

LIVING Democracy

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In this seminar we will explore how democratic ways of living can help us sustain democracy through dark times. Our country has been characterized as a “faltering” democracy for more than a decade by [international monitoring groups](#). Commentators have focused on the rise of authoritarian populism around the world and the widespread [dehumanization of daily life and degradation of civility](#). **This syllabus was drafted two weeks before the Biden-Trump debate and will be revised after the election.**

In our class discussions, we will downshift from these global trends to examine the democratic arts of listening, reasoning, and imagining together as a way to sustain hope and resist demagoguery. We will explore how such equitable ways of thinking and living can help us stand against factionalism, injustice, and post-factual politics. We will take note of national deliberations on the economy, immigration, and environmental and social change, but our central focus will be on how thinking globally and engaging locally to live democratically can help us resist tyranny, support those in need, and develop a more grounded understanding of the issues and opportunities we face.

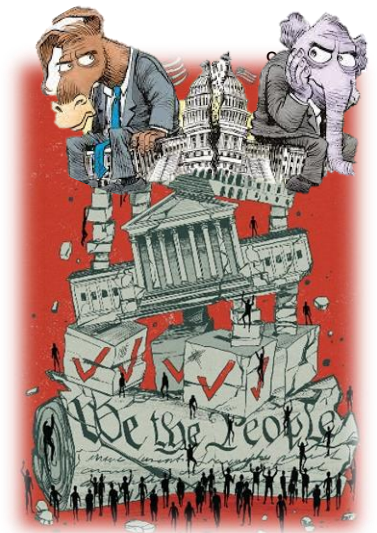
While the topics of our discussion will be changed by the historic election we are living through, I am currently envisioning six classes that should be relevant whichever party is in power:

- 1) The Ends of Democracy:** We will step back from the deadening din of debates on how our democracy may be coming to an end to renew our sense of the ends we hope our democracy can achieve. In the course of our discussions, we will remind ourselves of the resilience of democratic ways of living to help us reflect on the waves of migration, activism, and social and technological changes that we have lived through and younger Americans were born into.
- 2) Conflicted Visions/Shared Problems:** We will examine how the issues and movements that proved decisive in the fall election were shaped by competing visions of American democracy. We will focus on what minority, women, younger, and other swing voters imagined they were voting for and against.
- 3) But What Can We Really Do?** It can be hard not to slip into despair when we watch elections go badly and judicial and legislative decisions roll back human rights and environmental protections. To counteract this debilitating fatalism, we will explore how women, African Americans, and others have organized to defend their rights against hostile regimes and oppressive social hierarchies.
- 4) Keeping the Democratic Imagination Alive in Deadening Times:** After our discussions of the visions of democracy set out in the election and by the new administration, we will examine texts such as Langston Hughes’ “Let America Be America Again” to consider how artists from marginalized groups have envisioned the potentials of our democracy to sustain hope in dark times.



5) #StruggleContinues: We will explore how social movements are being networked in ways that are transforming the lives of younger generations. We will examine #BLM and other hashtag movements that mobilize local groups within national and global networks. We will also consider how such networks are changing how younger people think and connect with others.

6) Caring Democracy: The ills that have infected our democratic life are often defined in moralistic and nationalistic terms that can reduce democracy to a form of political governance in a way that divorces how we live from how they govern. A healthier and more purposeful democratic life emerges when we consider caring for ourselves and others as a part of grassroots collective action.



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

DRAFT READING LIST

1) The Ends of Democracy

Inaugural addresses and commentary on the new administration will be included.

- [Democracy as a Way of Life in America](#), Schneirov & Fernandez, 2013.
- [“America, The Gerontocracy,”](#) Timothy Noah, Politico, 9/3/19.
- [“What Happened to American Conservatism?”](#) David Brooks, 12/8/21.

2) Conflicted Visions/Shared Problems

Election analyses will be included along with these background readings.

- [“The Growing Evidence that Americans are Less Divided than You may Think,”](#) Karl Vick, *Time*, 7/2/24.
- [“Cultural Issues and the 2024 Election,”](#) Pew Research Center, 6/6/24.
- [Party of the People: Inside the Multiracial Populist Coalition Remaking the GOP](#), Patrick Ruffini, 2023. [Excerpt](#)
- [“If you want to build an alternative to Trumpism, you need to read black freedom fighter W.E.B. Du Bois,”](#) Gary Wilder, *Open Democracy*, 5/5/17

3) But What Can We Really Do?

Former President Trump is projected to be our next president. If he is not elected, these and other readings will change.

- [“Despair and Resignation Are Not a Strategy: How to Fight Back in a Second Trump Term,”](#) Romero, ACLU, 3/6/24.
- [“Trump Could Come Back. #Resistance Might Not,”](#) Michael Schaffer, Politico, 1/26/24.
- [“The Resistance to a New Trump Administration Has Already Started,”](#) Charles Savage et al., *New York Times*, 6/16/24.!”

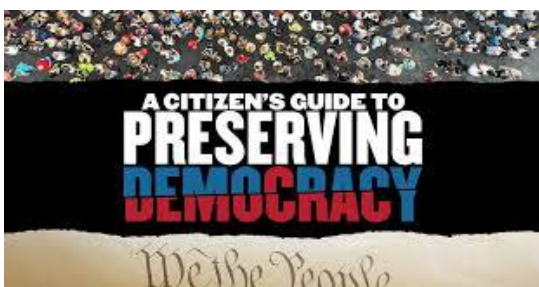
4) Keeping the Democratic Imagination Alive in Deadening Times

Whoever wins the election, Christian nationalism and populist authoritarianism will likely continue to shape our politics.

- [“Go Ahead, Worry! A Worst-Case Scenario for American Democracy,”](#) Robert Crawford, *The Nation*, 9/1/21.
- [“The Rise of Political Violence in the United States,”](#) Rachel Kleinfeld, *Journal of Democracy*, Oct. 2021.
- [“Chicken Littles Are Ruining America,”](#) David Brooks, *The Atlantic*, 1/31/24.
- [“Our Democracy’s Founding Ideals Were False When They Were Written. Black Americans Have Fought to Make Them True,”](#) Nikole Hannah-Jones, *NYT*, 8/14/19.
- Poems and essays from [Arts & Democracy](#).

5) #StruggleContinues

- “Does the Civil Rights Movement Model Still Work,” Nicole Austin-Hillery, [Legal Change: Lessons from America’s Social Movements](#), 2015.
- [“Black Lives Matter and the Revitalization of Collective Visionary Leadership,”](#) Sarah J Jackson, *Leadership*, 2021.
- [“Donald Trump’s Gift to Feminism: The Resistance,”](#) Susan Chira, *Daedalus*, 2020.
- [“How Younger Voters Will Impact Elections: Younger Voters are Poised to Upend American Politics,”](#) Morley Winograd et al, Brookings, 2/27/23. [“Taking a Stand”](#)
- [“The Risk Generation: How new forms of risk are shaping the youngest generation,”](#) Berkeley Institute for Young Americans, nd.



6) Caring Democracy

- [Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice](#), Joan Tronto, 2013.
- [“Healthy Democracy Framework,”](#) Democracy Fund, nd.
- [How to Know a Person: The Art of Seeing Others Deeply and Being Deeply Seen](#), David Brooks, 2023. ([interview](#))
- [“How to fix democracy to fix health care,”](#) Vittoradolfo Tambone et al., *The Lancet*, 1/29/22.
- [A Citizen’s Guide to Preserving Democracy](#), PBS, 01/02/24