Course Description

This course is about the relationship between theories of democratic government and contemporary democratic politics.

Learning Goals and Course Requirements

1. Students will read, discuss, and reflect on current political science research about democratic politics in the US, and in other contemporary democratic societies.
   - *Discussion Papers (30%: due by 5pm on Tuesdays, beginning October 3)*
     In preparation for each class, each student should prepare brief responses to discussion questions provided by the instructor (max. 2 pages) that explicitly reference the readings assigned for that week, and provide some analysis. These papers are intended to assess comprehension of course material, and to provide an opportunity for reflection on key topics prior to class meetings. Papers should be well-written, with appropriate professional/academic style, full citations, etc..
   - *Class Participation (10%)*
     Students are expected to have read all course materials before class, and should be prepared to analyze them in detail. Students who do not effectively contribute to class discussions—i.e., those who are absent, do not raise on-point questions or comments, or are unprepared—will not receive full credit for participation.

2. Students will develop their own empirical projects, focusing on some aspect of contemporary democratic politics that exists in tension with democratic expectations, specifying and testing their own hypotheses, or evaluating an implication of existing research.
• **Topic Memo (10%; due October 19); Poster Session (20%; November 30); Final Paper (30%; due December 15)  

Students will test of a working hypothesis about contemporary democratic in the US, or in a broadly comparative analysis, that is informed by the existing political science literature, or its implications. Topic memos should clearly state a research question, identify three pieces of existing research on their topic (and a brief discussion of their insufficiencies), and outline a strategy for empirical analysis. Students will be encouraged to meet with their instructor to review their topic memo, before proceeding with the larger project. (A list of suggested topics will be posted on Canvas early in the quarter.) Students will present an overview of their research project in poster form, during the ninth week of the quarter. Successful final papers will incorporate the comments and suggestions that they receive on their topic memos, and during the poster session.

**Grading Policies**

Regarding late work:

- **Late discussion papers** will not be accepted; students will be assigned a grade of ‘0’ for papers that are not submitted on time.

- **Late topic memos and final papers** will be penalized at a rate of one-third of a letter grade per day late, for a maximum of three days, at which point students will be assigned a grade of ‘0.’

If you feel strongly that your grade on a topic memo, poster, or final paper, does not reflect the quality of your work, you may appeal in the following way: Write a memo that explains, in as much detail as possible, why you think that you should have received a different grade. Submit this memo, along with your graded work, and a letter in which you formally request that the assignment be re-graded. After considering your appeal, the grade assigned by the instructor may be higher, lower, or identical to the grade that you originally received, but it will be final.

**Laptop/Tablet/Phone Policy**

Use of laptops/tablets/phones is not permitted during seminar meetings, unless otherwise noted in the syllabus or permission is provided by the course instructor. Students should have paper copies, or well-organized notes, for all required readings.

**Students with Documented Disabilities**

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oaes).
Course Outline

N.B. This is a new course, under development. Some of the readings proposed below may be revised, replaced, or added. All readings (about 150 pages per week) will be made available through Canvas. No books will be ordered for this course.

Topic 1. Origins of Democratic Expectations (September 28)

- What are the normative foundations of democratic government?
- What are the implications of these normative foundations for what we should expect from our contemporary democratic societies?


Topic 2. Democratic Citizenship (October 5)

- What do democratic governments expect from ordinary citizens? Are these expectations reasonable?
- How does economic inequality affect democratic citizenship?


Topic 3. Preference Formation (October 12)

- Where do citizen preferences come from?
- Which considerations structure citizens’ evaluations of governments and policy?
- What is the basis of partisanship?


Topic 4. Mobilization

(a) Citizens and Voters (October 19)
- Who votes? Why?
• What are the implications of restrictions on suffrage?

(b) **Parties and Candidates** (October 26)
• Why are some groups represented by parties, and not others?
• Who contests elections?

**Topic 5. Elections**

(a) **Preference Aggregation and Representation** (November 2)
• How might we reconcile the importance of elections to democratic government, and the implications of social choice theory, specifically, that preferences aggregated by majority rule are collectively incoherent?
• How do electoral rules contribute to the quality of representation?

(b) **Accountability** (November 9)
• How effective are elections in providing democratic accountability?
• How do electoral rules contribute to the ability of voters to hold elected representatives accountable for their actions?
Topic 6. Government Formation (November 16)

- Who governs?
- How do different institutional structures (i.e., presidential, parliamentary, and other systems) contribute to (or undermine) decision-making that reflects democratic expectations?


Topic 7. Policy-making (November 30*)

- Whose interests are reflected in public policy?
- What structures the relationship between elected bodies of government, and the agencies that implement the decisions of those elected bodies? What are the implications of these structures for the equal consideration of interests?


* N.B. *The poster session will be held during first half of this class.*

Topic 8. Legitimacy in Contemporary Democracies (December 7)

- How well do contemporary democratic societies meet democratic expectations?
- What provides for legitimacy in contemporary democratic societies?