

Democratic Politics: Institutions, Media, and Society (STS 325)

New Jersey Institute of Technology

Instructor Information

Instructor	Email	Office Hours
Prof. Doron Shultziner	ds2469@njit.edu	Thursdays after class, 11:30-12:30
Classroom:	FMH 313 Tuesday/Thursday	Office: Cullimore 431B

Course title: Democratic Politics: Institutions, Media, and Society

Course number: STS 325

Prerequisites: none

Course description:

This course introduces three major aspects of democratic politics in a comparative perspective. In the first part of the course, we will compare the presidential system (e.g., USA) to the parliamentary democratic system model (e.g., Europe, Israel), such as how politicians are elected to office, how a coalition is formed, and the powers of a President relative to a Prime Minister. In the second part of the course, we will explore the interrelation between politics, parties, politicians, and the media in democracies, and learn how to prepare political advertisements. In the third part of the course, we will investigate how civil society and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) affect politics in democracies. We will also explore why and when people mobilize to affect political decision-making and explore examples from effective nonviolent protests that shaped important political outcomes in democracies.

Learning outcomes:

By the end of the semester, students will be able to...

1. Analyze the advantages and challenges of presidential and parliamentary political systems and propose a reform of a political system.
2. Form a coalition government in a parliamentary system.
3. Identify and distinguish between different types of political parties.
4. Understand how politicians use media.
5. Write political messages for different political parties.
6. Understand how civil society can affect public decisions, especially through protests.
7. Become familiar with successful cases of civic action and social movements.
8. Create recommendations for political movements on how to influence political decision makers in a democracy.

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Required Books:

Mahler, G. S., & Hazan, R. Y. (2024). *Politics and government in Israel* (4th ed.). State University of New York Press. [henceforth, Mahler & Hazan, 2024].

McCormick, J., Hague, R., & Harrop, M. (2025). *Comparative Government and Politics* (13th ed.). Bloomsbury Academic. [henceforth, McCormick, Hague & Harrop, 2025].

Course work:

Component	Weight
Active course attendance	10%
Class debate on presidential v. parliamentary systems	5%
Presentation assignment	10%
Mid-term assignment – building an ideal political system	25%
In-class assignment, coalition formation	10%
Group work assignment – political ads	5%
Presentation assignment – political ads	5%
Final assignment	30%
Bonus points for voluntary extra-credit assignments and final quiz	1-5 bonus points

Grading Policy: the grading scale is based on an absolute scale. Numerical scores are converted to letter grades.

Academic Integrity: According to the NJIT policy,

“Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: [NJIT Academic Integrity Code](#).

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu”

Generative AI policy: AI tools are great tools to explore topics and help in many ways. They are not meant to be substitutes for your own original thoughts, analyses and writing. Unless otherwise instructed, all course work should be your original writing and analyses.

Class Recording: the class lectures may be recorded by the instructor and will be accessible on CANVAS for the benefit of the students. These recordings shall only be used as an educational resource and are not to be distributed or used outside of this class.

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Course Schedule:

Date	Course Content
Tuesday, September 02, 2025	Introduction, course objectives, the rules of political power <i>Reading:</i> Mahler & Hazan, 2024, pp. 97-101.
Thursday, September 04, 2025	The executive branch – lecture <i>Readings:</i> Mahler & Hazan, 2024, pp. 133-134, 140-145 (from “The Prime Minister”). McCormick, Hague & Harrop, 2025, pp. 185-186, 191-198.
Tuesday, September 09, 2025	The executive branch – lecture and class exercise <i>Readings:</i> Mahler & Hazan, 2024, pp. 133-134, 140-145 (from “The Prime Minister”). McCormick, Hague & Harrop, 2025, pp. 185-186, 191-198.
Thursday, September 11, 2025	The legislative branch – lecture <i>Readings:</i> Mahler & Hazan, 2024, pp. 118-132. McCormick, Hague & Harrop, 2025, pp. 213-224.
Tuesday, September 16, 2025	The legislative branch – lecture and class exercise <i>Readings:</i> Mahler & Hazan, 2024, pp. 118-132. McCormick, Hague & Harrop, 2025, pp. 213-224.
Thursday, September 18, 2025	The judiciary – lecture and class exercise <i>Readings:</i> Mahler & Hazan, 2024, pp. 107-112, 147-152. McCormick, Hague & Harrop, 2025, pp. 167-175.
Tuesday, September 23, 2025	Checks and balances – lecture <i>Readings:</i> Mahler & Hazan, 2024, pp. 153-158. McCormick, Hague & Harrop, 2025, pp. 95-96.
Thursday, September 25, 2025	Which system is better? Class debate on presidential versus parliamentary political systems
Tuesday, September 30, 2025	Presentations based on home assignment on two points to reform either a parliamentary or a presidential system. Summary of topic 1, explanation and preparation for the first assignment
Thursday, October 02, 2025	Wellness Day – No class
Tuesday, October 07, 2025	Types of political parties and what are they good for? <i>Readings:</i> Mahler & Hazan, 2024, pp. 187-199. McCormick, Hague & Harrop, 2025, pp. 375-370, 381-382, 388-389.

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Thursday, October 09, 2025	How are politicians selected? <i>Readings:</i> Mahler & Hazan, 2024, pp. 187-199. McCormick, Hague & Harrop, 2025, pp. 375-370, 381-382, 388-389.
Tuesday, October 14, 2025	Mapping parties in Israel <i>Reading:</i> Mahler & Hazan, 2024, pp. 166-168, 199-204.
Thursday, October 16, 2025	Coalition formation – theories and principles of application <i>Reading:</i> Mahler & Hazan, 2024, pp. 134-140.
Tuesday, October 21, 2025	Coalition formation – theories and principles of application – pre-assignment trial <i>Reading:</i> Kenig, O. (2013). Coalition Building in Israel: A Guide for the Perplexed. The Israel Democracy Institute. https://en.idi.org.il/articles/10248
Thursday, October 23, 2025	In-class assignment – coalition formation
Tuesday, October 28, 2025	Politicians and the media – class lecture <i>Reading:</i> Markowitz-Elfassi, D., Sheaffer, T., Tsfati, Y., Weimann, G., & Wolfsfeld, G. (2018). Political communication and Israeli politics, pp. 643-647, in Reuven Y. Hazan (ed.) et al., <i>The Oxford Handbook of Israeli Politics and Society</i> . Oxford University Press.
Thursday, October 30, 2025	Principles of effective political advertisements – class exercise
Tuesday, November 04, 2025	Analyzing political messages for different parties – class exercise <i>Materials:</i> 14 campaign ads that will give you a taste of the 2022 Israeli elections: https://unpacked.media/14-campaign-ads-that-will-give-you-a-taste-of-the-israeli-elections/ Political advertisements from the 2019 election campaigns: https://israelpolicyforum.org/2019/04/03/a-closer-look-at-israeli-election-ads/
Thursday, November 06, 2025	Group work – preparing political ads for parties (5%)
Tuesday, November 11, 2025	Presentations based on a written home assignment – a campaign advertisement for a political party (5%)
Thursday, November 13, 2025	How civil society affects public decisions? Part A – strategy <i>Readings:</i> Mahler & Hazan, 2024, pp. 207-213.
Tuesday, November 18, 2025	How civil society affects public decisions? Part B – tactics

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	Readings: Michael A. Beer. 2021. <i>Civil Resistance Tactics in the 21st Century</i> . International Center on Nonviolent Conflict. Pp. 11-18. https://commonslibrary.org/topic/tactics/
Thursday, November 20, 2025	Case study: The movement against democratic backsliding in Israel – part A Shultziner, D. (2023). <i>The movement against democratic backsliding in Israel</i> . Sociological Forum, 38(4): 896-903. https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12921
Tuesday, November 25, 2025	Case study: The movement against democratic backsliding in Israel – part B Shultziner, D. (2023). <i>The movement against democratic backsliding in Israel</i> . Sociological Forum, 38(4): 896-903. https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12921
Tuesday, December 02, 2025	Creating your campaign – class exercise
Thursday, December 04, 2025	Creating your campaign – presentations
Tuesday, December 09, 2025	Final class, summary, post-course quiz, and final assignment preparation
Tuesday, December 16, 2025	Final assignment submission deadline