



Course information 2011–12

PS1114 Democratic politics and the State

This course introduces students to studying the State and democratic politics and serves as an introduction to political science, the modern discipline for the study of political processes. It focuses on some broad theories (or viewpoints, models or interpretations) of how liberal democratic politics works. It focuses on views that *disagree* strongly and profoundly about how far liberal democracy succeeds or fails and about how democratic states are controlled and in whose interests.

Prerequisite

None apply.

Aims and objectives

This course is designed to:

- introduce students to an understanding of politics and the political process in modern liberal democracies
- introduce students to the main approaches in political science
- introduce students to the key features of the liberal democratic state and some important critiques of its limits
- prepare students for further courses in politics.

Essential reading

For full details, please refer to the reading list

Pierson, C. *The Modern State*. (Routledge)
Held, David and Anthony McGrew
Globalization/Anti Globalization. (Cambridge: Polity Press)

Assessment

This course is assessed by a three hour unseen written examination.

Learning outcomes

At the end of this course and having completed the essential reading and activities students should be able to:

- ✓ demonstrate an understanding and knowledge of political processes in modern liberal democracies.
- ✓ outline and critically assess viewpoints highlighting the limits of liberal democracy.
- ✓ apply the main theories, models and concepts used in the study of politics to the analysis of key institutions of the modern state.
- ✓ critically evaluate different theories of the state

Students should consult the *Programme Regulations for degrees and diplomas in Economics, Management, Finance and the Social Sciences* that are reviewed annually. The Prerequisites, Exclusions, and Syllabus are subject to confirmation in the *Regulations*. Notice is also given in the *Regulations* of any courses which are being phased out and students are advised to check course availability.

Syllabus

This is a description of the material to be examined, as published in the *Regulations*. On registration, students will receive a detailed subject guide which provides a framework for covering the topics in the syllabus and directions to the essential reading.

What is politics and the political process?

Alternative definitions of 'politics' (for example, the competitive struggle for control of the state apparatus, the expression of group identities, and the relations between states) and the mechanisms by which they operate.

The state under liberal democracy; Introduction to 'the state' as a modern political form of exercising authority; and liberal democracy as a combination of majority rule and the protection of civil liberties. The recent emergence of liberal democracy as the dominant form of government in modern countries.

Classical views: Pluralism, Conservatism, Elitism and Marxism; Introduction to the 'classical' (nineteenth and early twentieth century) theories of the state, government and politics. Different approaches are illustrated using the core political ideas of John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, Max Weber, Friedrich Hayek, Roberto Michels and Vilfredo Pareto.

The contemporary liberal democratic state and modern pluralism; Shifts in the pluralist theory of the state from the 1960s to the twenty-first century. Differences in the development of pluralist thought in Europe and in the USA. The application of this model to other countries will be examined. Particular emphasis on the ideas of Robert Dahl and Michael Walzer.

Limits to democracy I: the new right and neo-conservatism; New right theories see some key factors as inhibiting the effective operation of liberal democracy – state regulation coarsening market processes and state growth undermining free enterprise. Modern neo-Conservative thought points to a lack of moral codes and social norms as eroding the stability of democracy. The works of William Niskanen, Robert Putnam and Samuel Huntington will be examined.

Limits to democracy II: feminism, environmentalism and globalization; Exploration of the limits of liberal democracy in three alternative theories of the state. Feminist theorists' focus on the differential political development, power and influence of males versus females. Green theorists' arguments that the liberal democratic state has failed to halt the degradation of the world environment. Globalization theorists' contention that power has shifted away from democratically-controlled nation-states to a range of global networks. Particular emphasis on the ideas of Carole Pateman, John Dryzek and David Held.

Limits to democracy III: modern elite theory and neo-Marxism; Comparison of the modern elite view that liberal democracy is a façade, behind which the state is controlled by a monied and educated elite, with the neo-Marxist position that capitalist economic development promotes a partial and fundamentally flawed form of democracy. The political ideas of Noam Chomsky and Klaus Offe are examined.