

Democracy in the Twenty First Century

Winter Term 2023/2024

Time: Monday 10:00 AM – 13:30 PM

Location: IBW Gebäude, Seminar Room S103

Instructor: Jun.-Prof. Chitrlekha Basu, PhD

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Office Hours: Wednesday 13:00 – 15:00 PM

Overview. Contemporary phenomena such as high levels of inequality, new forms of technology, political polarization and, most recently, a global pandemic, have transformed democratic politics in the twenty first century. Some commentators have even gone so far as to argue that the future of democracy is now in peril, suggesting that support for democracy is waning even among citizens of long-standing democracies. In this advanced seminar, we will consider how developments such as rising income and wealth inequality, broadband internet and social media, and the COVID-19 pandemic, have influenced the operation of democratic politics in contemporary societies. We will also seek to better understand the causes of key recent developments, such as the ‘crisis’ of social democracy in Western Europe, growing support for populist alternatives across the globe, and possible democratic backsliding. Although we will, at times, broaden our regional focus, the bulk of the course will focus on the politics of the United States and Western Europe. Over the course of the semester, students will learn to how to interpret and evaluate recent quantitative research on these topics. Most sessions will consist of a mixture of oral presentations and class discussion. At the same time, students will have the opportunity to develop and enhance their own quantitative research skills, in preparation for an MA or PhD thesis.

Prerequisites. This is an advanced seminar, and I will assume that students are familiar with regression analysis and concepts like statistical significance. As such, it is essential that students have either previously completed the MA course in quantitative methods (or an equivalent), or take it jointly with this course if they have no background in quantitative research methods. Moreover, students should be able to understand and express themselves in English, as this will be the classroom language – though perfection is neither expected nor required. All coursework should also be completed in English.

Assessment. Your performance in this course will be evaluated using a portfolio examination, based on in-class participation (10%), one oral presentation (20%), and a research paper making use of quantitative research methods (70%).

Participation [10%]. As this is a graduate seminar, and not a lecture, the success of the seminar will hinge entirely on active participation by students in class discussion. To obtain a high grade for participation, students should regularly attend and participate in weekly sessions, and, beginning 23 October (session 2), also hand in **two (reasonable) discussion questions** based on at least **two** of the week’s assigned readings via email by noon on the Sunday preceding the session.¹ If there is a reason why you

¹That is, I will expect to receive discussion questions from enrolled students beginning Sunday 22 October. This also

will not be able to regularly attend the seminar (e.g. outside employment or caring responsibilities), please let me know in advance so I can take this into account when determining your participation grade.

Discussion questions should be open-ended and leave room for discussion, disagreement and debate. For instance, “What explains the declining performance of social democratic parties in Europe?” is a good discussion question – researchers disagree on the answer. Discussion questions may also single out aspects of the research design that seem unpersuasive (i.e., Is the theoretical argument convincing? Does the evidence provided support the claim being made? Are the measures used appropriate given the research question?). On the other hand, students should not suggest discussion questions where the answer is clear and unambiguous from the assigned readings. For instance, “What are the two facets of social policy preferences, according to Trump and Cavallé?” is not a good discussion question. I will select two to three questions each week from those submitted to guide our class discussion of the assigned readings.

Paper presentation [20%]. Each enrolled student will deliver an oral presentation of 20 minutes (with slides) on **one** assigned reading over the course of the semester. Presentations will be allocated in the first week of the lecture period. Presentations should: (i) summarize the key argument(s) of the selected article or book chapter(s), (ii) identify the research question and methodology, (iii) identify the evidence on which any conclusions are based, as well as (iv) critically evaluate the research design and the overall persuasiveness of the study.

Research paper [70%]. One objective of this course is to help students learn how to write an empirical research paper using quantitative research methods and publicly available data. Enrolled students will therefore be expected to complete a 15-20 page research paper (double-spaced, font size 12, one inch margins) to be emailed to the instructor by 23:59 CET on **16 February 2024**. References and appendices will not count towards the page limit (although too-long appendices will be penalized). Late submissions will be penalised by 1/3 of a grade per day late unless previously arranged with the instructor. Paper submissions will be checked for plagiarism.

Students should also email a 1-2 page proposal outlining the (i) research question/puzzle, (ii) working hypotheses, and (iii) proposed data and methodology (e.g. OLS with fixed effects) to the instructor by 23:59 CET on **22 December 2023**. The research question or motivating puzzle in the paper should concern one or more of the topics covered in the course. *Note: if fewer students enroll in this course than expected, we will skip the final topic and students will instead present their research proposals to the rest of the class in the last session of the course (in place of a written submission).*

Readings. All required readings are listed below and will be made available electronically to enrolled students via ILIAS.

means that you do not need to read *all* of the assigned readings for each session.

Key Dates.

- 9 October 2023: introductory session
- 22 October 2023: deadline to submit discussion questions for first session (12:00 CET)
- 23 October 2023: first substantive session
- 11 December 2023: last substantive session
- 22 December 2023: deadline for 1-2 page proposal (23:59 CET)
- 16 February 2024: deadline to submit research paper (23:59 CET)

Course Schedule

9 October: Introduction (note: shorter session from 10.00 - 11.30 AM only)

- Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl. 1991. 'What Democracy Is ...and Is Not.' *Journal of Democracy* 2(3): 75-88.
- John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen and Jonas Berge. 2022. 'Does Democracy Matter?' *Annual Review of Political Science* 25: 357-75.

23 October: Democracy in the New Gilded Age

- Kris-Stella Trump and Charlotte Cavallé. 2015. 'The Two Facets of Social Policy Preferences.' *Journal of Politics* 77(1): 146-160.
- Tom O'Grady. 2022. *The Transformation of British Welfare Policy: Politics, Discourse and Public Opinion*, ch. 6.
- Nicholas Carnes. 2012. 'Does the Numerical Underrepresentation of the Working Class in Congress Matter?' *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 37(1): 5-34.
- Lea Elsässer, Svenja Hense and Armin Schäfer. 2020. 'Not Just Money: Unequal Responsiveness in Egalitarian Democracies.' *Journal of European Public Policy* 28(12): 1890-1908.

30 October: Democracy in the Internet Age

- Yphtach Lelkes, Gaurav Sood and Shanto Iyengar. 2017. 'The Hostile Audience: The Effect of Access to Broadband Internet on Partisan Affect.' *American Journal of Political Science* 61(1): 5-20.
- Levi Boxell et al. 2017. 'Greater Internet Use is Not Associated with Faster Growth in Political Polarization Among US Demographic Groups.' *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114(40): 10612-10617.
- Andrew Guess. 2021. '(Almost) Everything in Moderation: New Evidence on Americans' Online Media Diets.' *American Journal of Political Science* 65(4): 1007-1022.
- Max Schaub and Davide Morisi. 2020. 'Voter Mobilization in the Echo Chamber: Broadband Internet and the Rise of Populism in Europe.' *European Journal of Political Research* 59(4): 752-773.

20 November: The Crisis of Social Democracy

- Geoffrey Evans and James Tilley. 2012. 'How Parties Shape Class Politics: Explaining the Decline of the Class Basis of Party Support.' *British Journal of Political Science* 42(1): 137-161.
- Johannes Karreth, Jonathan Polk and Christopher Allen. 2013. 'Catchall or Catch and Release? The Electoral Consequences of Social Democratic Parties' March to the Middle in Western Europe.' *Comparative Political Studies* 46(7): 791-822.
- Tarik Abou-Chadi and Markus Wagner. 2019. 'The Electoral Appeal of Party Strategies in Postindustrial Societies: When Can the Mainstream Left Succeed?' *Journal of Politics* 81(4): 1405-19.
- Frederik Hjørth and Martin Vinaes Larsen. 2022. 'When Does Accommodation Work? Electoral Effects of Mainstream Left Position Taking on Immigration.' *British Journal of Political Science* 52(2): 949-957.

27 November: The Rise of Populist Alternatives

- Italo Colantone and Piero Stanig. 2018. 'The Trade Origins of Economic Nationalism: Import Competition and Voting Behavior in Western Europe.' *American Journal of Political Science* 62(4): 936-953.
- Leonardo Baccini and Stephen Weymouth. 2021. 'Gone for Good: Deindustrialization, White Voter Backlash and US Presidential Voting.' *American Political Science Review* 115(2): 550-567.
- Bruno Castanho Silva and Christopher Wratil. 2023. 'Do Parties' Representation Failures Affect Populist Attitudes? Evidence from a Multinational Survey Experiment.' *Political Science Research and Methods* 11(2): 347-362.
- Miriam Sorace. 2023. 'Does Populist Voting Rise Where Representative Democracy is Systematically Failing?' *Electoral Studies* 85: 102658.

4 December: Democratic Backsliding

- Matthew H. Graham and Milan W. Svobik. 2020. 'Democracy in America? Partisanship, Polarization and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States.' *American Political Science Review* 114(2): 392-409.
- Alexander Wuttke, Konstantin Gavras and Harald Schoen. 2022. 'Have Europeans Grown Tired of Democracy? New Evidence from Eighteen Consolidated Democracies, 1981-2018.' *British Journal of Political Science* 52(1): 416-428.
- James Bryan. 2023. 'What Kind of Democracy Do We All Support? How Partisan Interest Impacts a Citizen's Conceptualization of Democracy.' *Comparative Political Studies*, online first.
- Daniel Treisman. 2023. 'How Great is the Current Danger to Democracy? Assessing the Risk with Historical Data.' *Comparative Political Studies*, online first.

11 December: Democracy and COVID-19

- Sarah Engler et al. 2021. 'Democracy in Times of the Pandemic: Explaining the Variation of COVID-19 Policies Across European Democracies.' *West European Politics* 44(5-6): 1077-1102.
- Damien Bol, Marco Giani, André Blais and Peter John Loewen. 2021. 'The Effect of COVID-19 Lockdowns on Political Support: Some Good News for Democracy?' *European Journal of Political Research* 60(2): 497-505.
- Dominik Schraff. 2020. 'Political Trust During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Rally Around the Flag or Lockdown Effects?' *European Journal of Political Research* 60(4): 1007-1017.
- Frances Amat et al. 2020. 'Pandemics Meet Democracy: Experimental Evidence from the COVID-19 Crisis in Spain.' Working paper.