DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIP:
POLITICS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

INSTRUCTOR: Peter Rutland: prutland@wesleyan.edu

ASSESSMENT: 1) Four 5-page reports due 6.00 pm on 9 Jan, 15 Jan, 20 Jan and 25 Jan. [20 points each]
2) Participation in class and in Moodle forum [20 points]

Students are required to attend every class and to complete the required (core) reading.

The discussion classes will meet at 10.00-12.30 am EST on each weekday Jan 10-23.

All lectures for the class are pre-recorded on google drive here and should be watched before each discussion class.

GOALS OF THE COURSE

The world is in a mess. Facing existential threats of war, pestilence and climate change, global leaders are increasingly insecure and unable to cooperate for long-term planning. The world’s political systems are polarized between winners and losers, between countries that have ‘made it’ into liberal democracy and market capitalism, and those that remain mired in poverty, stagnation, inequality and war. There is growing skepticism about whether democracy is the best form of government for dealing with these challenges. Democracy is in retreat: only 15% of the world’s population live in stable liberal democracies. Despite the homogenizing process of globalization, only by conducting case studies of individual countries can we understand the variety of political and economic systems and the complexity of the modern world.

To follow current events students should read the international section of the New York Times, Washington Post or Wall Street Journal every day. They are available free through Wesleyan’s Olin Library, instructions here.

The course has both a theoretical and an empirical component.

On the theory front, the course aims to provide a conceptual framework, a box of tools to help answer the question of who rules, and how, in each of the world’s 193 countries. In fact you will be offered three rival theoretical frameworks, prisms through which to view the world. Each of these theories is both descriptive/empirical and prescriptive/normative – they both describe the world ‘as it really is’ and make a value judgment about what is right and wrong.

The three theories are: 1) Liberal democracy or pluralism,
2) Marxism and the theory of imperialism, and
3) Elite theory

On the empirical front, we examine half a dozen countries in some detail, and you will learn how to research three randomly assigned counties. We survey the whole range of political systems currently in operation: liberal democracies such as the UK; communist or former communist countries (Russia and China); and the Global South, both democratic and authoritarian (India, South Africa).

This course is Comparative Politics, focusing on political process within a given country. A different field of political science, International Relations, deals with global issues and institutions that go beyond a state’s borders.

This course is writing intensive. The most important part of the course is learning how to research and write the three reports on the politics of a given country, using a conceptual framework to structure your analysis. Figuring out what questions to ask is just as important – more important! – than finding the answers to those questions.
READINGS


Some of the readings on the syllabus have hyperlinks that will take you directly to the web. All the readings (except Baradat book) are posted on Moodle.

*Core readings* are required, the first items listed for each class.

*Optional readings* are extra sources that I may refer to in class. The more of them you get a chance to read, the more you will get out of the class. But reading them all is not expected or required.

(V) indicates that the source is a video.

HOW TO PREPARE THE THREE COUNTRY REPORTS

Each student will be randomly assigned three countries in the first week of class.

You will research the contemporary political system in those countries and then write an essay applying one theory to one country i.e. a liberal analysis of Country A, a Marxist analysis of Country B, an Elite Theory analysis of Country C. You can choose which country you want to study for each theory.

Each paper should be 5 pages long including notes, double-spaced, consisting of:

- an introduction summarizing your main points.

- a page or so on the political history of the country, as interpreted through the theory being applied. Do not give a detailed chronology of the country’s entire history, just select the main events important for the theory in question.

- a couple of pages explaining how the current political system works, its structure and problems, as seen through the prism of the given theory. Who rules, and how? Is the political situation stable or unstable? What are the threats to stability? What does the theory propose should be done to improve things?

- a page discussing the advantages and disadvantages to using the given theory to analyze the country.

The assignment should be sent to me as an email attachment (Word document, not pdf) by 6.00 pm on the day it is due. Remember what I am looking for is not only facts, but critical analysis of political institutions and processes.

Beware of plagiarism: do not cut and paste material from the internet into your essay. Always include ‘quotation marks’ if you copy material directly, and always provide a clear attribution of the sources you are using.

You use **at least two books or academic journal articles** on each country, to give you a sense of how scholars approach that country. Also use **at least two newspaper articles** from sources such as *Wash Post* or *New York Times* to bring you up to date.

Include a bibliography listing the sources used. Use footnotes or endnotes to show attribution. Always provide source notes for direct quotes and for statistics. Otherwise use notes sparingly, not more than 1-2 notes per paragraph. Any style of notes is acceptable eg Chicago.
SOURCES FOR THE THREE RANDOM COUNTRY RESEARCH PAPERS

For the history and overview of the political system you should begin with the history and annual reports on each country in Encyclopedia Britannica or Wikipedia, or the CIA and State Department sites listed below.

The best source for analysis of contemporary politics is newspapers like New York Times and Washington Post, and the BBC web site. Search those sites for articles on your country from the past couple of years.

You should search for relevant articles on your assigned countries in political science journals.
Go to: www.wesleyan.edu/library/ then click on Journal Locator under Electronic Resources

Useful academic journals: The Journal of Democracy World Politics
Comparative Politics Comparative Political Studies

You can also look for articles through Google scholar – an invaluable search engine for finding recent academic articles on any topic. Its shows you the most widely-cited articles, and shows you the other articles that cited them.

Here is a list of some of the most useful web sites.

Freedom House Annual country reports (click on the country name to see the report)
BBC country profiles Archive of recent articles on each country in the world. Note also the handy chronology of major political events.
Library of Congress Country Studies Detailed descriptions of institutions and recent events
CIA World Factbook Key facts and good socio-economic data on each country; top right search box.
Encyclopedia Britannica Access it through Olin library website. Type in a country’s name and you will find articles on government and history. Click on the box ‘Year in review’ on left and you will find articles summarizing the major political events each year.
The Economist File of articles on individual countries, search through index or on Olin site.
Open Democracy European site with lively articles about democratic prospects around the world.
Human Development Report Development reports and country data, from the UN Development Project.
Gapminder A striking graphics program using HDR data to show the rate of development in all countries of the world across various socio-economic indicators.

For the Marxism paper:
In Defense of Marxism Theoretical articles and news analysis.
World Socialist Website Search for stories on your country.
https://jacobinmag.com/ American left-wing magazine.

For help with writing you are encouraged to use the services of the Writing Workshop. To make an appointment go to Wesportal→ Academics→ Writing Workshop Account.

THE MOODLE FORUM

I will assign two students to work together to prepare a one paragraph summary of the most interesting main argument, as they see it, in one of the core assigned sources for that day. They should also post two questions for discussion in class. There will be two topics assigned for each class.

Other students can make their own contributions to the Moodle forum after the lead pair have made their post.

The lead pairs should upload their posts by 8.00 pm the day before the class discussion. The first such forum will be for the class on Tuesday January 10, so the lead pairs should post their comments by 8.00 pm on Monday January 9. Each person will be part of the lead pair twice during the course.

PREPARATORY WORK: WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?
Since this is an intensive winter session class, you have to complete a block of reading for topics (a) - (c), watch the first four assigned recorded lectures, and write one assignment before the classes begin on 10 January.

**First assignment, 5 pages, to be submitted by 6.00 pm on Monday, 9 January:**

Analyze the strength and weakness of democracy in the US. How does the current American model compare to the practice of direct democracy in Ancient Greece, or the theory of pluralism laid out in Robert Dahl’s *Polyarchy*?

**Topic (a) ** THE ORIGINS OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Ancient Greece saw the birth of direct democracy. What were the key features of the Athenian model? How many of them are still visible in modern democracies? The 18th century saw the birth of representative government, with a focus on individual rights.

*Core:*
Peter Rutland ‘Origins’ and ‘American republic’ recorded lectures.
Benjamin Constant *The Liberty of the Ancients Compared to That of the Moderns* (1816)

*Optional:*
Aristotle *Politics* (350 BCE) Book 4
Fred Miller ‘Aristotle’s political theory’ *Stanford Encyclopida of Philosophy* (2011)

**Topic (b) ** DAHL’S MODEL OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Modern democracy balances majority rule with individual rights and minority rights. Dahl’s ‘pluralism’ model has two elements: contestation and participation. For radical or communitarian democrats, Dahl’s procedural model is too minimalist.

*Core:*
Peter Rutland ‘Dahl’s Polyarchy’ recorded lecture.
Damon Young ‘What’s happening right now in America is a start’ *Time* 6/20/20

*Optional:*
Robert Dahl *Polyarchy* (1971) chs 4-11

**Topic (c) ** THE US POLITICAL SYSTEM

What divides the parties now? Was Trump’s election cause or effect of the polarization in society? What are the flaws in the state of democracy in the US? Can they be fixed?

Peter Rutland ‘The US political system’ recorded lecture.
Malka Older ‘The US has never truly been a democracy’ *New York Times* 10/24/19
David Leonhardt ‘The US is lagging behind many rich countries’ *New York Times* 7/2/20
David Ignatius ‘America is losing its way’ *Washington Post* 7/4/22

**Topic 1a ** INTRODUCTION
Jan 10
WHAT IS POLITICAL SCIENCE? What is the best form of government? What do we mean by ‘best’, and how do we measure it?

Hans Rosling ‘200 countries, 200 years, 4 minutes’ BBC 11/26/10

WHAT IS THE STATE?

How does Max Weber define the state? What do states do? Is the state obsolete in the era of globalization?

Core:
Peter Rutland ‘What is the state?’ recorded lecture.
Leon Baradat Political Ideologies (2017) chs. 1-3
Wikipedia.org ‘The State’
Rutger Bregman ‘The real Lord of the Flies’ Guardian 5/9/2020

Optional:
Max Weber Politics as a Vocation (1919)

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Discussion of the models of direct democracy and representative democracy that you studied while writing the first paper.

ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

What choices are made in designing electoral systems? What is gerrymandering? What is Anthony Downs’ ‘median voter theorem’? Why did it take so long for women to get the vote? How successful have various democracies been in improving female representation?

Core:
Peter Rutland ‘Electoral systems’ and ‘Proportional representation’ recorded lectures.
Leon Baradat Political Ideologies (2017) ch. 6
Donald Horowitz ‘Electoral systems: a primer for leaders,’ J. of Democracy 14 (4) 2003
Philippe Schmitter ‘What democracy is...and is not’ Journal of Democracy 2 (3) 1991
Kate Lemay ‘Winning the right to vote’ New York Times 8/13/20

Optional:
Harry Stevens ‘Ranked choice voting’ Washington Post 6/21/21
Anthony Downs An Economic Theory of Democracy (1958) ch. 8
Heather Long ‘80 nations set quotas for female leaders’ Washington Post 3/29/19

THE BRITISH POLITICAL SYSTEM

What are the differences between the US and British democratic traditions?
How does a parliamentary system differ from a presidential system?
What was Thatcherism, and why did it appear when it did? What did New Labour stand for? Why did a majority of Britons vote for Brexit?

**Core:**
Peter Rutland ‘Britain’ recorded lecture.

**Optional:**
Peter Rutland ‘Britain’ in Kopstein & Lichbach *Comparative Politics* ch. 1
Rowena Mason ‘How did the UK end up voting to leave the EU?’ *Guardian* 6/24/2016
Laurence Whitehead ‘The hard truths of Brexit’ *Journal of Democracy* 31 (2) 2020: 81-95

**Topic 2c POPULISM**
Jan 11

What is populism? Is it a sign of democratic revival, or democratic decline?

**Core:**
Richard Evans (V) *Is populism a threat to democracy?* Gresham College 6/16/20 (60 mins)

**Optional:**
Cass Mudde ‘Copying the populist right won’t save the left’ *Guardian* 5/14/19
Ronald Inglehart & Pippa Norris ‘Trump and the populist authoritarian parties’ *Perspectives on Politics* 15 (2) 2017: 443–454

**Topic 3a MARXISM**
Jan 12

Marxists believe liberal democracy is a fraudulent theory that masks domination by the capitalist class, and national politics are subordinate to global capitalism. What solutions does Marxism propose?

**Core:**
Peter Rutland ‘Marxism’ recorded lecture.
Karl Marx & Frederick Engels *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)
Karl Marx ‘The future results of the British rule in India’ (1853)

**Optional:**
Phil Gasper ‘The Manifesto today’ *Socialist Worker* 11/18/05
**Topic 3b IMPERIALISM**  
**Jan 12**

How did Lenin adapt Marxism to justify seizing power in Russia?  
How do contemporary Marxists analyze the dynamics of global capitalism?  
What is ‘world system theory” and ‘underdevelopment’ theory? What options do developing countries have for escaping from exploitation by the more developed economies?

*Core:*

Peter Rutland  ‘Imperialism’ recorded lecture.  
Vladimir Lenin  *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), ch. 7  
Andre Gunder Frank  *The Development of Underdevelopment* (1966)

**Topic 4 THE SOVIET UNION AND POST-SOVIET RUSSIA**  
**Jan 13**

The Soviet Union tried to build a state on Marxist principles. Their system was copied in two dozen other countries, usually with disastrous results. How did the Soviet system work?  
What is a ‘totalitarian’ regime?  Why did Gorbachev launch perestroika - and why did it fail?  
Why did post-soviet Russia slip back into autocracy?

*Core:*

Peter Rutland  ‘Soviet communism’ and “Fall of Soviet Union’ recorded lectures.  
Leslie Holmes  ‘Totalitarianism’ *International Encyc. of Social & Behavioral Sciences*  
Optional:  
Stephen Hanson  ‘Russia’ in Kopstein & Lichbach *Comparative Politics*, ch. 7  
Leon Baradat  *Political Ideologies* (2018) ‘Socialist theory, applied’ ch. 8, 9  
George Orwell  *1984*  
Peter Rutland  ‘Post Soviet Russia’ recorded lecture.  
Peter Rutland  ‘Putin forever’, *All the Russias* 3/24/20  
BBC Newsnight (V)  ‘Putin: president for life?’ 6/30/2020 (11 mins)

**Second assignment, 5 pages, to be submitted by 6.00 pm on Sunday Jan 15.**

How would a Marxist assess the political and economic situation in country B?  
Is it stable or unstable? What political forces exist there that could overthrow the country’s ruling regime?  
Even if a revolution is not likely, what ‘progressive forces’ could improve the lot of the oppressed?

**Topic 5 CHINA**  
**Jan 16**

What were the differences between Chinese and Soviet socialism?  
How come China did a better job of managing the transition to capitalism than Russia?  
Why is China still a Leninist state? Will China become a democracy in the foreseeable future?

*Core:*

Peter Rutland  ‘China’ recorded lecture.  
Yu Shan Wu  ‘China’ in Kopstein & Lichbach *Comparative Politics* ch. 8  
Ruairidh Brown  ‘How the Chinese state uses Marxism today’ *Conversation* 9/30/19  
Bates Gill  ‘Xi’s grip on power is absolute’ *The Conversation* 6/27/19  
Optional:  
Henry Rowen  ‘When will China be free?’ *Journal of Democracy* 18 (3) 2007  
PBS (V)  *China From the Inside* 2007 (55 mins)
**ELITE THEORY**

Jan 17

Elite theory offers an alternative to liberalism and Marxism. Why are authoritarian leaders able to stay in power? Why do some launch modernizing reforms and not others? When do revolutions occur? Can they succeed? Why are military coups so common? What happens under military regimes?

**Core:**
- Peter Rutland ‘Elite theory’ recorded lecture.
- Peter Rutland ‘Military coups’ recorded lecture
- Matias Lopez ‘Elite theory’ Sociopedia (2013)
- John Higley & G. Field Elitism (1980) 1-68

**Optional:**
- Leon Baradat Political Ideologies (2017) ‘Fascism’ ch. 10
- Alan Wolfe ‘The power elite now’ American Prospect, 10/44, 1999
- Govt intelligence ‘Coup d’état’ (2007)
- Wikipedia Coup d’etat; List of coups since 2010
- Russell Goldman ‘Myanmar’s coup explained’ New York Times 5/25/21
- Al Jazeera ‘Turkey’s failed coup attempt’ 7/15/17

**INDIA**

Jan 18

India made the transition from colonial rule to become the world’s largest democracy. How can a country so poor, and so divided by religious and ethnic strife, sustain itself as a democracy? Is Prime Minister Modi’s Hindutva nationalism undermining Indian democracy?

**Core:**
- Peter Rutland ‘India’ recorded lecture.
- Rudra Sil ‘India’ Kopstein & Lichbach Comparative Politics ch. 10
- Jeffrey Gettelman ‘Modi captures historic election victory’ New York Times 5/23/19
- Anjali Modi ‘India awakens to fight for its soul’ New York Times 12/20/19

**Optional:**
- Sumit Ganguly ‘Is Hindu nationalism transforming India?’ Current History Apr 2020
- Sumit Ganguly ‘Six decades of independence’ Journal of Democracy 18 (3) 2007
**Topic 6b  SOUTH AFRICA**

Jan 18

The collapse of the apartheid regime was a major triumph for democracy. Why did the Afrikaners agree to give up power? 28 years later, how is South African democracy holding up?

**Core:**
- Peter Rutland ‘South Africa’ recorded lecture.
- Antoinette Handley ‘South Africa’ Kopstein & Lichbach *Comparative Politics*, ch. 12
- Bill Keller ‘South Africa since Mandela’ *New York Times* 12/26/2012
- Frances Reid (V) *Cradock Four* (2000) (10 mins)
- Norimitsu Onishi ‘A weakened ANC clings to victory’ *New York Times* 5/10/19

**Optional:**
- Masupye Maserumule ‘*The future of Mandela’s party*’ *Conversation* 4/26/20
- Freedom House ‘*South Africa*’ Country Report 2020
- Trevor Noah *Born a Crime* (2016)

**Topic 7  REVOLUTIONS**

Jan 19

Under what conditions do popular protests succeed in bringing about regime change? Can non-violent social movements succeed? The 2011 Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya caught everyone by surprise. Why did they break out? How important was the role of social media in these revolutions?

**Core:**
- Peter Rutland ‘Revolutions’ recorded lecture.
- Peter Rutland ‘Arab Spring’ recorded lecture.
- CBS News (V) *Tunisia: the spark* (13 mins) 20 Feb 2011
- Erica Chenoweth ‘Nonviolent resistance proves potent weapon’ *Harvard Gazette* 2/4/19

**Optional:**
- Tina Rosenberg ‘How to topple a dictator,’ *New York Times* 2/13/15
- Scott Anderson ‘Fractured lands: How the Arab world came apart’ *N York Times* 8/14/16
- Deutsche Welle (V) ‘Arabellion: 10 years after the Arab Spring’ (2021) (90 mins)
- Larry Diamond ‘Liberation technology’ *Journal of Democracy* 21 (3) 2010, 69-83

**Jan 20  NO CLASS !!**

Third assignment, 5 pages, to be submitted by 6.00 pm on Friday, 20 January.

An Elite theory analysis of country C. How would an Elite Theorist assess the political and economic situation in country C? Who makes up the ruling elite, and what is the basis for their power? Is the political system stable or unstable? What classes or political forces exist that could threaten or promote stability?
Topic 8  THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY
Jan 23

What are the prospects for democracy world-wide? Can democracy survive and prosper? Can it meet the challenges of ethnic conflict, poverty, inequality, and environmental decay?

Core:
Peter Rutland  ‘The future’ recorded lecture.
Sarah Repucci  ‘A leaderless struggle for democracy’ Freedom House 2020
The Economist  ‘What’s gone wrong with democracy?’ 28 Feb 2014
Larry Diamond  ‘The liberal democratic order in crisis’ American Interest 2/16/18

Optional:
Steven Pinker  A history of violence  9/27/11
Larry Diamond  ‘Breaking out of the democratic slump’ J. of Democracy 31 (1) 2020
Francis Fukuyama  ‘30 years of world politics’ Journal of Democracy 31 (1) 2020
Francis Fukuyama  ‘Why is democracy performing so poorly? J of Democracy 26 (1) 2015
The Economist  ‘Africa’s fragile democracies’ 8/20/16
Peter Lewis  ‘Aspirations and Realities in Africa,’ J. of Democracy 30 (3) 2019

Fourth assignment, 5 pages, to be submitted by 6.00 pm on 25 January:

A liberal democratic analysis of country Z. How democratic is country Z? If not, why not? How could democracy in that country be improved or strengthened? What is the likelihood of that happening, and what kind of political developments would cause it to happen?

To research this paper start with the Freedom House country report (click the Country Reports button). Also search for articles about your country in Journal of Democracy.