

**Syllabus for Political Science 216:
Popular control, electoral accountability, and representation (“Contemporary
Liberal Theory”)**

Winter 2018

Instructor:	Sean Ingham	Course location:	tbd
Office hours:	by appointment	Course time:	Thursdays, 12-2:50pm
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Course description

Do elections produce governments that are accountable to their citizens? Do they give citizens control over their leaders? The answers have fundamental importance for how we understand and evaluate democracy. They are also intertwined with a difficult conceptual puzzle: what do the concepts of electoral accountability and popular control mean if, as skeptics have argued, there is no such thing as “the will of the people,” or even “the will of the majority,” to which elected leaders could be made to respond? In this seminar we will try to answer these and related questions, drawing on literature in democratic theory, formal political theory, and empirical political science. The seminar should be of broad interest to empirically minded political scientists and theorists alike.

No prior knowledge of the more technical material on the syllabus is assumed. On the contrary, the relatively gentle introduction to formal reasoning and proofs, in weeks 2 and 3, and several assigned journal articles containing game-theoretic models, in weeks 6, 7, and 8, are intended to help students get ready for POLI 204C: Game Theory in the spring.

Course requirements

The final grade will be the average of a participation grade (50%) and a grade for a seminar paper (50%). One option for the seminar paper is to write a proposal for a theory-driven empirical study on some question related to the topics of the course.

Readings

Most readings will be available online, but students should acquire Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

Reading schedule

1. Jan. 11. Introduction to the themes of the course

The first week introduces the themes of the course, as described above. When we describe “the people” in a democracy as controlling their elected leaders, or describe their government as responsive to “their” wishes, are we viewing the people as a collective agent capable of having its own wishes and goals? If not, how should we analyze these claims?

- Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), ch. 1.
- Sean Ingham, *Rule by Multiple Majorities: A New Theory of Popular Control* (unpublished manuscript), ch. 1.

2. January 18. Introduction to logic and proofs

This week is devoted to the basics of logic and proofs. The goal is to prepare students for the foray into social choice theory in week 3. Velleman's text is also assigned as a prerequisite for POLI 204C: Game Theory in the spring quarter, and an added benefit of studying this week's material is better preparation for that course.

- Daniel Velleman, *How to Prove It: A Structured Approach*, second edition, chs. 1, 2.

3. January 25. Arrow's impossibility theorem

The goal is to understand the formal definitions of a "preference aggregation rule" and the various properties of such rules invoked in Arrow's theorem, so that one can assess for oneself the claims political scientists make about the theorem's implications.

- David Austin-Smith and Jeffrey Banks, *Positive Political Theory I* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), ch. 2.

4. February 1. Cyclical majorities and the critique of popular rule

What are the implications of Arrow's theorem and cyclical majorities for foundational concepts in democratic theory like popular rule, popular control, and popular sovereignty? Are cyclical majorities merely a logical possibility or do we have reason to believe they occur in practice? Should the answer to the second question affect how we answer the first?

- Riker, *Liberalism Against Populism*, ch. 10.
- Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, ch. 2.
- Gerald Mackie, *Democracy Defended* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), ch. 2.
- Ingham, *Rule by Multiple Majorities*, ch. 3.
- *Optional further reading*: John Patty and Elizabeth Maggie Penn, *Social Choice and Legitimacy*, chs. 1–4.

5. February 8. Conceptions of popular control

In light of the conceptual puzzles raised by social choice theory, how should we analyze the concept of popular control? What does it mean, more generally, for a group of people to have control over something? Is it possible for a majority of citizens to have control over their elected government even when majorities have cyclical preferences?

- Ingham, *Rule by Multiple Majorities*, chs. 4, 5.
- Phillip Pettit, "Three Conceptions of Democratic Control," *Constellations* 15(1) (2008): 46–55.

6. February 15. Electoral accountability

We now turn to questions about whether and how democracies provide citizens with any control over their elected leaders and policy outcomes. In the models of electoral accountability that Fearon and Ashworth describe, what, specifically, do citizens have control over? According to the stories these models tell, what could explain failures of electoral accountability?

- John Dunn, "Situating Democratic Political Accountability," in *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation*, eds. Przeworski Adam, Stokes Susan C., and Manin Bernard (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- Jennifer Rubinstein, "Accountability in an Unequal World," *Journal of Politics* 69(3) (2007): 616–632.

- Fearon James, “Electoral Accountability and the Control of Politicians,” in *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation* (1999).
- Scott Ashworth, “Electoral Accountability: Recent Theoretical and Empirical Work,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 15 (2012): 183–201.

7. February 22. Retrospective voting and electoral accountability

What is a useful definition of “retrospective voting,” and under what conditions can retrospective voting induce electoral accountability? Can “myopic retrospective voting” induce electoral accountability? Can retrospective voting, myopic or rational, induce electoral control even if voters use contradictory performance standards?

- Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, chs. 4, 5.
- Andrew Healy and Neal Malhotra, “Retrospective Voting Reconsidered,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 16 (2013): 285–306.
- Scott Ashworth, Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, and Amanda Friedenberg, “Learning About Voter Rationality,” *American Journal of Political Science*, forthcoming.
- Ingham, *Rule by Multiple Majorities*, ch. 6.

8. March 1. Representation

What is the proper role—“trustee,” “delegate”—of elected representatives? What relationship between their actions and the preferences, opinions, and interests of their constituents should one expect to observe in a functional representative democracy? How do the puzzles about preference aggregation, studied earlier in the quarter, bear on these questions?

- Bernard Manin, Adam Przeworski, and Susan Stokes, “Elections and Representation,” in *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation*.
- Jane Mansbridge, “Clarifying the Concept of Representation,” *American Political Science Review* 105(3) (2011): 621–630.
- Phillip Pettit, “Varieties of Public Representation,” in *Political Representation*, eds. Ian Shapiro, Susan C. Stokes, Elisabeth Jean Wood, and Alexander Kirshner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- Justin Fox and Kenneth W. Shotts, “Delegates or Trustees? A Theory of Political Accountability” 71(4) (2009): 1225–1237.

9. March 8. Voter (mis)information and arguments for/against representative democracy.

Do facts about voters’ levels of knowledge and cognitive abilities matter to the justification of representative democracy? If so, how? Is there a level of incompetence at which a person no longer has a compelling moral claim to participate in collective decision-making? Why or why not?

- Jason Brennan, *Against Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), chs. 1, 6.
- Thomas Christiano, *The Constitution of Equality: Democratic Authority and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), selections tbd.

10. March 15. Student presentations