

CSS 230
State and Society in the Modern Age

Fall 2017

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This course analyses the core political institutions of Western democracy as they have evolved over the past 200 years. The European model of the nation-state and capitalist economy became something which other countries around the world were forced to emulate or combat.

Political scientists pose the same questions as do philosophers and historians: the relationship between the individual and society, and the conditions under which efficient and just systems of government emerge. Political scientists range over the same historical evidence as the other disciplines, although they tend to spend less time on dead people than do historians. The difference is mainly in method and approach. Political scientists look for systemic explanations, for structural patterns across many cases. Historians revel in the specificity of individual cases and the uniqueness of history, but political scientists feel uncomfortable when forced to deal with specific cases. While philosophers judge empirical reality against abstract principles, political scientists stick with evidence from the material world.

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to some of the most important ideas and authors on the evolution of the modern state and political movements. Unlike economics, which has a set of very clear and unified theoretical principles, there is no agreement among political scientists about how to analyze these topics. Liberalism is broadly accepted as the only legitimate frame of reference, having fought off the Marxist challenge, but within liberalism there are divergent approaches as to the scope for democracy, the role of the state, the relative merits of stability and change. Mid-range theories, more exactly approaches, come in and out of fashion. This tutorial introduces you to some of the most influential writers in the political science tradition and the box of tools they have used to tackle these problems.

Course organization

Each week there is a principal source or sources that everyone is required to read, and then a list of supplementary readings. At least for some of the weeks, you should read a couple of these additional sources, and use them in preparing your paper. No-one is expected to read all the supplementary readings every week.

Each week you must write a five page double spaced essay and email it to me (prutland@wesleyan.edu) by 2.00 pm on Friday. You can address one of the questions in the syllabus for that week, or come up with your own question based on the topics in the readings.

BOOKS

All the books mentioned in the syllabus are on reserve in Olin, and all the suggested articles and book chapters are available on the web or on Wesfiles for this course via hyperlinks in the syllabus.

Robert A. Dahl *Polyarchy* (1972)
ISBN-13: 978-0300015652 paper \$22.

John Dryzek and Patrick Dunleavy, *Theories of the Democratic State* Palgrave 2009.
ISBN-13: 978-0230542877 paper \$53

Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*
Harvard University Press; Revised edition (1971)
ISBN-13: 978-0674537514 paper \$29.09.

Peter Rutland, *Myth of the Plan*
(Open Court Press, 1985/1990 First edition)
ISBN-13: 978-0812691283 paper \$22.95

Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States*
Blackwell Publishing Limited; Reprint edition (1993)
ISBN-13: 978-1557863683 paper \$39.59

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Richard Heffner, ed.)
Signet Classics (2010)
ISBN-13: 978-0451531605 paper \$6.64

1) DEMOCRACY

Sep 8

What is democracy? Is it the best possible form of government? What are its advantages and disadvantages, its possibilities and its limitations? Is its goal to empower the people, or to dis-empower them?

We begin with the person who invented the concept, Aristotle.

How does he see the range of options for organizing political life?

How relevant is Aristotle for understanding democracy in the 21st century?

Benjamin Constant, writing at the time of the French Revolution, offers one explanation of the relationship between 'ancient' and 'modern' liberty.

Aristotle [*Politics*](#) (350 BCE) Book 4

Benjamin Constant [*The Liberty of the Ancients Compared to That of the Moderns*](#) (1816)

Supplementary reading

Fred Miller [‘Aristotle’s political theory,’](#) *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2011)

Amartya Sen [‘Democracy as a universal value,’](#) *Journal of Democracy* (1999) 10 (3): 3-17

2) THE MODERN STATE

Sep 15

What do states do?

What role did war play in the emergence of the modern state in Europe?

What is the rule of law, and why did it emerge?

John Dryzek & Patrick Dunleavy *Theories of the Democratic State* (2009) ch. 1

Max Weber [*Politics as a Vocation*](#) (1919)

Charles Tilly *Coercion, Capital and European States* (1993) chs. 1-4

Wikipedia.org [‘State’](#)

Supplementary reading

Michael Mann [‘The autonomous power of the state,’](#) in John B. Hall (ed.), *States in History* (1987) 109-36

Barry Weingast [‘The political foundations of democracy and the rule of law,’](#) *American Political Science Review* (1997) 91(2): 245-63

3) AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

Sep 24 6.00 pm

What particular conditions made America suitable for modern democracy?

What did Tocqueville get right, and what did he get wrong, in his analysis of America?

Can American democracy serve as a model for the rest of the world?

Is Tocqueville still relevant? Putnam’s influential 1995 article argued that Tocqueville’s associational communities had broken down; Skocpol critiqued Putnam’s account.

Alexis de Tocqueville *Democracy in America* vol. 1 (1835) Use the abridged version edited by Richard Heffner, Signet Books 2001.

Daniel Elazar [‘To secure the blessings of liberty,’](#) (1987)

The Federalist Papers [no. 9](#) (Hamilton), [no. 10](#) (Madison) (1787)

Supplementary reading

- Charles Tilly [‘Models and realities of popular collective action,’](#) *Social Research* (1985) 52 (4) 717-747
- Timur Kuran [‘Now out of never. The element of surprise in the East European revolution of 1989,’](#) *World Politics* (1991) 44 (1): 7-48
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- Gunar Trumbull *Strength in Numbers. The Political Power of Weak Interests* (2012) ch. 1 [ebook]
- Sidney Tarrow *Power in Movement, Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (1998)

7) ELITE THEORY

Oct 22 6.00 pm

Elite theory takes a different approach to liberal democracy. It argues small groups of strategic elites control decision making in all societies, including liberal democracies.

Which analytical framework do you find more convincing: liberalism or elitism?

Is ‘stability’ more important than democracy or liberty?

- Matias Lopez [‘Elite theory’](#) Sociopedia (2013)
- Michael Lind [‘The new class war’](#) *American Affairs* 5/20/2017
- John Dryzek & Patrick Dunleavy *Theories of the Democratic State* Palgrave 2009, ch. 3.
- John Higley & G. Lowell Field [Elitism](#) (1980) ch. 1

Supplementary reading

- Heinrich Best & John Higley [‘Introduction,’](#) *Palgrave Handbook of Political Elites* (2018)
- Samuel P. Huntington *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968)
- Fareed Zakaria [‘The rise of illiberal democracy,’](#) *Foreign Affairs* (1997) 76 (6)
- Fareed Zakaria [‘America’s democracy has become illiberal’](#) *Washington Post* 12/29/16

Outside lecture Round table on the German elections
Oct 23 4.30 pm Downey House 113

8) THE COMMUNIST ALTERNATIVE

Oct 27

For most of the 20th century, the most successful alternative to capitalism and liberal democracy was the Soviet model.

What were the strengths and weaknesses of Soviet central planning?

What pathologies of bureaucratic behavior can we learn from the Soviet experience?

In 1989-91 state socialism collapsed in the Soviet Union and East Europe, but elements live on in China, Vietnam and North Korea, and in big bureaucracies everywhere.

- Peter Rutland *The Myth of the Plan. Lessons of Soviet Planning* (1985)

Supplementary reading

- James Scott [Seeing Like a State](#) (1998), ch. 6. [full text download]
- Robert Service *Comrades! A History of World Communism* (2007)
- Stephen Kotkin *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse* (2001)