INTRODUCTION TO THE PRACTICE OF POLITICS

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Prelims in PPE / HPOL
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Contents

Teaching Arrangements

Lectures

Please see the departmental intranet for details on the Introduction to the Practice of Politics lecture series and the Political Analysis component.

Tutorial Schedule

Tutorials will take place weekly, in the 8 weeks of Hilary Term. A detailed schedule of tutorial groups and times will be arranged by email.

Essay Assignments

For each tutorial, answer *one* question with an essay of 1200–1500 words, to be submitted by email by 9 a. m. on the day of the tutorial. In total, you will complete at least 7 essays out of 8 weeks.

At the end of this reading list you can find a detailed guide on essay writing. Please read it and regularly refer back to it (and to the short summary at the end) if needed.

Collections and Examinations

A college collection (mock exam) on the Introduction to the Practice of Politics will be held at the start of Trinity Term.

The full Preliminary examinations will consist of: 4 questions in 3 hours, including both Theory and Practice of Politics, of which at least 2 on Practice (PPE); 3 questions in 3 hours, on the Practice of Politics (HPOL). Please refer to your student handbook for details. Past exam papers and examiners' reports are available for reference.

Introduction

Aims and Objectives:

These tutorials introduce you firstly to the way government is classified across democratic regimes, and to debates about the merits and drawbacks of each type: particularly the implications for political stability, and for policy performance. In this section of your tutorial work there is an explicit link with the work you will do in the Political Analysis lectures and classes. The next set of tutorial topics considers political institutions under regimes that are only partially democratic, or not democratic at all. Finally, the tutorials examine—mostly in advanced democracies—what determines the shape and operation of political parties and the party system, and the extent to which the values and attitudes on which political preferences rest in advanced democracies appear to be changing, why this is so, and how we might measure such changes. In this section, you consider not only stable attitudes and structured partisan competition, but also more deeply divided and contested politics, and sources of populism and radicalism.

Objectives

- To introduce you to regime classification and comparison, to develop your understanding of the necessary conditions for democratic government and political stability
- To develop your analytical skills.
- To introduce you to social science methodology in the context of historical explanation and comparative analysis.

General Reading, Textbooks and Handbooks

Boix, Carles and Susan Carol Stokes (eds.) (2007), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, The Oxford Handbooks of Political Science, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Caramani, Daniele (ed.) (2017a), *Comparative Politics*, Fourth Edition, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Clark, William Roberts, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder (2012g), *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 2nd ed., London: CQ Press.

Kellstedt, Paul M. and Guy D. Whitten (2009), *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*, Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lijphart, Arend (2012b), *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, 2nd ed., New Haven: Yale University Press.

Rhodes, R. A. W., Sarah A. Binder, and Bert A. Rockman (eds.) (2006), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, Oxford Handbooks of Political Science, Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

Sartori, Giovanni (1994c), *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry into Structures, Incentives and Outcomes*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Weingast, Barry R. and Donald A. Wittman (eds.) (2006), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, The Oxford Handbooks of Political Science, Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

Introductory Reading: What Is Political Science?

Almond, Gabriel A. (1998), "Political Science: The History of the Discipline", in *A New Handbook of Political Science*, ed. by Robert E. Goodin and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 50–96, DOI: 10.1093/0198294719.003.0002.

Clark, William Roberts, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder (2012c), "Chapters 1–3: What Is Comparative Politics?", in *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 2nd ed., London: CQ Press.

Dogan, Mattei (1998), "Political Science and the Other Social Sciences", in *A New Handbook of Political Science*, ed. by Robert E. Goodin and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 97–130, DOI: 10.1093/0198294719.003.0003.

Goodin, Robert E. and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (1998), "Political Science: The Discipline", in *A New Handbook of Political Science*, ed. by Robert E. Goodin and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 3–49, DOI: 10.1093/0198294719.003.0001.

Mair, Peter (1998), "Comparative Politics: An Overview", in *A New Handbook of Political Science*, ed. by Robert E. Goodin and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 309–335, DOI: 10.1093/0198294719.003.0012.

Reading for the Vacation

Elster, Jon (1989), *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511812255.

Weber, Max (2004), *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. by David S. Owen and Tracy B. Strong, trans. by Rodney Livingstone, Indianapolis: Hackett Pub, https://archive.org/details/max_weber_the_vocation_lectures_science.

Note on the reading lists

The literature for each topic is divided as follow:

1. 'Introductory Reading': normally textbook chapters which provide a general overview of the topic; they are a good starting point when you approach a new topic, but they are not sufficient on their own.
2. 'Required Reading': essential contributions, as well as broad reviews of the relevant debates; you are expected to read these (some can cover similar ground), engage with them critically and be familiar with what they discuss.
3. 'Further Reading': they should be used as additional references for your essays, to pursue specific lines of argument, investigate certain points further, or provide more empirical evidence.
4. 'Methodological Reading': articles on conceptual and methodological issues related to the topic, they will strengthen your understanding of the discipline; you should try to read some of these, even if they will not directly feature in your essays, and it will be good to revisit them with more time going into your second year.

You can access journal articles and handbook chapters by following the DOI links provided and by signing in the publisher's page via institutional login and your Oxford SSO. Books are available in College or University libraries (or online).

The reading lists can be extensive: it is important to read broadly, while learning to read effectively and selectively.

1 Parliamentary and Presidential Systems

1.1 Essay Questions

1. To what extent is 'semi-presidentialism' a meaningful category?
2. Does distinguishing amongst regimes based on whether they are presidential, semi-presidential or parliamentary tell us much about political outcomes?

1.2 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?

1.3 Reading

Introductory Reading

Clark, William Roberts, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder (2012a), "Chapter 12: Parliamentary, Presidential, and Semi-Presidential Democracies: Making and Breaking Governments", in *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 2nd ed., London: CQ Press.

Required Reading

Colomer, Josep M. (2006), "Comparative Constitutions", in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, ed. by R. A. W. Rhodes, Sarah A. Binder, and Bert

A. Rockman, Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199548460.003.0012.

Lijphart, Arend (2012a), "Chapter 7: Executive–Legislative Relations: Patterns of Dominance and Balance of Power", in *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, 2nd ed., New Haven: Yale University Press.

Samuels, David (2007), "Separation of Powers", in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. by Carles Boix and Susan Carol Stokes, Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199566020.003.0029.

Sartori, Giovanni (1994b), "Chapters 5–7: Presidentialism and Parliamentarism", in *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry into Structures, Incentives and Outcomes*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Further Reading

Chaisty, Paul, Nic Cheeseman, and Timothy Power (2014), "Rethinking the 'Presidentialism Debate': Conceptualizing Coalitional Politics in Cross-Regional Perspective", *Democratization*, 21, 1 (Jan. 2, 2014), pp. 72–94, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2012.710604.

Cheibub, José Antônio (2007), *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Cox, Gary W. (2006), "The Organization of Democratic Legislatures", in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, ed. by Barry R. Weingast and Donald A. Wittman, Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199548477.003.0008.

Duverger, Maurice (1980), "A New Political System Model: Semi-presidential Government", *European Journal of Political Research*, 8, 2, pp. 165–187, DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-6765.1980.tb00569.x.

Elgie, Robert (1998), "The Classification of Democratic Regime Types: Conceptual Ambiguity and Contestable Assumptions", *European Journal of Political Research*, 33, 2 (Mar. 1998), pp. 219–238, DOI: 10.1111/1475-6765.00381.

King, Anthony (1976), "Modes of Executive-Legislative Relations: Great Britain, France, and West Germany", *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 1, 1, pp. 11–36, DOI: 10.2307/439626.

Lijphart, Arend (ed.) (1992), *Parliamentary versus Presidential Government*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Linz, Juan J. (1990), "The Perils of Presidentialism", *Journal of Democracy*, 1, 1, pp. 51–69, DOI: 0.1353/jod.1990.0011.

Sedelius, Thomas and Jenny Åberg (2020), "Eastern Europe's Semi-Presidential Regimes", in *The Routledge Handbook of East European Politics*, ed. by Adam Fagan and Petr Kopecký, Routledge Handbooks, London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Shugart, Matthew Søberg (2008), "Comparative Executive–Legislative Relations", in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, ed. by Sarah A. Binder, R. A. W. Rhodes, and Bert A. Rockman, Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199548460.003.0018.

Siaroff, Alan (2003), "Comparative Presidencies: The Inadequacy of the Presidential, Semi-Presidential and Parliamentary Distinction", *European Journal of Political Research*, 42, 3 (May 2003), pp. 287–312, DOI: 10.1111/1475-6765.00084.

Strøm, Kaare (2003), "Parliamentary Democracy and Delegation", in *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies*, ed. by Kaare Strøm, Torbjörn Bergman, and Wolfgang C. Müller, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Van Cranenburgh, Oda (2008), "'Big Men' Rule: Presidential Power, Regime Type and Democracy in 30 African Countries", *Democratization*, 15, 5 (Dec. 1, 2008), pp. 952–973, DOI: 10.1080/13510340802362539.

Methodological Reading

Bates, Robert H. (2007), "From Case Studies to Social Science: A Strategy for Political Research", in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. by Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199566020.003.0007.

Gerring, John (2007), "The Case Study: What It Is and What It Does", in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. by Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199566020.003.0004.

2 Consensus and Majoritarian Democracies

2.1 Essay Questions

1. 'Consensus democracies are "gentler" than majoritarian democracies but less efficient in policy making'. Discuss.
2. 'If consensus democracies have more veto players than majoritarian democracies, any polity should lean towards a majoritarian ideal'. Discuss.

2.2 Why This Topic?

A more advanced part of the debate begun in the first tutorial topic is whether there are better ways of getting at key differences between regime types than by examining constitutional rules. One example of this, which you can only touch on lightly at this stage, is veto-player analysis, which is squarely rooted in rational-choice approaches to political analysis, and which seeks to understand political processes by examining decisions according to the number and strategic location of actors who influence outcomes by their positional or institutional power of veto (and hence their bargaining power). Proponents of this approach observe that formal constitutional power is at times a poor guide to the bargaining power observable using veto-player analysis. A further area of debate relates to assumptions about 'how democracy should work in a more purposeful sense: is democracy there to deliver clear choices between alternatives, or is it there to bargain between, reconcile, and integrate, the wide range of interests and demands that society is composed of? Here we reach the debate between majoritarian democracy and consensus democracy, which forms the empirical background question to much of the work you will do in Hilary Term in Political Analysis.

2.3 Reading

Introductory Reading

Clark, William Roberts, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder (2012e), "Chapters 15–16: Institutional Veto Players; Consequences of Democratic Institutions", in *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 2nd ed., London: CQ Press.

Required Reading

Bogaards, Matthijs (2017), "Comparative Political Regimes: Consensus and Majoritarian Democracy", in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, Oxford University Press, vol. 1, DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.65.

Lijphart, Arend (2012b), *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, 2nd ed., New Haven: Yale University Press.

Powell, G. Bingham (2000), *Elections as Instruments of Democracy*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Sartori, Giovanni (1994a), "Chapters 1–4: Electoral Systems", in *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry into Structures, Incentives and Outcomes*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Further Reading

Anderson, Christopher J. and Christine A. Guillory (1997), "Political Institutions and Satisfaction with Democracy: A Cross-National Analysis of Consensus and Majoritarian Systems", *American Political Science Review*, 91, 1 (Mar. 1997), pp. 66–81, DOI: 10.2307/2952259.

Andeweg, Rudy B. (2000), "Consociational Democracy", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 3, 1 (June 2000), pp. 509–536, DOI: 10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.509.

Bogaards, Matthijs (2020), "Kinder, Gentler, Safer? A Re-Examination of the Relationship between Consensus Democracy and Domestic Terrorism", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 43, 10 (Oct. 2, 2020), pp. 886–903, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2018.1507312.

Geissel, Brigitte and Ank Michels (2018), "Participatory Developments in Majoritarian and Consensus Democracies", *Representation*, 54, 2 (Apr. 3, 2018), pp. 129–146, DOI: 10.1080/00344893.2018.1495663.

Jónsson, Guðmundur (2014), "Iceland and the Nordic Model of Consensus Democracy", *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 39, 4 (Aug. 8, 2014), pp. 510–528, DOI: 10.1080/03468755.2014.935473.

Laver, Michael (2006), "Legislatures and Parliaments in Comparative Context", in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, ed. by Barry R. Weingast and Donald A. Wittman, Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199548477.003.0007.

Lijphart, Abend (1968), "Typologies of Democratic Systems", *Comparative Political Studies*, 1, 1 (Apr. 1, 1968), pp. 3–44, DOI: 10.1177/001041406800100101.

Lijphart, Arend (1969), "Consociational Democracy", *World Politics*, 21, 2 (Jan. 1969), pp. 207–225, DOI: 10.2307/2009820.

Manatschal, Anita and Julian Bernauer (2016), "Consenting to Exclude? Empirical Patterns of Democracy and Immigrant Integration Policy", *West European Politics*, 39, 2 (Mar. 3, 2016), pp. 183–204, DOI: 10.1080/01402382.2015.1046669.

Poloni-Staudinger, Lori M. (2008), "Are Consensus Democracies More Environmentally Effective?", *Environmental Politics*, 17, 3 (June 1, 2008), pp. 410–430, DOI: 10.1080/09644010802055634.

Qvortrup, Matt (2020), "The Logic of Domestic Terrorism Revisited: A Response to a Critic", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 43, 10 (Oct. 2, 2020), pp. 904–909, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2018.1529376.

Russell, Meg and Ruxandra Serban (2021), "The Muddle of the 'Westminster Model': A Concept Stretched Beyond Repair", *Government and Opposition*, 56, 4 (Oct. 2021), pp. 744–764, DOI: 10.1017/gov.2020.12.

Strohmeier, Gerd (2015), "Does Westminster (Still) Represent the Westminster Model? An Analysis of the Changing Nature of the Uk's Political System", *European View*, 14, 2 (Dec. 1, 2015), pp. 303–315, DOI: 10.1007/s12290-015-0368-0.

Tsebelis, George (1995), "Decision Making in Political Systems: Veto Players in Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Multicameralism and Multipartyism", *British Journal of Political Science*, 25, 3 (July 1995), pp. 289–325, DOI: 10.1017/S0007123400007225.

Tsebelis, George (2002), *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Van Praag, Philip (2017), "Consensus Democracy in the Netherlands: Background and Future", in *Political Science and Changing Politics*, ed. by Floris Vermeulen, Amsterdam University Press, pp. 89–112, DOI: 10.1515/9789048539208-006.

Methodological Reading

Brady, Henry E. (2008), "Causation and Explanation in Social Science", in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, ed. by Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier and Henry E. Brady, Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199286546.003.0010.

Brady, Henry E., David Collier, and Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier (2011), "Overview Of Political Methodology: Post-Behavioral Movements and Trends", in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, ed. by Robert E. Goodin, Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604456.013.0048.

Elster, Jon (2015a), "Chapters 1–3: Explanation and Mechanisms", in *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*, 2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, DOI: 10.1017/CBO9781107763111.

Lichbach, Mark Irving (2009), "Thinking and Working in the Midst of Things: Discovery, Explanation, and Evidence in Comparative Politics", in *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, ed. by Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, 2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 18–71, DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511804007.003.

3 Democratic and Non-Democratic Regimes

3.1 Essay Questions

1. 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?
2. 'All we need to know to classify a country as democratic is whether it holds free and fair elections'. Discuss.

3.2 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.

3.3 Reading

Introductory Reading

Clark, William Roberts, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder (2012f), "Chapters 5 and 10: Democracy and Dictatorship", in *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 2nd ed., London: CQ Press.

Required Reading

Collier, David and Robert Adcock (1999), "Democracy and Dichotomies: A Pragmatic Approach to Choices about Concepts", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2, 1 (June 1999), pp. 537–565, DOI: 10.1146/annurev.polisci.2.1.537.

Geddes, Barbara (1999), "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2, 1, pp. 115–144, DOI: 10.1146/annurev.polisci.2.1.115.

Levitsky, Steven and Lucan Way (2002), "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism", *Journal of Democracy*, 13, 2, pp. 51–65, DOI: 10.1353/jod.2002.0026.

Schedler, Andreas (1998), "What Is Democratic Consolidation?", *Journal of Democracy*, 9, 2, pp. 91–107, DOI: 10.1353/jod.1998.0030.

Schmitter, Philippe C. and Terry Lynn Karl (1991), "What Democracy Is... and Is Not", *Journal of Democracy*, 2, 3, pp. 75–88, DOI: 10.1353/jod.1991.0033.

Further Reading

Acemoglu, Daron and James A. Robinson (2008), "Paths of Economic and Political Development", in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, ed. by Donald A. Wittman and Barry R. Weingast, Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199548477.003.0037.

Ahmed, Amel (2012), *Democracy and the Politics of Electoral System Choice: Engineering Electoral Dominance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, DOI: 10.1017/CBO9781139382137.

Ahram, Ariel I. and J. Paul Goode (2016), "Researching Authoritarianism in the Discipline of Democracy", *Social Science Quarterly*, 97, 4 (Dec. 2016), pp. 834–849, DOI: 10.1111/ssqu.12340.

Art, David (2012), "What Do We Know About Authoritarianism After Ten Years?", *Comparative Politics*, 44, 3 (Apr. 1, 2012), pp. 351–373, DOI: 10.5129/001041512800078977.

Cheibub, Jose Antonio, Adam Przeworski, Fernando Papaterra Limongi Neto, and Michael M. Alvarez (1996), "What Makes Democracies Endure?", *Journal of Democracy*, 7, 1, pp. 39–55, DOI: 10.1353/jod.1996.0016.

Collier, David and Steven Levitsky (1997), "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research", *World Politics*, 49, 3 (Apr. 1997), pp. 430–451, DOI: 10.1353/wp.1997.0009.

Dahl, Robert A. (1998), *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

— (2005), "What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?", *Political Science Quarterly*, 120, 2 (June 2005), pp. 187–197, DOI: 10.1002/j.1538-165X.2005.tb00543.x.

Diamond, Larry (2021), "Democratic Regression in Comparative Perspective: Scope, Methods, and Causes", *Democratization*, 28, 1 (Jan. 2, 2021), pp. 22–42, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2020.1807517.

Gandhi, Jennifer and Ellen Lust-Okar (2009), "Elections Under Authoritarianism", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12, 1, pp. 403–422, DOI: 10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.060106.095434.

Gilbert, Leah and Payam Mohseni (2011), "Beyond Authoritarianism: The Conceptualization of Hybrid Regimes", *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 46, 3 (July 28, 2011), DOI: 10.1007/s12116-011-9088-x.

Haber, Stephen (2008), "Authoritarian Government", in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, ed. by Donald A. Wittman and Barry R. Weingast, Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199548477.003.0038.

Lieberman, Robert C., Suzanne Mettler, Thomas B. Pepinsky, Kenneth M. Roberts, and Richard Valelly (2019), "The Trump Presidency and American Democracy: A Historical and Comparative Analysis", *Perspectives on Politics*, 17, 2 (June 2019), pp. 470–479, DOI: 10.1017/S1537592718003286.

Magaloni, Beatriz and Ruth Kricheli (2010), "Political Order and One-Party Rule", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 13, 1, pp. 123–143, DOI: 10.1146/annurev.polisci.031908.220529.

Przeworski, Adam (2016), "Democracy: A Never-Ending Quest", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 19, 1 (May 11, 2016), pp. 1–12, DOI: 10.1146/annurev-polisci-021113-122919.

Robinson, James A. (2006), "Economic Development and Democracy", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 9, 1, pp. 503–527, DOI: 10.1146/annurev.polisci.9.092704.171256.

Rogenhofer, Julius Maximilian and Ayala Panievsky (2020), "Antidemocratic Populism in Power: Comparing Erdoğan's Turkey with Modi's India and Netanyahu's Israel", *Democratization*, 27, 8 (Nov. 16, 2020), pp. 1394–1412, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2020.1795135.

Scheve, Kenneth and David Stasavage (2017), "Wealth Inequality and Democracy", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 20, 1 (May 11, 2017), pp. 451–468, DOI: 10.1146/annurev-polisci-061014-101840.

Smith, Rogers M. and Desmond King (2021), "White Protectionism in America", *Perspectives on Politics*, 19, 2 (June 2021), pp. 460–478, DOI: 10.1017/S1537592720001152.

Winters, Jeffrey A. and Benjamin I. Page (2009), "Oligarchy in the United States?", *Perspectives on Politics*, 7, 4 (Dec. 2009), pp. 731–751, DOI: 10.1017/S1537592709991770.

Methodological Reading

Goertz, Gary (2008), "Concepts, Theories, and Numbers: A Checklist for Constructing, Evaluating, and Using Concepts or Quantitative Measures", in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, ed. by Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier, Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199286546.003.0005.

Mahoney, James and Celso M. Villegas (2009), "Historical Enquiry and Comparative Politics", in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. by Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, Oxford: Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199566020.003.0003.

4 State Formation and State Strength

4.1 Essay Questions

1. Assess the role of technology in the formation of modern states.
2. What explains variations in state capacity?

4.2 Why This Topic?

The state is one of the fundamental units of political life in modern politics. Why do states exist? This question has intrigued political theorists, scholars of international relations, and comparative political scientists. Scholars looking at the rise of the state in Europe (and elsewhere) often locate its origins in both the need for decisive action in the face of military conflict and the need for tax revenue to fund it. Yet, we continue to explore the historical origins of the state, in part because we continue to debate both the rationale for the state and what explains variation in state structure. Literature looking at more recent state building, particularly outside of Europe but also in the post-Soviet context, points to quite different constellations of factors affecting the development and structure of states, raising further questions.

While states as political units share a number of factors, scholars have pointed to wide variation among states. Political scientists often apply adjectives such as "high capacity" "low capacity" "strong" and "weak" to describe the role of states. This work points to both the institutional and social origins of state variation. States often possess highly varying bureaucratic structures, which are in part the product of their internal structure as well as their relationship to social groups. Can states promote beneficial societal outcomes through the right institutions? Can states withstand lobbying (or corruption) from societal elites without becoming predatory?

4.3 Reading

Introductory Reading

Clark, William Roberts, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder (2012b), "Chapter 4: The Origins of the Modern State", in *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 2nd ed., London: CQ Press.

Required Reading

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5 Social Movements

5.1 Essay Questions

1. What have social movements contributed to modern political practice?
2. What explains the success or failure of particular social movements?

5.2 Why This Topic?

Political action such as strikes, demonstrations, and manifestations of civic engagement most often take place outside of traditional political institutions such as political parties. The purpose of this topic is to help understand what drives individuals, groups, and movements to mobilize in this way, and whether these kinds of collective civil practices are different in form and nature; whether they help to bring disadvantaged groups into the political process, or groups which are less inclined to participate; how social movements cut across national boundaries; under what conditions these groups interact with formal institutional processes (for example elections), and with what effects; and some of the conditions under which this kind of collective action may be successful. There are also significant debates about whether these different forms of collective action can be regrouped under the heading of 'contentious politics', and whether they can be defined according to "rational" theories. There are discussions about social movements' impact and success, and the extent to which they contribute to wider political socialization. The study of social movements is an important prism for understanding how politics is experienced at grass-roots and national levels, and how forms of institutionalized political power—-in democracies and non-democracies—may be challenged from below.

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6 Party Systems

6.1 Essay Questions

1. Are party systems more the result of social or institutional influences?
2. To what extent are party systems in developing-world democracies based on social cleavages?

6.2 Why This Topic?

To understand a key body of literature seeking to explain the sociological determinants of party systems across all democracies, from the emergence of mass democracy to the third wave of democratisation. In addition, to understand how political institutions, particularly the type of electoral system, shape the party system, thereby augmenting the sociological approach.

A key interpretation of modern party systems in the advanced industrial democracies is that parties (thanks also to the freezing effect of strong party organisation) were frozen in the mould established in the late 19th and early 20th century, with the transition to mass democracy, raising the barrier to entry for new parties. From this perspective therefore, parties present in any particular advanced democracy primarily reflect the underlying social cleavages, which were important in the period of mass democratisation. With the third wave of democratization in the early 1980s, we also witnessed the emergence of new democracies from Latin America, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. While the literature on party systems in Western Europe sees party competition as programmatic, and the bases for it as social and ideological, work on party systems in other parts of the world often highlight competition, which is not rooted in social cleavages and stress alternatives to programmatic links, in particular clientelism. This topic introduces the concept of a party system, of political cleavages and party organization. It also highlights the differences between party systems in the advanced industrial democracies and newer, developing world democracies.

However, political parties vary a good deal, both within and between countries, across advanced and developing democracies, and in the extent to which they are rooted in strong and distinct social identities. Many look as if they are not built on social identities at all. The rate of formation of new parties in recent decades seems to have increased in several advanced democracies, and their sociological origins are often difficult to pin down. What is more, in developing democracies, party systems often do not appear to reflect social cleavages at all. Since Maurice Duverger's (1954) seminal work, observers have pointed to the effect of institutions on the shape of the party system, most notably the electoral system and more recently, the format of the executive. This topic introduces the mechanical and psychological effects of electoral systems on party systems. It also contrasts the effect of majoritarian electoral systems and proportional representation on party systems, and examines the interaction of electoral systems and cleavage structures.

The hypothesis that parties in the advanced industrial democracies reflect social cleavages, and that party systems are frozen in time, is much contested on several levels. The thesis of long-term historical continuity in party systems often requires

a very stretched interpretation of 'continuity', even across the period from the 1880s to the 1960s, let alone subsequently. Parties vary a good deal, both within and between countries, in the extent to which they are rooted in strong and distinct social identities, and many look as if they are not built on social identities at all. The rate of formation of new parties in recent decades seems to have increased in several advanced democracies, and their sociological origins are often difficult to pin down. Although this does not render the sociological thesis of Lipset and Rokkan redundant, it does raise questions about its utility as an explanation for the contemporary party systems of the advanced democracies.

Secondly, this sociological thesis also struggles as a framework of understanding for party systems outside of the advanced industrial democracies. Party systems in these countries often have not followed the evolutionary development pattern of the Western European party systems described by Lipset and Rokkan. Rather the development of party systems outside of the advanced industrial democracies has tended to be discontinuous; reflect divergent responses to expanded political mobilization; or simply reflect long-standing historical elite divisions. In many of these party systems as a consequence, competition, is often not based on programmatic policy proposals, but on catch-all parties cantered upon personality and clientelism.

Finally, while it is widely agreed that the relationship between electoral and party systems is mutual, nearly all work has been focused on the effect of electoral systems on party systems, and a general consensus exists on this topic. However, electoral institutions may shape party systems, but these institutions also emerge from party systems. How party systems shape electoral systems remains completely underdeveloped and under-theorised and no clear consensus yet exists on this issue.

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7 Voting Behaviour

7.1 Essay Questions

1. Why do voters have stable attachments to political parties?
2. If the attachment between voters and parties has weakened, is that because of changed voters or changed parties?

7.2 Why This Topic?

Perhaps the single most important notion in the study of voting behavior is that of party identification, which denotes an affective orientation towards a political party. It is thus hardly surprising that the observed trend towards weaker party attachments over the last half century has featured as a key issue in the study of voting behavior. Almost any textbook of party politics dedicates a lengthy section to explain the loosening of partisan ties in advanced democracies at least since the 1960s. The stylized picture that emerges from this literature is one of partisan dealignment, whereby party loyalties have eroded, electoral volatility has increased and turnout has decreased. By delving into this literature, this topic allows us to assess the generalizability of these conclusions and unpack the underlying mechanisms of electoral change. Consider, for example, the contrast between this dealigning pattern described above and the pattern of increased partisan polarization and sorting in American politics. What accounts for this divergence within advanced democracies? Why does party seem to be becoming less important in Europe and more important in the US? What are the implications of dealignment for individual voting behavior and party competition? How have parties' strategies changed as a result of this change? These questions addressed in this topic. We will focus both on top-down factors of political change driven by party competition, and on bottom-up developments from partisan dealignment.

As a way to explain electoral change, it is not always good practice to perceive the electorate as a single homogeneous entity. Electoral change may not therefore be the result of unanimous opinion shifts among the electorate. It may be driven by disproportionate change among specific age groups, which become more influential through generational turnover. The concept of generational turnover enables us to examine more systematically the sources of dealignment and its prospects for the future. In so doing, we will touch upon the distinction between dealignment and realignment and discuss how these concepts help us understand the dynamics of party competition in advanced democracies.

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8 Populism

8.1 Essay Questions

1. What explains the rise of populism in party politics?
2. What is the relationship between left–right ideology and the rise of populism in advanced democracies?

8.2 Why This Topic?

The rise of populism in advanced industrial societies is, in large part, a reaction to the inability of traditional parties to respond adequately in the eyes of the electorate to a series of phenomena such as economic and cultural globalization, immigration, the decline of ideologies and class politics, and the exposure of elite corruption. In Western Europe the phenomenon is also directly connected to the speed and direction of European integration. One of the important issues to be analyzed is how far the different cases in Europe are comparable, and should be seen as manifestations of the same underlying phenomena; also how far European populisms can be compared to their American counterpart.

More generally, the question of populism opens up a discussion of the current 'political malaise' in advanced industrial societies, manifested in steadily falling turnouts across Western Europe, declining party memberships, and ever-greater numbers of citizens in surveys citing a lack of interest and distrust in politics and politicians. This perception has in turn affected electoral behaviour as increasing numbers of de-aligned and disillusioned voters either simply do not bother participating or become available and open to new, and sometimes more radical, alternatives.

This topic seeks to understand the underlying social and cultural sources of these phenomena, and to establish how far populist claims that politics has become more convoluted, distant and irrelevant to people's lives can be defended. The aim is also to assess how far populist politics represents a serious challenge to established political institutions, and whether populism marks the emergence of a new dimension of politics which transcends the classic Left–Right divide.

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Guide on Essay Writing

Introduction

This guide (adapted from the reading list of the 2nd-year Comparative Government course) provides a break-down of the essential elements of a good essay and it gives you the tools for a critical and rigorous self-assessment of your own technique.

Whilst this guide will outline the fundamental requirements of a good essay this is by no means the final word on essay technique, and much comes down to personal style. However, an essay is an offering to the wider academic community and therefore "personal style" should not mean that only you are able to understand the essay!

Before considering the seven fundamental questions you should ask yourself with every essay, it is important to understand how examiners and tutors identify "good" essays.

What is a "good" essay?

An essay is an act of written communication offering a solution to an intellectual problem. The problem at hand will have no objectively correct solution, and the essay must persuade the reader to accept the proposed interpretation of the available evidence. To make sense of the evidence the author must subject it to "critical analysis", which is the foundation of any argument. Therefore essays are used to test critical analysis, which is a highly prized skill in any occupation that deals with pernicious doubt—such as the law, business, media, and teaching. A successful argument will contain three basic elements:

1. Narrative—where you describe empirical data.
2. Analysis—where you explain the implications of the data.
3. Critical Analysis/Argument—where you utilise the data in order to propose a single coherent solution to the problem, and critically assess alternative solutions to the same problem.

Narrative is important, but it is the easiest element to write and therefore contributes relatively little to your overall mark. Far more important is your analysis and argument. Narrative must be used, but only as a support for your argument. Therefore do not just list facts or describe what other people have argued; instead set out your own argument and use facts and reviews of the literature to explain and defend your position.

Whilst writing an essay there are seven questions you should ask yourself to check whether your critical analysis is of sufficient quality:

Have I answered the question in the introduction?

There are two crucial points here. Firstly you must be sure that you are answering the question precisely and in its entirety. Secondly you should set out your answer in your introductory paragraph.

On the first point, it is tempting to answer an essay question by utilising analysis and evidence that you are familiar with, without necessarily being sure of their relevance. Be aware that essay questions are very carefully written in order to

test the flexibility of your knowledge and essay writing skill. Therefore, if you answer your own question you leave the examiner in doubt as to your cognitive adaptability. This is one of the easiest ways to significantly damage your mark before the essay has barely even started. As the examiners have put it:

> "Some candidates would have been advised to take more care to answer the precise question asked rather than using it as an opportunity to regurgitate a detailed knowledge of what was thought to be the underlying topic."

To avoid this problem it is critical that you carefully analyse the question and determine what it is trying to ask you. For instance, the following question has laid a trap for those who do not take care to understand what they are being asked:

> Does the UK Constitution provide a framework for representative democracy?

It is tempting, when confronted with this question,to launch into familiar debates concerning the pros and cons of the New Labour constitutional reforms. However, an essay that does not assess the UK Constitution as a whole and whether it provides "a framework for representative democracy" would be a failure to fully answer the question.

Therefore you need to be absolutely sure that you are answering the question, the whole question, and nothing but the question! Remember that essay questions are tricky in order to discriminate between candidates. The best scripts will demonstrate that the author is able to adapt what they know to the question asked, rather than answering a question of their own choosing. There is an important mantra—unlike politicians, political scientists always answer questions!

The second important point to consider is that your answer should be laid out in your introduction. This means that your central argument needs to be summarised fully within the first couple of lines of the essay. Do not tease the examiner by saying that one could argue several points without specifying your central contention—tell them precisely what you intend to argue straight away. This may seem a blunt and unattractive essay style, but you need to very efficiently communicate your ideas as the examiners have very limited time to mark your scripts and they will not want to hunt around your essay for a clear answer to the question. It is not good enough to have a clear conclusion; you must make your case in the introduction and argue it all the way through the essay to the end. The mantra here is—hit the examiner between the eyes. Just as a shop lays its finest wares at the front window, you should sell yourself just as forcefully.

Ensuring that your argument is clearly laid out in the introduction and is consistent throughout the essay requires very careful planning. Before you write a word on the essay you need to know what you are going to say and how it links together to form a coherent argument. The importance of good planning is difficult to over-emphasise.

Have I defined all of the unclear elements in the question?

Another way to catch out candidates is to use words in the question whose meaning is deliberately unclear. A good candidate will always seek to clarify the meaning of such words so as to base their argument on a solid foundation. When it comes to the analysis of the question wording you should be as pedantic as it is possible to be. Home in on descriptive words that are subjective, for example:

> "The crucial limit on the autonomy of the US Supreme Court is that ideologically extreme Justices are rarely nominated and never confirmed." Discuss.

It would not be possible to provide a clear answer to this question unless you clearly defined what "ideologically extreme Justices" are, and could assess whether i) they are "rarely" nominated and never confirmed, and ii) whether this is the "crucial" limit on the Court's "autonomy". Conceptual clarity is of particular importance to Comparative Government where there is the need to generalise across different cases.

Clear definitions are therefore very important, but they should not detain you for long in your essay. A sentence or two is typically sufficient. The key thing to remember is that you are only defining these terms so that your answer to the question is more solidly founded, and you should not be tempted to begin an extensive debate on what "ideologically extreme Justices" are. In some essay questions there are many subjective terms employed and definitions can seem cumbersome—nevertheless be succinct and remember that definitions are a means to the end of creating a clear argument, and not an end in themselves.

As an example, imagine the following essay question:

> "Wayne Rooney is a genius" Discuss.

It would be impossible to successfully answer this question unless you set out to the reader what your interpretation of the word "genius" is. The whole essay can turn on this conceptual clarity, where weaker candidates will simply propagate the doubt raised in the question by not being clear as to a plausible solution.

In thinking about how to define complex ideas it is typically best to offer a clear elucidation in your own words. Dictionary definitions—even those taken from political science dictionaries—rarely capture the detail of a concept and should usually be avoided. It is common for an essay question to introduce a concept that is widely used in the literature, and in these cases a definition taken from a widely respected source is a good solution to the problem of clarity. For instance, one could define "democracy" with a very brief explanation of Robert Dahl's classic "Polyarchy" concept. That said, be aware that it is highly unusual in political science for concepts to be incontestable—even from the most august authorship.

Do I have a logical structure that is clearly set out in a "road map"?

Once again the issue here is clarity of communication. Your essay is a contribution to an on-going academic debate, and therefore it needs to be easily understood by your intellectual peers. To achieve this, a logical structure is obligatory.

"Logical" is perhaps rather misleading in this context. Essay structure is "logical" in the colloquial meaning of that word—as in the structure makes sense to a third-party observer. It does not therefore mean "logical" in the more literal Aristotelian sense. Essentially you are aiming to organise your essay in a way that is reader-friendly. Therefore you should have paragraphs that link together to form a coherent whole, and where the movement from one paragraph to the next makes sense and does not jar with the reader.

Perhaps the easiest way to understand logical structure is to know what it is not. "Stream of consciousness" is the antithesis of a logical structure. This is where the writer does not plan the essay but writes down ideas as they emerge in the consciousness. This typically means very long, incoherent paragraphs that jump from one issue to the next without any obvious justification. This is not a style of essay writing, it is the lack of a style, and it is infuriating to examiners who must decipher the disorganised prose.

Your essay is not written for your own records, so well organised prose is fundamentally important to this act of communication. You are trying to sell your ideas to a buyer who is not going to spend that much time at your stall, and you therefore need to make their comprehension of your ideas as easy as possible. The best way to achieve this is, once again, through careful planning. After you have decided upon your central line of argument, you can then decide what the core elements of this argument are and these can form the basic bones of your structural skeleton. To make an argument, there will typically be three or four separate but connected elements that need to be discussed. If you assign each of these elements a paragraph or two, you can discuss each in turn and build up your whole argument piece by piece.

Think of yourself as a defence barrister who wants the jury to return a not guilty verdict. Your argument is that the defendant is not guilty, and you will break this proposition down into separate elements that collectively form the case for your client's innocence. Therefore you might seek to carefully set out to the jury the key elements that make a conclusion of innocence inevitable—such as i) an alibi, ii) a lack of motive, iii) a lack of prior convictions etc. All of these elements combine to make the case for your client's innocence, and working out how to discuss these elements to make your case to the can make all of the difference.

Breaking your argument into easily comprehensible bite-size elements is not always easy to achieve, but will always depend on the question and your proposed answer. For instance, if we consider once again the question:

> Does the UK Constitution provide a framework for representative democracy?

Let us say that you decide to make a strong case that the UK Constitution does provide a framework for representative democracy. A possible structure to establish this argument would be to look at the core elements of a "framework for representative democracy" in turn and show that in each case the UK Constitution does make provision. Thus, one might consider the core elements of a representative democracy to be: i) formal representation—where politicians are selected from amongst all major demographic sectionsof the society,ii) mandate representation—where politicians follow the policies they have been elected to pursue, and iii)

accountability representation—where politicians aim to achieve the "best" results by the time of the next election notwithstanding promises made. In your essay you could discuss each of these elements in turn to argue that generally speaking the UK Constitution does provide a framework for representative democracy.You could further subdividethese sectionsto consider different sub-categories and to assess counter arguments to your position.

Through planning your argument, you will see that to make your case as strongly as possible there are certain points that need to be dealt with, and these points should form the basic content of your separate paragraphs. These paragraphs should also be linked together so that you are not jumping from one issue to the next, but rather the prose flows seamlessly. The best way to link your paragraphs together is by showing how they interconnect to make your argument, and it is often worth reiterating your core argument at the end of every paragraph, perhaps by utilising the question wording. This has the advantages of reminding the reader of your central point and also showing that each of your points is relevant to the question.

For example, in response to the question considered above you should end each paragraph with a "bridging sentence" that links your separate points together:

> ** Paragraph on Formal Representation **
> ...in terms of formal representation, considering the evidence discussed, the UK Constitution arguably does provide a framework for representative democracy. However as argued throughout "providing a framework" implies the potential to be representative, even if in practice factors other than the UK Constitution frustrate the full realisation of representative democracy. This central point is further reinforced when we consider the next major aspect of representative democracy—mandate representation....
> ** Paragraph on Mandate Representation **

Such bridging sentences ensure that your essay flows nicely and that the reader understands how you are developing your argument.

The final important point to make is that you must advertise your proposed structure in your introduction. This will mean the examiner knows in advance what your central points are, how they link together, and in what order you intend to analyse them. This is commonly referred to as a "road map", as it helps the reader navigate your essay with ease. This does not need to be any longer than two sentences that signal how the essay will develop:

> "This essay will consider in turn the requisite elements of a framework for representative democracy. Firstly, formal representation will be discussed, followed by mandate representation and finally accountability representation."

It is essential to understand that the easier you make your examiners' job, the more inclined they will be to reward you. However, more fundamentally, good structure is necessary for clear communication of your ideas, and therefore great care should be taken to plan in advance the structure of your essay.

Have I balanced my argument?

Your essay must communicate a single argument with clarity, and you certainly should not sit on the fence. However, it is not unusual for candidates to take this too far by acknowledging only one side of a debate. If you do not make it clear that you have considered alternatives to your argument then your examiner will assume that you do not know what alternatives there are, and that your conclusions are based on ignorance.

To avoid this problem you need to explore alternatives to your central thesis, because it is impossible to argue a strong case without rebutting potential threats to its validity. Imagine a debater who never acknowledges the points raised by the opposition; it shows the weakness of their contentions and leads to the impression that their assertions are based on emotion rather than reason. Therefore, for each of your main points, you should briefly discuss what your intellectual critics would say and show why their solution to the problem at hand is flawed in comparison to your offering. If you can paraphrase scholarship that demonstrates a competing or complementary position to yours, all the better. By doing this you can show the examiner your knowledge of the literature and where your argument fits into it.

Make sure that your voice comes across loud and clear. The examiners want to know your argument, and do not want a simple narration of the different schools of thought. You need to have the courage to stake your claim with vigour and you should not hide behind the existing literature. Never forget that the key skill that is being tested is your ability to analyse critically a problem in your own words, and thus your argument is the crucial element.

Whilst clarity and boldness are important, be sure to avoid a condescending tone when reviewing the literature. The scholars you are critiquing are highly regarded in their field, and to disdain their endeavours can seem brusk and arrogant. The examiner does not want to read a self-righteous rant, so maintain a discrete and positive tone. Your aim should be to write an essay that your fiercest critic would come away from thinking that you had made a fair case. Therefore, a balanced argument does not mean that you are sitting on the fence, it means that you fully understand the literature and you have absolute confidence in your conclusions.

What evidence do I have to support my contentions?

As mentioned throughout this handout, the key to a good essay is to have a good argument. However, argument in the Institutions Prelim cannot simply be based on reason alone, and empirical evidence is also required to establish its validity. This raises a series of difficult questions, most notably—What sort of evidence is required, and how much evidence is sufficient?

Firstly, it is difficult to say what evidence is “required”, because the problems posed by university essay questions are so uncertain that we are unlikely to ever reach a position where we can with confidence say—this evidence is requisite to “prove” this case. Choosing between sources of evidence and analysing the relative strengths and weaknesses is therefore a crucial skill, and it depends on judgement. The essential point is that all evidence is to some extent flawed, and you are trying to make the case that your evidence and analysis provide the best

possible solution to the problem posed. Therefore, acknowledge the weaknesses of your own evidence, and explain why you have nevertheless decided that it is better than the alternatives.

This brings us to consider what types of available evidence there are. At its most simple, evidence can be sub-divided into quantitative and qualitative. The former can be objectively measured and numerically expressed, whilst the latter relies on the interpretation of the author. However, be aware that this is a simplistic definition, as numerical expressions can be used for subjective data—such as an index of happiness. Indeed quantitative and qualitative evidence are rarely used separately, because numerical data usually needs to be interpreted in order for it to make sense. For instance, quantitative data of electoral turnout may show that turnout in the UK is around 60% for general elections, but to understand why this is so may require a scholar to unpick the 60% statistic and link it with other evidence that cannot be objectively measured.

Whilst most undergraduate essays will largely utilise qualitative evidence—including analysis of institutional forms, or discussion of significant events—quantitative evidence can also be a highly effective way of establishing a case. Numerical data can even be used to great effect in exams; so long as the author provides a citation or some other guarantee to the reader that the data have not been fabricated.

The choice of what type of evidence to use will depend on the question posed. Where some topics benefit from a great deal of quantitative evidence, others rely more on interpretation to make sense of a problem. You will need to decide which type of evidence best supports your contention, and why your use of evidence is more effective than that used by alternatives analyses. Bear in mind that using quantitative data is a good way of helping you to stand out from the crowd in the Prelims paper.

Another crucial distinction to make when considering evidence is between single-country case studies and comparative questions. The Prelims paper allows students to pursue both approaches to generating inferences in political science, and this creates a great deal of confusion come exam time. If the question concerns just one country, then the evidence used should reflect this by considering only that one country in detail. The essay can utilise both quantitative and qualitative evidence, so long as it clarifies the problem raised by the single country. In comparative questions, again a mixture of quantitative and qualitative evidence can be used, but the essay must refer to more than one country in a comparative analysis.

Comparative analysis is where two or more cases are evaluated according to the same criteria. So consider the following question:

> "The legislature is powerless in the face of the modern executive." Discuss.

To answer this you would need to establish a means of evaluating "powerlessness" and then assess evidence from different countries to make your case. You may decide, for example, that legislatures remain a hugely important focus for public opinion which is a form of non- institutional power enjoyed in the "face of the modern executive". To help make this case you might provide qualitative evidence

of the different legislatures acting as the public voice against their executives. Such evidence would go some way to successfully supporting your case.

Other issues concerning the type of evidence used are its relevance to the current situation and its provenance. In terms of the former, you should use evidence that is as up-to- date as possible unless the question specifically asks for a focus on a historic event or period. So if for example the question concerns the US executive, you should discuss the Obama and Bush administrations and avoid evidence from further back, unless there is no contemporary evidence available. Secondly, in terms of provenance, as suggested above, the reader wants to feel confident that you are not making up your evidence. To put their mind at ease you should reference diligently, and can even use citations in exams if you simply put the author's name and the year of publication in brackets at the end of the sentence (John Smith, 2013). You may also want to buttress your qualitative interpretations with references to, and quotations from, other authors that have come to a similar conclusion to yours. As mentioned above, you must be careful not to let established authors speak on your behalf. A reference or a quote should be there to support your position, not to make it for you. By outlining the provenance of your evidence and keeping it fresh and relevant you will be more effectively contributing to the academic debate, and hence writing a better essay.

Having considered the quality of evidence, we must move to the quantity. How much is enough? This again is impossible to answer with absolute certainty, and given the constraints of time in an exam you should be realistic when it comes to evidence. You will not be able to provide reams of quantitative data, nor pages of finely detailed qualitative analysis, but nor do you want to be lacking evidence to make your case. The balance to be struck cannot be prescribed and comes down to the judgement of the author. You should ask yourself: Have I done enough to make my case, given the constraints imposed? If you can answer this question in the affirmative, then your evidence ought to be sufficient.

Is my argument original?

Examiners will usually only consider awarding a first class grade where the script displays originality. As the examiners have said:

> "...the handful of very strong scripts suggested original and thoughtful responses to the question that moved beyond what they had read."

Developing original arguments is very difficult and can potentially backfire. The risk is in creating an argument that is original but also ill-thought through and displaying a lack of understanding of the problem. To be original you do not have to be radical; instead you might offer a subtle development of an existing theory, or argue against the predominant consensus, or offer a new piece of evidence. That is not to say that you cannot be radical and challenge all existing assumptions, only that radicalism is more risky and in an exam context it can be difficult to be radically innovative within the time constraints.

Have the confidence to develop new ideas and remember that it is your ideas the examiners are interested in. The only reliable means of generating original

insights in academia is through hard work. In other words, you would need to read and understand the vast majority of the reading list on a given topic and you would need to be abreast of cutting edge scholarship as reported in academic journals. Constantly critique and challenge the arguments that you read, and see if you can come up with something new.

Being original is strongly encouraged in all of your essays and exam scripts. Just be sure that your arguments are well supported by a clear understanding of the topic.

Does my conclusion wrap up my argument into a coherent whole?

Finally the conclusion to an essay is there to wrap up all of the points that you have made into a coherent whole. It is there to round up an essay and there should not be any new information introduced at this stage. Make sure that you plan carefully to avoid missing a killer point in the main body of the essay that you then feel obliged to squeeze into your conclusion. The conclusion simply reiterates the points that you have made, why they link together, and how they relate to the question. You certainly should not use your conclusion to finally lay out your central argument—you must set this out in your introduction. The best way to think about it is that your introduction tells the reader what you will say; the main body of the essay says it; and the conclusion repeats what you have said.

Conclusion

There is a lot in this guide to take on board and remember. The main points that you should take away with you are that an essay is a vehicle to communicate your critical analysis, and clarity of communication is therefore of the upmost importance. You should be confident in your abilities and try to enjoy essay writing as a chance to explore a subject in greater detail.

Summary

Read through your essay plan or outline (and full essay) and try to assess it by answering the following questions.

1. Have I answered the question in the introduction?
2. Have I defined all of the unclear elements in the question?
3. Do I have a logical structure that is clearly set out in a “road map”?
4. Have I balanced my argument? What evidence do I have to support my contentions?
5. Is my argument original?
6. Does my conclusion wrap up my argument into a coherent whole?
7. What mark would I give this essay and why?

If you have difficulty in answering these questions positively, try to revise the outline as required. In some cases you might need to do some more reading to fill all the gaps.

Once you know what the content of the essay should be, the writing itself can be quite formulaic. Very briefly and bluntly, it will generally follow a structure like this:

> Introduction, argument, definitions, theory, mechanisms, data and results, critical points and alternative explanations, conclusions; all written in 6 paragraphs of 200 words each, each developing only one main concept in 6 sentences.

Your essay writing will improve if you spend more time analysing the literature you read (precise concepts, measurement of dependent and independent variables, mechanisms linking the two, data or cases, empirical tests, etc.), and your comprehension of the literature will improve if you follow organised and logical structures when you write.

Go back to this guide regularly and when needed.