

GOVT E-1063C | Spring 2020

## Democracy and Its Discontents

*"Democracy is based on a profound insight into human nature, the realization that all men are sinful, all are imperfect, all are prejudiced, and none knows the whole truth. That is why we need liberty and why we have an obligation to hear all men. Liberty gives us a chance to learn from other people, to become aware of our own limitations, and to correct our bias. Even when we disagree with other people we like to think that they speak from good motives, and while we realize that all men are limited, we do not let ourselves imagine that any man is bad. Democracy is a political system for people who are not sure that they are right."*

- E.E. Schattschneider

### Lectures

Mondays, 5:50-7:50 pm (ET), Harvard Hall, Rm 101

### Instructor

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### Office hours

Tues. 4:00-6:00, Thurs 5:30-6:30, by appointment on Canvas, in person or via Zoom.

### Teaching fellows

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### OVERVIEW

What does democracy mean to ordinary citizens today? Over the past few decades, our understanding of democracy has evolved significantly. There is a renewed debate about democracy's meanings, as well as the institutions and practices that democracy requires. This interest has been inspired by a third wave of democratization in developing countries, as well as growing concerns about populism and political disaffection within established liberal democracies. Contemporary democratic theory is now diverse, expansive, and exciting, offering multiple opportunities for students to combine normatively significant problems and perspectives with empirical research.

This survey course is intended to acquaint students with some of democracy's possibilities. Each week, we will explore a different theoretical component of modern democratic institutions and practices, including: elections, civil society, participation, representation, disagreement, deliberation, equality and diversity, the role of the judiciary, and institutional design. Students will gain an appreciation of the varieties of democratic thought, a knowledge of the key concepts and debates in the field, and a sense of how democratic ideals are approximated in institutional forms. Our energies in the final weeks of the course will be devoted to considering the practical possibilities for democratic institutional design and reform. If the ideal of democracy is to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is essential for us to continue to find ways of making democratic forms of governance meaningful and relevant to people's everyday lives.

## EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Participation	10%
First Response Paper	20%
Second Response Paper	20%
Third Response Paper	20%
Final Paper	30%

### Writing

Students are expected to fulfill the requirements of a **writing intensive course**. The course is designed to provide students with the writing skills to analyze theoretical texts, and assess their *political* importance. Specifically, the course will teach students how to **(1)** clearly articulate their views about the significance of different political norms and ideals **(2)** present an argument about the importance of these norms and ideals, **(3)** use their position to examine and defend existing democratic institutions that are grounded on these norms or ideals. By the end of the course, students should not only possess a solid understanding of the major approaches to contemporary democratic theory, but should also feel confident enough to engage in their own research and theorizing about democracy.

All writing-intensive courses at the Harvard Extension School offer students the opportunity to develop writing skills for a specific academic discipline. These courses feature common elements. Students will:

- Develop core writing skills, as defined by the instructor, in the discipline of the course;
- Complete multiple writing assignments of varying lengths, at least two of which must be submitted in draft form and then revised;
- Produce a minimum of 10-12 pages of polished writing, beyond required rough drafts, over the course of the term;
- Meet at least once in individual conference (in person, by phone, or online) with the instructor or TA to discuss writing in progress;
- Receive detailed feedback on their drafts and revisions, on both content and expression.

### Participation

Students are expected to complete all required readings for the course and regularly attend lectures. Depending on final enrollment numbers, students may also be expected to attend sections run by a teaching assistant each week (online). Participation will count for **10%** of your final grade.

In addition to regularly attending lectures (and possibly sections), students will be expected to post once a week to the course's online discussion board. This will give students an opportunity to discuss course materials with their peers, to pose questions or trade ideas, and to post relevant articles or videos that connect course content to the real world. Each week, I will post a topic to get our discussions started, but students should feel free to post about anything related to the course—even if the topic is from previous weeks. I encourage you to make the discussion board your own.

We will be using an online discussion tool called **YellowDig** that will give you points for each post or reply you make. *Please note* that this is not an invitation for over-achievement. Posts (and videos) should be kept short, and be thoughtful. Please be mindful of your own time, as well as the time of your classmates. Yellowdig assigns points for posts as follows:

- Original Post: *10 points*
- Replies to others: *5 points*
- Receiving a "Like" or "Love": *1 point*
- Instructor Badge: *10 points*

To complete this component of the course you must reach **250 points** over the course of the semester. Please note that the **maximum** number of points that you can earn per week is capped at **25** (so, please, don't leave all of your posts until the end!).

### **Conduct**

During the semester, we may touch upon some sensitive topics on which people have deeply held, conflicting political views. Elections. Inequality. Racism. Sexism. Partisanship. Ideology. And so on. You should therefore anticipate that some topics, classroom discussions, and online exchanges may prove challenging to you. There may be opinions with which you vehemently disagree. The norm of this course is that the students and the instructor will treat topics respectfully and intellectually. But note that "respectfully" does not mean "neutrally", where any opinion is just as correct as any other. Nor does it mean that we will avoid difficult or politically-charged conversations. Participating in this course should be understood as you sharing our collective goal of tackling political issues responsibly, rather than avoiding them, even when doing so is an understandable struggle. Equally, it means collectively working together to create a safe environment in which everyone feels comfortable contributing to the discussion.

### **Readings**

All of the required readings are to be completed *before* class each week. Many of the ideas and concepts that we will discuss are complex. In order to get the most out of the lectures it is therefore essential to be already familiar with the texts. **Undergraduate students** are expected to complete all required readings, though the recommended readings are optional. **Graduate students** are expected to complete **both** the required and recommended readings each week.

Though no background in political theory or political science is required to take this course, students should be aware that this course is primarily about political ideas. Some of the readings will be quite abstract. Others, quite dense. Still others will be challenging enough to require reading, then rereading. The challenge will be worthwhile. Serious reflection about our working ideals of democracy requires at least some exposure to serious writing, both to gain the vocabulary needed to think critically about democracy and to see good examples of theoretical argument. *But please remember: we're all in this together.* What will ultimately make the course rewarding and enjoyable for everyone is a joint commitment to working through the readings each week, as a group.

There are two required books for GOVT-E 1063C. Additional readings will be posted online to the course website (Canvas). I have selected the required books with an eye to their continued usefulness as a reference beyond this course. The books are:

- Robert Dahl, *On Democracy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).
- Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Electronic and print copies of both books can be purchased online (e.g., Amazon). A limited number of copies will also be made available for purchase at the Harvard COOP bookstore.

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## Written assignments

### (1) Three Response Papers

Each response paper is to be three pages long (typed, double-spaced, 12pt font), and each will count toward **20%** of your final grade.

To succeed in the kind of theoretical reasoning that this course emphasizes, **three skills** are needed. **(1)** You must be able to read selections of other people's theoretical arguments, and accurately articulate what their main arguments are. **(2)** You must be able to critically engage with other people's arguments, by pointing to oversights or weaknesses. **(3)** You must be able to offer your own arguments for or against a theoretical position, and be able to defend that position by anticipating objections.

A central goal of this course is to develop these three skills.

Each of the three skills will also be modelled in various ways in my lectures. The papers will ask you to put these skills into practice. *Each of the three paper assignments will require you to focus primarily, though not exclusively, on one of these three skills.* The **first paper** will therefore involve you writing about the specific argument or arguments that an author that we're reading is making. The **second paper** will ask you to look at a different author, and focus on criticizing the argument or arguments that the author is making. The **third paper** will ask you to develop your own position on an issue in light of the arguments that two other authors have made.

All response papers will include feedback from the teaching team. The **second** of these three papers will involve a **rewrite** as well. Since it will be the first place where you put forward your own reasoning—in the form of objections—and where at the same time you must also illustrate an understanding of the material—in order for your objections to work—this is a good paper to go through the process of a formal revision. You will be working with the course team to do this.

### (2) Draft of Final Paper

The final paper will be **eight pages** long if you are an **undergraduate student**, and **twelve pages** long if you are a **graduate student**. You will need to submit a *complete* draft of it. A complete draft is a complete version of your final paper, and must contain all the elements expected in the final paper, including proper citations and a bibliography. The teaching team will provide in person or online feedback on your writing, enabling you to discuss writing strategies, debrief previous writing assignments, and make revisions on your final paper.

### (3) Revision of Final Paper

Your final paper will be a revision of your complete draft. It will count for **30%** of your final grade. Standards will be provided for what counts as an acceptable revision.

No research will need to be done for the final paper. I will provide a topic and readings that go along with it. You will be asked to write a paper that defends a position related to the topic, arguing it by way of engaging the articles attached to the topic, and drawing upon previous material covered in the course. The idea behind this assignment is to get you to bring the skills developed in writing the response papers together. As such, the three short response papers should be viewed as giving you the building blocks you'll need to succeed in writing the final paper.

### Late policy

All written assignments must be submitted to Canvas on the day that it is due. Late papers and assignments will be penalized at the rate of **1/3 of a letter grade for every 24 hours** (e.g., A- to B+). Note that this policy applies as well to paper proposal drafts and short response papers. I am willing to waive late penalties *only* in the case of documented medical emergencies and other unforeseen

emergencies (note: computer malfunctions and internet delays do not count). Bottom line: if you think you might not meet a deadline, reach out to the teaching team in person or over email before your assignment is due. Note that all assignments must be completed in order to pass this course.

### Writing resources

Writing papers for a political theory course takes some getting used to. There are particular norms and conventions that have been developed to help you successfully make and defend a political argument. A key aim of this course is to help you to produce the kind of analytical writing that will serve you well, both in the classroom and beyond. In addition to the feedback that you will receive from the course team, there are a number of writing resources that may prove helpful over the semester:

Jim Pryor, a professor of philosophy at NYU, has written a very helpful guide about how to write philosophy and political theory papers:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

The Harvard Extension School Writing Center offers tips and tutorials to improve your writing, one-on-one appointments (in person and online), and other writing resources:

<https://www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/writing-center>

Finally, for many technical questions—how to properly cite articles, format a bibliography, conventions about grammar and punctuation—the Chicago Manual of Style is an indispensable resource:

<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>

### Assignment due dates

**First Response Paper: due at the start of week 3 lecture [Feb 10<sup>th</sup> by 5pm (ET)]**

Provide a **three-page argument analysis** of the reading selections from Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, which is part of the week 3 readings.

**Second Response Paper, First Draft: due at the start of week 5 lecture [Feb 24<sup>th</sup> by 5pm (ET)].**

Provide a **three-page argument critique** of Brennan and Lomasky's chapter "Is there a duty to vote?" which is part of the week 5 readings.

**Second Response Paper, Revised Draft: due at the start of week 7 lecture [March 9<sup>th</sup> by 5pm (ET)].**

This is a revision of your second response paper.

**Third Response Paper: due at the start of week 10 lecture [April 6<sup>th</sup> by 5pm (ET)].**

Provide a **three-page argument position** using the readings for week 9, engaging the question: "Is market freedom incompatible with democratic freedom?"

**Draft of Final Paper: due at the start of week 12 lecture [April 20<sup>th</sup> by 5pm (ET)].**

Read all the articles for the final paper topic — "Where do we go from here?" Write an **eight-page (undergrad) or twelve-page (graduate) paper** engaging with the selections from David Runciman's *The Confidence Trap* ("Epilogue") and Jane Mansbridge's article "On the Importance of Getting Things Done". In your paper, identify what you see as the single biggest challenge facing democracy today. Drawing on *at least two other* readings we have covered over the semester (your choice), take a position as to whether or not democracy can overcome the challenge that you identify. If so, explain how drawing from the readings. If not, explain why not, again, drawing from the readings.

**Revision of Final Paper: due two days after the end of the lectures [May 8<sup>th</sup> by 5pm (ET)].**

This is a revision of your final paper. You must meet with the teaching team prior to handing in this revised draft. Meetings will be scheduled online during Weeks 12 and 13.

## ACCESSIBILITY

The Harvard Extension School is committed to providing an accessible academic community. The **Accessibility Office** offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities. Please visit <https://www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/accessibility-student-services> for more information.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are responsible for understanding **Harvard Extension School policies on academic integrity** (<https://www.extension.harvard.edu/academic-integrity>) and how to use sources responsibly. Not knowing the rules, misunderstanding the rules, running out of time, submitting the wrong draft, or being overwhelmed with multiple demands are not acceptable excuses. There are no excuses for failure to uphold academic integrity.

To support your learning about academic citation rules, please visit the **Harvard Extension School Tips to Avoid Plagiarism** (<https://www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/avoiding-plagiarism>), where you'll find links to the Harvard Guide to Using Sources and two free online 15-minute tutorials to test your knowledge of academic citation policy. The tutorials are anonymous open-learning tools.

## DISCUSSION AND READING SCHEDULE

### I. January 27<sup>th</sup> – Is democracy in crisis?

*"Optimism about democracy is today under a cloud ... But the criticism is only an exhibition of querulousness and spleen or of a superiority complex, unless it takes cognizance of the conditions out of which popular government has issued."*

-Dewey

The Economist, "What's gone wrong with democracy?"

[<https://www.economist.com/essay/2014/02/27/whats-gone-wrong-with-democracy>]

Pippa Norris, "Authoritarian populism is rising across the West. Here's Why."

[[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/11/its-not-just-trump-authoritarian-populism-is-rising-across-the-west-heres-why/?utm\\_term=.df0382471889](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/11/its-not-just-trump-authoritarian-populism-is-rising-across-the-west-heres-why/?utm_term=.df0382471889)]

David Runciman, *The Confidence Trap*, "Preface" and "2008: Back to the Future."

**Recommended:**

Robert Dahl, *On Democracy*, chaps. 1-2.

### II. February 3<sup>rd</sup> - What do we mean, when we talk about "democracy"?

*"The fundamental principle of the democratic constitution is freedom... One component of freedom is ruling and being ruled in turn. For democratic justice is based on numerical equality ... [T]he multitude must be in authority, and whatever seems right to the majority, this is what is final and what is just."*

-Aristotle

Robert Dahl, *On Democracy*, chaps. 4-5.

Amartya Sen, "Democracy as a universal value."

Josiah Ober, "Learning from Athens: Success by design."

[<http://bostonreview.net/josiah-ober-learning-from-athens>]

**Recommended:**

Elizabeth Anderson, "Democracy: Instrumental vs. Non-instrumental value."

**\*\* First response paper due before week III lecture\*\***

### III. February 10<sup>th</sup>–Is democracy just about elections?

*"[T]he democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote."*

-Schumpeter

Robert Dahl, *On Democracy*, chap. 8.

Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, selections.

Adam Przeworski, "Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A defense," selections.

**Recommended:**

Jeffrey Green, "The Citizen as Spectator," pp. 32-54.

### IV. February 17<sup>th</sup>–What is democratic representation, and who gets it?

*"When should men feel that they are represented? When would it be correct to say that they are represented? ... What would count as evidence that they are represented?"*

-Pitkin

Bernard Manin, "The Verdict of the People."

Hannah Pitkin, "Representation and Democracy: An Uneasy Alliance."

Jane Mansbridge, "Rethinking Representation."

**Recommended:**

Robert Dahl, *On Democracy*, chap. 9

**\*\* Second response paper draft due before week V lecture\*\***

### V. February 24<sup>th</sup>-What reasons do we have for participating in democratic politics?

*"The better the state is constituted, the more does public business take precedence in the minds of the citizens ... In a well-regulated nation, every man hastens to the assemblies."*

-Rousseau

Loren Lomasky and Geoffrey Brennan, "Is there a Duty to Vote?"

Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, selections.

Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, chap. 4

**Recommended:**

Arend Lijphart, "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma."

### VI. March 2<sup>nd</sup>–What role should civil society play in a democracy?

*"The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of the functions performed by private citizens."*

-Tocqueville

Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed are the Organized*, chaps. 2-3.

Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, selections.

Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, chap. 5

**Recommended:**

E.E. Shattschneider, *The Semisovereign People*, chaps. 4 and 6.

**\*\* Second response paper final due before week VII lecture\*\***

## VII. March 9<sup>th</sup> – Who wants to talk about politics, and why?

*“Does participation in democratic procedures have only the functional meaning of silencing a defeated minority, or does it have the deliberative meaning of including the arguments of citizens in the democratic process of opinion- and will-formation?”*

-Habermas

John Rawls, “The Idea of Public Reason,” pp. 212-227.

Jürgen Habermas, “Political Communication in Media Society.”

Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson. *Why Deliberative Democracy?* pp. 1-29.

**Recommended:**

Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, chap. 1

## VIII. March 23<sup>rd</sup> - Does deliberative democracy dampen dissent?

*“Theoretic politicians ... have erroneously supposed that by reducing mankind to a perfect equality in their political rights, they would at the same time be perfectly equalized and assimilated in their possessions, their opinions, and their passions.”*

-Madison

Nancy Rosenblum, “Anything but Partisanship.”

[\[https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/anything-but-partisanship-anti-partyism-bipartisanship-and-the-luster-of-independence\]](https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/anything-but-partisanship-anti-partyism-bipartisanship-and-the-luster-of-independence)

Iris Marion Young, “Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy.”

Lynn Sanders, “Against Deliberation.”

**Recommended:**

Chantal Mouffe, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?”

## IX. March 30<sup>th</sup> – Is democracy compatible with capitalism?

*“I believe that banking institutions are more dangerous to our liberties than standing armies.”*

-Jefferson

Milton Friedman, “The Relation between Economic Freedom and Political Freedom”

Charles Lindblom, “The Market as Prison.”

Elizabeth Anderson, “Private Government.”

**Recommended:**

Robert Dahl, *On Democracy*, chaps. 13-14.

**\*\*Third response paper due before week X lecture\*\***

## X. April 6<sup>th</sup> – How much inequality can a democracy tolerate?

*“We can either have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both.”*

-Brandeis

Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page. “Testing Theories of American Politics.”

John Ferejohn, “Is Inequality a Threat to Democracy?”

Ian Shapiro, “Why the poor don't soak the rich.”

**Recommended:**

Wolfgang Streeck, “The Return of the Repressed.”



### **XI. April 13<sup>th</sup> – Can democracy accommodate diverse citizenships?**

*“How is it possible for there to exist over time a just and stable society of free and equal citizens, who remain profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?”*

-Rawls

Charles Taylor, “A Tension in Modern Democracy.”

Sarah Song, “What does it mean to be an American?”

Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, chaps. 1-2, 4.

**Recommended:**

Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, chap. 3

### **\*\* Draft of final paper due before week XII lecture \*\***

### **XII. April 20<sup>th</sup> – What happens if we find ourselves in the minority?**

*“The one pervading evil of democracy is the tyranny of the majority.”*

-Lord Acton

Robert Dahl, “Decision-making in a Democracy: The Supreme Court as a Policy-Maker.”

Ronald Dworkin, “The Majoritarian Premise and Constitutionalism.”

Jeremy Waldron, “Judicial Review and the Conditions of Democracy.”

**Recommended:**

Pierre Rosanvallon, “The Preference for Judgement”.

### **\*\* Online meetings to discuss final paper revisions \*\***

### **XIII. April 27<sup>th</sup> – When should we defer to experts in a democracy – and when shouldn’t we?**

*“It is not useful, but hurtful, that the constitution of the country should declare ignorance to be entitled as much political power as knowledge ... everyone is entitled to some influence, but the better and wiser to more than others.”*

-J.S. Mill

Daniel Bell, “The China Model: Is Democracy the Least Bad Political System?” pp. 14-36.

David Estlund, “Why not an epistocracy of the educated?”

Hélène Landemore, “Democratic Reason,” pp. 251-272.

**Recommended:**

Tom Nichols, “When Experts are Wrong.”

### **XIV. May 4<sup>th</sup> – What kinds of innovations might help improve democracy?**

*“By its very nature, a state is ever something to be scrutinized, investigated, searched for. Almost as soon as its form is stabilized, it needs to be remade.”*

-Dewey

Archon Fung, “Democratizing the Policy Process.”

Mark Warren and John Gastil, “Can mini-publics address the cognitive challenges of citizenship?”

Cristina Lafont, “Should deliberative mini-publics shape public policy?”

**Recommended:**

John Dewey, “Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us.”

The Participedia Project [<https://participedia.xyz>]

**\*\*Final paper due by May 8<sup>th</sup> at 5:00pm (ET)\*\***

**Final paper– Where do we go from here?**

*“Democracy in the late modern world cannot be a complete political system ... [It] needs to be reconceived as something other than a form of government: as a mode of being which is conditioned by bitter experience, doomed to succeed only temporarily, but is a recurrent possibility as long as the memory of the political survives.”*

-Wolin

David Runciman, *The Confidence Trap*, Epilogue.

Jane Mansbridge, “On the Importance of Getting Things Done.”

**Recommended:**

Robert Dahl, *On Democracy*, chap. 15.