

# Contemporary Comparative Politics

PSC 23000-B

Fall 2021

Mondays 2:00-3:15

Online via Blackboard Collaborate Ultra

Nicholas Rush Smith  
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Office Hours

Monday 12:30-1:30

Meetings Via Zoom

Sign-Up for a Time via <https://calendly.com/nrsmithccny/15min>

This course provides a broad overview of contemporary comparative politics by providing an overview of the dynamics by which democracies rise, work, and fall. To teach about the long history of democratic politics, the course uses a mixture of academic, journalistic, primary sources.

**Class Organization:** The course is divided into three sections. The first section of the course will provide a review of different concepts of democracy and examine the conditions under which democratic regimes have been established. The second section examines the ways democratic systems function. The final section examines how threats to democratic regimes. The course will blend lectures and discussions. Students will be able to watch a weekly pre-recorded lecture on Blackboard weekly to reserve our class time for discussion of weekly readings.

**Learning Outcomes:** The primary goal of this course is for students to be able to understand world politics in a comparative perspective with a particular understanding of the origins, dynamics, and threats to democratic systems.

**Course Assignments:** The primary assignments for the course are four take home exams and participation in class discussions.

**Grading and Evaluation:** The course will be graded on a 100-point scale with the following breakdown:

- Essay Exams: 90 points
  - 3 exams x 30 points per exam
    - Exam 1: Due October 13
    - Exam 2: Due November 15
    - Exam 3: Due Per CCNY Final Exam Schedule
- Participation: 10 points
  - See attendance policy for details

**Attendance Policy:** Participation in class discussions is crucial to the success of the course, so participation is an important component of students' final grades. Because weekly participation in the course material is so important for student's learning, **students will lose 2.5 points from the**

**participation portion of their grade for each class missed (i.e. 2.5% off the final course grade for each discussion missed up to a maximum of 10% off the final grade).** I will allow one unexcused absence without penalty. However, each subsequent unexcused absence will incur this penalty. Should a student run into a health, personal, or technical challenge which means they will have difficulty participating in a live discussion, I will excuse the absence. However, students should make their best effort to contact me *before* the discussion that will be missed explaining the absence or as soon as possible thereafter.

With that said, I also understand that given the extraordinary circumstances under which class is taking place, technical or internet access challenges may present difficulties for some students to access the class discussions on a regular basis. If you anticipate such problems or encounter them unexpectedly due to a change in life circumstance, I encourage you to contact me as soon as possible to discuss your situation so that we can work together individually to develop a solution.

Weekly discussion sessions will take place via Blackboard Collaborate Ultra on Mondays from 2:00pm-3:15pm (certain weeks excepted – see course schedule below). Information on accessing Blackboard Collaborate Ultra can be found here: [https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Participant/Get\\_Started](https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Participant/Get_Started).

**Accessibility & Campus Resources:** At City College, we strive to make all our classes accessible to every student, regardless of any disability (visible or non-visible; physical, cognitive, emotional, or learning) or any other special circumstances (such as a medical, personal, or housing emergency; family responsibilities; financial difficulties; legal difficulties; or immigration status) that may affect your ability to attend class and complete the coursework. Please speak to me (and your other professors) in office hours or via email early in the semester or as soon as you're aware that you may need accommodations, so that we can work together to make sure that you receive the support you need.

City College offers resources to students in a wide range of circumstances. Please share this information with your friends and classmates at CCNY! We want all students to succeed and to take advantage of all the support the college has to offer.

Please let your other professors know if you have registered with the AccessAbility Center/Student Disability Services (AAC/SDS) or have any **special needs, learning differences, or medical conditions** that may affect your coursework so that we can make the appropriate accommodations. If you believe you may need an accommodation, please do get in touch with the AAC/SDS. You can reach the AccessAbility office via email ([disabilityservices@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@ccny.cuny.edu)) or through their Zoom virtual front desk (<https://ccny.zoom.us/j/116151245>).

If you need a **computer, tablet, or wi-fi**, you can request them through an online form ([https://portal.ccny.cuny.edu/depts/oit/cuny\\_loaner/login.php](https://portal.ccny.cuny.edu/depts/oit/cuny_loaner/login.php)). You can also contact the iMedia Center via email ([imedia@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:imedia@ccny.cuny.edu)) or via their Zoom virtual front desk, Monday-Thursday, 11am-3pm (<https://ccny.zoom.us/j/2126505480>).

If you have any questions or concerns about your **immigration status** or that of your family members, please consult the CCNY Immigration Center for free and confidential advice via phone (212-650-6620) or email ([meetu.dhar@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:meetu.dhar@ccny.cuny.edu)).

If, for any reason, you are struggling with **personal issues, anxiety, depression, or stress**, there are a number of resources on campus.

The Student Counseling Center in the Health and Wellness Center provides remote counseling that is free and confidential to students. You can contact them via phone (212-650-8222), email ([counseling@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:counseling@ccny.cuny.edu)), or their Zoom virtual front desk, Monday-Thursday 10am-4pm (<http://ccny.zoom.us/j/2126508222>). They also have links to a number of resources on their website (<https://www.ccny.cuny.edu/counseling>).

The Colin Powell School offers free, confidential peer mentoring with trained graduate students on issues of stress management and self-care. To sign up, simply send an email ([peernavigationccny@gmail.com](mailto:peernavigationccny@gmail.com)) or sign up online (<https://calendly.com/peernavigation/calendar?month=2020-10>).

If you are dealing with **food insecurity**, please visit Benny's Food Pantry in the Hoffman Lounge on the first floor of the NAC. The pantry is open even during the pandemic. To gain access on weekdays, just make an appointment online (<https://calendly.com/bennysfoodpantry/benny-s-food-pantry-appointment-system?month=2021-08>).

If you are facing an **emergency shortage of funds**, please email Ms. Charlene Darbassie ([cdarbassie@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:cdarbassie@ccny.cuny.edu)) or Dean Andy Rich ([arich@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:arich@ccny.cuny.edu)) in the Colin Powell School Dean's Office. They will tell you how to apply for an emergency grant. Applying is quick and easy.

If you are experiencing or have experienced **domestic violence** or **violence that is sex-based, gender-based, or sexuality-based**; or if you are experiencing or have experienced **discrimination because of gender, sex, sexuality, race, ethnicity, language, religion, disability, or other reasons**, please report it to Diana Cuzzo in the Office of Affirmative Action, Compliance, and Diversity via email ([dcuzzo@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:dcuzzo@ccny.cuny.edu)) or phone (212-650-7330). For a confidential discussion of these and related issues, please contact Sophie English via email ([senglish@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:senglish@ccny.cuny.edu)) or phone (212-650-8905).

If you are struggling in any of your classes, don't hesitate to get extra **academic support**. Just make an appointment with the Academic Resource Center ([www.ccny.cuny.edu/sssp/tutoring-arc](http://www.ccny.cuny.edu/sssp/tutoring-arc)) or email Charlene Darbassie ([cdarbassie@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:cdarbassie@ccny.cuny.edu)) in the Colin Powell School office of Academic Support Services.

The CCNY Writing Center ([www.ccny.cuny.edu/writing](http://www.ccny.cuny.edu/writing)) offers individualized **writing support** to all students.

To receive information and support about securing **internships** and planning for your **post-college career**, please contact Debbie Cheng ([dcheng@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:dcheng@ccny.cuny.edu)) and Ashif Hassan ([ahassan@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:ahassan@ccny.cuny.edu)) in the Colin Powell School Dean's Office. Also, take a look at the new Career Handbook that their office has created to help you start thinking about career and professional development (<https://www.ccny.cuny.edu/colinpowellschool/career-and-professional-development>).

For a continually updated list of **other pandemic-related resources throughout New York City**, please see this online document: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sg5wJgKU9dUqmt62IGqxtWVccHSRUCChUrBBm3upvH8/edit?ts=5e792358#>

For **advising**, contact the Colin Powell School Advising Office (<https://www.ccny.cuny.edu/colinpowellschool/office-academic-advisors>). At their website, you can make a virtual appointment with one of the advisors or you can find their email addresses so you can send them a message.

Week dates	Learning Outcomes	Read/Watch/Listen	In-Class Activity	Assignments
<b>Section 1: Democracy's Meanings and Origins</b>				
<b>Module 1: Course Introduction</b> August 25  <b>(NOTE: Wednesday Class for Intro Discussion)</b>	-Understanding course expectations	Review Syllabus	Overview discussion	None
<b>Module 2: What is Democracy?</b> August 30	-Understanding how democracy has been conceptualized, both by scholars and in common parlance	<p><b>Watch:</b> Lecture – What is Democracy?</p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Robert Dahl. 1998. <i>On Democracy</i>. New Haven: Yale University Press: Chapter 4.</p> <p>Amartya Sen, 1999. “Democracy as a Universal Value.” <i>Journal of Democracy</i> 10 (3): 3-17.</p> <p>Frederic C. Schaffer. 1997. “Political Concepts and the Study of Democracy: The Case of Demokaraasi in Senegal.” <i>PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review</i> 20 (1): 40-49.</p> <p>Atossa Araxia Abrahamian. 2021. “There Is No Good Reason You Should Have to Be a Citizen to Vote.” <i>New York Times</i>. July 28.</p> <p><b>Listen:</b> <i>Democracy Works Podcast</i>. “Danielle Allen on Achieving Democracy’s Ideals.” March 22, 2021. Available from: <a href="https://media.simplecastcdn.com/942a6dac-a4a0-41a0-9039-6dfc9da7901c/episodes/7de5925e-6b54-4c9e-8353-99ef71a465b4/audio/fb7db478-233e-41e5-b70e-8613b6f9191a/128/default_tc.mp3?cid[]=5bdf11b1-5c1b-4452-86e0-8f6c066718c0">https://media.simplecastcdn.com/942a6dac-a4a0-41a0-9039-6dfc9da7901c/episodes/7de5925e-6b54-4c9e-8353-99ef71a465b4/audio/fb7db478-233e-41e5-b70e-8613b6f9191a/128/default_tc.mp3?cid[]=5bdf11b1-5c1b-4452-86e0-8f6c066718c0</a></p>	What do we mean when we say “democracy?”	None
<b>Module 3: Democratic Revolutions</b> September 13  <b>(NOTE: No class September 6 per CUNY Cancellation)</b>	-Understanding the Age of Revolutions and its legacies	<p><b>Watch:</b> Lecture – Democratic Revolutions</p> <p><b>Read:</b> Eric Hobsbawm. 1962. <i>The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848</i>. New York: Vintage Books: Chapter 3.</p>	Revolution as the basis for modern democracy	None

		<p>Lynn Hunt. 2008. <i>Inventing Human Rights</i>. New York: Norton: Chapter 1</p> <p>Julius S. Scott. 2018. <i>The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution</i>. London: Verso: Chapter 4.</p> <p><b>Listen:</b>  <i>In Our Time Podcast</i>. “The Haitian Revolution.” Available here:  <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b04lsqgs">https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b04lsqgs</a></p>		
<p><b>Module 4: Democratization from Above</b>  September 20</p>	<p>-Understanding how acquiescence from above can lead to democratic transition</p>	<p><b>Watch:</b>  Lecture – Democratization from Above</p> <p><b>Read:</b>  Daniel Ziblatt. 2017. <i>Conservative Parties and the Birth Of Democracy</i>. New York: Cambridge University Press: Chapter 2.</p> <p>Frances Hagopian. 1990. “Democracy by Undemocratic Means? Elites, Political Pacts, and Regime Transition in Brazil.” <i>Comparative Political Studies</i> 23 (2): 147-170.</p> <p>Michael Albertus and Victor Menaldo. 2018. <i>Authoritarianism and the Elite Origins of Democracy</i>. New York: Cambridge University Press: Chapter 3.</p>	<p>Democratization through elite pacts</p>	<p>None</p>
<p><b>Module 5: Democratization from Below</b>  October 4</p> <p>(NOTE: No class September 27. Professor attending conferences)</p>	<p>-Understanding how pressure from the bottom can force a democratic transition</p>	<p><b>Watch:</b>  Lecture – Democratization from Below</p> <p><b>Read:</b>  Elisabeth Jean Wood. 2000. <i>Forging Democracy from Below: Insurgent Transitions in South Africa and El Salvador</i>. New York: Cambridge University Press: Chapter 8.</p> <p>Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan. 2011. <i>Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict</i>. New York: Columbia University Press: Chapter 2.</p> <p>Adam Branch and Zachariah Mampilly. 2015. <i>Africa Uprising: Popular Protest and Political Change</i>. London: Zed Books: Chapters 4 and 7.</p>	<p>Democratization through popular mobilization</p>	<p>None</p>

<b>Section 2: Democracy's Functions</b>				
<b>Module 6: Stabilizing New Democratic Systems</b> October 13  (NOTE: Class on Wednesday with No class October 11, per CUNY Cancellation)	-Understanding why democracy sometimes endures following a transition and why it doesn't	<b>Watch:</b> Lecture – Stabilizing New Democratic Systems  <b>Read:</b> Peter Harris. 2010. <i>Birth: The Conspiracy to Stop the '94 Election</i> . Cape Town: Umuzi: Chapter 4.  Desmond Tutu. 1999. <i>No Future without Forgiveness</i> . New York: Image Books: Chapters 2-4.  Sisonke Msimang. 2017. <i>Always Another Country</i> . New York: World Editions: Selections.	What helps democracy endure once established	Exam 1 Due by 2:00pm
<b>Module 7: Democracy's Incentives</b> October 18	-Understanding the incentives democratic institutions create for rulers and citizens	<b>Watch:</b> Lecture - Democracy's Incentives  <b>Read:</b> Robert Dahl. 1998. <i>On Democracy</i> . New Haven: Yale University Press: Chapter 5.  Amartya Sen. 2000. <i>Development as Freedom</i> . New York: Random House: Chapter 7.  Michael Massing. 2003. "Does Democracy Avert Famine?" <i>The New York Times</i> . March 1.	How individual incentives shape democratic politics	None
<b>Module 8: Democracy's Institutions</b> October 25	-Understanding the core institutions of democracy	<b>Watch:</b> Lecture – Democracy's Institutions  <b>Read:</b> Robert Dahl. 1998. <i>On Democracy</i> . New Haven: Yale University Press: Chapter 8.  Robert A. Dahl. 2002. <i>How Democratic is the American Constitution?</i> New Haven: Yale University Press: Chapter 6.  Carolyn Holmes. 2020. <i>The Black and White Rainbow: Reconciliation, Opposition, and Nation-Building in Democratic South Africa</i> . Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press: 2020: Chapter 4.  <b>Listen:</b> <i>Commonwealth Club Podcast</i> . "Jamal Greene: How Rights Went Wrong in America." Available	How institutions shape democratic politics	None

		from : <a href="https://www.commonwealthclub.org/events/archive/podcast/jamal-greene-how-rights-went-wrong-america">https://www.commonwealthclub.org/events/archive/podcast/jamal-greene-how-rights-went-wrong-america</a>		
<b>Module 9: Democracy's Citizens</b> November 1	-Understanding the role people play in a democracy	<b>Watch:</b> Lecture – Democracy's Citizens  <b>Read:</b> Robert Putnam. 1993. <i>Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy</i> . Princeton: Princeton University Press: Chapter 4.  James Holston. 2008. <i>Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil</i> . Princeton: Princeton University Press: Chapter 7.  <b>Listen:</b> <i>Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs Podcast</i> . 2020. "Protests in Perspective: Civil Disobedience and Activism Today, with Erica Chenoweth and Deva Woodly." November 16. Available from: <a href="https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20201116-protests-perspective-civil-disobedience-activism-erica-chenoweth-deva-woodly">https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20201116-protests-perspective-civil-disobedience-activism-erica-chenoweth-deva-woodly</a>	How citizens shape democratic politics	None
<b>Module 10: Democracy's Contradictions</b> November 8	-Understanding the violence of democratic states	<b>Watch:</b> Lecture – Democracy's Contradictions  <b>Read:</b> Yanilda Gonzalez. 2020. <i>Authoritarian Police in Democracy: Contested Security in Latin America</i> . New York: Cambridge University Press: Chapter 3.  Beatrice Jauregui. 2015. "Just War: The Metaphysics of Police Vigilantism." <i>Conflict and Society</i> (1).  Chen, Adrian. 2016. "When a Populist Demagogue Takes Power." <i>The New Yorker</i> . November 21.	How democratic states use violence to govern	None
<b>Section 3: Democracy's Demise</b>				

<p><b>Module 11: Threats from Democratic Institutions</b> November 15</p>	<p>-Understanding the anti-democratic tendencies of democratic citizens</p>	<p><b>Watch:</b> Lecture – Threats from Democratic Institutions</p> <p><b>Read:</b> Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. <i>How Democracies Die</i>. New York: Crown: Chapters 1 and 4.</p> <p>Sheri Berman. 2018. “How Liberalism Failed.” <i>Dissent</i> 65 (4): 119-123.</p> <p>Assorted articles on violence in South Africa following the arrest of Jacob Zuma</p>	<p>How threats to democracy emerge from within its institutions</p>	<p>Exam 2 Due by 2:00pm</p>
<p><b>Module 12: Threats from Democratic Citizens</b> November 22</p>	<p>-Understanding threats to democracy emerging from within the international system</p>	<p><b>Watch:</b> Lecture – Threats from Democratic Citizens</p> <p><b>Read:</b> Wendy Brown. <i>In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West</i>. New York: Columbia University Press: Chapter 1.</p> <p>Arlie Hochschild. 2016. <i>Strangers in their Own Land</i>. New York: New Press: Chapter 7.</p> <p>Sheri Berman. 1997. “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic.” <i>World Politics</i> 49 (3): 401–429.</p> <p><b>Watch:</b> PBS. “What Makes People Want Autocracy: Interview with Masha Gessen.” Available from: <a href="https://www.pbs.org/wnet/amanpour-and-company/video/what-makes-people-want-autocracy/">https://www.pbs.org/wnet/amanpour-and-company/video/what-makes-people-want-autocracy/</a></p>	<p>How threats to democracy emerge from its citizens</p>	<p>None</p>
<p><b>Module 13: Threats from the Past</b> November 29</p>	<p>-Understanding nostalgia for authoritarianism</p>	<p><b>Watch:</b> Lecture – Threats from the Past</p> <p><b>Read:</b> Witold Szablowski. 2014. <i>Dancing Bears: True Stories of People Nostalgic for Life under Tyranny</i>. New York: Penguin: Chapter 1 and 2.</p> <p>Svetlana Alexievich. 2017. <i>Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets</i>. New York: Random House: Selections.</p>	<p>How history shapes desires for authoritarian governance</p>	<p>None</p>

		Jacob Dlamini. 2009. <i>Native Nostalgia</i> . Johannesburg: Jacana: Introduction and Chapter 6.		
<b>Module 14: Life in the Wake of Democracy</b> December 6	-Understanding some of the consequences when democracy collapses	<b>Watch:</b> Lecture – Life in the Wake of Democracy  <b>Read:</b> Timothy Snyder. 2017. <i>On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century</i> . New York: Tim Duggan Books: Chapter 1.  Masha Gessen, 2016. “Autocracy: Rules for Survival.” <i>The New York Review of Books</i> . November 10.  Joshua Yaffa. 2020. “What Navalny’s Poisoning Really Says about the Current State of Putin’s Russia.” <i>The New Yorker</i> . August 21.  Masha Gessen. 2021. “Lyubov Sobol’s Hope for Russia.” <i>The New Yorker</i> . July 26, 2021.	What life looks like in the wake of democratic collapse	None
<b>Module 15: The Politics of the Pandemic in Comparative Perspective</b> December 13  (NOTE: Optional Class)	-An optional discussion of how countries have dealt with the pandemic from a comparative perspective	<b>Read:</b> Charles Mann. 2020. “Pandemics Leave Us Forever Altered.” <i>The Atlantic</i> . June.  Jeffrey Smith and Nic Cheeseman. 2020. “Authoritarians are Exploiting the Coronavirus. Democracies Must Not Follow Suit.” <i>The Atlantic</i> . April 28.  “Covid-19 Is Undoing Years of Progress in Curbing Global Poverty.” 2020. <i>The Economist</i> . 23 May.  Arundhati Roy. 2020 “The Plague is a Portal.” <i>Financial Times</i> . 3 April.  Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. 2020. “Finding a Vaccine Is Only the First Step. No One Will Be Safe Until the Whole World Is Safe.” <i>Foreign Affairs</i> . April 30.  Arundhati Roy. 2020. “After the Lockdown, We Need a Reckoning.” <i>Financial Times</i> . May 23.	The potential political consequences of the pandemic	Exam 3 Due per CCNY Final Exam Schedule

