The Future of Democracy: Potential Topics

In this seminar we will be looking at both the challenges to democratic governance, both in the U.S. and around the world, and consider how democracy might be made more resilient in the face of these threats. You are encouraged to consider both aspects (the threat and possible responses) in your choice of topic.

Please plan on bringing to this seminar a <u>neutral point of view</u> about current politics; see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neutrality_(philosophy). If you want to talk about politics *per se*, there are other seminars for you.

Challenges

- People are encouraged to think of themselves as "consumers" instead of "citizens"
- Focus on individuals within state; "there is no such thing as society"
- Asymmetric polarization; right-wing echo chambers more impenetrable than left-wing
- The role of the media, traditional and digital
- Balancing majority and minority interests: how do you get this right?
- Non-proportional electoral systems and political duopolies leave too many voters with no electoral home
- Limitations of representative systems: do we need more petition, initiative, and referendum options?
- Does the Supreme Court has too much power to overrule Congress?
- Has the Executive branch acquired too much power? Has Congress ceded too much?
- Fragility of presidential democracies compared to parliamentary democracies
- Adversarial judicial system with a limited range of coercive alternatives available
- The civil service: corrupted by money? hollowed out because not valued?
- The military-industrial complex and the national security state
- The impact of neo-liberalism and globalization
- The centrality of property rights and contract in the Constitution
- The overworked American: Who has time for democracy?

Some responses

- The epistocratic alternative: rule by experts (is this what we have now, with perhaps poor choice of "experts"?)
- Deliberative and participatory democracy in the 21st century (Madison's vision was deliberative democracy, but who should deliberate?)
- Collaborative governance, sociocracy: decisions by synthesis rather than edict or compromise
- "Slow democracy": in praise of inefficiency
- Consultation: e.g., Swiss use of referendums, or participatory budgeting
- Principle of subsidiarity: push decision making down as far as possible
- Restorative justice
- Constructive use of the internet: wikis, public work, civic identity

How can democracy reinvent itself for the 21st century?

The Future of Democracy: An incomplete bibliography

There are hundreds of books, scholarly and popular, published on this topic, maybe hundreds every year! Not to mention many long-read articles in magazines such as The Atlantic and The Guardian Weekly and other magazines. These are just a few to get you started.

David Runciman's **How Democracy Ends** (2018) is recommended as a readable survey.

In addition, Runciman's weekly-plus podcast *Talking Politics* is a thoughtful, delightful listen; see https://www.talkingpoliticspodcast.com/. There was a series December 2019 about American history: 30-minute vignettes about people and events that you may have heard of but whose political significance and relevance to today you never before appreciated. The January 30 episode titled "Are we losing faith in democracy?" interviews Robert Foa:

Foa, R.S. et al. (2020). "The Global Satisfaction with Democracy Report 2020." Cambridge, United Kingdom: Centre for the Future of Democracy. https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/publications/global-satisfaction-democracy-report-2020/

L. Jacobs and D. King, eds. (2009) **The Unsustainable American State**.

R. Kuttner (2018). **Can Democracy Survive Global Capitalism?**

D. Acemoglu and J. A. Robinson (2012). **Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty.**

W. Clark and W. Teachout (2012) **Slow Democracy: Rediscovering community, bringing decision making back home**.

P. Norris and R. Inglehart (2019). "Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism". https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2818659

G. Monbiot (2018). **Out of the Wreckage: A New Politics for an Age of Crisis**.

R. Madron and J. Jopling (2003). **Gaian Democracies: Redefining Globalization and People-Power**. First chapter on line at http://www.gaiandemocracy.net/articles/SB Summary.pdf.

H. C. Boyte (2018). **Awakening Democracy through Public Work: Pedagogies of Empowerment**.

D. J. Amy (2000). **Behind the Ballot Box: A Citizen's Guide to Voting Systems**.

D. Green (2018). **How Change Happens**. Available as a PDF at http://how-change-happens.com/

https://www.theatlantic.com/projects/is-democracy-dying/ An excellent series from fall of 2018. More recently, The Atlantic has had a number of articles on democracy in the age of the internet and social media.