

RESEARCH SEMINAR: DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

Fall 2009

Political Science 320
Haverford College

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(and by appointment)

Course Description

This research seminar is intended to serve two functions for political science majors. First, it is a capstone seminar that gives students an opportunity to reflect upon the condition of democracy in America. Most fundamentally, to what extent do ordinary people have the capacity to influence the major decisions that shape their lives? Second, the seminar will prepare students to undertake a senior thesis on some aspect of power and politics in the United States.

We will begin by examining a number of critiques of the U.S. political system that offer a variety of causal explanations for why democratic attitudes and practices have arguably declined in recent decades. Some scholars blame citizens themselves for not assuming more responsibility for how the nation is governed. Others emphasize the misbehavior of powerful elites and the damage they do to key political institutions. Still others attribute a perceived decline in democracy to societal changes that have produced growing social divisions and deepening polarization or contributed to a diminution of social capital and civic engagement. Yet another school points to the ongoing marginalization of certain groups as evidence of what it sees as a floundering democracy. We will then look more closely at the phenomenon of political participation. Why do some Americans participate extensively in politics while others shun political involvement? What kinds of people are most likely to participate in politics? To what extent does energetic participation inhibit deliberative decision making while fostering extremism and polarization? The seminar concludes by reassessing the quality of both representative and participatory democracy in America.

As we evaluate the concept and practice of democracy in America, we will also prepare for the senior thesis by studying how political scientists conduct empirical research. We will discuss how to think about research questions, carry out a literature review, construct hypotheses, define concepts, measure variables, and collect and analyze data.

By the end of the course, students will have chosen a thesis topic and research question, written a comprehensive literature review that responds to their research question, and prepared a research design to guide the empirical work that they will execute during the spring semester to complete their senior thesis.

Requirements

Class participation	20%
Thesis proposal	no grade
Annotated bibliography	10%
Presentation of research	10%
Literature review	50%
Research design	10%

Texts

Bill Bishop, with Robert G. Cushing, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded Americans Is Tearing Us Apart* (Houghton-Mifflin 2008).

Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Off Center: The Republican Revolution and the Erosion of Democracy* (Yale University Press 2005).

Jon A. Shields, *The Democratic Virtues of the Christian Right* (Princeton University Press 2009)

Alan Wolfe, *Does American Democracy Still Work?* (Yale University Press 2006).

All other assigned readings will be available through Blackboard.

Topics and Readings

I. Introduction to Course

Week 1

A. Course overview

B. Thinking about your thesis

II. Challenges to American Democracy

Week 2

A. Faltering Citizenship

Alan Wolfe, *Does American Democracy Still Work?* Chs. 1-5, 7.

Week 3

B. Elite Power and Flawed Institutions

Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Off-Center*, Introduction, Chs. 1-2, 4-6.

Week 4

C. Polarization

Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort*, Chs. 1-6, 11.

Thesis Proposal Due

Week 5

D. Polarization (continued)

Jon A. Shields, *The Democratic Virtues of the Christian Right*, Chs. 1-6.

Week 6

E. Declining Social Capital and Civic Engagement

Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 6 (January 1995): 65-78.

Theda Skocpol, "Why Civic Life Changed" in *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life*

Cliff Zukin, et al., "Engagement in Public Life" in *A New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life, and the Changing American Citizen*

Henry Farrell, "Can Partisanship Save Citizenship?" *The American Prospect*, January/February 2009

Week 7

Fall Break

Week 8

F. Inequality and Marginalization

S. Karthick Ramakrishnan and Irene Bloemraad, "Introduction: Civic and Political Inequalities" Kristi Andersen, "Parties, Organizations, and Political Incorporation: Immigrants in Six U.S. Cities"

Laurencio Sanguino, "Selective Service: Indians, Poles, and Mexicans in Chicago" in S. Karthick Ramakrishnan and Irene Bloemraad, eds., *Civic Hopes and Political Realities: Immigrants, Community Organizations, and Political Engagement*

Larry M. Bartels, "The New Gilded Age" in *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*

Annotated Bibliography Due

III. Participatory Democracy

Week 9

Steven Rosenstone and Jon Hansen, "The Political Logic of Political Participation" in *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*.

Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, "The Big Tilt: Participatory Inequality in America," *The American Prospect*, May/June 1997
Jane Mansbridge, "On the Idea that Participation Makes Better Citizens" in *Citizen Competence and Democratic Institutions*, eds. Stephen L. Elkin and Karol Edward Soltan
Morris P. Fiorina, "Extreme Voices: A Dark Side of Civic Engagement" in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, eds. Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina.

IV. Deliberative Democracy

Week 10

Research Skills Workshop, Magill Library
Diana C. Mutz, "Hearing the Other Side, in Theory and Practice" in *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative versus Participatory Democracy*
Lawrence R. Jacobs, Fay Lomax Cook, and Michael X. Delli Carpini, "The Discursive Turn: Citizens Talking Together" in *Talking Together: Public Deliberation and Political Participation in America*
Cass Sunstein, "The Daily Me" and "An Analogy and an Ideal" in *Republic.com2.0*

V. Conclusion

Week 11

Anthony Arblaster, "Introduction: Defining Democracy" and "Government by the People" in *Democracy*, 2nd ed
Michael Tomasky, "How Historic a Victory?" *The New York Review of Books*, December 18, 2008

VI. Research and Writing

Weeks 12-13

- A. Preparation of Literature Review/Research Design
- B. Individual Meetings with Steve during Class Time

Weeks 14-15

- C. Presentation of Research

Literature Review Due on Last Day of Classes

Research Design Due at End of Exam Period

