Instructor:

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Office Hours: Friday 10:30-12:30 and by appointment.

Course Description

Is democracy a “Western” concept? Until quite recently, political theorists tended to identify the historical origins and institutional forms of democratic government with late eighteenth and nineteenth-century Western Europe and North America. But the global diffusion of democracy since the 1970s, and especially since the end of the Cold War, pushes us to revisit this standard narrative. How has ‘democracy’ as a political system changed between and across countries, cultures, and continents? How have different histories shaped the meaning and concrete form that democracy has taken in particular contexts? Is it possible for us to identify a shared singular core to democratic politics?

This seminar offers students an opportunity to analyze the theoretical foundations of democracy through a comparative framework. We will seek to understand how central norms of democratic politics—such as voting, representation, citizenship, and civil rights—have been understood in different intellectual traditions, especially those informed by forms of political thought outside Western Europe and the United States. We will also explore what new institutions and political practices the study of these traditions might introduce into current models of democracy. Course readings will be a combination of primary texts and selected secondary literature, drawn from political theory, history, and legal studies. The readings will cover South and East Asia, West Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

The course will be conducted as a discussion seminar and is aimed at upper-year undergraduates. The goal of the course is to have students read primary texts across a range of perspectives and to bring disparate philosophies of politics into constructive conversation with one another.
Course Readings

All course readings will be available online as PDFs. Readings will be posted in advance under Library Reserves on the course Chalk site.

Most weeks will also include a set of supplementary/suggested readings. These are not mandatory. They are intended to help you explore a topic in further detail and will be valuable for both in-class presentations and writing assignments. I recommend looking over the suggested readings as you are able.

Assessment

Participation (10%): Engaged discussion and regular attendance are the most important components of the class. This is a reading-heavy seminar and students are expected to attend each session having carefully studied the material in advance. Constructive discussion during class includes actively, respectfully listening and responding to your peers. During discussion, you are also expected to be engaged with the week’s readings and to support your arguments with evidence from the texts as much as possible. I discourage relying on any outside readings or references for discussion. Please email me in advance if any emergency reasons prevent you from attending a given class.

Blog Posts (10%): For a minimum of 3 times during the quarter, students are expected to upload a personal reflection on the week’s readings as a blog post on the course website. Rather than being formal essays, blog entries are meant to encourage you to raise any issues, questions, or challenges you had with the readings. There is no strict word limit for the blog entries, but each post should be at least 300 words (3-4 paragraphs).

Blog posts are due by 6 PM the evening before class.

Group Presentations (10%): Starting from Week 2, groups of two-three students will present each session’s readings to the class. Presentations should include a short summary of all the readings and identify a minimum of 3 questions or issues which you would like to see further answered or discussed. Presentations should be approximately 5 minutes each. We will sign up for groups and dates during the first class.

First Paper (30%): The first paper will be due in Week 5. It will be a relatively short writing assignment (1500 words, ~6 pages) asking you to compare two of the readings we will have completed by Week 5. I will circulate essay topics and assignment details at the beginning of Week 4.

Final Paper Proposal (10%): During Week 10, you will be required to turn in a 1-page description of your final essay topic. I will circulate assignment details and suggestions for essay topics in the previous week.
Final Paper (30%): The final paper will be due during Finals Week. It will be a medium-length assignment (2000-2500 words, ~8-10 pages). The assignment should accommodate the comments I provide on your paper proposal.

Classroom Policies

Assignments: All assignments are due over email on the listed due dates. Late essays will not be accepted. The only exceptions will be emergencies supported by appropriate documentation. I am able to grant short extensions for the first paper, but you must email me your request at least two days in advance of the due date.

Class readings: I generally encourage you to bring printed copies of the readings to class. However, you can also use laptops or tablets in class if necessary. Please get in touch if you have any problems accessing the readings.

Plagiarism: Academic integrity is fundamental to learning and scholarship. Plagiarism is a serious offense and will not be tolerated. You are responsible for your own original ideas, and I expect you to cite any and all secondary sources appropriately. Plagiarism of any kind will result in a failing grade and will be referred to the university for further action. Make sure you are familiar with the University of Chicago’s policies on academic honesty: https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/Policies#Honesty.

Internet Resources

There are a number of websites and blogs on politics and political philosophy in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East which will be helpful additions to the course. I will occasionally circulate links to relevant blog posts and multimedia to supplement readings. I encourage you to look at some of these websites to keep up with ongoing intellectual developments in the regions we will be studying:

Jadaliyya [history and politics in the Middle East and North Africa. Bilingual English/Arabic]: http://www.jadaliyya.com/handler.cfm?pagebase=index
The Caravan – A Journal of Politics and Culture [primarily South Asia]: http://www.caravanmagazine.in
The Immanent Frame – Social Sciences Research Council (SSRC) [religion in public life, multiculturalism, global politics]: http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/.

Questions/Concerns

Please contact me with any issues or concerns with accessibility as early as possible.
I also encourage you to come to office hours and discuss the readings and assignments over email throughout the quarter.

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Class

Please remember to do the first week’s readings in advance. They provide an important methodological framework for the course. We will discuss them after getting organized in the first hour.


Week 2: Political Institutions I – State Sovereignty

Focus: Theories of the state, Islamic jurisprudence, South Asian politics


Recommended


Week 3: Political Institutions II – Political Participation and Popular Sovereignty

Focus: Frantz Fanon, decolonization in Africa and the Middle East
Homi Bhabha, “Framing Fanon,” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. vii-xli.

**Recommended**


**Week 4: Citizenship**

*Focus: M.K. Gandhi, anti-imperialism in South Asia*

*Note: If this will be your first time reading M.K. Gandhi, I encourage looking over Anthony J. Parel’s introduction to the centenary edition of Hind Swaraj in order to better understand the historical context.*

Gandhi, “The Pyramid vs. the Oceanic Circle” (1946), pp. 181-83.

**Recommended**


**Week 5: Civil Rights and Human Rights**

*Focus: ‘Asian Values Debate,’ Chinese political thought*

*First Paper Due*


**Recommended**


**Week 6: Markets and Economic Justice**

*Focus: African economic thought*


**Recommended**


**Week 7: Racial and Cultural Difference**

*Focus: Race and ethnicity in Latin America*


**Recommended**


**Week 8: Gender and Sexuality**

Focus: Women’s movements, feminist theory, LGBTQ politics in South Asia


**Recommended**


**Week 9: Secularism, Religion, and Democracy**

**Paper Proposals Due**

**Focus: Secularization and democratization in the Middle East**

Background”) and Chapter 2 (“Dueling Scriptures: The Political Theology of John Locke and the Democratization of Muslim Societies”), pp. 23-90.

**Recommended**


**Week 10: Review – Globalization and its Effects**


**Recommended**