

**Professor Crawford**

**Is Liberalism Ending?**

**Tuesdays, 10:00 a.m. –12:00 p.m. September 25 to October 30 2018**

Course Description:

There are signs that a political crisis is afflicting Western liberal democracies. Authoritarian and “illiberal” leaders are rising to power. Institutional constraints on their power are weakening. In the United States, Americans and others around the world took solace in the idea that strong institutions and the US Constitution would protect American Democracy after the 2016 election. But by mid-2018 it appeared to many that the institutional shock absorbers might be less than robust. Both in the US and in Europe, institutional checks and balances have weakened; press freedom has been curbed by corporate takeovers in the U.S. and by government fiat in Hungary and Poland. The judiciary is losing its independence. Many in the U.S. believe that the Supreme Court is no longer a wise and impartial adjudicator of the inevitable disputes that arise in any society. Liberal democratic norms such as a commitment to rule of law, trust in a free press, a belief in human equality and freedom, and a loss of faith in the electoral and economic systems are eroding. According to Freedom House, there is a global decline in freedom around the world. In international politics, the post-World War II international liberal order is at risk. The United States has begun to relinquish leadership of that order. A group of large, populous, increasingly wealthy, and undemocratic or fragile democratic states with governments hostile to liberalism—China, Russia, and India—have achieved great-power status. They have begun to challenge the Western conception of order based on the primacy of liberal post-World War II rules, and the establishment of alternative international institutions. The international economic system had become increasingly Balkanized much before Donald Trump threatened to unleash trade wars. Russia’s invasion and seizure of territory in Ukraine, the weakening of the European Union in the wake of Brexit, the euro crisis, the emergence of anti-liberal non-state actors and their successful efforts to fragment and undermine governance around the globe; the ascendance of authoritarian states, the rise of the extreme right— all these have combined to put liberalism at risk.

This course will explore these trends and address the following questions: What is Liberalism, and what are its alternatives? How is it related to Democracy? When and how did Liberalism emerge as a dominant foundation of economics and governance? What are its strengths and what are its weaknesses? What dangers does a “post-truth” environment pose to liberalism? Can history teach us anything about how and why liberal democracies fail, or do we face a set of unique circumstances today?

Suggested reading:

Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, W. W. Norton, 2007

Walter Laquer, *After the Fall: The End of the European Dream and the Decline of the Continent*, Thomas Dunne Books, 2012

Henry Luce, *The Retreat of Western Liberalism*, Atlantic Monthly Press, 2017

Stephen Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, Crown Press, 2018

Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*, 2017, and *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*, Tim Duggan Books, 2018

Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, Yale University Press, 2018

Yascha Mounk, *The People Vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom is in Danger and How to Save It*, Harvard University Press, 2018

Steven Pinker and Robert Muggah, “Is Liberal Democracy in Retreat?” (a push-back against the view that liberal democracy is in decline) <https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/is-liberal-democracy-in-retreat-by-stein-pinker-and-robert-muggah-2018-03>

### **Course Outline** (subject to revision and expansion)\*

**Session I:** What is Liberalism? How did it emerge historically? What are the differences between classical, progressive, and neo-liberalism? Is there a difference between social liberalism, economic liberalism, and political liberalism? Why should we care? Why do we call the United States a “liberal democracy?” What are the alternatives to liberalism? What is an “illiberal democracy?”

**Session II:** How did Liberalism come to be a dominant global ideology, when were international liberal institutions established, and when did the “liberal international order” begin to weaken? Was it ever really liberal, international, or orderly? A brief 20<sup>th</sup> century history

**Session III:** The possible causes of Liberalism’s Retreat: globalization, economic inequality, inherent weaknesses, the problem of rationality, the contradictions between political liberalism and neo-liberalism

**Session IV:** Can we learn from history? What caused Liberal Democracy to fail in the past? Are conditions today so different that history has nothing to teach us?

- Case study of Weimar Germany.

**Session V:** The problem of Liberalism in a post-truth environment

- Case study of migration and asylum politics and policy

**Session VI: Can and should Liberalism be saved? A Liberal's strategies for survival**

\*Because this outline was submitted three months before the beginning of the course, it is subject to change in the coming weeks and months. The most updated version will be published on my web site <http://bev.berkeley.edu>