

Descriptif d'enseignement / *Course descriptions*

Cycle master

Semestre

Changing democracies. The transformations of contemporary democracies.

Type de cours : Séminaire

Langue du cours/Language of instruction : English

Enseignant(s) – *Professor(s)*

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Résumé du cours – Objectifs - *Course description – Targets*

Declining electoral turnouts, decreased trust in elected institutions, the undermining of the rule of law in so-called “consolidated democracies”, as well as failures to “export” democracy via military interventions have undermined long-held, implicit postulates in the social sciences about the superiority of the “Anglo-American” or “Western” model of democracy and the robustness of a “third wave” of democratization leading, eventually, to the global dominance of liberal democracy. At the same time, new social movements (eg Black Votes Matter, Yellow Jackets, the environmental justice movement, etc.) and ensuing conflicts, together with the institutionalization of new research fields in academia, are generating debates about aspects of Western democracies that had previously elicited little public interest or were under-researched. These include, notably, controversies over the race-based and gendered dimensions of democratic institutions (not to say, of the social contract philosophy itself), the impact of fossil fuel dependence on the quality of democratic government, the intersections between social, ethnic and environmental inequalities, etc. Parallel to this, some social scientists express doubts as to the ability of democracies to tackle contemporary challenges (eg climate change, pandemics, terrorism) while remaining democracies.

The aim of the course is to analyze how current research in the social sciences contributes to renewing perspectives and analytical frameworks about the state of democracy in today’s world. Adopting a comparative perspective, it also intends to introduce students to ongoing academic and political discussions with which they may not be familiar (such as, for example, the conflict on “critical race theory” now raging in the US education system and political field).

By doing so, the course also aims to show how recognized works and research in the social sciences (not to say works long considered as “classics”) have often contributed to the spread of commonsense (and sometimes misleading) assumptions about democracy – notably, by failing to adequately deconstruct key notions and research agendas centered on “trust”, “civic culture”, “radicalization”, “democratic transition”, etc. – thus providing scientific legitimacy to concrete public policy choices, some of which have had deleterious consequences on democracy. At the same time though, the social sciences have also been impacted by innovative trends (such as the rise of “global history” and the discussion over “methodological nationalism”) that led many social scientists to deconstruct long-dominant narratives about democracy as a child of “the West” and of modernity. Innovating research agendas in other disciplines – such as critical

legal studies in law, postcolonial studies in literature, the history of energy systems in environmental studies – have also helped social scientists formulate new, stimulating questions about the state of contemporary democracies.

Evaluation - Assessment

Students are expected to:

- a) Contribute to in-class discussions on weekly reading (one article or book chapter per week)
- b) Provide an oral presentation (maximum 15 minutes) by groups of 3, on a topic chosen from a pre-selected list

Plan – Séances - Course outline

Class 1. Introduction: Democracies today: populism, authoritarian trend or right-wing turn?

Class 2. Uncivic & distrustful citizens? Reassessing notions of civic and political “cultures”

Class 3. Radicalized citizens? Liberalism and the challenge of the “wars on terror”

Class 4. Too diverse to share? Changing attitudes towards welfare and solidarity.

Class 5. Are democratic institutions colour-blind? Democracy and the race issue.

Class 6. Are democratic institutions gender-blind? Democracy & gender-based issues.

Class 7. Democracy and types of energy systems: the end of “fossil democracy”?

Class 8. The “network” as the only, possible future for democracy?

Class 9. Deconstructing the modern, Western democratic narrative

Bibliographie - Bibliography :

Seyla Benhabib, *Democracy and difference – Contesting the boundaries of the political*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Annie Collovald et Brigitte Gaïti, *La démocratie aux extrêmes. Sur la radicalisation politique*, Paris, La Dispute, 2006.

Russell Dalton, *The civic culture transformed. From allegiant to assertive citizens*, 2015, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The dawn of everything. A new history of humanity*, Macmillan, 2021.

Samuel Hayat, *Démocratie*, Anamosa, 2020

Charles Wade Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1997.

Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy. Political Power in the Age of Oil*, Verso, London, 2011.

David Stasavage, *The decline and rise of democracy. A global history from Antiquity to today*, Princeton University Press, 2020

Rebecca Willis, *Too Hot to Handle ? The Democratic Challenge of Climate Change*, Verso, 2020.