

Challenges to Modern Democracy | POU44121

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| Year | Senior Sophister |
| ECTS Credits | 5 |
| Contact Hours | TBC |
| Pre-requisite | Nil |
| Semester | 1 |
| Module Leader & Lecturer | Dr Redmond Scales |
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Module Outline

Learning Outcomes:

The module covers key concepts, arguments and evidence assessing the causes and effects of challenges to modern democracy. This module will equip students with the skills to identify the key traits associated with issues such as illiberalism, the rise of authoritarianism and democratic backsliding.

Module Learning Aims:

By the end of the semester, students are expected to be able to:

- Explain and critically examine concepts and challenges to democracy, such as illiberalism, democratic backsliding and the rise of authoritarianism.
- Examine the effect of illiberal practises on democratic institutions.
- Examine and explain challenges to the process of democratisation in nondemocratic and developing states.
- Design their own research proposal on a topic relating to challenges to modern democracy.

Module Content:

Around the world, democracy is under attack. In the year 2023, Freedom House reported that global freedom has declined for the 18th consecutive year in a row. Political freedoms declined in 52 countries, including democratic states such as Poland and Hungary. At the same time, only 21 countries experienced advancements in Political Rights and Freedoms in 2023 (Freedom House, 2024). How can we conceptualise democracy? What are the challenges to modern democracy and democratisation? How are current democracies undermining rights, freedoms and institutions? What can we do to ensure democracy survives?

This module look at key concepts and building blocks of democracy and how democratic ideals and institution are being eroded on a global level. The module will examine contemporary cases looking at challenges such as attacks on democratic institutions, the recession of political rights and electoral manipulation. Additionally this module will

examine challenges to democratisation as a process, looking at topics such as, International Development, Transnational Repression and the Rise of Authoritarianism.

Assessment

Topic presentation: 15%

Mid-term assignment: 35%

End of term paper: 50%

Recommended Reading List

- Dahl, R.A. (1998). *On Democracy*. Yale University Press. Chapters 4-5; pp.35-61
Freedom House, 2024, *Freedom in the World 2024: The Mounting Damage of Flawed Elections and Armed Conflict*. [online] Freedom House. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW_2024_DigitalBooklet.pdf [Accessed 26 August 2025]
- Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How Democracies Die*. Crown Publishing Group. Chapters 1-2, 4-5; pp. 16-47, 63-98.
- Mounk, Y. (2018). *The People vs. Democracy: Why our Freedom is in Danger and How to Save It*. Harvard University Press. Chapter 3; pp. 99-131
- Ryan, A. (2017). Liberalism. In R.E. Goodin, P. Pettit & T. Pogge (Eds.) *A companion to contemporary political philosophy*. 360-382