

Democracy in the Twenty First Century

Winter Term 2024/2025

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: by appointment

Overview. Contemporary phenomena such as high levels of inequality, new forms of technology, political polarization and the spectre of climate change 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 climate change, 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 4 November (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 Friday preceding the session.¹ If there is a reason why you

¹That is, I will expect to receive discussion questions from enrolled students beginning Friday 1 November. This also means that you do not need to read *all* of the assigned readings for each session.

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 10-15 research paper (double-spaced, font size 12, one inch margins) to be emailed to the instructor by 23:59 CET on **16 February 2025**. 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 **20 December 2024**. 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.

Key Dates.

- 28 October 2024: introductory session
- 1 November 2024: deadline to submit discussion questions for first session (12:00 CET)
- 23 October 2024: first substantive session
- 9 December 2024: last substantive session
- 20 December 2024: deadline for 1-2 page proposal (23:59 CET)
- 14 February 2025: deadline to submit research paper (23:59 CET)

Course Schedule

28 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.

4 November: 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.

11 November: 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.

18 November: The Crisis of Social Democracy

- 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 Hjorth 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.
- Daniel Bischof and Thomas Kurer. 2024. 'Lost in Transition – Where Are All the Social Democrats Today?', in Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt (eds.) *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*.

25 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.
- Bruno Castanho Silva and Christopher Wrátil. 2023. 'Do Parties' Representation Failures Affect Populist Attitudes? Evidence from a Multinational Survey Experiment.' *Political Science Research and Methods* 11(2): 347-362.
- Zachary P. Dickson et al. 2024. 'Public Service Delivery and Support for the Populist Right.' Working paper.
- Diane Bolet and Florian Foos. 2024. 'Media Platforming and the Normalisation of Extreme Right Views.' Working paper.

2 December: Democratic Backsliding

- Roberto Stefan Foa and Mounk. 2016. 'The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect.' *Journal of Democracy* 27(3): 5-17.
- 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.
- 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.
- Inga A.-L. Saikkonen and Henrik Serup Christensen. 2023. 'Guardians of Democracy or Passive Bystanders? A Conjoint Experiment on Elite Transgressions of Democratic Norms.' *Political Research Quarterly* 76(1): 127-142.

9 December: Democracy and Climate Change

- Michael M. Bechtel, Federica Genovese and Kenneth F. Scheve. 2019. 'Interests, Norms and Support for the Provision of Global Public Goods: The Case of Climate Cooperation.' *British Journal of Political Science* 49(4): 1333-1355.
- Nikhar Gaikwad, Federica Genovese and Dustin Tingley. 2022. 'Creating Climate Coalitions: Mass Preferences for Compensating Vulnerability in the World's Two Largest Democracies.' *American Political Science Review* 116(4): 1165-1183.
- Diane Bolet, Fergus Green and Mikel González-Eguino. 2023. 'How to Get Coal Country to Vote for Climate Policy: The Effect of a "Just Transition Agreement" on Spanish Election Results.' *American Political Science Review*, online first.
- Zachary P. Dickson and Sara B. Hobolt. 2024. 'Going Against the Grain: Climate Change as a Wedge Issue for the Radical Right.' *Comparative Political Studies*, online first.