

Citizens and Democracy

Spring 2026

Instructor: Marc Jacob, *Assistant Professor of Democracy and Global Affairs*

E-mail: marc.jacob@nd.edu

Class times: TTh 2:00pm-3:15pm

Classroom: Jenkins and Nanovic Hall B079

Student hours: By appointment

Course Description

Democracies strive to hold governments accountable to their citizens. But how, in practice, can citizens influence political outcomes? And under what conditions do citizens help sustain or undermine democracy? This course explores the role of public opinion, electoral behavior, and elite responsiveness in shaping democratic accountability. In the first half, we examine how voters' preferences and behaviors influence political elites, drawing on comparative research and case studies from Europe, Latin America, and the United States. In the second half, we turn to the citizen-side of democratic stability: What kinds of attitudes and forms of engagement foster democratic resilience? What makes citizens withdraw support from, or remain loyal to, anti-democratic leaders? Throughout the class, students will engage with canonical and recent advances in social science, public-facing books and newspaper articles, as well as practitioners.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

1. Describe how public opinion and electoral behavior affect political decision-making in representative democracies.
2. Evaluate different forms of political accountability and their implications for democratic stability.

3. Analyze empirical research on elite responsiveness and citizen behavior using comparative examples.
4. Formulate research questions and arguments about the conditions under which citizens uphold or erode democratic norms.
5. Communicate your ideas clearly in writing and oral presentations, drawing on academic research and real-world cases.

Course Structure

Assessments

For all assignments, please review the instructions and rubrics on the Canvas course page before beginning your work. All submissions must be uploaded to Canvas unless otherwise noted.

Midterm Quiz

A midterm quiz covering key concepts and materials from the first half of the course. The quiz will include a mix of closed- and open-ended questions.

Book Review

You will write a review of a public-facing intellectual book that summarizes its argument, connects it to course content, and offers a critical evaluation. You may choose from the following public-facing books, or receive instructor approval for an alternative. Please note that this does not imply an endorsement or substantive agreement by the instructor with the books. Instead, critically engaging with a public-facing book is intended to help us add perspectives to our class discussion and to connect theory and empirical evidence with popular accounts of contemporary politics.

- Heather Cox Richardson (2023). *Democracy Awakening: Notes on the State of America*.
- Anne Applebaum (2024). *Autocracy, Inc.: The Dictators Who Want to Run the World*.
- Thomas Schaller and Paul Waldman (2024). *White Rural Rage: The Threat to American Democracy*.
- Rita Omokha (2024). *Resist: How a Century of Young Black Activists Shaped America*.
- Robert Creamer (2024). *Nuts and Bolts: The Formula for Progressive Electoral Success*.
- Johnathan Karl (2025). *Retribution: Donald Trump and the Campaign That Changed America*.

- Josh Dawsey, Tyler Pager, and Isaac Arnsdorf (2025). *2024: How Trump Retook the White House and the Democrats Lost*.
- Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2018). *How Democracies Die*.
- Kamala Harris (2025). *107 Days*.
- Cameron R. Grant (2025). *Trump: The Art of the Rally*.
- Sami Sage and Emily Amick (2024). *Democracy in Retrograde*.
- Ziya Tong (2023). *The Reality Bubble: Blind Spots, Hidden Truths, and the Dangerous Illusions that Shape Our World*.
- Nanjala Nyabola (2020). *Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics: How the Internet Era is Transforming Kenya*.
- Caroline Criado Perez (2020). *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*.

Final Essay

The final assignment is an original essay that formulates a research question and uses evidence to evaluate it. The essay must draw on course literature and concepts. Original analysis of data is encouraged but not required.

Class Attendance, Contribution, and Quizzes

Active participation in class discussions and activities is essential for success. To support preparation for and engagement in this class, there will be three brief, unannounced reading quizzes during the semester. Your lowest quiz score will be dropped.

Students are permitted one (1) unexcused absence. Excused absences include those defined by University policy and verified as per section 3.1 (pages 5-7) of the Undergraduate Academic Code. Each additional unexcused absence will result in a 15-point deduction from your attendance and participation grade.

Grading Policy

Assignment	Points	Percentage (%)
Midterm Quiz	200	20
Book Review	200	20
Final Essay	350	35
Class Attendance, Contribution, and Quizzes	250	25
TOTAL	1000	100

Regrading Requests

Students requesting a regrade must submit a one-page written explanation outlining why the grade is not adequate, referencing specific criteria or errors in evaluation. Regrading requests should be thoughtful and based on the assignment's rubric or guidelines. Please note that upon review, the grade may remain unchanged, increase, or decrease. Requests must be submitted within one week of receiving the graded assignment.

Life Happens Clause

We all navigate complex and multifaceted lives, and I approach challenges with understanding and flexibility. To support this, you may invoke the "Life Happens Clause" for one assignment during the semester, granting you a 3-day extension without requiring an explanation. This clause is designed to provide grace when unexpected circumstances arise.

Late Submission Policy

Assignments submitted after the deadline will incur a penalty of 5% per day (including weekends), up to a maximum of 25%. Submissions more than five days late will not be accepted unless prior arrangements have been made. If you anticipate a delay, please communicate with me as early as possible. Note that you may use the "Life Happens Clause" (see above) once during the semester for a 3-day extension without penalty or explanation.

Final Grading

Letter Grade	Range (%)	Points
A	100% to 94%	1000 to 940
A-	<94% to 90%	<940 to 900
B+	<90% to 87%	<900 to 870
B	<87% to 84%	<870 to 840
B-	<84% to 80%	<840 to 800
C+	<80% to 77%	<800 to 770
C	<77% to 74%	<770 to 740
C-	<74% to 70%	<740 to 700
D	<70% to 64%	<700 to 640
F	<64% to 0%	<640 to 0

Course Policies

Accessibility and Accommodations

It is the policy and practice of The University of Notre Dame to provide reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. Students who have questions about Sara Bea Accessibility Services or who have, or think they may have, a disability are invited to contact Sara Bea Accessibility Services for a confidential discussion by emailing at sarabeacenter@nd.edu or by phone at 574-631-7157. Because the University's Academic Accommodations Processes generally require students to request accommodations well in advance of the dates when they are needed, students who believe they may need an accommodation for this course are encouraged to contact Sara Bea Accessibility Services at their earliest opportunity. Additional information about Sara Bea Accessibility Services and to learn more about the student process for requesting accommodations, please contact Sara Bea Accessibility Services.

Inclusion

I am committed to and strive to maintain a positive learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. In this class, we will not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, sex, age, economic class, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color, or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

Mental Health & Wellness

Care and Wellness Consultants provide support and resources to students who are experiencing stressful or difficult situations that may be interfering with academic progress. Through Care and Wellness Consultants, students can be referred to The University Counseling Center (for cost-free and confidential psychological and psychiatric services from licensed professionals), University Health Services (which provides primary care, psychiatric services, case management, and a pharmacy), and The McDonald Center for Student Well Being (for problems with sleep, stress, and substance use). Reach out to Care and Wellness Consultants to learn more.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a cornerstone of this course and is required at all times. I will not tolerate any form of academic dishonesty. The University's Honor Code serves as a vital reminder of our shared purpose as scholars and members of a broader community. It also provides clear guidelines on policy violations and the associated procedures.

Adherence to these principles ensures a fair and enriching academic environment for all.

Academic Freedom Policy

Higher education is predicated on the exchange, vetting, and deliberation of often controversial and unsettled ideas. The aim in this class is to create a welcoming academic environment where open inquiry, critical analysis and intellectual growth are possible, and where respectful debate is valued. In this particular class, we explore how citizen engage with political institutions in democracies and non-democracies around the world. We are not here to simply express personal opinions or repeat talking points, but rather to engage a set of ideas and research findings that have a long and complicated history and are therefore subject to ongoing debate. Committed students and scholars can, and do, disagree on the topics we will be discussing.

The syllabus has been designed to bring these controversies and disagreements to the fore. Students are also invited to introduce additional challenges in a serious and open-minded manner. To further our conversation, you may be asked to read and discuss perspectives, approaches and arguments that you do not agree with or that make you uncomfortable. Some of the views expressed may not be in accord with the principles of Catholic teaching or the values of the University, even as we ensure that Catholic views are represented on campus. Our Catholic mission demands that when we engage those who hold different or opposing views, we do so with respect and charity.

Ensuring that students and faculty feel free to express their deeply held views and continually developing perspectives also means ensuring that all students and faculty feel included and welcomed to engage in discussion. Our commitment to freedom of expression permits controversial opinions, but it does not extend to speech that threatens violence or constitutes harassment against an individual or a group. Hateful or discriminatory speech and behavior degrades the possibility for a free exchange of ideas. Such expressions violate University policies and will not be tolerated.

AI Usage Policy

Generative AI tools, although helpful for some derivative tasks such as statistical coding and simple proofreading, will not contribute meaningfully to your coursework in this class. Using AI to edit your writing is not necessary and will be distracting or even counterproductive, as your own thoughts will be replaced by generic text that lacks the analytical depth expected in this class. If you choose to use AI for brainstorming ideas, proofreading, or writing statistical code, it should only be in ways that support (and never replace) your own reasoning. Reflect on whether AI will genuinely help you engage more deeply with course material or whether it distracts you from meaningfully thinking about and working with the readings and topics we will discuss in this class. If the answer is no (which it usually is), trust in your own intellectual abilities and have confidence in your own creativity.

Permitted uses (optional, not expected):

- Brainstorming research questions or project ideas
- Rephrasing or organizing your writing for clarity
- Learning more about specific methods, including statistics

Prohibited uses:

- Submitting AI-generated content (e.g., paragraphs, literature reviews, proposals) as your own writing
- Using AI to complete reading-based assignments or quizzes
- Citing sources you have not read or generating fake citations
- Replacing your own reading and thinking with AI-generated summaries or analysis

Disclosure requirement: If you use AI tools to support any part of a graded assignment, you must include a brief disclosure in your submission. Please state:

- What tool you used
- What you used it for
- How it helped you improve your work

Using AI without disclosure or to bypass course expectations may be treated as academic misconduct. If you're unsure whether something is appropriate, just ask. I am happy to help you learn how to use these tools responsibly and thoughtfully.

Academic Writing

Notre Dame's University Writing Program offers a range of opportunities for students to receive feedback on their writing and advice on the writing process. Please visit the Writing Program's Writing Center for more information and to schedule an individual writing consultation.

Schedule

Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

Week 1

- **Session 1 (01/13): Introduction – What Is Democratic Accountability?**
 - **Required:** Schmitter, Philippe C. (2004): The Quality of Democracy: The Ambiguous Virtues of Accountability. In *Journal of Democracy* 15 (4), pp. 47-60.
- **Session 2 (01/15): Citizens, Elites, and Elections**
 - **Required:** Dahl, Robert A. (1971): *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Chapter 1.
 - **Optional:** Mansbridge, Jane (2003): Rethinking Representation. In *American Political Science Review* 97 (4), pp. 515-528.

Week 2

- **Session 3 (01/20): Theories of Voting**
 - **Group I:** Hutchings, Vincent; Jefferson, Hakeem J. (2018): The Sociological and Social-Psychological Approaches. In Justin Fisher, Edward Fieldhouse, Mark N. Frankin, Rachel Gibson, Marta Cantijoch (Eds.): *The Routledge handbook of elections, voting behavior and public opinion*. London, New York NY: Routledge, pp. 21–29.
 - **Group II:** Dowding, Keith (2018): Rational Choice Theory and Voting. In Justin Fisher, Edward Fieldhouse, Mark N. Frankin, Rachel Gibson, Marta Cantijoch (Eds.): *The Routledge handbook of elections, voting behavior and public opinion*. London, New York NY: Routledge, pp. 30–40.
- **Session 4 (01/22): Voting in Context**
 - **Required:** Peters, B. Guy (2018): Institutions and Voting Behavior. In Justin Fisher, Edward Fieldhouse, Mark N. Frankin, Rachel Gibson, Marta Cantijoch (Eds.): *The Routledge handbook of elections, voting behavior and public opinion*. London, New York NY: Routledge, pp. 41–53.

Citizen Accountability in Democracies

Week 3

- **Session 5 (01/27): What is Public Opinion?**

- **Required:** Zaller, John (1992): *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 6-39.
- **Optional:** Page, Benjamin I.; Shapiro, Robert Y. (1983): Effects of Public Opinion on Policy. In *American Political Science Review* 77 (1), pp. 175-190.
- **Optional:** Taylor, Humphrey (2002): The Value of Polls in Promoting Good Government and Democracy. In Jeff Manza, Fay Lomax Cook, Benjamin I. Page (Eds.): *Navigating public opinion. Polls, policy, and the future of American democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 315-324.

• **Session 6 (01/29): How Do Elites Respond to Public Opinion?**

- **Required:** Manza, Jeff; Cook, Fay Lomax (2002): The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy. The State of the Debate. In Jeff Manza, Fay Lomax Cook, Benjamin I. Page (Eds.): *Navigating public opinion. Polls, policy, and the future of American democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 17-32.
- **Optional:** Bevan, Shaun; Krewel, Mona (2015): Responsive elections: The effect of public opinion on political campaigns. In *Electoral Studies* 40, pp. 548–555.
- **Optional:** Butler, Daniel M.; Nickerson, David W. (2011): Can Learning Constituency Opinion Affect How Legislators Vote? In *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 6 (1), pp. 55-83.
- **Optional:** Broockman, David E.; Skovron, Christopher (2018): Bias in Perceptions of Public Opinion Among Political Elites. In *American Political Science Review* 112 (3), pp. 542-563.

Week 4

• **Session 7 (02/03): Descriptive Representation and Group Identity**

- **Required:** Mansbridge, Jane (1999): Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes'. In *Journal of Politics* 61 (3), pp. 628-657.
- **Optional:** Dovi, Suzanne (2002): Preferable Descriptive Representatives: Will Just Any Woman, Black, or Latino Do? In *American Political Science Review* 96 (4), pp. 729-743.

• **Session 8 (02/05): Electoral Campaigns: Persuasion, Targeting, and Mobilization**

- **Group I:** Gerber, Alan S.; Green, Donald P. (2000): The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout. In *American Political Science Review* 94 (3), pp. 653-663.
- **Group II:** Fridkin, Kim L.; Kenney, Patrick J. (2011): The Role of Candidate Traits in Campaigns. *Journal of Politics* 73 (1), pp. 61–73.

- **Optional:** Kalla, Joshua L.; Broockman, David E. (2018): The Minimal Persuasive Effects of Campaign Contact in General Elections. In *American Political Science Review* 112 (1), pp. 148-166.

Week 5

- **Session 9 (02/10): Political Campaigning in Practice**

- The New York Times (2015): The Partisans Are Wrong: Moving to the Center Is the Way to Win.
- Bonica, Adam (2025): The New York Times Argues “Moving to the Center Is the Way to Win.” But the Data Shows the Strategy Is Tapped Out.

- **Session 10 (02/12): Dr. Prakash Bhattarai Class Visit**

Dr. Bhattarai is the founder president of Centre for Social Change (CSC), a Kathmandu based research and advocacy institute actively involved in responding to three major obstacles to social change process in Nepal, namely, discrimination, violence, and violation of human rights.

- Please read this publication of the Centre for Social Change ahead of this session: “Counting Heads or Making Voices Count? Women and Dalits in Nepal’s Local Politics.”

Week 6

- **Session 11 (02/17): Media and Misinformation**

- **Required:** Guess, Andrew; Nyhan, Brendan; Reifler, Jason (2020): Exposure to Untrustworthy Websites in the 2016 U.S. Election. In *Nature Human Behaviour* 4 (May), pp. 472-480.
- **Optional:** Lazer, David M. J. et al. (2018): The Science of Fake News. In *Science* 359 (6380), pp. 1094-1096.

- **Session 12 (02/19): Conversation with James Mueller, Mayor of South Bend**

★ **Room change: Jenkins Nanovic Halls 1050**

Week 7

- **Session 13 (02/24): Conversation with Sonia Lumley, Notre Dame Student Body Vice President**

- **Session 14 (02/26): Review Session**

Week 8

- **Session 15 (03/03): Midterm Quiz**

- **Session 16 (03/05): Individual Work on Book Review (no in-person class)**

Week 9 (Spring Break)

- 03/10 and 03/12: No Class

Citizen Support for Political Regimes

Week 10

- **Session 17 (03/17): Citizenship Norms and Support for Democratic Institutions**
 - **Group I:** Dalton, Russell J. (2008): Citizenship Norms and the Expansion of Political Participation. In *Political Studies* 56 (1), pp. 76-98.
 - **Group II:** Clayton, Katherine; Davis, Nicholas T.; Nyhan, Brendan; Porter, Ethan; Ryan, Timothy J.; Wood, Thomas J. (2021): Elite rhetoric can undermine democratic norms. In *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118 (23).
 - **Optional:** Berelson, Bernard; Lazarsfeld, Paul Felix; McPhee, William N. (1954): Voting. A study of opinion formation in a presidential campaign. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press. Chapter 14.
- **Session 18 (03/19): The Role of Political Knowledge and Education**
 - **Required:** Delli Carpini, Michael X.; Keeter, Scott (1996): *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Chapters 1-2.
 - **Optional:** Galston, William A. (2001): Political Knowledge, Political Engagement, and Civic Education. In *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (1), pp. 217-234.

Week 11

- **Session 19 (03/24): Strategic Use of Social Media Under Dictatorship and Democracy**
Guest speaker: Dr. Madai Urteaga Quispe
- **Session 20 (03/26): Citizens and Elites in Non-Democracies**
 - **Group I:** Guriev, Sergei; Treisman, Daniel (2020): The Popularity of Authoritarian Leaders. In *World Politics* 72 (4), pp. 601–638.
 - **Group II:** Bermeo, Nancy G. (2003): *Ordinary people in extraordinary times. The citizenry and the breakdown of democracy*. Princeton, N.J., Oxford: Princeton University Press, Chapter 2.

Optional:

- Chen, Jidong; Pan, Jennifer; Xu, Yiqing (2016): Sources of Authoritarian Responsiveness: A Field Experiment in China. In *American Journal of Political Science* 60 (2), pp. 383-400.
- Gandhi, Jennifer; Lust-Okar, Ellen (2009): Elections Under Authoritarianism. In *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (1), pp. 403–422.

Week 12

- **Session 21 (03/31): Conversation with Linda Rogers, State Senator**
- **Session 22 (04/02): Preparing the Final Essay**

Assignment Deadline

Book Review: Due Thursday, 04/2, 5 p.m., on Canvas.

Week 13

- **Session 23 (04/07): Moving between Regime Types: The Role of the Electorate**
 - **Required:** Svoboda, Milan W. (2019): Polarization versus Democracy. In *Journal of Democracy* 30 (3), pp. 20-32.
 - **Optional:** Chiopris, Caterina; Nalepa, Monika; Vanberg, Georg (2025): A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: Citizen Uncertainty and Democratic Backsliding. In *Journal of Politics* 87 (4), pp. 1272–1287.
 - **Optional:** Jacob, Marc S. (2025): Citizens as a democratic safeguard? The sequence of sanctioning elite attacks on democracy. In *American Journal of Political Science* 69 (2), pp. 455-470.
- **Session 24 (04/09): Book Conference**

Week 14

- **Session 25 (04/14): Direct Democracy**
 - **Required:** Lupia, Arthur; Matsusaka, John G. (2004): Direct Democracy: New Approaches to Old Questions. In *Annual Review of Political Science* 7 (1), pp. 463–482.
- **Session 26 (04/16): Final Project Conference**

Individual Projects & Synthesis

Week 15

- **Session 27 (04/21): Class Wrap-Up**
- **Session 28 (04/23): Individual Work on Final Essays (no in-person class)**

Week 16

Individual Feedback Opportunity

During Week 16, I will offer a large number of meeting slots for you to meet with me individually and talk about your projects. You are also welcome to book a joint meeting with peers in your class and me. Sign-up details will be posted on Canvas.

- **Session 29 (04/28): No in-person class**

Assignment Deadline

Essay: Due Wednesday, 05/06, 5 p.m., on Canvas.

Written Assignments

Book Review Assignment (200 points)

You will write a critical review of a public-facing book from the approved list (or a pre-approved alternative). The review should:

- Summarize the book's main argument and central contributions
- Evaluate its strengths and limitations
- Connect its themes to course content (e.g., democratic accountability, public opinion, political participation, or electoral behavior)

Length: **1,200-1,500 words**

Final Essay (350 points)

For this class, you will write a final paper that formulates an original research question and develops an argument using course concepts learned in class and/or empirical evidence. The essay should:

- Identify and motivate a research question relevant to citizen influence or democratic accountability
- Propose a thesis statement to be evaluated in your essay
- Use course readings and/or scholarly sources to develop a theoretical or conceptual framework
- Apply evidence (qualitative, quantitative, or illustrative) to support the argument
- Demonstrate logical structure and appropriate citations

Length: **3,000-3,500 words**