

IDH2930 Democracy and Dictatorship through European History

Sections: #25646 (in person); #31421 (online)

Instructor: Dragana Svraka

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Office Hours: by appointment

Meeting Time: Wednesday 11.45

Location: Little Hall 0117

Summary

The course is organized around reading and discussion of the book *Democracy and Dictatorship in Europe* by Sheri Berman. This book examines European political history in order to understand what threatens democracy, and why some states manage to preserve democracy while others, more commonly, fail. The European political history provides important cases that are analyzed in the book: British democratic survival over time, French repeated failures to sustain democracy after the French Revolution, German and Italian unification, democratic collapse and resurgence after the WWII, Spanish troubled political development, and the rise and fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. The book's historical perspective provides important insights into the problems facing democracies today.

The course will be discussion-based, and students will use the cases from the book to examine questions related to the threats to democracy, democratic breakdown, survival, and consolidation. Throughout the semester students will learn about: (1) the concepts related to democracy and dictatorship, which will provide the analytical tools to understand and analyze threats to democracy and adequate responses to such threats, and (2) the political history of some prominent countries in Europe. Each week, we will focus on one period that was deemed crucial for political history of the continent. However, this is not a history class. The book focuses on historical accounts on political developments in Europe, and we will use them to tackle perennial issues related to importance of different political actors (such as political parties, aristocracy, or organized working class), structural conditions (such as level of economic development), and role played by unique events in affecting historical trajectories of democratic development. We will use historical insights to debate about the importance of these factors today, both in Europe and in other countries. The students will be graded for their weekly participation in the discussion (which will include participation in the class and at the online discussion board), for several small assignments throughout the semester, and for the short final paper. For the final paper, the students will be able to choose among several topics. They will also submit a one page draft explaining their plans for the

final project, which will be graded, and will provide them further guidelines as they work on their final papers. After this class, I expect students to get better understanding of the meaning of democracy, conditions for the robust democracy, and threats to it.

The course will use European political history to tackle the important questions of how to create and sustain democracy. Nowadays, we often hear about the threats to democracy and democratic backsliding, usually in relation to a specific situation or a country. This book provides a guide for systematic thinking about democracy, dictatorship, and political development. Students will learn to examine democratic health by comparing countries and relying on historical examples.

Objectives

This course has two objectives. First, you will learn how democracies function today, which elements are considered essential for well-functioning democracy, and how to identify threats to democracy. After this class, you should be able to use these insights to critically evaluate whether and to which degree democracy in a particular time and place might be in danger. The second goal focuses on you as active and engaged citizens rather than only students. Keeping that in mind, you will learn more about the roles that citizens play in protecting democracy, comparing their engagement with the role played by political institutions and specific political actors. Discussions in the class will allow you to learn how to articulate your positions on different topics using the convincing arguments based on evidence drawn from the analysis of political institutions and historical examples rather than personal opinions.

Requirements

The class focuses on democracy, dictatorship, and regime change. Throughout the semester, we will read one book (usually one chapter, and some weeks two), *Democracy and Dictatorship in Europe: From the Ancien Régime to the Present Day*, by political scientist Sheri Berman. The book closely follows political developments in a number of European states. Despite detailed historical narrative presented in the book, this is not a history book (therefore, I do not require from you to memorize names of all key figures and all key dates). Instead, we will read the book keeping in mind the bigger message: how to learn from the history and apply these insights in analyzing possibility for democratic success, breakdown, or erosion.

This is a discussion-based course, and our collective success depends on willingness of everyone to participate and share one's insights and thoughts. You are expected to read the assigned chapter(s) before the class, and be ready to be engaged and critically discuss assigned materials. Keep in mind that class participation (and not merely attendance) is a big part of your final grade! I will not lecture, though I

will make sure to prepare a few slides (focusing on putting the weekly discussion in the wider historical context). Also, I might assign you specific role some of the weeks to keep you more engaged and foster the debate.

The course will have an online discussion board, where each week I will ask a question inspired by the book. You are expected to comment on the weekly question (these questions will be broad, and will invite you to share your thoughts rather than just provide an answer). In class we will further discuss these questions, if needed. Some weeks, you will have additional assignments in the form of short papers (a paper on French Revolution, and 2 short country reports) that will be graded. At the end of semester, you will produce the final paper that uses the topics discussed in the book to think about large theme of democracy and dictatorship. Each student will choose the topic among several options, and will get guidance while developing the paper. In particular, you will submit a short draft presenting your idea for the final paper, and you will receive feedback to it. This draft will also be graded.

Your work will be evaluated based on:

Attendance (10%) - Attending class is mandatory, and absences should be excused based on University policies.

Participation in class (20%) – The course will function as discussion-oriented seminar. Students should read the assigned materials before the class, and come to class willing to critically discuss the weekly topic.

Participation in the discussion board (20%) – The students will also participate in a discussion board. Every week I will post a question to be discussed using the discussion board. The board will serve to engage you with each other, since you are expected to comment on each other's contributions, rather than repeating the common points.

Response paper – French Revolution (5%) – The importance of French Revolution for the political development in Europe and beyond can hardly be overstated. The students will be required to submit a short paper (2-3 pages) that will discuss wider significance of French Revolution before the class meeting where we will talk about French Revolution (**February 10th** before the class meeting 11.45). More precise instructions will be provided ahead of time.

Two 1-page country reports (each 5%) – Twice in the semester, students will be required to look beyond the cases examined in the book and give a short overview of the situation in another European countries (countries will be randomly assigned). You will have to identify the key political problem/challenge discussed in the assigned chapter, and briefly present how your assigned country dealt with it. The key point behind this exercise is checking whether other countries in Europe (not analyzed in the book) followed roughly similar path of political development, or they had to deal with other specific

issues. These comments will be presented to the class during the class discussion in the weeks discussing *Interwar Europe* (**March 10th**) and *Post-WWII Democratization* (**March 31th**). The students will also submit a short written summary of their comments on assigned country before the class meeting.

Draft idea for the final paper (5%) – Each student will submit one-page idea for the final paper, which will be graded, and to which you will receive feedback. The draft paper should help you to develop an original and interesting paper using one of the topics from the list. The list of topics for the final paper will be made available a week earlier. Due date: **March 24th before the class**.

Final paper (30%) – Students will be offered a choice of several topics, all of which look at the bigger picture and main takeaways from the book when it comes to our understanding of democracy, dictatorship, and regime change. In the process of writing, the students will use the feedback given to the draft paper, and the materials and themes from the book. Due date: **April 26th at noon**.

Grading scale:

| Grade | Score | Grade | Score | Grade | Score | Grade | Score |
|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| A | 94-100 | B | 83-86 | C | 73-76 | D | 63-66 |
| A- | 90-93 | B- | 80-82 | C- | 70-72 | D- | 60-62 |
| B+ | 87-89 | C+ | 77-79 | D+ | 67-69 | E | 0-59 |

Required Text

Berman, Sheri. 2019. *Democracy and Dictatorship in Europe: From the Ancien Régime to the Present Day*. New York: Oxford University Press.

University Policies

Academic honesty

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [Click here to read the Honor Code](#). Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

Make-up exams and other work

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies.

Students with disabilities

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Class evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluera.com/ufl/.

COVID-19

In response to COVID-19, the following policies and requirements are in place to maintain your learning environment and to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions.

- You are required to wear approved face coverings at all times during class and within buildings. Following and enforcing these policies and requirements are all of our responsibility. Failure to do so will lead to a report to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution.
- This course has been assigned a physical classroom with enough capacity to maintain physical distancing (6 feet between individuals) requirements. Please utilize designated seats and maintain appropriate spacing between students. Please do not move desks or stations.
- Sanitizing supplies are available in the classroom if you wish to wipe down your desks prior to sitting down and at the end of the class.
- Follow your instructor's guidance on how to enter and exit the classroom. Practice physical distancing to the extent possible when entering and exiting the classroom.
- If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms ([Click here for guidance from the CDC on symptoms of coronavirus](#)), please use the UF Health screening system and follow the instructions on whether you are able to attend class. [Click here for UF Health guidance on what to do if you have been exposed to or are experiencing Covid-19 symptoms](#).
- Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work. [Find more information in the university attendance policies](#).

Campus Resources

Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit *U Matter, We Care* website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website.

University Police Department: Visit UF Police Department website or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website.](#)

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

[Career Connections Center:](#) Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

[Library Support:](#) Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

[Teaching Center:](#) Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: [Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information.](#)

On-Line Students Complaints: [View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process.](#)

Important Note

The instructor reserved the right to change any of the administrative information (syllabus, readings, exams, distribution of grades, and papers) throughout the course of the semester and will inform students of such changes with due time and consideration.

Course Schedule

| Week | Date | Content |
|------|-------|---|
| 1 | 01/13 | <u>Introduction</u> [no readings] Introducing the class, discussing the syllabus, planning the semester. |
| 2 | 01/20 | <u>Political Development</u> [chapter 1] We will talk about main concepts in the book, especially: democracy, democratization, and democratic consolidation. This week will provide a conceptual overview of the things that you should keep in mind as you read the book. |
| 3 | 01/27 | The Ancien Régime [chapter 2] The weekly discussion will be centered on the period before the rise of democracies. We will analyze the political systems in Europe (originating in the Middle Ages) relying on the system of privileges and clear distinctions between different social groups/estates, debating conditions for its stability and possibility for change. |
| 4 | 02/03 | English Exceptionalism [chapter 3] The key question tackled this week relates to the failure of monarchical absolutism in England, and Glorious Revolution. Looking at this example, we will debate positive and negative sides of political gradualism. |
| 5 | 02/10 | The French Revolution [chapter 4] The discussion will center on the French Revolution, its origins, events surrounding it, and the wider significance it played beyond France. |
| 6 | 02/17 | 1848 [chapter 5] We will talk about the push for democratization in 1848, and roles played by different actors in calling for and resisting the political change. |
| 7 | 02/24 | French Third Republic [chapter 6] |

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| | | We will use the example of French Third Republic to examine functioning of weak democracies, focusing on main challenges to maintain and consolidate democracy into a stable political system. |
| 8 | 03/03 | <p>Unification: Italy, Germany [chapters 7 and 8]</p> <p>The discussion will be centered on (late) political unification of two important European states: Italy and Germany. Looking at two cases, we will assess similarities and differences in structural preconditions for unification, role of political leadership, and challenges related to consolidating a single state from many very diverse parts.</p> |
| 9 | 03/10 | <p>Interwar Europe [chapters 9 and 10]</p> <p>We will discuss challenges posed for European democracies in the period between First and Second World War. We will compare turbulent political situation in France with gradual democratization of Great Britain, aiming to understand which were the most significant factors influencing political situation at the time.</p> |
| 10 | 03/17 | <p>Democratic Collapse in Italy and Germany [chapters 11 and 12]</p> <p>This week we will examine the rise of a new type of dictatorship in Europe: fascism – national socialism. We will discuss the conditions leading to their rise, and the role played by different political actors affecting their success. We will also address the controversial topic of why fascism was popular, and how it affected states beyond politics.</p> |
| 11 | 03/24 | <p>Political Development in Spain [chapter 13]</p> <p>We will focus on one large European country that had specific political history: Spain. We will discuss why democratic breakdown in Spain in 1930s did not lead to the fascism, but conservative military dictatorship.</p> |
| 12 | 03/31 | <p>Consolidation of Democracy [chapter 14]</p> <p>We are focusing on the post-WWII period, examining why at that time most of the countries in Western Europe managed to achieve democratic consolidation. We will examine the key factors that made democracy work, and assess the role played by the external support provided by the United States.</p> |

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| 13 | 04/07 | <p>Communist Dictatorships in Central-Eastern Europe</p> <p>[chapters 15]</p> <p>This week focuses on Central-Eastern Europe, which after WWII transitioned to a new political regime: communist dictatorships. We will talk about structural conditions leading to this change, and the role that USSR played in imposing/maintaining these regimes. The specific examples will focus on Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany (GDR).</p> |
| 14 | 04/14 | <p>Transitions to Democracy</p> <p>[chapters 16 and 17]</p> <p>This week we examine two different examples of democratization: Spanish case, where democratization was tied to the problem of succession following the death of Franco, and cases of transition from communism and democratization in Central-Eastern Europe. We look at different factors and conditions leading to democracy, as well as challenges that these new democracies faced.</p> |
| 15 | 04/21 | <p>Lessons from Europe</p> <p>[chapter 18]</p> <p>In the final class we discuss wider relevance of European experience, and applicability of European lessons to other countries.</p> |