9/27

Q: What is democracy?
Q: What is polyarchy?
Q: How do we define democracy in the real world?

Read this week:
   Ellis and Nelson, Chpt 1 (to discuss Friday)
   Monroe & Kersh Chpt 1 & 2

What makes the US (or anything) a Democracy?

1)
2)
3)

etc)
What makes the US (or anything) NOT a Democracy?

1)

2)

3)

etc)
I. Democratic Government

A. What makes mass politics democratic?  

as opposed to: 

authoritarian / autocracy 
monarchy 
oligarchy 
**republic** 
 etc.

Traits of an “Ideal,” or pure Democracy:

**public opinion** -> **public policy**

1. “Majority Rule”

   - 50% + 1
   - full participation required

2. Public Discourse / Deliberation

   - perfect information
   - people seek out info on politics
   - full public discussion
   - full consideration of alternatives
   - people are interested

3. Perfect competition of groups/ideas

   - free entry into arena
Is this "democracy"?

What is left out of this definition?
1. ??
2. ??

B. Can there ever be a perfect democracy?
How do we know if/when a nation is democratic?

In the real world:
1. Most people don’t vote
2. Most of us have little information about politics other things more important in daily life (job, bills, sports, love, sex, family, .......etc.)
3. People act on basis of emotion and reason
4. Institutions constrain choices
   - number of parties function of rules
   - market forces constrain media output
So, what is a democracy?

- In pure form, an ideal (utopia?)
- In practice

Q: How do we define democracy in the real world?

Q: What is a republic (vs. a democracy)?
“Ideal” view of Democracy something no real place can meet

What real world criteria to define democracy?

II. POLYARCHY (R. Dahl, 1950s)

Polyarchy =

public opinion -----> elections -----> public policy

A. “Second Best,” “soft” definition of democracy

1. Control of nation vested in written constitution

   • “rule of laws, not rule of men...” LIMITS

2. Public officials selected via contested elections

   • fraud, coercion uncommon

3. Most adults have the right to run for office

   • socialists in US 1900s - 1950s
   • Nazis in Germany
   • Convicted felons in US

4. Citizens may seek out alternative sources of information

   • variation in media outlets exists
   • media not censored
5. Most adults *can* vote
   - no systematic exclusion of any social group (racial, religion, gender, language, etc.)
   - equal weight to each vote

6. People may organize groups to lobby elected officials form and join interest groups

7. Citizens have right to expression, to criticize govt without repercussion

B. Again, “real world” problems with these criteria

1. What countries qualify? (almost any)
   - Afghanistan today?
   - China? Hong Kong?
   - Russia?

   All these nations have elections, but might not considered democratic

2. What if elected officials have little *real* power
   - over markets
   - over private interests
   - over state interests
3. Too much emphasis on elections and voting?

Polyarchy =

opinion ----> elections -----> public policy
Is this "democracy"?

III. PLURALISM

How close does US really come to being a “polyarchical” democracy?

Pluralism =

public opinion ---> elite competition ---> public policy

A. Interest-group democracy (indirect democracy)

1. Indirect participation via groups that compete if their interest is threatened

   • a fluid system of group competition
   • a system of competition at the elite level

2. Countervailing centers of power

   • interest groups keep others in check
(manufacturing, labor, banks, etc.)

3. New groups can form and gain access to **multiple arenas** of public influence
   - Legislative
   - Executive
   - Judicial

4. **Power is fluid** and mobile influence may be unequal, but widely distributed.
   - money
   - skill
   - education
   - information
   - mobilization of voters
   - publicity stunts

5. **Multiple centers of power**

   having power in one area not = power in others

6. Policy function of “equilibrium” outcomes
   - not “majority rule” via elections
   - a balance of social interests via lobbying
I. Elite Theory of Democracy (Mills, Dye, Domhoff)

Elite model of democracy =

elite interest ---> policies / actions ----> mass opinion

A. Theory of Social and Economic Power

1. Power function of economic status (wealth and more)

2. Few have power, most do not

3. Few are atypical of society
   - distinct upper SES
   - interlocking social networks in schools, family, corporate & charitable boards, etc.

4. Non-elite movement into elite strata is slow only those who accept elite "consensus" enter

5. Elites share consensus on basic goals and values
   "managed capitalism"
   "liberalization"
   "globalization"
6. Public policy reflects elite preferences

7. Policy changes incrementally, “big” change is rare
   - End of slavery 1860s
   - New Deal in 1930s
   - Civil Rights /Great Society 1960s

8. Elites influence public more than we direct them
   - control of news media
   - control of entertainment media
   - control of political parties
   - control political agenda

9. NOT a “conspiracy”
   - privilege position of business in democracy
   - a collective action problem (see Coleman)
Elite Theory of Democracy =

elite interest ---> policy/actions ----> mass opinion

B. Compared to Pluralism

1. Pluralism =

- competition of plural, diverse set of elites
- “bottom up” democratic values
- diversity of representation → policy fluid, dynamic

2. Elite Theory =

- no competition, homogenous elite
- “top down” democratic values
- policy static, rarely changes
C. The Irony of American Democracy (T. Dye)

1. **mass commitment to democratic values only symbolic**
   - pledge to flag
   - memorize US Constitution (preamble)
   - memorize Declaration of Independence
   - learn myths (GW cannot tell a lie)
   - US greatest nation on Earth

   but, no commitment to democratic values

2. **democratic values =**
   - rights of political expression
   - rights of minorities
   - tolerance
   - civil liberties
   - protections from state actions

3. **American ethos =**
   - mass apathy?
   - many think we go “too far” with rights
4. **Mass intolerance in survey data?** (late 1990s)

- 57% say groups can’t use public buildings to crit. US
- 50% say majority can vote to ban some speech
- 47% say foreigners critical of US can’t visit
- 43% say homosexuals should not be teachers (same in 2005)

- only 18% say OK to let some guilty go to protect rights of innocent (2002)
- 44% SAY OK to curtail some liberties of US Muslims (register, monitor, observe...2004)

5. Strongest tolerance of minorities in upper strata, and well-educated

6. Candidates can succeed by appealing to racial resentment, violations of liberties, law

**IRONY** = elites more supportive of democracy than mass public

- **elites protect “rules of the game”** (via courts)
- elites fear mass led change elites also act undemocratically