

GV101 Into to PolSci

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Lent Term Revision Document

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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.

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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 symbolic 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
 - Consensus systems has **lower levels** of accountability
- Institutions such as **bicameralism** or **federalism** also reduce clarity within the system due to a further dispersion of power

1.3.2 Substantive Representation

Substantive representation focuses on the actors taking actions in line with the ideological interests which they represent. The higher the substantive representation, the more in line the interests they represent and subsequent policy.

There are two key concepts to recognise:

1. Ideological Congruence: the extent to which actions representatives do are in line with the interests of the people at a point in time (static capture of alignment and representation)
2. Ideological Responsiveness: this is how quickly representatives change their behaviour to become more congruent with the interests of their people over time (dynamic and directional form of representation)

Congruence

Judged by the ideological distance between the government and the **median** voter

- **Majoritarian:** representatives tend to be congruent with the majority
- **Consensus:** representatives tend to be congruent with as many people as possible

Responsiveness

Conditions necessary for responsiveness include representatives **wanting to be more congruent** and also the representatives **having the ability to become more congruent**.

- **Majoritarian:** higher responsiveness due to ability to enact change more easily to stay in power
- **Consensus:** lower responsiveness due to dispersion of authority and perhaps a strict alignment with party interests. There is also less clarity of responsibility and more veto players in a consensus system

1.3.3 Descriptive Representation

Descriptive representation is about whether or not representatives resemble who they represent. This could be on the category of **race, gender, religion or class**. Here are some key features:

- Descriptive representation is valued more highly in **consensus based government** than **majoritarian based ones**
- Plausibly inferior to **substantive representation**
- This is focused more on **who people are** rather than **what they do**
- Cannot be held accountable by descriptive characteristics especially if they are **morally arbitrary**
- Critics argue that it can promote group essentialism, an exclusivity which is not conducive to cooperation
- However, descriptive representation can often lead to **substantive representation**
- Large district magnitudes lead to more descriptive representation
- It is a particularly pertinent issue with regards to women's representation

1.3.4 Symbolic Representation

Symbolic representation is about what representatives stand for. Key features include:

- A dynamic, performative and constitutive process
- Involves a back and forth claims-making process between the representatives and the represented
- It is, however, **understudied** compared to other forms of representation

1.4 Veto Players

Veto players are already covered in the Short Answer Question document. Refer to the GitHub to have access to those. Key things to remember though are:

- More veto players means less policy change
- Bigger policy distances between veto players means less policy change

1.5 Types, Pros and Cons

Below is a table on the regime types that can be related to the Majoritarian and Consensus visions:

	Regime Type	
	Parliamentary	Presidential
Single Party	Majoritarian Westminster	Consensus USA
Coalition	Consensus Cont. Europe	Super-Consensus Lat-Am Model

Below is another table to illustrate some common-found pros and cons of Majoritarian versus Consensus Democracy systems:

	Majority	Consensus
Pros	Decisive Government Clear responsibility Electoral Promises Kept	Slower decisions Broad compromises Protection of Minorities
Cons	Decisions too quick Elective dictatorship No compromises Threat to minority interests	Decisions too slow No clear responsibility Electoral promises broken Veto by minorities

2 Regimes: Presidents, Ministers and Parliaments

How a democracy's regime is classified depends on the relationship between the government, the legislature and the president. The type of government formed depends on policy-seeking or office-seeking candidates. Presidential democracies include more **more minority governments** but fewer **coalition governments than parliamentary ones**. Semi-presidential democracies, however, are understudied.

2.1 Classification Questions

Classification is based on how **people are kept in power**. Hence, there are two essential questions:

- Is the government responsible to the elected legislature?
- Is the head of state popularly elected for a fixed term in office?

2.1.1 Government Responsibility

Legislative responsibility means that a legislative majority has the constitutional power to remove the government from office without cause. This is done through a vote of no confidence, a constructive vote of no confidence which includes a suggested replacement and a vote of confidence which is initiated by governments confident that they will stay in power. Presidential democracies are **defined by the absence of legislative responsibility**. **The legislature cannot remove the government without cause**

2.1.2 Head of State

A Head of State is popularly elected if they are elected through a process where voters either:

- Cast ballots directly for the candidate
- Cast ballots to elect an assembly (electoral college) that elects a head of state

2.1.3 Summary

Below is a summary on the differences between regime types.

- **Presidential:** does not depend on a legislative majority to exist
- **Parliamentary:** depends on legislative majority, **the Head of State is not popularly elected**
- **Semi-presidential:** depends on legislative majority, **the Head of State is popularly elected**

2.2 Presidential Regimes: Making and Breaking

This section will go over presidential democracies, how they form, what types there are and what types of compositions they can have.

2.2.1 Formation Process

- Comprises of the president and the cabinet
- No requirement of a legislative majority to stay in office e.g. Republican President but Democratic Senate
- The president is always the **formateur which leads the formation of a coalition government**

Coalitions form in two main ways:

1. Portfolio Coalition: legislators form a coalition related to the parties in the cabinet
2. Legislature Coalition: bloc voting occurs for a piece of legislation

2.2.2 Presidential Cabinets

Here are some features of cabinets leading to different types:

- Can rule with minority cabinet but implicit legislative majority
- Coalition governments are thought to be exceptional cases in presidential governments dependent on policy/office seeking objectives
- Presidential decree: **order by the president that has the force of law**
- Weak decree power creates more incentives for coalitions
- Coalition governments may be more unstable in presidential democracies
- Coalition governments may survive longer but not be as effective
- Portfolio coalitions can outlive legislative coalitions

2.2.3 Composition of Presidential Cabinets

- Less partisan ministers and lower cabinet proportionality
- Some look more parliamentary

2.3 Institutions and Democratic Survival

2.3.1 Perils of Presidentialism

Historical evidence points to less stability for democracy in presidential systems and has led to studies on the so-called **Perils of Presidentialism**. Perils are listed as such:

- Difficult for citizens to identify who is responsible for policies as there is a **low clarity of responsibility** due to the separation of powers
- Presidentialism is thought to slow the policymaking process as policies must work their way through the legislature and be accepted by the president which means its tougher for a cabinet with minority control
- Produces a pattern of executive recruitment different from parliamentary systems which might result in nepotism
- Difficult to produce comprehensive policy due to the complex bargaining and lack of clarity

Further to that, Juan Linz provides 6 factors to consider. They are listed below with brief explanations:

1. **Paradox of Presidentialism:** inability to have legitimacy and the suspicion of the personalisation of power
2. **Zero-sum:** winner takes all mentality due to the strength of executive power
3. **Style:** lack of a neat differentiation of roles within the government
4. **Dual Legitimacy:** clarity of responsibility: legitimacy from legislative or electorate?
5. **Stability Issues:** deadlock, legislative vs executive, minorities and majorities vetoing policy
6. **Time Factor:** rushed politics with hasty implementation due to time constraint

2.3.2 Instability

We begin with the concept of **Immobilism:** a situation in parliamentary democracies in which government coalitions are so weak and unstable that they are incapable of reaching an agreement on new policy. An example of this is France and their highly fragmented legislature leading to government immobilism.

Another question of stability, when comparing presidential to parliamentary, is whether or not one system is more stable than the other. Stephen and Skach argue that parliamentary systems are more stable:

- Essence of Parliamentary Systems is mutual dependence
- Essence of Presidential Systems is mutual independence

- Mutual dependence encourages reconciliation
- Mutual independence encourages antagonism

Hence, democratic over-achievers are three times more likely to be parliamentary regimes as the drive to stay democratic is stronger due to this mutual dependence.

2.3.3 Presidentialism and Multipartism

The Perils of Presidentialism might only be a result of timing as we have adopted the regime system at a wrong time. Legislature fragmentation can occur as a result of:

- Parliamentary cabinet instability
- Presidential democratic instability

Legislative and executive gridlock has no constitutional means of resolution. Possible methods are dissolving government or a vote of no confidence. Further, inability to find legal ways out of deadlock causes instability. Institutional choice matters much more in poorer countries than richer ones as there are lower margins for error. Increased veto players leads to less democratic stability as well.