Political Science W3120: Problems in Democratic Theory  
Spring 2009  
Professor Melissa Schwartzberg  
Teaching assistants: Margaret Lange and Jeffrey Lenowitz  
Tues.-Thurs. 1:10-2:25

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This is a course designed to enable students to analyze the concept of democracy and to evaluate the institutional mechanisms by which democracies make decisions. We will investigate the presuppositions of various mechanisms: for instance, how do different decision procedures reflect particular conceptions of the ways in which agents make political judgments? We will pay close attention to the normative implications of these decision procedures: what are the consequences of adopting a supermajority rule rather than a majority rule, or of deliberating collectively prior to voting rather than casting ballots without a preceding discussion? Finally, we will consider the sorts of constraints we might impose upon democratic decision-making: in particular, we will discuss whether constitutional rules restricting majority decisions should be considered democratic, and whether it makes sense to restrict or suspend the operation of democratic institutions for democracy's sake.

**Course requirements:**
- 3 take-home essay examinations (30%, 30%, and 30%).
- Participation in discussion section (10%).

**Texts for purchase:**

The other readings will be available on Courseworks.

**Class schedule**

**Jan. 20: Course introduction: What is democracy?**  
***Note: Class will begin upon the conclusion of the inauguration ceremony***

**Part I: Democracy, elections, and the individual capacity for judgment**

**Jan. 22: Does democracy require elections? Lotteries.**
Reading:
Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III.6-8; Book IV.

**Jan. 27: Should “every vote count”? Part I: Greece (assemblies and juries).**

Reading:

**Jan. 29: Should “every vote count”? Part II: Rome (orders and acclamation).**

Reading:

**Feb. 3: Should democracy be aggregative? Rousseau, *Social Contract*.**

Reading:
Rousseau, *Social Contract*, I.6-7; II.1-4, 6; IV.1-4

**Feb. 5: Jeffrey Lenowitz, guest lecturer**

Reading:

**Feb. 10: The epistemic benefits of aggregating individual judgments. Part I: The Condorcet Jury Theorem**

Reading:

**Feb. 12: The epistemic benefits of aggregating individual judgments. Part II: Prediction markets**

Reading:
Part II: Democratic decision-making: The choice of voting rules

Feb 17: The (in)coherence of majority rule

Reading:
***First midterm distributed***

Feb. 19: The tyranny of the majority?: Madison and Tocqueville

Reading:
Madison, Federalist 10 and 47.
Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Book I, ch. 16-17.

Feb. 24: Democracy and representation: Mill

Reading:
Mill, Considerations on Representative Government, chs. 5-7.
***First midterm due***


Reading:
Mill, Considerations on Representative Government, chs. 8-10.

March 3: Unanimity, supermajority and majority rule. Part I: Congress and the filibuster

Reading:

March 5: Unanimity, supermajority and majority rule. Part II: Juries

Reading:

Part III: Democracy and Deliberation

March 10: What is deliberation?
Reading:

**March 12: Margaret Lange, guest lecturer.**

Reading:

**March 24: Deliberation and disagreement**

Reading:

**March 26: Against deliberation**

Reading:

***Second midterm distributed***

**March 31: Deliberative polls: Fishkin video in class.**

Reading:

**Part IV: Constitutionalism and democracy**

**April 2: Why a constitution? Part I: Constitutions as contracts.**

Reading:

***Second midterm due***

**April 7: Why a constitution? Part II: Constitutions as precommitment and coordination devices.**
Reading:

April 9: Passover (class cancelled)

April 14: Amending a constitution. Part I: What is amendment?

Reading:
Levinson, Sanford. "How many times has the United States Constitution been amended? (A) <26; (B) 26; (C) 27; (D) >27: Accounting for Constitutional Change." In Sanford Levinson, ed., *Responding to Imperfection*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

April 16: Amending a constitution. Part II: Amendment and constitutional legitimacy

Reading:

April 21: Democracy and expertise revisited: Judicial review

Reading:

April 23: Democracy and emergency

Reading:

April 28: Course conclusion.

***Final take-home exam distributed, due May 12.***