

# Types of Democracy

Lesson 2

# Do we want a democratic constitution?

- Arguments against democracy
- Anarchism – coercion never justified
  - Not specific to democracy
- Guardianship – need skilled rulers
  - Plato and ship of state
  - Central banking & economic policy
  - People are stupid, uninformed, false consciousness
- Toughness – people want or need to be ruled
  - Michels, Schmitt, fascism

# Arguments for democracy

- Prevents long-term tyranny
- Preserves liberal rights
- People are best judges of own interests
- Fair terms of social contract (Rawls)
- Produces best policies (wisdom of crowds, Condorcet)
- Increases legitimacy of government
- Prevents wars (democratic peace)
- An end in itself (zoon politikon)
- Better than other systems

# Democracy's flaws

- Inefficient (campaigns, elections, patronage)
- Ineffective (checks and balances)
  - May need strong authority for state-building, economic reform
- Bad policy choices (uninformed citizens, lobbies)
  - Democratizing states more likely to fight wars
- Creates conflict
  - Can use liberal rights to promote hate (Rwanda)
- Unstable (regular changes of government)
- Ugly (sausages and laws)

# Democratic institutions - Historical background

- Literature from 1950s and 60s
- Two types of democracy (eg, Almond and Verba)
- Good, functioning democracies
  - Government versus loyal opposition
  - Responsible party government
  - UK and US
- Bad, deviant democracies
  - Distinction between government and opposition less clear
  - Instability, changing governments
  - Germany, France, Italy

# Lijphart's contribution

- Deviant democracies are legitimate, democratic alternative
- Initial work on consociationalism in late 1960s
  - A means of regulating conflict in divided societies
  - Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, but also Lebanon
- Later two types of democracy
  - Consensus versus majoritarian
  - Applies even to homogeneous societies
- What questions is he answering?
  - Who governs?
  - Whose interests does government respond to?



# Majoritarian democracy

- Democracy as majority rule
  - Single winner of election
  - Power unified in single body
  - Extreme = temporary elected dictatorship
- Characteristics
  - Competitive, adversarial
  - Exclusiveness
  - How does it represent society?

# Why choose majoritarian?

- Simplicity
- Speed and effectiveness
- Clear choices for voters (may not be capable of more)
- Stable governments
- High accountability

But

- Power corrupts
- Tyranny of majority
- Major discontinuities in policy
- Dissatisfied losers
- Doesn't use all of society's knowledge



# Consensus democracy

- Democracy as giving everyone a voice
  - Let as many as possible participate in government
  - Disperse power to different bodies
- Characteristics
  - Bargaining, compromise
  - Inclusiveness
  - How does it represent society?

# Why choose consensus?

- More representative (women, minorities)
- More opportunities to correct bad decision
- Policy (but not government) stability
- Kinder and gentler

But

- Small majorities can stop popular policies
- Hard to make rapid changes
- Low accountability

# Is one more democratic than other?

- Depends on what you mean by democratic
- Accountability
  - Majoritarian wins: easier to pinpoint responsibility and sanction, but only at election time
- Choice
  - Consensus wins: multiple, divergent parties
- Representation = do politicians do (i) what people want or (ii) what is best for people
  - Unclear, we will refer to later

# How do they relate to traditional ideologies?

- What would a classical liberal/libertarian favor?
- What about a socialist? A communist?
- A traditional conservative (Tory)?
  
- In practice, politicians favor whichever institutions benefit themselves or their party
  - Ruling parties tend to prefer majoritarian institutions
  - Opposition parties tend to prefer consensus

# What type of democracy in postcommunist Europe?

- Doesn't fit Lijphart's scheme, hybrid
- First dimension
  - Many parties, coalition governments, short duration => consensus
  - High disproportionality, weak corporatism => majoritarian
- Second dimension
  - Centralized, weak bicameralism => majoritarian
  - Strong judicial review, rigid constitutions, strong central banks => consensus

# Why doesn't postcommunist region fit?

- Coordination problems
  - High disproportionality because of wasted votes and unconsolidated party systems
  - Weak corporatism because weak unions and business associations
- Communist legacies
  - Few historical parties
  - Unions discredited
  - Inherited unicameral systems
  - Backlash against communist system
- International influences
  - Globalization, markets => weak corporatism
  - Strong judicial review, strong central banks, rigid constitutions

# Problems with Lijphart

- First dimension is mostly the electoral law
- Many measures problematic (eg, cabinet duration)
- Where does presidentialism/parliamentarism fit?
  - President seems majoritarian, but also divides power between executive and legislature
  - Parliament seems consensus, but only if coalition governments (cf., UK)
- Dimensions don't completely cohere
- Where do certain countries fit?
  - US and Latin America

# Another conception?

- G. Bingham Powell, Elections as Instruments of Democracy
  - Proportional versus Majoritarian: electoral rules & policy making rules
  - Similar to Lijphart, but looks at citizen control, not who governs
  - Majoritarian = direct control by citizens – clear choices and accountability
  - Proportional = indirect control – voters choose representative agent who acts on their behalf



# Veto players/veto points

- Veto player/point: actor whose assent is required for policy to be enacted
  - Institutional veto players: senate, president, court
  - Partisan veto players: multi-party system
- Connection between veto players and capacity for policy change
  - Fewer veto players, less potential for policy change
- Is policy change important?
  - Policy change may be associated with government & regime stability
- Majoritarian as few veto players and proportional as many?

# Gerring – Centripetal Democracy

- Flow of power from diverse sources to powerful center
  - Inclusive and authoritative
- Key is PR plus strong government
  - Parliamentary, unitary, closed list PR
  - Sweden as ideal
- Is this what Czech Republic should have?
  - Is Czech Republic moving in opposite direction

# Does type of democracy matter?

- Lijphart: consensus => kinder, gentler government
  - Correlations between type and outcomes
- But endogeneity: choice of institutions not exogenous
- Persson and Tabellini: try to compare like with like
  - Countries that should have same institutions but don't
  - More positive results for majoritarian institutions – lead to better economic policy