

POLS4790 SPECIAL TOPICS: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY IN THE UNITED STATES

Spring Semester, 2024
Tues 5:30-8:00
Baldwin Hall 301

Dr. Carolyn Bourdeaux
#180E Baldwin Hall
Office Hours: Tues 2:00-4:00
e-mail: Please use eLC
for course-related questions

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Recent events have exposed deep fissures and a potentially serious erosion of the norms that underpin our ability to function as a democracy. In addition to polarization and institutional breakdowns in policy processes, critics have raised concerns about electoral integrity and the rise of a campaign industrial complex. Drawing on the instructor's substantial experience in politics and policy making, this class will provide students with opportunities to learn more about these and other contemporary challenges to democracy in the US while developing students' understanding of the tradeoffs underlying proposed reforms.

Upon completing the class, students will be able to:

- ✓ Describe common expectations around the nature and functions of American democratic government.
- ✓ Identify and critically assess contemporary concerns about the effective functioning of American democracy, including concerns around voting and voting rights, electoral integrity, polarization, and institutional breakdowns in the policy-making process.
- ✓ Creatively assess potential solutions to this problem as well as the role of citizens in preserving the effective functioning of our democratic system.

During this course, emphasis will also be placed on developing critical thinking skills through analyzing problems and developing solutions as well as developing the ability to effectively communicate through writing.

BOOKS

Dahl, Robert. 2020. *On Democracy* (Yale University Press: New Haven)
Gehl, Katherine M., and Michael E. Porter. 2020. *The politics industry: how political innovation can break partisan gridlock and save our democracy* (Harvard Business Review Press: Boston, Massachusetts).
Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die* (Broadway Books, Penguin Random House LLC: New York).

Martin, Jonathan, and Alexander Burns. 2022. *This Will Not Pass: Trump, Biden, and the Battle for America's Future* (Simon & Schuster: New York).

Other readings are available on eLC or through the UGA Library system and are organized by lecture topic. These have the “” in the syllabus.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Overall: Students will be required to stay up to date with the course via eLC. If a student misses a class, he or she is responsible for obtaining any information missed. This course syllabus provides a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary.

Class Participation and Attendance (20%): This course is heavily grounded in substantial and informed student participation. Each class is designed to build on the readings assigned and to actively engage students in contributing to their own learning experience through student discussion of the readings. To receive a top grade in class participation, students need to:

- ✓ Arrive on time to class and have a good attendance record.
- ✓ Come to class prepared to discuss the readings, videos and other course materials.
- ✓ Complete on-line class preparation assignments when assigned. (I will deduct up to 3 points from your final class participation grade if these are not completed.)

Essay on Democracy (20%): Students will develop a brief, well written essay on the following topic: Has the process and decision-making around Atlanta’s Law Enforcement Training Center been “democratic” or not? Ground your answers in the readings and class discussions. I am looking for quality writing and a quality argument not a particular right or wrong answer. Some background materials will be provided as part of the assignment; however, students are encouraged to do their own research as well. Students will need to bring a completed draft into class for peer review one week prior to the due date. *Maximum length 1500 words (around 3 pages, double spaced), one-inch margins, use complete citations.*

Draft Due: Feb. 6 @ 5:00pm on eLC, bring a hard copy to class for peer review. Failure to provide a complete and well written draft will result in up to 6 points taken off from your final grade.

Final Due: Feb. 13th @5:00pm on eCL

Group Presentation and Individual Policy Memo on a Democratic Reform Proposal (30%): Students will be assigned a group and a policy reform to research and present to the class. Group size will depend on the size of the class.

Group Presentation: As a group, you will put together a 15-minute research-based

presentation which will be 20% of total grade, given to the group as a whole.

Individual Memo: Each individual in the group will also develop a five-page policy memo (80% of total grade) on the topic as well. The memo should reflect each *individual student's own work*. The memo can draw on sources and ideas from the group but should be developed independently and therefore should not in any way be a copy of the work of other members of the group. The memos can reach different conclusions and draw on different source materials from the group presentation.

The organization of the presentation and memo should be as follows: Explain 1) the problem, including context and background; 2) the reform and how it is expected to solve the problem; 3) evidence-based pros of the reform; 3) evidence-based the cons of the proposal, and 4) a recommendation and justification.

Presentation Due: March 19th @5:00 on eLC Note that in-class presentations will begin on March 19th and proceed into the following week March 26th. Order will be picked at random. Students will have 15 minutes maximum to present. Each member of the group should speak to some aspect of the reform.

Memo Draft Due: March 26th @ 5:00pm on eLC, Bring a hard copy to class for peer review. Failure to provide a complete and well written draft will result in up to 6 points taken off from your final grade.

Memo Final Due: April 2 @ 5:00 on eLC.

For the memo, I am looking for quality writing and a quality argument grounded in the materials, not a particular right or wrong answer. Students should draw on at least 5 research-based, credible sources. *Maximum length is 5 pages, double spaced, one-inch margins, all citations should be complete not just hyperlinks*. More information on how to write a memo will be provided in class.

Final Exam (30%): The final exam will be take home and open book. Students will have one week to complete the work. I will ask two questions that will require well-developed essays that synthesize the readings for the course.

Due: May 7th @5:00 on eCL

GRADING

<i>Class Participation</i>	20%
<i>Essay on Democratic Process</i>	20%
<i>Democratic Reform</i>	30%
<i>(Group Presentation 20%, Memo 80%)</i>	
<i>Final Exam</i>	30%
<i>TOTAL</i>	100%

In computing the overall course grade, I will use the following scale:

93 – 100	A	78 - 79.99	C+
90 - 92.99	A-	73 - 77.99	C
88 - 89.99	B+	70 - 72.99	C-
83 - 87.99	B	60 - 69.99	D
80 - 82.99	B-	0 - 59.99	F

ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE

Students are responsible for contacting the professor when having trouble understanding the material or requirements of the course. My office hours are Tuesday from 2-4. To schedule a meeting, contact me via eLC e-mail. For non-course related questions, you may contact me at Carolyn.Bourdeaux@uga.edu.

For course-related assistance or questions, please use eLC e-mail.

COURSE WEB SITE ON eLC

A web site for the course is available on-line through eLC. The web site includes the course syllabus, lecture slides, readings and student grades (as they become available). The web site may be accessed through the UGA homepage at www.uga.edu, see icon in the top right corner for the link. Many course materials will be available only through eLC, and students are responsible for obtaining any material posted on eLC.

ASSIGNMENT FORMAT AND GRADING

All written work must be typed, proofread, and well-written. All written work should be prepared in accordance with a widely accepted reference style, such as APA or Chicago. Be consistent in using the style you choose. For on-line information about different citation style guides a helpful website is:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/>

All assignments will be administered through eLC and all assignments should be submitted electronically on eLC by the date and time due. Any questions you may have about your grade(s) should be addressed in writing to the professor.

Please promptly turn in your assignments. I will take off a 10 points for every 24 hours that an assignment is late. The count of a “day late” starts immediately after the due date and time. For example, submitting an assignment an hour after the time due means that you can earn no more than a 90. 24 hours after the due date, you can earn no higher than 80. You are responsible for ensuring that assignments are submitted on time in eLC.

ACADEMIC HONESTY AND OTHER COURSE CRITERIA

Academic Honesty: Students must abide by the University of Georgia policy regarding academic honesty. All academic work must be performed without any form of cheating, lying, stealing, or receiving assistance from any other person or using any source of information not appropriately authorized or attributed. The University policy on academic honesty is available at <http://www.uga.edu/honesty/>.

Note: The use of artificial intelligence software or word mixing software to write your papers or exams for this class is not permitted.

Any evidence of cheating, plagiarism or other unauthorized assistance will result in a **zero** on the assignment and may result in dismissal from the course.

Students with Disabilities: Students who wish to request an accommodation for a disability may do so by registering with the University's [Disabilities Resource Center](#). Student accommodation requires issuance by the Center of approved documentation and a plan. The accommodation plan for this course must be provided to me prior to the second week of class to negotiate the terms of the accommodation.

Prohibition on Recording Lectures: In compliance with University of Georgia guidance, students *may not make visual or audio recordings* of any aspect of this course, unless they have written authorization from the UGA Disability Resource Center.

Students who have a recording accommodation must agree in writing that they:

- Will use authorized recordings only for personal academic purposes during the specific course.
- Understand that faculty members have copyright interests in their class lectures and agree not to infringe on these rights in any way.
- Understand that the faculty member and students in the class have privacy rights and agree not to violate those rights by using recordings for any reason other than their own personal study.
- Will not release, digitally upload, broadcast, transcribe, or otherwise share all or any part of the recordings. They also agree that they will not profit financially and will not allow others to benefit personally or financially from lecture recordings or other course materials.
- Will erase/delete all recordings at the end of the semester. 6. Understand that violation of these terms may subject them to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct or subject them to liability under copyright laws.

ATTENDANCE, MAKE UP EXAMS, AND ASSIGNMENT COMPLETION

I will send around a sign in sheet at the start of each class. I appreciate knowing in advance if you cannot make the class or are going to be late, but do not require this. Please note that a significant part of the grade for this class is class participation so an

excessive number of absences or late arrivals could seriously impact your grade. If you miss a class or arrive late, you are responsible for getting notes from a classmate and otherwise catching up on what was missed.

On occasion, I understand that students face serious extenuating circumstances in their lives, and in such cases, students may work with the instructor to set up an alternative schedule for completing coursework. Previous examples of such circumstances include a student giving birth to a baby and facing a death in their immediate family. Generally, I expect students to contact me *in advance* about any serious barriers to completing an assignment so we can work out an alternative arrangement.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS:¹

DATE	TOPIC
JAN. 9 TH	INTRODUCTIONS
JAN. 12 TH	Last day to drop class.
JAN. 16 TH	<p>DESIGNING A SELF-GOVERNING INSTITUTION <i>On Democracy</i>, Ch. 1-3</p> <p>*Ostrom, Elinor. 2015. <i>Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action</i> (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge). Chapter 3</p> <p>*Fung, Archon. 2019. 'Saving Democracy from Ourselves: Democracy as a Tragedy of the Commons.' in Debra Satz and Annabelle Lever (eds.), <i>Ideas That Matter: Democracy, Justice, Rights</i> (Oxford University Press).</p> <p>*Case Study: Maas, Peter. (May 2001) <i>Ayn Rand Comes to Somalia</i>. The Atlantic.</p>
JAN. 23 RD	<p>DEMOCRACY AND US INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN <i>On Democracy</i>, Ch. 4-7</p> <p>*<u>US Constitution</u></p> <p>*<i>The Federalist Papers</i> <u>10</u>, <u>51</u> (on line)</p> <p>*Case Study: Bourdeaux, Carolyn and Larry Schroeder. 2003. <i>The Public Debate</i>.</p>

¹ While class discussions may overlap class sessions, all readings and assignments are due as listed below. The course schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

JAN. 30TH

DEFINING A DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

On Democracy, Ch. 8-13

*King, Martin Luther, Jr. 1963. [Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#).

*Economist Intelligence. 2022. "[Democracy Index 2022: Frontline democracy and the battle for Ukraine](#)." In. London, UK: Economist Intelligence Unit.

Case Study: Atlanta's Law Enforcement Training Center (See Democracy Essay Assignment for links to resources on this.)

Guest Speaker: Reverend James "Major" Woodall, Public Policy Associate of the Southern Center for Human Rights, former State President of Georgia NAACP

FEB. 6TH

VOTING RIGHTS: HISTORY AND CONTEMPORARY BATTLES

*Newkirk, Vann R. III. "When America Became a Democracy." *The Atlantic*. (March 2021)

*Crayton, Kareem. 2023. "[The Voting Rights Act Explained](#)." [The Brennan Center](#).

***Watch:** Committee on [House Administration Field Hearing on Voting Rights and Election Administration in Georgia](#) (available on YouTube; through Stacey Abrams Testimony)

FEB. 6TH

Draft Democracy Essay Due on eLC @5:00, bring draft to class.

FEB. 13TH

VOTING RIGHTS CONT'D

*AJC Staff, "[What does Jim Crow 2.0 mean? A look at the history of segregation laws](#)." *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* (May 25, 2021)

*Niese, Mark, "[How Georgia's voting law works](#)." *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* (May 6, 2021)

*Carney, Tim, "[Georgia's Election Laws Falsely Accused of Voter Suppression](#)." American Enterprise Institute (Nov. 2, 2022)

*Kenmore, Abraham, "[Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger discusses 2022 midterm election, new voting law](#)." *The Augusta Chronicle* (Oct. 24, 2022)

Debate: SB202, Jim Crow 2.0?

Guest Speaker: Sara Ghazal, Member of the State Board of Elections and former Director of Voter Protection for the Georgia Democratic Party

FEB. 13TH

Final Democracy Essay Due on eLC @5:00.

FEB. 20TH

STANDING UP A MODERN CAMPAIGN: WHO WINS AND WHY

This Will Not Pass, Ch. 1-4

The Politics Industry, Ch. 1-4

Other Reading TBD

FEB. 27TH

FORCES OF POLARIZATION: PARTY DECLINE, GERRYMANDERING, AND THE PRIMARY PROBLEM

How Democracies Die, Ch. 1-3
The Politics Industry, Ch. 5-7
Other Reading TBD

MAR. 5TH **SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS**

MAR. 12TH **FORCES OF POLARIZATION: ELECTORAL FRAGMENTATION & MONEY IN POLITICS**

- *Lau, Tim, "[Citizens United Explained](#)." The Brennan Center (Dec. 12, 2019)
- *Mayer, Jane, "Covert Operations: The billionaire brothers who are waging a war against Obama." *The New Yorker* (Aug. 30, 2010)
- *Edsall, Thomas B., "[For \\$200, a Person Can Fuel the Decline of Our Major Parties](#)." *The New York Times* (Aug. 30, 2023)
- *Vandewalker, Ian, "[The Benefits of Public Financing and the Myth of Polarized Small Donors](#)." Brennan Center for Justice. (Feb. 12, 2020)
- *Pildes, Richard, "Small-Donor-Based Campaign-Finance Reform and Political Polarization." *The Yale Law Journal Forum* (Nov. 18, 2019)

Guest Speaker: Nick Troiano, Executive Director, Unite America

MAR. 19TH **PROPOSED ELECTORAL REFORMS TO RESTORE STABILITY (STUDENT PRESENTATIONS)**

MAR. 19TH Presentations Due @5:00 on eLC

MAR. 21ST Withdrawal Deadline

MAR. 26TH **PROPOSED ELECTORAL REFORMS TO RESTORE STABILITY (STUDENT PRESENTATIONS CONT'D)**

MAR. 26TH Draft Memos Due @5:00 on eLC, Bring Copy to Discuss in Class

APR. 2ND **FEDERAL BUDGET PROCESS – SIMULATION**

Guest Lecturer: Phil Smith, National Field Director, Concord Coalition
APR. 2ND Final Memo Due @5:00 on eLC

APR. 9TH **JANUARY 6TH AND THE PEACEFUL TRANSFER OF POWER**

This Will Not Pass, Chapters 5-8,
How Democracies Die, Ch. 4-7

Watch: [Synopsis of the January 6th Committee](#) (watch the summary videos and read synopsis)

APR. 16TH **THE FILIBUSTER, LEGISLATIVE BREAKDOWNS, AND EXECUTIVE ORDERS**

This Will Not Pass, Ch. 9-12
How Democracies Die, Ch. 8-9

APR. 23RD

BREAKDOWN AND RENEWAL

Packer, George, “The Four Americas: Competing Visions the Country’s Purpose and Meaning are Tearing it Apart. Is Reconciliation Possible?” *The Atlantic Monthly* (July/August 2021)

Haidt, Jonathan and Tobias Rose-Stockwell, “Why it Feels Like Everything is Going Haywire.” *The Atlantic Monthly* (December 2019)

Guest Speaker TBD

APR. 23RD

Final Exam Available

MAY 7TH

Final Exam Due @5:00 on eLC