

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
AND  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**POSC 105  
DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL CAPACITY**

- I. THIS MORNING:
  - A. Working definitions of democracy
  - B. A government that works: the concept of political capacity
  - C. Reading:
    - 1. You should be reading *There Are No Children Here*
    - 2. Be sure to start the *Times* by today since I will be looking for articles from the first week.
- II. DEMOCRACY:
  - A. Refer to the last set of notes.
  - B. Two components:
    - 1. Liberties
    - 2. Direct or indirect control of decision making
- III. DEMOCRACY AS FREEDOM:
  - A. Democracy as “freedoms to and from”
    - 1. Political rights (e.g., speech, assembly, etc.)
    - 2. Economic and social security
      - a. **Questions:**
        - \* Does someone living in poverty have the same effective rights as a wealthy person?
        - \* Are valuable are political rights to those who are malnourished, ill?
        - \* Consider two countries, both having identical constitutions guaranteeing political rights and freedom. In one 20 percent of the population lives in poverty; in the other no one does. Are they equally democratic, in the sense of democracy as freedom?
    - 3. Psychological freedom.
      - a. \*A Key test of democracy is the public’s level of **enlightened understanding**
  - B. Proposition: rights are a necessary condition of democracy but by themselves do not constitute it.
- IV. DEMOCRACY AS GOVERNMENT BY THE PEOPLE:
  - A. What is the source of a government’s **legitimacy**; that is, it’s right to command obedience from it’s citizen’s

1. \*Popular sovereignty versus divine right of kings: read and listen to “Popular Sovereignty” on the web site. (Go to the electronic reserve room.)
  - B. Proposition: an essential element of democracy is citizen participation in the making of public (authoritative) policies.
    1. The word means government **by** the people
  - C. Popular democracy: citizens make binding decisions.
- V. SOME OBJECTIONS TO POPULAR DEMOCRACY:
- A. Logistical practical considerations.
  - B. \*Is government by the masses desirable?
    1. Certainly the founders had doubts.
      - a. Hence they created a republic
      - b. See below
    2. When all is said and done not everyone agrees that popular or populist democracy is desirable no matter how strongly they claim to support the basic ideas of democracy.
- VI. ALTERNATIVE FORM - DEMOCRACY AS ACCOUNTABILITY:
- A. \***Republican** form of government:
    1. A republic is...
  - B. \*The key is **accountability**: if decisions are to be made on behalf of and in the name of the people, then at a minimum these leaders should be meaningfully accountable to their constituents..
    1. We can judge a system by how well it permits citizens to hold leaders accountable.
  - C. Necessary conditions:
    1. Individual responsibility: citizens take an active interest in politics
    2. Institutional responsibility:
      - a. Parties and candidates take distinct and opposing stands on issues.
      - b. Information is available at a reasonable cost.
      - c. Rules, laws, institutions, culture, encourage and facilitate participation.
      - d. Decision makers can be held accountable.
- VII. SUMMARY:
- A. Criteria for evaluating democracy
    1. Extent of freedoms.
    2. Level of enlightened understanding
    3. Power to hold leaders accountable
  - B. Each of us can apply these criteria to the United States although our conclusions will probably not agree.
  - C. The meaning of the term, "democracy," is not self-evident.
    1. What the founders meant by the concept (and by rights) is not clear.

2. What they intended may not even be relevant.
- D. How a society defines democracy partly (if not mainly) determines the distribution of tangible and intangible goods and values. Bluntly stated, the prevailing conception of democracy partially determines who wins and who loses and who gets the things that are worth having such as power, wealth, prestige, and legitimacy.
- E. Democracy is a "contentious" form of government: not everyone really believes in it, no matter how much lip service they give to the term. (See above)
  1. Hypothesis: Elites (those in positions of power) have mixed feelings about democracy: they accept its abstract principles but are reluctant to put it in practice.
  2. Many elites do not trust the people to govern themselves.
  3. Other elites do not want the people to participate in major decision making.
  4. When push comes to shove, many prefer less to more democracy.
- F. Hypothesis: democracy does not have a necessary connection with any particular type of economy.
  1. Capitalism and democracy are not synonymous; a socialist society could be democratic.
  2. Whether or not this ever occurs is a matter of debate.

#### VIII. NEXT TIME:

- A. Film that demonstrates many of these points.
- B. Political capacity
- C. Reading:
  1. About now you should be finishing Chapter 1 Patterson of *We the People*
  2. In the "Electronic Reserve Room" (class web page):
    - a. "An Argument for Government"
    - b. Sovereignty
    - c. For your information (but not required) I suggest the readings on political power and theories of "who governs America."

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