

**Democracy, Citizenship and Class from Solon to Trump
(SOC 342.01 Political Sociology)**

The end of the Cold War once seemed to signal the final triumph of liberal democracy. More than three decades later however, liberal democracy now appears besieged and in decline across the globe. The progressive erosion of democratic norms, institutions and rights by contemporary “populist”, illiberal or post-fascist political currents which harkens back to the rapid breakdown of democracy in the 20th century in the face of original fascism paints a sobering picture: Modern democracy is a fragile arrangement; resting uneasily atop underlying class conflict, scrutinized by competing interpretations of its subject (demos/people/citizens), and facing the cynicism of large sections of the masses and outright hostility from far right political entrepreneurs. Now more than ever, the fate of democracy depends on clarity of understanding and its survival requires a historically-informed revitalization.

This political sociology course will be introduced through a history of the social struggles in ancient Greece over issues of debt and land ownership. Democracy is going to be situated as the form of government favored by the poor majority of small peasants, wage earners and craftspeople in their struggles against an aristocratic rich minority descended from an ancient warrior class. The institutions of Athenian direct democracy, such as office holding by lot, the general assembly of the demos and the citizen judiciary will be explained in technical detail, along with the principles they were the embodiment of. The issue of exclusions in terms of citizenship and sex, as well as the role of slavery will be scrutinized. The philosophical critiques of democracy expounded by major figures of the Socratic tradition such as Plato and Aristotle will be discussed both on their own terms and in terms of their partisanship born of their historical and social context.

We will then embark upon a comparison of ancient democracy to the modern democracy that prevails in today’s societies on the points of direct vs. representative decision making, universality vs. exclusion and totality vs. boundedness of domain. We will analyze the Marxist critique of capitalism in terms of the separation of the political and the economic and the multiculturalist challenge to democracy; debating whether democracy should be based on “identity-blind” individual rights or identity-affirming group rights.

The contemporary degeneration and decline of democracy in cases such as the USA, Russia, Turkey, Hungary and Venezuela will be referred to in order to inform the debate over the meaning of populism. Finally, we will look at contemporary projects for reimagining democracy through proposals for bringing back sortition, “radical democracy” and cooperative enterprises. We will discuss the issue of scale (population size) and the proper polity or “shell” democracy can function in such as the city, nation-state and international bodies.

Learning outcomes aimed for in this course are reaching a situated understanding of where democracy comes from in terms of the structure of societies, greater affinity with the fundamental varieties of democracy, a heightened awareness of contemporary threats that democracy faces in today’s uncertain world, as well as potentials and perspectives for its reinvigoration and improvement.

The readings will be a mixture of historical accounts, classic philosophical texts and polemical discussions that focus on sociological themes and debates in relation to the concept. Students are expected to read them before class in order to be prepared to contribute to the class discussion. The instructor will frequently provoke discussions on the themes covered in reading materials, therefore prepared attendance is highly recommended.

Requirements: Midterm Exam (40%), Final Paper (50%), Class Participation (10%)

Week 1

June 24 (Introduction)

June 25

- On The Experience of Moral Confusion (Debt: The First 5000 Years, pp. 1-19) (2011), David Graeber.
- How Interest-Bearing Debt was Brought to Greece and Italy, 8th Century BC (The Collapse of Antiquity, pp. 45-58) (2023), Michael Hudson.

Week 2

June 30

- Reformers Cancel Debts and Redistribute Land, 7th and 6th Centuries BC (The Collapse of Antiquity, pp. 61-77) (2023), Michael Hudson.
- Sparta's Oligarchy Defers an Early Political Crisis, 6th Century BC (The Collapse of Antiquity, pp. 79-96) (2023), Michael Hudson.

July 1

- Solon Bans Debt Slavery in Athens, 594 BC (The Collapse of Antiquity, pp. 97-111) (2023), Michael Hudson.
- From Democracy to the Thirty Tyrants, 508-404 BC (The Collapse of Antiquity, pp. 113-130) (2023), Michael Hudson.

July 2

- Classical Democracy: Athens (Models of Democracy, pp. 22-39) (2006), David Held.
- The Nature of the Polis (Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory, pp. 13-64) (1978), Ellen Meiksins Wood, Neal Wood.

Week 3

July 7

- Excerpts From Plato on Democracy (The Republic, Book IV, V, VI, VIII)
- Socrates: Saint of Counter-Revolution (Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory, pp. 81-118) (1978), Ellen Meiksins Wood, Neal Wood.

July 8

- Excerpts From Aristotle on Democracy (Politics, Book I, III, IV, VI)
- Aristotle: Tactician of Conservatism (Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory, pp. 209-257) (1978), Ellen Meiksins Wood, Neal Wood.

July 9

- Introduction: Perspective and Problems (Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory, pp. 1-12) (1978), Ellen Meiksins Wood, Neal Wood.
- Conclusion: The Socratics Against Athens (Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory, pp. 258-265) (1978), Ellen Meiksins Wood, Neal Wood.
- The Principle of Leadership (The Open Society and its Enemies pp. 114-129, pp. 581-582) (1945), Karl Popper.

Week 4

July 14

- Labour and democracy, ancient and modern (Democracy Against Capitalism, pp. 181-203) (1995), Ellen Meiksins Wood.
- The demos versus 'we, the people': from ancient to modern conceptions of citizenship (Democracy Against Capitalism, pp. 204-237) (1995), Ellen Meiksins Wood.

July 16 (Midterm Exam)

Week 5

July 21

- The separation of the 'economic' and the 'political' in capitalism (Democracy Against Capitalism, pp. 28-48) (1995), Ellen Meiksins Wood.
- The Development of Liberal Democracy (Models of Democracy, pp. 56-95) (2006), David Held.
- Direct Democracy and the End of Politics (Models of Democracy, pp. 96-122) (2006), David Held.

July 22

- "The Cultural Particularity of Liberal Democracy" (1992), Bhikhu Parekh.
- Introduction, (Culture and Equality, An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism, pp. 3-18) (2001), Brian Barry.
- "Equal Treatment & Same Treatment", Brian Barry.

July 23

- Civil society and the politics of identity (Democracy Against Capitalism, pp. 238-263) (1995), Ellen Meiksins Wood.
- Capitalism and human emancipation: race, gender and democracy (Democracy Against Capitalism, pp. 264-283) (1995), Ellen Meiksins Wood.

Week 6

July 28

- The Political Sociology of Democracy (The New Handbook of Political Sociology pp. 538-563) (2020), Jessica Kim and Kathleen M. Fallon.
- "Conquered or Granted? A History of Suffrage Extensions" (2009), Adam Przeworski.

July 29

- Introduction: The Cure for the Common Man (The People, No! pp. 7-19) (2020), Thomas Frank.
- What Was Populism? (The People, No! pp. 21-45) (2020), Thomas Frank.
- Peak Populism in the Proletarian Decade (The People, No! pp. 70-94) (2020), Thomas Frank.
- The Money Changers Burn the Temple (The People, No! pp. 159-179) (2020), Thomas Frank.
- Let Us Now Scold Uncouth Men (The People, No! pp. 181-197) (2020), Thomas Frank.

July 30

- Introduction: Is Everyone a Populist? (What Is Populism? pp. 1-6) (2016), Jan-Werner Müller.

- What Populists Say (What Is Populism? pp. 7-40) (2016), Jan-Werner Müller.
- What Populists Do, or Populism in Power (What Is Populism? pp. 41-74) (2016), Jan-Werner Müller.
- Conclusion: Seven Theses on Populism (What Is Populism? pp. 101-103) (2016), Jan-Werner Müller.

Week 7

August 4

- Illiberal Democracy (The Future of Freedom, pp. 63-84) (2003), Fareed Zakaria.
- Democracy and Autocracy in the Age of Populism (The New Handbook of Political Sociology, pp. 1027-1052) (2020), Carlos de la Torre.
- "The Mystery of 'Populism' Finally Unveiled" (2017), Gaspar Miklos Tamas.
- Introduction (For a Left Populism, pp. 9-13) (2018), Chantal Mouffe.
- The Populist Moment (For a Left Populism, pp. 14-24) (2018), Chantal Mouffe.

August 5

- Legislature by Lot: Envisioning Sortition Within a Bicameral System (Legislature by Lot, Transformative Designs for Deliberative Governance, pp. 14-45) (2019), John Gastil and Erik Olin Wright.
- From Deliberative to Radical Democracy: Sortition and Politics in the Twenty First Century (Legislature by Lot, Transformative Designs for Deliberative Governance, pp. 51-73) (2019), Yves Sintomer.
- Radicalizing Democracy (For a Left Populism, pp. 35-46) (2018), Chantal Mouffe.

August 6

- Surplus Possibilities: The Intentional Economy of Mondragon (A Postcapitalist Politics, pp. 101-126) (2006), J. K. Gibson-Graham.
- What "Self-Directed Means" (Democracy at Work, A Cure for Capitalism, pp. 117-122) (2012), Richard Wolff.
- How WSDEs Work Internally (Democracy at Work, A Cure for Capitalism, pp. 123-137) (2012), Richard Wolff.
- Economic and Political Democracy (Democracy at Work, A Cure for Capitalism, pp. 143-151) (2012), Richard Wolff.

Week 8

August 11

- Democracy, the Nation-State and the Global System (Models of Democracy, pp. 290-311) (2006), David Held.
- Markets and Peoples: Democratic Capitalism and European Integration (How Will Capitalism End, pp. 143-150) (2016), Wolfgang Streeck.

August 12

- Heller, Schmitt and the Euro (How Will Capitalism End, pp. 151-163) (2016), Wolfgang Streeck.
- Why the Euro Divides Europe (How Will Capitalism End, pp. 165-183) (2016), Wolfgang Streeck.
- "Why We Must Save The EU" (2016), Yanis Varoufakis.
- "Why the EU is failing and what must be done" (2025), Yanis Varoufakis.