They assembled against Moses and Aaron and said to them, “You take too much upon yourselves, for the entire congregation are holy. So why do you raise yourselves above G-d’s assembly? ...Should you exercise authority over us?

Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of G-d, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice”. I Samuel 24

The fall of the Soviet Union brought a dramatic upsurge in the number of people worldwide living under avowedly democratic regimes. The Arab Spring unsuccessfully tried to expand that number. Yet, the democratic ideal is currently so pervasive and persistent that even the most autocratic rulers worldwide rarely reject it outright. It is understood that democracy is the requirement for legitimacy.

This course will selectively survey contemporary issues in democratic theory through several lenses:

**Definitional, Descriptive, and Genitive/ Historical Approach**

This approach seeks to describe and define democracy. What is it? How did it evolve historically? Are there fixed stages and preconditions for democracy? How does contemporary democracy differ from the classical (Greek and Roman) versions?

**Evolutionary Approach**

Contemporary “success stories” typically went through protracted, tumultuous struggles. Instead of looking exclusively at “freeze frame” democracies, scholars can understand democracy in terms of learning curves, thresholds, and transitions. Does democracy have a recipe or a blueprint? Can it take root in any soil or are there social, economic and cultural preconditions which must be met first?
Normative Approach
This approach seeks to justify democracy in terms of social justice, fairness, human dignity and autonomy. Is democracy intrinsically good or instrumentally good? Does democracy’s legitimacy derive from its normative claims that it is the most just system because humans are innately constituted to live according to democratic rules, whatever their culture and history, or is democracy simply one among many just regimes?

a. If democracy is about managing inevitable power relations and preventing domination, as the Framers of the US Constitution noted, how do we prevent it from being abused.

b. If democracy is normative, do we have a responsibility to promote it globally? Is it possible that democracy is not appropriate for all contexts, cultures or stages of development? Would promoting democracy in these cases just constitute another form of ‘imperialism’ and Western conceit?

Performance, Structures, functions, and Procedures
Do democratic procedures that aggregate individual interests in order to carry out collective decisions produce superior policy outcomes? What are the ‘paradoxes’ of democracy.

a. Can democratic processes produce “perverse” outcomes? Can we trust our fellow citizens to vote rationally so that democratic processes promote common goods like environmental protection and sustainable economies, or will they, instead, hasten climate change and resource depletion? What is the relationship between majority rule and minority rights? Can persistent majorities and minorities undermine democracy?

b. Democracy is connected to distributive justice but what is the connection between capitalism and democracy? Are the two causally or only incidentally related? How much inequality is compatible with democracy? Does the formal policy of “one person one vote” ensure democracy, or are the poor effectively disenfranchised when economic power translates into political power? What about issues of race, gender and ethnicity? What are the strengths and weakness of “differentiated citizenship” models which seek to accommodate difference? Should we consider ‘group rights’?

c. What about the connection between democracy and liberal philosophy? Is liberal democracy which is prevalent in the West, the only ‘real’ variant? Does liberalism, with its emphasis on rights-based individualism and civil and political rights, undermine both community and democracy? Does our public philosophy of liberalism produce citizens who possess the commitment and competence to keep democratic institutions afloat?
d. Does democracy require a separation between the public and the private realm? Is the separation of Church and State or religion and politics required? If so, that might mean that democracy is uniquely suited to secular, western or “modern” societies. Should religious views be bracketed and contained in the private realm? What about when moral and religious views shape political behavior with respect to controversies like same-sex marriage and abortion?

Course Requirements

It is your responsibility to complete the assigned readings before the class to which they pertain. The success of this seminar depends on your thoughtful participation, which in turn, depends on your having read and thought carefully about the assignments for a given class.

Students will divide themselves into working groups of five or so people who will complete assignments as a collective throughout the semester. Each week students will be expected to complete the assigned readings and to prepare questions that relate to the central concerns of the authors. The group will then present a brief discussion of why the questions are important, as well as discussing provisional answers to the questions you have posed. You should be careful to note the methodology employed by the author and whether you are satisfied with the conclusion that the author drew. Each student will be responsible for handing in a written response as an individual. These responses should be a total of about three pages double-spaced. Papers must be typed and in hard copy. The completion of the essays is a prerequisite for passing the course. No late papers will be accepted without a medical justification. These short essays will constitute 60% of your final grade. There will be a research paper on a topic of your choice, approved by me, delivered as a group, with written versions produced and handed in as a group. This project will constitute 40% of your grade. Attendance and participation are mandatory and will be duly noted and factored in to your grade.

Readings and Course Materials

All books required for the course can be found at the UVM Bookstore. Alternatively, feel free to search for copies online at sites like textbooks.com. You may find better deals on the internet.

1. On Democracy, Robert A. Dahl
   Yale Nota Bene Books 1998
   0-300-08455-2
2. Democracy and the Limits of Self-Government by Adam Przeworski
   Cambridge UP 2010
   978-0-521-14011-9
3. Paradoxes of Liberal Democracy: Islam, Western Europe, and the Danish Cartoon Crisis by Paul M. Sniderman
   13:978-069116 1105
   Princeton UP 2014
4. Democracy and Difference by Seyla Benhabib
   10: 069 1044 783
   Princeton 1996
5. Models of Democracy, 3rd Edition by David Held
   0-8047-5472-1 Stanford UPPress

Some materials are posted on Blackboard (Bb) under our course name and number. You will also find an array of supplemental, recommended materials on Blackboard. News, messages, and current events articles will be placed on Bb as well, so make sure you check in often. If you are not familiar with how to access Blackboard, get help ASAP!

CLASSROOM PROTOCOL

The Department of Political Science requires that this classroom protocol, defining minimum standards of conduct, be included in all syllabi.

1. Students are expected to attend and be prepared for ALL regularly scheduled classes.

2. Students are expected to arrive on time and stay in class until the class period ends. If a student knows in advance that he/she will need to leave early, he/she should notify the instructor before the class period begins.

3. Students are expected to treat faculty and fellow students with respect. For example, students must not disrupt class by leaving and reentering during class, must not distract class by making noise, and must be attentive to comments being made by the instructors and by peers.

Week 1 and 2
Robert Dahl *On Democracy*
*What is Democracy? How did it begin? The Ideal and Real. Conditions that are favorable and unfavorable to its development.*

Part I
Part II

Part III
Part IV

Week 3, 4, and 5
Adam Przeworski *Democracy and the Limits of Self-Government*

Ch. 1 Introduction
Ch. 2 Self-government
Ch. 3 Representative institutions and suffrage
Ch. 4 Equality
Ch. 6 Agency
Ch. 7 Liberty

Week 6, 7, 8, and 9

David Held, *Models of Democracy*

Part One Classical Models
1. Classical Democracy: Athens
2. Republicanism: Liberty, Self-Government and the Active Citizen
3. The Development of Liberal Democracy: For and Against the State
4. Direct Democracy

Part Two Variants from the Twentieth Century
5. Competitive Elitism and the Technocratic Vision
6. Pluralism, Corporate Capitalism, and the State
9. Deliberative Democracy

Part Three What Should Democracy mean Today?
Held, Ch.10. Democratic Autonomy
In Benhabib: Seyla Benhabib “Ch. 4 Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy
In Benhabib: Joshua Cohen, Ch. 5. Procedure and Substance in Deliberative Democracy
Week 10 and 11 Democracy and Difference: Gender, Race, Culture, Ethnicity

Seyla Benhabib. *Democracy and Difference*
   Introduction: The democratic Moment and the Problem of Difference
   Anne Phillips, Ch. 7 Dealing with Difference: A Politics of Ideas, or a Politics of Presence?
Jean Cohen, Ch. 10. Democracy, Difference, and the Right of Privacy
Fred Dallmayr Ch. 14. Democracy and Multiculturalism

Week 12
Paul M. Sniderman, *Paradoxes of Liberal Democracy: Islam, Western Europe, and the Danish Cartoon Crisis*

Week 13 and 14

Research Papers and Presentations
This assignment provides an opportunity to apply theories and concepts to contemporary problems of democracy.

Suggested topics:

A. *Democratic Transitions:*
   1. Post-Soviet Union
   2. Arab Spring
      a. Egypt—what went wrong?
      b. Tunisia—what went right?
B. *Issues in contemporary US democracy: race, class, religion, gender and sexual orientation;*
   1. Felony disenfranchisement
   2. Citizens United
   3. Hobby Lobby
   4. Same sex marriage
   5. Immigration and Citizenship
   6. abortion