

SOCI 438 A02¹

Issues in Contemporary Sociology: Democratic Decline, Citizenship, and Gender.

Instructor:

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Course Description:

What does democratic decline and the rise of authoritarianism mean for citizenship rights? What role do women play in promoting anti-democratic politics, and how are they in turn impacted by the success of these politics? How do gendered frames of citizenship feed into anti-immigrant politics?

In this course, we'll be trying to answer these questions and more. The course will focus on the European context but will include comparison with Canada and beyond.

Recent decades have seen important shifts in European politics of belonging. As part of a broader project of European integration, citizens of EU member states have the right to live and work across the European Union without needing a visa or any residency permits. They also have access to the social services system of their host country, just as the citizens of that country do. These fundamental shifts in the boundaries around citizenship, as inclusive and progressive as they are, have triggered a regressive and nativist backlash.

Anti-immigrant politics are, perhaps, the most visible outgrowth of this regressive backlash, championed by radical right political parties across Europe. The newest French radical right party, *Reconquête*, for one, include in their platform a promise to end immigration in all its different forms along with a laundry list of concrete actions meant to 'strengthen' France. Among these actions are promises to cut back on social services, to end birthright citizenship, and to provide financial incentives for motherhood in rural communities. The stated aim of these actions is to disincentivize immigration to France, and to incentivize larger families among French nationals. However, the broader effect is to hollow out citizenship rights and to enforce a regressive model of gender relations.

The anti-pluralistic views of the radical right – epitomized by their idealization of an ethnocratic society – is profoundly anti-democratic. This is a view of society where citizenship is not only restricted to members of the ethnonational community, but also where the experience and practice of citizenship is profoundly shaped by gender, class, and race.

¹ This outline is only intended to give an overall sense of the course. A detailed course outline will be made available in August before the first day of class. Only that outline is to be considered official.

Substantive citizenship is a vital ingredient in democratic participation. Substantive citizenship requires that the rights of citizenship be actually realized. The right to education is only realized, and therefore only means anything, when the state ensures that there are enough adequately trained teachers to go around. Similarly, the right to vote is meaningless if you cannot get the time off work to go vote, or if you cannot afford childcare while you go vote.

With this context in mind, this course takes a deeper look at how access to substantive citizenship and democracy is shaped by social position. Beyond that, this course takes up the issue of democratic decline, and its effects on the politics of belonging. In addressing these topics, we will be engaging with contemporary sociological theories of the politics of belonging, feminist perspectives on citizenship and democracy, and the production of gender within regressive political imaginaries.

In this class, we will touch on difficult topics around racism, hate politics, and gender inequality. In light of this, I, as the instructor, will do my utmost to ensure that our class is a brave and caring space. In return, I will expect students to approach difficult discussions with empathy and curiosity.

Given that this class will be delivered in a seminar format, regular and consistent attendance and participation is required. Students are expected to come to class prepared to participate in discussions on the readings. Students will be required to facilitate discussion in at least one class in groups of 3-4. The course will culminate in a research paper on a topic of your choosing related to the themes of the class, along with a (informal) conference style presentation of your paper.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course, you will be able to engage confidently with contemporary theories of citizenship and belonging. You will be able to assess theoretical arguments, and apply them to empirical questions about gender, citizenship, and democracy. You will have also gained important experience in group work, academic presentation, and discussion facilitation.

Course Pre-requisites:

Minimum 4th Year standing; declared Major or Honours in Sociology; or permission of the department.

Topics May Include:

Topics will include: the politics of belonging; citizenship and the state; democratic backsliding and populism; and the role of women in regressive politics. These topics will be connected through a consistent focus on gender, in particular how gender is produced within different politics, and how gender and sexual identities in turn shape political experience and inclusion.

Required Resources May Include:

There is no required textbook for this course. All resources will be made available on the course Brightspace page. Resources will include peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, lectures, videos, and news articles.