

# Govt1101: Australian Politics

Week 2 – tute 1

Democracy – rule by the people, based on values of political equality. Different types. Australia has a liberal democracy.

Liberal democracy – combines democratic principle of political equality and institutions that embody liberal ideas of freedom such as representative assemblies, separations of powers, free press etc (they take many different forms)

Direct democracy – the fundamental idea of democracy founded in Greece. Citizens actively ruled and made decisions about issues that affected them. Women, slaves, non property owners and many other were excluded. This enabled the limited amount of citizens to gather to discuss issues and vote. Many affected had no say in the decisions. Critical points:

- Assumptions it makes in the capacity of citizens to govern themselves
- Belief that people are able to fully understand issues that are being raised – especially today's wide range of complex issues
- Assumption that citizens would be thinking about the good of the state. History has shown other motives of political actors

Republican democracy – concept that democracy needs to be underpinned by particular values. It suggests individuals should participate with a view as to what is in the best interest of society as a whole and leave individual views to the side.

Representative democracy – emerged focusing on representation rather than participation. Mainly due to the scale of issues that were emerging in democracies and a growing scepticism about self government and human nature. Focused on the election of individuals that have the attributes and capacity for good governing. Criticised for lack of direct form of governing. It focuses on finding models of representation that stay closest to the principles of democracy such as voting systems, parliaments and executives

Pluralism – a view that is against power being in the hands of a few. Suggests power should be rotated and that democracy needs to better reflect the diversity of society. It reckons it's not enough to have elections as the minority will never be able to win and that institutions should also be representative of the minority not the majority

Elite theory - refers to a system of government in which the leaders of large bureaucratic organizations, corporate, governmental or nonprofit, are able to exercise a significant degree of influence on society. This became popular due to the increased questioning of the capacity of people to govern. Most liberal democratic systems work on this basis as parties become more professional rather than a mass membership. It is a questionable theory of democracy as it is so sceptical of the capacity of people to govern and is more a theory of governance.

There is ongoing tension between the principles of equality (democracy) and freedom (liberal). In Australia there is increased emphasis on quality in political institutions and in social and cultural practices.

Like in other liberal economies, critics argue that politics has become distant from the people and more professionalised and elitist and has thus increased levels of disenchantment

Globalisation and democracy

- Less acceptance of authority and new pressure on representative forms of democracy
- Challenge to reflect increasing diverse views and interest
- Greater emphasis and pressures from international organisations

Political act - Voting, writing a letter to an MP, signing a petition, going to a concert, buying selected products from the supermarket

Politics:

- involves interactions and relationships creating winners and losers
- The study of politics is the study of interactions of unequal power between individuals and (formal and informal) institutions, groups and organisations in a community

The three dimensions of power:

- The first dimension – concrete decision- making processes in formal institutions of power (Dahl) – Focus on conflicts and decisions about particular issues between actors with already formed preferences within a particular arena.
- The second dimension - acknowledges that power can be exercised secretly (covertly). Within any political community, there are ways of raising barriers to prevent or limit the participation of some groups over others (Bachrach & Baratz) – Focus on conflicts and decisions over which issues and already formed preferences. People not given the opportunity to participate. Not willing to participate as they don't think they will be listened to as they are a minority. They withdraw from it
- Third dimension - social and cultural forces further influence decision-making (Lukes) – Focus on (potential) conflicts over the formation/understanding of preferences/interests and issues. Other forces that influence individuals. Indicates false consciousness. People make decisions based on ideas that are influenced by other groups.

## Lecture week 2

Separation of powers – executive (ministers, cabinet) , judiciary (interprets law), legislature (parliament)

Almond and Verba – authors of political science – liberal democracies can only operate in a stable way because citizens share a 'civic culture' – need to be aware of political systems and be active participants. E.g community forums

Low levels of knowledge, voting and political party participation in Australia

Constitution

- establishes the rules between the government and the people
- places legal limit on what government can do
- establishes fundamental institutions of the political system
- format and content of any institution is determined by the values and wishes of those who frame it – individual countries institutions differ and resemble a particular history and culture
- 189, 1897-98 – constitutional convention, 1898-1899 – referendum to adopt the draft constitution written by upper class, white males. Interests at the time:
  - provide social services
  - expand infrastructure
  - raise taxes
  - defence
  - maintain trade
- ch.1 – establishes Australian parliament, ch.2 – outlines role of governor general, ch. 3 – established judicature
- sect 51 - divides powers between the commonwealth and the state. Comm has exclusive power in respect to external affairs, money, post, marriage etc.
- sec 128 - provides mechanisms for the amendment of the constitution – only by referendum- double majority – majority of votes in majority of states
- establishes 2 houses of parliament – rep and senate

- establishes federal judiciary and the high court to interpret institution
- sec 109 – deals with concurrent powers and inconsistencies – powers both state and comm have
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conventions – unwritten rules of government which become and established practice. E.g. prime minister

### Week 3 – tute 2 – chp. 2 & 19

#### Institutionalism

Old Institutionalism - an approach to the study of politics that focuses on formal institutions of government. E.g. senate, cabinet, constitution.

New institutionalism - a social theory that focuses on developing a sociological view of institutions, the way they interact and the effects of institutions on society. Various forms

- Normative institutionalism - focuses on the norms and values of institutions and the way in which they shape individual behaviour
- Rational choice institutionalism - a theoretical approach to the study of institutions arguing that actors use institutions to maximize their utility. However, actors face rule-based constraints provided by the institutional environment which influence their behavior
- historical institutionalism - is a social science method that uses institutions to find sequences of social, political, economic behavior and change across time. It is a comparative approach to the study of all aspects of human organizations and does so by relying heavily on case studies.
- Empirical institutionalism - focuses on categorizing institutions in particular ways in order to explain choices made by government e.g. presidential vs parliamentary, unitary vs federal
- Network institutionalism - focuses on behavior of informal that regularize interaction between individuals and organisations
- sociological institutionalism - a form of new institutionalism that concerns 'the way in which institutions create meaning for individuals, providing important theoretical building blocks for normative institutionalism within political science
- constructivist institutionalism – institutions are organised systems of ideas
- feminist institutionalism - new institutionalist approach that looks at "how gender norms operate within institutions and how institutional processes construct and maintain gender power dynamics

All approaches consider institutions the essential component of political life, that they matter as most political action occurs within institutions so it is crucial to understand how these bodies act and how they influence the behaviour of individuals working within them

Approaches have no common agreements of the definition of an institution, the capacity of individuals to shape institutions, and that the manner in which the political world should be studied

#### Parliament

House of Representatives - Lower house consisting of members directly elected by voters, 150 members

Senate - upper house comprising of 76 senators elected using proportional representation from the states in territories

The balance of power - a position in which neither government or opposition party have a majority - support of one or more minor party or independent is needed to pass or reject motions. In this situation the minor party holds the balance of power

Cabinet - Central group of ministers in a government

Legislature - the institution of government that debates, amends, passes and appeals legislation - in Australia sometimes called parliament

Index of power devised by Fish and Kroenig (2009) - compares the power of national legislature on a scale of 0 to 100. Zero meaning Parliament has no independent power and does what is told by the power holders in government. The closer to 100, the more independent the parliament

Australian state defined formally in Australian Constitution originally it was parliamentary law of the United Kingdom. Evolve over time, have more autonomy,

Federal policy exists under the crown making the United Kingdom sovereign head of state. Governor-general is the formal representative and in each state by state governor - no Australian parliament has passed a law until it has been approved by the crown. Australian government has power to appoint and dismiss representatives of the crown therefore ongoing debate

- Elected representatives of Parliament must act collectively on behalf of its citizens, not always the case, a lot of people underrepresented
- Parliament ensures a degree of decentralisation of power in Government
- representation involved elections but also involves petitions, appearing as weaknesses before committees, protesting
- accountability
- ministerial responsibility - questioning of the ministers to Parliament for the decision is taken by the cabinet, their own individual actions and those of the public service e.g. question time
- link between the government and the governed
- ways which parliamentary government balance of power -
  - constrains the executive branch - by allowing them to alien government with approval of Parliament
  - Parliament holds executive accountable to Parliamentary committees and question time
  - Power of Parliament is balanced against the executive power which it depends on for its resourcing, structure and organisation
- Provides means for federal nation to achieve common purposes and greater unity/utility

Parliamentary power paradox - while parliaments, by definition lack the power to act independently, they have an effective power to impede executive power

The Senate - while it lacks the power to make laws on its own, its constitutional role in the legislative process gives a considerable power to rejection of government bill and negotiate legislative outcome that better suit political interests of the Senate

Lecture week 3

Hung parliament - no major party had majority and therefore could not govern. Had to rely on support from minor parties and independents

Three main constitutional functions of Australian/Westminster parliaments

1. Determining who governs, who become executive
  - Executive (cabinet and wider ministry) have to be drawn from parliament
  - Confidence - PM has to retain support from parliament
2. Keeping executive accountable