Executive Power, Partisanship, and the Challenge to Constitutional Democracy

Date: 22 October 2021 (Friday)
Time: 10:00 (HKT)
Venue: Online (This talk will be held via Zoom.)

Speaker:
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Abstract
Constitutional democracy, in both its presidential and parliamentary forms, developed as an attempt to simulate some of the benefits of the pluralist and mixed constitution in pre-revolutionary Europe, particularly as re-imagined by Montesquieu under the label of the separation of powers. The challenge was how to balance power against power without relying on distinct estates and social orders. The solution was thought to be institutional design, rules that would allow a unified people to use the practices and forms that had been premised on social division. In some important ways the experiment failed right away; institutional design was both subordinated to and replaced by party competition in ideologically divided electorates. That hybrid form had unexpected advantages and stability— but today it is also proving to be vulnerable to a combination of the executive power Montesquieu warned about and the demagogic authoritarian partisanship the founders of constitutional democracy feared.

Short Biography
Jacob T. Levy is Tomlinson Professor of Political Theory, Chair of the Department of Political Science, and coordinator of the Research Group on Constitutional Studies at McGill University. He is the author of The Multiculturalism of Fear and Rationalism, Pluralism, and Freedom, and of articles and chapters on federalism, the separation of powers, nationalism, the history of liberal thought, Montesquieu, and the rights of indigenous peoples. He holds an MA and PhD in Politics from Princeton and an LLM from the University of Chicago Law School. He is a Senior Fellow at the Niskanen Center in Washington DC.

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