

LIVING DEMOCRACY

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With his “[trifecta](#)” [victories](#) and his pervasive presence over the last decade, Donald Trump has become the most influential political figure of our time. He has claimed his victory vindicated his vision of January 6, 2021 as a “[day of love](#)” that is part of “[the greatest movement in the history of our Country](#).” He has selected cabinet, Senate, and House loyalists dedicated to [demolishing “the deep state,”](#) including firing the civil servants who have the legal and scientific expertise in law enforcement, climate, health, and economics to resist his edicts.

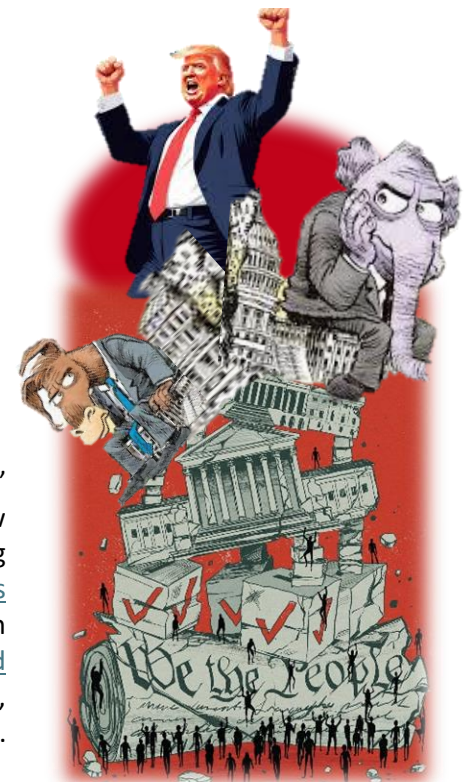
Since Trump’s first term, our country has been characterized as a “faltering” democracy by [international monitoring groups](#). The MAGA movement is now promoting authoritarian populism around the world. For example, after donating \$270M to Trump’s campaign, [Elon Musk turned to support Germany’s ethnonationalist far-right party](#) in snap election on 2/23/25. In response to such trends, traditional conservatives such as [David Brooks have spoken out to defend “liberal democracy”](#) by arguing it is grounded in “persuasion, argument, negotiation, [and] compromise” and respects reasoned expertise and human rights.

I noted these movements and perspectives in the last draft of the syllabus. This revision includes readings on the outcome of the election, President Trump’s second-term agenda, and its likely impact on immigrants and others in precarious positions.

The previous syllabus already attended to trends and groups that proved to be decisive in the election, particularly the anxieties of younger voters that motivated them and other traditional Democratic constituencies to shift to the right. Such anxieties also seem to have impacted other key constituencies, as did the apparent tendency towards “[collective amnesia](#)” about President Trump’s chaotic first term and the low public approval ratings it led to (34% when he left office).

In discussing these historical trends and ongoing events, we will try to sustain a hopeful pragmatism that combines criticisms of inequities with an action-oriented engagement in the democratic arts of listening, reasoning, and imagining together as a way to resist demagoguery. We will explore how such equitable ways of thinking and living can help us stand against factionalism, injustice, and post-factual politics. In our last classes, we will focus on how thinking globally and engaging locally can help us resist tyranny and develop a more grounded understanding of the issues we face.

The vision of [democracy as a way of life](#) comes into focus when we distinguish between national politics and [civil society](#). This ill-defined domain of experience includes our personal lives as well as community institutions such as schools, museums, libraries, and other not-for-profit organizations. This domain is vital to understanding liberal democracy, as becomes evident in debates of rights to privacy, healthcare, freedom of religion, and the separation of church and state. We will consider the importance of getting involved in civil institutions—as we all do in a range of ways, for example by participating in this class and other educational and cultural organizations.



[“Democracy is in Peril,
just not the way you think”](#)



As a case in point that will be close at hand, [the Tucson Festival of Books](#) provides an engaging local enactment of the values of coming together to discuss shared values, political issues, and the powers of the civic imagination. The writers who will be presenting include [national experts on many of the topics we will discuss](#). To connect our weekly discussions with related Festival sessions, I have highlighted readings by writers whom you can hear at the Festival with the symbol **TfOB** to link to their bio page in the Festival website.

Some readings will change as the Trump administration implements its agenda. If you want to recommend topics or readings, [email me](#).



1. DEMOCRACY IN “THE AGE OF TRUMP” (January 30)

In this overview, we will reflect on the campaign and introduce our focus on democracy as a way of life. We will review the campaigns, the failure of the Democrats to make a persuasive case, and the transformation of the Republican party by the MAGA movement, with the acquiescence of party leaders and others seeking to minimize the significance of January 6. In addition to the primary readings we will discuss in class, I have listed additional background readings for each week for you to follow up on issues that may be of interest to you.

Primary Readings (All readings are in the HSP course folder):

- “How Far Trump Would Go,” Eric Cortellessa, *Time*, 4/30/24
- “The End of Democratic Delusions,” George Packer, *Atlantic Magazine*, 2/2/24.
- “Dismantling Democracy: Christian Nationalism’s Threat to America’s Future,” Katherine Stewart, *The Revealer*, 10/1/24. **TfOB**
- “Congress’s Jan. 6 Investigation Looks Less and Less Credible,” Jonathan Turley, *The Hill*, 11/25/24. **TfOB**
- “Mitch McConnell’s Worst Political Calculation,” Michael Tackett, adapted from *The Price of Power: How Mitch McConnell Mastered the Senate, Changed America, and Lost His Party*, 2024. **TfOB**
- *Democracy as a Way of Life in America*, Introduction, Richard Schneirov and Gaston Fernandez, 2013.

On the cusp of his second presidency, all of us—from his most fanatical supporters to his most fervent critics—are living in [the Age of Trump](#).

Background Sources: (The first reading is in our HSP folder because it is from a copyrighted book.)

- *Democracy as a Way of Life in America*, Chapter 1, Richard Schneirov and Gaston Fernandez, 2013.
- “Is Trump ‘America’s Hitler’?” Tom Zoellner, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 10/11/24. **TfOB**
- “Donald Trump is the End of the Modern Era,” Joshua Zeitz, *Politico Magazine*, 12/06/24.
- *The Longest Con: How Grifters, Swindlers, and Frauds Hijacked... Conservatism*, Intro. Joe Conason, 2024. **TfOB**
- Rob Reiner’s documentary *God & Country*, which is based on Katherine Stewart’s *Money, Lies, and God: Inside the Movement to Destroy American Democracy*, 2024. (review) **TfOB**



2. WHO VOTED FOR WHOM AND WHY (February 6)

We will analyze Trump’s and Harris’s platforms against exit polls to assess why groups voted as they did, and then we will examine the historical and psychological sources of Trump’s popular appeal. While Trump claimed “[an unprecedented... mandate](#),” he won a smaller percentage of the vote than both Obama elections and got fewer votes than Biden. We will also consider whether the MAGA movement has created a lasting majority or if Democrats can rebuild their coalition by addressing the economic and cultural anxieties that Trump connected with and Harris was unable to do in her campaign.

Primary Readings: (These readings are in our HSP course folder.)

- “Exit Polls: From A to Z,” Karlyn Bowman, *Forbes*, 11/12/24.
- “Why We Need Answers,” Maria Konnikova, *The New Yorker*, 4/30/13
- *Party of the People: Inside the Multiracial Populist Coalition Remaking the GOP* excerpt, Patrick Ruffini, 2023—“[the book that predicted the 2024 election](#).”
- “How Democrats Lost Their Base and Their Message,” Nate Cohn, *New York Times*, 1/26/24.
- “Was the Trump Election a Setback for Women? Even Women Do Not Agree.” Searcey, *NYT*, 11/12/24.
- “The Immigrants who Oppose Immigration,” Paolo Ramos, *The Atlantic Magazine*, 9/23/24. **TfOB**

Background Readings: (The last three readings from sources requiring subscriptions are in the HSP folder.)

- [20 CORE PROMISES TO MAKE AMERICAN GREAT AGAIN!](#) Trump Platform, [American Presidency Project](#).
- [A NEW WAY FORWARD](#), Harris Walz Campaign, Harris Platform, [American Presidency Project](#).
- [ABC, CBS, NBC and CNN consortium exit poll](#), CNN Politics
- “[What Trump Supporters Believe and Expect](#),” Carroll Doherty, et al., Pew Research Center, 11/13/24.
- “The Second Pandemic Election,” Jess Bidgood, *New York Times*, 11/6/24.
- “The Democratic Party Is Shedding Latino Voters. Here’s Why,” Katherine Stewart, *New Republic*, 5/11/22. **TfOB**
- “The Republican and Democratic Parties are Killing Electoral Reform,” David Daley, *The Guardian*, 11/16/24. **TfOB**

3. THE MAGA agenda (February 13)

This class will examine the bills and programs that are put forward by the Trump administration. After the inauguration, I will add the Primary Readings, including his inaugural address and analyses of his administration. We will try to focus on substantive issues and not get distracted by Trump's latest headline-grabbing statements. For now, here are background readings on the possibilities of bipartisan compromise on selected issues and the need to resist some of the extreme appointments and proposals that have been made. We will also consider how Trump's attacks on "the deep state," "mainstream media," and "fake news," have contributed to debilitating declines in public trust in the [government](#), [media](#), and [science](#), particularly [since the pandemic](#), when people's need for simple answers spawned social media conspiracies about vaccines and government policies.



Background Readings:

- "We can still have progress under Trump. We just need to focus on mission," Glantz, *Guardian*, 22/11/24.
- "How a Second Trump Administration Can Help Working Families," Kiki Bradley and Mark Rodgers, *National Review Plus*, 11/10/24.
- "How experts warn Trump could use an authoritarian playbook to go after the media," CNN, 11/8/24.
- "'Curious if I'm on that list?': Kash Patel's potential targets fear his tenure as FBI director," David Rohde, *NBC News*, 12/21/24, [TFoB](#)
- "NPR and PBS Stations Brace for Funding Battle Under Trump," Benjamin Mullin and Kate Conger, *New York Times*, 12/27/24, [TFoB](#)
- "Why many scientists fear a second Trump term," Rebecca Hersher, *All Things Considered*, NPR, 3/6/24.

4. WHO'S AT MOST RISK? (February 20)

Over 11 million people have been targeted for deportation, but mass migration cannot be walled out in such ways because it is a [wicked problem](#) that is inextricably connected to climate change, US drug addiction, income inequities, and related crime and corruption in home countries. After noting these complexities, we will shift away from national politics to consider the experiences of migrants and those working with them in Arizona, including journalists who report on issues such as the passage of [Proposition 314](#) allowing local law enforcement to arrest and deport undocumented residents. We will also talk about your views on immigration in our communities and the ways you get your information on local affairs.



Primary Readings:

- "The Five Biggest Roadblocks to Trump's Immigration Agenda," Hackman, *Wall Street Journal*, 1/1/25.
- "'It's Going to Take Everyone': How Immigrant Advocates Are Preparing for Trump's Return," Rebecca Scheid, *Time*, 11/15/24.
- *The Truth about Immigration: Why Successful Societies Welcome Newcomers*, Intro, Zeke Hernandez, 2024. [TFoB](#)
- "A Mother's Impossible Choice at the Border," [Alejandra Oliva](#), *The Cut*, 6/19/23. From [Rivermouth: A Chronicle of Language, Faith, and Migration](#). [TFoB](#)
- "Arizona immigrant families brace for the threat of ... mass deportations," Alisa Reznick, KJZZ, 20/12/24
- "More immigration gaslighting by local officials," Steve Christy, *Tucson Daily Star*, 1/2/25.

Background Resources: (Resources without links are in HSP course folder.)

- "[Wicked Problem: The Road Ahead for Immigration Policy](#)," Aspen Ideas (audio recording of panel discussion with former governor Doug Ducey), nd.
- "[Key Findings about US Immigrants](#)," Mohamad Moslimani and Jeffrey Passell, Pew Research, 9/27/24.
- "[Large Majority of Arizona Voters Want Bipartisan Solutions to Border Crisis; Immigration Reform](#)," Center for the Future of Arizona, 5/13/24.
- "[Tucson Mayor vows to protect families from separation in Trump deportations](#)," Bregel, *Tucson.com*, 11/26/25.
- "[How Does the US Refugee System Work?](#)" Dana Roy et al., Council of Foreign Relations, 3/26/24.
- "[Trump and Harris Supporters Differ on Mass Deportations...](#)," Mukherjee and Krogstad, Pew Research, 9/27/24.
- "[The Collapse of bipartisan immigration reform: A guide for the perplexed](#)," William Galston, Brookings, 2/8/24.

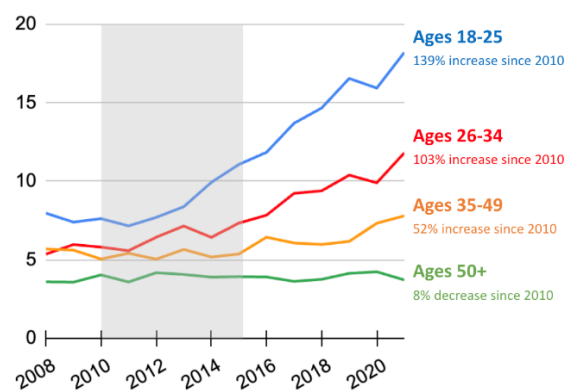
5. WHY ARE YOUNG PEOPLE SO STRESSED? (February 27)

We will briefly loop back to our second-class discussion of one of the decisive shifts in the 2024 election: the increase in younger people voting Republican, especially [younger men](#), and [particularly younger white men](#). This shift is part of what makes the 2024 election so significant because Democrats have traditionally assumed that they could rely on the fact that younger voters tend to be [more diverse, more educated, more activist—and more liberal](#). Conservatives have come to see these tendencies as a result not of the idealism of youth but of the liberal biases of higher education. [Anti-woke attacks](#) have fueled [distrust of higher education, government, other public institutions](#), and [science](#) since the pandemic. Conservatives have invested heavily in nation-wide efforts to recruit young people to the conservative cause, most notably through the [Turning Point USA network](#) on campus programs, paid internships, and other programs.

This distrust has contributed to the dramatic increases in stress that have been documented among Gen Z (born after 1996) and Millennials (born 1981-1995). These increases are [tracked in this table](#) from Jonathan Haidt's overview of his book [Anxious Generation](#). He attributes these [well-documented increases](#) to changes in parenting and the "the phone-based childhood" that became common in recent decades (which parents agree has made [childhood more difficult](#)).

Most media reports of the impact of social media on youth fail to attend to the socioeconomic changes that had such a formative impact on those who came of age in the decade between the Great Recession and the Global Pandemic. Younger people spent some of their school and college years attending classes in their bedrooms, leaving them with feelings of isolation and depression have been increased by [increases in threats such as rising school shootings, college costs, and inflation](#). Another distinctive aspect of their experience is that [Donald Trump has been an established part of our national political life](#) since they became aware of it.

Percent U.S. Anxiety Prevalence



SOURCE: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health

While this stress has had formative impact on young people, they are the [proverbial canary in the coal mine](#) insofar as they challenge us to reflect on how rising mistrust has impacted our lives, schools, and communities. This impact is starkly apparent in the dark recesses of the web, but it also surfaces when a casual conversation turns heated, and we witness simmering grievances explode in ways we had not anticipated—as we will discuss in our last class together.

Primary Readings:

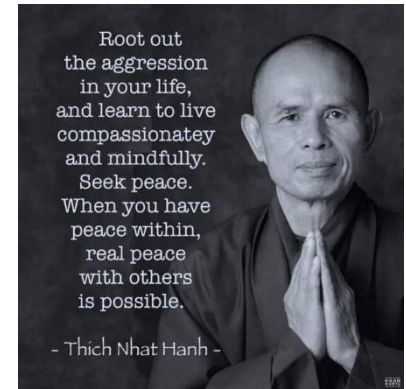
- “The Not-So-Woke Generation Z,” Faith Hill, *The Atlantic*, 11/14/24.
- “The Rough Years That Turned Gen Z into America’s Most Disillusioned Voters,” Restuccia & Collins, *WSJ*, 3/15/24
- “Growing up Trump: How the returning president has shaped younger voters,” Staci Watkins, *WHRO*, 11/26/24.
- “Rumors on X Are Becoming the Right’s New Reality,” Renée DiResta, *The Atlantic*, 10/11/24. [TFoB](#)
- Elle Reeve, *Black Pill: How I Witnessed the Darkest Corners of the Internet Come to Life, Poison Society, and Capture American Politics*, excerpt, 2024. [TFoB](#)
- “Paying attention: There’s a second civil rights movement,” Juan Williams, *Washington Post*, 1/3/24. [TFoB](#)
- “A Time We Never Knew,” Freya India, *After Babel*, 4/22/24.

Background Resources: (These resources are available online.)

- [A Political and Cultural Glimpse into America’s Future: Gen Z’s Views of Generational Change and the Challenges and Opportunities Ahead](#), PRRI,
- [The Anxious Generation](#), Jonathan Haidt. (online resources for parents, related research and organizations)
- [“America’s News Influencers \[on social media\],”](#) Galen Stocking et al., Pew Research, 11/18/24.
- [“Teens, Social Media and Technology 2024,”](#) Michelle Faverio and Olivia Sidoti, Pew Research, 12/12/24.
- [“The Gen Z Activism Survey,”](#) United Way of National Capital Area, 3/5/24.
- [“US National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People,”](#) The Trevor Project, 2023.
- [“Parenting Gen Z: Navigating Boundaries, Complex Emotions, and Tough Conversations,”](#) Gallup, 2024.

6. DEMOCRATIC WAYS OF LIVING? (March 6)

Our last class will explore the idea of democracy as a way of life—if we can tune out the noise and preserve our quiet space to reflect together. Even before our new president takes office, the din has become deafening with all the chaotic references to buying Greenland, annexing Canada, and reclaiming the Panama Canal—and those were just the daily blather this week. President Trump has an overwhelming knack at normalizing behaviors and ways of thinking that were unimaginable before he became part of our lives. The new norms desensitize us, and then they numb us so much that we just want to step back, unplug, and retreat into our private lives to preserve our sanity away from all the public stress.

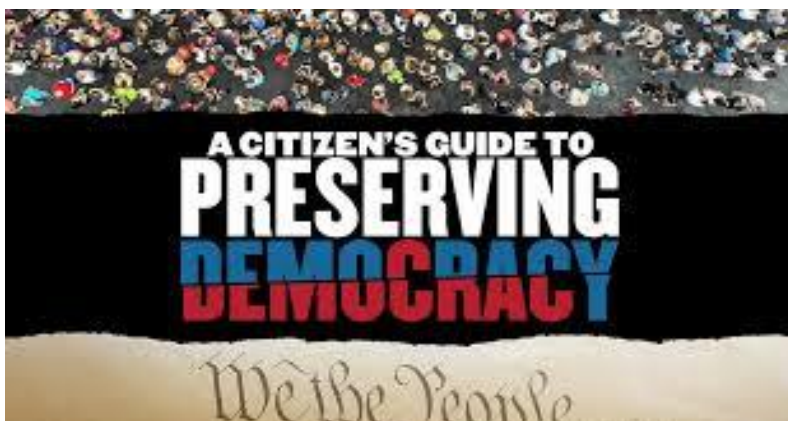


The readings for this week were chosen to help you stay centered, sustain civility, and resist inequities—the simple virtues that are so hard to maintain just now. The readings present ethics and politics as integrally related (rather than as private and public domains of experience) insofar as they share a concern for living well with others to achieve our shared potentials. This art is enacted by [paying attention](#), [listening to others](#), and [performing daily rituals](#) in mindful ways. In addition to living out democratic virtues, the readings also present calls to action to resist the normalization of inequities. Such resistance can involve direct actions, such as demonstrating to protect rights, as well as less direct resistance, such as resisting collective amnesia about January 6, 2021 and [nostalgic reinventions of what made America great](#).

The challenges our democracy is experiencing are *global* in the dual sense of worldwide and wholistic. First, the same divisions and movements we are witnessing are also destabilizing other liberal democracies around the world because [wicked problems](#) such as mass migration, climate change, crime, and income inequalities are overwhelmingly difficult to assess let alone solve. Second, the wholistic aspects of these problems challenge us to change how we live, think, and communicate because the problems cannot be solved by a government mandate, they require society to change at an elemental level—like a flock of birds in flight, which is the example DiResta poses in a background reading for this week. Such synchronicity can be hard to imagine, but a sense of the dynamics involved is provided by reflecting on a life well lived, as Alter discusses in another of our last readings.

Primary Readings (While links are included for excerpted books, the excerpts are in our HSP folder.):

- [You Must Stand Up, The Fight for Abortion Rights](#) excerpt, Amanda Becker, 2024. **TFoB**
- “The Art of Protecting Your Peace,” Courtney Carver, *Time*, 11/26/24.
- [How to Know a Person: The Art of Seeing Others Deeply and Being Deeply Seen](#) excerpt, David Brooks, 2023.
- [The Ritual Effect: From Habit to Ritual, Harness the Surprising Power of Everyday Actions](#) excerpt, Michael Norton, 2024. **TFoB**
- “The Conventional Wisdom about Jimmy Carter Is Wrong,” Jonathan Alter, *The New Republic*, 2/22/23. **TFoB**
- “Don’t Mention the Coup!” David Frum, *The New Yorker*, 1/6/25
- “The Last Time Democracy Almost Died,” Jill Lepore, *The New Yorker*, 1/27/20.



Background Resources:

- [“How to Know a Person with David Brooks,”](#) Life Stories, nd: a documentary in which Brooks talks about his “life journey” to become “more fully human.”
- [“How Online Mobs Act Like Flocks of Birds,”](#) DiResta, Noema, 11/3/22. **TFoB**
- [“Healthy Democracy Framework,”](#) Democracy Fund, nd.
- [A Citizen’s Guide to Preserving Democracy,](#) PBS documentary, 01/02/24