

Democratic Theory

Can study democratic theory by thinkers (Locke) or empirically
No set linear path to examine democratic theory

What do we mean by politics?
Not “schmoozing to get ahead”

Politics is the process of determining who gets what in society (who receives the benefits and who pays the costs)

Assumptions underlying definition of politics:

- 1) humans have needs/wants
- 2) resources to satisfy needs are scarce
- 3) most benefits are costly, must be paid for

Meeting assumptions is politics

A process is necessary to decide how benefits and costs are distributed
Such a process exists in every society
(may be embedded in “traditions” in some types of society)

definition is universal because:

- applies everywhere
- doesn't assume/prescribe who should be involved in the process or the nature of its outcome

mechanisms of distribution are varied
thus, not necessarily democratic

inherent to the definition of politics is the notion of power

Power is the ability of one individual or group to get another individual or group to act in accord with its intentions

“Those who are directed toward affecting who governs and how the government behaves” (Wilson) – tied up in democratic power

politics is not tentative, it happens
costs and benefits are distributed, and they are done so authoritatively, not provisionally or tentatively
it is implied that it is effective

power can be:

- coercive – brute force
- non-coercive – subtle influence

coercive power – a set of institutions which embody the process of politics that have the capacity to force compliance and to defend themselves against challenge

non-coercive power – subtle use of power, not direct or obvious
ex. speechwriter's influence/power over the speaker

example: to collect taxes, one can...

send army (coercive)

send bill (non-coercive)

legitimacy of power occurs when those governed accept the power used by those who govern
“take the gun out of their face and see if the people still accept it”
the people comply with the distribution of costs and benefits (the results) and/or at least the process used to get there

where legitimacy is high, less coercive force is possible
coercion is not enough; eventually that kind of power will diminish

What is legitimate in the US?

legitimacy is derived from democracy

there has been debate over Supreme Court decisions

Supreme Court Justices are appointed for life – extremely undemocratic
more evolved/developed means more democratic

defining democracy:

1) rule of the many (Aristotle)

2) “Institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which leaders acquire power by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote” (Schumpeter)

we agree with Schumpeter

process written into the constitution

the US is a representative democracy

Two approaches to defining democracy:

- Procedural democracy

- Substantive democracy

Procedural Democracy – focus on process, the way things get done

- democracy is simply a way of making decisions

- there is no real philosophy or theory of democracy

Democracy is simply an agreement amongst citizens about...

- A. Who participates in decision-making?
- B. How much should each vote count?
- C. How many votes are needed to reach a decision?

How many people are involved in making political decisions is what makes a system more or less democratic.

3 forms of government:

Autocracy – one individual makes political decisions

Oligarchy – a class or group of individuals makes political decisions

Democracy – all citizens (directly or indirectly) make political decisions

Substantive Democracy – 6 beliefs

- 1) democracy has a theoretical base
- 2) procedure is important but secondary to the *intent* of democracy
- 3) these principles within mainstream American thinking are embodied in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights:
 - the individual is of major importance in society
 - each individual is basically equal
 - each individual has inalienable rights
- 4) the process of democracy is secondary to these principles
- 5) principle of majority rule is subordinate to the principle of liberty
- 6) the true measure of democracy is the extent to which it honors its substance and protects the rights/freedoms of the citizens

Critiques of Procedural and Substantive Democracies:

Substance: very subjective on what criteria is used to determine what's democratic. Is liberty most important? Is equality?

Procedural: procedures may be followed but create very poor results. Majority rule can obfuscate minority rights.

Where do we stand?

somewhere in the middle

need assumptions we are dedicated to and a set of procedures to achieve them

US derived a system that can be addressed according to both principle and process

Popular Democracy requires that...

- citizens be interested/knowledgeable
- citizens participate in elections and other political activities
- politicians be held accountable for their decisions by the public

How is power actually distributed?

There are 4 principle theories:

- 1)Marxist (Marx): Those who control the market control everything
- 2)Power Elitist (Mills): Not just one group, but a few (corporations, political leaders, and the military)
- 3)Bureaucratic Model (Weber): Appointed bureaucrats have all the power
- 4)Pluralist: multiple groups that don't have monolithic interests compete and thus must compromise

Pluralist model is the “most right”

However, certain groups have more influence than others