

The Future of Democracy Challenges and prospects

Course #	20FFD
Format:	Seminar
Moderator:	Kathy Campbell
Date and Time:	Wednesday, 9:30-11:30 10 weeks, starting September 23
Location:	Wesley United Methodist Church, Hadley
Maximum number of participants:	18
Auditors accepted:	Yes, up to 2

Purpose: This seminar will explore current threats to democracy, both in the United States and around the world, and consider means by which it might be made more resilient in the face of these threats.

Description: As the world enters the third decade of the 21st century, democracy is under stress in many places and for many reasons. Authoritarian populism is on the rise around the globe. Poorly-paid jobs and the "gig economy" leave citizens with less time and energy to participate in civil society. On-line echo chambers amplify polarizing messages. Structural democratic deficits arise from winner-take-all electoral systems and the influence of money.

Proposed reforms range from civic education to creating more opportunities and incentives for participation to media reform. Structural changes

could include holding elections on weekends, alternative electoral systems, and direct democracy options such as referendums or participatory budgeting.

Is democracy about to be crushed under the weight of ever-increasing pressures? Or does democracy persist precisely because democratic systems have the power to re-invent themselves?

Participants will be expected to maintain a neutral point of view with respect to current political affairs, including the 2020 U.S. elections.

Role of participants: Participants will research and make a 20-to30 minute presentation on a problem and/or solution of their choice and lead discussion. The moderator will provide a list of possible topics and resources.

Resources: *How Democracy Ends*, by David Runciman (2018) provides an informal overview. The moderator will provide more extensive bibliography as well as a list of potential topics.

About the Moderator: Kathy's interest in this area comes from 25 years of being active in the League of Women Voters and her interest in the commons, the subject of an LIR seminar that she moderated in 2016.