



Mahidol University
International College

ICIR 223 Democracy as a Political System

Course Description & Aims:

This course provides students with an understanding and ability to analyze and assess the historical development, principles and practices of democracy. Students will understand essential elements; criticisms, strengths, and weaknesses; alternative systems; social and cultural prerequisites for democracy; possible future developments.

Historical developments; the principles, practices, and processes of democracy; essential elements; criticisms, strengths, and weaknesses; alternative systems; social and cultural prerequisites for democracy; possible future developments. Students will understand; analyze; assess the historical development, principles and practices of democracy.

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Student hours Tuesdays and Thursdays 11-12 and 3-4

Assessment

Participation	10%
Midterm exam	20%
Two (2) class presentations (2 @ 20%)	40%
Final exam	30%

Course Learning Outcomes

At the completion of the course the student will be able to:

1. Describe the historical development of democracy and how its meaning and practice have changed over time
2. Understand and critically evaluate the main arguments that have been used for and against democracy
3. Analyze, compare and contrast the varieties of democratic design, and explain their strengths and weaknesses
4. Analyze and explain the causes of transitions to democracy, and understand the challenges that arise to them
5. Discuss the challenges that face established democratic systems, and predict their future development

Topic No.	Topic
1	What is 'democracy'? How does democracy differ from other forms of political authority?
2	A short history of democracy What have been the main trends in the development of democracy? What arguments have historically been made in favour of, and against, democratization?
3	Varieties of democracy (1). Parliamentary and presidential systems. Electoral systems
4	Varieties of democracy (2). Strengths and weaknesses of different democratic designs. Choices facing democracies in designing their political institutions
5	Democracy and law, society and economy
6	Midterm exam, review and discussion
7	Correlates of democracy and the incidence of democracy
8	Transitions to democracy
9	Challenging issues for new democracies
10	New challenges to old democracies
11	The impact of digital technologies on democracy
12	The unfinished journey of democracy: review and conclusions from history, theory and practice

Assessment Methods & Criteria

Classroom Participation 10%

Students will receive 0-10% depending on attendance and active participation in class (contribution to discussions, asking and answering questions). Coming to **student hours**, or meeting to discuss the course at other times, is also encouraged. There will be a **group debate** on a major issue –details will be given early in the course.

What are “student hours”? Student hours (formerly “office hours”) are times a teacher sets aside each week for students to come and ask any questions and discuss any issues they would like. It is time devote solely to student interests and concerns. If you would like to come but cannot make the regular student hours, please contact me to arrange a convenient time to meet.

Two group projects 20% each

Students will prepare and deliver two group presentations on key aspects of democratic theory and practice. They will be assessed on presentation and persuasion skills as well as clarity of understanding and argument. Presentations are due in weeks 4 and 10.

Mid-term 20%

Students will be assessed on weeks 1-5 of the course. They will be required to answer two essay questions.

Final exam 30%

Students will be assessed on the second half of the course. They will be required to answer two essay questions.

An essential book for this course is Dahl, *On Democracy* (Yale University Press)

These websites are particularly useful for keeping up with democracy-related developments:
<http://foreignpolicy.com/channel/democracy-lab/> articles on current democratic issues around the world

<http://www.electionguide.org/> Guide to upcoming elections

<https://freedomhouse.org/> Detailed account of distribution of democracy and freedom around the world –see especially:

[https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-](https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016?gclid=CNjVu_XA_M4CFRQjaAodwYQLkA)

2016?gclid=CNjVu_XA_M4CFRQjaAodwYQLkA --interactive map and country reports

What is 'Democracy'? How Does Democracy Differ from Other Forms of Political Authority?

Topic description: Course overview and expectations on students. The nature of politics as the creation and enforcement of binding rules. Alternatives ways of making these rules, and how democracy differs from others.

Expected Learning Outcomes: Students will understand the scope and approach of the course, and expectations on them. They will understand the basic problem of politics in collective human life, and the nature of democracy as a distinctive way of addressing it.

Readings:

- Dahl, *On Democracy*, ch, 1-4
- Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, "What Democracy Is...And is Not" *Journal of Democracy* Summer 1991 (<http://www.ned.org/docs/Philippe-C-Schmitter-and-Terry-Lynn-Karl-What-Democracy-is-and-Is-Not.pdf>)

Class discussion: students will analyse the meanings of democracy, and how it differs from other principles of governance.

A Short History of Democracy

Topic description: The historical development of the theory and practice of democracy and democratic ideas from ancient Greece to the present day. The most common arguments for and against democracy.

Expected Learning Outcomes: Students will understand the main trends, over time and around the world, in the spread of democracy and suffrage. In particular, they will recognize how recently it has been practised widely. They will understand how the theory and practice of democracy have evolved, and the main arguments used for and against it.

Readings:

- Dahl, *On Democracy*, chs. 5-7
- Excerpt to be circulated from Plato: "the ship"
- Joseph Siegel et al, "Why Democracies Excel", *Foreign Affairs*, Sept-Oct 2004

Class discussion: students will discuss and explain how the incidence and design of democracy have evolved since Athens

Varieties of Democracy (1). Parliamentary and Presidential Systems. Electoral Systems

Topic description: Varieties of democracy: the key design variables of democratic systems. The difference between parliamentary, presidential and semi-presidential systems. The varieties of electoral systems.

Expected Learning Outcomes: Students will understand the concepts of legislature, executive, election. They will understand the meanings and ambiguities of "majority" and recognize basic voting paradoxes. They will understand the basic differences between different democratic designs.

Readings:

- Excerpts from the Electoral Society website
- Class exercise on Condorcet and other voting paradoxes

Class discussion: students will discuss the differences between systems of executive-legislative relations, and between systems of voter choice-electoral outcome

Varieties of Democracy (2). Strengths and Weaknesses of Different Democratic Design Choices

Topic description: Strengths and weaknesses of different democratic designs. Arguments and evidence for their impact on democratic performance. Choices that face democracies in designing their political institutions.

Expected Learning Outcomes: Students will understand arguments and evidence for the ways that different institutional designs affect political outcomes. This will give them an opportunity to explore political-scientific approaches to causes and effect.

Readings:

- Arendt Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, chapter 17, Conclusions and Recommendations
- Juan Linz, “The Perils of Presidentialism”
- Andreas Schedler, “The Menu of Manipulation” *Journal of Democracy* 13:2
- Daniel Calingaert, “Election Rigging and How to Fight It”, *Journal of Democracy* 17:3
- Short summaries of the history of voting, gerrymandering, voter suppression etc

Class exercise: “How to rig an election”. Students will explore a hypothetical scenario of an unpopular authoritarian ruler who plans to hold elections he will “win“. Students will prepare presentations as advisors to the ruler, the opposition leader and international observers, and analyze the possibilities and limits of producing fake elections.

Democracy and Law, Society and Economy

Topic description: The relationships between democracy and other aspects of a country’s system: law, culture and economic system

Expected Learning Outcomes: Students will understand the relationship between democracy and law, and the importance of guarantees of rights in a democratic constitution. They will explore arguments about the (in)compatibility of democracy with different cultural traditions, in particular the “Asian values” debate. They will examine arguments about democracy and economic systems and performance/

Readings:

- “Asian values” debate: Interview with Lee Kuan Yew; response by Kim Dae Jung
Daniel Bell, *The China Model*, chapter 1

Class discussion: students will discuss the “Asian values” debate, and other contemporary non-Western critiques of democratic practice

Midterm Exam, Review and Discussion

Topic description: Mid-term exam and review

Expected Learning Outcomes: Before the exam: students will consolidate their understanding, especially of topics of which they are less confident. After the exam: students will learn lessons from exam preparation and performance that they can apply to the final exam, and beyond.

Activities:

Group exercise: Discussion of course material so far. Outline model answers to sample questions.

Group discussion: Review of exams questions, how to tackle them and lessons learned.

Readings:

Review of course readings to date

Correlates of Democracy and the Incidence of Democracy

Topic description: Correlates of democracy, and arguments that explain them. Patterns in the incidence of democracy in the 20th century. The changing role of international factors.

Expected Learning Outcomes: Student will understand what factors about a country, and its external environment, typically cause it to become democratic, and why. They will be able to identify and explain exceptions to these generalization and future tests of them. They will be able to explain the ‘third wave’ of democracy.

Readings:

- Dahl, *On Democracy*, chs. 12-14
- Samuel P. Huntington, “Democracy’s Third Wave”, *Journal of Democracy* 2:2
- Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, “How Development Leads to Democracy”, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2009
- Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “International Linkage and Democratization”, *Journal of Democracy*, 16:3

Class exercise: students will develop arguments to predict how the incidence of democracy may change in the future, and what factors that will influence this, based on observed correlations.

Transitions to Democracy

Topic description: Transitions to democracy. Stages of authoritarian breakdown, dynamics of transition, inauguration and consolidation of new democracy.

Expected Learning Outcomes: Students will understand the characteristics paths of modern transition to democracy, the variables that shape them. They will understand the key actors, their choices and strategies. They will compare two forms of social science explanation: the large-N comparative statics of week 8, and the rational-choice approach of the transitions literature.

Readings:

- Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, vol. 4: *Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies*, pp. 15-70

Class discussion: through peer learning and feedback, students will refine and enhance their understanding of topics covered in the first half of the course

Challenging Issues for New Democracies

Topic description: Key challenges that face a new democracy, including: integrating beneficiaries of the old regime, building a loyal state, achieving stable and effective civil-military relations, and managing identity conflicts (national, ethnic, religious etc)

Expected Learning Outcomes: Students will understand the challenges that characteristically face a new democratic regime, and how to address them. They will explore why civil-military relations and identity politics can be particularly significant problems, and what policies and methods can help to resolve them.

Readings:

- Arendt Lijphart, “Constitutional Design for Divided Societies”
- Samuel P. Huntington, “Reforming Civil-Military Relations”

Class exercise: students' groups will each prepare a presentation on a non-democracy to assess the prospects for it becoming democratic, and the path by which it might do so.

New Challenges to Old Democracies

Topic description: New challenges to old democracies. Globalisation and multinationals, the rise of non-democratic states. The problems of democratic foreign policy. How these challenges can be addressed, and their limits?

Expected Learning Outcomes: Students will understand the tensions between democratic decision-making and the growing scale of economic activity, and strategies for tackling this. They will understand the difficulties democracies face in conducting an effective foreign policy, and assess whether this puts them at a disadvantage in their relations with assertive non-democracies.

Readings:

- Simon Johnson, "The Quiet Coup", *The Atlantic*, September 2009
- Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page, "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens", *Perspectives on Politics* 12:3
- Excerpt from Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*
- Martin Wolf, "Capitalism and Democracy: the odd couple", *Financial Times*, 19 September, 2017

Class discussion: students will discuss the consequences of elite capture of governance in mature democracies

The Impact of Digital Technologies on Democracy

Topic description: The impact of digital technology and the internet on democracy: "liberation technologies" or "fake news"? Ways of enhancing positive impact and tackling harmful ones. How this issue may evolve?

Expected Learning Outcomes: Students will understand the positive and negative implications of the information revolution for the performance and stability of democracy. They will reflect on the implications for citizen choice and participation. They will explore ways that public policy, and individual awareness, can tackle these issues.

Readings:

- Evgeny Morozov, "How the net aids dictatorships", TED talk and transcript
- Yascha Mounk and Roberto Stefan Foa, "The End of the Democratic Century", *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2018

Class discussion: students will discuss why assessments of the impact of virtual technology on democracy have shifted so sharply over the past decade

The Unfinished Journey of Democracy

Topic description: Review of course material and further discussion of most challenging issues.

Expected Learning Outcomes: Students will consolidate their understanding of the course. They will gain a deeper understanding of the relationships between the historical, theoretical and empirical elements of the course. They will clarify their understanding of the most challenging topics.

Readings:

- A Discussion of Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt's "How Democracies Die". *Perspectives on Politics*, 16(4)

Class discussion: Through peer-sharing and feedback, students will refine and enhance their understanding of course topics.