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## Who Governs in the Americas and in Europe?

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# Mémoire(s), identité(s), marginalité(s) dans le monde occidental contemporain

Cahiers du MIMMOC

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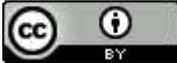
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- 1 The 1960s triggered the debut of a controversy about the essence of American domestic political power which was made palpable by the debate between C. Wright Mills author of *The Power Elite* (1956) and Robert A. Dahl, Professor of Political Science at Yale University. Sociologist C. Wright Mills, known for his radical stances, maintained that the American democratic system was merely a “pipe dream”. He pinpointed that power was seized by an elite composed of a restricted social group. The financial, military and political interests of this group established an interwoven closed system that Mills labeled “the Power Elite” in his book. Endorsing a “pluralist” perspective, Robert Dahl argued that in a democracy, decision-making bodies are far from being monolithic and elites are not homogenous. In his monograph, *Who Governs?* Dahl delineated the American democratic system as a “polyarchy” where the partition of powers is the rule, and where political power is divided between the various competing prevailing groups delving to have their preferences and ideas acknowledged and implemented. The point he ascertained then preceded the initiation of the concept of “governance” which has gradually become extensively wielded since the 1990s. The notion of “governance”, which was originally adopted to assign the method in which a government exercises its economic, political and administrative powers and handles its resources, was *infra* enhanced to encompass other fields. This justifies the wide use of this concept by theoreticians of public policy, political scientists and sociologists. In point of fact, “Governance” becomes a medium to legitimize political processes, the affiliation between political institutions and the body politic, and their inter-relations and the link between society and the manifold economic actors. It is a theory of social regulation that can be germane at all levels of government, hence the genesis of the terms local governance, urban governance, territorial governance, European governance and world governance. The term is also applied to non-state organizations in the local, national and international arenas.

- 2 Critics of this concept castigate it as the ideological bedrocks of the 1980s neo-liberalism that continues to dwindle the Welfare State. In this vein, scholars perceive “governance” as a theoretical justification for the “dismantling” of the State. They decry the replacement of the term “government” by “governance”, pointing out that the new appellation implies the abridgement of the decision-making powers of the State as a backer of popular sovereignty in favor of a “participatory democracy” which has no real political features. Concerning the latter, the shift from government to governance testifies to the existence of a conversion from a culture of popular sovereignty enshrined in republican law, which ensures public interest, to a pragmatic and utilitarian society. In this society – that safeguards special economic interests – the notion of the common good has become irrelevant.
- 3 In this fashion, the approach of governance remains within the contours of the debate sparked by C. Wright Mills and Robert A. Dahl on the crux of power. The controversy is still lingering. Currently, the issue is to pin down whether the transition from the notion of “government” to “governance” hints at a sheer semantic modification or rather entails a crucial ideological shift. It is perhaps worthwhile to pause and pose these questions: is governance really grounded in “responsibility”, “transparency”, the “rule of law” and “participation” as its proponents maintain or does it lead instead to the erosion of the notion of public good to the benefit of that of private interests embodied in the activities of lobbies and other special interest groups? Does the splintering of decision-making centers and the multiplication of actors involved in the elaboration and the implementation of public policies lead to the emergence of a real participatory democracy or does it on the contrary contribute to the weakening of public authorities, the sole and unique guarantors of the equality of all citizens before the law? Sheldon Wolin’s theory that “democracy incorporated” has led to new forms of totalitarianism can also be of a reference (*Democracy Incorporated; Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*, 2008).
- 4 The articles included in this volume examine some of these pivotal issues. Andrew Ives argues that the concept of governance as elucidated and put into practice by contemporary western governments flawlessly cobwebs with the chief axioms of neo-liberalism. Through upholding an approach of management based on delegating an array of agents in contest, governance generates a pattern remindful of the free market and ponies up the neo-liberal aim of “squarely” handing over positioning power to those with capital. Chrysovalantis Kampragkos’ s paper focuses on the core of supranational organizations and adumbrates that the Leninist approach of imperialism reclaims interpretive significance, contrary to theories of globalization that have scrutinized contemporary capitalism in relation to a combined transnational elite that is quondam associated with the nation-state. Susan Finding’s article delves into the debates about the ins and outs of unequivocally electing mayors and on the essence of democracy and the dependability of democratic institutions in Britain. Riveting notably at the scope of democratic functioning, this article probes the rationale for the relative successes and failures of the changes introduced. Brian Schmitt discusses the new business heads arising as a consequence of economic restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s. These leaders represent -- among others a new “global investment class” (GIC) that partakes an array of strategic priorities which engenders the support of young and ambitious “New Democrat,” Bill Clinton over the established liberal Republican, George H. W. Bush and argues how the merging of Clinton and the GIC speaks for a new “ruling epoch” as alluded

to by in C. Wright Mills. Anne Debray's paper examines two dubious batches of propositions from California in the recent past: "medical and recreational marijuana, and same-sex marriage". It investigates distinct powers such as money, special interests, and the potential institutional checks. It also explores the relevance of these schemes to direct democracy. Lanouar Ben Hafsa's paper examines the role of the American Catholic hierarchy as a deciding force in articulating opposition to abortion and how it gave the right-to-life movement more than institutional support and legitimacy.