

# PIA3122: RETHINKING THE VALUE OF DEMOCRACY

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## Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

## Part I Course Overview

### Course Title

Rethinking the Value of Democracy

### Subject Code

PIA - Public and International Affairs

### Course Number

3122

### Academic Unit

Public and International Affairs (PIA)

### College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

### Course Duration

One Semester

### Credit Units

3

### Level

B1, B2, B3, B4 - Bachelor's Degree

### Medium of Instruction

English

### Medium of Assessment

English

### Prerequisites

Nil

### Precursors

Nil

### Equivalent Courses

POL3122 Rethinking the Value of Democracy

### Exclusive Courses

Nil

## Part II Course Details

### Abstract

Democracy was denigrated as mob rule by some philosophers and aristocrats. Yet nowadays it occupies a preeminent place in the political imagination: democracy is widely regarded as essential to political legitimacy and has been serving as the rallying cry for reformist political movements across the globe. But there remain political and philosophical debates concerning the right to democracy and the value of democratic participation. This course engages students to rethink the value of democracy by exploring such topics as the challenge of meritocracy, the importance of political participation, the contributions and limits of public deliberation, and whether or not capitalism undermines democracy.

### Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs	Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1 Rethink the value of democracy and its foundations from different political and philosophical perspectives (e.g. the political meritocratic perspective and the ethical perspective).		x	x	
2 Critically evaluate some of the criticisms of democracy made by ancient philosophers (e.g. Plato) and contemporary scholars (e.g. Joseph Schumpeter and Richard Arneson).		x	x	
3 Seek to understand the possible crucial importance of democracy in the context of political disagreement and moral disagreement.		x	x	
4 Acquire the basic analytical skills to assess the common arguments for or against democracy in public and private political discussions.		x	x	x
5 Students are expected to formulate their own views on a wide range of social and political issues (in particular, is democracy necessary for public policymaking?).		x	x	x

#### A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

#### A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

#### A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

### Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs	Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Lectures	a) Acquire a basic understanding of the key concepts concerning the value of democracy. b) Grasp the main criticisms of democracy made by philosophers and political scientists.c) Understand the possible vital importance of democracy in the contemporary world.	1, 2, 3, 4
2	In-class discussions and debates	a) Evaluate the main criticisms of democracy made by philosophers and political scientists.b) Gain a deeper understanding of the value and the limits of democracy.c) Acquire analytical skills for deliberating and debating about the value of democracy and its relations to a wide range of social and political issues.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
3	Individual essays	a) Gain a deeper understanding of democracy through patient study of the literature.b) Assess democracy' s value carefully through writing carefully.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
4	Test	Grasp the basic concepts needed for understanding the value of democracy. Develop a holistic view of democracy' s value and limits.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

### Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

	ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("-" for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	In-class discussion and debate	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	20	Students are expected to attend all lectures and participate in discussion and debate in class. From the second lecture onwards, students will be asked to respond to 1 to 2 in-class discussion questions. They are expected to discuss or debate actively.	Yes
2	Individual essays – about 3,000 words long	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	40	Students will write an individual essays (about 3,000 words). They are expected to demonstrate a very good understanding of the main readings and to formulate their own views.	Yes
3	Test	1, 2, 4, 5	40	At the end of term, students should show a clear understanding of the arguments for or against democracy and formulate their own views on democracy' s value and limits.	No

**Continuous Assessment (%)**

100

**Examination (%)**

0

**Assessment Rubrics (AR)****Assessment Task**

1. In-class discussion and debate

**Criterion**

Attendance (to take part in the discussion); understanding of the lecture; willingness to discuss/debate.

**Excellent (A+, A, A-)**

0-1 absence; Excellent understanding of democracy' s value and limits. Excellent critical reasoning skills and communication skills.

**Good (B+, B, B-)**

2 absences; Fairly good understanding of democracy' s value and limits. Fairly good critical reasoning skills and communication skills.

**Fair (C+, C, C-)**

3 absences; Rudimentary understanding of democracy' s value and limits. Rudimentary critical reasoning skills and communication skills.

**Marginal (D)**

4 absences; Weak understanding of democracy' s value and limits. Weak critical reasoning skills and communication skills.

**Failure (F)**

5 absences or more; Very poor understanding of democracy' s value and limits. Very poor critical reasoning skills and communication skills.

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**Assessment Task**

2. Individual essay

**Criterion**

Understanding of the readings; originality of ideas; clarity and organization of ideas.

**Excellent (A+, A, A-)**

Great familiarity with the relevant readings, and excellent critical reasoning skills.

**Good (B+, B, B-)**

Satisfactory familiarity with the relevant readings, and fairly good critical reasoning skills.

**Fair (C+, C, C-)**

Basic familiarity with the relevant readings, and basic critical reasoning skills.

**Marginal (D)**

Poor understanding of the relevant readings, and weak critical reasoning skills.

**Failure (F)**

Absence, or: not familiar with the relevant readings, and very poor critical reasoning skills.

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**Assessment Task**

3. Test

**Criterion**

Understanding of the lectures; understanding of the readings; originality of ideas; clarity and organization of ideas.

**Excellent (A+, A, A-)**

Excellent understanding of democracy' s value and limits. Excellent critical reasoning skills, writing skills, and communication skills.

**Good (B+, B, B-)**

Fairly good understanding of democracy' s value and limits. Fairly good critical reasoning skills, writing skills, and communication skills.

**Fair (C+, C, C-)**

Rudimentary understanding of democracy' s value and limits. Rudimentary critical reasoning skills, writing skills, and communication skills.

**Marginal (D)**

Weak understanding of democracy' s value and limits. Weak critical reasoning skills, writing skills, and communication skills.

**Failure (F)**

Absence, or very poor understanding of democracy' s value and limits. Very poor critical reasoning skills, writing skills, and communication skills.

## Part III Other Information

### Keyword Syllabus

Democracy. Meritocracy. Virtue. Knowledge. Participation. Voting. Plato. Mill. Rousseau. Schumpeter. Legitimacy. Authority. Equality. Justice. Respect. Rights. Intrinsic vs. instrumental value. Political disagreement. Moral disagreement. Public deliberation. Deliberative democracy. Capitalism.

### Reading List

#### Compulsory Readings

	Title
1	Plato. Republic, Book VI.
2	Robert Dahl (1991). Democracy and Its Critics. New Haven: Yale University Press.
3	Joseph Schumpeter (2003). Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy. Routledge, Chapters XXI and XXII.

#### Additional Readings

	Title
1	Thomas Christiano (2008). The Constitution of Equality: Democratic Authority and Its Limits. Oxford University Press.
2	Thomas Christiano and John Christman (2009) (Eds). Contemporary Debates in Political Philosophy. Oxford: Blackwell.
3	David Harvey (2008). "The Right to the City," New Left Review 53: 23–40.
4	Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson (2004). Why Deliberative Democracy? Princeton University Press.
5	Daniel A. Bell et al. (2013) (Eds). The East Asian Challenge for Democracy: Political Meritocracy in Comparative Perspective. New York: Cambridge University Press.