

# Syllabus for Poli Sci 219: What Could Justify Electoral Democracy?

(Last updated May 4, 2023)

*Instructor:* Sean Ingham  
*Course time:* Mondays, 9am–11:50am  
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## Course description

What are the alternatives to representative democracy, and what considerations could justify representative democracy in comparison with the alternatives? We will discuss recent literature in political theory that compares representative democracy with non-democratic meritocracy, epistocracy, and sortition-based forms of direct democracy, and consider whether it is possible to rank these regimes with respect to the values of social equality, stability and social peace, and quality of governance. Special attention will be given to higher-order questions about methods of argument in normative political theory.

## Assignments and grades

The grade is an average of a grade for the writing assignments (50%) and a grade for participation (50%).

- **Writing assignments.** Students have two options:

*Option A.* The student submits a short memo on each week's reading (except the first week's reading assignment). The memo should be 1-2 pages single-spaced (or about 400-700 words). Its purpose is to identify questions that merit further discussion in seminar and might eventually generate a research question that could be investigated in a future paper. The memo should indicate some reasons for and against different answers to the questions and should read like a preview of a high-level seminar discussion of the questions. The memo should be emailed to singham@ucsd.edu by 3:30pm the Sunday before seminar.

*Option B.* The student submits a seminar paper (6,000-10,000 words) at the end of the quarter. The student should submit a short, one-page memo (single-spaced), identifying the question the paper will answer and explaining the significance of the question as well as the reasons its answer is not obvious, by May 1.

- **Participation.** In addition to participating in seminar discussions, students are expected to do one or two short presentations. *Presentations should not try to summarize the reading.*

The purpose of the presentation is to set up and provide some structure to further discussion. The presenters should identify a question or puzzle that they would like the entire group to discuss, put forward some potential answers to the question, and sketch the reasons for and against them. A presentation should be about 10 minutes.

## Reading list

1. Introduction to the topic; questions about method; introduction to the regimes under comparison.
  - Dimitri Landa and Ryan Pevnick, *What Could Justify Representative Democracy?* Introduction and chapter 2.
  - Helene Landemore. 2020. *Open Democracy: Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton University Press. Introduction.
  - Daniel Bell. 2015. *The China Model*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 2.
2. Instrumental versus non-instrumental justifications of democracy
  - Richard Arneson. 2004. “Democracy Is Not Intrinsically Just.” In *Justice and Democracy: Essays for Brian Barry*. Eds. Keith Dowding, Robert Goodin, and Carole Pateman. Cambridge University Press.
  - Elizabeth Anderson. 2009. “Democracy: instrumental vs. non-instrumental value.” In *Contemporary debates in political philosophy*. Eds. Thomas Christiano and John Christman. Wiley Blackwell.
  - Jason Brennan. 2011. “The Right to a Competent Electorate.” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 61(245): 700–724.
  - Daniel Viehoff. 2023. “Challenging Democratic Commitments.” In *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy*, vol. 9. Eds. David Sobel and Steven Wall.
  - Presentation: Joon
3. Social equality and the justification of democracy
  - Niko Kolodny. 2023. *The Pecking Order: Social Hierarchy as a Philosophical Problem*. Harvard University Press. Introduction, Chapters, 1, 5–7, 24–29.
  - Presentation: Kevin
4. Social equality and the justification of democracy, continued
  - Daniel Bell. 2015. *The China Model*. Princeton University Press. Ch. 2.
  - Landa and Pevnick, ch. 3.
  - Sean Ingham. 2022. “Representative Democracy and Social Equality.” *American Political Science Review* 116(2): 689–701.
  - Presentation: Lucas
5. Is equality a reason to prefer sortition to elections?

- Alex Guerrero. 2014. “Against Elections: The Lottocratic Alternative.” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42(2): 135–178.
  - Dimitri Landa and Ryan Pevnik, *Representative Democracy Without Apology*, chs. 4, 6.
  - Christina Lafont. 2020. *Democracy without Shortcuts: A Participatory Conception of Deliberative Democracy*, chs. 1, 5, 6.
  - Optional: Dimitri Landa and Ryan Pevnik. 2021. “Is Random Selection a Cure for the Ills of Electoral Representation?” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 29(1): 46–72.
  - Optional: Helene Landemore. 2020. *Open Democracy: Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton University Press.
  - Presentation: Ricardo
6. Alternatives to universal and equal suffrage: epistocracy.
- Jason Brennan. 2016. *Against Democracy*. Princeton University Press. Ch. 8.
  - Claudio López-Guerra. 2014. *Democracy and disenfranchisement: The morality of electoral exclusions*. Oxford University Press. Ch. 2.
  - Adam F. Gibbons. 2021. “Political Disagreement and Minimal Epistocracy.” *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 19(2): 192–201.
  - Sean Ingham and David Wiens. 2021. “Demographic Objections to Epistocracy: A Generalization.” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 49(4): 323–349.
  - Presentation: Jorge
7. Minimalist justifications of democracy
- Adam Przeworski. 1999. “Minimalist Conception of Democracy: a Defense.” In *Democracy’s Value*. Eds. Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordon. Cambridge University Press.
  - Landa and Pevnick, ch. 5
  - Presentation: Shelby
8. Minimalist justifications of democracy, continued
- Samuel Bagg. Forthcoming. *The Dispersion of Power: A Critical Realist Theory of Democracy*. Oxford University Press.
  - Presentation: Desmond
9. Student presentations/additional readings tbd.
10. Student presentations/additional readings tbd.