

POT 4311: Problems of Democracy (Spring 2023)

Instructor: Yuanxin Wang
Meeting Times: M, W, F 6 (12:50PM-1:40PM)
Office: Anderson Hall 330

Email: yuanxin.wang@ufl.edu
Classroom: Anderson 0034
OH: T 10AM-12PM, [By Appointment](#)

Course Description

The global popularity of democracy today has been increasingly haunted by its ambiguous meaning and contested substance. While it has been often associated with various ideas such as freedom, equality, constitution, representation, and even revolution, democracy, the venerable Greek term, originally signifies the rule (*kratos*) by the people (*demos*). But who are the people? How do and should they rule? What are the justifications and, if any, limitations of their ruling? An investigation on how *past* political thinkers and activists reflected on these questions not only helps us de-familiarize and problematize *current* opinions about democracy but also points toward alternative *futures* of democratic ideals.

This advanced undergraduate course situates the ongoing debates about democracy and its problems in a larger historical and philosophical framework. We will study a sampling of classic and contemporary literature on democracy. We will begin with the history of democracy, ranging from ancient Athenian democracy to revolutionary democracies in the modern world, and draw insights from their advocates and critics. We will then return to the contemporary world and examine debates about the normative values and justifications of democracy. Finally, we will interrogate current challenges to democracy (i.e. populism, racial domination, neoliberalism, social media) and consider various attempts to solve or mitigate these problems.

Course Objectives

1. Foundational Knowledge: Students are expected to understand key historical ideas and moments in the development of democracy and identify key debates in contemporary democratic theory as presented in the course.
2. Application and Integration: Students are expected to develop an ability to apply and synthesize the concepts and arguments they have learned in the course to analyze democratic theories and practices.
3. Learning to Think Differently: Students are expected to develop a reflexive perspective on the reading material. They are also encouraged to develop a capacity to think critically and differently by exploring democratic theories beyond the confine of the canonical traditions and prevailing practices.

Course Requirements and Grading

Your grade for this course will be based on 6 components:

1. Attendance and participation (15%; 5%, 10%)

Attendance (5%) in this course is expected. Role will be taken at the beginning of each class meeting. Excused absences must be consistent with university policies and require appropriate documentation. Additional information can be found [here](#). Students who miss more than 30% of the class (12 class meetings) will not be able to complete/pass the course.

Active in-class participation (10%) is essential to your achievement in this course. When you come to class, you should come prepared to discuss the material that has been assigned for that class. This means that you are expected to do the reading to be covered during a given class in advance and bring your personal insights to an open and fruitful discussion.

2. Weekly discussion posts (15%; 1% each)

In addition to participating during class, you are required to prepare at least TWO discussion questions for each Friday class meeting which is based on a seminar format. The questions should be well situated in the text and highlight some passages/arguments of the week's reading that you find important and noteworthy. Each question should consist of three components in 4-5 sentences (about 100 words): (i) passages from the reading (with page number, if available) that have drawn your attention; (ii) a brief explanation of how certain arguments/concepts/assumptions in these passages could lead to a puzzle and invites different interpretations; (iii) the question(s) for discussion.

The questions must be posted on our Canvas page by **8PM on Thursday** of each week. (*You do not have to post discussion questions on the weeks you are assigned for group presentation and response papers. You will receive full credit for that week's discussion post as long as you give the presentation or submit the response paper on time.) *At least ONE question should refer to the text that the instructor has not lectured on (in most cases, that means the required reading for the class on Friday).* Given the timely nature of this assignment, no late post or retrospective make-up will be accepted.

3. Two response papers (25%; 12.5% each)

You are required to write TWO short response papers (5 pages, double-spaced, 12 font, Times New Roman) on the weeks you choose. The paper IS NOT a mere summary of the authors' arguments but your own reflection on the materials. You must refer extensively to the texts, interpret crucial passages to demonstrate their theoretical import and/or practical significance, and point out the gaps, oversights, and even contradictions in the author's argumentation. A good response paper should have four elements: (i) a clear and strong argumentative thesis; (ii) a short summary of the main points of the author(s); (iii) a well-constructed discussion of your own perspective, especially how and where you agree or disagree with the author(s); (iv) a brief conclusion.

You can only write response papers prospectively, i.e. on materials we have not studied and discussed yet. The paper must be turned in (as a PDF or as a Microsoft Word document) via Canvas **prior to the first class meeting of the week** for which the readings are assigned. For example, if you choose to write on the materials of Week 4, you should submit your paper no

later than 12:50PM on Monday, January 30. Your first response paper must be turned in by **February 27** (the first class meeting of Week 8), and your second response paper by **April 17** (the first class meeting of Week 15). The highest grade for a late response paper in the absence of a legitimate excuse is C+. Please be aware: a “C+” is not the lowest grade a late assignment can receive; it is the highest (i.e., it is the ceiling, not the floor).

4. Group presentation (15%)

Each group is expected to give a 20-minute presentation at the beginning of the Friday seminar, followed by a brief Q&A session. At 20 minutes, your group will be asked to stop the presentation regardless of your progress. The presentation should have three components: (i) a synopsis of the required reading for that Friday class; (ii) one empirical case (i.e. recent or historical events) that is related to that week’s general topic and/or arguments in any particular readings; (iii) at least SIX well-articulated questions for class discussion.

Your presentation grade breaks down into three parts: (i) the overall performance of the group (5%); (ii) your individual performance during the presentation and the Q&A (5%); (iii) peer review of other members of the group (5%). *A sign-up sheet for group assignment and presentation schedule will be circulated at the beginning of the semester.* The presentation should be facilitated by PowerPoint slides, which must be sent to the instructor by **10AM on Friday**. DO NOT read what is on the slides verbatim. Talking directly to your audience is essential to an interactive and appealing presentation.

5. Final paper proposal (5%)

Think early about your final paper. You are required to discuss the general topic and research question of the paper with the instructor **by the end of Week 11**. You can *either* [make an appointment](#) during his office hours on Tuesday *or* submit a 1-page proposal by **March 25**. No late appointment/submission will be accepted.

6. Final paper (25%)

You are required to write a research paper (10-12 pages, double-spaced, 12 font, Times New Roman) that engages the authors and themes we study in the course. More details on this assignment will be provided during the semester. The final paper must be submitted via Canvas by **May 3**. The highest grade for a late response paper in the absence of a legitimate excuse is C+.

The course is out of 100 total points, and the Grading Scale is as follows: 93-100 (A); 90-92 (A-); 87-89 (B+); 83-86 (B); 80-82 (B-); 77-79 (C+); 73-76 (C); 70-72 (C-); 67-69 (D+); 63-66 (D); 60-62 (D-); 0-59 (E; failing)

More information on UF grading policy may be found at [Grades and Grading Policies](#). Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with [university policies](#).

Policy on Academic Integrity

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.” On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” [The Honor Code](#) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor in this class.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Class Demeanor

Students are expected to arrive to class on time and behave in a manner that is respectful to the instructor and to fellow students. Opinions held by other students should be respected in discussion. Your courtesy towards others is key to a lively and enjoyable intellectual environment. Phones should be turned off prior to class.

Policy Regarding in Class Recording

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to

another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Student Privacy

There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments. For more information, please see [the Notification to Students of FERPA Rights](#).

Material and Supply Fees

There are no additional fees for this course.

Campus Resources

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: [Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or [visit the Student Health Care Center website](#).

University Police Department: [Visit UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).

GatorWell Health Promotion Services: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the [GatorWell website](#) or call 352-273-4450.

In response to COVID-19, the following recommendations are in place to maintain your learning environment, to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions, and to further the health and safety of ourselves, our neighbors, and our loved ones.

- If you are not vaccinated, get vaccinated. Vaccines are readily available and have been demonstrated to be safe and effective against the COVID-19 virus. Visit [one.uf](#) for screening / testing and vaccination opportunities.

- If you are sick, stay home. Please call your primary care provider if you are ill and need immediate care or the UF Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161 to be evaluated.
- Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work.

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: [Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information.](#)

On-Line Students Complaints: [View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process.](#)

Readings and Assignments Schedule

***Please note that the syllabus can be changed as needed during the semester. ***

***These mandatory readings might be complemented with additional readings through the semester, provided by instructor. ***

Week 1 (Jan 9-13) Introduction

Jan 9 Syllabus walkthrough

Jan 11 De-familiarizing democracy: historical and normative perspectives

Jan 13 Josiah Ober, “The Original Meaning of “Democracy”” [7 pages]

**Sign up for group presentation.*

PART I: THE BIRTH OF DEMOCRACY: ANCIENT ATHENS

Week 2 (Jan 16-20) Athenian Democracy: Eulogy and Sarcasm

Jan 16 No Class (Holiday)

Jan 18 Thucydides, “Pericles’ Funeral Oration,” from *History of the Peloponnesian War*; Aristophanes, *The Wasps*, Act One, Scene 1 [54 pages]

Jan 20 Matthew Landauer, “The “Idiōtēs” and the Tyrant: Two Faces of Unaccountability in Democratic Athens” [28 pages]

Presenters:

Week 3 (Jan 23-27) The Trial of Socrates: The City and Man

Jan 23 Plato, *The Apology of Socrates* [35 pages]

Jan 25 Plato, *The Republic*, Book VIII, pp.233-249 [17 pages]

Jan 27 Richard Kraut, “Socrates and Democracy,” section 1-4, from *Socrates and the State* [22 pages]

Presenters:

PART II: MODERN DEMOCRACY AND REVOLUTIONS

Week 4 (Jan 30-Feb 3) Revolution and Democracy: An Introduction

Jan 30 Sheldon Wolin, “Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing Democracy” [23 pages]

Feb 1 John Locke, *The Second Treatise*, Chapter 2, 8-9, 19 [29 pages]

Feb 3 Emily Nacol, “The Risks of Political Authority: Trust, Knowledge and Political Agency in Locke's Second Treatise” [16pages]

Presenters:

Week 5 (Feb 6-10) Revolution and Democracy in America

Feb 6 *Declaration of Independence*; Thomas Jefferson’s letter to James Madison; James Madison’s Letter to Thomas Jefferson; *The Federalist*, #10, #14 [19 pages]

Feb 8 Abigail Adams’s letters to John Adams and Mercy Otis Warren; Jefferson, *Notes on the state of Virginia*; David Walker, *Appeal* [18 pages]

Recommended: William Apress, *Eulogy on King Philip*

Feb 10 Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration*, Chapter 14-18, 25-28 [32 pages]

Presenters:

Week 6 (Feb 13-17) Revolution and Democracy in France

Feb 13 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book I, Chapter 1, 6-8; Book II, Chapter 1-4, 6-7; Book III, Chapter 3-7; Book IV, Chapter 1 [35 pages]

Feb 15 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*; Olympe de Gouges, “Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Female Citizen”; Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, “What is the Third Estate?” [35 pages]

Feb 17 Joseph Schumpeter, “Two Concepts of Democracy”, pp.153-177 [25 pages]

Presenters:

Week 7 (Feb 20-24) Revolution and the Dilemma of Democracy in Haiti

Feb 20 Toussaint L’Ouverture, “Proclamation”, “Letter to the General Assembly from Biassou”, “Toussaint L’Ouverture to His Brothers and Sisters in Varettes”, “Address to Soldiers for the Universal Destruction of Slavery”, “Letter to the French Directory”, “Haitian Constitution of 1801” [31 pages]

Recommended: Jean Bertrand Aristide, “Introduction,” from *Toussaint L’Ouverture: The Haitian Revolution*

Feb 22 *The Haitian Declaration of Independence*; Getachew, “Universalism After the Post-colonial Turn: Interpreting the Haitian Revolution” [28 pages]

Feb 24 Lorenzo Ravano, “The Borders of Citizenship in the Haitian Revolution” [26 pages]

Presenters:

Week 8 (Feb 27-Mar 3) After Revolution: Social Movements and Struggle for Inclusion

Feb 27 Judith Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion*, pp.387-418 [32 pages]

**Your first response paper must be turned in no later than 12:50PM, February 27.*

Mar 1 Carole Pateman, “Feminism and Democracy”; Stokely Carmichael, “Toward Black Liberation” [29 pages]

Mar 3 Sheldon Wolin, "What revolutionary action means today?" [12 pages]

Presenters:

PART III: THE VALUE AND LEGITIMACY OF DEMOCRACY

Week 9 (Mar 6-10) Intrinsic and Instrumental Values

Mar 6 In-Class Film Viewing: “What is Democracy?”

Mar 8 Richard Arneson, “Democracy is not Intrinsically Just”; Thomas Christiano, “Democracy as the Public Realization of Equality,” from *The Constitution of Equality* [47 pages]

Mar 10 Elizabeth Anderson, "Democracy: Instrumental vs. Non-Instrumental Value" [16 pages]

Presenters:

Week 10 (Mar 13-17) Democratic Authority

Mar 13 David Estlund, “Democratic Authority”, from *Democratic Authority* [20 pages]

**There will be no class on March 12. TWO discussion questions based on Estlund’s piece should be posted on Canvas by 8PM, March 16. No group presentation this week.*

Mar 15 No Class (Spring Break)

Mar 17 No Class (Spring Break)

Week 11 (Mar 20-24) Majority Rule

Mar 20 Jeremy Waldron, “The Core of the Case against Judicial Review” [61 pages]

Mar 22 Alexis de Tocqueville, “Of the Omnipotence of the Majority in the United States and Its Effects,” from *Democracy in America* [25 pages]

Recommended: Jon Elster, “Tyranny and Brutality of the Majority”

Mar 24 Ben Saunders, “Democracy, Political Equality, and Majority Rule” [30 pages]

Presenters:

**You must discuss the proposal of your final paper during the instructor’s office hours or submit a written proposal by March 25.*

PART IV: CURRENT CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY

Week 12 (Mar 27-31) Populism(s)

Mar 27 Jan-Werner Müller, “Introduction” and “What Populists Say”, from *What is Populism?* [40 pages]

Mar 29 Margaret Canovan. “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy”; Philippe Schmitter, “The Virtues and Vices of Populism” [22 pages]

Recommended: Nadia Urbinati, “Political Theory of Populism”

Mar 31 John McCormick. “Democracy’s Crisis and the Populist Cry of Pain” [22 pages]

Presenters:

Week 13 (Apr 3-7) Democracy and the Color Line

Apr 3 Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Introduction and Chapter 1 [40 pages]

Apr 5 Jane Mansbridge, “Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent ‘Yes’”; Meena Krishnamurthy. “(White) Tyranny and the Democratic Value of Distrust” [46 pages]

Apr 7 Juliet Hooker, “Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Black Politics” [22 pages]

Presenters:

Week 14 (Apr 10-14) Democracy and Neoliberalism

Apr 10 Thomas Biebricher, *The Political Theory of Neoliberalism*, pp. 25-8; 79-108 [34 pages]

Apr 12 Wendy Brown, “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization”, “Neoliberalism's Frankenstein” [45 pages]

Apr 14 “Neoliberalism Has Finally Reached the End of the Road”; “In the Biden Era, Neoliberalism Is Alive and Kicking” [20 pages]

Presenters:

Week 15 (Apr 17-21) Re-Imagining the Democratic Space: Immigration & Social Media

Apr 17 Sarah Song, “Political Theories of Migration”; Arash Abizadeh, “Closed Borders, Human Rights, and Democratic Legitimation” (esp. pp.156-61) [40 pages]

**Your second response paper must be turned in no later than 12:50PM, April 17.*

Apr 19 Simone Chambers, “Truth, Deliberative Democracy, and the Virtues of Accuracy: Is Fake News Destroying the Public Sphere?”; Jennifer Forestal, “The Architecture of Political Spaces: Trolls, Digital Media, and Deweyan Democracy” [30 pages]

Apr 21 John Dryzek, “The Forum, the System, and the Polity: Three Varieties of Democratic Theory” [27 pages]

Presenters:

Week 16 (Apr 24-28) Wrap-Up

Apr 24 Wrap-Up Lecture

Apr 26 Review Session

Apr 28 No class (Reading Days)

**Final paper must be turned in by May 3.*