective democracy, participatory democracy, and elite-driven democracy. We will seek to understand how democracies gain footholds in post-authoritarian environments, and we will consider the fraught circumstances that can lead democratic collapse. This will be a wide-ranging seminar that prepares you for your continued studies in political science, regardless of your areas of particular interest. The faculty members of the Political Science Department are excited to offer you this opportunity to read alongside us and to consider both the normative and the empirical puzzles surrounding this messy business we call democracy.

Briefly, the big ideas include the following:

- We begin with three models of democracy: the citizen as governor, as elector, or as intermediary. We will associate these ideas with Rousseau, Schumpeter, and J.S. Mill, respectively. Of course, stating citizen roles this way can suggest a high level of individual agency, when in fact a more collective model of thinking about citizen efficacy -- the public as a whole governing -- may be more analytically useful. There are also serious limitations to individual agency in the context of the political institutions that guide most political behavior.
- Next, we will read about transitions to democracy. These examples range from Eastern European democratization after authoritarianism, to the American experience.
- Discussing democratic institutions will be important, including political parties and elections. These vehicles for the aggregation of public preferences can be more or less effective as vote mobilizers, candidate recruiters, policy formulators, and value defenders. Beyond the strengths and weakness of parties, we will also discuss how different electoral systems shape and channel voters' preferences as well as empower or marginalize groups of citizens.
- Citizens come next: Robust citizen engagement faces at least three major obstacles: a dearth of opportunities, a lack of interest, and cognitive shortcomings. While conceptually separate, these three often work in concert to limit citizen input. The silver lining – in something of a paradox – is that the absence of strident and continuous citizen engagement is probably our salvation about as often as it is a source of lament and hand-wringing by good-government advocates. Some amount of slippage provides a pressure-relief valve, diffusing or blunting the loads that could otherwise overwhelm democratic institutions.
- Finally, we will read about conditions that tend to foster democratic breakdown. Historic and contemporary cases (indeed, right now) of transitions to and from democracy offer an opportunity to understand how we in advanced democracies got here, but also how this progress can be a two-way street.

The structure of the seminar: A typical week

This seminar consists of guided reading and plenty of group discussions. In order to allow students to make significant contributions to our experience, each week small teams of students will share the presentations. Typically, on Tuesdays faculty will lead the discussions, and on Thursdays the leadership will actively involve both faculty and students. Discussion co-leaders should prepare a two-page summary of the text that also includes several well framed questions that the group should discuss. On those days, the other students will also bring to class one or two well framed (and typed) questions on the readings. Posing your discussion questions during class will contribute to your grade. Student participation does not necessarily mean knowing all

of the answers, rather displaying an understanding of the relevant questions, especially those based on the readings. See Canvas for suggestions on how to craft an excellent question.

The faculty will share the teaching roles. One instructor will take the lead and will be responsible for assignments, grading student work, office hours, and other administrative matters. Others will take turns visiting class for one or two weeks at a time. This rotating structure will offer several points of view for students to consider as the semester progresses. The lead instructor (Shaw, this time around) should be the students' first stop when seeking help.

While this is a seminar on democracy, this will, alas, not be an entirely democratic experience. The faculty have some fairly well developed ideas about how the various parts of this seminar should proceed. That said, active student participation and feedback is vital to our enterprise. We expect you to keep up on the readings and be prepared to discuss them at every meeting. Please give us feedback on the assignments and class sessions. These conversations will help us to meet each of you at your learning edge.

In the first half of the semester you will produce a short paper that identifies a meaningful claim, the evidence for this claim, and an objection, all based on the syllabus readings. Double-spaced, this essay will run approximately four pages. This project will also involve peer-review that runs about one or two pages. This will help you to think deliberately about your writing, but it will also require committing some time to read and thoughtfully comment on another student's paper in a timely way. You will share your peer-review with me as well as your peer, and you will receive a grade based on the quality of your peer review. See guidance documents in Canvas for how to write this essay and how to do an effective peer-review.

By semester's end each student will produce a principal paper that applies the readings to a particular case. This will give you an opportunity to learn more about a particular nation at a particular moment in time. (See our Canvas page for more specific guidance.) This paper should run between eight and ten pages, double-spaced. Before launching into the work, each student will produce a one-page, skillfully written prospectus that presents the question and briefly describes the literature that will be used to support the claim and the objections. You will receive timely feedback, including a grade, on this prospectus.

Grades and academic integrity

Grades are on the following:

The short paper	10%
Short paper peer-review	5%
A prospectus for your principal paper	5%
The principal paper (the paper version)	15%

The principal paper (the presentation)	10%
Turns at discussion co-leadership	5%
Participation and the use of your questions	10%
Four quizzes (5% each, via Canvas, outside of class)	20%
Final exam (Canvas, in class)	20%

You can expect an online quiz on the readings every three weeks. You will take these quizzes outside of class time, via Canvas. These times quizzes will always be available on a Thursday between 4:00 and 11:59pm. There are no opportunities for make-up quizzes unless you provide me documentation of illness by the day of the quiz. Late written assignments will suffer a five percentage point reduction for each day late, weekends included. Each unexcused absence beyond the first will correspond to a one percentage point reduction in your overall grade.

I am aware that academic dishonesty has become common at some institutions. While I am sure that very few, if any, Illinois Wesleyan students would cheat on class assignments, the university's policy and my policy on academic dishonesty bear repeating. Academic dishonesty fundamentally undermines the mission of the university and cheapens our collective enterprise. Students caught cheating on an exam or engaging in plagiarism on written assignments will receive a failing grade for the course. This includes working on quizzes or exams with others, which is not something you are permitted to do. You may not use artificial intelligence to generate written work. In cases of academic dishonesty I will also file a formal complaint with the administration. Per the university's academic dishonesty policy, the administration will move to expel from the university any student who is the object of two such substantiated complaints. See the university catalog for further explanation.

Readings

You will need to purchase four books. They have been ordered through the IWU bookstore.

* Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, (2018) Crown Books
* A.C. Grayling, *Democracy and Its Crisis*, (2017) One World Books
* Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*, (2016) Princeton University Press
* Adam Przeworski, *Why Bother with Elections?*, (2018) Polity Press

Nearly all of the other readings will be on our Canvas page. The optional readings listed below may be useful as you prepare your papers. You will need to locate the optional readings through the library.

The schedule and reading list:

Week 1: Introductions

- Syllabus overview
- See the PP file on our Canvas page that corresponds to this first session

- John Dewey, "Creative Democracy: The Task before Us" (1939)

Week 2: Models of Democracy, part 1: Table Setting [Simeone]

- Tuesday: Rousseau, *On the Social Contract* (*Book 1, chapters 6, 7, 8; Book 2, chapters 6, 7; Book 3, chapters 3, 4; Book 4, chapters 1, 2, 3*); Rousseau, Discourse on Political Economy, pp. 171-176
- Thursday: Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1942), chapters 21 & 22

Week 3: Models of democracy, part 2: Governors, Electors, or Conformists? [Simeone]

- Tuesday: Brennan, *Against Democracy* (2016), chapters 1 & 2; and Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (1970), pages 22-35
- Thursday: Kinder and Herzog, "Democratic Discussion" in *Reconsidering the Democratic Public*, Marcus and Hanson, eds. (1993)
- Thursday – debate: How should democracy work?
    - Optional: Ian Shapiro, *Democracy's Place*, chapter 4 ("Democratic Innovation: A South African Perspective on Schumpeterianism")

Quiz #1: via Canvas

Week 4: Political parties

- A first draft of your short paper is due to your peer in class on Tuesday of this week. Your peer-review is due to your peer in class on Thursday of this week.
- Tuesday: Morlino, "Political Parties," chapter 14 in Haerpfer et al. (eds) *Democratization, 2nd edition* (2019)
- Thursday: Shapiro and Rosenbluth, *Responsible Parties: Saving Democracy from Itself* (2018), excerpts from chapters 1 (entire), 2 (26-32, 36-41), 4 (71-76, 89-94), & 5 (95-109)

Week 5: Elections

- The final version of your short paper will be due in class on Tuesday of this week
- Tuesday: Przeworski, *Why Bother with Elections?* (2018), chapters 1-5 (skim chapters 2 and 3)
- Thursday: Erikson, Stimson & McKuen., *The Macro Polity*, pages 237-263 & 272-276 (2002)
    - Optional: Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence: The Political Representation of Gender, Ethnicity, and Race*, chapters 1, 2 & 5 (1995)

Week 6: Roles for citizens

- You should schedule a conference with a PS faculty member early this week. Your prospectus is due in class on Thursday

- Tuesday: Kinder and Kalmoe, *Neither Liberal nor Conservative: Ideological Innocence in the American Public* (2017), chapters 1 & 2
    - Optional: Phillip Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in David Apter (ed.) *Ideology and Discontent* (1964)
- Thursday: Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, chapter 10 (and skim 5)
    - Optional: Martin Gilens, "Two-Thirds Full? Citizen Competence and Democratic Governance," in Berinsky (ed) *New Directions in Public Opinion, 2nd edition* (2016)

Quiz #2: via Canvas

Week 7: (week of February 19) Democratic culture

- Your revised prospectus is due in class on Thursday of this week
- Tuesday: Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (1993) chapter 6; and Englehart and Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (2005). Introduction (pp. 1-5. 9-10), chapter 1 (pp. 15-26, 46-47), chapter 8 (all of it)
- Thursday: Dalton, *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation is Reshaping American Politics, 2nd edition* (2016), chapters 2 & 3
    - We will do an exercise in class this day that requires laptops or tablets. Please bring yours.
    - Optional: Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education, with a new preface and epilogue*, chapters 2 & 3 (1999)
    - Optional: Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (1963)
    - Optional: Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory*, chapter 7 (1989)
    - Optional: Margaret Levi, "Social and Unsocial Capital: A Review Essay of Robert Putnam's Making Democracy Work," *Politics and Society* vo. 24, 1996

Week 8: Democratic responsiveness

- Tuesday: Soroka and Wlezien, *Degrees of Democracy: Politics, Public Opinion, and Policy* (2010), chapters 1, 2 (pp. 22-30), 8 and 9
- Thursday: Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, chapter 6

Week 9: Transitions to Democracy

- Tuesday: Przeworski and Limongi, "Modernization: Theories and Facts," *World Politics* 49 (January 1997): 155-183
- Thursday: Boix and Stokes, "Endogenous Democratization," *World Politics* 55 (July 2003): 517-49

Quiz #3: via Canvas

Week 10: SPRING BREAK

Week 11: Democratic breakdown, part 1 [Munro]

- Tuesday: Haggard and Kaufman, "Democratization During the Third Wave," Annual Review of Political Science, vol. 19 (2016)
- Thursday: Varshney, "Asian Democracy through an Indian Prism" (2015); and Shapiro, *Democracy's Place*, chapter 4 (1996); and Roy, *Field Notes on Democracy*, chapter 1 (2009)
    - Optional: Benjamin Page and Martin Gilens, *Democracy in America? What Has Gone Wrong and What We Can Do about It* (2017), chapters 3-6
    - Optional: Diskin, Diskin and Hazan, "Why Democracies Collapse: The Reasons for Democratic Failure and Success," *International Political Science Review* 26 (2005)

Week 12: Democratic breakdown, part 2 [Munro]

- Tuesday: Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (2018), introduction and chapters 1, 2 & 4
- Thursday: Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, chapters 5-8
    - Optional: Manuel Castells, *Rupture: The Crisis of Liberal Democracy* (Polity, 2019), chapter 3
    - Optional: Barbara Walter, *How Civil Wars Start, and How to Stop Them*, Crown Books (2023)
    - Optional: Zvolic, *Journal of Democracy*, piece on incumbency

Quiz #4: via Canvas

Week 13: Summing up

- Tuesday: Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, chapter 10
- Thursday: Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, chapter 11

Week 14: Student presentations, part 1

- Tuesday and Thursday: student presentations - each one will be about 10 minutes long, plus Q&A (plan for 4 presentations per session)

Week 15: Student presentations, part 2

- Tuesday: Student presentations
- Thursday: Student presentations & course evaluations

The principal paper is due to my office (paper copy) by noon on Friday, April 19th. See the rubric in Canvas.

Week 16: Review

- Tuesday: Review for final exam

The final exam via Canvas in class. Bring a laptop or tablet.