LEGITIMACY PROBLEMS IN
ESTABLISHED DEMOCRACIES

International Symposium
VU University Amsterdam
25-27 September 2013

No formal registration is required but if you wish to participate:
please send an email to j.j.woldendorp@vu.nl.
Organised by Hans Keman & Jaap Woldendorp - Comparative Political Science at the VU Amsterdam and made possible by the generous support of the KNAW – Royal Academy of Science, the Faculty of Social Sciences of the VU University and the Department of Political Science & Public Administration.

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The democratic performance of party democracy is considered by many as being below par, resulting in lower levels of trust in parties, parliament, and government which negatively affects the system’s legitimacy. Legitimacy is considered to be essential for peaceful and effective governance in a democracy – it is the grease that makes democracy work. Legitimacy is often defined as the popular compliance with and acceptance of political authority of the state and as a systemic outcome of variations in the democratic performance of political parties in parliament and government. Central to democratic performance is the degree of ‘responsiveness’ of parties towards electors, and of ‘responsible’ (accountable) performance of parties in parliament towards government. The central issue is therefore: to what extent parties, in or out government, enhance the democratic performance to maintain legitimacy (popular consent by representing the ‘demos’ (electorate) in a responsive manner and by directing governmental actions in a responsible (and accountable) fashion?

Legitimate government also implies the ‘lawful’ exercise of public authority that can be impartially scrutinized (i.e. Rule of Law). Taken in this sense, legitimacy allows the transformation of coercion into compliance with the exercise of state powers in a peaceful but authoritative manner. Legitimate government is expected to steer the ship of state effectively (with lower transaction costs and without unnecessary coercion (resulting in lower levels of protest for the common good. Hence, responsive and responsible party behaviour is the benchmark of ‘good governance’, contributing to public welfare, popular acceptance and peaceful compliance with political authority. Yet, the concept of legitimacy is not only a contested concept but also a complex phenomenon, which is hard to define and measure. This symposium is intended to take stock of comparatively driven research of the multifarious manifestations
and dimensions of legitimacy in order to develop a research agenda that can serve as a guide for the future.

Three themes will be discussed during the sessions:

One, the democratic performance of parties in elections by focussing on electoral change, emerging new parties and the quality of representation as ‘trustees’ of the ‘demos’. Responsiveness is here a key term, meaning that popular consent and support is developed on the basis that parties indeed are functioning as trustworthy and responsive channels of interest representation of their constituency as well as of society as a whole within the context of indirect democracy.

Two, how adequate do parties operate as intermediaries between the electorate’s preferences (interests and party government? This behaviour should not only be adequate in terms of ‘responsiveness’, but also in terms of making ‘responsible’ and ‘accountable’ policy for the common good. This obviously implies a tension between what the electorate wants and what society needs. Hence, party government in whatever form and institutional context is confronted with policy dilemma’s that must be solved in one way or another.

Three, the relationship between parties – government – electorate is in large part influenced by the institutionalisation of these relations and by the degree of government efficacy regarding politically contested issue like for example European Integration, Unemployment and the Labour Market, Welfare State retrenchment, Crime, Law and Order, the Environment, Globalisation etcetera. The extent to which parties, be it in or out government, handle these issues will affect the democratic performance and levels of legitimacy in established democracies.

We expect the Symposium shall contribute to a fertile and fruitful exchange of ideas and information to enhance future research on ‘Legitimacy’ in democratic societies.
PROGRAMME

Wednesday 25 September 2013

Location: Faculty of Social Sciences VU, Metropolitan Building

Political Performance and Changing Patterns of Legitimacy
Chair: Anton Hemerijck

14.00-14.30: Registration of participants
14.30-14.45: Opening by Dean Anton Hemerijck of the Faculty of Social Sciences of VU University
14.45-15.15: Reflections on the Theme of the Conference Hans Keman
16.15-16.45: Democratic Performance in the Netherlands Jacques Thomassen
17.15-18.15: Informal Reception for participants

Thursday 26 September 2013

Location: Auditorium VU (Main Building)

Trust in Politics, Electoral Change and New Parties
Chair: Dietmar Braun

09.00-09.15: Opening
09.15-09.45: Democracy and subnational decentralization Liesbet Hooghe & Gary Marks
10.15-10.45: Electoral Change in Europe Cees Van der Eijk
11.30-12.00: How do Europeans view and evaluate democracy? Hans-Peter Kriesi

12.45-14.15: Lunch (provided)
Party Behaviour and Democratic Performance
Chair Gary Marks

14.30-15.00: Responsive and Responsible Party Behaviour
Paul Pennings

15.30-16.00: Party Government and Public Policy: Why some incumbent parties radically deviate from the preferences of their social constituencies - Manfred Schmidt

16.45-17.45: Organizing Democratic Choice
Ian Budge & Michael McDonald

Friday 27 September 2013

Location: Atrium VU (Medical Faculty)

Legitimacy and Quality of Democracy
Chair: Henk Overbeek

09.00-09.15: Opening

09.30-10.00: Political Dissatisfaction and Welfare State Legitimacy - Kees van Kersbergen

11.00-11.30: Institutions and Policy Performance
Klaus Armingeon

12.00-12.30: Consensus Democracy & the Quality of Democracy - Rudy Andeweg

13.00: Closure and Departure
Participants:

- Rudy Andeweg, Professor of Empirical Political Science, Leiden University
- Klaus Armingeon, Professor of Political Science, University of Berne
- Dietmar Braun, Professor of Political Science, Université de Lausanne
- Ian Budge, Emeritus Professor of Government, Essex University
- Cees van der Eyk, Professor of social science research methods, School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham
- Anton Hemerijck, Dean of Faculty Social Sciences, VU University
- Liesbet Hooghe, Professor of Political Science, VU University & University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Hans Keman, Professor of Comparative Political Science, VU University
- Kees van Kersbergen, Professor of Political Science, Aarhus University
- Hans-Peter Kriesi, Professor of Political Science, European University Institute Florence
- Gary Marks, Professor of Political Science, VU University & University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Michael McDonald, Professor of Political Science, State University of New York at Binghamton
- Henk Overbeek, Professor of International Relations, VU University
- Paul Pennings, Associate Professor of Comparative Politics, VU University
- Manfred Schmidt, Professor of Political Science, Ruprechts-Karls-University Heidelberg
- Jacques Thomassen, Emeritus Professor of Political Science, Twente University
Abstracts of the Presentations:

Democratic performance in the Netherlands – Jacques Thomassen

This contribution is mostly based on the Democratic Audit in the Netherlands Rudy Andeweg and I recently organized, in cooperation with the fine fleur of Dutch political science. The obvious purpose of the audit was to assess the democratic performance of the Dutch political system.

In order to do so one needs evaluation criteria. The most obvious approach is to deduce these criteria from normative democratic theory. But then the problem is that there is not a single generally agreed upon normative theory of democracy: democracy is an essentially contested concept. The two main normative theories of democracy are the collectivist or populist theory of democracy and the liberal or Madisonian theory of democracy. Lijphart’s models of democracy, the majoritarian and the consensus models of democracy can be seen as the institutionalization of these two normative theories. According to the representatives of the consensus school of democracy a consensus model of democracy with all its checks and balances was the only one feasible for a deeply divided country as the Netherlands traditionally was. The core research question of the Dutch democratic audit, and of this contribution, is whether this type of democracy that was designed in the 19th and early 20th century is still appropriate for the social and political conditions of the 21st century. Therefore, the Dutch democratic audit is not so much an evaluation of the current political system using the criteria of a particular normative model of democracy, but rather an evaluation of the fit of the model of democracy that inspired the design of the Dutch system and the social and political context that now confronts the Dutch system.
Democracy and subnational decentralization -
Liesbet Hooghe & Gary Marks

This presentation will survey the evolution of regional authority in 80 OECD, European, Latin American, and South-East Asian countries from 1950 to 2010 using a new measure which goes beyond extant measures of decentralization in two respects. First, instead of conceiving the authority of regional governments as a point along a single dimension, it breaks authority down into multiple dimensions. These include taxing authority, borrowing autonomy, policy making, institutional depth, the authority to influence national legislation, and constitutional powers. The extent to which these hold together can then be assessed empirically. Second, instead of considering regional government as a single entity for a country, the unit of analysis is the individual region at any level between the local and the national. Hence we can detect differences in the structure of governance that escape estimates of "decentralization." The picture that emerges is one of wide variation across countries and over time. The presentation concludes with some bivariate slides relating functional and regime characteristics to cross-sectional and diachronic variation in regionalization.

Electoral Change in Europe -
Cees van der Eijk

The Downsian notion that parties’ competition for votes and rational choice of voters jointly lead to optimal collective outcomes is rarely challenged. Yet, such optimality is far from unavoidable. On the contrary, Downsian conditions may easily result in sub-optimal collective outcomes, in which the supply of parties does not adequately cater to voters’ political demand. In this paper I elaborate the theoretical argument and present data on the match or mismatch of supply and demand from a number of European countries.
How do Europeans view and evaluate democracy? –
Hanspeter Kriesi

This rather straightforward question constitutes the focus of a study in the making, based on the new module of Round 6 of the European Social Survey. Although the data of this module will not yet be available at the time of the conference, I will be able to present the thinking behind the module. The module is based on three assumptions. First, it considers democracy as an essentially procedural concept. Second, it conceives of democracy as a multidimensional procedural concept. Contrary to the general trend in political support studies, which distinguish only between ‘democrats’ and ‘non-democrats’ or investigate whether citizens embrace or reject liberal democracy, the module aims at capturing the variety of conceptions of democracy that exist among Europeans. To do so, it starts out from a broad list of democratic attributes to cover a wide range of principles people may associate with democracy. Third, the distinction between normative principles and effective functioning of democracy, between the democratic ideals and really existing democracies, is crucial for the module. The democratic principles refer to the aspirations of the citizens, the meaning they give to the notion of democracy. The citizens’ assessment of the way the democratic principles have been implemented in their own country refers to their evaluation of democracy or their satisfaction with the way democracy works. As the module considers multiple dimensions of democracy, it will be able to distinguish between the extent to which the various principles are endorsed by the citizens of the different countries, and the extent to which each one of these principles has been implemented in a given country. The distinction between meaning and evaluation of democracy is crucial, because it is related to another key concept of the scholarly debate on democracy – legitimacy. As has been pointed out by others, it is the comparison between the democratic ideals
and the really existing functioning of democracy that makes for a judgment about the legitimacy of a democratic regime. If norms and reality match, the regime will be considered legitimate, if reality falls short of the ideal, there will be more or less of a legitimacy deficit or a ‘democratic deficit’.

*Responsive and Responsible Party Behaviour –*
Paul Pennings

To what extent do parties perform democratically in elections, parliament and government thereby effectively enhancing the system’s legitimacy by means of responsive, accountable and effective government? Most research on responsive and responsible party behaviour has shown that there is a tension between them. Parties tend to make choices on the basis of their ideology (‘responsibility’) and not in a reaction to public opinion (‘responsiveness’). This tension is also present within democratic theory, namely between those that defend:
- a Jeffersonian bottom-up approach of democracy;
- a Hamiltonian top-down approach of party government;
- a Madisonian mixed approach that seeks to keep the peace between the conflicting Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian forces.

These three approaches present fundamentally different evaluations of the democratic deficit:
- the bottom-up approach suggests that such a deficit exists since responsiveness is the essence of democracy;
- the top-down approach states that there is no deficit since responsibility is the essence of democracy;
- the mixed approach asserts that there is a partial deficit since responsibility is more strongly developed than responsiveness.

I will argue that these three classical approaches still dominate the debate and empirical research on contemporary democracy, but that they are too generalizing (one model is preferred) and too much assuming the boundaries of the nation-state and ignoring governance mechanisms beyond the nation-state. The
diversity and complexity of democratic processes in a globalized multi-layered world have to be taken into account in order to understand in which conditions and contexts responsiveness and responsibility are in balance or not.

*Party Government and Policy Representation –*  
Manfred G. Schmidt

This contribution focuses attention on the relationship between incumbent parties and policy preferences of their social constituencies in a two-step procedure. The first step is organized around recent versions of partisan theory of public policy. In this part of the presentation, it will be pointed out when parties differ in a way broadly consistent with what the voters of these parties prefer. The second part of the presentation shifts the focus on a class of cases which challenge partisan theory: These cases consist of policy outputs of incumbent parties which deviate massively from what these parties normally represent. Examples include a policy shift of a leftist demand-side oriented party to a supply-side oriented policy stance and a rapid policy shift of a centre-right party from a pro-nuclear energy policy stance to a policy of phasing out nuclear energy. The contribution aims at identifying some of the major political mechanisms which are conducive to policy shifts of that variety.

*Organizing Democratic Choice -*  
Ian Budge & Michael McDonald

Democracy’s solution to representation requires recognizing democratic governance as a process that unfolds through a time horizon of several elections. We begin by accepting that good and credible evidence shows that even along a single liberal-conservative/left-right dimension “only a modest proportion of the vote is knowable from policy proximity” in the U.S. and only modest and variable degrees of ideological congruence are seen
in democracies more generally. These facts alone make one doubt whether elections are useful ‘instruments of democracy’ (Bing Powell’s phrase) on the left-right super issue let alone along separable dimensions in each of several policy domains. Indeed, Miller and Stokes’ (1963) modest opinion-policy associations in three policy domains in the American context and similar modest associations among various policy domains in European contexts appear to offer strong (discouraging) confirmation. Nevertheless, and consistent with all this evidence, we show that the pessimistic conclusion is largely a consequence of analyzing democratic representation as the outcome of an event, a single election, rather than as a process. In macro-theory and in actual practice, mostly incongruent ideological electoral choices in a single-election short run can and do produce congruent policy representation not only along the left-right dimension but in each of various policy domains over longer time.

Political Dissatisfaction and Welfare State Legitimacy - Kees van Kersbergen

This is the great paradox of democratic politics of our time: on the one hand, if anything, in the past three decades, we have witnessed the increasing esteem, legitimacy, and triumph of democracy as a regime throughout the world, while, on the other hand, we have been observing an increasing dissatisfaction with politics and a loss of confidence in the performance of government in new and well established democracies. Democracy is at once becoming more and less well-liked, or so it seems. Although this is still a contentious issue in research, it seems that all democracies are confronted with popular discontent and legitimacy problems: lack of support for, popular compliance with, and acceptance of political authority. Amidst all the turmoil about democratic politics, however, we observe another great paradox: on the one hand, we observe that
democracies are facing increasing problems of legitimacy, but on the other hand we notice that the welfare state – arguably the single most important achievement of democratic politics – still stands out as a bulwark of legitimacy. Whether focusing on welfare attitudes, values, or social rights, and making use of a wide variety of data-sets, research in various traditions and disciplines robustly documents persistently high and even increasing levels of support for the welfare state. Surely, support varies according to welfare regime type, social program type, and social position (income, education), but the overall picture is one of a high level of popularity of social policy institutions among the public.

In my presentation, I would like to explore the idea that one of the main sources of welfare state legitimacy may very well be a certain de-politicization: the “absence” of party politics in the welfare state. First, the existing edifice of the welfare state is taken for granted and is not recognized (anymore) as a democratic achievement. Second, social policies, once institutionalized, take on a life of their own, create their own support groups (employees, clienteles, interest groups) and evolve at an ever increasing distance from day-to-day party and electoral politics. No political party can credibly claim credit for existing welfare state institutions and because the welfare state creates its own sources of legitimacy, it does not nourish democratic legitimacy. In fact, the re-politicization of the welfare state tends to reinforce the problem of democratic legitimacy. Political parties “in and out of government” are facing evil dilemmas with regard to the welfare state. There is an increasing tension between rising popular demand for social protection (new social risks, impact of the Great Recession) and a decreasing political capacity to deliver due to (financial) market constraints and international agreements. In addition, there is the ever-present conflict between short-term political pressures (say elections) and long-run social policy agendas and commitments. It has always been difficult to “govern for the future”, i.e.
imposing short term costs (e.g. in the form of taxes), while
awaiting long term positive returns, but it has become even more
difficult now. The current mainstream interference of politics
with the welfare state (e.g. restructuring, retrenchment, cost
containment, privatization, deregulation, but also social
investment) brings back party politics squarely into the welfare
state. The irony I wish to explore in my presentation is that this
both adds to political dissatisfaction and reinforces welfare state
legitimacy.

When do institutions matter? The case of the European sovereign
debt crisis - Klaus Armingeon

Formal institutions of democratic political systems constrain
political actors and they increase democratic legitimacy since
they need to be based on a democratic constitution. These are
two conclusions, which can be drawn from comparative analyses
of policy making in democratic OECD- and EU nations. The
empirical evidence from the European sovereign debt crisis
contradicts this established wisdom. (1) Institutions proved to be
much more flexible and amenable to economic and political
influence and much less constraining than suggested by previous
research. (2) Institutions worsened the democratic deficit.
Democratic governments do not always create democratic
institutions.

Consensus Democracy & the Quality of Democracy -
Rudy B. Andeweg

This presentation revisits two contrasting claims by the leading
author on consociationalism and consensus democracy, Arend
Lijphart. In his recent work on consensus democracy (2012),
Lijphart argues that a consensus democracy is a ‘kinder, gentler’
type of democracy. But in his early work on consociational
democracy, he warned that continued elite accommodation in a
society that is no longer segmented, is likely to cause a rise of anti-system politics. Others have sought to refine the analysis by distinguishing between the two dimensions of consensus democracy: the executive-parties dimension, with Proportional Representation as the key variable, and the federal-unitary dimension and its core variable, the degree of representation. The dependent variable, quality of democracy has also been broken down into two key components: responsiveness and accountability. Can we still conclude that consensus democracy is linked to democratic quality (and in what direction)?