Introduction to Democracy

Course Number: POLITICS 135.
Monday, Wednesday, and Friday: 1:30-2:20 pm
King 321

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Office hours: Wednesday, 3:00-5:00 pm or by appointment.

“Democracy” today is virtually synonymous with legitimacy, justice, and freedom. But what does democracy really mean? What kinds of authority do democracies claim, and where does this authority come from? How do ordinary people, or “the people,” create, sustain, and transform democratic authority? What kinds of obligations, protections, and privileges do democracies in turn create for citizens— in moments of crisis and in everyday life? Are there limits to democracy’s power over our individual lives, and if so, how are these limits set and renegotiated over time by “local” politics? How should democrats relate to outsiders and enemies? How is democracy lived? This course will consider these and other controversies over the very meaning of democracy and citizenship.

In this introductory course in the field of political theory, we will explore how contemporary politics challenges traditional conceptions of democracy, with special attention to questions of justice, rights, power, individuality, culture, welfare, and pluralism. We will begin with the problem of defining the nature and scope of the concept of democracy, on classical, early modern, modern, and contemporary accounts. We will then go on to critically assess whether and how such accounts should be revised. Is contemporary democracy somehow different from democracy in the ancient and early modern worlds? What is the relationship between democracy and politics more generally? Do democracies have special claims to authority that non-democracies do not? Does democracy require any particular set of ethical commitments on the part of citizens, or political philosophers for that matter, or must democracy be essentially impartial with regard to ethics and morality? What can the social sciences teach us about democratic life, and upon what issues must social science remain silent? How should democrats engage their critics - and their enemies? Is democracy really the wave of the future, as many democrats contend, or is democracy in fact radically imperiled by changing global forces? What will democracy become, and how?

Course Requirements

| Essay I: | 20% |
| Essay II: | 30% |
| Final essay: | 40% |
| Class participation: | 10% |

The final essay will be due on Tuesday, December 20 at noon by email.
**Required Texts**

The following texts are available for purchase at the campus bookstore:


Mary Wollstonecraft *A Vindication of the Rights of Man and A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (Cambridge).

The following texts will be distributed as handouts:

James Madison “Federalist Paper #10.”

Max Weber “Politics as a Vocation.”

Sheldon Wolin “Fugitive Democracy.”

**Readings Schedule**

September 7, 9: Introduction to the course.

September 12, 14, 16: Rousseau.

September 19, 21, 23: Rousseau.

September: 26, 28, 30: Rousseau.

October 3, 5, 7: James Madison “Federalist Paper #10” (handout).

October 10, 12, 14: Mary Wollstonecraft. Essay 1 due.

October 17, 19, 21: Wollstonecraft.

October 24, 26, 28: FALL RECESS.


November 21: (no class Wednesday, November 23. make up class TBA.) Wolin versus Weber.

November 28, 30, December 2: Wolin *Democracy Incorporated*.

December 5, 7, 9: Wolin.

December 12: Concluding reflections.