Elections & Democratic Theory: A Review

MU MVZ 449
Spring 2010
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Agenda

- A little democratic theory
- Madison's vision of American government
- How elections impact government

Democratic Theory: A Review

Thomas Hobbes

In the State of Nature: "[there are] no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short"

Quoted at http://radicalacademy.com/hcdffilehome5b.htm

Democratic Theory, cont'd

John Locke

"We hold these truths to be self-evident….That, to secure these [natural] rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Quoted at http://radicalacademy.com/hcdffilehome5b.htm

Democratic Theory

- Characteristics
  - Government should serve the interests of the people
  - The people have a method of affecting the exercise of public power

- Key issues
  - *How* can we ensure the people hold public power?
  - *How* can we ensure that this government is stable?
  - *What* do we mean by "public power"?

Democratic Theory

- "Pure democracy"
  - Direct exercise of the public's will
  - Modern day examples

- Potential problems identified by philosophers
  - ability implement
  - Plato's problem
  - goal is debatable
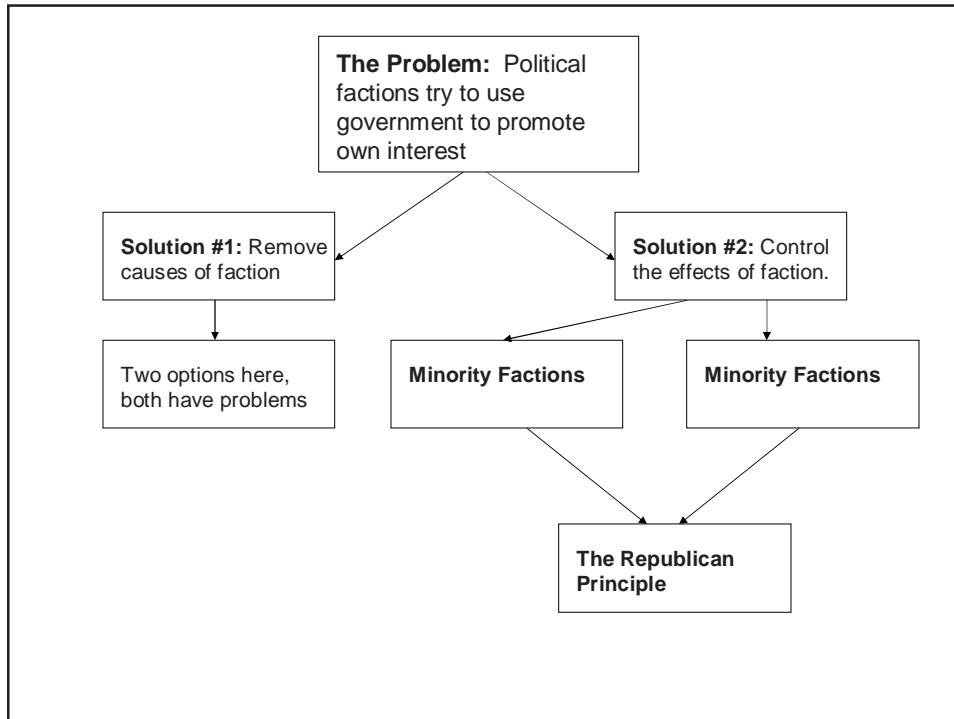
Madisonian Democracy

James Madison

Principle Architect of the American *Constitution*

Main theoretical ideas underlying the *Constitution* are outlined in *Federalist #10*.

The Problem: Political factions try to use government to promote own interest

Solution #1: Remove causes of faction

Two options here, both have problems

The Problem: Political factions try to use government to promote own interest

Solution #1: Remove causes of faction

Solution #2: Control the effects of faction.

Two options here, both have problems

Minority Factions

Minority Factions

The Republican Principle

Review: The Republican Principle

- Differences between a republic and a democracy

- Republic as a solution to the problem of "minority faction"

- Republic as a partial solution to the problem of "majority faction"

Delegation of Authority

- The key to making this method work rests on the <u>delegation</u> of power

- Problems:
  - how much power to delegate?
  - how can you control the delegate?
  - how should the delegate make decisions?

- Leads to the concept of…representation
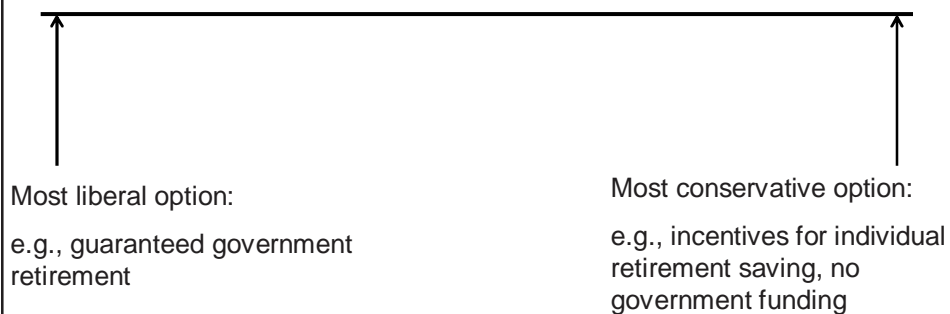
Representative Democracy

- Definition?

- Key characteristic:

  Power of the people is **<u>delegated</u>** to **<u>representatives</u>**

- In theory, how does this work?

The Problem of Prediction with Elections

- Principal = voters
- Agent = representative

- So, the focus here is on the linear match of self-identification of preferences with some matchup, lineup of candidates, especially when that "match" is less than ideal.

This scale represents a range of possible policy options.

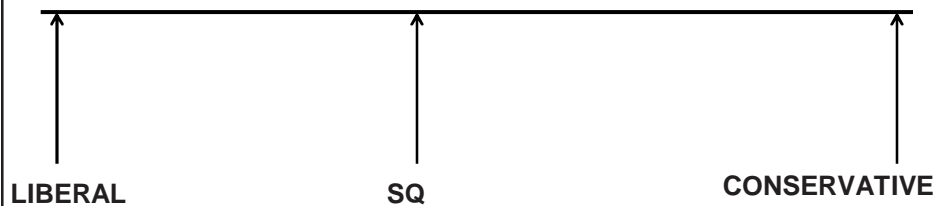For example, all possible policy solutions to Social Security crisis or funding for prisons.

Most liberal option:

e.g., guaranteed government retirement

Most conservative option:

e.g., incentives for individual retirement saving, no government funding

We can place the current state of policy on this scale.

Call it SQ for "status quo". It does not have to be in the center.

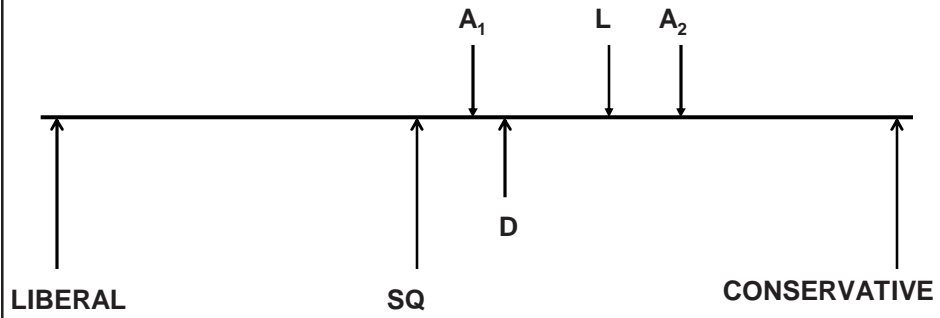**LIBERAL**   **SQ**   **CONSERVATIVE**

Using this "example", we can now think about how elections induce representation.

LIBERAL   **SQ**   **CONSERVATIVE**

L   legislator's personal political view

A_1, A_2 two different policies being proposed to the status quo

---

The closer a policy alternative is to your own preference, the more you favor that position.

What does *L* like best? A_1, A_2, or SQ?

9

D   What the district wants!

A₁   L   A₂

LIBERAL   SQ   CONSERVATIVE

D

Now what does *L* like best? A1, A2, or SQ?

A₁   L   A₂

D

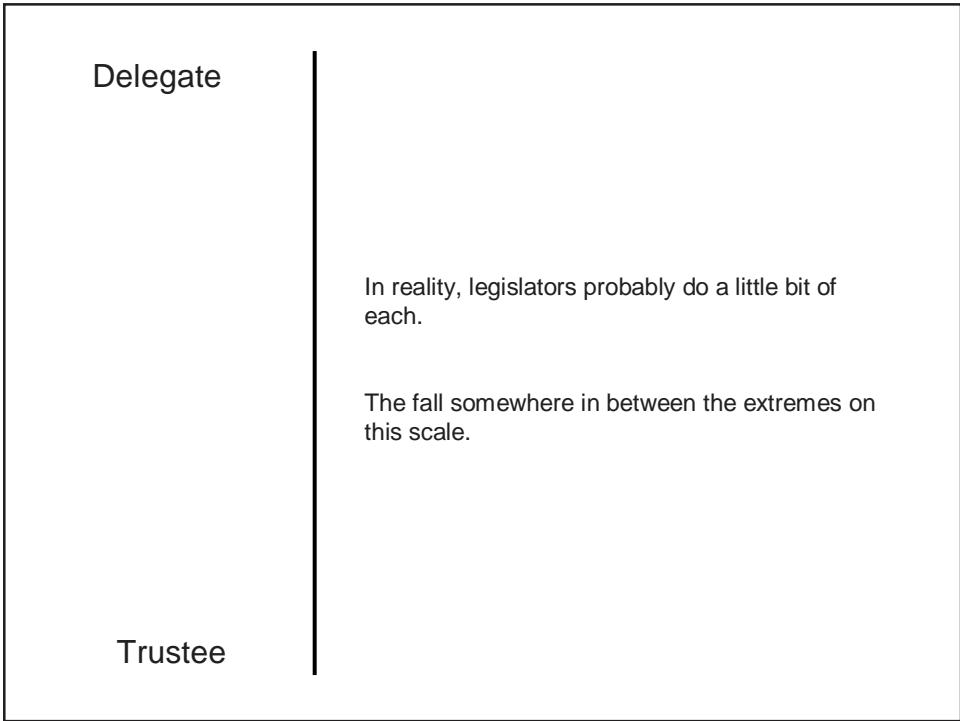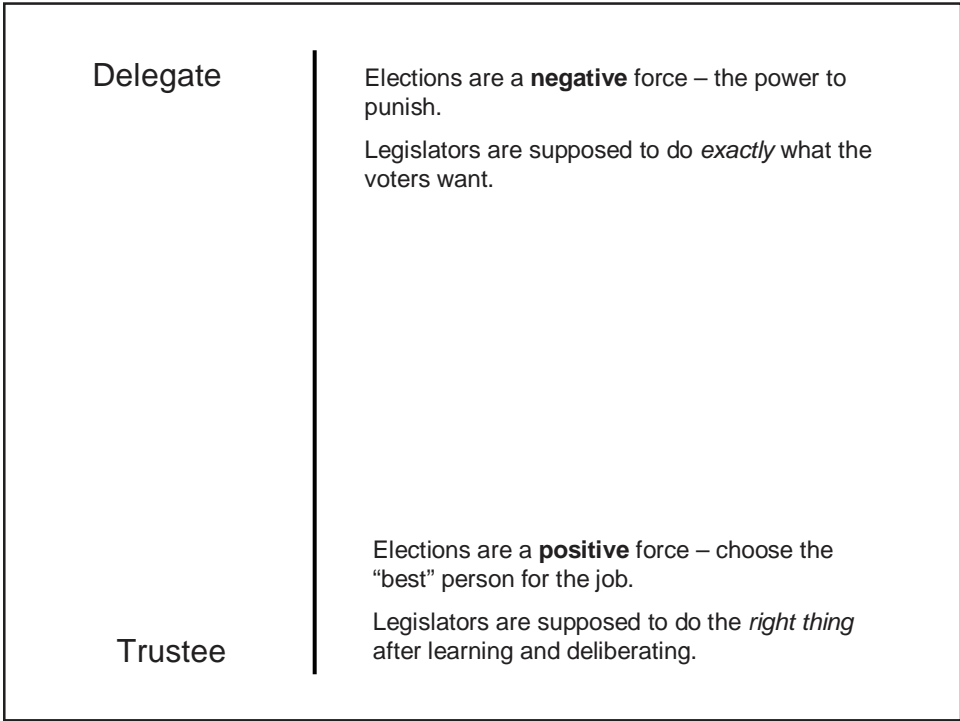LIBERAL   SQ   CONSERVATIVE
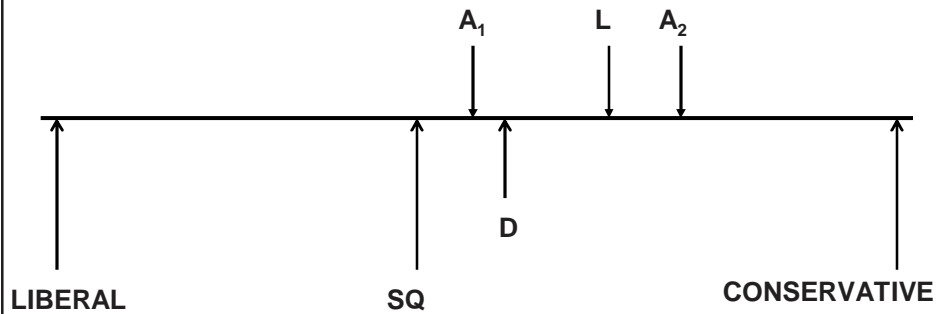
Some questions

- Why does *D* have the power to alter *L*'s choice?

- Does this necessarily mean that *L* will listen to *D* on every vote? Why or why not?

- What does it take for *L* to listen to *D*? What kinds of things must *D* do to make *L* pay attention?

Types of Representation

- Principal POLS Canon: Hanah Pitkin *The Concept of Representation*

- Two generalized types of representation, relevant as election references:
  - delegate (John Locke)
  - trustee (Edmund Burke)

Delegate

Elections are a **negative** force – the power to punish.

Legislators are supposed to do *exactly* what the voters want.

Elections are a **positive** force – choose the "best" person for the job.

Legislators are supposed to do the *right thing* after learning and deliberating.

Trustee

Delegate

In reality, legislators probably do a little bit of each.

The fall somewhere in between the extremes on this scale.

Trustee

Issues to Consider

- What qualities does an electoral system need to ensure each type of representation? How do they differ? How are they the same?

- What qualities do *voters* need to ensure each type of representation? What information is relevant to their votes under each model?

Ahhh…There it is…the Normative Context

- Compare what we learn about elections and voting to your criteria on these issues.

- What does our electoral system reasonably accomplish? What needs to be changed?