PL PO 3091 DEMOCRACY – THEORY & PRACTICE

The American University of Paris

Associate Professor Julian Culp & Victor Mardellat

Fall 2025

Women carrying 1 million signatures in favor of women's enfranchisement

1917, New York City, New York

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Democracy, which means government by, for, and of the people, is an intriguing idea that raises many questions: Who belongs to the people? What is the will of the people? Who can speak in the name of the people? In this course we focus contemporary theories and practices of democracy, paying special attention to the development of democratic theory when democratic practice is considered to be in crisis.

BASIC INFORMATION

Prerequisites	None	*Credits*	4
Contact	JCulp@aup.edu; VMardellat@aup.edu	*Final exam*	Dec. 12, 12h30-15h00
Schedules	Tuesday & Friday 13h45-15h05	*Room number*	SD-6
Office hours	Tuesdays and Fridays 15h30-16h30	*Office number*	G-L19 (Grenelle Building)

SCHEDULE

N.B.: The schedule is subject to change throughout the course of the semester.

Week 1 – Introduction

Sept 2: **Introduction**

Sept 5: **Democratic Theory & Democracy in Crisis**

Required reading: Chambers, Simone. 2025. *Contemporary Democratic Theory*, Ch. 1.

Week 2 – Justifying Democracy

Sept 9: **Justifying Democracy**

Required reading: Chambers, Simone. 2025. *Contemporary Democratic Theory*, Ch. 2.

Sept 12: **Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy**

Required reading: Cohen, Joshua. 1997. "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy." In J. *Bohman* and W. *Rehg*, (eds.), Deliberative Democracy. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Presenters: Artem & Nolan

Week 3 – Non-Instrumentalism I: Equality

Sept 16: **Equality**

Required reading: Chambers, Simone. 2025. *Contemporary Democratic Theory*, Ch. 3.

Sept 19: **The Authority of Democracy**

Required reading: Cristiano, Thomas. 2004. "The Authority of Democracy." *Journal of Political Philosophy*.

Presenter: Lucie

Week 4 – Non-Instrumentalism II: Freedom

Sept 23: **Freedom**

Required reading: Chambers, Simone. 2025. *Contemporary Democratic Theory*, Ch. 4.

Sept 26: **Political Freedom**

Required reading: Richardson, Henry. 2003. "Freedom and Legitimacy," in ibid. *Democratic Autonomy*.

Presenters: Asha & Emma

Week 5 – Wrap-Up & First Exam

Sept 30: **Wrap-Up**

Oct 3: *****First Exam in Class*****

***** Weeks 6 through 8 will be taught by Victor Mardellat!**

For queries concerning these weeks, please contact him via vmardellat@aup.edu. ***

Week 6 – Instrumentalism I: Realism

Oct 7: **Realism**

Required reading: Chambers, Simone. 2025. *Contemporary Democratic Theory*, Ch. 5.

Oct 10: **Democratic Ideals and Realities**

Required reading: Achen, Christopher and Bartels, Larry. 2017. "Democratic Ideals and Realities," in ibid. *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government.*

Presenter: Lucy & Omar

Week 7 – Instrumentalism II: Performance Skeptics

Oct 14: **Performance Skeptics**

Required reading: Chambers, Simone. 2025. *Contemporary Democratic Theory*, Ch. 6.

Oct 17: **Ignorant, Irrational, Misinformed Nationalists**

Required reading: Brennan, Jason. 2016. *Against Democracy*. Ch. 2: "Ignorant, Irrational, Misinformed Nationalists"

Presenters: Cade & Adam

Week 8 – Instrumentalism III: Epistemic Democracy & Second Exam

Oct 21: **Epistemic Democracy**

Required reading: Chambers, Simone. 2025. *Contemporary Democratic Theory*, Ch. 7.

Oct. 24: *****Second Exam in Class*****

Fall Break

Oct 28: **Fall Break – No Class!**

Oct 31: **Fall Break – No Class!**

Week 10 – Populism and the People

Nov 4: **Populism and the People**

Required reading: Chambers, Simone. 2025. *Contemporary Democratic Theory*, Ch. 8.

Nov 7: **Trust the People!**

Required reading: Canovan, Margaret. 1999. "Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy." *Political Studies* 47/1, 2–16.

Presenter: Giogio

Week 11 – Populism and the People

Nov 11: **National Holiday, No Class!**

Nov 14: Required reading: Urbinati, Nadia. 2019. "Political Theory of Populism." *Annual Review Political Science* 22,111–127.

Presenter: Helena

Week 12 – Representation

Nov 18: **Representation**

Required reading: Chambers, Simone. 2025. *Contemporary Democratic Theory*, Ch. 9

Nov 21: **A Democratic Aristocracy**

Required reading: Manin, Bernard. 1997. "A Democratic Aristocracy," in ibid. *Principles of Representative Government*, Ch. 4.

Presenter: Allison

Week 13 – Public Sphere

Nov 25: **Public Sphere**

Required reading: Chambers, Simone. 2025. *Contemporary Democratic Theory*, Ch. 10

Nov 28: **The Digital Public Sphere**

Required reading: Habermas, Jürgen. 2022. "Reflections and Hypotheses on a Further Structural Transformation of the Political Public Sphere." *Theory, Culture & Society* 39, 145-71.

Presenter: Alicia

Week 14 – Innovation and Disobedience

Dec 2: **Innovation and Disobedience**

Required reading: Chambers, Simone. 2025. *Contemporary Democratic Theory*, Ch. 11

Dec 5: **Citizen Assemblies**

Required reading: Landemore. Hélène. 2020. *Open Democracy*. Princeton UP (excerpts).

Presenter: Daniel

Dec 6–9: **Reading Days**

Dec 12: **12h30-15h00 Final Exam**

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To grasp and express key core concepts in democratic theory
- To understand and reconstruct scholarly texts in philosophy and political theory
- To analyze and evaluate conceptual and normative political arguments
- To develop and convincingly argue for one's own position on how to think of and solve democratic problems in a globalized and digitalized world

CONTACT INFORMATION

For consultation and meetings, please contact us before or after class, by e-mail via JCulp@aup.edu or VMardellat@aup.edu or during open office hours in the office G-L19 (in the Grenelle building).

BLACKBOARD

Course-related material, such as readings, lecture slides, assignment tasks, etc., will be made available on the BLACKBOARD portal. Make sure that you have joined the course and that you adjust your settings to receive notifications and messages. Important updates will be posted on the BLACKBOARD course page.

REQUIRED AND FURTHER READINGS

The required book is Simone Chambers, *Contemporary Democratic Theory*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2024. It should be purchased at AUP's bookstore (2bis passage Landrieu).

Except for the readings that are part of this book, all *required readings* mentioned in the schedule above will be made available on BLACKBOARD.

In case you are interested in studying a topic in further depth, please feel free to contact the professor for information, or contact the AUP Library: http://library.aup.edu/index.html – email: library@aup.edu. A fine online resource for philosophy is *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: https://plato.stanford.edu.

A useful textbook that may serve as optional background reading is David Held, *Models of Democracy*, Stanford University Press, 2006, ISBN: 9780804754729. It is available via AUP's Library: https://aup.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma992110943406026&context=L&vid=33AUP_INST:default_view&lang=en&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=Everything&query=any,contains,David%20Held%20%20Models%20of%20Democracy&mode=advanced.

REQUIREMENTS

Requirement	Relative weight for overall grade
Participation (including Presentations)	30% (20 % JC & 10 % VM)
First and Second Exam	40% (20 % JC & 20 % VM)
Pop-Quiz	5%
Final Exam	25% (JC)

Make sure that you familiarize yourself with the requirements and that you plan your time and work reasonably. The requirements are meant as springboards for your own, rewarding exploration of the topic.

Participation

Preparation

Students are expected to come to every class meeting prepared. The *preparation* means *active and careful reading* of the assigned texts, which means you should take notes and excerpt the core ideas of the texts.

Attendance and Punctuality

Attendance is required and will be taken every class. You may miss up to three sessions without excuse – though each of these three as well as all other unexcused absences will lower your participation grade.

More than three unexcused absences will be reported to the *Student Development* office. In such a case you might also be asked to withdraw from the course. Absences may only be considered excused if they are officially excused, that is, in cases of medically documented student illness, participation in course-related study trips, family emergency or an appointment with the immigration office.

It is the student's responsibility to make up work for the missed class and to communicate with the professor for that purpose.

Attendance at the two in class exams and the final exam period is mandatory. Students must be mindful of this policy when making their travel arrangements, and especially during the Drop/Add and Exam Periods.

Punctuality is essential for undisrupted and efficient coursework. It is a sign of respect not only for the professor, but also for your fellow students. If you are late, you may be marked absent.

Active Participation and Restricted Use of Digital Devices

Active participation encompasses the active engagement in the discussions during class and in the work group activities. In discussions, all participants are expected to show respect and courtesy.

Please silence all cell phones prior to the start of class and *do not use digital devices* (laptops, phones, etc.) during class, unless truly necessary.

Participation Grade

Your participation grade will be assigned based on your *participation in class throughout the semester*. Your class participation throughout the semester will be assessed based on the following rubric (adapted from Bean, John and Peterson, Dean. 1998. "Grading classroom participation." In: *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 74, 33-40).

A	A student will receive an **A** if he/she: comes to class prepared; contributes readily to the conversation but doesn't dominate it; makes thoughtful contributions that advance the conversation; and shows interest in and respect for others' contributions and views.
B	A student will receive a **B** if he/she: comes to class prepared; makes thoughtful comments when called upon; contributes occasionally without prompting; and shows interest in and respect for others' contributions and views. This grade may also be appropriate for an active participant whose contributions are less developed or cogent than those of students who deserve an **A**.
C	A student will receive a **C** if he/she: comes to class prepared and listens attentively, but does not voluntarily contribute to discussions and gives only minimal answers when called upon. A student will also receive a **C** if he/she participates in discussion, but in a problematic way. Such students may talk too much, make rambling or tangential contributions, continually interrupt with digressive questions, bluff their way when unprepared, or otherwise dominate discussions, not acknowledging cues of annoyance from instructors or other students.
D or **F**	A student will receive a **D** or **F** if they often seem on the margins of the class and may have a negative effect on the participation of others. Such students often don't participate because they haven't come to class prepared. Students receiving an **F** may be actually disruptive, radiating negative energy via hostile or bored body language, or be overtly rude.

Presentation of Reading and Discussion Questions
You'll be asked to present the central ideas and 3 questions concerning the assigned reading. You should use a handout or power point slides for presenting your questions. More information will follow.

The presentation ***will count towards your participation grade*** and assessed relative to the following, equally relevant, criteria:

(1) coherence of the presentation
(2) ability to speak freely without reading off your notes
(3) quality of handout or power point slides
(4) engagement with the audience, demonstrated, inter alia, by the use of convincing examples and the ability to respond adequately to questions.

1 Pop-Quiz – Surprise date! Multiple-choice questions concerning the required reading.

First, Second, and Final Exams
After the first third, the second third, and at the end of the course you will be expected to review the material and write an exam. The exam will consist of a set of questions on the materials covered in the course. These questions will contain knowledge questions regarding key terms and intellectual positions as well as short essay questions that ask you to *reconstruct* and *discuss* philosophical texts and arguments.

GRADING
The grades for the requirements and for the entire course are based on the 4.00 system stated below:

Letter Grade	4.0 Scale	Score	Meaning
A	4.0	94.00-100.00	Excellent
A-	3.7	90.00-93.99	Excellent
B+	3.3	87.00-89.99	Good
B	3.0	84.00-86.99	Good
B-	2.7	80.00-83.99	Good
C+	2.3	77.00-79.99	Satisfactory
C	2.0	74.00-76.99	Satisfactory
C-	1.7	70.00-73.99	Satisfactory
D+	1.3	67.00-69.99	Unsatisfactory
D	1.0	64.00-66.99	Unsatisfactory
D-	0.7	60.00-63.99	Unsatisfactory
F	0	0.00-59.00	Failure

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY
As an Anglophone university, AUP is committed to effective English language mastery at the undergraduate level. Courses require scholarly research and formal written and oral presentations in English, and students are expected to strive to achieve excellence in these domains as part of their course work. To that end, the evaluation includes English proficiency. Students can obtain help on specific academic assignments in the university's *Writing Lab*. For more information, please visit https://www.aup.edu/academics/academic-resources/academic-resource-center/writing-lab or email: writinglab@aup.edu.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT
All work that you submit must be your own. Your sources must be properly cited. For example, direct quotations from others must be in quotation marks. If you have questions about how to attribute your sources, talk to the professor or to the staff of the *Writing Lab*: https://www.aup.edu/academics/academic-and-career-resources/academic-resource-center/writing-lab – email: writinglab@aup.edu. Plagiarism is a serious academic misconduct and will be dealt with accordingly.

You should familiarize yourself with AUP's policy on plagiarism at http://www.aup.edu/academics/offices-resources/academic-resource-center/writing-lab/plagiarism. For the sake of fairness and academic integrity, there will be no tolerance with plagiarism and other such forms of academic misconduct. Any conduct, whether intentional or unintentional, which creates the impression that some of the coursework you submit for grading is your own achievement when it is not will be reported to the *Academic Integrity Office* and may result in an "F" grade for the whole course.

Sometimes students present alien work as their own not because they want to earn an unfair advantage over their peers but rather because they feel unable to cope with the workload for some academic or personal reason. If this is the case, please do not hesitate to contact the professor or AUP's student guidance counselors Pamela Montfort via pmontfort@aup.edu or Charlotte Vernier via cvernier@aup.edu.

Artificial Intelligence

Recent developments in generative artificial intelligence (AI) are fascinating, and the proliferation of tools offering to generate texts, code, and images on the basis of large language models is hard to ignore. AI is probably now embedded in the operating system of your phone and computer, and in the basic software that we use for writing, web searches, etc. We will regularly discuss AI in this course – as an economic, social, and technical phenomenon – and we will try to become as conscious as we can about the relation between our own thinking and the infrastructures and presuppositions on which AI draws. For each assignment we will clarify as to which uses of AI are allowed, and which are prohibited. As in all courses, you are solely responsible for the contents and form of the work that you produce, and you should expect to be able to document and cite all of the processes involved in the construction of work that you submit.