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WK 5: “How Democratic is the United States”

This week’s readings ask us to consider *how* democratic the United States is. Our readings try to answer this question using two different approaches: a public participation approach & an institutional approach.

Let’s break up into four groups: each group will fill in one column. Then, let’s regroup to fill in the entire table. We will address discussion questions as we move through the table.

	Institutional Approach		Participation Approach	
	1. Lessig	2. Levinson	3. Schlozman, Verba, & Brady	4. Skocpol & Williamson
What relationships is the author examining?				
What is the author’s argument?				
What evidence is used to make this point? What data do they draw on? Is the evidence sufficient to support the argument?				
What are the implications of the argument and findings?				
Link to other course readings?				

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Money ⇒ Congress

Lessig

- What is Lessig’s definition of a democratic congress?
- According to Lessig, does money influence the behavior of elected representatives? If so, how? Is his argument convincing? Why or why not?
- Lessig seems to say that even among special interests, influence is not equal. What inequalities exist, even among special interests, in communicating their voice to Congress? Which special interests make their voice heard to Congress?

“The People” ⇒ Congress

Schlozman, Verba, Brady

- SVB quote E.E. Schattschneider, “The heavenly chorus sings with a stronger upper-class accent.” What does this mean? Why does it sum up the SVB findings?
- Who is making their “voice” heard? What inequalities exist among “the people” in communicating their voice to elected officials?
- Are all types of communication equal?

Skocpol & Williamson

- If money is what matters in determining whom government is responsive to (according to Lessig and SVB), why was the Tea Party so successful?
- “What do you make of the active citizen engagement of Tea Partiers? Is their engagement a good thing for American democracy – or not?” How do the authors answer this question? Do you agree, what do you think?

Institutions ⇒ Democratic Outcomes

Levinson

- To what extent do we want representation in a democracy? What would Levinson say?
- Levinson wants to revise the constitution. Discuss each element of the constitution that Levinson would like to revise. Would a revised constitution improve American democracy?