

Democracy in a Global Context

HPRH 2201 R01

Professor Nicholas Tampio

Fordham University

Spring 2026

Alpha House, TF 10-11:15 am

Office hours: Faber 678, 11:30 am-12:30 pm,
Faber Hall 665



Course description

Democracy is a political regime that chooses leaders by a majority vote. At a more profound level, democracy is a way of life that treats everyone with dignity regardless of their sex, religion, race, wealth, or physical abilities. Authoritarian cultures around the world assign people roles that do not treat them as moral or political equals. This course addresses the problem of how to create democratic norms and institutions around the world.

To do this, the course reads early twentieth century political thinkers and activists who were grappling with this problem. Here are the main authors with whom we will engage in a dialogue. *Jane Addams*, the founder of Hull House and an advocate for democratic ethics permeating the family, industry, education, and politics. *John Dewey*, the pragmatic philosopher who helped found organizations dedicated to civil liberties, civil rights, and labor rights. *W.E.B. Du Bois*, a pioneer in philosophy, sociology, and political science who laid the foundation for the modern civil rights movement. *Horace Kallen*, an early proponent of cultural pluralism. *Hu Shi* and *B.R. Ambedkar*: John Dewey's students who brought and modified his ideas to China and India respectively. And *Jason Brennan* and *Tongdong Bai*, critics of democracy who keep us honest.

One purpose of the course is to learn about a rich moment in intellectual history when thinkers from around the world were talking with one another about how to make democracy a reality. A second purpose is for us to think together about how to renew their project for our own time.

Required books

Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 9780252070235

Dewey: *Political Writings*, edited by D. Morris and Ian Shapiro, 9780872201903

W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 9780486408903

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, 9780195670554

Course Requirements

Students will write and present a 2500-word research paper on what the assigned author would say about a current event. For the paper, cite a few sources about the current event and the author. You may make a PowerPoint.

Students will lead one class discussion. Print up on sheet with key quotes from the text and two secondary sources on it. Don't lead discussion for an author on whom you are also presenting.

Sign up for your presentation and [discussion days here](#).

Midterm and final. I will distribute a few questions a week ahead of the midterm and final and randomly select two on the day of the exam.

Class participation. Students should do the reading before class and be prepared to discuss the material.

To understand university policies on academic rights and responsibilities, sexual harassment, services for students with disabilities, and other important topics, please see the [undergraduate faculty handbook](#).

Grade distribution

Research paper	20
Research presentation	10
Handout and leading class discussion	20
Midterm	20
Final exam	20
Class participation	10

Class schedule

I. Introduction to the Course

1. January 13 - The state of democracy around the world

Is the world becoming more or less democratic? What does that even mean? In the first class, we study the interactive Freedom House map to see (a) how it defines key terms like democracy, freedom, political rights, and civil liberties and (b) what it says about countries like the US, China, and India.

[Freedom in the World Map](#)

2. January 16 - No class. I will be at the Southern Political Science Association conference.

3. January 20 - Who could be against democracy? Jason Brennan's answer

This course assumes that democracy is a good thing. Is it? In this class, we discuss a critique of democracy made by Jason Brennan (b. 1979), Robert J. and Elizabeth Flanagan Family Professor of Strategy, Economics, Ethics, and Public Policy at the McDonough School of Business at Georgetown University. Reviving an argument that goes back to Plato, Brennan argues that democracy means rule by hooligans and it is better to put experts in charge.

[The Case Against Democracy | The New Yorker](#)

[Trump Won Because Voters Are Ignorant, Literally](#)

II. Jane Addams on democracy and social ethics

What is the big deal about having the majority decide who rules? What is the underlying principle and how could it apply to things other than elections? Jane Addams (1860-1935) founded Hull House in Chicago to help immigrants adjust to their new country. She was also a philosopher who defined democracy as a social ethics that “constantly raises the value and function of each member of the community, however humble [they] may be.” In this unit, we consider how she tries to democratize philanthropy, parent-child relationships, households, schools, and municipal government.

4.- Addams on charitable effort, filial relations, household adjustment,

Democracy and Social Ethics, Introduction, Chapters 1-3

5. January 23 – Addams on industrial amelioration, educational methods, and political reform
Democracy and Social Ethics, Chapters 4-6

6. January 30 – Student presentations on Jane Addams

III. John Dewey on democracy, pragmatism, education, and politics

Jane Addams was a friend and inspiration for John Dewey (1859-1952), the pragmatist philosopher who helped found the NAACP, the ACLU, and labor unions. Dewey engaged in a life-long conversation with philosophers such as Plato, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Thomas Jefferson. He was also a public intellectual who wrote about how to democratize interpersonal relations, art, science, and education. He leaves readers with the challenge of how to break down the barriers that keep people from communicating with one another.

7. February 3 – John Dewey on the ethics of democracy

- *The Ethics of Democracy* (1888)
- *Creative Democracy-The Task Before Us* (1939)

8. February 6 – John Dewey on art, science, and moral progress

- *Intelligence and Morals* (1910)
- *Art and Civilization* (1934).

9. February 10 – John Dewey on education for social change

- *Ethical Principles Underlying Education* (1897)
- *The Need of an Industrial Education in Industrial Democracy* (1916).

10. February 13 – Student presentations on John Dewey

IV. W.E.B. DuBois on democracy, race, education, and global justice

W.E.B. Du Bois (1869-1963) wrote his dissertation at Harvard University on the transatlantic slave trade and thought about how it left a problem for democracy. How can you have a democracy when black folk have less and are treated as less than white folk? In this unit, we think with Du Bois about the definition of race, how slavery and racism corrupt democracy, and how education and international affairs can begin to dissolve the veil that separates blacks and whites.

11. February 20 – Du Bois on international affairs

- II. The Souls of White Folk
- III. The Hands of Ethiopia

12. February 24 – Du Bois on economic exploitation

- IV. Of Work and Wealth
- V. The Servant in the House

13. February 27 – Du Bois on the franchise and women’s rights

- VI. Of the Ruling of Men
- VII. The Damnation of Women

14. March 3 – Student presentations on W.E.B. DuBois

15. March 6 – Midterm

Interlude: Another argument against democracy

16. March 17 – Who could be against democracy?! Tongdong Bai’s answer

There are smart people around the world who distrust democracy. Confucius distinguishes the gentleman (*junzi*) and the petty man (*xiaoren*), and Confucian political theorists such as Fudan University philosophy professor Tongdong Bai (b. 1970) maintain that elites, chosen by test scores and performance evaluations, ought to govern the ignorant masses. Does Trump show where

democracy leads? Does the pandemic prove that meritocracies achieve better results than democracies?

Against democratic education

V. Horace Kallen on cultural pluralism

Horace Kallen lived during a mass wave of immigration into the United States and wrote a famous two-part article advocating cultural pluralism. This unit will give us a chance to think of how democracies should create space for cultural minorities.

17. March 20 - [Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot A Study of American Nationality, Part I](#)

18. March 24 - [Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot A Study of American Nationality, Part II](#)

19. March 27 - Student presentations on Horace Kallen

VI. Hu Shih and the project of Chinese democracy

The last two units of the course are on John Dewey's doctoral students who advocated democracy in China and India. Hu Shih (1891-1962) was a leading figure in the May Fourth movement that could have led to a democratic future for China. It did not, and Hu Shih spent much of his career explaining how one could reconstruct Chinese intellectual history to defend ideals like pragmatism, liberalism, and democracy.

20. March 31 - Hu Shih and Democracy

Hu Shih, "Intellectual China in 1919"

Hu Shih, "Historical Foundations for a Democratic China"

["May Fourth, the Day That Changed China"](#)

Sor-Hoon Tan, [China's Pragmatist Experiment in Democracy: Hu Shih's pragmatism and Dewey's Influence in China](#)

21. April 7 - Hu Shih and liberalism

Hu Shih, "The Struggle for Intellectual Freedom in Historic China"

Sor-hoon Tan, [The pragmatic Confucian approach to tradition in modernizing China](#)

22. April 10 - Student Presentations on Hu Shih or Sor-hoon Tan

VII. Ambedkar and the project of Indian democracy

B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) was a Dalit (formerly Untouchable) who called for the annihilation of caste. Gandhi defended the Varna system that slotted people into family occupations, but Ambedkar argued that that still preserved an inegalitarian culture. Near the end of his life, Ambedkar explored ways for Indians to nurture democratic habits.

23. April 14 - Ambedkar on the annihilation of caste

“Annihilation of Caste”; “Reply to the Mahatma”

24. April 17 - The challenge of finding an Indian substitute for fraternity

“Buddha or Karl Marx”

25. April 21 - Student presentations on Ambedkar

26. April 24 - No class. I'll be at the New England Political Science Association conference.

27. April 28 - Professor Tampio will present a paper on democracy and nutrition.

Final exam -

Tuesday, May 5, 2026	9:30 AM	11:30 AM
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