POLITICAL ASPECTS OF GOVERNMENT

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Summary

Two types of democracy, majoritarian and consensus, are first discussed. The majoritarian principle is typically embodied in parliamentary systems, by the combination of the single-member district plurality (majority) system, the two-party system, and single-party cabinets; and in presidential systems by presidential domination over the parliament. Consensus democracies are based on the principle that accommodation of minority interests and securing of minority acceptance are essential in arriving at such decisions. The majoritarian principle finds typical institutional expression in the setting of the parliamentary system, the combination of single-member district plurality (majority) system, the two-party system, and single-party cabinets; and in the setting of the presidential system, presidential domination over the parliament. The consensus principle is embodied, in deeply divided "plural societies," by "consociational" arrangements, and more generally by the combination of proportional representation, multiparty system, and oversized coalition cabinets.

The second item discussed is interest groups. The corporatist model has been influential in the analysis of groups that are licensed by the state. The model focuses on interdependence and collaboration among economic groups, each subject to state controls and internally hierarchical. Among groups not licensed by the state, the relation with the state varies widely. It ranges from symbiosis to mutual isolation. How interest groups may be incorporated into democratic order is an important question faced by all democracies, majoritarian or consensus.

This article concludes by examining the concept of power. The concept is crucial for understanding why certain decisions are made, why certain issues are placed on the political agenda, and why actors hold certain preferences. A conditional analysis of power, broad definition of power covering conflict and consensus, unintentional exercise of power, and exercise of power against someone's "real interest," among

others, are discussed. Attention is drawn to the question of how explicit conceptualizations of the word relate to its everyday usage.

1. Introduction

This introductory article presents an overview of political aspects of government. It provides a broad context for the individual discussions of important elements of the political process: election and voting, political parties, interest groups, public opinion and mass media, decentralization and local politics, and power structure.

Sections 2 and 3 discuss two types of democracy: majoritarian and consensus. Any collectivity, whether it be national, sub-national, international, or transnational, faces the question of what decision-making principle to adopt. Unless the principle it adopts is widely accepted by its members, collective decisions will lack legitimacy and, therefore, effectiveness. The two sections focus on two basic types of decision making principle democracies may adopt: majoritarian and consensual.

Democracies that are organized on the basis of the majoritarian principle may be called majoritarian democracies. Democracies that are organized on the basis of the consensus principle may be called consensus democracies. In the two sections, configurations of political institutions that give expression to the two types of decision-making principle will be delineated. Specifically, electoral system, party system, cabinets in parliamentary systems, and presidential power will be examined in detail. Remarks on intergovernmental relations will also be made.

Section 4 deals with interest groups. Interest groups in democracies play an important role in the making of public policy. But they have routinely been criticized as pursuing parochial interests in an undemocratic manner. How their activities may come to enjoy democratic legitimacy is a difficult problem for majoritarian and consensus democracies alike. This section will point out the importance of the problem after describing the variety of ways in which groups relate to the state.

The final section discusses the concept of power. The concept, and concepts closely related to it (e.g., influence, control), are central to any analysis of political aspects of government. But, despite extensive debate, students of politics have not come even close to reaching an agreement on how to define power. In fact, the study of power has been called a bottomless swamp. This section will not attempt any synthesis; it will identify some of the important questions that have been raised in the debate on what power is.

The discussion in sections 2,3, and 4 focuses mostly on national policy making. But the type of decision-making principle adopted by, for example, a municipality can be given expression by the configuration of political institutions in that municipality. And how the activities of interest groups influential in municipal policy making can be legitimized is an important problem posed to the municipality. Thus, many parts of the discussion in the three sections are meant to be applicable to policy making at the subnational level.

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Biographical Sketch

Professor Okawara received his M.A. from the University of Tokyo in 1980. He specializes in the field of theory of political process. He has also been engaged in the study of Japanese security policy. He has published in both of these fields. His theoretical work has centered on power and influence in the political process. His English language publications (co-authored) include *Japan's National Security: Structures, Norms, and Policy Responses in a Changing World* (Cornell University East Asia Program, 1993), and

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