

## Australian Politics Notes

### Week 1 - Introduction

- Politics is everywhere
- Politics is the 'master science'
  - Impacts on every facet of human activity
  - Structures society, norms and behaviour
- Mechanism for achieving societal goals
- Politics and government affects everyone
- Equipped with skills to understand and analyse how decisions are made and their impact
- Politics as the study of *power*
  - Who has it?
  - What do they do with it?
- Government:
  - How community administers affairs
  - Structures employed in decision making
  - Institutions employed in carrying out decisions
- Politics:
  - Struggle for influence over decisions made
- Power:
  - "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" – (Dahl 1957: 202-3)
  - E.g. whoever holds the remote control has power to choose which TV show to watch
- Distribution of resources; limited resources are available to the Government
- Theory and practice; Politics is tangible as well as philosophical
- How do we study Politics?
  - Philosophy: Classical approach
    - Analyses ideas and what major thinkers have argued
    - Focus on core questions – e.g. "how is one 'free'?"
    - E.g. Plato (429-347 BCE): *Republic*, The 'ideal regime'; leaders should be "cut from a different cloth" (best educated, sound character, avoid desires of the masses)
    - Makes judgements – an elitist view?
  - Empiricism:
    - Seeks to offer explanation of political events
    - Theories/explanations should be tested by observing events
    - Avoid engaging with metaphysical questions, seeks to analyse political behaviour in established systems
    - E.g. What are the approaches of parties in government?
  - Political Science:
    - Studying politics as a natural science
    - Use of scientific method – cold and calculating
    - Test proposed explanation by using objective and quantifiable data
    - Ideal: free from scientist's values and research can be replicated
    - E.g. why do people vote the way they do?
  - Eclectic:
    - Combining elements from different traditions