DEMOCRACY'S GLOBAL CRISIS

This seminar investigates the worldwide crisis of democracy and how democracy’s defenders might overcome it. In the late 20th century, democracy was on a global roll; now it is in retreat in every world region. In the United States, the world’s oldest and most powerful democracy, one of the two major parties works to restrict voting access and refuses to accept defeat in elections. India, the world’s largest democracy, has come under the control of a party that pursues an exclusionary, ethnonational agenda. Poland and Hungary, once exemplars of successful democratization, are now dominated by parties that attack judicial independence and free media. Democracy is under threat in Brazil, the Philippines and other developing-world democracies as well, and authoritarianism has hardened in China, Russia, Venezuela, and much of the Middle East. How can we explain democracy’s crisis? How can democrats reverse the autocratic wave, and what must they do to restore democracy’s promise?

Our seminar will focus intensively on discussion of the readings, which must be done in their entirety before each class meeting. All readings are available electronically on the bcourses page. Requirements consist of two 2,000-word papers on the readings, a final essay exam, and attendance and active participation in seminar meetings. Grades will be determined on a 100-point scale: each short paper counts for 15 points (for 30 points in total); the final exam for 40 points; and attendance and participation for 30 points. Participation in the online discussions on bcourses will count toward the participation grade.

Use of any electronic or internet devices, including laptops and cellphones, is not allowed during class.

Our books for the course are:

- Peter Pomerantsev, This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War against Reality (New York: Public Affairs, 2019).
Syllabus

PART I: DEMOCRACY UNDER SIEGE

Week 1 (January 20): The Setting


Week 2 (January 27): The Erosion of Democracy in the Old Democracies


“Global Leader Approval Ratings,” *Morning Consult*, updated December 9, 2021 (peruse numbers; note Modi’s ratings and compare them with those of other leaders). https://morningconsult.com/global-leader-approval/
Week 3 (February 3): The Erosion of Democracy in the Neodemocracies and the Endurance of Autocracy


Tarek Masoud, “The Arab Spring at 10: Kings or People?,” *Journal of Democracy* 32, 1 (January 2021), pp. 139-154.

Vivian Yee, “‘What Have We Done with Democracy?’ A Decade on, the Arab Spring Seems to Wither,” *New York Times*, October 10, 2021.


PART II: UNDERSTANDING AND EXPLAINING DEMOCRACY’S CRISIS

Week 4 (February 10): Structural Explanations for Democracy’s Crisis


**Week 5 (February 17): Psychology, Perception, and Misperception**


**Week 6 (February 17): Political Parties, Leadership, and Failures of Representation**


**Week 7 (March 3): Transnational Forces**


**Week 8 (March 10): A Case Study**


**First preliminary essay**

**PART III: NATIONALISM, BELONGING, AND DEMOCRACY**

**Week 9 (March 17): National Identity**


Week 10 (March 31): Nationalism and Ethnonationalism

Constitution of India (1949), preamble and part III, sections 12-30.


Week 11 (April 7): National Unity and Disunity


Frederick Douglass, “Composite Nation” (speech delivered in the Parker Fraternity Course, Boston 1867).


PART IV: RHETORIC, COMMUNICATION, AND MESSAGING

Week 12 (April 14): Communicating with Voters


Week 13 (April 21): Disinformation and the War on Reality

Peter Pomerantsev, This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War against Reality (New York: Public Affairs, 2019) (entire).

Second preliminary essay

PART V: DEMOCRACY’S FUTURE

Week 14 (April 28): The Way Forward


