

**International Summer School 2010**

**STATES, CITIZENS, AND POWER: DEMOCRACY IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

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**Introduction**

Democracy is the only type of political system most of us have experienced and we tend to assume that it is the most efficient and fair form of political system available to us. Indeed, there are many western politicians who argue that democracy is so self-evidently superior that we should export it to the rest of the world. But what is democracy? Do democratic states, wherever they are in the world, have more in common with each other than with their undemocratic neighbors? This course addresses these questions and draws on examples from the US, UK, and around the world.

**Assessment**

The course will be assessed on the basis of:

- 2000-word (approx.) essay (60%), due in the final week of the course
- course report on class participation (20%)
- one brief presentation in the last session (ten minutes maximum) (20%)

**Overview of topics**

- (i) Introduction
- (ii) What are democracies?
- (iii) The importance of Democratic Institutions
- (iv) Presidential, Semi-Presidential, and Parliamentary Democracy
- (v) Citizens, Social Movements, and Interest Groups
- (vi) The role of the mass media in Democracy
- (vii) Voters and elections [ESSAY DEADLINE]
- (viii) Party Systems and Party Government

**Description of topics**

*Introduction*

In this first session we discuss if it makes sense to compare concepts across countries. What are the most appropriate institutions to compare? What can we hope to gain from adopting a comparative framework? A general discussion of the nature of comparative democratic politics will also identify those topics that are of particular interest to students.

*What are democracies?*

In session 2 we ask how do we a democratic state? Does it make sense to talk of different models of democracy in different cultural contexts? What are the different institutional manifestations of democracy? Is democracy always liberal? Seminar questions: 1. What is democracy? How do we define it?; 2. Is it possible to export democracy to other countries?; 3. Is it desirable to export democracy to other counties?

*The importance of Democratic Institutions*

We discuss (written and unwritten) Constitutions; the power of Executives, the extent to which Legislatures can act as a check on Executives, and the power of Judiciaries and the impact of judicial review. Seminar questions: 1. What are the arguments for and against (i) written and (ii) unwritten constitutions?; 2. Why is the division of powers considered to be important?; 3. Are institutions more than just the passive settings for political agency?

*Presidential, Semi-Presidential, and Parliamentary Democracy*

We examine the strengths and weaknesses of Presidential systems; Semi-presidential systems, and Parliamentary systems, using examples from around the world. Seminar questions: 1. What are the

arguments for and against (i) presidential, (ii) semi-presidential, and (iii) parliamentary government?; 2. Is the analytical distinction between the three types of democracy actually helpful when examining real-world systems?; 3. Why is there no single blueprint for stable democracy?; 4. Can systems be imposed upon countries from outside or must they draw upon the established practices of countries *even if* these practices are not obviously democratic?

#### *Citizens, Social Movements, and Interest Groups*

We examine Voluntary organizations; pressure groups, NGOs and INGOs; social movements; theories of social movements and pressure groups. Seminar questions: 1. Are interest groups a threat to democracy?; 2. How do groups overcome the collective action problem?; 3. How much influence do NGOs and INGOs enjoy within the governance process?; 4. What is 'new' about new social movements?

#### *The role of the mass media in Democracy*

We examine media regulation; the media as a public service and the media as a business; media ownership; and e-politics. Seminar questions: 1. Do politicians over-estimate the impact of media coverage on politics?; 2. Does the public underestimate media influence?; 3. Is the concentration of media ownership a threat to democracy?; 4. How convincing are the (i) reinforcement; (ii) agenda setting; and (iii) priming theories of media influence?

#### *Voters and elections*

We examine the different criteria for evaluating electoral systems and the role of electoral systems in stabilising democratic institutions; Seminar questions: 1. When assessing an electoral system, what is the nature of the trade-off between stability and representation?; 2. Can electoral system design affect ethnic conflict regulation in ethnically divided societies?; 3. Assess the Columbia, Michigan, and rational choice models of voting.

#### *Party Systems and Party Government*

We discuss the concept of a political party; party types and party families; political parties and democratic consolidation; 'iron law of oligarchy'; coalition theory; representative versus responsible government. Seminar questions: 1. How essential are political parties to representative democracy?; 2. Do parties reflect cleavages in society or do they actively create them?

### **Reading list (indicative)**

#### **Core text:**

Newton, K. And Van Deth, J. W. (2007) Foundations of Comparative Politics: Democracies of the Modern World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

#### **Preparatory Reading**

You will find the following comparative politics 'classics' useful when preparing for this course:

Lijphart, A. (1999) Patterns of Democracy. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Sartori, G. (1987) The Theory of Democracy Revisited. London: Chatham House.