GV101 Into to PolSci

Professor Simon Hix

Lent Term Revision Document

Cedric Tan

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Abstract

This is a revision document for selected Lent Term Topics for the GV101 course. This is specific to the GV101 exam in May. The notes are mine fully and may not be authentic to the lecturer's as they have been modified.

The format of this material is usually recounted lecture by lecture. Material may be merged together if it fits appropriately though this is unlikely in this course.

Contents

1 How Government Works

We will begin with a discussion on the workings of government which is an overarching theme on political institutions

1.1 Consequences of Democratic Institutions

There are two fundamental ways in which Democracy should work:

1. Majoritarian

2. Consensus

The choices on these electoral rules has a huge impact on who gets to govern. The tension between majoritarian and consensus democracy is between **a guarantee of coherent stable choices (group transitivity)** and **a guarantee of freedom to form their own preferences (universal admissibility).** Below I will explain the two types of visions associated with the two main forms of democracy.

1.1.1 The Majoritarian Vision

Key features:

- Elections are a choice between alternatives

- Elected party has responsibility over policy etc.

- Two models exist:

    - Trustee model: politicians have autonomy
    - Delegate mode: politicians have to stick to the constitution

Further to that, other features for citizens include:

- Ability to decide on performance and whether or not to reward or punish the party in power (clarity of accountability)

- However, you are only able to assert this influence every election

- Policy is only determined by the majority you vote in, there is no influence whatsoever from minority parties

- Voters need to vote in a clear majority for this system to be effective

1.1.2 The Consensus Vision

Key features:

- Elections as an opportunity to choose a wide range of representatives

- Representatives are chosen by belief that they would be effective for particular issues or views

- Consensus is based on the trustee model of representation:

  - Autonomy to bargain
  - Constantly shifting majorities
  - Continuously shift in accordance with citizen's preferences

Further to that, other key features in the decision-making process include:

- No privileged status in the decision-making process by any one party

- As many people as possible should be able to govern

1.2 Institutions

Below is a table of the institutions and how they differ between Majoritarian and Consensus governments.

Institution	Majoritarian	Consensus
Electoral System	Majoritarian	Proportional
Party System	Two parties	Many parties
Government Type	Single-party Majority	Coalition/Minority
Federalism	Unitary	Federal
Bicameralism	Unicameral	Bicameral
Constitutionalism	legislative supremacy	higher law
Regime Type	Parliamentary	Presidential

There is almost a dichotomy between representation of as many views as possible in a meaningful manner versus efficiency and action

1.3 Political Representation

Hannah Pitkin describes four different views of political representation:

1. **Formalistic Representation:** how representatives are authorised and held accountable

2. **Substantive Representation:** how representatives act for the people and promote interests

3. **Descriptive Representation:** the extent to which representatives resemble their constituencies

4. **Symbolic Representation:** focuses on the synbolic ways representatives stand up for

The idea is that Descriptive and Symbolic forms of representation focus on **who** is being represented whilst Substantive representation focuses on **actions taken** by these representatives.

1.3.1 Formalistic Representation

Formalistic representation is about authorisation and accountability.

Authority

- **Majoritarian:** majority authorises the distribution of power; policy-making decisions by the minority is considered illegitimate

- **Consensus:** dispersion of power as an important factor: direction proportion to electoral size, authority as distributed accordingly

Accountability

- **Retrospective voting:** the ability of voters to sanction the ruling part based on their performance

- **Clarity of responsibility:** the ability to identify who the responsible people are for certain policies. This is required to have accountability. Higher concentrations of power lead to increased clarity whilst lower concentrations means more dispersion and a subsequent lack of clarity within the system

- **Accountability:** the extent to which we can attribute blame or praise for certain actions that were carried out.

  - Majoritarian systems have **high levels** of accountability
  - Consesus systems has **lower levels** of accountability