

Athabasca University

POLI 470 Democratic Theory and Practice

Detailed Syllabus

Welcome to *POLI 470: Democratic Theory and Practice*. The course is an advanced, senior-level course that examines an idea in context: the meanings, practices, and possibilities associated with democracy.

In this course we ask which modes of thinking about democracy are most appropriate and effective for answering the following questions:

- Is true democracy an ancient ideal that is only realisable in small communities?
- Is it a modern ideal well-suited to mass societies characterised by diverse and educated citizenry, pluralism, and advanced technology?
- Is the pragmatic polity a stable practice and a satisfactory ideal for the whole world?
- Is it an unstable compound of capitalism, liberalism, and democracy that is mired in contradiction and likely to fail?
- Is democracy just an instrument for securing other valued goods, such as liberty, non-violence, prosperity, and certain kinds of legal equality?
- Does it possess sufficient intrinsic merit to be valued as an end in itself?

Course Objectives

POLI 470: Democracy in Theory and Practice looks at the idea of democracy in the contexts of social, economic, technological, and cultural change in the modern era. As you work through the course, you will learn

new concepts and acquire critical skills that will serve you well both in academia and, it is to be hoped, in practices of citizenship.

When you have completed *POLI 470: Democratic Theory and Practice*, you should be able to

1. identify the principal meanings of, and criteria for, democracy;
2. distinguish democratic from non-democratic institutions and practices;
3. distinguish democracy from related concepts, such as freedom, equality, majority rule, republicanism, constitutionalism, and citizenship;
4. describe the main characteristics of multinational constitutional democracies;
5. identify the leading models of democracy in terms of their central ideas and historical conditions;
6. critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of democratic theories and practices;
7. describe how changing social and political conditions have affected the evolution of democratic ideas and practices;
8. describe how trends and developments in political theory and philosophy have affected theories of democracy and of democratic citizenship; and
9. discuss the prospects for democracy and citizenship in the twenty-first century, particularly in relation to such factors as social, economic, and environmental conditions; power and domination; technological change; globalisation; ethnic diversity, and cultural change.

Course Materials (note: additional online materials were revised in 2017).

Gutmann, Amy, and Dennis Thompson. 2004. *Why Deliberative Democracy?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Held, David. 2006. *Models of Democracy*, third ed. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Mouffe, Chantal. 2009. *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso.

Tully, James. 2008. *Public Philosophy in a New Key. Vol. 1: Democracy and Civic Freedom*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

—Reading File (online)

Course Outline

Unit 1: The Concept of Democracy: Universally Valued, Essentially Contested

When you have completed Unit 1, you should be able to

- identify the most important usages of the word *democracy*;
- discuss the importance of theory for the understanding of democracy;
- explain the different, yet overlapping, contributions of analytic, empirical and normative theory to the understanding of democracy;
- describe Jack Lively's arguments for (a) the priority of analytic over empirical theory, and (b) political equality, not majority rule, being "the defining principle" of democracy; and
- explain W. B. Gallie and William E. Connolly's notion of democracy as an "essentially contested concept."

Required Readings

- Unit 1 Commentaries
- Robert A. Dahl, "[What is Democracy?](#)"
- David Held, "Introduction" in *Models of Democracy*
- Jack Lively, "[The Meaning of Democracy](#)"
- Andrew Reeve, "[New Introduction](#)"
- William E. Connolly, "[Essentially Contested Concepts](#)"

Unit 2: Classical Models: Ancient Democracy to Early Modern Republicanism

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 2 you should be able to:

1. describe the ideals and aims of Athenian democracy, especially as touted by Pericles;
2. describe the institutional features (constitution) of Athens, and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship;
3. summarize the contemporary critiques of Athenian democracy by Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle;
4. describe how the doctrine of mixed government became applied in both democratic theory and democratic practice in Athens;
5. explain the difference that Benjamin Constant sees between ancient and modern conceptions of liberty, and explain why he believes the distinction is important; and
6. explain the appeal of ancient republicanism for Marsilius, Machiavelli, Rousseau, and Wollstonecraft.

Readings:

- Unit 2 Commentaries
- David Held, “Classical Democracy: Athens” and “Republicanism: Liberty, Self-Government and the Active Citizen” in *Models of Democracy*
- Benjamin Constant, [“The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with That of the Moderns”](#)
- Niccolo Machiavelli, [*Discourses on Livy*](#), Book I, Chapters 1–12

Unit 3: The Second Coming of Democracy: Liberal and Radical Responses to Modernity

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 3 you should be able to:

1. list the main factors that gave rise to both the absolutist state and the constitutional state during the early modern period (i.e., the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries).
2. identify the main historical conditions that gave rise to the American and French Revolutions.
3. summarise the main theoretical contributions of Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, Madison, and J. S. Mill to modern liberal democracy.
4. explain the differences between “protective” and “developmental” models of liberal democracy.
5. describe the relationship between Marxism and direct democracy.
6. describe the gaps and omissions in both liberal and radical theories identified by feminism.

Readings:

- Unit 3 Commentaries
- David Held, “The Development of Liberal Democracy: For and Against the State” and “Direct Democracy and the End of Politics” in *Models of Democracy*
- Carole Pateman, “[Feminism and Democracy](#)”

Assignment 1: Short Essay 1

Units 1–3

Due Date

Following the completion of Unit 3 (approximately week 6 or 10 of the suggested study schedules)

Weighting

20% of the final grade for the course

Instructions

Write an essay of 6 to 8 pages (1,500–2,000 words) that responds to one (1) of the following questions. Please stay within the word length specified. Since the main purpose of the first assignment is to give you an opportunity to use and reflect upon the assigned readings, you are expected to use only the course materials.

Before you complete this assignment, please read the [Academic Integrity](#) section in the Student Manual.

{There are 8 questions to choose from, on topics ranging from ancient democracy to Mill and de Tocqueville}

Unit 4: Liberal Democracy under Modern Capitalism: Pluralist and Elitist Models

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 4 you should be able to:

1. identify the aspects of life in modern industrial society that gave rise to a more restrictive model of democracy in the thought of Weber and Schumpeter.
2. describe pluralism and explain how it has been used to modify the competitive elitist model.
3. describe and compare neo-pluralist and neo-Marxist critiques of classic pluralism; and
4. describe and evaluate the defence of Ian Shapiro's Schumpeterian model.

Readings:

- Unit 4 Commentaries
- David Held, “Competitive Elitism and the Technocratic Vision” and “Pluralism, Corporate Capitalism and the State” in *Models of Democracy*
- Ian Shapiro, “[Power and Democratic Competition](#)”

Unit 5 Challenges to Liberal Democracy

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 5 you should be able to:

When you have completed Unit 5, you should be able to

1. explain what factors gave rise to more radical theories of democracy on both the right and the left in the 1970s and 1980s;
2. describe what impacts the collapse of communism had on democratic theory and practice since 1990;
3. explain what Francis Fukuyama means by the “end of history,” and give at least two criticisms of his thesis;
4. give an example of a political theory that attempts to reconcile liberalism and democracy through rationalist consensus; and
5. explain Carl Schmitt’s point that there is not an ideal harmony between liberalism and democracy, or between liberal and democratic conceptions of equality.

Readings:

Unit 5 Commentaries

David Held, “From Postwar Stability to Political Crisis: The Polarization of Political Ideals” and “Democracy after Soviet Communism” in *Models of Democracy*

Chantal Mouffe, “Introduction: The Democratic Paradox,” “Democracy, Power and ‘The Political,’” and “Carl Schmitt and the Paradox of Liberal Democracy” (pp. 36–45 only) in *The Democratic Paradox*

Unit 6: Deliberative Democracy

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 6 you should be able to:

When you have completed Unit 6, you should be able to

1. describe the main elements of deliberative democracy as a model and what distinguishes it from the ideals of aggregative democracy, direct democracy, and participatory democracy;
2. describe in general terms the factors, both social and intellectual, that have stimulated the rise of deliberative politics in the past two decades;
3. identify and distinguish the key contributions of Habermas, Young, Dryzek, and Gutmann and Thompson to deliberative democracy;
4. describe the criticisms of deliberative democracy described by Held, Fish, and agonistic pluralists like Mouffe; and
5. explain Gutmann and Thompson 's defence against these and other criticisms.

Readings:

- Unit 6 Commentaries
- David Held, “Deliberative Democracy and the Defence of the Public Realm” in *Models of Democracy*
- Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, “What Deliberative Democracy Means” in *Why Deliberative Democracy?*
- Chantal Mouffe, “Schmitt and the Paradox of Liberal Democracy” (pp. 45–57 only) and “For an Agonistic Model of Democracy” (pp. 83–98 only) in *The Democratic Paradox*

Assignment 2: Research Proposal

Due Date

Following the completion of Unit 6 (approximately week 9 or 15 of the suggested study schedules)

Weighting

10% of the final grade for the course

Instructions

Select an area of democratic theory that interests you from the list of essay topics provided in Assignment 4. Write a 2 to 3 page (500–750 word) research proposal outline and bibliography on this topic.

Be sure to indicate exactly which topic you are choosing, and to explain your choice of sources, either in the body of your proposal, or by way of annotations to your bibliography. List at least six (6) sources that are not included in the course materials.

Unit 7 Critical and Postmodern Theory

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 7 you should be able to:

1. generally explain the growing relevance of post-Wittgensteinian and post-Nietzschean philosophies to democratic theory in recent decades;
2. identify and discuss the defining characteristics of what James Tully calls “public philosophy as a critical activity”;
3. explain the importance of the later Wittgenstein for grasping some of the limitations of Critical Theory (Habermas) and critical hermeneutics (Taylor) in public argument; and
4. compare and contrast Habermas’s approach to understanding political argument and practices of governance with the postmodern/governmentality/agonistic approaches of Michel Foucault and Chantal Mouffe.

Readings:

- Unit 7 Commentaries
- Chantal Mouffe, “Wittgenstein, Political Theory and Democracy” and “For an Agonistic Model of Democracy” (pp. 98–105 only) in *The Democratic Paradox*

- James Tully, “Public Philosophy as a Critical Activity,” “Situated Creatively: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy,” and “To Think and Act Differently: Comparing Critical Ethos and Critical Theory” in *Public Philosophy in a New Key*

Assignment 3: Short Essay 2

Due Date

Following the completion of Unit 7 (approximately week 10 or 18 of the suggested study schedules)

Weighting

20% of the final grade for the course

Instructions

Write an essay of 6 to 8 pages (1,500–2,000 words) that responds to one (1) of the following questions. Please stay within the word length specified. Since the main purpose of the second assignment is to give you an opportunity to use and reflect upon the assigned readings, you are expected to use only the course materials.

Before you complete this assignment, please read the [Academic Integrity](#) section in the Student Manual.

{There are 8 topics, on topics ranging from Schumpeter, Weber and Shapiro to the evolution of the neo-pluralism of Lindblom and Dahl; the critiques of Rawls and Habermas; deliberative theories of Thompson and Guttmann; and the discussion of Tully, Rawls, and Habermas}.

Unit 8: Democracy and Citizenship in a Divided World

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 8 you should be able to:

1. explain why Gutmann and Thompson are critical of recent approaches to fundamental moral disagreement in liberal theory;
2. define “deliberative democracy” (Gutmann and Thompson) and “the agonistic freedom of citizens” (Tully), and compare them as theoretical responses to international conflict; and
3. compare Gutmann and Thompson’s “principles of preclusion and accommodation” and Tully’s “public philosophy” as responses to cultural diversity.

Readings:

- Unit 8 Commentaries
- Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, “Moral Conflict and Political Consensus” in *Why Deliberative Democracy?*
- James Tully, “The Agonistic Freedom of Citizens” and “Reimagining Belonging in Diverse Societies” in *Public Philosophy in a New Key, vol.1.*
-

Unit 9 Democracy and Citizenship in Diverse Communities: Canada and Its Indigenous Peoples

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 9 you should be able to:

1. describe the four main characteristics of multinational constitutional democracies;
2. describe the four characteristics of the free and democratic activity of “struggling over the recognition of a national identity in a multinational society”; and
3. describe the main principles that must govern a reconstituted treaty relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians, according to James Tully’s book.

Readings:

Unit 9 Commentaries

James Tully, ch.6, “Multinational Democracies: An Introductory Sketch,” and ch.7 “The Negotiation of Reconciliation,” and ch.8 “The Struggles of

Indigenous Peoples for and of Freedom” in *Public Philosophy in a New Key*.

Unit 10 Democracy and Globalisation

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 10 you should be able to:

- explain and assess the argument that globalisation is causing a democratic deficit;
- identify several different theoretical approaches to the question of global democracy; and
- describe David Held’s model of cosmopolitan democracy and some of the major criticisms levelled at it by Mouffe, Dryzek, Saward, and others.

Readings:

- Unit 10 Commentaries
- David Held, “Democracy, the Nation–State and the Global System” in *Models of Democracy*
- Michael Saward, “[A Critique of Held](#)”
- Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, “What Deliberative Democracy Means” (pp. 36–39 and 61–62 only) in *Why Deliberative Democracy?*
- Chantal Mouffe, “A Politics without Adversary?” (pp. 118–128 only) in *The Democratic Paradox*
- John Dryzek, “[Three Kinds of Democracy](#)”

Unit 11 Possible Futures

Learning Objectives – After completing Unit 11 you should be able to:

- describe the virtues attributed to “minimal” and “competitive” democracy in the context(s) of the twenty-first century;
- explain Zakaria’s view that democracy is apt to be shallow in liberal terms in most parts of the world;

- explain and compare what de Sousa Santos and Avritzer mean by hegemonic and counter-hegemonic conceptions of democratic practice;
- explain and compare the two meanings of global citizenship as defined by Tully and their implications for future practices;
- describe why some democratic theorists believe that capitalism might be harmful to democracy; and
- describe some of the conflicting ways in which technological change is likely to affect the nature and practices of citizenship.

Readings:

- Unit 11 Commentaries
- Fareed Zakaria, “[Illiberal Democracy](#)”
- Boaventura De Sousa Santos and Leonardo Avritzer, “[Introduction: Opening Up the Canon of Democracy](#)”
- James Tully, “[Two Meanings of Global Citizenship: Modern and Diverse](#)”
- Mark Kingwell, “Democracy’s Gift: Politics, Anxiety, and Hope in the Twenty-First Century” (podcast video)

Assignment 4: Final Research Essay

Due Date

Following the completion of Unit 11 (approximately week 16 or 26 of the suggested study schedules)

Weighting

50% of the final grade for the course

Instructions Write an essay of 15 to 20 pages (3,750–5,000) words on one (1) of the following topics, unless you have specific permission from your tutor to do otherwise. The final research essay allows you to further develop a particular interest in any one of the issues raised in the course.

You are expected to engage the course materials wherever appropriate, as well as incorporate references from outside the course material, such as those listed in the study guide references lists.

Before you complete this assignment, please read the [Academic Integrity](#) section in the Student Manual.

{5 general topic areas are suggested , including questions about leading selected authors such as Dryzek , Pateman, Benhabib, “minimal “ theorists; deliberation in public policy; pluralism; Plato; and indigenous and post-colonial struggles}.

