Theorising the Democratic State
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Lecture 6:
Associational Life
Atomised mass society

Schumpeter:

- People are engaged in their personal concerns
- Citizens’ task confined to choice between governments
- Voting is modelled on individual choice between consumption goods
Individualism leads to authoritarian government.
Individualism and Authoritarian Government

Individual freedom

+ Equality of status between all individuals

→ separation from others

+ care only for oneself

→ demand for security from Government
Feudal/aristocratic society
Modern central state
Remedy for tendency to state centralisation

• Local collective self-government and public provision

  • decreases need for central state provision and regulation
  • raises local social capital – stocks of resources needed for social investment and production
  • increases individual capacity and reliability

  • raises expected costs of defection
  • engenders friendship and preference for helping
Centralised and authoritarian states proscribe civil association; civil association keeps truthfulness alive in authoritarian states.

Vaclav Havel b. 1936
‘Here a different kind of life – a kind of anti-political politics – can be lived, and the self-sustaining aspects of the system, its presence within each individual, can be shaken off.’
(John Keane, introduction to Power of the Powerless, 1985)
Commercial society requires trust in contract, civility and sociability between parties to contracts; and has its counterpart in friendliness and politeness in social life.
Ties:

Density: Is everyone connected with you connected with each other?

Multiplexity: Does the connection between two persons have more than one dimension (e.g. work, leisure, worship, debt, kinship)?

Strength: Is the tie direct, or is it e.g. the friend of a friend?
In a society and state with a civic culture there is ‘a substantial consensus on the legitimacy of political institutions and the direction and content of public policy, a widespread tolerance of a plurality of interests and belief in their reconcilability, and a widely distributed sense of political competence and mutual trust in the citizenry.’

Gabriel Almond 1911-2002  Sidney Verba b.1932


The theory of civic culture:

Democratic stability needs an underlying culture – a political culture - of a particular sort: a civic culture

Almond and Verba’s method:
Attitude measurement by survey
Civic culture vocabulary

Political culture: the culture that underlies and supports, or is the counterpart to, a particular kind of polity (political society including government) and politics (competition, formal and informal, for the power to govern)

Civic culture: (Almond and Verba) a political culture centred on ‘civility’ and ‘civic values’ – acceptance of political authority, tolerance of plurality, broad agreement about public policy, widely distributed political competence, trust in government and other citizens

Democratic culture: acceptance, endorsement and practice of democratic procedures and values: majoritarianism, public deliberation, governmental accountability, election or selection of government, popular sovereignty ...
5. Social Capital: *the resources that human beings need in order to make social investments, get a return on these, engage in social production – eg friendships are a form of social capital which enable individuals to get help and support when needed; neighbourly relations are a form of social capital which enable neighbourhoods to make improvements in their environment ...*

6. Civil Society: *Society based on civil values (politeness, trust in contracts, sociability, public life (coffee houses, art, public space, news media and discussion); hence with organisational and regulatory capacity independent of state and government; the basis for ‘speaking truth to power’ (Havel).*
Other possible and actual political cultures

• Marx on capitalist society: exploitative and ever concentrating capitalist class; exploited, propagandised and coerced working class; vanguard revolutionary proletarian party alongside bourgeois political parties;

• Marx’s communist vision: self-governing communities absent public political (coercive) power;

• Elitists: permanent and stable hierarchical domination; orderly reproduction of elite groups through inter-generational transmission of position

• de Tocqueville’s ancien regime: irresponsible aristocracy; bourgeois jealousy of aristocratic privilege; peasantry angry about exploitation; intellectuals intoxicated with grand theory

• ‘amoral familism’: closely knit kinship groups, hostile to each other; strong vertical ties to patrons  [Banfield]
Theory:

Civil Society (high levels of social capital; civic culture) is a necessary condition of a stable and properly democratic state and government.
because ...

Negative: *relation between mass society, loss of social ties, and authoritarian government based on demagogic appeal*

Positive:

1. *learning for people in groups: cooperation, organisation, deliberation, selection of officers*

2. *concentrations of social and human capital – for campaigns, participation in public debate, holding government to account etc*

3. *multiple memberships and overlapping networks: more effective power facing government*