THE CORE CONCEPTS OF DEMOCRACY

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Contents

The State

Nearly all present-day political activity occurs within units (or polities), based on geographical territory known as 'states'. Today's conception of the state emerged in the modern West; however, states are now widespread and accepted as the basic unit of international affairs.

The fundamental tenets of all states:

- *Territoriality*: States defend their territoriality and police their borders, in effect claiming their exclusive ownership of the land against any contending parties.

- *Sovereignty*: Within the demarcated territory, the state has ultimate and sole authority, i.e. 'sovereignty'. Sovereignty further requires reciprocity, whereby states should not interfere in each other's domestic affairs.

- *A monopoly on legitimate force*: States are centralised polities that exercise the right of organised, legitimate force in the pursuit of law and order within their territory.

- *Plurality*: The international political environment is a plural space of different states that are self-regulating and self-governing. In principle, states are each other's equals. Clearly, however, states also have interest in each other's affairs in practice. Therefore, relations can sometimes become complex and strained.

The state's relationship to the population: Through the exercise of various legal means, by creating and deploying instruments such as constitutions, states exert binding power upon their people. This power forms a political community, entrenched in a common identity that is mobilised towards the achievement of common goals.

Citizenship and nation: At times, political groupings such as political parties do not find common ground and are organised around historical social, ethnic, religious, or class differences. In such scenarios, the threat to the unity of the state is addressed by using the strategies of citizenship. Through citizenship, states have endeavoured to lessen inequalities by endowing each member of the state with civil, political and social rights. Under the principle

that all citizens are equal before the law of the state, with each individual able to exercise their franchise, more citizens are able to participate in electoral politics and in the competition between different parties. With such competition creating some form of fallout for certain sections of the population, mechanisms such as the welfare state have come into operation to reduce socio-economic cleavages.

History of state development: In the historical trajectory of the modern state, there are three distinct phases. First came the consolidation of rule whereby a powerful centre emerged that asserted its dominance over competitors often by defeating them in war and by absorbing conquered land into a unified territory administered by the centre. The rationalisation of rule was the second phase in which the centre structured itself into a hierarchy of offices that would oversee control over the state. Finally, the expansion of the state was its assumption of numerous functions related to evolving social needs and the ever present need to manage various societal sectors. Different states have exhibited these three phases in different degrees.

Distinctions: Despite the basic similarities, many states differ from one another in noticeable ways. Some are centralised entities, while others have a federal structure. Some states enact policy driven development, while others leave development to the dictates of an untethered market. These differences between states are the result of contestation between parties within a state regarding the management of citizens and the decentralisation of power, which give each state its national character.

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Democracies

Within our historical period, democracy has become the predominant benchmark that determines how legitimate governments are. Rulers the world over, regardless of how truly democratic they may be, claim democratic credentials to bolster and vindicate their right to wield power.

Democracy as a term has several meanings. First and foremost, democracy describes a government that has been fairly installed by – and can be removed by – its citizens through meaningful periodic elections. Secondly, it is often invoked as an ideal to aspire towards in which people's rights are protected, equality striven for, and justice achieved. Thirdly, the term relates to existing democratic polities and their common processes, which go beyond simple elections. Derived from the Greek words demos – people – and kratos – power, democracy also relates historically to the form of rule exercised by Athenians in ancient Greece.

Four defining attributes of modern democracy:

Free and fair elections.

> Elections determine the composition of governments (who run the country) and legislatures (who make the laws). In democracies, elections that lead to new governments are periodic, free, and fair. That is to say electoral processes are regular; they are contested by candidates and participated in by voters who do so willingly and without coercion; and they are free from fraud and government interference that may afford any party an unfair advantage.

Universal participation.

> Democracies ensure that the adult population is able to exercise their right to vote and contest for office without fear of rejection due to their economic background, education status, gender, ethnic identification, or religious affiliation. In some democracies, some exclusions to voting and running for office still exist with regard to place of birth or criminal record, while all democracies exclude minors from participating. Since the early 20th Century, when for instance women were not permitted to vote, democracies have made significant strides in expanding the franchise ('vote').

In democracies, governments are required to ensure the human rights of all citizens. They do not perpetrate flagrant, organised acts of violence upon the population; they afford freedom of the press; they do not suppress the rights of people to assemble and organise, or ban political parties or interest groups from political participation. Constitutions often codify and enshrine these citizens' rights which are preserved and defended by an independent judiciary and other institutions that safeguard citizens against government overreach and ensure accountability.

Responsible government.

Elected authorities can approve and enact policies uninhibited by unelected authorities such as a monarch, the armed forces, the international community, and religious leaders. To ensure human rights are not trampled on, there may be oversight by courts which can overturn certain decisions. Despite the intervention of interest groups in formulating policy, any decision made by the executive and elected representatives is their own and they bear responsibility to their voters for their policies.

States which may be democratic or have democratic aspirations may fulfil the above four conditions in various degrees. As such, democracy is seen within a continuum in which full democracy and overt dictatorship are on either end. Nonetheless, there is a certain minimum standard that must be achieved in each area before a country can properly be called a 'democracy'.

Types of democracies:

Parliamentary

In parliamentary democracies, the executive (the 'government') depends upon the support of the legislature (the 'parliament'). Parliament is seen as the most democratically legitimate body of representatives and, if it withdraws its support from the government, then a new government must be formed or fresh elections held. Voters elect their parliamentary representatives and these representatives appoint the prime minister. Of course, in practice voters also consider the future prime minister that they would prefer. Parliamentary democracies have a prime minister, who leads the government, and a ceremonial president (or other 'head of state') who has mainly

ceremonial duties. Other features include limits to the separation of powers between legislators, the executive, and the cabinet – as they are all members of parliament – and non-fixed terms of office.

Presidential

In a presidential system, the head of government (here known as the 'president') is elected directly by the people. There are also separate elections for the legislature (normally known as 'parliament' or 'congress'). This means that, even if the legislature and president are from different parties or the legislature no longer supports the president, nonetheless the president can normally remain in power. The president and members of the cabinet are not members of the legislature creating a strict separation of powers between the two elected branches of government. In America, this is based on the idea that there should be tension between the executive and the legislature to prevent either one from becoming too powerful, however in other countries this has not always worked. The president serves as both the head of government and state (as opposed to the parliamentary division between prime minister and ceremonial president). Presidential democracy dates back to 1787 with US effort to form a republican government.

Semi-presidential

These systems combine elements of both parliamentary and presidential regimes with an elected president and an appointed prime minister who answers to parliament. Some give lots of power and discretion to the president while others are more parliamentary in character.

Parliamentary or presidential?

While people disagree about which form of democracy is better, it is argued that presidentialism makes the political process quite rigid. Furthermore, presidentialism tends to focus power in one individual rather than balancing power within the executive. In presidentialism, voters have a greater say in directly electing a president but the contest itself is a winner-takes-all situation which can create greater polarisation. Voters have a better sense of who is in control, but the president can overwhelm other branches of government, the opposition, and state apparatuses. Furthermore, even as legislators may have greater scope for

independence, disagreement with the president can lead to paralyzing stalemates. As such, democracy of either kind is an evolving reality as much as an aspirational project that works best to serve people.

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Authoritarian Regimes

Authoritarian regimes are characterised primarily by their having 'no turnover in power' of the executive. They lack free and fair elections, and they only represent and further the interests of a few elite groups within a population. Despite sharing these common attributes, different authoritarian regimes have considerable structural differences.

Totalitarianism is a form of extreme authoritarian rule in which the leaders wish to reshape and reconfigure human nature itself. The leadership seeks to provide a blueprint for the complete overhaul of human interactions and restructure them often in ways that are highly destructive. Whereas other authoritarian scenarios only pursue the necessary control to retain power indefinitely, totalitarianism exercises comprehensive power over people and every aspect of their lives. Such absolute control is achieved through extreme repression in the form of organised campaigns of terror which historically have included pogroms, labour or concentration camps, and sham trials, all of which serve to elicit conformity and subdue resistance. Totalitarian regimes are also highly reliant on indoctrinating the population into an ideology of the state to manufacture legitimacy for itself and create an organisational ethos. To authoritarian leadership, propagating an ideology is less important and perhaps something that is adopted expediently with changing alliances. Authoritarianism does not seek to mobilise a population to a particular end, but rather prefer an apathetic population. Today, very few totalitarian regimes remain.

Continuous and categorical typologies of authoritarianism

These are employed to classify various types of authoritarian rule. Continuous typologies locate authoritarianism along a democratic-autocratic continuum which attempts to capture the gradations in authoritarian regimes. This conception recognises competitive authoritarian regimes which are hybrid regimes in which democratic institutions are allowed to exist but are utilised to manipulate election outcomes and undercut any opposition. This authoritarianism exists on a scale and categorising it thus addresses its fluctuating and evolving nature rather than seeing it as a static phenomenon.

Categorical typologies group authoritarianism based on a defining feature of that rule, for instance, the strategy used for control or the structural type of the regime. Some categorical forms of authoritarianism are:

- *Personalist dictatorships*: Leaders of these exercise unrestrained power. They enfeeble the military and curtail the legislature to allow themselves free rein while consolidating power over the media and the judiciary to obstruct and suppress any opposition. Due to these survival strategies, personalist dictatorships are quite long-lived.

- *Single-party regimes*: In these, a single party operates determining all policy by holding all political positions. The party is a well-organised, self-governing entity thus checking the power of the leader to make autonomous decisions. All state apparatus, civil society, the military and the media are under state rule.

- *Military dictatorships*: These are regimes that have seized power and begun to occupy the executive branch. Because a ruling junta form a collective, decision making is not unilateral. They are relatively short-lived and are sometimes, though certainly not always, open to discussing the terms of their exit.

Durability of authoritarian regimes: Elections are periodically held in most authoritarian states today to legitimise their credentials and allow them to ensure and extend their longevity. Even though past authoritarian regimes were more overtly oppressive, such regimes today are more likely to absorb dissenters or rivals by offering them positions within the power hierarchy and thus neutralizing them. Sometimes, because of the stability afforded by durability of the system, especially if it results in economic growth, authoritarian rule enjoys palpable support.

Corruption and clientelism: Higher levels of corruption are a feature of authoritarian regimes as opposed to democracies. Clientelism or patron-clientelism is an essential survival tool for authoritarianism. It refers to personal relationships between citizen-clients and government-patrons based on the exchange of resources, goods, money, services, or access in return for the citizens' allegiance. Clientelist states can orient their institutions and services in such a way that their particular patrons are made the sole beneficiaries and so that they can police their political support.

How do authoritarian regimes perform?

According to IMF date authoritarian regimes underperform economically compared to democratic ones. Corrupt, personalist rule performs the worst as individual survival of the ruler is the primary objective and in the process institutions, due process, and resistance are rendered ineffective allowing for the widespread plunder of the country. Single-party regimes in which a leader is constrained by party procedure perform the best economically among authoritarian regimes. Despite the economic drawbacks to authoritarianism, since the Cold War there have been some democratic overturns to authoritarianism indicating that democratic institutions can be upended and utilised to serve authoritarian ends.

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Legislature

Legislators are individuals comprising a parliament, congress, or an assembly, gathered together for political purposes to represent and link citizens and the government, to maintain oversight of the executive, and to formulate policy.

Types of legislature:

- *Parliament*: In parliamentary systems, the executive is indirectly elected in that the elected legislature chooses an executive from among their ranks. The executive branch is officially answerable to the legislature all through its incumbency, and hence, can be ejected from power if it loses the support of a legislative majority. This ouster may result in new legislative elections. Due to this high level of interdependence between the legislature and the executive, this type of system is sometimes called a 'fused-power' system.

- *Congress*: In systems where the executive or president is directly elected, the type of legislature is often called a congress. Such presidential systems are known as separation-of-power (SoP) systems in which both the legislative and executive branches are elected independently and both parties lack the power to eject the other from office.

The role of legislature:

- *Linkage and representation*: Legislators form a linkage between citizens and their government. In parliamentary or fused-power systems where the electorate does not directly elect the executive, the link between citizens and the government that the legislature provides serves as the citizens' strongest instrument of communication with power. In practice, citizens will consider both the performance of the government and the performance of their individual legislator or political party when deciding who to vote for. In addition to linking citizens to the government, individual legislators are the representatives of their constituents and as such are required to work towards safeguarding their interests. Because legislatures tend to be diverse, they function as open forums of debate where differing opinions are aired which in turn can inform

citizenry and sway public opinion and policy outcomes. All these functions serve to influence the degree of legitimacy that the legislature commands which in turn lends legitimacy to the system at large.

- *Control and oversight*: Although voters directly or indirectly elect the executive via elections, they often lack the expertise, time and resources needed to supervise the political process of the executive. Therefore, the legislature steps in and fulfils the task of overseer and comptroller of the executive. In parliamentary or fused-power systems, the executive answers to the legislature regarding policy matters and if the majority of the legislature deems the executive's policy agenda unsatisfactory, they can remove the executive via *a motion of censure* or *a vote of no confidence*. In SoP type presidential elections, the executive's policy agenda is not umpired by the legislature; the executive can only be removed from office through *impeachment* due to acts deemed illegal and not due to policy differences. In day to day running, legislatures employ question time, special hearings, inquiries, investigative committees, and special reports to gather information and exercise general oversight over executive policies. By having control over the budgetary process, legislatures are also able to exercise indirect control over the executive in matters of policy. Presidents often have more mechanisms at their disposal to evade legislative scrutiny and the direct election of a president can also contribute to cultures that are predisposed to personality cults. On the other hand, the parliamentary system can have a humanising influence where the prime minister is easily and periodically called on the answer questions in person.
- *Policy-making and policy-influencing*: Legislatures utilise tools such as consultation, delay, veto amendment, and initiation in making policy. Amendments and initiation are positive powers while veto and delay are negative powers which impede a policy process and can be used as a bargaining, or influencing, tool. While some systems have a strong tradition of non-government legislators introducing legislation, most legislatures focus on influencing change upon legislation already introduced by the government.

Organisational structure of legislatures: Often the internal structure of the legislature determines the extent to which it is effective and able to impact the larger system within which it operates. Most legislatures are composed of one (unicameral) or two (bicameral) chambers. In the former, all powers of legislature are invested in the one chamber while in the latter, power between the two chambers may be shared symmetrically or asymmetrically.

Number, quality, and consistency of members: Legislatures are relatively large assemblies of individuals and tends to be the most plural branch of government. The extent to which the legislature is professionalised which allows members to devote their time entirely to legislative tasks, the nature of its committees and other structures, the type of members it draws to its ranks, and the resources they can mobilise are direct markers of the authority it wields within the larger political system.

A legislature's effectiveness

The extent to which the legislature is able to function independently of the executive (*institutional autonomy*) and the extent to which individual members are able to function independently of party politics (*individual autonomy*) highly determine the policy influence of legislature. In parliamentary or fused-party systems where there is no separation of powers, the legislatures' institutional autonomy is reduced. In contrast, in presidential or SoP systems with direct election of both executive and the legislature, institutional autonomy is theoretically greater. However, few countries have managed to achieve the stable separation of powers as is found in America. Particularly, significant deviation between the legislature and president in SoP systems can lead to gridlock and political collapse, requiring fresh elections. When re-election is a goal for members of the legislature, their autonomy diminishes in that their party leader has sway over the electoral process, and so, they must adhere to supporting party positions within the legislature. The presence and amount of state funding available for election campaigns also determine individual autonomy. Legislative autonomy, thus, has a direct bearing on policy making, and the type of policy made determines the legitimacy and effectiveness of the broader political system and in turn national stability.

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Governments and Bureaucracies

A state's *central political executive* is called its government whose job it is to preside over the country. During its tenure, the government not just puts into effect laws passed by the legislature, it also influences what laws come into being in the first place and exercises general command over the country. The two fundamental principles of democratic government are that the government should link with the electoral process and should function within constitutional restraints.

How government decisions are made:

Presidentialism: In this form, the president is directly elected by the electorate for a set amount of time. The president is both head of government and of state and not answerable to the legislature politically. Members of the government are presidential appointments generally with the legislature's consent. The president is effectively the sovereign and no collective decision-making regime exists.

Parliamentarism: The head of government and the head of state are separate offices. The latter is able to dissolve parliament usually under proposal from the head of government. The head of government, typically elected by parliament, is politically liable along with the cabinet to the parliament and can be ousted from office via a vote of no confidence within parliament.

Parliamentary systems present a wider range of modes of decision making such as cabinet government, prime ministerial government, and ministerial government. Cabinet governments are ones in which the cabinet discusses and rules upon matters of concern. Prime ministerial governments resemble presidential ones in that decision-making is monocratic, the difference being that a president has a constitutional right to such decision-making. In ministerial or fragmented governments, individual cabinet ministers are tasked with different domains exclusive to them. Coalition governments, because of differences in party makeup, result in more complicated modes of decision-making. Generally speaking, parliamentary government creates more of a collegial relationship between the prime minister and other cabinet members than presidential government. Cabinet members in a parliamentary system are not mere appointees, instead the prime minister is merely a first among equals who has to justify and agree decisions with other cabinet members.

Semi-presidentialism: In this form of government, the directly elected president forms a cabinet that is politically responsible to parliament. In Sri Lanka, decision-making has tended to mirror the archetypal presidential system rather than the parliamentary system.

Government autonomy: the party dimension

Since government is linked to the electoral process through political parties, a key concern is the extent to which these parties can influence and control the behaviour of their members in government. The values and policies of the party come to bear upon the government and questions arise as to the autonomy of governments to override party concerns.

Political parties exercise power over their affiliates in government by means of party programmes, the recruitment of party leaders into government office, and permanent supervision and control of the government. Party programmes specify clear objectives and the means to achieve those objectives. For instance, ministers will have clear aims that will be monitored by the party for success. Despite such oversight by parties, empirical studies predominantly demonstrate that they have only finite control over government.

The political capacity of government

The potential of a government to accomplish goals depends on the political environment of that government's term. The government's support base on the ground in society and in political institutions contribute to the conduciveness of the political environment for governments fulfilling their potential.

In presidential systems, a unified government, in which the executive and legislative chambers are all held by one party, presents greater capacity for getting the work of governing done. However, as discussed above, decision making may be focused on the individual president rather than debate within the cabinet. A divided government, in which different parties control the different branches, entails that the president use strategies such as decrees, vetoes, legislative initiatives, and patronage to sway members of the legislature, or settle with legislative parties. If these strategies do not work, there may be a gridlock.

In parliamentary systems, single-party majority governments, in which there is no line of division along party lines, normally have the capacity to accomplish the most politically as

decisions made will be uncontentious. In addition, decisions made within cabinet are likely to have been discussed and debated privately in advance.

Bureaucratic capacities

The capacity of a government to execute its decisions is also contingent on the will and capability of bureaucrats within the structures and processes of the public administration. Classic bureaucracy strives to render the civil service a neutral instrument of government, but in reality, bureaucracies are made of individual human beings with private interests and agency. The enactment of individual political preferences by bureaucrats can lead to loss of departmental agency. Furthermore, career concerns of bureaucrats can lead to further bureaucratic growth.

On way governments counter the bureaucratic dilemma is through a spoils system in which the winning party has free rein over appointing a large section of the bureaucracy after elections. Another is through New Public Management (NPM) systems whereby a profit motive is made the strategy for survival, key positions are open to and competed for by outsiders for a fixed term of office, and accountability is dependent on the bureaucrat achieving agency targets rather than merely following protocol. Over-politicisation of the public service often heightens public discontent and most modern constitutions aim for a depoliticised administration. In addition, politicisation also runs its own risks of bloated inefficiency because appointments are made on political allegiance rather than merit.

Adapted from Chapter 8 Governments and Bureaucracies by Wolfgang C. Müller in *Comparative Politics* edited by Daniele Caramani.

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Constitutions, Rights, and Courts

The basic function of most modern constitutions is to constrain political power. A constitution is a body of normative legal rules also known as meta-norms which are norms about their formulation and application. The constitution determines how legal norms are created, interpreted, administered and altered. Constitutionalism refers to the commitment of a polity to function within the bounded rules established by the constitution. The extent to which constitutionalism exists varies over time, across countries, and within a political community. Constitutionalism can also refer to government that is limited by the constraints placed upon it by the constitution.

Types of constitutions

Type 1: *Absolutist*

The operative meta-norm of this type of constitution is that the ruler stands above the law. As such, the prerogative to create and alter legal norms, which includes the constitution, is absolute and consolidated by centralised rule. In such systems, constitutions demonstrate, rather than constrain, the absolute power of the ruler. These constitutions are becoming rarer.

Type 2: *Legislative supremacy*

This type of constitution allows for the establishment of government institutions and elections to the legislature, the idea being that elections lend legitimacy to legislative power and legislative majorities in turn validate statutes. The three defining meta-norms of this type of parliamentary sovereignty model are: (i) the constitution is unentrenched in that it can be changed by regular legislative processes and a simple majority; (ii) through the criterion of validity, if any legal norm contradicts a parliament's legislation, it is deemed void; (iii) there are no substantial restraints on the authority of the legislature.

Type 3: *Higher law*

While no two Type 3 constitutions are entirely alike, they do have commonalities and are now considered to be the 'good' kind of constitution to have. These constitutions make the protection of rights a priority, repudiate legislative primacy, and make overruling constitutional

decisions of high courts rather tenuous.   This form of 'new constitutionalism' makes a constitutional justice system a key element of its makeup.

The tenets of 'new constitutionalism' are as follows: (i) a written constitution establishes the institutions of the state and vests in them their authority; (ii) the People are entrusted as the ultimate arbiters of power through elections or referenda; (iii) all forms of public authority including that of the legislature is legal only to the extent that it corresponds and abides by constitutional law; (iv) the constitution comprises of a bill of rights and constitutional mechanisms to defend those rights; (v) the constitution itself states how it can be amended.

Judicial Review

Once under type 3 new constitutionalism, the matter of how to ensure a constitution's normative primacy is solved by the establishment of a system of 'constitutional review' by a third-party judiciary mechanism which evaluates the legitimacy of other legal norms. The two main models of constitutional review available today are *the American diffuse judicial method* and *the European model of concentrated review* conducted by a constitutional court. These models are grounded on different conceptions of the separation of powers.

American judicial review: In this system, in which the constitutional judicial review authority is diffuse or decentralised, any judge is endowed with the power to invalidate or withhold application of a statue that is considered contrary to the constitution. As the highest appellate court in the legal hierarchy, the Supreme Court is a court with 'general jurisdiction' for all issues of law, not merely constitutional ones. Judicial review is defensible under prevailing separation of powers precepts insofar as it is 'case or controversy' review. As it is the judges' legal obligation in general to resolve legal cases, sometimes of a constitutional nature, they are invested with the power to review. As such, judicial review is considered 'concrete', which is to say it is practiced similarly to ordinary litigation. A private person can allege the breach of a constitutional right and request remedy from the court for this violation. All American judicial review is concrete.

European constitutional review: In this system, the authority to review is centralised or concentrated. With judicial review of statutes proscribed, only a constitutional court can deem a statute unconstitutional while being restricted to matters of constitutional review only. Civil and criminal suits meanwhile are adjudicated by ordinary courts. Review powers, in these

systems, are justifiable under the doctrine of separation of powers to the extent that the judiciary is not involved, but a special, distinct institution, the constitutional court carries out review. This form of review is considered to be abstract in that no concrete case is litigated between two parties and resolved with a judgement. Instead, the constitutional court answers questions regarding the constitution put to it by judges and officials. Therefore, judicial review does look like a 'confusion of powers' as judges partake in legislative function. Compared to judicial review, abstract review appears rather like 'advisory opinions' that are non-binding which the US separation of powers doctrine does not permit.

Effectiveness of constitutional review

Constitutional review will be effective (i) if constitutional discord is consistently brought before review authorities; (ii) if judges who adjudicate are able to rationalise their decisions, give defensible reasons; and (iii) if people governed by constitutional law understand the precedence-setting nature of the rulings and the importance of accumulated jurisprudence.

Adapted from Chapter 9: Constitutions, Rights and Judicial Power by Alec Stone Sweet in *Comparative Politics* edited by Daniele Caramani.

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Elections and Referendums

Elections and referendums present people with the opportunity to cast a vote and express their will on how they and their country are to be governed. Representatives are selected to seats in parliament or other institutions through elections. Referendums, on the other hand, are votes that determine whether a particular issue is accepted or discarded. Elections are conducted in accordance with rules that direct the choices people make as they vote; these votes are transformed into parliamentary seats or the election of a president. In referendums, decisions on a given issue are not made by directly elected officials but by the people themselves. While elections are the norm in democracies, the manner in which referendums are used differ widely.

Election regulations

An electoral system is a set of regulations that shape how people vote during elections and how these votes are turned into office allocations. In modern times, differences in who gets to participate in voting in democracies are a matter of detail and not of principle since, after rather hard-fought battles over the twentieth century, formerly disenfranchised groups such as working-class men, minorities, and women all partake in the vote generally after the age of eighteen.

Types of electoral systems

The primary difference among electoral systems is between those based on single-member, majoritarian constituencies, or *first-past-the-post (FPP)* systems, and those based on *proportional representation (PR)* in multimember constituencies. In FPP systems, the most dominant party within the constituency wins the election, with no representation afforded to the rest of the parties involved. The alternative vote and two round systems are different iterations of this common structure.

In proportional representation systems, through many different methods, the principle of granting each voting bloc a 'fair share' in representation is achieved. In other words, the proportion of votes cast correspond to the same proportion of seats allocated. Different iterations of PR systems are list and mixed systems, and the single transferable vote. The level of choice afforded to voters in PR systems to express their say in party candidates varies, with non-PR systems giving voters no say at all.

Both systems have their unique advantages and disadvantages. In PR, a wider variety of parties tend to be given a shot at election. On the other hand, FPP tends to allow more independence for individual members of parliament without overly-centralised party control. Furthermore, members of parliament have a direct responsibility to a given constituency, so accountability may be stronger.

Referendums

While the majority of political decisions today are made by representative government, meaning through elected officials, in some instances a referendum is used which directly consults the people upon a specific issue requiring them to vote upon it. Referendums may be compulsory given the particular circumstance under review, such as if a country's sovereignty is concerned, or they may be optional in which instance they may be susceptible to political manipulation. Either way, a referendum may be triggered at the behest of a group of voters, called an initiative, or of a political institution such as the parliament. Referendums can be broken down to two kinds: decision-promoting and decision-controlling.

Arguments for and against referendums abound. Those for them cite that they enrich democracy via people's direct involvement, facilitate an explicit verdict on a discrete issue, add legitimacy to key issues, create a more well-informed electorate, and enhance democracy, when appropriately used, according to evidence. Those against them cite that lower quality policy decisions are being made by non-experts, that they may give biased majorities power to violate minority rights, that only the most invested on an issue vote leaving others out, and that they minimise the decision-making process by choosing an issue *du jour*. Regarding the latter, in fact, the regularity of referendums is on the rise even though they are still few and far between. The available empirical data on referendums indicate that the fears of detractors and the hopes of supports are overstated.

Adapted from Chapter 10: Elections and Referendums by Michael Gallagher in *Comparative Politics* edited by Daniele Caramani.

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Multilevel Governance

Multilevel governance is the pattern of distribution of authority inside and beyond the state, authority being the capacity to make binding decisions and agreements that conform to accepted rules. States with multilevel governance tend to have a decentralisation of power both at the centre of the state and across its territory. At the centre, decision-making is not vested wholly in a single individual or clique, but instead it is a responsibility that gets shared amongst more autonomous officials and bodies. Across the state's territory, authority is divested also in various regional government bodies. Similarly, all governments today tend to have some multilevel dimension in international relations.

A functionalist logic – that something exists to serve a function – and a demand for self-rule are presented as the two rationalisations for multilevel governance.

From a **functionalist perspective**, multilevel governance fulfils the need for organised distribution of public goods from the local to the global level. For instance, a local or municipal government is best placed to decide on how a local service such as the public library or the schools ought to be improved upon or changed, whereas public goods with a broad application and externality such as healthcare or pensions are best implemented by a national government. Generally, the greater the population, the greater the number of rungs or levels on the ladder of government within the state and the fewer over it.

From a **self-rule perspective**, multilevel governance is responding to the outlook of a certain group that sees itself as a separate community. The insistence of minorities for self-rule separates them from other state regions, and when central governments allow for this, the result is a *differentiated government*. Some articulations of multilevel governance are federalism, home-rule, decentralisation, confederation, and devolution.

Drivers of multilevel government

Substate governance has become deeply established in almost all countries as territories have secured distinct powers and government has become differentiated. Some factors driving multilevel government are:

- Ethno-territorial identity: Groups that coalesce around a regional ethnic identity can call for self-rule and force the central government to decentralise power.

- Democracy: In authoritarian systems, the rulers are highly mistrustful of substate government because it can create openings for opposing power centres beyond the rulers' control. In contrast, in democracies, rulers are less preoccupied with consolidating power and willing to transfer authority out of their hands if that garners them support.

- Interdependence: Trade, travel, and migration across countries have increased rapidly over the years. As a result, international coalitions have come into being to address the large-scale externalities that have arisen such as the need for trade or migration regulations, and to address security or climate change concerns. Within the state, the presence of multilevel government addresses the small-scale, socio-economic effects of such change on communities.

- Affluence: Affluence demands convenience. With increases in wealth, the demand for public goods to be provided more conveniently to the citizen arises. Some of these public goods are health care, education, infrastructure, and provisions for a viable environment which are best provided by regional and local authorities who are privy to the degree of need and optimal methods of delivery.

- Peace: War spurs centralisation while peace allows governments the scope to decentralise authority to regional, local, and international jurisdictions.

Effects of multilevel governance

Decentralisation through multilevel governance brings people closer to those who govern them and gives them better access to policy-making through elections at various levels. This in turn requires the government to be more responsive to citizens which contributes to the strengthening of democracy. Substate governance can create opportunities for minorities that allow for different power-sharing mechanisms which can be the difference between secession and the continued union of states. Multilevel governance also creates variance in policy within

a country so that rather than blanket proposals, there are more accommodating options for different groups. However, poorly managed multilevel governance can also entrench or worsen territorial divisions.

Adapted from Chapter 11: Multilevel Governance by Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks, and Arjan H. Schakel in *Comparative Politics* edited by Daniele Caramani.

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Political Parties

Political parties are the key players in political systems. These political systems may be democratic, authoritarian, or even totalitarian. Parties are well-established political organisations which perform the task of organising and presenting candidates up for elections where they are available, and it is implausible to think that any other form of social organisation will supplant it in the way it feeds government.

Over the ages, the definition of parties has evolved and remains contentious. A definition we can analyse is that of Huckshorn (1984:10): 'a political party is an autonomous group of citizens having the purpose of making nominations and contesting elections in the hope of gaining control over governmental power through the capture of public offices and the organisation of the government'. In this definition, the *objective of parties* is gaining government power through elected office, the *methods* used for that are nominations and taking part in elections, *competition* is explicitly stated indicating contestation, and *autonomous* indicates the self-governing nature of a party. All these four aspects can be contested but remain core tenets of parties. An implied element that Huckshorn adds through his definition is that the group that forms a party has a level of cohesive consistency that helps them function in a coordinating fashion while perpetuating a particular identity.

What constitutes a political party is not merely a question for politics, it concerns the law as well. For instance, entities that are afforded recognition as parties are often granted special privileges, such as government funding and required to submit to obligations regarding transparency.

Functions of Parties

Political parties take part in core functions that are crucial for the operation of democracy.

They **coordinate** among public officials, among citizens who have identical political leanings, and between officials and citizens. To accomplish this, they keep up discipline and communication inside the parliamentary caucus, coordinating its action for or against the cabinet. They also organise political action among similarly-inclined individuals and formulate links between organised party backers in the populace and their representatives in public office.

Political parties are usually the key participants **contesting in elections**. They are in charge of the candidates and choosing the issues on which voters will vote. They accomplish this by supplying candidates, and linking them individually to distinctly identifiable symbols, histories, and expectations of team work. They also develop the policy agenda and recruit and coordinate workers for campaigns.

Political parties participate in the **recruitment** and selection of staff for both elected and appointed offices. They also recruit activists for party purposes and train and socialise them to potentially hold office.

Finally, political parties function as **representatives** of both groups of citizens and of certain ideological leanings. They do so by speaking on behalf of their members in government and embodying the ideological position which has garnered them their supporters' backing.

Types of party organisation

The manner in which parties organise has transformed since the franchise has expanded and society has undergone change. As society continues to evolve, so will party organisation. Some types of parties are:

Cadre or elite parties are the earliest modern form of party that formed in parliaments comprised exclusively of elites and resourced entirely by personal wealth and connections.

Mass parties came into being during the push for mass suffrage. Its members were organised locally and its membership large. The leadership was answerable to its members and the resource base was formed from membership fees and related organisations.

Catch-all parties, formed during the mid 1900s, were more heterogenous in membership, but with membership that was marginalised in the decision-making process as the party was resourced by interest groups and other individuals.

Cartel parties are parties that effectively form cartels to reduce electoral hazards and are resourced by state subsidies. Their central office is dominated by the party in office and reliant on political consultants. While plebiscites among members and supporters determine decisions, the difference between the two are blurred. These are parties currently in operation although

not in the Sri Lankan context where party alliances shift and coalesce around various electoral exigencies such as in 2015 with the need to depose the incumbent.

Business-firm parties are parties with corporate resources, that are operated by politically inclined entrepreneurs, with a focus on business and economic growth rather than the general membership. Forza Italia created by Italian businessman Silvio Berlusconi is an example of such a party.

Parties provide a vital conduit for political activity. They introduce and integrate new citizens into a political environment and enrich the democratic process. However, political parties today face certain challenges. In all forms of existing parties across the democratic world, party membership and the active participation of members in party organising are on the wane. Furthermore, parties are facing more and more legal regulations. This may be rationalised on the grounds of financial fair-play or general impartiality, however, this can entrench existing parties with a set structure formed over time.

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Party Systems

Party systems are sets of party actors that compete (in elections) and cooperate (building coalitions) with one another to increase their power with the aim of commanding government in plural, democratic contexts. The types of parties that exist, the number and size of parties, and how they behave in order to increase their gains are all determinants of party systems. All political parties are coalesced around the principle of maximising votes and converting that to legislative power. Party systems have evolved over time and the number of competing parties and the government systems they operate in determine and perpetuate certain political outcomes over others. For instance, the party system in Sri Lanka has managed to keep power vested within the Sinhala majority.

The genealogy of party systems

Party families emerged from socio-economic and cultural conflicts or cleavages created by industrialisation, urban growth, and state formation. The following are some of the cleavages that resulted in new party formations:

Centre–periphery conflicts arose with resistance to centralised state power with regard to administration, taxation and cultural standardisation giving prominence to a certain language or religion. Regional parties and parties formed along linguistic, religious, and ethnic lines are characteristic of this cleavage. Sri Lanka's Tamil and Muslim parties are examples.

State–church conflicts emerged when the centralised and secular state clashed with established but waning clerical and aristocratic entitlement over church influence in state affairs and religious education. Conservative, religious parties arose from this cleavage. Sri Lanka's BBS is such a party.

Rural–urban cleavages were the result of agrarian support for protective trade barriers coming up against liberal urban industry that favoured the free markets and low tariffs. Agrarian and peasant party formations resulted from this cleavage.

Workers–employers cleavages arose from the conflict between capital and labour, the industrialists who initiated industrialisation and the workers *needed* to power it. Some defining issues for labour or workers' parties formulated along this cleavage are job protection, pensions, social welfare, and degree of state involvement in the economy.

Communists–socialists cleavages arose within left or labour movements over the question of revolution or reform. Systems of splinter communist parties resulted from this cleavage.

Materialist–post- materialist values came into being out after WWII when policy priorities between generations shifted. Various social movements demonstrated these new values and created Green parties and libertarian parties.

Open–closed societies were created with globalisation and the resultant opening up of markets that exacerbated anxieties and created threats related to employment, immigration, identity and being subsumed by supranational forces. Populist parties on the left and right resulted from this cleavage.

All of these cleavages are not featured in all countries. While the left-right cleavage is ubiquitous, the others vary across countries. Until the recent splits caused by globalisation and generational preferences, party systems had remained rather stable.

The morphology of party systems:

The number of parties and their size determine the nature of the competition between parties. Votes and the resultant number of seats in the legislature are indications of party strength, and as such the electoral system in which parties operate is a variable to be considered. Plural societies are inclined towards two-party systems and proportional representation towards multiparty systems.

Main party systems:

Dominant-party systems are ones in which one large party is able to command an absolute majority of votes and seats for a protracted period of time. Other parties are unable to even

come close to the 50% threshold, and thus there is no change of rule effectively creating one party rule.

Two-party systems have two equally large and powerful parties that command around 80% of the vote and seats together. Both parties receive 35-45% of the votes and one party is able to reach an absolute majority and form a one-party government. Power usually rotates between the parties.

Multiparty systems have no majoritarian parties that reach 50% of the votes and seats, but are composed of many parties of different sizes. These parties contest elections individually but need to form coalitions following elections to wield power, and since these coalitions can change over time, there is alternation in power.

Bipolar systems consist of two large coalitions that can amass up to 80% of the vote and seats. Over time, these coalitions tend to be stable and contest elections as electoral alliances. The coalition governments that form alternate power with elections.

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Interest Groups

Comprehending politics and political decisions is not just a matter of understanding government structure and electoral and party systems, but also the influence and pressure exercised by various groups with vested interests. Such groups rose to prominence with mass industrialisation and its attendant issues, and the shift in focus from institutions to social processes.

Interest groups are usually defined as organisations with membership that lobby government but with no electoral participation (Wilson 1990). However, this definition is insufficient as in some countries interest groups and their work is sharply defined, while in others their involvement is blurred. The concept of *public* and *private* interest groups have been introduced to distinguish the type of organisation activity that is of interest to the public and that which may be deemed private. But this dichotomy too is considered contentious.

Interest associations in theory:

Republican traditions in general and theorists such as Rousseau saw interest groups as a threat to democracy. He feared that specific interests fronted by particular groups could supersede the will of the people. In fact, the unitarist ideal of the 'indivisible state' is still the prevalent republican sentiment as regards interest groups.

Liberal traditions, on the other hand, do not view interest groups as a threat to democracy. They conceive of them as a crucial source of liberty. As state power increased pluralists saw that individuals needed to band together to resist any despotic state tendencies. Based on a right to association, interest groups serve to safeguard growth of civic life. This view is contingent, however on two dubious presuppositions that interest groups are uniformly spread across all political domains and all individuals have the same ability and will to associate.
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In contrast to republicans, the *neo-corporatist tradition* maintains that specific interests and groups that associate around interests cannot be denied access to the political arena. In contrast to pluralists, neo-corporatists interrogate the concept of free competition between varying interests as the strongest would tend to prevail. As this would challenge governance, social justice, and the economic potential of democracies, neo-corporatists hold that while

guaranteeing freedom of association, public policy should also make provision for balance of power between contrasting interest groups especially between those of capital and labour. In this scenario, policy-outcomes can demonstrate the best ideas and arguments and not merely be the result of power dynamics among interest groups.

Interest associations in practice:

Group formation: Selective incentives drive rational individuals to join interest groups (Olson 1965). The theory of rational choice states that only groups that supply private benefits will thrive, while ones that supply public goods, i.e. benefits given regardless of membership, will find it difficult to draw members. However, collective experiences and concerns regarding morals may also sway individuals to join a group. Additionally, the formation of interest groups in practice may depend as well on external sponsors and organisers.

Collective action: Business interest groups do not need to engage in collective action. As any given investment decision has a direct impact on the economy, the capitalists must be consulted regardless of the level of their organisation. This streamlines the job of business interest groups immensely. In contrast, for trade unions or other citizens' groups to have an impact, such as through a strike, collective organisation is absolutely necessary, as well as the willingness of individuals to act cooperatively.

Direct lobbying: This form of lobbying involves direct, private access to decision-makers. The power of interest groups is dependent upon their ability to exert influence on policy-makers and achieve particular policy results. Unsurprisingly, whenever a group possesses great financial resources, legitimacy and competence, the greater its ability to pressure decision-makers and in turn, create desirable policy outcomes. Accessibility of institutions and the nature of the issue also determine how effective lobbying can be.

Political exchange: This form of lobbying involves trade unions and business interest groups engaging with policy-makers on the basis of exchanging information regarding the economic sphere. This is a rather broad definition that could even include corporate lobbying.

Contentious politics: This type of lobbying, also called outside lobbying, includes strikes and contentious forms of exercising pressure upon policy-makers. Through contentious action, unions force institutions to a compromise.

Private interest government: This is the case when the state has delegated decision-making to interest groups. It now passes as *regulatory governance* whereby with the objective of reducing the influence of interest groups, policy is handed to independent agencies. Regulatory agencies however do not operate in political or ideological vacuums and hence can have agendas that subvert why certain policy was handed to them.

As can be seen, interest groups perform an important role in the political architecture. A general consensus regarding whether they subvert or sustain democracy is, however, non-existent.

Adapted from Chapter 14: Interest Groups by Ronald Erne in *Comparative Politics* edited by Daniele Caramani.

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Regions

A region is a particular geographical territory which may be given cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious or economic attributes or significance depending not just on its constituent population but also on the context in which it is being invoked politically. Thus defining a region is a political act contingent upon why the defining is required in the first place.

While regions may belong within a nation state, they are spatially different entities that have their own economic, political, administrative and cultural instincts that may develop over time into identities. Regionalism is the politicisation of the identity associated with a certain region that pertains to its values, choices, and aspirations. Regionality is dependent on its natural or organic unity, the quality and salience of its institutions and the robustness of regional identity.

Theories and approaches to regions:

Modernisation theorists see the unavoidable whittling away of regionalism through cultural homogeneity. To achieve this, the central elites attempt to suffuse modern values to the outposts in order that the regional masses gradually modernise. Over time, though, regions have opposed and defied efforts to culturally homogenise them, attempts at centralised political control, and economic marginalisation.

Some see regions predominantly as **cultural spaces**. The value system and identity, formed from a region's history, folklore, and cultural emblems, all distinct to that certain region can be deployed politically to articulate regional interests and strategies.

Marxists understand regions as spaces that the market has overlooked. In other words, their proposition is that unrestrained capitalist development does not apply uniformly over territory and as a result some regions are left in straits. Political economy then is a crucial factor in regional disparities that often lead to disputes.

In liberal Western democracies, regionalist secessionist movements have had very little success. While regional autonomy has been granted in a few cases, no country has split due to regional differences. For instance, countries like the UK and Canada are considered **multinational countries** where both the majority and minority nations are involved in a common socialisation as well as differentiation project. This is generally attributed to well-

established institutional power and influence, belief in plurality and tolerance, and the capacity of individuals to inhabit dual identities. This **institutionalist outlook** on regions posits the power of institutions to alleviate or exacerbate regional differences through study of constitutions, bureaucracies, government structures and electoral systems among other institutions.

Regionalism from below:

The rise of parties calling for regionalism, 'regionalism from below', is explained by *democratisation*, the rise of *neoliberalism* and the weakening welfare state, and the political *mobilisation of minority groups*. Invoking democracy, many regions are able to make historical claims to regional autonomy based on identity and culture. Due to neoliberalism and its attendant policy ramifications, such as austerity, many regional parties have made ground calling for autonomy. Finally in multinational states, regionalism has grown as the minority nations have become highly politicised and utilised elections and referendums to push forward regional agendas. Even so, with time, regional parties in multinational democracies appear to become an intrinsic part of the existent party system within which the nation operates. They thus become less of a threat to unity and a constituent part of possible coalitions that contribute to stability.

Moreover, regions whose autonomy is guaranteed constitutionally through federal structuring have the greatest freedom to operate independently. In federal nations, regions amount to independent political bodies with constitutional powers and the right to engage in national politics and intergovernmental relations between regional governments.

Regional political economy:

The polarisation of regions within states is a historical process that began with state and state-building enterprises encountering regional hostility such as military conflict, ethnic nationalism, regional movements and party politics. This differentiation was furthered by the implementation of the welfare state. At first regional policy conducted by the central government was technocratic and de-politicised, but as state reach became more ubiquitous, regional players recognised that their interests and those of the centre were inconsistent. This led to the establishment of regional development policies to work alongside national

programmes. However, changes to the international political economy meant the shrinking of regional development and welfare, which in turn resulted in new regionalist endeavours. *Defensive* regionalists who emerged were invested in the established economic sectors and its threatened dependents. *Modernizing* regionalists wanted to bring straggling regions in line with the national economic standards whereas *autonomist* regionalists reinvigorated historical claims for nationhood. Finally, there is a new regionalism that has risen out of the conditions created by globalisation.

Adapted from Chapter 15: Regions by James Bickerton and Alain-G. Gagnon in *Comparative Politics* edited by Daniele Caramani.

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Political Culture

A state's political culture is determined by the cultural norms, values and beliefs of individuals in that state as they pertain to political thought and action. Thus, political culture has a psychological element to it that extends to the composition of political systems. Because it is easy to employ reductive cultural stereotypes while studying political culture, a scientific study of it necessitates evidence based on relevant data from nationally representative population samples. Understanding political culture can allow for state specific analyses and responses to problems arising out of that culture.

Cultural differences around the world:

Globally, cultural differences reduce down to sacred/secular values, shortened to secular values, and patriarchal/emancipative values shortened to emancipative values. Different nations place varying degrees of importance on secular and emancipative values prompted by particular historical trajectories and the impact of waves of modernisation. More secular orientations are the outcome of Communist, Confucian and Protestant traditions with industrialisation further aiding the secularisation processes. The Protestant tradition has also made nations more amenable to emancipative values with post-industrial modernisation helping along the process. Emancipative values incidentally also has an impact on a country's position along the autocracy/democracy spectrum.

The historical roots of the political culture concept:

A principal presupposition of the political culture paradigm is that the social structure of a populace contributes to particular attitudes among its individuals which in turn make a certain kind of political system more accepted than another. As such, there is a direct progression from social structures to personal beliefs to the validity of political institutions and in turn prevailing governments. Hierarchical or vertical social structuring fosters authoritarian attitudes that validate dictatorial rule, whereas horizontal social structures foster egalitarianism that in turn validate democratic rule. Recognition of people as the 'masses' that can affect political change is a concept that, while Greek in origin, was resuscitated with the revolutions of the 1700s which reinstalled people as agents of political change.

Citizens' democratic maturity:

Civic competence within a culture is emphasised as a concept that can bolster democracy. Democracy is thought to put more demands on individuals than authoritarian rule as the freedom to choose between parties, issues and opinions of candidates, and participate in elections requires educating oneself and utilising that education for electoral ends, even as participation is voluntary. Moreover, even in limited democratic settings where there is reduced participation, the population must have a sense of the electoral process.

The allegiance model of the democratic citizen:

In addition to civic competence, the model democratic citizen also subscribes to a sense of allegiance to the normative beliefs, institutions, and players of democracy. This allegiance format supports the restriction of citizens' political actions to elite-entrusting forms of participation. For instance, participation in elections whereby legislators (elites) are elected to look out for the best interests of the citizens is elite-entrusting behaviour as opposed to participation in social movements whereby the masses are mobilising directly. This latter form of participation is construed as non-institutional activity of which an ideal citizen would not partake. As representation is the key component principle of democracy, its legitimacy requires party-voter alignments.

Party-voter dealignment:

Party–voter alignments are a constituent component of representative democracy. As such, while people may change their alignment with a party, they cannot float freely outside the bound of all available alignments. In such a case of party-voter dealignment in which the masses mobilise outside the set institutions of representative democracy, governments are put in situations where they are unable to acquiesce to the demands of the mobilisations. This leads to citizen disappointment over democratic institutions and the subsequent crises of legitimacy for governments. Party-voter dealignment trends such as elite-challenging mass action have generally eroded the allegiance model of democracy.

The assertive model of the democratic citizen:

As a result of elite-challenging mobilisations, e.g. movements for women's rights etc., emancipative values have risen across post-industrial nations and even beyond. However, in societies where emancipative values have become the strongest, there has been a long-term decline in parliaments, the police and the military but a higher horizontal trust in fellow citizens. In effect, emancipative values in general have made people more liberal in their conception of democracy while simultaneously employing a more critical lens on its workings, as well as more accepting and open with regard to non-group members.

A cultural view of democracy:

According to data, the extent to which a country oriented towards democracy during one of the many waves of democratisation was contingent on the salience of its emancipative values. The impulse for democratic freedoms is not considered to be universal but culturally mediated by the growth of emancipative values. Since emancipative values are generally on the rise across the globe, there is reason to expect democratic gains even in countries that have historically tended towards autocratic rule. Understanding that political culture is influenced by secular and emancipative values allows us to formulate a scientific approach to its analysis and to redress any of its deficits or excesses.

Adapted from Chapter 17: Political Culture by Christian Welzel and Ronald Inglehart in *Comparative Politics* edited by Daniele Caramani.

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Political Participation

Political participation that is voluntary sets up some curious questions. Why people take part in the political arena at all when it is costly, time-consuming and requires long-term commitments, why some take part in political participation whereas others do not, and why certain types of political participation are preferred to others are all questions that have no set answers. Political participation then, is an undertaking that people commit to regardless of obstructions and inclinations towards more unpremeditated action that can yield immediate dividends.

How? Modes of political participation

Sites of participation

Political participation takes place in different arenas and political contexts. People can be involved in (i) forum politics in the public arena via the community, in the streets or through the media to publicise and disseminate demands to those willing to listen; (ii) targeting policy-makers in the legislative or executive branches with their communications and requests; (iii) choosing those who go on to policy-making roles in the legislature or executive branches. All these sites have different levels and intensities of involvement as one can move from sporadic and voluntary to consistent and elected participation.

The breadth of risk inherent to political participation depends on the political regime and climate in which it operates. The less liberal a regime is regarding people's freedom of political expression via organised action, the greater the risk and potential costs. This is true even if the political expression articulated is relatively restricted and mild. In contrast, in democracies, participating in communication with government officials and participating in nominating and choosing officials are low risk activities.

Modes of participation

Social movements are the mode of political participation that involves and utilises the public forum, of the community, the street or the media to make policy demands of the government. There is no membership in official membership in social movements and there is no strongly articulated organisational structure.

Interest groups are the form of political participation that involves communicating with decision-makers in the legislature or executive branches directly to communicate preferable policy outcomes, demands and threats. Interest groups are centralised entities that have a formal membership scheme and regulations, with these features rendering them as distinct and preferable partners in policy making as opposed to more amorphous social movements.

Political parties are the form of political participation that involves people in the electoral process of a country. Participants collaborate on nominating candidates for the legislature, help them campaign and build a supporter base, and work to maximise turnout for these candidates. All of the above constitute setting up of political parties without which isolated candidates cannot run for office successfully.

Why? Determinants of political participation

Political engagement is not the only avenue available for people to have better life opportunities. They can rely on family and community associations or the market and often do. It is when these preliminary mechanisms of support fail to offer solutions that people turn to politics. As such, political participation is a last resort to affect a binding resolution on a given conflict.

The aim of much of political participation is to provide collective goods to all, even those who had no part in their production. This is called the collective action paradox. If for instance, a person resolved to minimise costs of benefits and decided that others should bear the cost of production of the collective good, that is became a free-rider, no good may be produced at all. A solution to the free-rider problem is the offering of selective incentives that provide benefits to those who are best organised to provide a particular public good. All of this, however, must not take away from the possibility that some people participate in collective action considering it to be a reward in itself, or because the costs of participation are viewed as negligible.

When and where? Macro-level participation

In democratic nations with electoral systems that regularly elect the legislature and executive branches to office through universal franchise, many avenues for political participation are available. Social movements, interest groups and political parties are all able to operate in these liberal, plural environments as they tend to be wealthier and possess more resources to encourage participation. In authoritarian regimes, the executive branch is all powerful and lie

outside democratic accountability; however, they may allow some social movements, interests groups or political parties if elections are held. In extremely harsh, dictatorial regimes all political participation is restricted and monitored. They are restricted in that organised participation from below may be made impossible, and monitored in that top-down policies may make participation in state-run projects mandatory.

The particular political issue at stake can also direct the nature of political participation. Social movements generally crystallise around a single issue that people deem is important, but they lack structural coherence and hence longevity. Organising consistently around a set of closely related issues over time brings interest groups into existence. Political parties form when intricate, interconnected problems require coordinated, sustained problem-solving achieved through electing party officials to office.

Who? Micro-level participation

On an individual basis, people with more time, social connections, disposable income, and cognitive ability are more inclined to take part in politics than those with less resources.

Adapted from Chapter 18: Political Participation by Herbert Kitschelt and Phillip Rehm in *Comparative Politics* edited by Daniele Caramani.

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Political Communication

Political communication is the interplay of information that is created, shaped and distributed by those involved in the political system, the media, and the larger public which constitute the public sphere. Discursive power in the public sphere is the extent to which the information within it is controlled by a given player. Examining political communication as part of the media system and in terms of its relevance to the political system helps to delineate how it differs from place to place.

Comparative study of political communication

Comparative research on political communication differentiates between at least two separate settings and seeks to illustrate how the macro-level context moulds the modes of communication differently. This macro-level, called the *communication ecosystem*, is composed of collaborative as well as contentious streams of information between political operators, their own communication outlets, the news media, social media platforms and the public. Political communication today has two simultaneous modes of operation: (i) the long-established, legacy media, top-down oriented model of mass communication; and (ii) the diffused, participatory and interactive model of internet communication. The cohabitation of these two logics have turned media systems today into 'hybrid systems'.

Media-politics relations

A political system's ability to exert influence on the news media depend on five factors: the function of the state and oversight in media policy; the existence of a majority driven or consensus government; the manner in which interest arbitration has occurred in the past regarding pluralism; the type of political system; and the history of democratisation. Working with these factors, Hallin and Mancini identified three media system types: the North Atlantic liberal model, a North-West European democratic corporatist model, and a Southern European polarised pluralist model. While subsequent media systems have been added, they are mostly associated with Western countries. Researchers understand the need to broaden their studies to non-Western countries and weak democracies as media systems can help illustrate why regime and system changes happen.

Political information flows

Political actors

Political actors engage in three forms of message creation: government communication, parliamentary communication and election communication. Their approach to each form of communication has become measured and professional as they identify the importance of the media and their role.

In the area of government communication, the government may take a party-centred or citizen-centred approach to communication. The former is an approach that is biased toward the party in power while the latter is a more citizen-focused approach that involves participation, in which institutions and policies require a non-partisan, civic form of talking to the public.

In the area of parliamentary communication, the news media in political systems has a substantial effect on setting the parliament's agenda. Studies have shown that opposition parties' parliamentary activities are more sensitive to media scrutiny than that of the party in power. Moreover, voicing opposition to a member of the government in parliament is also shown to increase chances of being seeing by the press.

In the area of election communication, the 'fourth era of political communication' incorporates new campaign tools, techniques, and capabilities made possible by the rise of big data technology. The resultant individual-centred campaigns utilise the internet and algorithms to target specific individuals according to their media consumption. The logic of these campaigns is datafication that involves micro-analysis and mobilising accordingly. Despite the ubiquity of data-driven campaigns, the particularities of a certain country determine the methods that campaign experts will use.

Media actors

Over the latter half of the 1900s, the news media in many Western countries are thought to have become more objective in their reporting on politics. However, they have also tended towards becoming interpretative. A study in 2013 illuminated three types of news coverage.

US reporting, even though it tends to be interpretative with news analysis and background stories, still commits to maintaining a fact-based style that depends on expert positions, and a view from both sides of the story. Scandals are exceptions to this manner of reporting. Compared to the US, the Italian model of reporting is inherently adversarial, pessimistic, and opinion-driven. A third style found in German and Swiss newspapers contains both news and opinion features heavily but on separate pages. Often country specific factors determine the framing, negativity, bias, and personalisation of news.

National audiences

In most countries, notable generational breaks can be seen in the type of news sources consumed. Older citizens continue to depend on traditional news sources which they use regularly, while younger groups use digital and social media heavily but rely on them for news infrequently. Different countries vary in the degree to which their audiences are splintered, polarised and tuned out of news completely. The tendency appears to be that the blend of the changing nature of democracy, hybrid media and political communication ecosystems creates outcomes that are ambivalent.

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Policy-making

Public policies are the products of political systems. They come in the form of laws, regulations and guidelines to bring about specific changes and achieve goals and are the result of a chain of actions aimed to address a particular social issue. There are several different types of policies. *Distributive* policies relate to how government goods or resources are to be directed to particular recipients. *Redistributive* policies determine the transfer of resources between social groups. *Regulatory* policies set terms and conditions for individual and collective conduct while *constituent* policies make changes to existent institutions or create new ones.

Framing policy-making

Policy-making can be conceptualised as a plan of action for finding solutions to societal problems through institutional means. Looking at institutions, especially those that form the electoral system, is instructive for how policy-making happens. A cognitive frame is the particular orientation through which actors see and make sense of the world while a normative frame refers to beliefs and values that help structure that world. Both frames can both strengthen or constrain a particular policy process.

Conceptual models of policy making

Institutional model: This model takes into account how existent institutions, both official and informal, and the limitations and opportunities they provide pre-determine the structure of policy decisions.

Rational model: This model concentrates on how best to garner 'optimal' policy decisions using all accessible information on past policy results and deducing the policy that is calculated to yield the best outcome.

Incremental model: This model, which originated as a reaction to the rational model, aspires to a realistic rather than an optimal process of policy-making. It places relevance on the shortcomings of decision-makers with regard to both their comprehension of a subject and their cognitive abilities leading to incremental changes to policy.

Group model: This model situates policy as the outcome of equilibrium after group struggle. In this theory, the strength of interest groups involved determine the policy that comes about with changes to the power of a group involved possibly sparking policy changes.

Elite model: This model theorises that policy-making is the domain and doing of the elites in government driven by their preferences. It theorises that the non-ruling masses are considered to be deficient in their understanding of policy while the elites are well-versed on questions of policy from their proximity to power. In this model, through these articulations, a bias in policy making is identified in that policies are consistent with the priorities of elites rather than the concerns of the public masses.

The policy cycle

Policy-making always happens within constraints such as that of time, resources, public opinion and constitutional law. It is a process with established precedents enacted through various institutions some of which overlap and compete with one another. New policy decisions are not discrete decisions taken independently of previous ones, and they can have an effect on policy decisions to come in the future. The process involved in policy-making is a series of political acts. They are:

Agenda setting

In this first stage, a societal problem requiring state intervention is singled out. Being able to set a particular agenda and/or exclude societal problems from the agenda is a key source of power for the policy-making institution or individual responsible. Usually, policy agendas are set by public authorities, the bureaucracy, the media, or interest groups.

Policy formulation

This stage calls for defining, discussing, accepting or rejecting practical ways of moving forward to tackle the chosen policy issue. Policy formulation takes place in government offices, among lobbyists and interest groups, in legislative committees, commission meetings and think-tanks. The staff affiliated with these collectives often draw up the proposals knowing what their leaders are aiming for.

Policy adoption

The adoption of a particular policy option depends on government institutions. If there is a need to build a majority to approve the policy, then a whole host of considerations come into play such as party values and interests of the electorate that complicate adoption. The official capacities of the actors involved making the policies also factor in how policies are adopted.

Implementation

Policies are implemented when they are put into practice as laws or initiatives. The implementation process can be a long-drawn out process. At times, there can be a gap between passing new legislation and its being put into operation. For effective implementation, there must come into being an entity, often a bureaucracy, but sometimes private actors that can bear responsibility and convert policy targets into a workable project.

Evaluation

This stage involves an appraisal of the policy-making process and its outcome to see whether it has achieved its targets. Evaluation is usually a standard part of policy-making and the domain of experts in the given area.

Adapted from Chapter 20: Policy-making by Christoph Knill and Jale Tosun in *Comparative Politics* edited by Daniele Caramani.

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