

Chapter 1: What Should We Know About American Government?

- I. Why have government? (this differs from Wilson)
 - A. Balance individual freedom v. government-guaranteed order
 - B. Balance individual freedom v. government-guaranteed equality

- II. The meanings of democracy
 - A. **Direct** or **participatory democracy**
 1. Definition: *A form of government where policy is made directly by all or most citizens.*
 2. Examples (these three examples are not discussed in Wilson)
 - a. Initiative: *a petition procedure, used in some states, that allows as few as 5% of the voters to propose new state or local laws that are then submitted to a popular referendum.*
 - b. Referendum: *an election in which a proposed law or state constitutional amendment is submitted to the voters for ratification or rejection.*
 - c. Recall: *a petition procedure, used in some states, that allows a minimum percentage of the voters to force a recall (special) election that would allow the voters to remove an elected office holder prior to the completion of their elected term of office.*
 3. Arguments for & against (not discussed in Wilson)
 - B. **Authoritarian** or **totalitarian democracy** (Wilson does not discuss this alternative in detail)
 1. Definition: *A form of government where policy is made by authoritarian or totalitarian elites not subject to popular control; such elites claim to be ruling in the best interests of the people.*
 2. Examples (this form of democracy is not nearly as common since the end of cold war — because the US and USSR are no longer propping up such regimes)
 - a. **Left:** authoritarian or totalitarian *communist or pro-communist* regimes
 - (1) Europe: none at present (until 1989, the USSR and its satellite nations)
 - (2) Asia: China, Vietnam, North Korea
 - (3) Latin America: Cuba
 - (4) Middle East: Libya, Syria
 - (5) Africa: Angola
 - b. **Right:** authoritarian or totalitarian *capitalist or pro-capitalist* regimes
 - (1) Europe: none at present (until he was defeated for reelection, Serbia under Slobodan Milosevic)
 - (2) Asia: Myanmar (Burma), Pakistan
 - (3) Latin America: none at present (in past: Peru under Alberto Fujimori; Chile under Augusto Pinochet)
 - (4) Middle East: Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia
 - (5) Africa: Kenya
 - (6) **U.S. during declared or civil wars** (but not during peacetime or *undeclared* wars)
 - (a) Lincoln during the Civil War
 - (b) Wilson during WWI
 - (c) F. D. Roosevelt and H. S. Truman during WWII
 - (d) A controversy has arisen over George W. Bush's post-9/11 claim of presidential authority to order warrant-less electronic domestic surveillance and detention of U.S. citizens suspected of terrorist activities
 - c. Either left or right: **authoritarian or totalitarian theocracies:** Algeria, Iran, Sudan
 3. Arguments for & against (not discussed in Wilson)
 - C. **Representative democracy** (also known as republican democracy)
 1. Definition: *A form of government where policy is made by popularly elected representatives subject to popular control through free, fair, frequent, and competitive elections.*
 2. Examples: U.S., Canada, Australia, Japan, most of western Europe
 3. Prerequisites
 - a. Freedom of speech
 - b. Freedom of press
 - c. Freedom of assembly & petition
 - d. Widespread respect for the fundamental rights of others
 - e. Widespread belief that the political system is legitimate
 4. Arguments for & against (not discussed in Wilson)

III. Two kinds of (representative) democracy

A. Parliamentary system

1. Definition: *A form of government in which there is a union or merger of the executive and legislative branches — the chief executive [and sometimes other cabinet officers] is a member of the parliament and elected to executive office by the majority party or party coalition in parliament — hence the same party or party coalition controls both branches.*
2. Advantages: a **more efficient government that is also more responsive to majority will**
 - a. There is little delay in policy making because there is no possibility of partisan “gridlock” between branches controlled by opposing parties
 - b. A clearer electoral mandate is given to the majority party to put into policy its campaign promises
 - c. It is easy for voters to assign responsibility for good or poor performance by the government
3. Disadvantages: a **potentially more dangerous government** if the majority will is short-sighted, unrepresentative, or tyrannical
 - a. There is little routine bargaining and compromise between opposing parties in government.
 - b. There is no regular opportunity for those not in the majority to influence government policy until the next election.
 - c. There are fewer built-in “check-and-balance” safeguards within government against “hasty and passionate” policy making.
4. Examples:
 - a. *Europe*: most representative democracies (except France & Russia); e.g., Germany, Ireland, UK, & Switzerland
 - b. *Asia*: most representative democracies (except S. Korea, Philippines, & Taiwan); e.g., Australia, India, Japan
 - c. *Middle East*: Israel
 - d. *Sub-saharan Africa*: most representative democracies (except Liberia, Namibia, & Zambia)
 - e. *Western Hemisphere*: few examples -- Canada & some Caribbean nations

B. Presidential system

1. Definition: *A form of government in which there is a separation of the executive and legislative branches — the President is elected by the people and not by the Congress — hence the two branches represent different constituencies and often are controlled by opposing parties*
2. Advantages: a **safer government** with more protections against misguided or tyrannical majorities
 - a. More check-and-balance safeguards against “hasty and passionate” policy making
 - b. More bargaining and compromise between diverse elements in society
 - c. More opportunity for those not in the majority to influence government policy while it is being made
3. Disadvantages: a **less efficient government that is also less responsive to majority will**
 - a. More delay or even “gridlock” in lawmaking and law enforcing
 - b. A less clear electoral mandate is often given by the voters to the government
 - c. It is much more difficult for the voters to assign responsibility for good or poor performance by the two elected branches
4. Contemporary examples:
 - a. *Europe*: France & Russia
 - b. *Asia*: South Korea, Philippines, Taiwan
 - c. *Middle East*: (none, although Israel popularly elected 3 prime ministers between 1999 & 2001)
 - d. *Sub-saharan Africa*: Liberia, Namibia, & Zambia
 - e. *Western Hemisphere*: most representative democracies (except Canada & some Caribbean)

IV. The puzzles of American government

V. Who governs? Pluralism (with bargaining & compromise) or special interest domination & manipulation of the public?

VI. To what ends? What balance between freedom v. order and freedom v. equality?

VII. What American politics means for us:

A. An adversarial system of dispersion of power & representation

1. Separation of powers by branch (presidential system with an independent judiciary)
2. Division of powers by level (federalism)
3. Bill of Rights guarantees of individual freedoms (political movements, parties, & interest groups)

B. Too often a polarized political elite that misrepresent a more pragmatic mass public