POIR 555:  
Democracy and Democratization in Comparative Perspective  

Fall 2023

When: W 5:00-7:50 p.m.  
Where: DMC 105  
Office Hours: M 1:00-3:00 p.m.  
or by appointment

Professor Gerardo Munck  
E-Mail: munck@usc.edu  
Office: DMC 361D

Course Description

This seminar explores research that builds and tests theories of democratization and the endurance of democracy. We start with some classic readings on the nature and value of democracy. Then we consider some early theorizing and, in more detail, various schools of thought that flourished after World War II. We end by considering some new areas of research, related to the state, the nation and democratic backsliding. The overall aim of the seminar is to learn about concepts, theories and empirical tests in the field of democracy studies.

Requirements

i) Three analytical essays (30% of the final grade). These short essays (5 to 7 double-spaced pages) on all the readings for one week will be due, at the latest, by Wednesday at 4 p.m. in my mailbox in VKC 330 or in the email inbox. Under no conditions can papers used in other classes be used for this class.

ii) Five précis (20% of the final grade). These short (1-page) analytical summaries will focus on one of the readings (not covered in the three analytical essays) and will be due, at the latest, by Wednesday at 4 p.m. in my mailbox in VKC 330 or in the email inbox. Under no conditions can papers used in other classes be used for this class.

iii) Class participation (25% of the final grade) on the basis of the required readings, each and every week.

iv) A take-home final exam (25% of the final grade). As a final assignment, students will be asked to write, as a sort of take-home exam, a roughly 10 page, double-spaced, paper, on a question to be assigned.

Readings

I have posted the readings for which I have electronic copies on the USC Blackboard, under course “Readings.” The readings are in folders organized by the number of each meeting.

When doing the readings, it makes sense to read them in the order they are presented in this syllabus. For each week, I have made a few notes of issues that we will discuss. Also, the full text of each reading is frequently not required; therefore, look at the notes next to the reading in this syllabus to see what pages you should read.
Topic Outline and Reading Assignments

Meeting 1: Introduction (August 23)

Basic ideas about social science research. The contents and requirements of the course. Analytical essays. Stylized facts about the history of democracy.


The Nature and Value of Democracy: Arguing About Democracy

Meeting 2: The Concept of Democracy (August 30)

Pre-World War II thinking about the nature of democracy. Schumpeter’s critique of the classical conception of democracy. Schumpeter’s alternative. A procedural conception of democracy. Dahl’s approach to democracy: principles and “institutions.”


Schumpeter, Joseph. 1942. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. New York: Harper. [Read only pages 240-73, starting with the section on “A Mental Experiment” and ending where the section on “The Principle Applied” begins.]


Meeting 3: The Value of Democracy (September 6)

Intrinsic and instrumental value. Arguments for and against democracy. The limits of democracy or what we should not expect from democracy. Democracy as a mechanism for processing conflicts peaceful.

Femia, Joseph V. 2001. *Against the Masses. Varieties of Anti-Democratic Thought since the French Revolution*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. [Read Chapters 1 through 4; skip the conclusion.]


The Origins and Endurance of Democracy:
Initial Theorizing and Post-World War II Schools of Thought

Meeting 4: Pre-World War II Thinking: Economics, Culture, Politics and International Factors (September 13)


Tocqueville, Alexis de. 2010 [1835]. Democracy in America Vol. 2 Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund. [Read the part that focuses on the “habits and mores” on pages 466-72.]


Veblen, Thorstein. 1915. Imperial Germany and the Industrial Revolution. London, UK: Macmillan & Co., Ltd. [Read starting with first full paragraph on page 61 to the top of page 62, all of Chapter 6, and from the bottom of page 240 through the middle of page 245.]


Meeting 5: Modernization Theory: Economic Development (September 20)

Distinction between modernization theory and modernization as a process. The metatheory of modernization theory: societal reductionism and unilinear development. The West as the model for the rest. The Lipset hypothesis about the economic determinants of democracy. The distinction between the origins and stability of democracy.


Meeting 6: Power Structure Theory: Class, State and the State System (September 27)

The critique of modernization theory. Modes of economic development rather than one path. Political and international factors as opposed to only societal factors. A focus on power relations more than on preferences for democracy. Moore, and Huber, Rueschemeyer and Stephens, on the impact of capitalism and classes. Tilly on the impact of state formation and external factors. Mazzuca’s synthesis.


Meeting 7: Political Institutional Theory I: Political Actors and Strategic Choices (October 4)

The critique of modernization theory. The rejection of societal prerequisites; the problem of national unity as an exception. Beyond correlates to mechanisms. A focus on political actors and processes. Politically-based preferences for regimes. Politicism and voluntarism. The distinction between the origins and stability of democracy.


Meeting 8: Political Institutional Theory II: Political Institutions and Ruling Coalitions (October 11)

A focus on elites and institutions. The old regime and its impact. The durability of authoritarian regimes.


**Meeting 9: Political Economy Theory: Economic Inequality and Redistribution** (October 18)

Distributive conflict models. The median voter model. A focus on preferences based on economic outcomes under democracy. A unified theory of the origins and stability of democracy. The differences between Boix, and Acemoglu and Robinson. The results of tests (Houle, Haggard and Kaufman).

Boix, Carles. 2003. *Democracy and Redistribution.* New York: Cambridge University Press. [Read only pages 1-16 of the “Introduction,” and focus on the argument about economic equality and capital mobility.]

Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. 2006 *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy.* New York: Cambridge University Press. [Read only Chapter 2, “Our Argument,” and sections 6 and 7 of Chapter 3 (to see how these authors locate their work in the context of the broader literature).]


**New Areas of Research:**

State, Nation, Quality of Democracy, and Democratic Backsliding

**Meeting 10: The Long-Term I. The State and Quality of Democracy** (October 25)

How does the formation of states and state building affect, or interact, with regimes and democracy? Conceptual matters again: expanding the dependent variable, from democracy to high-capacity democracy. Explanatory matters: prerequisites again?


**Meeting 11: The Long-Term II. Nation, Ethnic Politics and Democracy** (November 1)

How does nationalism and nation-building affect ethnic politics and democracy?


**Meeting 12: Post-Cold War Patterns I. De-Democratization** (November 8)

The debate about patterns in the state of democracy since the end of the Cold War. Is there a democratic recession? Thinking about democratic backsliding or erosion.

Treisman, Daniel. 2023. “How Great is the Current Danger to Democracy? Assessing the Risk With Historical Data.” *Comparative Political Studies* 0(0).


**Meeting 13: Post-Cold War Patterns II. De-Democratization** (November 15)

How do we start to make sense of the sense that democracy is in crisis? How can we explain instances of democratic backsliding?


**Meeting # 14: No class. Thanksgiving Holiday** (November 22)

**Taking Stock**

**Meeting 15: Assessing Democracy Studies** (November 29)

What have we learned about democracy? Which are the main advances in knowledge? What are the areas where progress has not been made? What are the most fruitful ways to contribute further to the literature?
A Comprehensive Bibliography

Classic and Recent Works on the Nature and Value of Democracy


**Classic and Recent Works on the Explanation of Democracy**


Overviews and Critical Assessments


Academic Conduct and Support Systems

**Academic Conduct**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* [https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/](https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, [http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/).

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* [http://equity.usc.edu/](http://equity.usc.edu/) or to the *Department of Public Safety* [http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us](http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us). This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* [http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/](http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/) provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage [sarc@usc.edu](mailto:sarc@usc.edu) describes reporting options and other resources.

**Support Systems**

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* [http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali](http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali), which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* [http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* [http://emergency.usc.edu/](http://emergency.usc.edu/) will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.