An Overview of Democracy’s Contemporary Dysfunctions

I. Introduction to the Course—Its Motivations and Organization

A. Democracy in Dark Times: Beyond a Democratic Recession and into the Territory of Genuine Danger
B. Ways of Valuing Democracy
   1. Intrinsic vs. Instrumental Value
   2. The Bare Idea of Democracy vs. Liberal Democratic Ideals
C. Some Motivating Concerns
   1. Democratic Self-repair
   2. Social Self-protection
   3. Self-reinforcing Cycles of Democratic Decay and Social Stratification
D. Endogenous vs. Exogenous Problems: Is the Trouble with (21st Century Modern Representative) Democracy or Recent Social and Cultural Circumstances that Democracy Can Only Steer?
E. An Overview of Topics to be Covered
F. The Twin Tasks of Democratic Self-repair
   1. Diagnosis
   2. Reform

II. Some Troubling Trends

A. From Nicolás Maduro’s Troubles in Venezuela to the Assent of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil—The Growing Ranks of Left and Right Populist Leaders and Movements in the Democratic World
B. From TINA to Multiple Alternatives
   1. Illiberal Democracy (e.g. Orban’s Hungary, etc.)
   2. Managed Democracy (e.g. Putin’s Russia)
   3. Managed Authoritarianism (e.g. Xi’s China)
C. Placing Trump’s Right Wing Populism in the US in this Broader Context
III. An Important New Work Sheds Light on this Troubling Trend: Yascha Mounk’s *The People vs. Democracy*

A. The Central Argument of Mounk’s Work: Liberal Democracy is Drifting Apart and Being Replaced by Undemocratic Liberalism and Illiberal Democracy
B. The Unresponsiveness to Popular Discontent of Liberal Elites
C. The Illiberalism of Growing and Mobilized Segments of Democratic Electorates

IV. Mounk’s Analytic Framework

A. Revising Assumptions About the Stable Consolidation of Liberal Democracy: Doubly Contingent, not Permanent
B. The Conditions that Stabilize Liberal Democracy
   1. Sustained High Levels of Economic Growth and Rising Standards of Living
   2. Dominance of a Single Racial or Ethnic Group
   3. Strong Elite Control over the Main Media of Communication
C. The Overturning of these Conditions in the Last Quarter Century
   1. Slowing Economic Growth and Declining Standards of Living for Large Segments of Democratic Electorates
   2. Change in Both the Demographics and Cultural Politics of Liberal Democracies
   3. The Democratization of Access to Social Media and Digital Technology and with it the Falling Away of Gate-keepers
D. The Appeal and Promise of Authoritarianism in these Circumstances

V. An Important Case Study: The Transformation of Post-Communist Poland (see Anne Applebaum, “A Warning From Europe,” *Atlantic*, October 2018)

VI. A Few Critical Reflections on this Framework for Analysis