

Politics Prelims - PPE and HP

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Hilary Term 2020

Tutorials

In Hilary Term, the Politics Prelims taught by me will take place on **TUESDAY of Week 3 (4 February)** and **Week 6 (25 February)** between 10:00 am and 01:00 pm in the Department of Politics and International Relations, room to be announced.

Essays

You will be required to submit one essay for each of the tutorials. The essays should be approximately 1,500 words in length (including footnotes), and should develop and critically sustain an argument of your choice as an answer to the questions you can find below. All essays must include page numbers, bibliography and references. The latter may be Harvard-style or in footnotes.

Please, remember to send the essay via email both to me and to your tutorial partners **at least 24h in advance of the tutorials**. In class, you will be expected to have read the others' essays, and be ready to ask questions and comment on them.

Readings and Questions

Week 3: Constitutional Variations (B1) — February 4th

Essay Question

- What is the difference between a presidential, semi-presidential, and parliamentary system? What other variables does the real-world operation of a regime depend on, besides those found in constitutions?

Why this topic?

To enable you to understand basic constitutional differences in the way power is allocated between branches of government. In stable and long-established democratic government, power is often said to derive from a constitutional agreement (usually written down, but, even when written down, qualified by conventions and understandings which may not be written down). Similarly power is said to be allocated to branches of government in patterns that vary from country to country. The topic introduces several long-established concepts: the constitutional allocation of power; the separation of powers between governmental branches and its claimed effects on legislative politics; the fusion of executive and legislature under parliamentary government; the impact of separation or fusion on executive strength; variations in the real meaning of fusion depending on legislative and party politics. In one way this is a sorting and classifying exercise to make sure you use terminology clearly, and to help you understand how political science literature uses it. Your tutor may spend some time simply working through these definitions to be sure you see how they are conventionally used. However, underlying the exercise is an implicit debate about how useful classification is, and if it is useful, what it should be based on. One part of this debate is whether a constitution and its rules are a useful power-map at all, when so much seems to depend on informal and contingent aspects of politics like the nature of party politics, or where a country is in an electoral or political cycle, or how popular a government is at any particular point, etc. If the location of

political power can vary so much, do constitutions only serve as background constraints, and if so, are comparisons of how they work only of limited usefulness?

Readings

- Clark, W.R., Matt Golder, and Sonia Golder, 2009. *Principles of Comparative Government, Washington*, (Chapter 11: “Parliamentary, Presidential, and Mixed Democracies”, pp. 395-461) (**Introductory: start here**)
- Samuels, D., 2007: “Separation of Powers”. In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, New York.
- Lijphart, A., 2012. *Patterns of Democracy. Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, New Haven.
- Siaroff, A., 2003. ‘Comparative Presidencies: The Inadequacy of the Presidential, Semi-Presidential and Parliamentary Distinction’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 42(3), pp. 287-312.

Week 6: Democratic Legislatures (B3) — March 25th

Essay Question

- Can we draw a sharp distinction between regimes that are democratic and those that are not? If so, what are the criteria? If not, why not?

Why this topic?

The concept of democracy is one of the most used in the study of politics and yet there exists enormous scholarly debate over what precisely constitutes ‘democracy’ and symmetrically, how to define non-democratic regimes. This tutorial explores the debate over conceptualizing political regimes and also touches on theories that explain transitions between regimes and variation

within them. The tutorial readings begin with the classic distinction between ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ conceptions of democracy and the associated debate over measuring democracy. Some scholars argue for a multi-dimensional conception of democracy including contestation, inclusion, the separation of powers, the granting of civil liberties, and the responsiveness of government to demands. Accordingly, fine-grained scales of democracy or ‘polyarchy’ have been created to capture such distinctions. Conversely other scholars have argued that democracy should be considered a ‘bounded whole’ that is a binary ‘either/or’ concept. Still other scholars argue that formal democracy even in paradigmatic cases like the United States might be undermined by socioeconomic inequalities, producing oligarchy rather than democracy. The tutorial then turns to variations among authoritarian and democratic regimes, examining literature that explores the worlds of ‘electoral’ or ‘competitive’ authoritarianism. These works problematize the connection often made between holding elections and being ‘democratic,’ noting the ways in which authoritarian regimes might use elections to underscore rather than undermine their hold on power. Finally the tutorial concludes by examining the prospects of democratic survival and consolidation, also drawing on the literature explaining the origins of democratic transitions. These readings should help students think about which structural or strategic forces hold together political regimes or split them apart.

Readings

- William R Clark, Matt Golder and Sonia Golder, *Principles of Comparative Politics*, CQ Press, Washington, 2009, (Chaps 5 and 10).
- Philippe Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl (1991), “What Democracy Is... and Is Not.” *Journal of Democracy* 2:3 (Summer): 75-88
- Art, David. 2012. ”What do we know about authoritarianism after ten years?” *Comparative Politics* 44.3: 351-373.

- Schedler, A., (1998) “What is Democratic Consolidation?”, *Journal of Democracy*, 9(2), pp. 91-107.