

**PT 328 When the People Rule:
Popular Sovereignty in Theory and Practice**

Spring 2023, Tue 15:45-19:00, SR 4

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Office Hours: Tu 14:30-15:30, or by appointment

Course Description

Democracy, a Greek word, means the rule of the people. Yet what does it mean for the people to rule? This question is at the heart of many contemporary geopolitical battles, not least, the ideological and material war between Vladimir Putin's Russia and the Western liberal alliance led by the United States. This question also has a long and complex history. Our aim in this course will be to interrogate popular sovereignty as a principle, examining its origins in antiquity; the philosophical arguments, both ancient and modern that have been advanced for and against it; and the relationship between this principle and the practice of self-governance in two particular cases: the early American republic, and modern Russia.

Issues we address include: what constitutes "a people," in what sense can it be regarded as sovereign, and how is inclusion within, or exclusion from, the sovereign people determined? How has the rule by the people been understood historically? Why has it been regarded as legitimate or good? How is the will of the people conceptualized and expressed? What is the relationship between "public opinion" and popular sovereignty? The course will encompass theoretical accounts as well as empirical and policy analysis, aiming to bring diverse discourses into conversation.

This course will be taught simultaneously at Bard College Berlin and Smolny Beyond Borders, with occasional joint meetings and student collaboration across campuses. We will also host several guest speakers.

Required Texts

Aristotle, *Politics* (Tr. Peter L. Phillips Simpson) ISBN 9780872201774

Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Tr. Victor Gourevitch) ISBN 978-0521424462

Course Reader

Library and Book Purchase Policies

Students are expected to have at their disposal a hard copy of all required texts. Copies of the required books and additional readings are available on reserve at the library.

Requirements

Attendance and Participation

Careful preparation, regular attendance and active participation are essential to the success of this course. Absences beyond two will affect the seminar grade. Please note: arriving late or leaving in the middle of a session will count as half an absence.

Writing

Reflection paper and presentation: over the course of the semester, students will take turns to reflect on the proceedings of each week, and present these reflections at the beginning of the following week. The reflection paper should offer a concise (up to 1500-word) account of the week's reading and discussions that recapitulates its main themes, probes deeper a key issue, and articulates questions for further discussion. The reflection papers should be posted on google classroom by 5 pm on Mondays.

Project Proposal and Final Essay: at the end of the semester students will write a substantial final essay of up to 3500 words on one aspect of the course material. To identify the final essay topic students are expected to conduct individual research throughout the term and submit (by Sunday, April 30) a 500-word proposal for the final essay topic, including bibliography, to be discussed with the instructor. The deadline for the final essay is May 19, 2023.

Assessment

Assessment will be based on seminar participation (30%); reflection paper and presentation (25%); a project proposal (15%) and final essay (30%).

Late Submission and Academic Integrity

Late papers will be downgraded in light of the policy outlined in the Student Handbook. Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Deadlines at a glance

The schedule for reflection papers will be set up by **Friday, February 3**

Proposals for final essays are due on **Sunday, April 30**

Final Essay deadline: **Friday, May 19**

Schedule

| week | Tuesday 15:45-19:00 | Readings | Guests |
|------------------------|---|---|--------|
| 1: Jan 31 | Opening | | |
| 2: Feb 7 | What is politics? | Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> , book 1 | |
| 3: Feb 14 | Democracy and Citizenship | Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> , book 3 | |
| 4: Feb 21 | Ancient constitutionalism | Athenian Constitution | |
| 5: Feb 28 | – joint session – | Thucydides, Funeral Oration | |
| 6: Mar 7 | Popular sovereignty and the state | Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , selections | |
| 7: Mar 14 | What is politics? (Aristotle revisited) | Rousseau, <i>Social Contract</i> , book 1 | |
| 8: Mar 21 BC spr br | Sovereignty vs Government | Rousseau, <i>Social Contract</i> , books 2 and 3 | |
| 9: Mar 28 | <u>Case study I</u> American Founding | Declaration of Independence Thomas Jefferson, Deleted antislavery passage from a draft of the Declaration of Independence. Federalist papers, 1, 2, 10, 51, 54, 55 | |
| Apr 3-7 | SPRING BREAK | | |
| 10: Apr 11 | Popular sovereignty and the US constitution | Tocqueville, <i>Democracy in America</i> , vol. 1 part 1 chs. 2-5, 8; part 2 ch. 1 | |
| 11: Apr 18 | Race and democracy | Tocqueville, <i>Democracy in America</i> , vol. 1 part 2 chs. 6-7, 10 Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the 4th of July?” July 5th, 1882 | |
| 12: Apr 25 | <u>Case study II</u> Soviet Russia | Lenin, The socialist revolution and the right of nations to self-determination Lenin, Critical Remarks Stalin’s letter to Lenin The Constitution of the USSR Stalin, The national question and Leninism | |
| 13: May 2 | Putin’s Russia | TBD | |
| 14: May 9 | Concluding Keynote | | |
| 15: May 15-19 | Final Essay due: Friday, May 19, 23:59 | | |