

The Fragility of Liberal Democracy

PhD mini-course in dynamic political economy

Tor Vergata University of Rome, 2024

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ABSTRACT

This course covers some theoretical and empirical techniques at the frontier of dynamic political economy. The theoretical focus is on dynamic information design and incomplete contracts; the empirical focus is mainly on online survey experiments. The common thread motivating the course is the study of the limits of democratic stability, with a particular attention to liberal elements of democratic constitutions.

ASSUMED KNOWLEDGE

The course is designed to be accessible to most PhD students in economics and advanced students in political science with a training in formal theory. Some knowledge of game theory at Master's or PhD level is essential. Some knowledge of theoretical work in information design and contract theory is helpful for a full understanding of the theoretical work covered.

SCHEDULE AND READINGS

***The schedule is for guidance only. Some topics may be covered in a different date than scheduled.**

Lecture 1: October 22, 11–13. *Liberal democracy and the will of the majority*

1. Popular support for democracy: From data to questions
 - Foa, Roberto Stefan, and Yascha Mounk. "The danger of deconsolidation: The democratic disconnect." *Journal of democracy* 27.3 (2016): 5-17.
 - Besley, Timothy, and Torsten Persson. "Democratic values and institutions." *American Economic Review: Insights* 1.1 (2019): 59-76.
2. Defining democracy: Rule of law, liberalism, social democracy

- Przeworski, Adam. "Who Decides What Is Democratic?." *Journal of Democracy* 35.3 (2024): 5-16. Basic framework GG
3. Liberal democracy: Tradeoffs
 - Graham, Matthew H., and Milan W. Svobik. "Democracy in America? Partisanship, polarization, and the robustness of support for democracy in the United States." *American Political Science Review* 114.2 (2020): 392-409.
 4. The Fragility of Liberal Democracy: A basic framework

Lecture 2: October 24, 11–13. The rise and fall of illiberal democracies

1. The rise and fall of illiberal democracies:
 - Gratton, Gabriele, and Barton E. Lee. "Liberty, security, and accountability: The rise and fall of illiberal democracies." *Review of Economic Studies* 91.1 (2024): 340-371.
 - Grillo, Edoardo, et al. "Theories of Democratic Backsliding." *Annual Review of Political Science* 27 (2023).
 - Zakaria, Fareed. "The rise of illiberal democracy." *Foreign Aff.* 76 (1997): 22.

Lecture 3: October 29, 11–13. Checks, balances, and conflict

1. Checks and balances: Gridlock and polarization
 - Dziuda, Wioletta, and Antoine Loeper. "Dynamic collective choice with endogenous status quo." *Journal of Political Economy* 124.4 (2016): 1148-1186.
 - Gehlbach, Scott. *Formal Models of Domestic Politics 2nd Edition*, Chapter 4.4; pp. 91-94 (2022).
 - Jacob, Marc S., Barton E. Lee, and Gabriele Gratton. "From gridlock to polarization." (2024)—available: <https://gratton.org/papers/GridlockPolarization.pdf>
 - Alesina, Alberto, and Howard Rosenthal. "Polarized platforms and moderate policies with checks and balances." *Journal of Public Economics* 75.1 (2000): 1-20.
2. Platonic Republics: Technocracy and anti-elite populism
 - Gratton, Gabriele, and Barton E. Lee. "Drain the Swamp: A Theory of Anti-Elite Populism." (2023).