Democratic and Dictatorship: Politics in the Contemporary World

World events in the past several decades have underscored the importance of rethinking old questions about democracy: what it means, why it matters, what sorts of institutions can embody it, and what can be done to establish, defend, and deepen it. To explore these issues this course uses the experiences of the United States, Sweden, Russia, and the former Soviet Union, and Tanzania.

The course begins by exploring conceptual and normative issues related to democracy. It then reviews how democracy is being studied in contemporary political science, focusing on cognitive biases that affect political participation, democratization and autocratization, and cross-national comparisons of voter qualification and voter turnout.

The course then proceeds to four country studies, starting with the United States. The topics addressed in the US section are the social bases of support for Donald Trump, why Joe Biden won the 2020 election, how the Trump and Biden administrations responded to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the role of misinformation and disinformation in contemporary US politics.

The second country study is Sweden, where we'll study basic political institutions, the political party system, the welfare state, and contemporary politics, including the rise of the populist right and the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The third country study is of Russia and the former Soviet Union. We examine Marxism and Leninism, the ideologies that influenced the Soviet political system, review the historical legacies that have influenced post-transition Russian leaders, study the autocratization of the Russian regime under Putin, and compare alternative explanations for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The fourth country study is Tanzania, where we explore the pre-colonial political system of the Makonde (one of Tanzania's larger ethnolinguistic groups), inquire as to why Tanzania has suffered less ethnic conflict than neighboring countries, evaluate Julius Nyerere's effort to create a democratic one-party state, and investigate democratic backsliding and pandemic response under the late president John Magufuli and the current president Samia Suluhu Hassan.

Course Requirements

The course grade will be based on 22 reading quizzes, a short (5-6 page) paper, three in-class blue-book exams, and class participation.
Summary of Due Dates and Final Grade Weightings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading quizzes</td>
<td>One each class</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Paper</td>
<td>Oct 8 (Su)</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden Exam</td>
<td>Oct 26 (Th)</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russia Exam</td>
<td>Nov 16 (Th)</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tanzania Exam</td>
<td>Dec 7 (Th)</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
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Honor Code

Any instance of cheating or plagiarism will suffice for a grade of "F" for the entire course.

Reading Quizzes

The quizzes are posted on the Moodle segment for each class session. They involve multiple-choice questions on each reading. Most of the class sessions have two readings, although several have one or three. The questions have four possible answers, only one of which is correct. Usually you will get two questions, but sometimes three or four, depending on how many readings were assigned and how many questions I thought up.

The quizzes are designed to highlight important issues in the reading and to introduce the method of multiple working hypotheses. The quizzes can be challenging, but are not intentionally tricky or funny. You are allowed, indeed encouraged, to see your questions before you do the reading. The quiz on each class session opens ten minutes after the previous class session ends. It must be completed by 9:30 AM on the day for which the reading is assigned.

Do not use artificial intelligence (ChatGPT etc.) at any point while taking the quiz -- whether to find out the answer, to double-check your answer, etc. In class from time to time, however, we'll watch Chat GPT answer quiz questions and see how it does vs. the class consensus. You are honor-bound not to ask artificial intelligence, your classmates, or anyone else for help on quizzes.

"Deception concerning adherence to the conditions set by the instructor for a formal academic exercise" is Provision 5 of the Wesleyan Honor Code. The quiz is a formal academic exercise, and the conditions I am setting are: you may not request assistance from anyone (e.g., your classmates) or anything (e.g., Chat-GPT) on the quiz questions you have been asked to answer, nor may you give assistance to anyone else on quiz questions that they have been asked to answer. The questions you will get on each reading are selected randomly from a larger pool of questions, so whomever you might ask for assistance is in any case unlikely to have gotten the same questions that you received.

Paper

The first assignment is a 5-6 page (double-spaced) paper on the quality of democracy in the United States. It should be uploaded to the course Moodle by 5 PM Sunday, October 8.

You will be asked to (1) identify defects in the quality of democracy in the United States, (2) assess whether those defects drop the United States below the threshold of polyarchy ("minimalist" democracy), (3) propose a single constitutional, legal, or regulatory change that would improve US
democracy (or restore it, if you think it's below the threshold), either by deepening it or by making it more resilient to autocratization, and (4) defend the desirability and feasibility of the proposed change against counter-arguments that it would be undesirable, infeasible, or both. The paper must contain specific citations, with page numbers, to at least eight of the readings assigned for the class sessions from September 7 to October 5.

No outside reading need be done. The course readings and your general knowledge should suffice for you to complete the paper. If you've read this far in the syllabus, send me an email. The first student to email me gets extra course credit (unrelated to the paper). Your paper grade will be based mostly on the clarity and persuasiveness of your argument and on your ability to support it by addressing, criticizing, and building on points in the assigned reading.

Examinations

You'll write out each exam by hand in a blue book during a single class period, without notes or electronic devices. The first exam takes place during the class period Thursday, October 26. It covers the October 10-19 class sessions and their assigned readings, mostly on Sweden. The second exam takes place during the class period Thursday, November 16. It will cover the October 31 to November 14 class sessions and their assigned readings, mostly on Russia and the former USSR. The third exam takes place during the class period Thursday, December 7. It will cover the November 21 to December 5 class sessions and their assigned readings, mostly on Tanzania. You may use ChatGPT (etc.) to prepare for the exams if you think it will help you, but (of course) not during the exam.

Artificial Intelligence

You may not use ChatGPT or any other artificial intelligence platform ("AI") on the quizzes or on the three in-class handwritten exams. On the paper due October 8 you may use AI for insight but not in the writing. All students must include a statement indicating whether AI was used at any point in the assignment. If you didn't use AI, just write "I didn't use AI at any point in this assignment." If you did use AI for insight, describe how you used it.

Obtaining Course Readings

All readings are available on the Moodle; no books are required. Cardinal Print will produce a Course Pack of readings assigned for this course. There will be two volumes, the first covering Democracy in Comparative Politics and the USA, and the second Russia and Tanzania. The lead time on Course Packs is 12 days, so please download the first two week's readings from Moodle. The course pack will start with the Schedler and Diamond readings for Tuesday September 19.

When the course pack is ready, you may either view a digital file for free or order a printed copy for a charge. As of January 2022, up to 100 double-sided pages cost $15.00, up to 150 cost $22.00, up to 200 cost $30.00, etc. No returns, refunds, or exchanges are permitted. To view a digital copy or purchase a printed copy, log into WesPortal and select Course Packs, which is listed under Courses. If you wish to purchase a printed copy, click Order Print. Your printed course packs will be delivered through Wes Station's package delivery system and billed to your student account. You will typically receive your course pack within three business days of placing your order. Course pack billing occurs toward the end of the semester. You will receive an email prior to billing so that you may review the charges.
Accessibility Services

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a disability as defined by the ADA. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

If you have a disability, or think that you might have a disability, please contact Accessibility Services in order to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. Accessibility Services is located in North College, room 021 or can be reached by email (accessibility@wesleyan.edu) or phone (860-685-2332).

Religious/Spiritual Observance Resources:

If you anticipate that your religious/spiritual observance may conflict with academic obligations such as attending class, taking examinations, or submitting assignments, you can work directly with your professor to make reasonable arrangements. Should you require additional support or guidance, please feel free to contact Rabbi David Leipziger Teva, Director of the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at dleipziger@wesleyan.edu, or any of the chaplains in the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at https://www.wesleyan.edu/orsl/index.html.

For a list of a religious holidays celebrated by members of the Wesleyan community, go to Wesleyan’s Multifaith calendar which can be found at: https://www.wesleyan.edu/orsl/multifaith-calendar.html.

Title IX Resources

If trauma inhibits your ability to participate fully in class, please contact Debbie Colucci, Title IX Coordinator, at dcolucci@wesleyan.edu, or your class dean. Additionally, and if you are comfortable, you can work directly with your professor to make reasonable arrangements.
Summary of Course Schedule

Tu Sep 5  Introduction to the Course

1. Democracy in Comparative Politics

1.1. Conceptual and Normative issues
Th Sep 7  Conceptualizing and Justifying Democracy
Tu Sep 12 Measuring Democracy

1.2. Democracy in Contemporary Political Science
Th Sep 14  Democracy, Political Knowledge, and Political Decision-Making
Tu Sep 19  Democratization and Autocratization

1.3. Electoral Rights and Electoral Behavior
Th Sep 21  Who Has the Right to Vote?
Tu Sep 26  Who Actually Does Vote?

2. Democracy: Country Studies

2.1 The United States
Th Sep 28  The Trump Presidency and Its Aftermath
Tu Oct 3  The Social Basis of Support for Donald Trump
Th Oct 5  Pandemic Politics and Prebunking
Su Oct 8  *Improving US democracy paper due at 5 PM*

2.2. Sweden
Tu Oct 10  Political Institutions and Political Parties in Sweden
Th Oct 12  Why Is There Social Democracy in Sweden, But Not in the United States?
Tu Oct 17  The Welfare State in Sweden and the United States
Th Oct 19  Sweden: Rise of the Right
*Th Oct 26*  *Sweden Exam, blue book in class*

2.3. Russia and the former Soviet Union
Tu Oct 31  Marxism and Leninism
Th Nov 2  The Russian Revolution and Its Aftermath
Tu Nov 7  Stalinism and the Collapse of Communism
Th Nov 9  Russia: Politics since 1990
Tu Nov 14  Why Did Russia Invade Ukraine?
*Th Nov 16*  *Russia/USSR Exam, blue book in class*

2.4. Tanzania
Tu Nov 21  Political Authority in Pre-Colonial Tanganyika
Tu Nov 28  The Depoliticization of Ethnicity in Mainland Tanzania
Th Nov 30  Democracy and the One-Party State in Tanzania
Tu Dec 5  Tanzania: Contemporary Politics and Pandemic Response
*Th Dec 7*  *Tanzania Exam, blue book in class*
**TOPICS AND READINGS**

**Tu Sep 5**  
**Introduction to the Course**  
No assigned reading

**1. Democracy: Initial Considerations**

**1.1. Conceptual and Normative Issues**

**Tu Sep 7**  
**Conceptualizing and Justifying Democracy**

   Chapter 4 (35-43), Chapter 8 (83-99).


**Tu Sep 12**  
**Measuring Democracy**


**1.2. Democracy in Contemporary Political Science**

**Th Sep 14**  
**Democracy, Political Knowledge, and Political Decision-Making**


**Tu Sep 19**  
**Democratization and Autocratization**


**1.3. Electoral Rights and Electoral Behavior**

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**Who Has the Right to Vote?**


Tu Sep 26  Who Actually Does Vote?


2. Democracy: Country Studies

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Th Sep 28  The Trump Presidency and Its Aftermath


Tu Oct 3  The Social Basis of Support for Donald Trump


Th Oct 5  Pandemic Politics and Prebunking


Su Oct 8  Improving democracy in the USA paper due at 5 PM

Please review the assignment sheet posted on the course Moodle and upload your paper to the Moodle by 5 PM.
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Tu Oct 10  Political Institutions and Political Parties in Sweden


Th Oct 12  Why is There Social Democracy in Sweden, But Not in the United States?


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Th Nov 30 Democracy and the One-Party State in Tanzania


Tu Dec 5 Tanzania: Politics and Pandemic Response


Th Dec 7 Tanzania Exam (no new readings)