

POLS 4060- Problems in Democratic Theory
Fall 2024, MWF 1:50-2:40
Classroom- Baldwin 102
Dr Colin French, Baldwin Hall 378
Office Hours- MWF 3:15 - 4:45PM or by Appointment

‘Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time....’- Winston Churchill

Democratic forms of government, despite being ubiquitous across the western world, are still somewhat recent in the full course of human history. Many of the world’s democratic countries are economically prosperous, and protect liberties and minority rights at high levels, and many authoritarian regimes hold faux elections to grant themselves a sense of legitimacy from the idea of popular mandate.

In this class, we will evaluate democracy both from a theoretical and empirical framework. As a theory based course, reading will be heavy, but students will not need an advanced grasp of mathematics or statistics. Some of the topics to be covered include, but are not limited to...

Key Questions- Democratic Performance and Proliferation

- 1) Does democratic government ensure greater minority rights?
- 2) Does democracy help or hurt economic prosperity?
- 3) Are democracies more peaceful on the international arena?
- 4) Is democratic government ‘the future’- i.e. will every country eventually reach this standard? Should they try?
- 5) Is democracy ‘the end of history,’ or will other newer forms of government emerge?
- 6) Why did it take so long in human history for democracy to become a popular form of government?
- 7) Can democracy survive political polarization?
- 8) Does the rise of the internet help or hurt democratic regimes?

Key Questions- Microfoundations

- 1) Does democracy rely on an assumption about the nature of human behavior?
- 2) Do certain cultures and societal values work better with democratic government than others?
- 3) Does the public know enough about politics for elections to be meaningful choices?
- 4) What happens when large distinct minority factions (Political or otherwise) cannot gain political power in a democracy?
- 5) How has political polarization affected democracy and elections?

Key Questions- Prescriptive

- 1) Is there anything that can be done about political ignorance?

- 2) Should voting be mandatory?
- 3) Can democracy be improved?

Key Dates

Midterm Exam- October 9th

Final Exam- December 2nd

Books

“Against Democracy”- Jason Brennan, 2016

ISBN: 9780691162607

“The Myth of the Rational Voter”- Bryan Caplan, 2007

ISBN: 9780691138732

“Ill Winds”- Larry Diamond, 2019

ISBN: 9780525560623

“The Third Wave”- Samuel Huntington, 1991

ISBN: 9780806125169

Grading

Weekly Quizzes (Except on short/exam weeks)- 40%

These are simply meant to keep everyone reasonably up to date on the readings so that we can have the best possible class discussions. The quiz questions will be things that, if students got the main grasp of the readings, should be relatively straightforward. Quizzes will be administered online via ELC, and will be open on Friday from noon to midnight. The lowest two grades will be dropped, but this includes missed quizzes.

Participation & Attendance- 20%

A big part of political theory is engaging with the logic, using examples, probing problems with the ideas, and bringing anecdotes into the discussions. As such, while it is hard to get full participation everyone in a class of 45, the more perspectives we get, the better the educational experience will be. Students get 3 free absences per semester without affecting this grade- any more than that will require an excuse.

Midterm and Final Tests- 40%

Like the quizzes, these will be multiple choice and short answer heavy tests drawing from the readings, lectures, and discussions that we had in class.

Week 1- Introduction

8/14- Syllabus and Class Policies

8/16- Dahl- “On Democracy”- Where and How did Democracy Develop? ELC (Pages 7-25)

Week 2- Dahl & Bedrock discussion of democracy

8/19- Dahl: "On Democracy" What Lies Ahead- ELC (Pages 26-43)
8/21- Dahl: "On Democracy" Why Democracy? ELC (Pages 44-61)
8/23- Dahl: "On Democracy" Why Political Equality? ELC (Pages 62-82)

Week 3- *Contemporary Democracy- Where and Why* (Huntington Unit)

8/26- Theory Workshop- Where does democracy emerge and prosper?
8/28- Huntington - Chapter 1 "What?"
8/30- Huntington- Chapter 2 "Why?"

Week 4

9/2 Labor day NO CLASS

9/4 Huntington- Chapter 3 "How: Processes of Democratization"
9/6 Huntington- Chapter 4 "How: Characteristics of Democratization"

Week 5

9/9 Huntington- Chapter 5 "How Long"
9/11 Huntington- Chapter 6 "Whither?"
9/13- Huntington Discussion & Legacy

Week 6- *Threats to Contemporary Democracy* (Diamond Unit)

9/16 Diamond Chapter 1 "The Crisis"
9/18 Diamond Chapter 2 "Why Democracies Succeed and Fail"
9/20 Diamond Chapter 3 "The March and Retreat of Democracy"

Week 7

9/23 Diamond Chapter 4 "The Authoritarian Temptation"
9/25 Diamond Chapter 5 "The Decline of American Democracy"
9/27 Diamond Chapter 8 "Are people losing faith in Democracy?"

Week 8

9/30 Diamond Chapter 12 "Making the Internet Safe for Democracy"
10/2 Diamond Chapter 13 "Reviving American Democracy"
10/4 Diamond Final Discussion & Catch-up

Week 9

10/7- Dahl, Huntington, Diamond Review for Midterm

10/9- Midterm Exam

10/11- No Class

Week 10- *Criticisms of Democracy* (Caplan & Brennan Unit)

10/14- Caplan Intro and Chapter 1

10/16- Caplan Chapter 2 & 3- Systematically Biased Beliefs about Economics

10/18- Caplan Chapter 4 & 5- Rational Irrationality & Public Choice

Week 11

10/21 Caplan Chapter 6- From Irrationality to Policy

10/23 Caplan Chapter 7- Irrationality and the Supply Side of Politics

10/25 Caplan Chapter 8- “Market Fundamentalism versus the Religion of Democracy”

Week 12

10/28 Caplan Conclusion, & Ilya Somin “Democracy and Political ignorance- why small government is smarter”- ELC

10/30 Concluding Caplan/Somin and the upcoming 2024 Election Discussion

11/1- Prescriptive Institutions- The Electoral College, Mandatory Voting, Civic Education Programs

Week 13-

11/4- Pre Election Discussion- How is Democracy working in America? Conspiracies, Misinformation, Election Denialism, and Cynical Political Maneuvering- how abiding by the rules of the game requires everyone’s commitment.

11/6- Post Election Discussion and Preview- Jason Brennan’s *Against Democracy*

11/8- Brennan Chapter 1- Hobbits and Hooligans

Week 14- *Against Democracy*

11/11- Brennan Chapter 2- Ignorant, Irrational, Misinformed Nationalists

11/13- Brennan Chapter 3- Political Participation Corrupts

11/15- Brennan Chapter 4- Politics Doesn’t Empower You or Me

Week 15-

11/18 Brennan Chapter 5- Politics is not a Poem

11/20- Brennan Chapter 6- The Right to Competent Government

11/22- Brennan Chapter 7- Is Democracy Competent?

Week 16-

11/25- Brennan Chapter 8 & 9- The Rule of the Knowers & Civic Enemies

11/27 No Class (Thanksgiving)

11/29 No Class (Thanksgiving)

Week 17-

12/1- Review Session for Final

12/2- Final Exam

COURSE POLICIES

Make-ups for major assignments will only be offered in the case of serious need. Students should not assume an extension or make-up opportunity will be granted in all circumstances. Health and personal issues can be valid reasons. Late assignments will be penalized by ten percent for each day they are late.

SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

UGA Student Honor Code: "I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not tolerate academic dishonesty of others." A Culture of Honesty, the University's policy and procedures for handling cases of suspected dishonesty, can be found at www.uga.edu/ovpi

Plagiarism:

Writing and presenting original work in college can be challenging, but this is not an excuse to plagiarize. Any directly taken information, quotations, or work that is not referenced or cited can be counted as plagiarism. Please take note and remember to provide references to any outside materials used in your work or writing.

Attendance:

The student is responsible for all assigned course work and cannot be absolved of this responsibility. When enrolled in a particular course, the student is obligated to do all of the work assigned. Punctual and regular attendance is vital to the discharge of this obligation. Absences, excused or not, do not alter this responsibility. Regulations more restrictive than College guidelines, but not in conflict with it, may be established by the instructor for any course.

Instructors are responsible for distributing their individual course attendance guidelines in their syllabi during the first class each term. Absences will be excused for:

- documented illnesses,
- official representation of the College,
- death of a close relative,
- religious holiday, and
- other circumstances beyond the control of the student.

Excuses for official representation of the College must be obtained from the official supervising that activity or event.

Students whose unexcused absences surpass three of the scheduled classes may receive a lowered grade or failure at the instructor's discretion.

Wellness Statement

This policy statement was added as a requirement during the Spring 2020 semester. UGA syllabi are expected to include the following statement: Mental Health and Wellness Resources: • If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit <https://sco.uga.edu/>. They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services.

- UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services

(<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga>) or crisis support

(<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/info/emergencies>).

- If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA (<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga>) for a list of FREE workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center.

- Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App