

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Posc 105

DEMOCRACY AND CAPACITY

- I. THIS MORNING:
 - A. Means of democracy
 - B. Political capacity

- II. DEMOCRACY- SUMMARY:
 - A. Democracy as freedoms
 - 1. Individual rights and liberties.
 - 2. Economic security
 - 3. Enlightened understanding

- III. DEMOCRACY AS GOVERNMENT BY THE PEOPLE:
 - A. The source of a government's **legitimacy**; that is, it's right to command obedience from it's citizens:
 - 1. Popular sovereignty versus divine right, tradition or force
 - B. Literal interpretation: collective decision making **by** citizens themselves.
 - 1. Decisions binding on society are made by majority vote of eligible citizens.
 - 2. Town-hall democracy, populist democracy, direct democracy, participatory democracy.

- IV. OBSTACLES TO POPULAR DEMOCRACY:
 - A. "Logistical" problems
 - 1. How to inform citizens, assembly them in one place at one time, tally votes, etc.
 - B. Is government of and by the masses desirable?
 - 1. Are people responsible enough, knowledgeable, enough for self government?
 - a. Consider these questions: According to newspaper and television reports Iraq continues to develop "weapons of mass destruction" in defiance of UN resolutions. Possible American responses include 1) doing nothing and letting other countries deal with the threat; 2) continue with economic and political sanctions; 3) launch an air and cruise missile campaign against Iraqi military targets and weapons factories; and 4) use ground and air forces to remove Saddam Hussein's government and install a more democratic one. Since action does not have to be taken immediately—it can wait perhaps

six months or more—the decision could presumably be publically debated and decided by popular referendum.

- (1) Who should make this decision, the people or elected representatives and military and diplomatic experts?
- (2) If not the people why not them?
- (3) If people cannot make life-and-death decisions **for themselves**, are they free?

C. ✧**Democracy is a contested concept.**

1. We pay lip service to it but may not really want it in many key situations.

V. AN ALTERNATIVE FORM -DEMOCRACY AS ACCOUNTABILITY :

A. **Republican** form of government:

1. A republic is a form of government in which supreme power rests in citizens and is exercised by representatives chosen by and accountable to them.
2. ✧The key element:
 - a. Citizens must be able to hold leaders or representatives responsible for their action.
 - b. That is, citizens must have the ability to judge policies acceptable or unacceptable and to set guidelines for future action.

B. Necessary conditions:

1. Individual responsibility :citizens take an active interest in politics
 - a. Enlightened information
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.

C. Summary: democracy can be judged along two dimensions:

1. Level of meaningful rights held by its citizens.
2. Capacity to hold representatives accountable.

VI. ANOTHER CONSIDERATION:

- A. How relevant is democracy if a government cannot solve problems its citizens want and need solved?
- B. In asking this question raises issues of political capacity.
- C. Think for a moment of some of our most pressing concerns (apart from the impeachment issue): social security reform, education, environmental protection, crime, infrastructure,...
- D. ✧It is thus reasonable to ask whether a political system can
 - a. Identify such issues
 - b. Address them efficiently and in a timely fashion.

- E. In short we have tow big questions:
 - 1. How can government be **controlled and efficient** at the same time?
 - 2. When discussing reforms, then, we might keep these issues in mind.

VII. NEXT TIME:

- A. The conflict between majority rule and minority rights.
 - 1. Film on the Fourth Amendment
- B. Political capacity
- C. Reading:
 - 1. Optional: sections of the web page dealing with “Who Governs.”
 - 2. Don’t put off **There Are No Children Here**

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