

How Democracies Thrive: Resilience, Repair, and Reform in Democracy

Short Course for Master's and PhD Students
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In recent years, much has been written about democratic decline, democratic backlash, and even how democracies die. This short course takes a different angle. Instead of focusing on breakdown, we will explore how democracies survive and thrive by building resilience, repair and reform themselves, and sometimes even emerge stronger. We will look at the role of different actors, institutions and discourses in this process: from social movements and deliberative practices to political leaders and everyday citizens. Conceptually, the course is organised around three themes: **democratic resilience**, **democratic repair**, and **democratic reform**. Through these concepts and practical examples, you will gain a deeper understanding of how democracies respond to challenges, sustain their resilience, and find ways to innovate. Each session comes with a reading, which can be accessed [here](#). You are encouraged to engage with it ahead of the session. We will also allocate time to discuss your own projects, how you approach them, and how they relate (or not relate) to what we cover in this course.

Week 1 | Introduction: Charting the Living Field of Democracy, 10 September 2025

What do we study when we study democracy? What are the central problems democracy research addresses? Where does your project fit in this field?

Reading: Wedeen, L. (2004). Concepts and commitments in the study of democracy. In: *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics* (pp. 274–306), Cambridge University Press.

Week 2 | Democratic Resilience: Surviving the Crisis, 17 September 2025

What is democratic resilience? What are the key concepts and debates? What are the practical steps for building democratic resilience?

Reading: Holloway, J., & Manwaring, R. (2023). [How well does 'resilience' apply to democracy? A systematic review](#). *Contemporary Politics*, 29(1), 68-92.

Week 3 | Democratic Repair: Mending the Cracks, 24 September 2025

How do democracies mend broken trust, institutions, or social bonds? What does “repair” mean in democratic contexts? Who is responsible for democratic repair?

Reading: Hendriks, C., Ercan, S. A., & Boswell, J. (2020). *Mending Democracy: Democratic repair in disconnected times* (pp. 1–22). Oxford University Press.

Week 4 | Democratic Reform: Opening New Pathways, 1 October 2025

How can democracies not only survive and repair but also innovate? What is a democratic innovation? What is the role of social movements in democratic innovations?

Reading: Chwalisz, C. (2022). [A movement that's quietly reshaping democracy for the better](#). *Noema Magazine*.

Flesher Fominaya, C. M. (2022). [Reconceptualizing democratic innovation: “Democratic innovation repertoires” and their impact within and beyond social movements](#). *Democratic Theory*, 9(2), 78–100.

Week 5 | Wrap-up: Key highlights and your projects, 8 October 2025