

PSCI 118: Power to the People?
Fall 2018
Hopkins 400/Sawyer 308

Nicole Mellow
Office: SAB 235

Phone: x3730
Email: nmellow@williams.edu

Course Description:

“It is a dignified proposition with us—is it not?—that as is the majority, so ought the government to be.”

-Woodrow Wilson, “Leaders of Men,” June 17, 1890

Popular sovereignty — or the idea that the people rule themselves — has been heralded as one of the preeminent ideas of modernity. And over the course of the last two hundred or so years, a rising tide of nations committed themselves to the principles of popular sovereignty. Yet in recent years, the inevitability, soundness, and very viability of “rule by the people” have come into question. On the one hand, popular uprisings around the globe have rejected the decisions and practices of governing elites on the grounds that they are out of touch with the people’s needs. On the other hand, these uprisings have resurrected and strengthened authoritarian practices and have facilitated the erosion of liberal rights long considered instrumental to preserving democracy. The result — turmoil, unrest, and uncertainty about what the future holds — is evident from Venezuela to England, Turkey to the United States. Can popular sovereignty survive? In what form, and at what cost?

This class is an investigation into the idea and practice of popular sovereignty in the contemporary United States. We will explore this topic by actively consulting theory and empirical research in the social sciences. We will supplement this with our own research on the 2018 election, media coverage of issues, popular attitudes about democracy, and popular representation in government and by interest/advocacy groups. In other words, this class is part discussion seminar and part hands-on active research.

Additionally, this class is organized as a collaboration with a similarly structured first-year course being taught at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Over the course of the semester, the two classes will meet frequently via videoconference to share research and discuss readings and ideas (on the course outline, all dates that are starred (**)) are dates when we will spend a portion of the class in video conference). This is intended to broaden the perspectives brought to bear on our investigation generally and, specifically, to allow each class to share, for comparative purposes, real time research on the politics of the region in which their respective institutions are located. Finally, the two classes will meet in Washington, DC, in November (roughly November 15-17) to complete the collaborative research investigation. (Students who cannot come on the trip may participate in an alternative assignment and will not be penalized.)

One aim of this course is to introduce you to the concept of popular sovereignty in theory and practice. Another aim is to help you develop research skills and inclinations. This will help you if you pursue additional coursework, a major, or even a thesis in the social sciences. More than that, though, our aim is to encourage you, many of whom are just beginning your lives as rights- and responsibility-bearing participatory citizens, to think innovatively and creatively about the tasks, challenges, and opportunities of popular sovereignty. Our hope is to model forms of open-minded exploration, civil discussion, and creative investigation that we believe are necessary for citizens to rejuvenate popular governance in this moment.

Course Materials:

There is one book needed for this class: Jan Werner Muller, *What is Populism?* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017). Additional readings are online (accessible with hyperlinks in the syllabus or available on the course Glow site).

All readings should be completed by the day for which they are assigned. Please note that there is considerable variation in the reading load for any given day and/or week. Some weeks we will be reading quite a lot. In others, there will be much less as we will be focussed on other types of research and writing tasks. It is your job to plan your work accordingly.

Course Requirements:

Active Class Participation (20 percent): One of your primary responsibilities for this class is active participation. This means that you come to class having completed the reading and any other assignments and that you actively engage in discussion and other activities with thoughtful and intelligent input. To facilitate this, you are required to post a question and comment on the day's reading(s) **at least four times during the semester on Glow**. Think of these as *very* short blog posts or comments on a news article — they can be written in a casual tone (though complete sentences and coherent thought are required). These are ungraded, but failure to do these or doing them in haste or thoughtlessly will impact your participation grade. They are intended to help you organize your thoughts in advance of our class discussion and to give me some sense of how students are responding to the readings so that I can direct discussion accordingly. Be prepared to present and defend your ideas in class. Additionally, you may occasionally be called upon to present the ideas in one of the day's reading assignment. If you happen to be caught unprepared (it happens to all of us), you are allowed two passes in the semester before it impacts your participation grade.

Three essays (20 percent each): There is a 4-5 page essay due at the end of each of the three sections of the class (due dates: Friday, September 28 at 5 p.m.; Sunday, October 28 at 5 p.m.; and in class on Thursday, 12/6). While the first assignment is primarily a readings based essay, the subsequent two will integrate our research projects as well as readings. For the third essay, in particular, you will be asked to reflect on the research that emerges from the DC trip (or school based alternative) as well as course readings. Precise details of the assignments will be handed out at least two weeks before they are due.

Media and Election Day Group Projects (10 percent each): These are graded group or team research projects, potentially in collaboration with UNC student(s).

Completing these requirements fully and adequately will earn you a B in the course. Completing them exceptionally well will earn you a B+, A-, or A, depending on the quality of work. Not completing them, or completing them less than adequately, will earn you a B- or below.

Academic Honesty: I expect you to abide by the Williams Honor Code. In particular, there is much collaborative work that is required for this class, but all written work for which you are individually responsible should be done independently. Ideas and arguments taken from other authors need to be properly cited — when in doubt, cite.

Course Outline:

I. The Crisis of the Moment and Why We Should Care About Popular Sovereignty

September 6: Visions of Democracy

- *Federalist Papers*, #10 and #51, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed10.asp and http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed51.asp
- Sharon Statement, <http://www.yaf.org/news/the-sharon-statement/>
- Port Huron Statement, http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/SDS_Port_Huron.html

And *one* of the following:

- Black Lives Matter Statement of Purpose <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/what-we-believe/>
- Occupy Wall Street, First Official Press Release <http://occupywallst.org/forum/first-official-release-from-occupy-wall-street/>
- Trump's inaugural address <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/the-inaugural-address/>
- Tea Party Patriots Mission Statement, <https://www.teapartypatriots.org/ourvision/>

Discussion questions: What visions of democracy are promoted, implicitly or explicitly, in the first three documents (*Federalist Papers*, Sharon Statement, and the Port Huron Statement)? Do today's politicians and candidates align themselves with one vision of democracy more than another? In comparing contemporary and original statements, what are the different visions of democracy being promoted? To what extent do they depend on the veracity of the truth claims being made?

September 11**:

Introduction to UNC class and learn about their perspective on Election 2018

Discussion questions: What are some key, interesting insights about Southern politics that you learned from the UNC presentations in our meeting today? Think about how to find corollary information from Northeastern politics that you (in groups) can present to UNC students on the 13th.

September 13:** **Do we still believe in democracy?**

- Yascha Mounk, “Still the One,” *Slate*, 4/23/18

<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/04/shania-twain-and-the-crisis-of-american-democracy-really.html>

- Ari Adut, “A Theory of Scandal: Victorians, Homosexuality, and the Fall of Oscar Wilde,” *American Journal of Sociology* 2005, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/428816>

Discussion questions: Why, according to Mounk (and the authors he cites), do substantial segments of the public who acknowledge his deceits continue to support Donald Trump? What insight does this provide about public support for the broader political system, and what might account for this? How does Adut’s theory help to flesh this out or add to our understanding? Can we apply it, as he does in limited fashion, to American political, economic, and social life in recent decades?

Assignment: Come to class prepared to frame Northeast election cycle politics in 2018 for UNC students.

First Essay assignment will be distributed in class.

September 18: **Voters and Disagreement**

- *Vox* interview with Larry Bartels and Christopher Achen, “Two Eminent Political Scientists: The Problem with Democracy is Voters,” *Vox*, 2016,

<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/6/1/15515820/donald-trump-democracy-brexit-2016-election-europe>

- Marc Hetherington, “Why Polarized Trust Matters,” *The Forum*, 2015 (**GLOW**)
- Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort* (2008) excerpt on NPR, 2008, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92292747>
- Lynn Vavreck, “A Measure of Identity: Are You Wedded to Your Party?” *NYT*, 1/31/17, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/31/upshot/are-you-married-to-your-party.html>
- Chris Wells et al, “When We Stop Talking Politics: The Maintenance and Closing of Conversation in Contentious Times,” *Journal of Communication*, 2017, (click on link to PDF in <https://academic.oup.com/joc/article/67/1/131/4082436>)
- Natasha Lennard and Nicholas Mirzoeff, “What Protest Looks Like,” *NYT*, 8/3/2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/03/opinion/what-protest-looks-like.html>
- Mohammad Ali Kadivar and Neil Ketchley, “Sticks, Stones, and Molotov Cocktails: Collective Violence and Democratization,” 2018, <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/tdcae/>

Discussion questions: Based on these readings, how did the U.S. get to the point it is now at? What key factors appear to have driven or sustained polarization? Building on this, can we think of solutions (behavioral, cultural, or institutional) that might begin to address polarization and tribalism? What limits should there be on how people express and pursue disagreement?

September 20:** **Solutions and limits on tribalism**

Assignment: Come prepared to present solutions from our September 18 discussion and be ready to discuss and critique the solutions offered by UNC students.

Additional discussion questions: How out of bounds should violence be? Taking seriously the notion that violence in some cases is something that individuals and groups feel is being perpetrated by the state against them, are there acceptable grounds for “self-defense” and who decides?

II. The Challenge of the Public -- Seeking Unity in Diversity?

September 25: What is the Public? Does it Exist?

- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, selection on popular sovereignty (GLOW)
- Edmund S. Morgan. *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America*. New York: WW Norton, pp. 13-15, 55-77, 263-287. (GLOW)
- Buskirk, “If there’s a Red Wave Election in 2018, This Will be Why,” *NYT*, June 8, 2018
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/08/opinion/sunday/if-theres-a-red-wave-election-in-2018-this-will-be-why.html>

Discussion Questions: How are the concepts of popular sovereignty and the public treated in these different readings? What do they seem to mean and what are the assumptions about their functioning?

September 27: The Public in the 21st Century

- Noortje Marres, “Issues Spark a Public Into Being: A Key But Often Forgotten Point of the Lippmann-Dewey Debate.” pp. 208-217 in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds., *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005. (GLOW)
- Melvin Rogers, “Democracy Is a Habit: Practice It.” *Boston Review* July 25, 2018.
<http://bostonreview.net/politics/melvin-rogers-democracy-habit-practice-it>
- “Parks and Rec” episode --TBA

Discussion Questions: What is the vision of the public and/or democracy that is implicit or explicit in each of these treatments? How do they compare to the readings we did for September 25? How is our understanding of popular sovereignty challenged, undone, or reinforced through the narrative arc of the Parks and Rec episode (i.e., a contemporary popular take)?

Friday, September 28, 5 pm: First essay due

October 2: The Public and Imagined Communities

- Cato #3, 1787, in *The Founders’ Constitution*
<http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch4s16.html>
- Samuel Huntington, “One Nation Out of Many: Why ‘Americanization’ of Newcomers is Still Important,” *American Enterprise Institute*, 2004,
<http://www.aei.org/publication/one-nation-out-of-many/>
- Sarah Song, “What Does it Mean to be an American?” *Daedalus*, Spring 2009,
<https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/daed.2009.138.2.31>
- “The 9.9% is the New American Aristocracy,” *The Atlantic*
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/06/the-birth-of-a-new-american-aristocracy/559130/>

- Katherine Cramer, “The Views of Populists: What Trump Voters’ Perspectives and Perceptions of Trump Voters Tell Us About Democracy,” 2017, https://faculty.polisci.wisc.edu/kwalsh2/wp-content/uploads/2017/October/Cramer_VIEWS-of-populists_PrincetonIdentity2017_FINAL_r.pdf

Discussion questions: What is it that binds Americans into one common public? What are the limitations of this? Are the concerns expressed by anti-federalists, like Cato, at the founding still relevant, albeit expressed in new or different forms? Which, if any, of the authors might agree with the basic concerns outlined by Cato? Is there a tension between what binds Americans and the lived experience of (some) Americans? How might this be resolved, or is it insurmountable -- and if so, what does that mean for the notion of a common will? Do we even need a common public?

October 4:** **The Public in Practice**

- Declaration of Independence. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>
- Constitution and Bill of Rights. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript> and <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript>
- NC Constitution, <https://www.ncleg.net/Legislation/constitution/nccconstitution.html>
- MA Constitution, <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/Constitution>

Assignment: UNC students will present key ideas from the North Carolina constitution; Williams students will present key ideas from the Massachusetts constitution.

Group discussion: how do these documents try to address the matters discussed in the prior 3 classes, issues of democracy, publics, and community? Where are there indications of unity? Where division?

October 9: **Reading Period — No class.**

October 11: **The public made by the media**

- Sarah Sobieraj and Jeffrey M. Berry. “From Incivility to Outrage: Political Discourse in Blogs, Talk Radio, and Cable News.” *Political Communication* 28:1 (2011): 19-41, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10584609.2010.542360> (also in GLOW)
- Christopher Bail, Lisa Argyle, Taylor Brown, John Bumpus, Haohan Chen, M. B. Fallin Hunzaker, Jaemin Lee, Marcus Mann, Friedolin Merhout, and Alexander Volfovsky. “Exposure to Opposing Views can Increase Political Polarization: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment on Social Media.” <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/4ygux/>
- Mostafa El-Berwamy, “Your Echo Chamber is Destroying Democracy,” *Wired*, November 18/16, <https://www.wired.com/2016/November/filter-bubble-destroying-democracy/>
- Diana Mutz, “Effects of ‘In-Your-Face’ Television Discourse on Perceptions of a Legitimate Opposition,” *APSR* 101:4 (2007), (click on PDF in <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000305540707044X>)
- Andrew Guess, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler, “Selective Exposure to Misinformation: Evidence from the consumption of fake news during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign,” *European Research Council*, 1/September 18, <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/fake-news-2016.pdf>
- Levi Boxell, Matthew Gentzkow, Jesse Shapiro, “Is the Internet Causing Political Polarization: Evidence from Demographics,” *NBER Working Paper*, March 2017 <https://www.nber.org/papers/w23258>

Discussion questions: Is the media merely a mirror to society? In what ways is it and in what ways is it not? How might we reconcile the different conclusions of the authors we've read for today? Are some forms and forums of media more egregious in their impact on public discourse and citizen support of a common public? How so? Is there any incentive to change, and if not, might an incentive be conceived and implemented? In other words, if media is part of the problem in constructing a deliberative, rational public, how can the problem be made better?

Group project of the media assignment introduced. See hand-out.

October 16: Obstacles to a Common Public

- “Perceived Accuracy and Bias in the News Media.” Gallup/Knight Foundation, 2018. https://kf-site-production.s3.amazonaws.com/publications/pdfs/000/000/255/original/KnightFoundation_AccuracyandBias_Report_FINAL.pdf
- Tamar Wildner. “We can probably measure media bias. But do we want to?” *Columbia Journalism Review* January 9, 2018. <https://www.cjr.org/innovations/measure-media-bias-partisan.php>
- Prasad, M. , Perrin, A. J., Bezila, K. , Hoffman, S. G., Kindleberger, K. , Manturuk, K. , Powers, A. S. and Payton, A. R. (2009), “The Undeserving Rich: ‘Moral Values’ and the White Working Class.” *Sociological Forum*, 24: 225-253. doi:[10.1111/November.j.1573-7861.2009.01098.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/November.j.1573-7861.2009.01098.x)
- Michael Dawson, “After the Deluge” *WEB Dubois Review*, 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X06060176>
- Mackuen, Wolak, Keele, Marcus, “Civic Engagements: Resolute Partisanship or Reflective Deliberation?” *AJPS*, 2010 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25652216>
- Robert Putnam NPR interview, “Does Diversity Really Work?” <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12802663>

Discussion questions: Can media be a corrective for a divided public? Can the public acquire information in such a way that citizens can come to see a common “truth” (even if they disagree on the merits or solutions for that issue/policy “truth”)? Why or why not? What are the most salient lines of division, and why, in the quest for creating a common, deliberating public?

Second Essay assignment will be distributed in class.

October 18: Prepare group presentations on media.

October 23:** Media group project presentations

October 25:** Media group project presentations

October 28, 5:00 pm: Second essay due on challenge of public

III. The Challenge of Representation

October 30:** Elections and Representation

- Hannah F. Pitkin, “On Representation,” pp. 8-12 (as excerpted) **(GLOW)**
- Andrew Reynolds, “North Carolina is No Longer a Democracy”
<http://www.newsobserver.com/opinion/op-ed/article122593759.html> and “North Carolina’s democracy was bad at the start of 2017. A year later it’s much worse.”
<http://www.newsobserver.com/opinion/op-ed/article198165644.html>
- Susan Myrick. ‘Nonpartisan’ Redistricting Is Just a Fantasy. NC Civitas, January 20, 2017.
<https://www.nccivitas.org/2017/nonpartisan-redistricting-just-fantasy/>
- Jane Mansbridge. “Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent ‘Yes’” *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 3. (Aug., 1999), pp. 628-657.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2647821.pdf>
- Lani Guinier. “Groups, Representation, and Race Conscious Districting: A Case of the Emperor’s Clothes.” Chapter 5 in *The Tyranny of the Majority: Fundamental Fairness in Representative Democracy*. New York: Free Press, 1994. **(GLOW)**
- Percy Bacon Jr., “Why the Republican Party Elects so Few Women,” *fivethirtyeight*
<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/why-the-republican-party-isnt-electing-more-women/>
- NYT Editorial, “Vote for me! For second place at least,” *NYT*, 6/0September 18
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/08September/opinion/ranked-choice-voting-maine-san-francisco.html>

Discussion questions: What does it mean to “represent” the public? One might argue that representing the public will in government is only as good as the rules that facilitate that representation: Do you think that’s true? And if yes, how good are the current rules for representation? Do American rules facilitate one kind of representation better than another — and is that problematic from the perspective of popular sovereignty?

November 1:** **More than just elections: The role of intermediaries**

- Samuel Huntington, “Paradigms of American Politics: Beyond the One, The Two, and the Many,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 1974, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2148113>
- APSA Committee on Political Parties, *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, 1950, excerpt in *The Enduring Debate*, 2nd ed. David Canon, et al. eds., 2000, **(GLOW)**
- Dara Z. Strolovitch, “Do Interest Groups Represent the Disadvantaged? Advocacy at the Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender,” *Journal of Politics* (2006),
<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1111November.j.1468-2508.2006.00478.x>
- Kathleen Bawn, Martin Cohen, David Karol, Seth Masket, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, “A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands, and Nominations in American Politics,” in *Perspectives on Politics*, 10:3 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592712001624>

Discussion questions: What might parties do to bridge the representative gap between the people and the government? How well do they do it? Are interest groups better? Why or why not? Huntington reviews social science theories about how American politics tend to work -- democracy through parties (representing classes) or democracy through interest group pluralism is part of what he’s reflecting upon in this essay. We might think of these paradigms as operational, to greater or lesser degrees, in times of normal politics — but in times of upheaval, he suggests something new comes to the fore. Do you think generations might function as intermediaries for the (progressive) public will—in other words, can a new generation effectively create a public will?

November 6: Election Day

Exercise: Read about the rules surrounding the local election (and election place). Visit and observe the election place. Interview voters, election staff, and campaign staff (outside the election site). Take photos and videos, as allowed by local rules. How did they decide whom to vote for? What are the most important issues? Do voters feel represented? Are their outcomes that would make them feel more or less represented? How easy do they find voting to be?

November 8:** **Debrief: What happened Tuesday?**

November 13: **Governing Institutions in the U.S.**

- Sanford Levinson, with Robert Post and Barney Frank, “Our Undemocratic Constitution: Where the U.S. Constitution Goes Wrong (and How We the People Can Correct It)” exchange in the *Bulletin of the American Academy of the Arts and Sciences*, Winter 2007. <https://amacad.org/publications/bulletin/winter2007/undemocratic.pdf>
- Sarah Binder, “The Dysfunctional Congress,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2015. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-polisci-110813-032156>
- Frances Lee, “How Party Polarization Affects Governance,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2015. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-polisci-072012-113747>
- Paul Pierson, “Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics,” *American Political Science Review* 94:2 (2000) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2586011>
- Sarah Binder, “Three Reasons You Should Expect Congressional Gridlock on Gun Control,” *Washington Post*, 2018. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/02/27/yes-you-can-expect-congressional-gridlock-on-gun-regulations-these-are-the-3-biggest-barriers-to-action/>

Discussion questions: How well do U.S. institutions convert public will into outcomes? What are the problems or obstacles to their democratic performance? Is there an argument to be made against them being more democratic?

November 15: **Students travelling to Washington: no class.**

Assignment for students not on trip: small research project on public opinion and representation; assignment will be provided in class.

November 20:** **Debrief and discuss DC trip and non-traveling students’ projects**

Third Essay assignment will be distributed in class.

November 22: **Thanksgiving break — no class**

November 27: **Popular Sovereignty and Challenges in the U.S. and Beyond**

- Muller, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2
- Zilinsky and Rohac, “Saving Democracy From Its Defenders.” *The American Interest* June 25, 2018. <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2018/06/25/saving-democracy-from-its-defenders/>

Discussion questions: What is populism, according to Muller? How does populism relate to our ideas of the public will? What are the hallmarks of populist leadership and what should we be wary of if we still value popular sovereignty and democracy? How worried should we be?

November 29:**

- Muller, Chapter 3, Conclusion, and Afterward

Discussion questions: What remedies exist, for Muller, if we care about managing the downsides inherent in populism? How does the book, overall, relate to insights about the challenges of public and institutional responsiveness that we've discussed in the course?

Additional assignment: Start constitutional design exercise (each class comes up with 4 or 5 principles)

December 4:** Constitutional design discussion

December 6: **Wrap-up**

Third Essay Due in Class