States and Basic Institutions

DEF: *a nation is a population with a certain sense of itself, a cohesiveness, a shared history, culture and often a common language*

DEF: *a state is the government structures of a nation*

There are 194 states in the world.

The nature of the party system is heavily influenced by the electoral rules a state chooses to have in place.

Another way to distinguish between states is by how they choose to structure and manage their economies.

1. **Institutionalized Power**

Political institutions are important to the study of political science because they reflect how power has been institutionalized within the working structure of government.

DEF: *political institutions are authority that has been solidified in the state. They are the working structures of governments.*

A good way to study institutions is by looking for which office has the most power, constitutions can help answer the question but not always.

Another way to approach the question is by asking whether the state is a monarchy or a republic, even though today most countries are republics.

DEF: *a monarchy is hereditary rule by one person.*

DEF: *a republic is a political system without a monarch.*

There are some constitutional monarchies that are symbolic and do not actually rule the countries they represent.

Ex. Britain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Spain, and Holland

Traditional monarchies can still be found in the Arab world.

Ex. Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia.

1. **Effective, Weak and Failed States**

One way to think about states is to ask the question of whether the state functions at all.

Generally, analysts see three categories of states:

1. Effective states: states that can control their territory, have their laws obeyed, and experience minimal corruption.

Ex. the United States, Japan, and most European countries

1. Weak states: states where government has been penetrated by crime.

This limits the dispensation of justice in the state because it is often bought and sold. In weak states democracy is often preached but very seldom practiced.

Ex. Mexico, Nigeria, most of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

1. Failed states: states that effectively have no national government.

The actual territory of the state may be at risk either from internal or external forces. Law and order essentially are non-existent in most parts of the country.

Ex. Somalia, Libya, and Afghanistan

“Why nations fail” – by Acemoglu and Robinson.

The book analyses the factors that are responsible for the political and economic success or failure of states, based on two theories:

1. Drivers of democracy:

This theory emphasises the role of the threat of revolutions and social unrest in leading to democratization and the willingness of the elites to limit redistribution in causing switches to nondemocratic regimes.

According to the authors, the rich decide on the taxation rate and the level of redistribution and then the poor decide whether revolution is the optimal choice. Because of the potential loss of economic benefits by revolution, the rich have an incentive to propose a taxation rate that does not provoke revolution, while at the same time not costing the rich too many benefits.

Hence, democratization is the situation in which the rich increase monetary redistribution and franchise to the poor to avoid revolution.

1. How democracy affects economic performance

With this second theory the authors try to explain why inclusive institutions give rise to economic growth.

They say that economic institutions determine the distribution of resources for the future, hence institutions today determine economic growth and institutions in the future.

They also try to show how different institutions result in different levels of economic growth: extractive regimes lead to poor economic growth, while inclusive ones determine positive economic growth.

Their main thesis is that economic prosperity depends on the inclusiveness of economic and political institutions: “inclusive” institutions let many people participate in the decision-making process, while “extractive” institutions only let the elite to rule and exploit others.

1. **Unitary or Federal Systems**

A basic institutional choice is the territorial structure of the nation:

- Unitary System: *centralization of power in a nation’s capital with little autonomy for subdivisions. The first order civil divisions are administered by national authorities with only small local inputs.*

Ex. Departments in France, Provinces in the Netherlands, Counties in Sweden, Prefectures in Japan

- Federalism: *balancing of power between a nation’s capital and autonomous subdivisions. In federalist systems first-order civil divisions have considerable political lives of their own and cannot be legally erased or altered by the central power*

Ex. U.S. states, German Länder

**3.1 Unitary System**

*Unitary states are states where the component units are subordinate to the national government.*

During the 1970s there was an increase in the centre-periphery tensions in unitary states. Different states handled these tensions differently.

DEF: *centre-periphery tensions is the resentment of outlying areas at rule by nation’s capital*

DEVOLUTION IN BRITAIN:

Labour government in 1997 gave home-rule powers to Scotland, Wales, and North Ireland in the devolution process.

Some say this makes Britain quasi-federal, but it is still officially unitary.

DECENTRALIZATION IN FRANCE:

France had been very unitary since Louis XI’s absolutism in the fifteenth century, being run from Paris, and continue to be this way during the French Revolution, Napoleon, and republics.

Genuine decentralization began in 1981 with Mitterrand in which Paris-appointed prefects lost some powers.

AUTONOMY IN SPAIN:

Presence of regional resentment.

Centralizers' attempts to override diversity between Basques, Catalans, and Castilians. Following the French model, seventeen regional autonomías were instituted with control over local matters.

PROS AND CONS OF UNITARY SYSTEMS:

Unitary systems are just a choice of how to distribute power in government and as such they come with pros and cons.

1. Cons of unitary systems:

Absurd degrees of over-centralization of authority and a lack of local control leads to people ignoring politics as well as political alienation.

1. Pros of unitary systems:

Clear lines of authority, the ability of the national government to direct the economy, uniform taxation levels, and high education standards.

* 1. **Federal Systems**

Federal systems divide power between the national government and the component units. Component units have a great deal of autonomy from national government.

The national government does retain exclusive control in areas of foreign affairs, defence, and currency.

Federalism is a choice that is dictated by many things, including concerns about national defence, culture, economics, and national unity.

PROS AND CONS OF FEDEAL SYSTEMS:

1. Pros of federal systems:

- They help keep government close to citizens, which helps prevent apathy.

- The component units provide laboratories for policy experimentation

1. Cons of federal systems:

- The component units often lack the resources with which to deal with specific problems.

- Corruption and incompetence among officials

- A duplication of services by the national government and the component units

How federalism is structured varies across states.

EX-SOVIET FEDERALISM:

Ex-Soviet Russian federalism was federal on paper but not in practice.

While the post-Soviet order also adopted federalism, there are an awful lot of regional nationalistic tensions that existed.

EX-YUGOSLAV FEDERALISM:

Ex-Yugoslavian federalism was an example of hyper-federalism and its collapse following the death of Tito illustrates how federalism was a poor institutional choice.

CANADIAN FEDERALISM:

Canadian federalism illustrates the centrifugal pressures that can occur within the federal state.

1. **Electoral Systems**

DEF: *An electoral system is the set of rules that determines how elections and referendums are conducted and how their results are determined*

States can be identified by their choice of an electoral system.

Electoral systems help determine the number of parties, how to form a stable government, the degree of citizen interest in politics etc.

Two general types with many variations:

**4.1 Single-Member District**

DEF: *electoral system that elects one person per district by winning a plurality of votes (ex. USA and Britain)*

Single-member districts are the simplest of electoral systems and they are often referred to as first-past-the-post systems.

In this kind of system third parties exist but they are not competitive.

ADVANTAGES OF SINGLE-MEMBER DISTRICTS:

- They make politics more centrist.

- They provide clear majorities by magnifying electoral gains.

DISADVANTAGES OF SINGLE-MEMBER DISTRICTS:

- The majority that is created is artificial and does not accurately reflect the desires of the voting public.

- Gerrymandering makes districts safe and uncompetitive by drawing district lines to protect one political party.

- Politics are centrist and safe, but also uncompetitive.

US voting system

The first step towards the Presidential Election are the Primary Elections where the candidates for the presidential elections are selected. The winners of the Democrat and Republican Primary Elections will be the presidential candidates, and they will have to pick a running mate to be their Vice-President nominee.

Both parties will organize conventions in which they will present the candidates.

The elections are usually decided in swing states, where the population often changes their political alligeance.

Each state is worth a number of Electoral College votes based on population, the candidate with the most votes wins.

Gerrymandering:

DEF: *The process of dividing up and redrawing districts to give your political party an advantage*

The custom began in the 19th century in Massachusetts when the governor passed a bill allowing redistricting, which ended up favouring the governor’s party, the Democratic-Republican party that no longer exists. His aim was to win as many state Senate seats as possible.

There are two principal tactics are used in gerrymandering:

1. cracking: diluting the voting power of the opposing party's supporters across many districts.
2. packing: concentrating the opposing party's voting power in one district to reduce their voting power in other districts.
   1. **Proportional Representation**

DEF: *elect representatives by party’s precent of vote*

Proportional representation (PR) systems are more complicated than single-member-district systems.

Voters select party lists and parties win seats roughly equivalent to their percentage of the national vote (d’Hondt mathematical formula).

Thresholds are used to determine the minimum percentage of votes a party needs to win to gain seats.

ADVANTAGES OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION:

- Parliaments that are much more likely to reflect and represent the views and opinions of the public.

- Small parties can compete and do win.

DISADVANTAGES OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION:

- The creation of a multiparty system where no single party has a clear governing majority.

- Greater degrees of instability.

British voting system

UK system is the closest to the "ideal" majoritarian system, with a plurality electoral system and one elected house of Parliament, The House of Commons, and an upper chamber, The House of Lords plus generally two significant parties.

Every voter votes for one person, their local member of Parliament (which is their representative in the House of Commons).

When the counting of the votes is over, the party that wins the majority of the 650 seats gets to be the Government, with that party’s leader as the Prime Minister.

It can happen hat no party gets the majority, in which case we have a hung parliament. When this happens, tew parties that have a majority combined can form a coalition.

French voting system

The voting process was introduced in the 1960s and is parted in two stages:

- the first round is open two any candidate who can get 500 signatures of support from elected officials.

- the second round is a runoff between the two leading candidates is held two weeks after the first ballot.

Usually the elections are contests between the centre-left and centre right candidates. In 2017 given to the volatile political mood, the race was contended by four candidates: Marine Le Pen from Front National, Emmanuel Macron an independent with a new party (En Marche!), Francois Fillon from Les Republicains and Benoit Hamon from the Socialist Party.

French voters then have to vote for the election of the National Assembly, the lower House of the French Parliament. Voters from France’s 577 constituencies will have to pick their representative, known as Deputé. It is another two round process in which the two candidates with the most votes and any other with at least 12.5% of the votes go to a run-off first-past-the-post vote.

When the elections are over, the president has to appoint a Prime Minister to form a government.

German voting system

To join the Parliament a party must receive at least 5% of the popular vote and currently there are four parties to watch: the CDU, the Social Democrats, the Radical Left Party an the Environmentalist. Plus there are two parties that could overcome the 5% threshold: the Free Democrats and the AFD.

Parties usually form coalitions, which right now is formed by the CDU and the Social Democrats, but neither are happy of the situation. Hence the position to watch is for third place, contended by The Greens and the Free Democrats, which could become the CDU next coalition partner, and make the CDU pull to the left or the right. If neither of these do well, Merkel will have to decide between forming an unprecedented three-way coalition or continuing the coalition with the SPD

Proportional systems in the American system and why it is unlikely to happen

Elections for Congress in the U.S are based a plurality winner system. There is a very strong incentive to vote for one of the two major parties because people do not want to waste their vote by supporting a third party with no chance of winning. With only two parties inevitabily, millions of people are not going to be represented.

Party list system and Alternative vote system would be alternative methods in which American citizen would have more options to choose from, which would increase political participation and decrease people that do not feel represented.

The connection between a location and the legislator would weaken, but gerrymandering would not be a problem anymore, you’d break the priviledged position of the two parties in the political system and wider ranges of political opinions would be represented.

1. **States and the Economy**

Another way to classify governments is how they handle the economy:

1. Laissez-faire systems:

DEF: *French for “let it be”, economic system of minimal government interference and supervision.*

In a laissez-faire system the government adopts a hands-off approach to the economy. This means that there are limited attempts to redistribute wealth in society and that the government owns very little industry.

In general, the belief that guides a laissez-faire system is that economic prosperity increases as government regulation decreases and markets are free to work.

1. Welfare states:

DEF: *economic system of major government redistribution of income to poorer citizen.*

Welfare systems emphasize the redistribution of wealth in society and allow government a wide range of options in ensuring greater levels of social equality among citizens.

In a welfare state system, the government will not own industry generally but will rely on high levels of taxes to fund social programs to help redistribute wealth in society.

1. Statist systems:

DEF: *economic system of state ownership of major industries to enhance power and prestige of the state (precapitalist system).*

In statists systems the government is the number one capitalist and runs most of the industry.

The purpose is to set the economy in service to the state and its goals.

In doing so, the state cares little about inequality among citizens and provides few welfare benefits to its citizens.

1. Socialism:

DEF*: economic system of government ownership of industry, allegedly for good of whole society, opposite to capitalism*.

Socialist states have a high degree of state ownership of the major industries in the country. This could include utilities, railroads, mines etc.

Socialist states emphasize social equality and as such they promote high levels of social welfare which effectively redistributes wealth in society.

There are many ways that states have tried to manage their economies and as such there is a high degree of variation across states. Still there is a great deal of disagreement about which role for the state in the economy is the best.

1. FRANCE used the state as an agent of modernization and turned peasants into "Frenchmen".

France did modernize, but was it the best way?

1. UNITED STATES and BRITAIN modernized without heavy state intervention.
2. JAPAN is another example of state-led modernization.

The Japanese government assigned various branches of industry to samurai clans during the Meiji Restoration and told them to copy the West. After the war, the state again took the lead in in modernizing the state.