Senior Seminar: Designing Democratic Governments
POL 196
Spring 2014

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Class Meeting Time: W 2:00–4:50 p.m.
Office: 3715 Ellison Hall
Office Hours: T 2:00-4:00 p.m. or by appointment

1 Course Objectives

What kind of democratic government should a country have? In this seminar, we will examine the process by which democratic governments are designed; the major choices faced by constitutional designers (for example, a presidential versus a parliamentary regime and a proportional representation versus a majoritarian electoral system); and the arguments for and against particular choices. Throughout, the theoretical issues will be illuminated by discussions of both historic and current examples of institutional choice, with a particular focus upon (but not limited to) the United States and other advanced industrial democracies. Besides familiarizing students with the academic literature on political institutions and constitutional design, the goal of the seminar is to provide you with a flavor of graduate-level instruction and hence with a more interactive learning experience than can usually be obtained from even upper division lecture courses.

2 Course Requirements

First and perhaps most obviously, because this class is a seminar, it will fail without adequate student participation. Students should therefore come to class prepared to discuss the readings, which means having read the readings both carefully and critically. To encourage this, a large portion of your grade will be based upon your class participation. Note that the quantity of participation does not necessarily equal the quality, and I will weigh both when assigning you a participation grade. Class will, with the exception of our final class meeting in Week 10, be loosely organized into two sessions. In the first section, we will discuss the normative, theoretical, and empirical issues raised by the general readings. In the second, we will discuss a case study, where we will apply what we have learned to a contemporary example of institutional choice, debating the pros and cons of different institutional arrangements for a particular country.

Second, students are required to serve as a moderator for one theoretical set of readings, as well as for one case study. (To be clear: this means that you will be in the “hot seat” for two weeks between Weeks 3 and 10.) The moderator’s main job is to come to class prepared enough to keep everyone else (including the instructor!) on their toes. Moreover, for the theoretical readings, the moderator will write a short (circa 2 page) critical review.
of the readings containing some questions for discussion. Note that this short paper should
not summarize the readings (e.g., “Jones says X”). Instead, it should be critical, identifying
(in your opinion) issues for discussion such as the key debates, points of controversy, any
perceived theoretical or empirical (methodological) problems, and/or open questions. For
the case studies, the moderator will write a short (circa 2 page) memo identifying the
key issues and arguing either for or against the proposed institutional changes. A brief
explanation for the position, including taking on the opposing argument, should be included.
The purpose of both of these short assignments is to help spur discussion in class. To ensure
that we are all on the same page about what makes for good critical reviews and memos,
everyone will write either a critical review or a memo for Week 2 (our first real meeting),
an exercise that will count towards your participation grade. We will spend some time that
week talking about what people found to be the most useful approaches to each. Critical
reviews and memos should be posted on the course Gaucho Space website by 12:00 p.m. on
the Tuesday before the relevant class meeting so as to allow everyone time to reflect upon
them prior to class. Please send me your top three choices of topics from Weeks 3 through
10 for serving as moderator (ranked from first to third, for both the theoretical readings
and the case study) by 5:00 p.m. on Thursday the 3rd. I will then assign students to topics,
doing my best to take everyone’s preferences into account. Please also let me know by this
time if you would prefer to write a critical review or a memo for Week 2; if the distribution
is very unbalanced, I will ask some randomly-chosen students to switch.

Third and finally, students will write an approximately fifteen page (the acceptable range
being from ten to twenty pages) term paper, which will take the form of a policy memo, as
their final project. There are no exams in this course, so this final project doubles as both
a final exam and a more conventional research paper. The memo is due by noon on Friday,
13 June, although you may of course turn it in earlier if doing so better fits your schedule.
You may begin working on the memo at any time after the third week of class, when I
will hand out a detailed prompt. You will need to do some additional reading beyond the
syllabus for your paper, although the exact amount will depend upon the paper’s argument
and content.

3 Grading

Grades for the course will be calculated as follows.

- Class participation, including writing a critical review or memo for Week 3. (30%)
- Service as moderator, including critical review and memo. Each week’s service will,
  except in special circumstances, be weighed equally. (20%)
- Final project. (50%)

4 Required Reading Materials

Readings for the course are available in several ways. First, I have asked the university
bookstore to stock copies of our two core texts, Dahl’s On Democracy and Lijphart’s Patterns of Democracy, which I recommend purchasing if your budget allows it. Both can be
alternatively obtained from many online vendors nowadays, often used (and hence inex-
pensively). For example, the 1999 edition of the Lijphart text is a fine substitute for the
recently-released 2012 edition, and it is available used. These books have also been placed
on reserve at the library for those who do not wish to purchase a copy. Second, for copyright
reasons, other books from which we will be reading more than three chapters are available
on reserve from the library. You are of course also welcome to purchase copies of these
books, which are readily available online in both used and new formats. All of the readings
available from the library course reserve system are labeled [LIB] in the schedule below.
Third, readings that are available online are labeled [E] in the schedule. Note, however,
that to access some of these readings, you will either need to be on a university computer
or to have your home computer configured for off campus access. I have provided links
to these readings on the course Gaucho Space website. Fourth and finally, the remaining
readings (such as shorter book excerpts) are available as PDF files from the course Gaucho
Space website. These are labeled [GS] in the schedule.

5 Syllabus

Week 1: Organizational Session

Week 2: Democracy and Institutions: What Does It Mean to Design a “Democ-
romatic” Government?

- Arend Lijphart, 2012, Patterns of Democracy, Chapter 1; Chapters 2–3 recom-
   mended [LIB]
- The Economist, 2014, “What’s Gone Wrong with Democracy?,” 1 March (http:
  //www.economist.com/node/21597917) [E]
- G. Bingham Powell, 2000, Elections as Instruments of Democracy, Chapter 1.
  [GS]
- Case Study: Deliberative Democracy in the United States?
  - Room for Debate: “Out of Officials’ Hands and Onto the Ballot,” 2013, New
    York Times, 18 June (http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/06/18/ballot-
    initiatives-at-the-local-level) [E]
  - James Fishkin, 2013, “Deliberation by the people themselves: Entry points
    for the public voice,” Election Law Journal 12 (4) [GS]

Week 3: Constitutions

- Arend Lijphart, Patterns of Democracy, Chapter 12 [LIB]
- Zachary Elkins, Tom Ginsburg, and James Melton, 2009, The Endurance of
  National Constitutions, Chapters 1, 3, and 5 [LIB]
- Giovanni Sartori, 1997, Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry into
  Structures, Incentives and Outcomes, 2nd ed., Chapter 13 [GS]
• Case Study: A Constitution for Israel?
  – Mordechai Kremnitzer and Amir Fuchs, 2011, “Now’s the Time for a Constitution” (http://en.idi.org.il/analysis/articles/nows-the-time-for-a-constitution) [E]
  – Gregory Mahler, 2011, Politics and Government in Israel, Chapter 4, p. 97-114 [GS]

Week 4: Executive-Legislative Relations: Presidentialism vs. Parliamentarism

• Arend Lijphart, Patterns of Democracy, Chapter 7 [LIB]
• Jose Antonio Cheibub, 2007, Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy, Chapters 1 and 7 [GS]
• David Samuels and Matthew Shugart, 2010, Presidents, Parties and Prime Ministers: How the Separation of Powers Affects Party Organization and Behavior, Chapters 1, 8, and 9 [GS]
• Case Study: A Presidential System for Turkey?

Week 5: Vertical Relations: Centralization vs. Decentralization, Federalism vs. Unitarianism

• Arend Lijphart, Patterns of Democracy, Chapter 10 [LIB]
• Daniel Treisman, 2007, The Architecture of Government: Rethinking Political Decentralization, Chapters 1, 2 (p. 21-27 only), 10-12 [LIB]
• Case Study: A United Kingdom? Devolution and Scottish independence
Week 6: Electoral Systems: The Big Picture

- Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, Chapter 8 [LIB]
- Case Study: Electoral Reform in South Africa?

Week 7: Electoral Systems: The Devil Is in the Details


• Lisa Handley and Bernard Grofman, eds., *Redistricting in Comparative Perspective*, Chapters Introduction and 18 [GS]


• Mark Jones, 2009, “Gender Quotas, Electoral Laws, and the Election of Women: Evidence from the Latin American Vanguard,” *Comparative Political Studies* 42 (1) [GS]


• Case Study: Electoral Reform in California

**Week 8: In the Trenches: Electoral Administration and Governance**


• Susan Hyde, 2010, “Experimenting in Democracy Promotion: International Observers and the 2004 Presidential Election in Indonesia,” *Perspectives on Politics* 8 (2) [GS]


• Case Study: Election Administration in the United States
Week 9: Legislatures

- Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, Chapters 6 and 11 [LIB]
- Case Study: Reforming the House of Lords in the United Kingdom

Week 10: The Process of Constitutional Engineering and Its Limits