



CHAPTER 1 WHAT IS POLITICS?

'Man is by nature a political animal.'

ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, 1

PREVIEW

Politics is exciting because people disagree. They disagree about how they should live. Who should get what? How should power and other resources be distributed? Should society be based on cooperation or conflict? And so on. They also disagree about how such matters should be resolved. How should collective decisions be made? Who should have a say? How much influence should each person have? And so forth. For Aristotle, this made politics the 'master science': that is, nothing less than the activity through which human beings attempt to improve their lives and create the Good Society. Politics is, above all, a social activity. It is always a dialogue, and never a monologue. Solitary individuals such as Robinson Crusoe may be able to develop a simple economy, produce art, and so on, but they cannot engage in politics. Politics emerges only with the arrival of someone else into the story (a Man (or Woman) Friday). Nevertheless, the disagreement that lies at the heart of politics also extends to the nature of the subject and how it should be studied. People disagree about what it is that makes social interaction 'political', whether it is where it takes place (within government, the state or the public sphere generally), or the kind of activity it involves (peacefully resolving conflict or exercising control over less powerful groups). Disagreement about the nature of politics as an academic discipline means that it embraces a range of theoretical approaches and a variety of schools of analysis. Finally, globalizing tendencies have encouraged some to speculate that

the disciplinary divide between politics and international relations has now become redundant. (Chapter 20 considers how, why, and with what justification, politics has been criticized.)

KEY ISSUES

- What are the defining features of politics as an activity?
- How has 'politics' been understood by various thinkers and traditions?
- What are the main approaches to the study of politics as an academic discipline?
- Can the study of politics be scientific?
- What roles do concepts, models and theories play in political analysis?
- How have globalizing trends affected the relationship between politics and international relations?

DEFINING POLITICS

Politics, in its broadest sense, is the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live. Although politics is also an academic subject (sometimes indicated by the use of 'Politics' with a capital P), it is then clearly the study of this activity. Politics is thus inextricably linked to the phenomena of **conflict** and **cooperation**. On the one hand, the existence of rival opinions, different wants, competing needs, and opposing interests guarantees disagreement about the rules under which people live. On the other hand, people recognize that, in order to influence these rules or ensure that they are upheld, they must work with others – hence Hannah Arendt's (see p. 7) definition of political power as 'acting in concert'. This is why the heart of politics is often portrayed as a process of conflict resolution, in which rival views or competing interests are reconciled with one another. However, politics in this broad sense is better thought of as a search for conflict resolution than as its achievement, as not all conflicts are, or can be, resolved. Nevertheless, the inescapable presence of diversity (we are not all alike) and scarcity (there is never enough to go around) ensures that politics is an inevitable feature of the human condition.

Conflict: Competition between opposing forces, reflecting a diversity of opinions, preferences, needs or interests.

Cooperation: Working together; achieving goals through collective action.

Any attempt to clarify the meaning of 'politics' must nevertheless address two major problems. The first is the mass of associations that the word has

when used in everyday language; in other words, politics is a ‘loaded’ term. Whereas most people think of, say, economics, geography, history and biology simply as academic subjects, few people come to politics without preconceptions. Many, for instance, automatically assume that students and teachers of politics must in some way be biased, finding it difficult to believe that the subject can be approached in an impartial and dispassionate manner. To make matters worse, politics is usually thought of as a ‘dirty’ word: it conjures up images of trouble, disruption and even violence on the one hand, and deceit, manipulation and lies on the other. There is nothing new about such associations. As long ago as 1775, Samuel Johnson dismissed politics as ‘nothing more than a means of rising in the world’, while in the nineteenth century the US historian Henry Adams summed up politics as ‘the systematic organization of hatreds’.

The second and more intractable difficulty is that even respected authorities cannot agree what the subject is about. Politics is defined in such different ways as the exercise of power, the science of government, the making of collective decisions, the allocation of scarce resources, the practice of deception and manipulation, and so on. The virtue of the definition advanced in this text – ‘the making, preserving and amending of general social rules’ – is that it is sufficiently broad to encompass most, if not all, of the competing definitions. However, problems arise when the definition is unpacked, or when the meaning is refined. For instance, does ‘politics’ refer to a particular way in which rules are made, preserved or amended (that is, peacefully, by debate), or to all such processes? Similarly, is politics practised in all social contexts and institutions, or only in certain ones (that is, government and public life)?

From this perspective, politics may be treated as an ‘essentially contested’ concept, in the sense that the term has a number of acceptable or legitimate meanings (concepts are discussed more fully later in the chapter). On the other hand, these different views may simply consist of contrasting conceptions of the same, if necessarily vague, concept. Whether we are dealing with rival concepts or alternative conceptions, it is helpful to distinguish between two broad approaches to defining politics (Hay, 2002; Leftwich, 2004). In the first, politics is associated with an arena or location, in which case behaviour becomes ‘political’ because of where it takes place. In the second, politics is viewed as a process or mechanism, in which case ‘political’ behaviour is behaviour that exhibits distinctive characteristics or qualities, and so can take place in any, and perhaps all, social contexts. Each of these broad approaches has spawned alternative definitions of politics, and, as discussed later in the chapter, helped to

shape different schools of political analysis (see [Figure 1.1](#)). Indeed, the debate about ‘what is politics?’ is worth pursuing precisely because it exposes some of the deepest intellectual and ideological disagreement in the academic study of the subject.

	Politics as an arena	Politics as a process
Definitions of politics	The art of government Public affairs	Compromise and consensus Power and the distribution of resources
Approaches to the study of politics	Behaviouralism Rational-choice theory Institutionalism	Feminism Marxism Post-positivist approaches

Figure 1.1 Approaches to defining politics

Politics as the art of government

‘Politics is not a science ... but an art’, Chancellor Bismarck is reputed to have told the German Reichstag. The art Bismarck had in mind was the art of government, the exercise of control within society through the making and enforcement of collective decisions. This is perhaps the classical definition of politics, developed from the original meaning of the term in Ancient Greece.

The word ‘politics’ is derived from *polis*, meaning literally ‘city-state’. Ancient Greek society was divided into a collection of independent city-states, each of which possessed its own system of government. The largest and most influential of these city-states was Athens, often portrayed as the cradle of democratic government. In this light, politics can be understood to refer to the affairs of the polis – in effect, ‘what concerns the polis’. The modern form of this definition is therefore ‘what concerns the state’ (see p. 57). This view of politics is clearly evident in the everyday use of the term: people are said to be ‘in politics’ when they hold public office, or to be ‘entering politics’ when they seek to do so. It is also a definition that academic political science has helped to perpetuate.

Polis: (Greek) City-state; classically understood to imply the highest or most desirable form of social organization.

In many ways, the notion that politics amounts to ‘what concerns the state’ is the traditional view of the discipline, reflected in the tendency for academic study to focus on the personnel and machinery of government. To study politics is, in essence, to study government, or, more broadly, to study the exercise of authority. This view is advanced in the writings of the influential US political scientist David Easton (1979, 1981), who defined politics as the ‘authoritative allocation of values’. By this, he meant that

politics encompasses the various processes through which government responds to pressures from the larger society, in particular by allocating benefits, rewards or penalties. 'Authoritative values' are therefore those that are widely accepted in society, and are considered binding by the mass of citizens. In this view, politics is associated with 'policy' (see p. 365): that is, with formal or authoritative decisions that establish a plan of action for the community.

CONCEPT

Authority

Authority can most simply be defined as 'legitimate power'. Whereas power is the ability to influence the behaviour of others, authority is the right to do so. Authority is therefore based on an acknowledged duty to obey rather than on any form of coercion or manipulation. In this sense, authority is power cloaked in legitimacy or rightfulness. Weber (see p. 81) distinguished between three kinds of authority, based on the different grounds on which obedience can be established: traditional authority is rooted in history; charismatic authority stems from personality; and legal-rational authority is grounded in a set of impersonal rules.

However, what is striking about this definition is that it offers a highly restricted view of politics. Politics is what takes place within a **polity**, a system of social organization centred on the machinery of government. Politics is therefore practised in cabinet rooms, legislative chambers, government departments and the like; and it is engaged in by a limited and specific group of people, notably politicians, civil servants and lobbyists. This means that most people, most institutions and most social activities can be regarded as being 'outside' politics. Businesses, schools and other educational institutions, community groups, families and so on are in this sense 'non-political', because they are not engaged in 'running the country'. By the same token, to portray politics as an essentially state-bound activity is to ignore the increasingly important international or global influences on modern life, as discussed in the next main section.

Polity: A society organized through the exercise of political authority; for Aristotle, rule by the many in the interests of all.

This definition can, however, be narrowed still further. This is evident in the tendency to treat politics as the equivalent of party politics. In other words, the realm of 'the political' is restricted to those state actors who are consciously motivated by ideological beliefs, and who seek to advance

them through membership of a formal organization such as a political party. This is the sense in which politicians are described as ‘political’, whereas civil servants are seen as ‘non-political’, as long as, of course, they act in a neutral and professional fashion. Similarly, judges are taken to be ‘non-political’ figures while they interpret the law impartially and in accordance with the available evidence, but they may be accused of being ‘political’ if their judgement is influenced by personal preferences or some other form of bias.

The link between politics and the affairs of the state also helps to explain why negative or pejorative images have so often been attached to politics. This is because, in the popular mind, politics is closely associated with the activities of politicians. Put brutally, politicians are often seen as power-seeking hypocrites who conceal personal ambition behind the rhetoric of public service and ideological conviction. Indeed, this perception has become more common in the modern period as intensified media exposure has more effectively brought to light examples of corruption and dishonesty, giving rise to the phenomenon of **anti-politics** (as discussed in [Chapter 20](#)). This rejection of the personnel and machinery of conventional political life is rooted in a view of politics as a self-serving, two-faced and unprincipled activity, clearly evident in the use of derogatory phrases such as ‘office politics’ and ‘politicking’. Such an image of politics is sometimes traced back to the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli (see p. 5), who, in *The Prince* ([1532] 1961), developed a strictly realistic account of politics that drew attention to the use by political leaders of cunning, cruelty and manipulation.

Anti-politics: Disillusionment with formal or established political processes, reflected in non-participation, support for anti-system parties, or the use of direct action.

KEY THINKER



NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI (1469–1527)



Source: Getty Images/Fine Art

Italian politician and author. The son of a civil lawyer, Machiavelli's knowledge of public life was gained from a sometimes precarious existence in politically unstable Florence. He served as Second Chancellor (1498–1512), and was dispatched on missions to France, Germany and throughout Italy. After a brief period of imprisonment and the restoration of Medici rule, Machiavelli embarked on a literary career. His major work, *The Prince*, published in 1532, drew heavily on his first-hand observations of the statecraft of Cesare Borgia and the power politics that dominated his period. It was written as a guide for the future prince of a united Italy. The adjective 'Machiavellian' subsequently came to mean 'cunning and duplicitous'.

Such a negative view of politics reflects the essentially liberal perception that, as individuals are self-interested, political power is corrupting, because it encourages those 'in power' to exploit their position for personal advantage and at the expense of others. This is famously expressed in Lord Acton's (1834–1902) aphorism: 'power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. Nevertheless, few who view politics in this way doubt that political activity is an inevitable and permanent feature of social existence. However venal politicians may be, there is a general, if grudging, acceptance that they are always with us. Without some kind of mechanism for allocating authoritative values, society would simply disintegrate into a civil war of each against all, as the early social-contract theorists argued (see p. 62). The task is therefore not to abolish politicians and bring politics to an end but, rather, to ensure that politics is conducted within a framework of checks and constraints that guarantee that governmental power is not abused.

CONCEPT

Power

Power, in its broadest sense, is the ability to achieve a desired outcome, sometimes seen as the 'power to' do something. This includes everything from the ability to keep oneself alive to the ability of government to promote economic growth. In politics, however, power is usually thought of as a relationship; that is, as the ability to influence the behaviour of others in a manner not of their choosing. This implies having 'power over' people. More narrowly, power may be associated with the ability to punish or reward, bringing it close to force or manipulation, in contrast to 'influence'. (See 'faces' of power, p. 9 and dimensions of global

power, p. 445.)

Politics as public affairs

A second and broader conception of politics moves it beyond the narrow realm of government to what is thought of as ‘public life’ or ‘public affairs’. In other words, the distinction between ‘the political’ and ‘the non-political’ coincides with the division between an essentially public sphere of life and what can be thought of as a private sphere. Such a view of politics is often traced back to the work of the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle (see p. 6). In *Politics*, Aristotle declared that ‘man is by nature a political animal’, by which he meant that it is only within a political community that human beings can live the ‘good life’. From this viewpoint, then, politics is an ethical activity concerned with creating a ‘just society’; it is what Aristotle called the ‘master science’.

However, where should the line between ‘public’ life and ‘private’ life be drawn? The traditional distinction between the public realm and the private realm conforms to the division between the state and civil society. The institutions of the state (the apparatus of government, the courts, the police, the army, the social security system, and so forth) can be regarded as ‘public’ in the sense that they are responsible for the collective organization of community life. Moreover, they are funded at the public’s expense, out of taxation. In contrast, civil society consists of what Edmund Burke (see p. 35) called the ‘little platoons’, institutions such as the family and kinship groups, private businesses, trade unions, clubs, community groups and so on, that are ‘private’ in the sense that they are set up and funded by individual citizens to satisfy their own interests, rather than those of the larger society. On the basis of this ‘public/private’ division, politics is restricted to the activities of the state itself and the responsibilities that are properly exercised by public bodies. Those areas of life that individuals can and do manage for themselves (the economic, social, domestic, personal, cultural and artistic spheres, and so on) are therefore clearly ‘non-political’.

KEY THINKER



ARISTOTLE (384–322 BCE)



Source: iStock/sneska

Greek philosopher. Aristotle was a student of Plato (see p. 13) and tutor of the young Alexander the Great. He established his own school of philosophy in Athens in 335 BCE; this was called the 'peripatetic school' after his tendency to walk up and down as he talked. His 22 surviving treatises, compiled as lecture notes, range over logic, physics, metaphysics, astronomy, meteorology, biology, ethics and politics. In the Middle Ages, Aristotle's work became the foundation of Islamic philosophy, and it was later incorporated into Christian theology. His best-known political work is *Politics*, in which he portrayed the city-state as the basis for virtue and well-being, and argued that democracy is preferable to oligarchy (see pp. 111–12).

CONCEPT

Civil society

Civil society originally meant a 'political community'. The term is now more commonly distinguished from the state, and is used to describe institutions that are 'private', in that they are independent from government and organized by individuals in pursuit of their own ends. Civil society therefore refers to a realm of autonomous groups and associations: businesses, interest groups, clubs, families and so on. The term 'global civil society' (see p. 107) has become fashionable as a means of referring to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (see p. 273) and transnational social movements (see p. 286).

An alternative 'public/private' divide is sometimes defined in terms of a further and more subtle distinction; namely, that between 'the political' and 'the personal' (see [Figure 1.2](#)). Although civil society can be distinguished from the state, it nevertheless contains a range of institutions that are thought of as 'public' in the wider sense that they are open institutions, operating in public, to which the public has access. One of the crucial implications of this is that it broadens our notion of the political,

transferring the economy, in particular, from the private to the public realm. A form of politics can thus be found in the workplace. Nevertheless, although this view regards institutions such as businesses, community groups, clubs and trade unions as ‘public’, it remains a restricted view of politics. According to this perspective, politics does not, and should not, infringe on ‘personal’ affairs and institutions.

The notion that politics should exclude ‘the personal’ has nevertheless been challenged by feminist thinkers. From the feminist perspective, gender inequality has been preserved precisely because the sexual division of labour that runs through society has traditionally been thought of as ‘natural’ rather than ‘political’. The public sphere of life, encompassing politics, work, art and literature, has historically been the preserve of men, while women have been confined to an essentially private existence, centred on the family and domestic responsibilities. If politics takes place only within the public sphere, the role of women and the question of gender equality are issues of little or no political importance. Not only does this in effect exclude women from politics, but, as radical feminists (discussed in [Chapter 2](#)) in particular argue, it excludes from political analysis the core processes through which male domination and female subordination are brought about. These include conditioning within the family (the process through which boys and girls are encouraged to conform to contrasting stereotypes of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’), the distribution of housework and other domestic responsibilities, and the politics of personal and sexual conduct.

Public	Private
The state: apparatus of government	Civil society: autonomous bodies – businesses, trade unions, clubs, families, and so on
Public	Private
Public realm: politics, commerce, work, art, culture and so on	Personal realm: family and domestic life

Figure 1.2 Two views of the public/private divide

The view of politics as an essentially ‘public’ activity has generated both positive and negative images. In a tradition dating back to Aristotle, politics has been seen as a noble and enlightened activity precisely because of its ‘public’ character. This position was firmly endorsed by Hannah Arendt, who argued in *The Human Condition* (1958) that politics is the most important form of human activity because it involves interaction

amongst free and equal citizens. It thus gives meaning to life and affirms the uniqueness of each individual. Theorists such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (see p. 98) and John Stuart Mill (see p. 220) who portrayed political participation as a good in itself have drawn similar conclusions. Rousseau argued that only through the direct and continuous participation of all citizens in political life can the state be bound to the common good, or what he called the 'general will'. In Mill's view, involvement in 'public' affairs is educational, in that it promotes the personal, moral and intellectual development of the individual.

KEY THINKER



HANNAH ARENDT (1906–75)



Source: Getty Images/Fred Stein Archive

German political theorist and philosopher. Hannah Arendt was brought up in a middle-class Jewish family. She fled Germany in 1933 to escape from Nazism, and finally settled in the USA, where her major work was produced. Her wide-ranging, even idiosyncratic, writing was influenced by the existentialism of Heidegger (1889–1976) and Jaspers (1883–1969); she described it as 'thinking without barriers'. Her major works include *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), which drew parallels between Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, her major philosophical work *The Human Condition* (1958), *On Revolution* (1963) and *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963). The final work stimulated particular controversy because it stressed the 'banality of evil', by portraying Eichmann as a Nazi functionary rather than as a raving ideologue.

In sharp contrast, however, politics as public activity has also been portrayed as a form of unwanted interference. Liberal theorists, in particular, have exhibited a preference for civil society over the state, on the grounds that 'private' life is a realm of choice, personal freedom and

individual responsibility. This is most clearly demonstrated by attempts to narrow the realm of 'the political', commonly expressed as the wish to 'keep politics out of' private activities such as business, sport and family life. From this point of view, politics is unwholesome quite simply because it prevents people acting as they choose. For example, it may interfere with how firms conduct their business, or with how and with whom we play sports, or with how we bring up our children.

CONCEPT

Consensus

Consensus means agreement, but it refers to an agreement of a particular kind. It implies, first, a broad agreement, the terms of which are accepted by a wide range of individuals or groups. Second, it implies an agreement about fundamental or underlying principles, as opposed to a precise or exact agreement. In other words, a consensus permits disagreement on matters of emphasis or detail. A procedural consensus is a willingness to make decisions through a process of consultation and bargaining. A substantive consensus is an overlap of ideological positions that reflect agreement about broad policy goals.

Politics as compromise and consensus

The third conception of politics relates not to the arena within which politics is conducted but to the way in which decisions are made. Specifically, politics is seen as a particular means of resolving conflict: that is, by compromise, conciliation and negotiation, rather than through force and naked power. This is what is implied when politics is portrayed as 'the art of the possible'. Such a definition is inherent in the everyday use of the term. For instance, the description of a solution to a problem as a 'political' solution implies peaceful debate and arbitration, as opposed to what is often called a 'military' solution. Once again, this view of politics has been traced back to the writings of Aristotle and, in particular, to his belief that what he called 'polity' is the ideal system of government, as it is 'mixed', in the sense that it combines both aristocratic and democratic features (see [Chapter 4](#)). One of the leading modern exponents of this view is Bernard Crick. In his classic study *In Defence of Politics*, Crick offered the following definition:

Politics [is] the activity by which differing interests within a given unit of rule are conciliated by giving them a share in power in proportion to their importance to the welfare and the survival of the whole community. (Crick, [1962] 2000)

In this view, the key to politics is therefore a wide dispersal of power. Accepting that conflict is inevitable, Crick argued that when social groups and interests possess power they must be conciliated; they cannot merely be crushed. This is why he portrayed politics as 'that solution to the problem of order which chooses conciliation rather than violence and coercion'. Such a view of politics reflects a deep commitment to liberal-rationalist principles. It is based on resolute faith in the efficacy of debate and discussion, as well as on the belief that society is characterized by consensus, rather than by irreconcilable conflict. In other words, the disagreements that exist can be resolved without resort to intimidation and violence. Critics, however, point out that Crick's conception of politics is heavily biased towards the form of politics that takes place in Western pluralist democracies: in effect, he equated politics with electoral choice and party competition. As a result, his model has little to tell us about, say, one-party states or military regimes.

This view of politics has an unmistakably positive character. Politics is certainly no utopian solution (compromise means that concessions are made by all sides, leaving no one perfectly satisfied), but it is undoubtedly preferable to the alternatives: bloodshed and brutality. In this sense, politics can be seen as a civilized and civilizing force. People should be encouraged to respect politics as an activity, and should be prepared to engage in the political life of their own community. Nevertheless, a failure to understand that politics as a process of compromise and reconciliation is necessarily frustrating and difficult (in part, because it involves listening carefully to the opinions of others) may have contributed to a growing popular disenchantment with democratic politics across much of the developed world. This has been expressed in the rise of populism (see p. 53) and in the emergence of a style of politics that disdains compromise and consensus and places much more emphasis on conflict. The election of Donald Trump as US president has often been said to illustrate this trend (see p. 11).

Politics as power

The fourth definition of politics is both the broadest and the most radical. Rather than confining politics to a particular sphere (the government, the state or the 'public' realm), this view sees politics at work in all social activities and in every corner of human existence. As Adrian Leftwich proclaimed in *What is Politics? The Activity and Its Study* (2004), 'politics is at the heart of all collective social activity, formal and informal, public and private, in all human groups, institutions and societies'. In this sense, politics takes place at every level of social interaction; it can be found

within families and amongst small groups of friends just as much as amongst nations and on the global stage. However, what is it that is distinctive about political activity? What marks off politics from any other form of social behaviour?

FOCUS ON ...

'FACES' OF POWER

Power can be said to be exercised whenever A gets B to do something that B would not otherwise have done. However, A can influence B in various ways. This allows us to distinguish between different dimensions or 'faces' of power:

- **Power as decision-making:** This face of power consists of conscious actions that in some way influence the content of decisions. The classic account of this form of power is found in Robert Dahl's *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (1961), which made judgements about who had power by analysing decisions in the light of the known preferences of the actors involved. Such decisions can nevertheless be influenced in a variety of ways. In *Three Faces of Power* (1989), Keith Boulding distinguished between the use of force or intimidation (the stick), productive exchanges involving mutual gain (the deal), and the creation of obligations, loyalty and commitment (the kiss).
- **Power as agenda setting:** The second face of power, as suggested by Bachrach and Baratz (1962), is the ability to prevent decisions being made: that is, in effect, 'non-decision-making'. This involves the ability to set or control the political agenda, thereby preventing issues or proposals from being aired in the first place. For instance, private businesses may exert power both by campaigning to defeat proposed consumer-protection legislation (first face), and by lobbying parties and politicians to prevent the question of consumer rights being publicly discussed (second face).
- **Power as thought control:** The third face of power is the ability to influence another by shaping what he or she thinks, wants or needs. This is power expressed as ideological indoctrination or psychological control. This is what Lukes (2004) called the 'radical' view of power, and it overlaps with the notion of 'soft' power (see p. 443). An example of this would be the ability of advertising to shape consumer tastes,

often by cultivating associations with a 'brand'. In political life, the exercise of this form of power is seen in the use of propaganda and, more generally, in the impact of ideology (see p. 27).

At its broadest, politics concerns the production, distribution, and use of resources in the course of social existence. Politics is, in essence, power: the ability to achieve a desired outcome, through whatever means. This notion was neatly summed up in the title of Harold Lasswell's book *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How?* (1936). From this perspective, politics is about diversity and conflict, but the essential ingredient is the existence of scarcity: the simple fact that, while human needs and desires are infinite, the resources available to satisfy them are always limited. Politics can therefore be seen as a struggle over scarce resources, and power can be seen as the means through which this struggle is conducted. Advocates of the view of politics as power include feminists and Marxists. The rise of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s, bringing with it a growing interest in feminism, stimulated more radical thinking about the nature of 'the political'. Not only have modern feminists sought to expand the arenas in which politics can be seen to take place, a notion most boldly asserted through the radical feminist slogan 'the personal is the political', but they have also tended to view politics as a process, specifically one related to the exercise of power over others. This view was summed by Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* (1970), in which she defined politics as 'power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another'. Marxists, for their part, have used the term 'politics' in two senses. On one level, Marx (see p. 40) used 'politics' in a conventional sense to refer to the apparatus of the state. In the *Communist Manifesto* ([1848] 1967), he (and Engels) thus referred to political power as 'merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another'. For Marx, politics, together with law and culture, are part of a 'superstructure' that is distinct from the economic 'base' that is the real foundation of social life. However, he did not see the economic 'base' and the legal and political 'superstructure' as entirely separate. He believed that the 'superstructure' arose out of, and reflected, the economic 'base'. At a deeper level, political power, in this view, is therefore rooted in the class system; as Lenin (see p. 100) put it, 'politics is the most concentrated form of economics'. As opposed to believing that politics can be confined to the state and a narrow public sphere, Marxists can be said to believe that 'the economic is political'. From this perspective, civil society, characterized as Marxists believe it to

be by class struggle, is the very heart of politics.

Views such as these portray politics in largely negative terms. Politics is, quite simply, about oppression and subjugation. Radical feminists hold that society is patriarchal, in that women are systematically subordinated and subjected to male power. Marxists traditionally argued that politics in a capitalist society is characterized by the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, these negative implications are balanced against the fact that politics is also seen as an emancipating force, a means through which injustice and domination can be challenged. Marx, for instance, predicted that class exploitation would be overthrown by a proletarian revolution, and radical feminists proclaim the need for gender relations to be reordered through a sexual revolution. However, it is also clear that when politics is portrayed as power and domination it need not be seen as an inevitable feature of social existence. Feminists look to an end of 'sexual politics' achieved through the construction of a non-sexist society, in which people will be valued according to personal worth, rather than on the basis of gender. Marxists believe that 'class politics' will end with the establishment of a classless communist society. This, in turn, will eventually lead to the 'withering away' of the state, also bringing politics in the conventional sense to an end.

POLITICS IN ACTION . . .



TRUMP'S TRIUMPH: POLITICS AS POLARIZATION AND ANGER?

Events: In the early evening of 8 November 2016, the day of the US presidential election, an anonymous senior adviser to Donald Trump was quoted on CNN as saying: 'It will take a miracle for us to win'. In the event, the miracle happened. Indeed, the 'miracle' had started rather earlier that year, when, having built up an unassailable lead in the Republican Party's primary election race, Trump was declared the party's presumptive nominee on 3 May. This occurred despite the fact that Trump had enjoyed almost no support from either Republican elites or conservative media figures, and was heavily outspent by three other candidates for the nomination. In the presidential election itself, Trump triumphed over Hillary Clinton, the Democratic Party nominee, who had been widely expected to win. Although Clinton took the popular vote by a margin of nearly three million votes, Trump won the crucial Electoral College vote by 306 to 232. In doing so, he became the first US president to take office without having

previously stood for election or having served in a military or government post.

Significance: Donald Trump's victory in 2016 was a surprise not merely because (despite his personal wealth and celebrity status) he was an archetypal political outsider, lacking in conventional political experience. A further reason was that, in his personality, temperament and political style, Trump differed markedly from most presidential candidates. For one thing, his campaign rhetoric was, by turn, boastful, abrasive and, in the view of some, deeply offensive. Indeed, Trump's candidacy exemplified a form of politics that was distinctively polarized and polarizing; it seemed to relish division and attack and disdained compromise and consensus-building. However, it would be a mistake to suggest that this form of politics simply emerged out of the upheavals of 2016; instead, it can be traced back to developments in US party politics that have taken place since the early years of Ronald Reagan's presidency (1981–89). The most important of these has been the tendency of both the Democrats and the Republicans to abandon the pragmatic centre ground of politics and embrace a more ideological stance on matters related to family and lifestyle questions. This process was fuelled in significant ways by the growing influence of the new Christian right (discussed in [Chapter 2](#)). A series of so-called culture wars have therefore developed in US politics over issues such as immigration, gun control, racial integration, sex education in schools, homosexuality and women's rights, including abortion.



Source: Getty Images/Alex Wong

The emergence of Trump nevertheless gave renewed impetus to the politics of polarization, especially in view of Trump's tendency, typical of populist politicians, to see the world in terms of conflict

between light and darkness, or good and evil. This became apparent in a number of ways. For example, Trump's criticisms of his political opponents had a sweeping and deeply personal character. Ted Cruz, his closest Republican rival, was thus repeatedly referred to as 'Lyn' Ted' Cruz, while Hillary Clinton was branded as 'Crooked Hillary'. Similarly, his attacks on the Washington political establishment and on the media were stark and dismissive. In relation to the allegedly corrupt and failing established political system, he promised to 'drain the swamp', while the mainstream media were routinely criticized as purveyors of 'fake news'. On the other hand, the people whose concerns Trump was most keen to articulate – the white, predominantly male working class, who were believed to be angry as a result of stagnant or falling living standards, job insecurity, and the rise of women's and minority groups – were portrayed as the 'real people'. This suggested that they were the only group with legitimate political interests, all other groups being somehow inauthentic and therefore lacking in moral worth.

CONCEPT

Science

Science is a field of study that aims to develop reliable explanations of phenomena through repeatable experiments, observation and deduction. The 'scientific method', by which hypotheses are verified (proved true) by testing them against the available evidence, is therefore seen as a means of disclosing value-free and objective truth. Karl Popper (1902–94), however, suggested that science can only falsify hypotheses, since 'facts' may always be disproved by later experiments.

STUDYING POLITICS

Approaches to the study of politics

Disagreement about the nature of political activity is matched by controversy about the nature of politics as an academic discipline. One of the most ancient spheres of intellectual enquiry, politics was originally seen as an arm of philosophy, history or law. Its central purpose was to uncover the principles on which human society should be based. From the late nineteenth century onwards, however, this philosophical emphasis was gradually displaced by an attempt to turn politics into a scientific discipline. The high point of this development was reached in the 1950s

and 1960s with an open rejection of the earlier tradition as meaningless metaphysics. Since then, however, enthusiasm for a strict science of politics has waned, and there has been a renewed recognition of the enduring importance of political values and normative theories. If the ‘traditional’ search for universal values acceptable to everyone has largely been abandoned, so has the insistence that science alone provides a means of disclosing truth. The resulting discipline is more fertile and more exciting, precisely because it embraces a range of theoretical approaches and a variety of schools of analysis.

The philosophical tradition

The origins of political analysis date back to Ancient Greece and a tradition usually referred to as ‘political philosophy’. This involved a preoccupation with essentially ethical, prescriptive or **normative** questions, reflecting a concern with what ‘should’, ‘ought’ or ‘must’ be brought about, rather than with what ‘is’. Plato (see p. 13) and Aristotle are usually identified as the founding fathers of this tradition. Their ideas resurfaced in the writings of medieval theorists such as Augustine (354–430) and Aquinas (1225–74). The central theme of Plato’s work, for instance, was an attempt to describe the nature of the ideal society, which in his view took the form of a benign dictatorship dominated by a class of philosopher kings.

Normative: The prescription of values and standards of conduct; what ‘should be’ rather than what ‘is’.

Such writings have formed the basis of what is called the ‘traditional’ approach to politics. This involves the analytical study of ideas and doctrines that have been central to political thought. Most commonly, it has taken the form of a history of political thought that focuses on a collection of ‘major’ thinkers (that spans, for instance, Plato to Marx) and a canon of ‘classic’ texts. This approach has the character of literary analysis: it is interested primarily in examining what major thinkers said, how they developed or justified their views, and the intellectual context within which they worked. Although such analysis may be carried out critically and scrupulously, it cannot be **objective** in any scientific sense, as it deals with normative questions such as ‘Why should I obey the state?’, ‘How should rewards be distributed?’, and ‘What should the limits of individual freedom be?’

Objective: External to the observer, demonstrable; untainted by feelings, values or bias.

PLATO (427–347 BCE)



Source: Pixabay/mvivirito0

Greek philosopher. Plato was born of an aristocratic family. He became a follower of Socrates, who is the principal figure in his ethical and philosophical dialogues. After Socrates' death in 399 BCE, Plato founded his own academy in order to train the new Athenian ruling class. Plato taught that the material world consists of imperfect copies of abstract and eternal 'ideas'. His political philosophy, expounded in *The Republic* and *The Laws*, is an attempt to describe the ideal state in terms of a theory of justice. Both works are decidedly authoritarian and pay no attention to individual liberty, believing that power should be vested in the hands of an educated elite, the philosopher kings. He was therefore a firm critic of democracy. Plato's work has exerted wide influence on Christianity and on European culture in general.

The empirical tradition

Although it was less prominent than normative theorizing, a descriptive or **empirical** tradition can be traced back to the earliest days of political thought. It can be seen in Aristotle's attempt to classify constitutions (see pp. 111–12), in Machiavelli's realistic account of statecraft, and in Montesquieu's (see p. 344) sociological theory of government and law. In many ways, such writings constitute the basis of what is now called 'comparative government', and they gave rise to an essentially institutional approach to the discipline. In the USA and the UK, in particular, this developed into the dominant tradition of analysis. The empirical approach to political analysis is characterized by the attempt to offer a dispassionate and impartial account of political reality. The approach is 'descriptive', in that it seeks to analyse and explain, whereas the normative approach is 'prescriptive', in the sense that it makes judgements and offers recommendations.

Empirical: Based on observation and experiment; empirical knowledge is derived from sense data and experience.

Descriptive political analysis acquired its philosophical underpinning from the doctrine of empiricism, which spread from the seventeenth century onwards through the work of theorists such as John Locke (see p. 30) and David Hume (1711–76).

The doctrine of empiricism advanced the belief that experience is the only basis of knowledge and that, therefore, all hypotheses and theories should be tested by a process of observation. By the nineteenth century, such ideas had developed into what became known as ‘positivism’, an intellectual movement particularly associated with the writings of Auguste Comte (1798–1857). This doctrine proclaimed that the social sciences, and, for that matter, all forms of philosophical enquiry, should adhere strictly to the methods of the natural sciences. Once science was perceived to be the only reliable means of disclosing truth, the pressure to develop a science of politics became irresistible.

Behaviouralism

Since the mid-nineteenth century, mainstream political analysis has been dominated by the ‘scientific’ tradition, reflecting the growing impact of **positivism**. In the 1870s, ‘political science’ courses were introduced in the universities of Oxford, Paris and Columbia, and by 1906 the *American Political Science Review* was being published. However, enthusiasm for a science of politics peaked in the 1950s and 1960s with the emergence, most strongly in the USA, of a form of political analysis that drew heavily on **behaviouralism**. For the first time, this gave politics reliably scientific credentials, because it provided what had previously been lacking: objective and quantifiable data against which hypotheses could be tested. Political analysts such as David Easton (1979, 1981) proclaimed that politics could adopt the methodology of the natural sciences, and this gave rise to a proliferation of studies in areas best suited to the use of quantitative research methods, such as voting behaviour, the behaviour of legislators, and the behaviour of municipal politicians and lobbyists. Attempts were also made to apply behaviouralism to international relations (IR), in the hope of developing objective ‘laws’ of international relations. The rise of behaviouralism also gave a major impetus to the systemic study of comparative politics.

Positivism: The theory that social, and indeed all forms of, enquiry should adhere strictly to the methods of the natural sciences.

Behaviouralism: The belief that social theories should be constructed only on the basis of observable behaviour, providing quantifiable data for research.

CONCEPT

Comparative politics

Comparative politics refers to both a disciplinary subfield and a method of analysis. As a disciplinary subfield, it is often taken, especially in the USA, to mean simply 'the politics of foreign countries'. As a method of analysis, comparative politics involves identifying and exploring similarities and differences between political units (usually states) in order to develop 'grounded theories', test hypotheses, infer causal relationships, and produce reliable generalizations. The comparative method is sometimes seen as the most feasible technique for developing scientific knowledge of politics, in view of the practical difficulties of applying experimental techniques.

Behaviouralism, however, came under growing pressure from the 1960s onwards. In the first place, it was claimed that behaviouralism had significantly constrained the scope of political analysis, preventing it from going beyond what was directly observable. Although behavioural analysis undoubtedly produced, and continues to produce, invaluable insights in fields such as voting studies, a narrow obsession with quantifiable data threatens to reduce the discipline of politics to little else. More worryingly, it inclined a generation of political scientists to turn their backs on the entire tradition of normative political thought. Concepts such as 'liberty', 'equality', 'justice' and 'rights' were sometimes discarded as being meaningless because they were not empirically verifiable entities. Dissatisfaction with behaviouralism has grown as interest in normative questions has revived since the 1970s, as reflected in the writings of theorists such as John Rawls (see p. 44) and Robert Nozick (see p. 68).

Rational-choice theory

Amongst recent theoretical approaches to politics is what is called 'formal political theory', variously known as 'rational-choice theory', 'public-choice theory' (see p. 277) and 'political economy' (see p. 151). This approach to analysis draws heavily on the example of economic theory in building up models based on procedural rules, usually about the rationally self-interested behaviour of the individuals involved. Most firmly established in the USA, and associated in particular with the so-called Virginia School, formal political theory provides at least a useful analytical device, which may provide insights into the actions of voters, lobbyists, bureaucrats and politicians, as well as into the behaviour of states within the international system. This approach has had its broadest

impact on political analysis in the form of what is called ‘institutional public-choice theory’. The use of such techniques in fields such as party competition, interest-group behaviour and the policy influence of bureaucrats, is discussed in later chapters. The approach has also been applied in the form of game theory, which has been developed more from the field of mathematics than from economics. It entails the use of first principles to analyse puzzles about individual behaviour. The best-known example in game theory is the ‘prisoners’ dilemma’ (see [Figure 1.5](#)). **Game theory** has been used by IR theorists to explain why states find it difficult to prevent, for instance, the overfishing of the seas, or the sale of arms to undesirable regimes.

Game theory: A way of exploring problems of conflict or collaboration by explaining how one actor’s choice of strategy affects another’s best choice and vice versa.

By no means, however, has the rational-choice approach to political analysis been universally accepted. While its supporters claim that it introduces greater rigour into the discussion of political phenomena, critics have questioned its basic assumptions. It may, for instance, overestimate human rationality in that it ignores the fact that people seldom possess a clear set of preferred goals and rarely make decisions in the light of full and accurate knowledge. Furthermore, in proceeding from an abstract model of the individual, rational-choice theory pays insufficient attention to social and historical factors, failing to recognize, amongst other things, that human self-interestedness may be socially conditioned, and not merely innate.

CONCEPT

Constructivism

Constructivism (or social constructivism) is an approach to analysis that is based on the belief that there is no objective social or political reality independent of our understanding of it. Constructivists do not, therefore, regard the social world as something ‘out there’, in the sense of an external world of concrete objects; instead, it exists only ‘inside’, as a kind of inter-subjective awareness. In the final analysis, people, whether acting as individuals or as social groups, ‘construct’ the world according to those constructions.

New institutionalism

Until the 1950s, the study of politics had largely involved the study of **institutions**. This ‘traditional’ or ‘old’ institutionalism focused on the rules,

procedures and formal organization of government, and employed methods akin to those used in the study of law and history. The advent of the 'behavioural revolution', combined with growing concerns about its unreflective and essentially descriptive methods (which sometimes threatened to reduce politics to a collection of organizational rules and structures), led to institutionalism being marginalized during the 1960s and 1970s. However, interest in it was revived from the 1980s onwards by the emergence of what was called 'new institutionalism'. While remaining faithful to the core institutionalist belief that 'institutions matter', in the sense that political structures are thought to shape political behaviour, new institutionalism has revised our understanding of what constitutes an 'institution' in a number of respects.

Institution: A well-established body with a formal role and status; more broadly, a set of rules that ensure regular and predictable behaviour, the 'rules of the game'.

Political institutions are no longer equated with political organizations; they are thought of not as 'things' but as sets of 'rules', which guide or constrain the behaviour of individual actors. These rules, moreover, are as likely to be informal as formal, policy-making processes sometimes being shaped more by unwritten conventions or understandings than by formal arrangements. Apart from anything else, this can help to explain why institutions are often difficult to reform, transform or replace. Finally, rather than viewing institutions as independent entities, in which case they exist almost outside of time and space, new institutionalists emphasize that institutions are 'embedded' in a particular normative and historical context. Thus, just as actors within an institutional setting are socialized to accept key rules and procedures, the institution itself operates within a larger and more fundamental body of assumptions and practices. Nevertheless, despite these shifts, institutionalism has continued to attract criticism. For example, it is sometimes accused of subscribing to a structuralist logic in which, to a greater or lesser extent, political actors are viewed as 'prisoners' of the institutional contexts in which they operate.

Critical approaches

Since the 1980s, the range of critical approaches to politics has expanded considerably. Until that point, Marxism had constituted the principal alternative to mainstream political science. Indeed, Karl Marx can be seen as the first theorist to have attempted to describe politics in scientific terms. Using his so-called 'materialist conception of history' (see pp. 39–43), Marx strove to uncover the driving force of historical development. This enabled him to make predictions about the future based on 'laws' that

had the same status in terms of proof as laws in the natural sciences. However, modern political analysis has become both richer and more diverse as a result of the emergence of new critical perspectives, notable examples including feminism (see pp. 47–8), critical theory, green ideology (see pp. 49–50), constructivism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism (see p. 181). What do these new critical voices have in common, and in what sense are they ‘critical’?

CONCEPT

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a term that was first used to describe experimental movements in Western arts, architecture and cultural development in general. As a tool of social and political analysis, postmodernism highlights the shift away from societies structured by industrialization and class solidarity to increasingly fragmented and pluralistic ‘information’ societies. In these, individuals are transformed from producers to consumers, and individualism replaces class, religious and ethnic loyalties. Postmodernists argue that there is no such thing as certainty; the idea of absolute and universal truth must be discarded as an arrogant pretence.

Critical approaches exemplify two broad, and sometimes linked, characteristics. The first is that they are ‘critical’ in that, in their different ways, they seek to contest the political status quo, by (usually) aligning themselves with the interests of marginalized or oppressed groups. Each of them, thus, seeks to uncover inequalities and asymmetries that mainstream approaches tend to ignore. Feminism, for example, has drawn attention to systematic and pervasive structures of gender inequality that characterize politics in all its forms and at every level. Critical theory, which is rooted in the neo-Marxism (see p. 41) of the Frankfurt School, has extended the notion of critique to all social practices, drawing on a wide range of influences. Green ideology, or ecologism (see p. 49), has challenged the anthropocentric (human-centred) emphasis of established political and social theory, and championed holistic approaches to political and social understanding. Postcolonialism emphasizes the cultural dimension of colonial rule, showing how Western cultural and political hegemony (see p. 181) over the rest of the world has been preserved despite the achievement of formal political independence across almost the entire developing world.

The second characteristic of critical approaches to politics is that, albeit in

different ways and to different degrees, they have tried to go beyond the positivism of mainstream political science, emphasizing instead the role of consciousness in shaping social conduct and, therefore, the political world. These so-called **post-positivist** approaches (sometimes called 'interpretivism' or 'anti-foundationalism') are therefore 'critical', in that they not only take issue with the conclusions of mainstream approaches, but also subject these approaches themselves to critical scrutiny, exposing biases that operate within them and examining their implications. This can be seen, in particular, in relation to constructivism (see p. 15)

Post-positivism: An approach to knowledge that questions the idea of an 'objective' reality, emphasizing instead the extent to which people conceive, or 'construct', the world in which they live. and poststructuralism. Constructivism has had a significantly greater impact on IR than it has had on political science, with many now treating constructivism as a mainstream international relations theory. However, constructivism is not so much a substantive theory as an analytical tool. In arguing that people, in effect, 'construct' the world in which they live, suggesting that the world operates through a kind of 'inter-subjective' awareness, constructivists have thrown mainstream political analysis's claim to objectivity into question. For example, as subjective entities, political actors have no fixed or objective interests or identities; rather, these are fashioned (and can be re-fashioned) through the traditions, values and sentiments that prevail at any time.

Poststructuralism emerged alongside postmodernism, the two terms sometimes being used interchangeably. Poststructuralism emphasizes that all ideas and concepts are expressed in language which itself is enmeshed in complex relations of power. Influenced particularly by the writings of the French philosopher and radical intellectual Michel Foucault (1926–84), poststructuralists have drawn attention to the link between power and systems of thought using the idea of **discourse**, or 'discourses of power'. In crude terms, this implies that knowledge is power. However, in the absence of a universal frame of reference or overarching perspective, there exists only a series of competing perspectives, each of which represents a particular discourse of power. Although poststructuralism and postmodernism reject the idea of absolute and universal truth (foundationalism), poststructuralists argue that it is possible to expose hidden meanings in particular concepts, theories and interpretations through a process of **deconstruction**.

Discourse: Human interaction, especially communication; discourse may disclose or illustrate power relations.

Deconstruction: A close reading of philosophical or other texts with an eye to their various blind spots and/or contradictions.

FOCUS ON ...

THE PRISONERS' DILEMMA

		Prisoner B	
		Confesses	Does not confess
Prisoner A	Confesses	A: 6 yrs B: 6 yrs	A: 0 yrs B: 10 yrs
	Does not confess	A: 10 yrs B: 0 yrs	A: 1 yr B: 1 yr

Figure 1.3 Options in the prisoners' dilemma

Two prisoners, held in separate cells, are faced with the choice of 'squealing' or 'not squealing' on one another. If only one of them confesses, but provides evidence to convict the other, he will be released without charge, while his partner will take the whole blame and be jailed for ten years. If both prisoners confess, they will each be jailed for six years. If both refuse to confess, they will only be convicted of a minor crime, and they will each receive a one-year sentence. [Figure 1.3](#) shows the options available to the prisoners and their consequences in terms of jail sentences.

In view of the dilemma confronting them it is likely that both prisoners will confess, fearing that if they do not the other will 'squeal' and they will receive the maximum sentence. Ironically, the game shows that rational behaviour can result in the least favourable outcome (in which the prisoners jointly serve a total of 12 years in jail). In effect, they are punished for their failure to cooperate or trust one another. However, if the game is repeated several times, it is possible that the prisoners will learn that self-interest is advanced by cooperation, which will encourage both to refuse to confess.

Concepts, models and theories

Concepts, models and theories are the tools of political analysis. However, as with most things in politics, the analytical tools must be used with care. First, let us consider concepts. A concept is a general idea about something, usually expressed in a single word or a short phrase. A concept is more than a proper noun or the name of a thing. There is, for example, a

difference between talking about a cat (a particular and unique cat) and having a concept of a 'cat' (the idea of a cat). The concept of a cat is not a 'thing' but an 'idea', an idea composed of the various attributes that give a cat its distinctive character: 'a furry mammal', 'small', 'domesticated', 'catches rats and mice', and so on. The concept of 'equality' is thus a principle or ideal. This is different from using the term to say that a runner has 'equalled' a world record, or that an inheritance is to be shared 'equally' between two brothers. In the same way, the concept of 'presidency' refers not to any specific president but, rather, to a set of ideas about the organization of executive power.

CONCEPT

Ideal type

An ideal type (sometimes 'pure type') is a mental construct in which an attempt is made to draw out meaning from an otherwise almost infinitely complex reality through the presentation of a logical extreme. Ideal types were first used in economics, for instance, in the notion of perfect competition. Championed in the social sciences by Max Weber, ideal types are explanatory tools, not approximations of reality; they neither 'exhaust reality' nor offer an ethical ideal. Weberian examples include types of authority (see p. 4) and bureaucracy (see p. 374).

What, then, is the value of concepts? Concepts are the tools with which we think, criticize, argue, explain and analyse. Merely perceiving the external world does not in itself give us knowledge about it. In order to make sense of the world, we must, in a sense, impose meaning on it, and this we do through the construction of concepts. Concepts, in that sense, are the building blocks of human knowledge. Nevertheless, concepts can also be slippery customers. In the first place, the political reality we seek to understand is constantly shifting and is highly complex. There is always the danger that concepts such as 'democracy', 'human rights' and 'capitalism' will be more rounded and coherent than the unshapely realities they seek to describe. Max Weber tried to overcome this problem by recognizing particular concepts as 'ideal types'. This view implies that the concepts we use are constructed by singling out certain basic or central features of the phenomenon in question, which means that other features are downgraded or ignored altogether. The concept of 'revolution' can be regarded as an ideal type in this sense, in that it draws attention to a process of fundamental, and usually violent, political change. It thus helps us make sense of, say, the 1789 French Revolution and the Eastern

European revolutions of 1989–91 by highlighting important parallels between them. The concept must nevertheless be used with care because it can also conceal vital differences, and thereby distort understanding – in this case, for example, about the ideological and social character of revolution.

A further problem is that political concepts are often the subject of deep ideological controversy. Politics is, in part, a struggle over the legitimate meaning of terms and concepts. Enemies may argue, fight and even go to war, all claiming to be ‘defending freedom’, ‘upholding democracy’ or ‘having justice on their side’. The problem is that words such as ‘freedom’, ‘democracy’ and ‘justice’ have different meanings to different people. How can we establish what is ‘true’ democracy, ‘true’ freedom or ‘true’ justice? The simple answer is that we cannot. Just as with the attempt to define ‘politics’, we have to accept that there are competing versions of many political concepts. Such concepts are best regarded as **‘essentially contested’ concepts** (Gallie, 1955/56). In effect, a single term can represent a number of rival concepts, none of which can be accepted as its ‘true’ meaning. For example, it is equally legitimate to define politics as what concerns the state, as the conduct of public life, as debate and conciliation, and as the distribution of power and resources.

Essentially contested concept: A concept about which controversy is so deep that no settled or neutral definition can ever be developed.

Model: A theoretical representation of empirical data that aims to advance understanding by highlighting significant relationships and interactions.

Models and theories are broader than concepts; they comprise a range of ideas rather than a single idea. A **model** is usually thought of as a representation of something, usually on a smaller scale, as in the case of a doll’s house or a toy aeroplane. In this sense, the purpose of the model is to resemble the original object as faithfully as possible. However, conceptual models need not in any way resemble an object. It would be absurd, for instance, to insist that a computer model of the economy should bear a physical resemblance to the economy itself. Rather, conceptual models are analytical tools; their value is that they are devices through which meaning can be imposed on what would otherwise be a bewildering and disorganized collection of facts. The simple point is that facts do not speak for themselves: they must be interpreted, and they must be organized. Models assist in the accomplishment of this task because they include a network of relationships that highlight the meaning and

significance of relevant empirical data. The best way of understanding this is through an example. One of the most influential models in political analysis is the model of the political system developed by David Easton (1979, 1981). This can be represented diagrammatically (see [Figure 1.4](#)).

DEBATING . . .

SHOULD STUDENTS OF POLITICS SEEK TO BE OBJECTIVE AND POLITICALLY NEUTRAL?

Many believe that a strict distinction should be drawn between studying politics and practising politics, between having an academic interest in the subject and being politically engaged or committed. But does this distinction stand up to examination? Should we (teachers as well as students) approach the study of politics in a neutral manner, adopting a stance of 'scientific' objectivity? Or should we accept that, in politics, interest and commitment are inevitably linked, and even that political conviction may drive political understanding?

YES	NO
Desire to explain. The motives for studying politics and practising politics are – or should be – different. Students of politics should seek, above all, to understand and explain the (all too often complex and baffling) political world. As they want to 'make sense' of things, any personal preferences they may hold must be treated as of strictly secondary importance. In contrast, practitioners of politics (politicians, activists and the like) are principally concerned with reshaping the political world in line with their own convictions or preferences. Political convictions thus blind people to 'inconvenient' truths, allowing political analysis to	Myth of neutrality. Whereas natural scientists may be able to approach their studies from an objective and impartial standpoint, this is impossible in politics. However politics is defined, it addresses questions about the structure and functioning of the society in which we live and have grown up. Family background, social experience, economic position, political sympathies and so on therefore build into each and every one of us preconceptions about the political world we are seeking to study. Indeed, perhaps the greatest threat to reliable knowledge comes not from bias as such, but from the

service the needs of political advocacy.

Objective knowledge. There is an approach to the acquisition of knowledge that has unrivalled authority in the form of scientific method, and this should be applied to all areas of learning, politics (or 'political science') included. Using observation, measurement and experimentation, scientific method allows hypotheses to be verified or falsified by comparing them with what we know about the 'real world'. Systematic enquiry, guided by such scientific principles, is the only reliable means of producing and accumulating knowledge. This knowledge is 'objective' because it is generated through a value-free approach that is concerned with empirical questions and does not seek to make normative judgements.

Free-floating intellectuals. Education and intellectual enquiry are themselves a training-ground in dispassionate scholarship, allowing students and teachers to distance themselves, over time, from the allegiances and biases that derive from social and family backgrounds. The German sociologist Karl Mannheim (1893–1947) thus argued that objectivity is strictly the preserve

failure to acknowledge bias, reflected in bogus claims to political neutrality.

Emancipatory knowledge. Very few people are drawn to the study of politics through a disinterested quest for knowledge alone. Instead, they seek knowledge for a purpose, and that purpose invariably has a normative component. As Marx famously put it, 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it'. Such an approach is most clearly embraced by modern critical theorists, who adopt an explicit commitment to emancipatory politics. The purpose of critical theory is to uncover structures of oppression and injustice in domestic and global politics in order to advance the cause of individual and collective freedom.

Competing realities. Post-positivist theorists question the very idea of scientific objectivity, arguing that there is more than one way in which the world can be understood. There is thus no single, overarching truth about the 'real world' out there, separate from the beliefs, ideas and assumptions of the observer. If the subject (the student of politics) cannot in any

of the 'socially unattached intelligentsia', a class of intellectuals who alone can engage in disciplined and dispassionate enquiry. As free-floating intellectuals, they can stand back from the world they seek to understand, and thereby see it more clearly.

reliable way be distinguished from the object (the political world), then dispassionate scholarship must be treated as, at best, an unachievable ideal, social and political analysis being an inevitably value-laden activity.

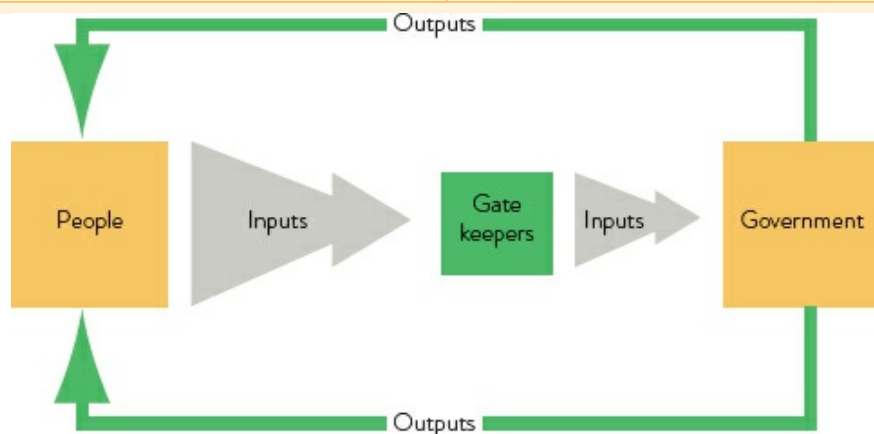


Figure 1.4 The political system

This ambitious model sets out to explain the entire political process, as well as the function of major political actors, through the application of what is called systems analysis. A system is an organized or complex whole, a set of interrelated and interdependent parts that form a collective entity. In the case of the political system, a linkage exists between what Easton calls 'inputs' and 'outputs'. Inputs into the political system consist of demands and supports from the general public. Demands can range from pressure for higher living standards, improved employment prospects, and more generous welfare payments to greater protection for minority and individual rights. Supports, on the other hand, are ways in which the public contributes to the political system by paying taxes, offering compliance, and being willing to participate in public life. Outputs consist of the decisions and actions of government, including the making of policy, the passing of laws, the imposition of taxes, and the allocation of public funds. Clearly, these outputs generate 'feedback' which, in turn, shapes further demands and supports. The key insight offered by Easton's model is that the political system tends towards long-term equilibrium or political stability, as its survival depends on outputs being brought into line with inputs.

The terms ‘**theory**’ and ‘model’ are often used interchangeably in politics. Theories and models are both conceptual constructs used as tools of political analysis. However, strictly speaking, a theory is a proposition. It offers a systematic explanation of a body of empirical data. In contrast, a model is merely an explanatory device; it is more like a hypothesis that has yet to be tested. In that sense, in politics, while theories can be said to be more or less ‘true’, models can only be said to be more or less ‘useful’. Clearly, however, theories and models are often interlinked: broad political theories may be explained in terms of a series of models. For example, the theory of pluralism (discussed in Chapters 3 and 4) encompasses a model of the state, a model of electoral competition, a model of group politics, and so on.

Theory: A systematic explanation of empirical data, usually (unlike a hypothesis) presented as reliable knowledge.

CONCEPT

Paradigm

A paradigm is, in a general sense, a pattern or model that highlights relevant features of a particular phenomenon. As used by Kuhn (1962), however, it refers to an intellectual framework comprising interrelated values, theories and assumptions, within which the search for knowledge is conducted. ‘Normal’ science is therefore conducted within the established paradigm, while ‘revolutionary’ science attempts to replace an old paradigm with a new one. The radical implication of this theory is that ‘truth’ and ‘falsehood’ are only provisional judgements.

However, virtually all conceptual devices, theories and models contain hidden values or implicit assumptions. This is why it is difficult to construct theories that are purely empirical; values and normative beliefs invariably intrude. In the case of concepts, this is demonstrated by people’s tendency to use terms as either ‘hurrah! words’ (for example, ‘democracy’, ‘freedom’ and ‘justice’) or ‘boo! words’ (for example, ‘conflict’, ‘anarchy’, ‘ideology’ and even ‘politics’). Models and theories are also ‘loaded’ in the sense that they contain a range of biases. It is difficult, for example, to accept the claim that rational-choice theories are value-neutral. As they are based on the assumption that human beings are basically egoistical and self-regarding, it is perhaps not surprising that they have often pointed to policy conclusions that are politically conservative. There is, therefore, a sense in which analytical devices, such as models and microtheories, are constructed on the basis of broader macrotheories.

Many of these macrotheories reflect the assumptions and beliefs of one or other of the major ideological traditions. These traditions operate in a similar way to the ‘paradigms’ to which Thomas Kuhn refers in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). In effect, a paradigm constitutes the framework within which the search for knowledge is conducted. According to Kuhn, the natural sciences are dominated at any time by a single paradigm; science develops through a series of ‘revolutions’ in which an old paradigm is replaced by a new one. Political and social enquiry is, however, different, in that it is a battleground of contending and competing paradigms. These paradigms take the form of broad social philosophies, usually called ‘political ideologies’: liberalism, conservatism, socialism, fascism, feminism, and so on (see [Chapter 2](#)). The various levels of conceptual analysis are shown diagrammatically in [Figure 1.5](#).



Figure 1.5 Levels of conceptual analysis



Source: Getty Images/Spencer Platt

The New York Stock exchange in 2008. The financial crash

illustrated how, in our globalized world, events in one country can have repercussions across the globe.

POLITICS IN A GLOBAL AGE

Beyond the domestic/international divide?

As an academic discipline, politics has conventionally focused on the state and particularly on its governmental apparatus: the institutional framework of the state, where power lies within it, how decisions are made, and so on. This state-based paradigm is one in which politics has a distinct spatial or territorial character. In short, borders and boundaries matter. This especially applies in the case of the distinction between domestic politics, which is concerned with the state's role in maintaining order and carrying out regulation within its own borders, and international politics, which is concerned with relations between or among states. In that sense, sovereignty (see p. 59), the supreme or unquestionable authority of the state, is a 'hard shell' that divides the 'inside' of politics from the 'outside'.

This domestic/international, or 'inside/outside', divide also separates what have conventionally been seen as two quite different spheres of political interaction (see [Figure 1.6](#)). Whereas politics 'inside' has an orderly or regulated character, stemming from the ability of the state within the domestic sphere to impose rule from above, politics in the 'outside' has an anarchic character, derived from the fact that there is no authority in the international sphere higher than the sovereign state. The spatial division that the state-based paradigm has inculcated is, furthermore, reflected in a traditional sub-disciplinary division of labour between 'political science' and 'international relations', or IR. While political science has tended to view states as macro-level actors within the political world, IR has typically treated states as micro-level actors within the larger international arena.

The state-based paradigm of politics has nevertheless come under pressure as a result of recent trends and developments, not least those associated with globalization (see p. 161). In particular, there has been a substantial growth in cross-border, or **transnational**, flows and transactions – movements of people, goods, money, information and ideas. As state borders have become increasingly 'porous', the conventional domestic/international, or 'inside/outside', divide has become more difficult to sustain. This can be illustrated both by the substantially greater vulnerability of domestic economies to events that take place elsewhere in the world, as demonstrated by the wide-ranging impact of the 2007–09 global financial crisis, and by the wider use of digital technologies that

enable people to communicate with each other through means such as mobile phones and the internet that national governments find very difficult to control. The increase in the scale, scope and, sometimes, nature of spatial interdependence has encouraged some to speculate that the disciplinary divide between political science and international relations should be dissolved (Hay, 2010).

Transnational: Configuration, which may apply to events, people, groups or organizations, that takes little or no account of national governments or state borders.

If political activity can no longer be seen to take place within discrete domestic and international spheres, politics is perhaps best understood in terms of overlaps and interrelationships between and amongst a number of spheres – the global, the regional, the national and the local (see [Figure 1.6](#)). Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to portray such an approach to politics as entirely novel, as the domestic/international divide has usually been treated more as a way of prioritizing a particular sphere and set of interactions, rather than as a rigid doctrine. For instance, liberal IR theorists have long argued that the constitutional structure of the state influences its external behaviour, while political scientists studying the causes of revolution have always accepted that war and invasion may sometimes be decisive factors in their outbreak.

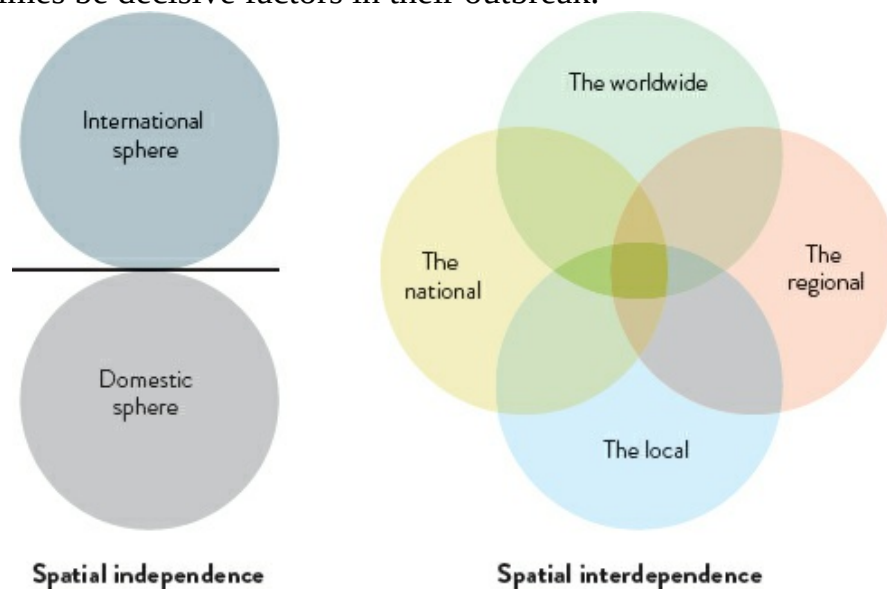


Figure 1.6 Contrasting models of spatial politics

Where does this leave us as far as political analysis is concerned? One of the implications of accepting that politics takes place not only in global, regional, national and local spheres, but also, crucially, through relationships between these various spheres, is that it so expands the

parameters and complexity of politics that it becomes difficult, and maybe impossible, to make sense of it as a whole. This would require, for example, that we study topics such as elections, political parties, constitutions, assemblies and other aspects of national government alongside topics such as war and peace, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, poverty and development, international organizations, and so forth. Moreover, although the domestic/international divide has undoubtedly been compromised by globalizing trends, it is difficult to argue that it has been rendered entirely meaningless. Only so-called ‘hyperglobalizers’, who subscribe to the fanciful idea that politics – and, for that matter, everything else – has been caught up in a swirl of interconnectedness that effectively absorbs all of its parts into an indivisible, global whole, fail to acknowledge that states, though often transformed, continue to be the most significant actors in both the domestic and the international spheres. Sovereignty may no longer be a ‘hard shell’ that separates politics ‘inside’ from politics ‘outside’, but it remains at least a ‘soft shell’.

Although this book adopts a holistic approach, which accepts the implications of spatial interdependence and, particularly, that what goes on within states and what goes on between states impact on each other to a greater degree than ever before, it considers the interactions of politics from a primarily domestic perspective. In contrast, its companion volume, *Global Politics* (2014), examines the interactions of politics from a primarily international or global perspective, and so gives particular attention to ideas, issues and theories that have conventionally been studied within the field of international relations.

FOCUS ON ...

POLITICS AND IR: TWO DISCIPLINES OR ONE?

Are political science and international relations (IR) two separate disciplines, or should they be thought of as subfields, or different levels of analysis, within the same broad discipline: politics or political analysis? In most contexts, political science and IR emerged independently from one another. Political science was established as an academic discipline from the mid-nineteenth century onwards in the USA and across Europe, while IR developed in the aftermath of World

War I, and was largely shaped by the desire to uncover the conditions for enduring peace (a concern about the policy relevance of its work that has never applied in the same way to political science).

Politics and IR constitute separate fields of knowledge, in the sense that the former addresses 'domestic' issues and developments (concerned with what goes on within the state), while the latter addresses 'international' issues and developments (concerned with what occurs between states). Politics and IR have therefore developed their own analytical tools and theoretical perspectives, helping each to enjoy the same degree of disciplinary authenticity as, say, economics or sociology.

However, the disciplinary divide between politics and IR may always have been arbitrary. In this view, politics and IR can be seen not as discrete but as overlapping disciplines: they ask very similar questions, albeit about different (if always related) levels of political interaction. Both politics and IR are primarily concerned with questions about power (its distribution, exercise, consequences and so forth), and both place a strong emphasis on the nature, role and activities of the state, even if political science views the state as a macro-level actor, while IR views it as a micro-level actor.

Questions about the balance between conflict and cooperation in social relations are also central to both disciplines. The idea of a disciplinary divide has become particularly problematic due to the advent of an increasingly interdependent world, in which 'the domestic' and 'the international' affect one another to a greater degree than ever before. Globalization, climate change, multilevel governance, security and crime are only some of the issues that confound the traditional domestic/international divide, and perhaps suggest that rigid disciplinary or sub-disciplinary fault lines should be dispensed with (Hay, 2002).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. If politics is essentially social, why is not all social activity political?
2. Should politics be thought of as an arena or a process?
3. What are the implications of viewing politics as a strictly 'public' activity?
4. How and why has there been debate about the parameters of the public/private divide?
5. Is compromise and consensus the very stuff of politics, or a rejection of politics?

6. Why has power so often been thought of as the defining feature of politics?
7. Why has the term 'politics' so often carried negative and associations?
8. On what grounds can politics be defended?
9. Is politics inevitable? Could politics ever be brought to an end?
10. What are the strengths and weaknesses of rational-choice theory?
11. How do mainstream and critical approaches to the study of politics differ?
12. Why and how have attempts been made to construct a science of politics?
13. Is it possible to study politics objectively and without bias?
14. Is the distinction between domestic and international realms of politics still sustainable?



FURTHER READING

- Kellstedt, P. M. and G. D. Whitten, *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research* (3rd edn) (2018). An introduction to the scientific study of politics using real world examples and an accessible style.
- Leach, R. and S. Lightfoot, *The Politics and IR Companion* (2nd edn) (2018). A succinct yet comprehensive textbook offering an accessible guide to the various aspects of a Politics and IR degree.
- Leftwich, A. (ed.), *What is Politics? The Activity and Its Study* (2004). A very useful collection of essays examining different concepts of politics as well as contrasting views of the discipline.
- Lowndes, V., D. Marsh and G. Stoker (eds), *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (4th edn) (2017). An accessible, yet comprehensive and sophisticated, exploration of the nature and scope of the discipline of political science.
- Moses, J. W. and T. L. Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research* (3rd edn) (2019). An introduction to the various methods of modern social science and their strengths and limitations for understanding the world in which we live.
- Savigny, H. and L. Marsden, *Doing Political Science and*

International Relations: Theories in Action (2011). An introduction to political science that uses case studies to examine a wide range of theories and approaches.



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CHAPTER 2

Political Ideas and Ideologies

'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways: the point is to change it.'

KARL MARX, *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845)

PREVIEW

All people are political thinkers. Whether they know it or not, people use political ideas and concepts whenever they express their opinions or speak their mind. Everyday language is littered with terms such as freedom, fairness, equality, justice and rights. In the same way, words such as conservative, liberal, fascist, socialist or feminist are regularly employed by people either to describe their own views, or those of others. However, even though such terms are familiar, even commonplace, they are seldom used with any precision or a clear grasp of their meaning. What, for instance, is 'equality'? What does it mean to say that all people are equal? Are people born equal, should they be treated by society as if they are equal? Should people have equal rights, equal opportunities, equal political influence, equal wages? Similarly, words such as communist or fascist are commonly misused. What does it mean to call someone a 'fascist'? What values or beliefs do fascists hold, and why do they hold them? How do communist views differ from those of, say, liberals, conservatives or socialists? This chapter examines political ideas from the perspective of the key ideological traditions. It focuses, in particular, on the 'classical' ideologies (liberalism, conservatism and socialism), but it also considers a range of other ideological traditions, which have arisen either out of, or in opposition to, the classical ones. Each ideological tradition constitutes a distinctive intellectual framework or paradigm, and so offers a particular

'lens' on the political world. However, before examining the various ideological traditions, it is necessary to consider the nature of political ideology itself.

KEY ISSUES

- What is political ideology?
- Is politics intrinsically linked to ideology? Can ideology come to an end?
- What are the key ideas and theories of the major ideological traditions?
- What internal tensions do each of the major ideologies encompass?
- How has ideological thought changed over time?
- How can the rise and fall of ideologies be explained?

WHAT IS POLITICAL IDEOLOGY?

Ideology is one of the most controversial concepts encountered in political analysis. Although the term now tends to be used in a neutral sense, to refer to a developed social philosophy or world-view, it has in the past had heavily negative or pejorative connotations. During its sometimes tortuous career, the concept of ideology has commonly been used as a political weapon to condemn or criticize rival creeds or doctrines.

CONCEPT

Ideology

From a social-scientific viewpoint, an ideology is a more or less coherent set of ideas that provides a basis for organized political action, whether this is intended to preserve, modify or overthrow the existing system of power relationships. All ideologies therefore (1) offer an account of the existing order, usually in the form of a 'world-view', (2) provide a model of a desired future, a vision of the Good Society, and (3) outline how political change can and should be brought about. Ideologies are not, however, hermetically sealed systems of thought; rather, they are fluid sets of ideas that overlap with one another at a number of points.

The term 'ideology' was coined in 1796 by the French philosopher Destutt de Tracy (1754–1836). He used it to refer to a new 'science of ideas' (literally, an idea-ology) that set out to uncover the origins of conscious thought and ideas. De Tracy's hope was that ideology would eventually enjoy the same status as established sciences such as zoology and biology. However, a more enduring meaning was assigned to the term in the

nineteenth century in the writings of Karl Marx (see p. 40). For Marx, ideology amounted to the ideas of the 'ruling class', ideas that therefore uphold the class system and perpetuate exploitation. In their early work *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels wrote the following:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force in society, is at the same time the ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of mental production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production. (Marx and Engels, [1846] 1970: 64)

The defining feature of ideology in the Marxist sense is that it is false: it mystifies and confuses subordinate classes by concealing from them the contradictions on which all class societies are based. As far as capitalism is concerned, the ideology of the property-owning bourgeoisie (bourgeois ideology) fosters delusion or 'false consciousness' amongst the exploited proletariat, preventing them from recognizing the fact of their own exploitation. Nevertheless, Marx did not believe that all political views had an ideological character. He held that his own work, which attempted to uncover the process of class exploitation and oppression, was scientific. In his view, a clear distinction could be drawn between science and ideology, between truth and falsehood. This distinction tended, however, to be blurred in the writings of later Marxists such as Lenin (see p. 100) and Gramsci (see p. 198). These referred not only to 'bourgeois ideology', but also to 'socialist ideology' or 'proletarian ideology', terms that Marx would have considered absurd.

Alternative uses of the term have also been developed by liberals and conservatives. The emergence of totalitarian dictatorships in the interwar period encouraged writers such as Karl Popper (1902–94), J. L. Talmon and Hannah Arendt (see p. 7) to view ideology as an instrument of social control to ensure compliance and subordination. Relying heavily on the examples of fascism and communism, this Cold War liberal use of the term treated ideology as a 'closed' system of thought, which, by claiming a monopoly of truth, refuses to tolerate opposing ideas and rival beliefs. In contrast, liberalism, based as it is on a fundamental commitment to individual freedom, and doctrines such as conservatism and democratic socialism that broadly subscribe to liberal principles are clearly not ideologies. These doctrines are 'open' in the sense that they permit, and even insist on, free debate, opposition and criticism.

DEBATING . . .

CAN POLITICS EXIST WITHOUT IDEOLOGY?

The term 'ideology' has traditionally carried pejorative implications, often expressed through predictions of its imminent (and usually welcome) demise. Nevertheless, despite its varied obituaries, political ideology has stubbornly refused to die: while particular ideologies may rise or fall, ideological forms of politics seem to be an enduring feature of world history. Is politics intrinsically linked to ideology? Or may politics finally be able to emerge from the shadow cast by ideological belief?

YES	NO
Overcoming falsehood and delusion. Most critiques of ideology associate it with falsehood and manipulation, implying that reason and critical understanding can, and will, emancipate us from ideological politics. In this view, ideologies are, in effect, political religions, sets of values, theories and doctrines that demand faith and commitment from 'believers', who are then unable to think outside or beyond their chosen world-view. If ideologies are intellectual prisons, the solution is to see the world 'as it is', something that can be achieved through the application of value-free scientific method. The purpose of political science is thus to disengage politics from ideology. Rise of technocratic politics. Political ideology arose in the form of contrasting attempts to shape emergent industrial society. The left/right divide (see p. 249) and the struggle	Ideology as an intellectual framework. Political ideology will always survive because it provides politicians, parties and other political actors with an intellectual framework which helps them to make sense of the world in which they live. Ideologies are not systematic delusions but, rather, rival visions of the political world, each illuminating particular aspects of a complex and multifaceted reality. Ideologies are therefore neither, in a simplistic sense, true nor false. Perhaps the most dangerous delusion is the notion of a clear distinction between science and ideology. Science itself is constructed on the basis of paradigms that are destined to be displaced over time (Kuhn, 1962). Ideological renewal. The secret of ideology's survival and continued relevance is its flexibility, the fact that

between socialism and capitalism has always been at the heart of ideological debate. However, the collapse of communism and the near worldwide acceptance of market capitalism mean that this rivalry has become irrelevant to modern politics. Politics has therefore come to revolve not around ideological questions to do with ownership and the distribution of wealth, but around 'smaller' questions to do with the effective management of the capitalist system. Ideological politics has given way to technocratic politics.

Rise of consumerist politics.

Ideology has little place in modern democratic systems due to the logic of electoral competition. Elections force political parties to behave like businesses in the marketplace, formulating 'products' (policies) in the hope of attracting the largest number of 'consumers' (voters). Parties thus increasingly respond to consumer/voter demands, rather than trying to reshape these demands in the light of a pre-existing ideological vision. Whether parties have historically been left-wing, right-wing or centrist in orientation, they recognize the electoral value of 'travelling light' in

flexibility, the fact that ideological traditions go through a seemingly endless process of redefinition and renewal. As old ideologies fade, new ones emerge, helping to preserve the relevance of political ideology. The world of ideologies does not stand still, but changes in response to changing social and historical circumstances. The declining relevance of the left/right divide has not led to the 'end of ideology' or the 'end of history'; it has merely opened up new ideological spaces that have been filled by the likes of feminism, green ideology, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism.

The 'vision thing'. As the principal source of meaning and idealism in politics, ideology touches those aspects of politics that no other political form can reach. Ideology gives people a reason to believe in something larger than themselves, because people's personal narratives only make sense when they are situated within a broader historical narrative. A post-ideological age would therefore be an age without hope, without vision. If politicians cannot cloak their pursuit of power in ideological purpose, they risk being seen simply as power-seeking

ideological terms. Electoral politics therefore contributes to a process of party de-ideologization.	programmes will appear to lack coherence and direction.
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A distinctively conservative use of the term ‘ideology’ has been developed by thinkers such as Michael Oakeshott (see p. 199). This view reflects a characteristically conservative scepticism about the value of **rationalism**, born out of the belief that the world is largely beyond the capacity of the human mind to fathom. As Oakeshott put it, in political activity ‘men sail a boundless and bottomless sea’. From this perspective, ideologies are seen as abstract ‘systems of thought’; that is, as sets of ideas that distort political reality because they claim to explain what is, frankly, incomprehensible. This is why conservatives have traditionally dismissed the notion that they subscribe to an ideology, preferring instead to describe conservatism as a disposition, or an ‘attitude of mind’, and placing their faith in **pragmatism**, tradition (see p. 81) and history.

Rationalism: The belief that the world can be understood and explained through the exercise of human reason, based on assumptions about its rational structure.

Pragmatism: A theory or practice that places primary emphasis on practical circumstances and goals; pragmatism implies a distrust of abstract ideas.

The drawback of each of these usages, however, is that, as they are negative or pejorative, they restrict the application of the term. Certain political doctrines, in other words, are excluded from the category of ‘ideologies’. Marx, for instance, insisted that his ideas were scientific, not ideological, liberals have denied that liberalism should be viewed as an ideology, and conservatives have traditionally claimed to embrace a pragmatic rather than ideological style of politics. Moreover, each of these definitions is loaded with the values and orientation of a particular political doctrine. An inclusive definition of ‘ideology’ (one that applies to all political traditions) must therefore be neutral: it must reject the notion that ideologies are ‘good’ or ‘bad’, true or false, or liberating or oppressive. This is the virtue of the modern, social-scientific meaning of the term, which treats ideology as an action-orientated belief system, an interrelated set of ideas that in some way guides or inspires political action.

However, much of the debate about ideology since the mid-twentieth century has focused on predictions of its demise, or at least of its fading relevance. This came to be known as the ‘end of ideology’ debate. It was

initiated in the 1950s, stimulated by the collapse of fascism at the end of World War II and the decline of communism in the developed West. In *The End of Ideology* (1960), the US sociologist Daniel Bell (1919–2011) declared that the stock of political ideas had been exhausted. In his view, ethical and ideological questions had become irrelevant because in most Western societies parties competed for power simply by promising higher levels of economic growth and material affluence. This debate was revived in the aftermath of the collapse of communism by ‘end of history’ theorists, such as Fukuyama (see p. 115), who suggested that a single ideology, liberal democracy (see p. 89), had triumphed over all its rivals, and that this triumph was final. At the heart of such debates lie questions about the relationship between politics and ideology, and specifically about whether politics can exist without ideology (see p. 28).

CLASSICAL IDEOLOGICAL TRADITIONS

Political ideology arose out of the transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism. In simple terms, the earliest, or ‘classical’, ideologies – liberalism, conservatism and socialism – developed as contrasting attempts to shape emerging industrial society. This meant that the central theme in ideological debate and argument during this period and beyond was the battle between two rival economic philosophies: capitalism (see p. 153) and socialism. Political ideology thus had a strong economic focus. The battle lines between capitalism and socialism were significantly sharpened by the 1917 Russian Revolution, which created the world’s first socialist state. Indeed, throughout what is sometimes called the ‘short’ twentieth century (from the outbreak of World War I to the fall of communism, 1989–91), and particularly during the Cold War period (1945–90), international politics was structured along ideological lines, as the capitalist West confronted the communist East. Although ideological debate has become richer and certainly progressively more diverse since the 1960s, not least as a result of the rise of so-called ‘new’ ideologies such as feminism and green ideology, the classical ideologies have retained their central importance. In large part, this has been because of their capacity to reinvent themselves. In the process of doing so, the dividing lines between them have often been blurred.

KEY THINKER 

JOHN LOCKE (1632–1704)



Source: Wellcome Collection

English philosopher and politician. Locke studied medicine at Oxford University before becoming secretary to Anthony Ashley Cooper, First Earl of Shaftsbury, in 1661. His political views were developed against the backdrop of the English Revolution, and are often seen as providing a justification for the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, which ended absolutist rule and established a constitutional monarchy in Britain. Locke was a key thinker of early liberalism, placing particular emphasis on 'natural' or God-given rights, identified as the rights to life, liberty and property. An exponent of representative government and toleration, Locke's views had a considerable impact on the American Revolution. His most important political works are *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) and *Two Treatises of Government* ([1690] 1965).

Liberalism

Any account of political ideologies must start with liberalism. This is because liberalism is, in effect, the ideology of the industrialized West, and is sometimes portrayed as a **meta-ideology** that is capable of embracing a broad range of rival values and beliefs. Although liberalism did not emerge as a developed political creed until the early nineteenth century, distinctively liberal theories and principles had gradually been developed during the previous 300 years. Early liberalism certainly reflected the aspirations of a rising industrial middle class, and liberalism and capitalism have been closely linked (some have argued intrinsically linked) ever since. In its earliest form, liberalism was a political doctrine. As reflected in the ideas of thinkers such as John Locke, it attacked absolutism (see p. 112) and feudal privilege, instead advocating constitutional and, later, representative government. By the early nineteenth century, a distinctively liberal economic creed had developed that extolled the virtues of *laissez-faire* (see p. 154) and condemned all forms of government intervention. This became the centrepiece of classical, or nineteenth-century, liberalism. From the late nineteenth

century onwards, however, a form of social liberalism emerged that looked more favourably on welfare reform and economic intervention. Such an emphasis became the characteristic theme of modern, or twentieth-century, liberalism.

Meta-ideology: A higher or second-order ideology that lays down the grounds on which ideological debate can take place.

KEY IDEAS



LIBERALISM

Individualism: Individualism (see p. 179) is the core principle of liberal ideology. It reflects a belief in the supreme importance of the human individual as opposed to any social group or collective body. Human beings are seen, first and foremost, as individuals. This implies both that they are of equal moral worth and that they possess separate and unique identities. The liberal goal is therefore to construct a society within which individuals can flourish and develop, each pursuing 'the good' as he or she defines it, to the best of his or her abilities. This has contributed to the view that liberalism is morally neutral, in the sense that it lays down a set of rules that allow individuals to make their own moral decisions.

Freedom: Individual freedom (see p. 302), or liberty (the two terms are interchangeable), is the core value of liberalism; it is given priority over, say, equality, justice or authority. This arises naturally from a belief in the individual and the desire to ensure that each person is able to act as he or she pleases or chooses. Nevertheless, liberals advocate 'freedom under the law', as they recognize that one person's liberty may be a threat to the liberty of others; liberty may become licence. They therefore endorse the ideal that individuals should enjoy the maximum possible liberty consistent with a like liberty for all.

Reason: Liberals believe that the world has a rational structure, and that this can be uncovered through the exercise of human reason and by critical enquiry. This inclines them to place their faith in the ability of individuals to make wise judgements on their own behalf, being, in most cases, the best judges of their own interests. It also encourages liberals to believe in **progress** and the capacity of human beings to resolve their differences through

debate and argument, rather than bloodshed and war.

Progress: Moving forwards; the belief that history is characterized by human advancement based on the accumulation of knowledge and wisdom.

Equality: Individualism implies a belief in foundational equality: that is, the belief that individuals are 'born equal', at least in terms of moral worth. This is reflected in a liberal commitment to equal rights and entitlements, notably in the form of legal equality ('equality before the law') and political equality ('one person, one vote; one vote, one value'). However, as individuals do not possess the same levels of talent or willingness to work, liberals do not endorse social equality or an equality of outcome. Rather, they favour equality of opportunity (a 'level playing field') that gives all individuals an equal chance to realize their unequal potential. Liberals therefore support the principle of **meritocracy**, with merit reflecting, crudely, talent plus hard work.

Meritocracy: Rule by the talented; the principle that rewards and positions should be distributed on the basis of ability.

Toleration: Liberals believe that toleration (that is, forbearance: the willingness of people to allow others to think, speak and act in ways of which they disapprove) is both a guarantee of individual liberty and a means of social enrichment. They believe that pluralism (see p. 101), in the form of moral, cultural and political diversity, is positively healthy: it promotes debate and intellectual progress by ensuring that all beliefs are tested in a free market of ideas. Liberals, moreover, tend to believe that there is a balance or natural harmony between rival views and interests, and thus usually discount the idea of irreconcilable conflict.

Consent: In the liberal view, authority and social relationships should always be based on consent or willing agreement. Government must therefore be based on the 'consent of the governed'. This is a doctrine that encourages liberals to favour representation (see p. 219) and democracy, notably in the form of liberal democracy (see p. 89). Similarly, social bodies and associations are formed through contracts willingly entered into by individuals intent on pursuing their own self-interest. In this sense, authority arises 'from below' and is always grounded in legitimacy (see p. 80).

Constitutionalism: Although liberals see government as a vital guarantee of order and stability in society, they are constantly aware of the danger that government may become a tyranny against the individual ('power tends to corrupt' (Lord Acton)). They therefore believe in limited government. This goal can be attained through the fragmentation of government power, by the creation of checks and balances amongst the various institutions of government, and by the establishment of a codified or 'written' constitution embodying a bill of rights that defines the relationship between the state and the individual.

Classical liberalism

The central theme of classical liberalism is a commitment to an extreme form of individualism. Human beings are seen as egoistical, self-seeking and largely self-reliant creatures. In what C. B. Macpherson (1962) termed 'possessive individualism', they are taken to be the proprietors of their own persons and capacities, owing nothing to society or to other individuals. This **atomist** view of society is underpinned by a belief in 'negative' liberty, meaning non-interference, or the absence of external constraints on the individual. This implies a deeply unsympathetic attitude towards the state and all forms of government intervention.

Atomism: The belief that society is made up of a collection of largely self-sufficient individuals who owe little or nothing to one another.

In Tom Paine's (see p. 221) words, the state is a 'necessary evil'. It is 'necessary' in that, at the very least, it establishes order and security, and ensures that contracts are enforced. However, it is 'evil' in that it imposes a collective will on society, thus limiting the freedom and responsibilities of the individual. The classical liberal ideal is therefore the establishment of a minimal or 'nightwatchman' state, with a role that is limited to the protection of citizens from the encroachments of fellow citizens. In the form of **economic liberalism**, this position is underpinned by a deep faith in the mechanisms of the free market and the belief that the economy works best when left alone by government. Laissez-faire capitalism is thus seen as guaranteeing prosperity, upholding individual liberty, and, as this allows individuals to rise and fall according to merit, ensuring social justice.

Economic liberalism: A belief in the market as a self-regulating mechanism tending naturally to deliver general prosperity and opportunities for all.

Modern liberalism

Modern liberalism is characterized by a more sympathetic attitude towards

state intervention. Indeed, in the USA, the term ‘liberal’ is invariably taken to imply support for ‘**big** government’ rather than ‘minimal’ government. This shift was born out of the recognition that industrial capitalism had merely generated new forms of injustice and left the mass of the population subject to the vagaries of the market. Influenced by the work of J. S. Mill (see p. 220), the so-called ‘New Liberals’ (figures such as T. H. Green (1836–82), L. T. Hobhouse (1864–1929) and J. A. Hobson (1858–1940)) championed a broader, ‘positive’ view of freedom. From this perspective, freedom does not just mean being left alone, which might imply nothing more than the freedom to starve. Rather, it is linked to personal development and the flourishing of the individual; that is, the ability of the individual to gain fulfilment and achieve self-realization.

Big government: Interventionist government, usually understood to imply economic management and social regulation.

This view provided the basis for social or welfare liberalism. This is characterized by the recognition that state intervention, particularly in the form of social welfare, can enlarge liberty by safeguarding individuals from the social evils that blight individual existence. These evils were identified in the UK by the 1942 Beveridge Report as the ‘five giants’: want, ignorance, idleness, squalor and disease. In the same way, modern liberals abandoned their belief in laissez-faire capitalism, largely as a result of J. M. Keynes’ (see p. 158) insight that growth and prosperity could be maintained only through a system of managed or regulated capitalism, with key economic responsibilities being placed in the hands of the state. Nevertheless, modern liberals’ support for collective provision and government intervention has always been conditional. Their concern has been with the plight of the weak and vulnerable, those who are literally not able to help themselves. Their goal is to raise individuals to the point where they are able, once again, to take responsibility for their own circumstances and make their own moral choices. The most influential modern attempt to reconcile the principles of liberalism with the politics of welfare and **redistribution** was undertaken by John Rawls (see p. 44). (The liberal approach to international politics is examined in [Chapter 18](#).)

Redistribution: A narrowing of material inequalities brought about through a combination of progressive taxation and welfare provision.

Conservatism

Conservative ideas and doctrines first emerged in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. They arose as a reaction against the growing pace of economic and political change, which was in many ways

symbolized by the French Revolution. In this sense, conservatism harked back to the *ancien régime*. In trying to resist the pressures unleashed by the growth of liberalism, socialism and nationalism, conservatism stood in defence of an increasingly embattled traditional social order. However, from the outset, divisions in conservative thought were apparent. In continental Europe, a form of conservatism emerged that was characterized by the work of thinkers such as Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821). This conservatism was starkly autocratic and reactionary, rejecting out of hand any idea of reform. A more cautious, more flexible and, ultimately, more successful form of conservatism nevertheless developed in the UK and the USA, characterized by Edmund Burke's belief in 'change in order to conserve'. This stance enabled conservatives in the nineteenth century to embrace the cause of social reform under the paternalistic banner of 'One Nation'. The high point of this tradition in the UK came in the 1950s as the Conservative Party came to accept the postwar settlement and espouse its own version of Keynesian social democracy. However, such ideas increasingly came under pressure from the 1970s onwards as a result of the emergence of the New Right. The New Right's radically anti-statist and anti-paternalist brand of conservatism draws heavily on classical liberal themes and values.

Ancien régime: (French) Literally, 'old order'; usually linked with the absolutist structures that predated the French Revolution.

Paternalistic conservatism

The *paternalistic* strand in conservative thought is entirely consistent with principles such as organicism, hierarchy and duty, and it can therefore be seen as an outgrowth of traditional conservatism. Often traced back to the early writings of Benjamin Disraeli (1804–81), paternalism draws on a combination of prudence and principle. In warning of the danger of the UK being divided into 'two nations: the Rich and the Poor', Disraeli articulated a widespread fear of social revolution. This warning amounted to an appeal to the self-interest of the privileged, who needed to recognize that 'reform from above' was preferable to 'revolution from below'. This message was underpinned by an appeal to the principles of duty and social obligation rooted in neofeudal ideas such as *noblesse oblige*. In effect, in this view, duty is the price of privilege; the powerful and propertied inherit a responsibility to look after the less well-off in the broader interests of social cohesion and unity. The resulting One-Nation principle, the cornerstone of what since the early nineteenth century has been termed a *Tory* position, reflects not so much the ideal of social equality as a cohesive and stable hierarchy that arises organically.

Paternalism: An attitude or policy that demonstrates care or concern for those unable to help themselves, as in the (supposed) relationship between a father and a child.

Noblesse oblige: (French) Literally, the 'obligations of the nobility'; in general terms, the responsibility to guide or protect those less fortunate or less privileged.

Toryism: An ideological stance within conservatism characterized by a belief in hierarchy, an emphasis on tradition, and support for duty and organicism.

KEY IDEAS



CONSERVATISM

Tradition: The central theme of conservative thought, 'the desire to conserve', is closely linked to the perceived virtues of tradition, respect for established customs, and institutions that have endured through time. In this view, tradition reflects the accumulated wisdom of the past, and institutions and practices that have been 'tested by time', and it should be preserved for the benefit of the living and for generations yet to come. Tradition also has the virtue of promoting a sense of social and historical belonging.

Pragmatism: Conservatives have traditionally emphasized the limitations of human rationality, which arise from the infinite complexity of the world in which we live. Abstract principles and systems of thought are therefore distrusted, and instead faith is placed in experience, history and, above all, pragmatism: the belief that action should be shaped by practical circumstances and practical goals, that is, by 'what works'. Conservatives have thus preferred to describe their own beliefs as an 'attitude of mind' or an 'approach to life', rather than as an ideology, although they reject the idea that this amounts to unprincipled opportunism.

Human imperfection: The conservative view of human nature is broadly pessimistic. In this view, human beings are limited, dependent and security-seeking creatures, drawn to the familiar and the tried and tested, and needing to live in stable and orderly communities. In addition, individuals are morally corrupt: they are tainted by selfishness, greed and the thirst for power. The roots of

crime and disorder therefore reside within the human individual rather than in society. The maintenance of order (see p. 415) therefore requires a strong state, the enforcement of strict laws, and stiff penalties.

Organicism: Instead of seeing society as an artefact that is a product of human ingenuity, conservatives have traditionally viewed society as an organic whole, or living entity. Society is thus structured by natural necessity, with its various institutions, or the 'fabric of society' (families, local communities, the nation, and so on), contributing to the health and stability of society. The whole is more than a collection of its individual parts. Shared (often 'traditional') values and a common culture are also seen as being vital to the maintenance of the community and social cohesion.

Hierarchy: In the conservative view, gradations of social position and status are natural and inevitable in an organic society. These reflect the differing roles and responsibilities of, for example, employers and workers, teachers and pupils, and parents and children. Nevertheless, in this view, hierarchy and inequality do not give rise to conflict, because society is bound together by mutual obligations and reciprocal duties. Indeed, as a person's 'station in life' is determined largely by luck and the accident of birth, the prosperous and privileged acquire a particular responsibility of care for the less fortunate.

Authority: Conservatives hold that, to some degree, authority is always exercised 'from above', providing leadership (see p. 332), guidance and support for those who lack the knowledge, experience or education to act wisely in their own interests (an example being the authority of parents over children). Although the idea of a **natural aristocracy** was once influential, authority and leadership are now more commonly seen as resulting from experience and training. The virtue of authority is that it is a source of social cohesion, giving people a clear sense of who they are and what is expected of them. Freedom must therefore coexist with responsibility; it therefore consists largely of a willing acceptance of obligations and duties.

Natural aristocracy: The idea that talent and leadership are innate or inbred qualities that cannot be acquired through effort or

self-advancement.

Property: Conservatives see property ownership as being vital because it gives people security and a measure of independence from government, and it encourages them to respect the law and the property of others. Property is also an exteriorization of people's personalities, in that they 'see' themselves in what they own: their houses, their cars, and so on. However, property ownership involves duties as well as rights. In this view, we are, in a sense, merely custodians of property that has either been inherited from past generations ('the family silver'), or may be of value to future ones.

KEY THINKER



EDMUND BURKE (1729–97)



Source: iStock/HodagMedia

Dublin-born UK statesman and political theorist who is often seen as the father of the Anglo-American conservative tradition. Burke's enduring reputation is based on a series of works, notably *Reflections on the Revolution in France* ([1790] 1968), that were critical of the French Revolution. Though sympathetic to the American Revolution, Burke was deeply critical of the attempt to recast French politics in accordance with abstract principles such as liberty, equality and fraternity, arguing that wisdom resided largely in experience, tradition and history. Nevertheless, he held that the French monarchy was, in part, responsible for its own fate since it had obstinately refused to 'change in order to conserve'. Burke had a gloomy view of government, recognizing that it could prevent evil but rarely promote good. He supported free-market economics on the grounds that it reflects 'natural law'.

The One-Nation tradition embodies not only a disposition towards social

reform, but also an essentially pragmatic attitude towards economic policy. This is clearly seen in the ‘middle way’ approach adopted in the 1950s by UK Conservatives. This approach eschewed the two ideological models of economic organization: laissez-faire capitalism on the one hand, and state socialism and central planning on the other. The former was rejected on the grounds that it results in a free-for-all, which makes social cohesion impossible, and penalizes the weak and vulnerable. The latter was dismissed because it produces a state monolith and crushes all forms of independence and enterprise. The solution therefore lies in a blend of market competition and government regulation, or what the UK prime minister Harold Macmillan called ‘private enterprise without selfishness’. Very similar conclusions were drawn after 1945 by continental European conservatives, who embraced the principles of **Christian democracy**, most rigorously developed in the ‘social market’ philosophy (see p. 156) of the German Christian Democrats (CDU). This philosophy embraces a market strategy, insofar as it highlights the virtues of private enterprise and competition; but it is social, in that it believes that the prosperity so gained should be employed for the broader benefit of society. Such a position draws from Catholic social theory, which advances an organic view of society that stresses social harmony. Christian democracy thus highlights the importance of intermediate institutions, such as churches, unions and business groups, bound together by the notion of ‘social partnership’. The paternalistic strand of modern conservative thought is often linked to the idea of ‘compassionate conservatism’.

Christian democracy: An ideological tendency within European conservatism, characterized by commitment to social-market principles and qualified interventionism.

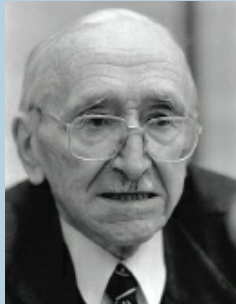
The New Right

The New Right represents a departure in conservative thought that amounted to a kind of counter-revolution against both the post-1945 drift towards state intervention and the spread of liberal or progressive social values. New Right ideas can be traced back to the 1970s and the conjunction between the apparent failure of Keynesian social democracy, signalled by the end of the postwar boom, and growing concern about social breakdown and the decline of authority. Such ideas had their greatest impact in the UK and the USA, where they were articulated in the 1980s in the form of Thatcherism and Reaganism, respectively. They have also had a wider, even worldwide, influence in bringing about a general shift from state- to market-orientated forms of organization. However, the New Right does not so much constitute a coherent and systematic

philosophy as an attempt to marry two distinct traditions, usually termed 'neoliberalism' and 'neoconservatism'. Although there is political and ideological tension between these two, they can be combined in support of the goal of a strong but minimal state: in Andrew Gamble's (1981) words, 'the free economy and the strong state'.

KEY THINKER

FRIEDRICH VON HAYEK (1899–1992)



Source: Getty Images/Laurent Maous

Austrian economist and political philosopher. An academic who taught at the London School of Economics and the Universities of Chicago, Freiburg and Salzburg, Hayek was awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1974. As an exponent of the so-called 'Austrian School', he was a firm believer in individualism and market order, and an implacable critic of socialism. *The Road to Serfdom* (1948) was a pioneering work that attacked economic interventionism. In later works such as *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960) and *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (1979) Hayek developed themes in political philosophy. Hayek's writings fused liberal and conservative elements, and had a considerable impact on the emergent New Right.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism (see p. 163) is an updated version of classical political economy that was developed in the writings of free-market economists such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman (see p. 160), and philosophers such as Robert Nozick (see p. 68). The central pillars of neoliberalism are the market and the individual. The principal neoliberal goal is to 'roll back the frontiers of the state', in the belief that unregulated market capitalism will deliver efficiency, growth and widespread prosperity. In this view, the 'dead hand' of the state saps initiative and discourages enterprise; government, however well-intentioned, invariably has a damaging effect on human affairs. This is reflected in the liberal

New Right's concern with the politics of ownership, and its preference for private enterprise over state enterprise or nationalization: in short, 'private, good; public, bad'. Such ideas are associated with a form of rugged individualism, expressed in Margaret Thatcher's famous assertion that 'there is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families'. The 'nanny state' is seen to breed a culture of dependence and to undermine freedom, which is understood as freedom of choice in the marketplace. Instead, faith is placed in self-help, individual responsibility, and entrepreneurialism. Such ideas are widely seen to be advanced through the process of globalization (see p. 161), viewed by some as neoliberal globalization.

Nanny state: A state with extensive social responsibilities; the term implies that welfare programmes are unwarranted and demeaning to the individual.

Neoconservatism

Neoconservatism reasserts nineteenth-century conservative social principles. The conservative New Right wishes, above all, to restore authority and return to traditional values, notably those linked to the family, religion and the nation. Authority is seen as guaranteeing social stability, on the basis that it generates discipline and respect, while shared values and a common culture are believed to generate social cohesion and make civilized existence possible. The enemies of neoconservatism are therefore **permissiveness**, the cult of the self and 'doing one's own thing', thought of as the values of the 1960s. Indeed, many of those who style themselves neoconservatives in the USA are former liberals who grew disillusioned with the progressive reforms of the Kennedy–Johnson era. Another aspect of neoconservatism is the tendency to view the emergence of multicultural and multi-religious societies with concern, on the basis that they are conflict-ridden and inherently unstable. This position also tends to be linked to an insular form of nationalism that is sceptical about both multiculturalism (see p. 185) and the growing influence of supranational bodies such as the UN and the EU. Neoconservatism also developed into a distinctive approach to foreign policy, particularly in the USA under George Bush Jr, linked to attempts to consolidate US global domination, in part through militarily imposed 'regime change'.

Permissiveness: The willingness to allow people to make their own moral choices; permissiveness suggests that there are no authoritative values.

Socialism

Although socialist ideas can be traced back to the Levellers and Diggers of

the seventeenth century, or to Thomas More's *Utopia* ([1516] 1965), or even Plato's *Republic*, socialism did not take shape as a political creed until the early nineteenth century. It developed as a reaction against the emergence of industrial capitalism. Socialism first articulated the interests of artisans and craftsmen threatened by the spread of factory production, but it was soon being linked to the growing industrial working class, the 'factory fodder' of early industrialization. In its earliest forms, socialism tended to have a fundamentalist (see p. 52), utopian and revolutionary character. Its goal was to abolish a capitalist economy based on market exchange, and replace it with a qualitatively different socialist society, usually to be constructed on the principle of common ownership. The most influential representative of this brand of socialism was Karl Marx, whose ideas provided the foundations for twentieth-century communism (see p. 119).

From the late nineteenth century onwards, however, a reformist socialist tradition emerged that reflected the gradual integration of the working classes into capitalist society through an improvement in working conditions and wages, and the growth of trade unions and socialist political parties. This brand of socialism proclaimed the possibility of a peaceful, gradual and legal transition to socialism, brought about through the adoption of the 'parliamentary road'. Reformist socialism drew on two sources. The first was a humanist tradition of ethical socialism, linked to thinkers such as Robert Owen (1771–1858), Charles Fourier (1772–1837) and William Morris (1834–96). The second was a form of **revisionist** Marxism developed primarily by Eduard Bernstein (see p. 43).

Revisionism: The modification of original or established beliefs; revisionism can imply the abandonment of principle or a loss of conviction.

During much of the twentieth century, the socialist movement was thus divided into two rival camps. Revolutionary socialists, following the example of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, called themselves 'communists', while reformist socialists, who practised a form of constitutional politics, embraced what increasingly came to be called 'social democracy'. This rivalry focused not only on the most appropriate means of achieving socialism, but also on the nature of the socialist goal itself. Social democrats turned their backs on fundamentalist principles such as common ownership and planning, and recast socialism in terms of welfare, redistribution and economic management. Both forms of socialism, however, experienced crises in the late twentieth century that encouraged some to proclaim the 'death of socialism' and the emergence of a post-

socialist society. The most dramatic event in this process was the collapse of communism brought about by the Eastern European revolutions of 1989–91, but there was also a continued retreat of social democracy from traditional principles, making it, some would argue, indistinguishable from modern liberalism.

KEY IDEAS



SOCIALISM

Community: The core of socialism is the vision of human beings as social creatures linked by the existence of a common humanity. As the poet John Donne put it, ‘no man is an Island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main’. This refers to the importance of community, and it highlights the degree to which individual identity is fashioned by social interaction and membership of social groups and collective bodies. Socialists are inclined to emphasize nurture over nature, and to explain individual behaviour mainly in terms of social factors, rather than innate qualities.

Fraternity: As human beings share a common humanity, they are bound together by a sense of comradeship or fraternity (literally meaning ‘brotherhood’, but broadened in this context to embrace all humans). This encourages socialists to prefer cooperation to competition, and to favour collectivism over individualism (see p. 179). In this view, cooperation enables people to harness their collective energies and strengthens the bonds of community, while competition pits individuals against each other, breeding resentment, conflict and hostility.

Social equality: Equality (see p. 470) is the central value of socialism. Socialism is sometimes portrayed as a form of egalitarianism, the belief in the primacy of equality over other values. In particular, socialists emphasize the importance of social equality, an equality of outcome as opposed to equality of opportunity. They believe that a measure of social equality is the essential guarantee of social stability and cohesion, encouraging individuals to identify with their fellow human beings. It also provides the basis for the exercise of legal and political rights. However, socialists disagree about the extent to which social equality can and should be brought about. While Marxists have

believed in absolute social equality, brought about by the collectivization of production wealth, social democrats have favoured merely narrowing material inequalities, often being more concerned with equalizing opportunities than outcomes.

Need: Sympathy for equality also reflects the socialist belief that material benefits should be distributed on the basis of need, rather than simply on the basis of merit or work. The classic formulation of this principle is found in Marx's communist principle of distribution: 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his need'. This reflects the belief that the satisfaction of basic needs (hunger, thirst, shelter, health, personal security, and so on) is a prerequisite for a worthwhile human existence and participation in social life. Clearly, however, distribution according to need requires people to be motivated by moral incentives, rather than just material ones.

Social class: Socialism has often been associated with a form of class politics. First, socialists have tended to analyse society in terms of the distribution of income or wealth, and they have thus seen social class (see p. 174) as a significant (usually the most significant) social cleavage. Second, socialism has traditionally been associated with the interests of an oppressed and exploited working class (however defined), and it has traditionally regarded the working class as an agent of social change, even social revolution. Nevertheless, class divisions are remediable: the socialist goal is either the eradication of economic and social inequalities, or their substantial reduction.

Common ownership: The relationship between socialism and common ownership has been deeply controversial. Some see it as the end of socialism itself, and others see it instead simply as a means of generating broader equality. The socialist case for common ownership (in the form of either Soviet-style state collectivization, or selective nationalization (a 'mixed economy')) is that it is a means of harnessing material resources to the common good, with private property being seen to promote selfishness, acquisitiveness and social division. Modern socialism, however, has moved away from this narrow concern with the politics of ownership.

Marxism

As a theoretical system, Marxism has constituted the principal alternative to the liberal rationalism that has dominated Western culture and intellectual enquiry in the modern period. As a political force, in the form of the international communist movement, Marxism has also been seen as the major enemy of Western capitalism, at least in the period 1917–91. This highlights a central difficulty in dealing with Marxism: the difference between Marxism as a social philosophy derived from the classic writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1820–95), and the phenomenon of twentieth-century communism, which in many ways departed from and revised classical principles. Thus, the collapse of communism at the end of the twentieth century need not betoken the death of Marxism as a political ideology; indeed, it may give Marxism, now divorced from the vestiges of **Leninism** and **Stalinism**, a fresh lease of life.

Leninism: Lenin's theoretical contributions to Marxism, notably his belief in the need for a 'vanguard' party to raise the proletariat to class consciousness.

Stalinism: The structures of Stalin's USSR, especially a centrally placed economy linked to systematic and brutal political oppression. Marx's ideas and theories reached a wider audience after his death, largely through the writings of his lifelong collaborator Engels, the German socialist leader Karl Kautsky (1854–1938) and the Russian theoretician Georgi Plekhanov (1856–1918). A form of orthodox Marxism, usually termed '**dialectical materialism**' (a term coined by Plekhanov, not Marx), came into existence, and was later used as the basis for Soviet communism. This 'vulgar' Marxism undoubtedly placed a heavier stress on mechanistic theories and historical determinism than did Marx's own writings.

Dialectical materialism: The crude and deterministic form of Marxism that dominated intellectual life in orthodox communist states.

Classical Marxism

The core of classical Marxism – the Marxism of Marx – is a philosophy of history that Engels described as the 'materialist conception of history', or **historical materialism**. This highlights the importance of economic life and the conditions under which people produce and reproduce their means of subsistence. Marx held that the economic 'base', consisting essentially of the 'mode of production, or economic system, conditions or determines the ideological and political 'superstructure'. Following Hegel (see p. 60), Marx believed that the driving force of historical change was the dialectic, a process of interaction between competing forces that results in a higher

stage of development. In its materialist version, this model implies that historical change is a consequence of internal contradictions within a 'mode of production', reflected in class conflict. Like all earlier class societies, capitalism is therefore doomed to collapse; in this case, as a result of conflict between the bourgeoisie or capitalist class, the owners of productive wealth and the proletariat, who are, in effect, 'wage slaves'. This conflict is irreconcilable, because the proletariat is necessarily and systematically exploited under capitalism, the bourgeoisie living by extracting 'surplus value' from its labour.

Historical materialism: The Marxist theory that holds that economic conditions ultimately structure law, politics, culture and other aspects of social existence.

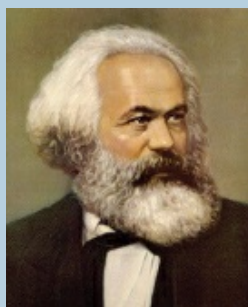
According to Marx, the inevitable proletarian revolution will occur once a series of deepening crises have brought the proletariat to full class consciousness. This would allow the working masses to recognize the fact of their own exploitation and so become a revolutionary force. The proletarian revolution would usher in a transitional 'socialist' period of development, characterized by the '**dictatorship of the proletariat**'. However, as class antagonisms fade and a fully communist society comes into existence, this proletarian state will 'wither away', meaning that a communist society will be one of both classlessness and statelessness. As a system of 'commodity production' gives rise to one based on 'production for use' and geared to the satisfaction of genuine human needs, 'the free development of each would become the precondition for the free development of all' (Marx).

Dictatorship of the proletariat: A temporary proletarian state, established to prevent counter-revolution and oversee the transition from capitalism to communism.

KEY THINKER



KARL MARX (1818–83)



Source: Getty Images/Donaldson Collection

German philosopher, economist and political thinker, usually portrayed as the father of twentieth-century communism. After a brief career as a university teacher, Marx took up journalism and became increasingly involved with the socialist movement. He settled in London after being expelled from Prussia, and worked for the rest of his life as an active revolutionary and writer, supported by his friend and lifelong collaborator Friedrich Engels. In 1864, Marx helped to found the First International, which collapsed in 1871 because of growing antagonism between Marx's supporters and anarchists led by Bakunin. Marx's classic work was the three-volume *Capital* ([1867, 1885, 1894] 1970). His best-known and most accessible work is the *Communist Manifesto* ([1848] 1967).

Orthodox communism

Marxism in practice is inextricably linked to the experience of Soviet communism (see p. 119), and especially to the contribution of the first two Soviet leaders, V. I. Lenin and Joseph Stalin (1879–1953). Indeed, twentieth-century communism is best understood as a form of Marxism–Leninism: that is, as orthodox Marxism modified by a set of Leninist theories and doctrines. Lenin's central contribution to Marxism was his theory of the revolutionary or vanguard party. This reflected Lenin's fear that the proletariat, deluded by bourgeois ideas and beliefs, would not realize its revolutionary potential because it could not develop beyond 'trade-union consciousness': a desire to improve working and living conditions rather than to overthrow capitalism. A revolutionary party, armed with Marxism, was therefore needed to serve as the 'vanguard of the working class'. In due course, this 'vanguard' or 'Leninist' party, composed of professional and dedicated revolutionaries, became the model for communist parties across the globe.

The USSR was, however, more profoundly affected by Stalin's 'second revolution' in the 1930s than it had been by the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. In reshaping Soviet society, Stalin created a model of orthodox communism that was followed in the post-1945 period by states such as China, North Korea and Cuba, and throughout Eastern Europe. What may be called 'economic Stalinism' was initiated with the launch in 1928 of the first Five Year Plan, which brought about the swift and total eradication of private enterprise. This was followed in 1929 by the collectivization of agriculture. All resources were brought under the control of the state, and a system of central planning dominated by the State Planning Committee (Gosplan) was established. Stalin's political

changes were no less dramatic. During the 1930s, Stalin transformed the USSR into a personal dictatorship through a series of purges that eradicated all vestiges of opposition and debate from the Communist Party, the state bureaucracy and the military. In effect, Stalin turned the USSR into a totalitarian dictatorship, operating through systematic intimidation, repression and terror.

KEY THINKER



HERBERT MARCUSE (1898–1979)



Source: Getty Images/Universal Images Group

German political philosopher and social theorist, and co-founder of the Frankfurt School. A refugee from Hitler's Germany, Marcuse lived in the USA from 1934. He developed a form of neo-Marxism that drew heavily on Hegel and Freud. Marcuse came to prominence in the 1960s as a leading thinker of the New Left and a 'guru' of the student movement. He portrayed advanced industrial society as an all-encompassing system of repression that subdued argument and debate, and absorbed opposition. His hopes rested not on the proletariat, but on marginalized groups such as students, ethnic minorities, women and workers in the developing world. His most important works include *Reason and Revolution* (1941), *Eros and Civilization* (1958) and *One-Dimensional Man* (1964).

Although the more brutal features of orthodox communism did not survive Stalin's death in 1953, the core principles of the Leninist party (hierarchical organization and discipline) and of economic Stalinism (state collectivization and central planning) stubbornly resisted pressure for reform. This was highlighted by Gorbachev's *perestroika* reform process (1985–91), which merely succeeded in exposing the failings of the planning system, and in releasing long-suppressed political forces. These eventually consigned Soviet communism to what Trotsky (see p. 382) had, in very different circumstances, called 'the dustbin of history'. However,

political Stalinism survives in China, despite the embrace of market reforms, and North Korea remains a thoroughgoing orthodox communist regime. The collapse of communism during the 1989–91 period is widely seen as the most significant ideological event of the modern period betokening, some have argued, the death of the larger ideology of socialism (see p. 42).

Perestroika: (Russian) Literally, ‘restructuring’; a slogan that refers to the attempt to liberalize and democratize the Soviet system within a communist framework.

Neo-Marxism

A more complex and subtle form of Marxism developed in Western Europe. By contrast with the mechanistic and avowedly scientific notions of Soviet Marxism, Western Marxism or neo-Marxism (see p. 64) tended to be influenced by Hegelian ideas and by the stress on ‘Man the creator’ found in Marx’s early writings. In other words, human beings were seen as makers of history, and not simply as puppets controlled by impersonal material forces. By insisting that there was an interplay between economics and politics, between the material circumstances of life and the capacity of human beings to shape their own destinies, neo-Marxists were able to break free from the rigid ‘base–superstructure’ straitjacket. This indicated an unwillingness to treat the class struggle as the beginning and end of social analysis.

POLITICS IN ACTION . . .



SOCIALISM: A DEAD IDEOLOGY?

Events: The early twentieth century witnessed the forward march of socialism in its different forms. The expansion of the franchise to include, over time, working-class voters gave a powerful impetus to the growth of democratic socialism. In 1914, for instance, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) became the largest party in the German parliament. The 1917 Russian Revolution demonstrated the potency of revolutionary socialism, by leading to the creation of the world’s first socialist state. Socialism’s influence spread yet more widely in the aftermath of World War II. As orthodox communism spread throughout Eastern Europe and into China, Cuba and beyond, democratic socialist parties, practising Keynesian social democracy, often dominated the policy agenda, even, sometimes, converting liberal and conservative parties to ‘socialist-style’ thinking. However, the advance of socialism was reversed in the final decades of the

twentieth century. This occurred most dramatically during 1989–91 through the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union. In China, although the communist regime survived, an accelerating process of market reform was begun. During the same period, democratic socialist parties in many parts of the world often retreated from traditional values, adopting policy agendas that appeared to be more closely related to liberalism and conservatism than to any recognizable form of socialism.



Source: Getty Images/Max Whittaker/Stringer

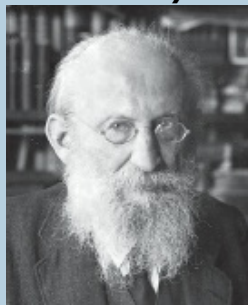
Significance: Socialism has undoubtedly gone through some difficult times since the final decades of the twentieth century. But does this betoken the end of socialism as a meaningful ideological force, incapable of revival or regeneration? Quite simply: is socialism dead? Those who argue it is claim that socialism's demise simply reflects the manifest superiority of capitalism over socialism as an economic model. In this view, capitalism is a uniquely effective means of generating wealth, and thereby of delivering prosperity. This is because it is based on a market mechanism that naturally draws resources to their most profitable use. Socialism's key flaw is that, by relying on the state to make economic life, whether through a system of comprehensive planning or a mixed economy, it is doomed to inefficiency. Any group of planners or officials, however dedicated and well-trained, are certain to be overwhelmed by the sheer complexity of a modern economy. These things had always been the case, but they became particularly apparent with the advent of globalization in the final decades of the twentieth century. Time, in a sense, had caught up with socialism. Globalization widened the gulf between capitalism and socialism. While

capitalism benefited from freer trade, new investment opportunities and sharpened competition in a globalized economy, socialism suffered from the fact that it further restricted the scope for national economic management.

Socialism's prospects may not be so gloomy, however. Hopes for the survival of socialism rest largely on the enduring, and perhaps intrinsic, imperfections of the capitalist system. As Ralph Miliband (1995) put it, 'the notion that capitalism has been thoroughly transformed and represents the best that humankind can ever hope to achieve is a dreadful slur on the human race'. In that sense, socialism is destined to survive if only because it serves as a reminder that human development can extend beyond market individualism. Moreover, globalization may bring opportunities for socialism as well as challenges. Just as capitalism has been transformed by the growing significance of the supranational dimension of economic life, socialism may be in the process of being transformed into a critique of global exploitation and inequality. Finally, there is evidence of a revival of socialism in the emergence of left-wing populist parties and movements, such as the UK Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Sanders' campaign for the Democratic nomination in the 2016 US presidential election, Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain.

KEY THINKER

EDUARD BERNSTEIN (1850–1932)



Source: Getty Images/ullstein bild Dtl.

German socialist politician and theorist. An early member of the German SPD, Bernstein became one of the leading advocates of revisionism, the attempt to revise and modernize orthodox Marxism. Influenced by British Fabianism and the philosophy of

Kant (see p. 425), Bernstein developed a largely empirical critique that emphasized the absence of class war, and proclaimed the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism. This is described in *Evolutionary Socialism* ([1898] 1962). He left the SPD over his opposition to World War I, although he subsequently returned and served as the secretary of state for the economy and finance in the Ebert government (1918–19). Bernstein is often seen as one of the founding figures of modern social democracy.

The Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács (1885–1971) was one of the first to present Marxism as a humanistic philosophy. He emphasized the process of ‘reification’, through which capitalism dehumanizes workers by reducing them to passive objects or marketable commodities. In his *Prison Notebooks*, written in 1929–35, Antonio Gramsci emphasized the degree to which capitalism was maintained not merely by economic domination, but also by political and cultural factors. He called this ideological ‘hegemony’ (see p. 197). A more overtly Hegelian brand of Marxism was developed by the so-called ‘Frankfurt School’, the leading members of which were Theodor Adorno (1903–69), Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) and Herbert Marcuse (see p. 41). Frankfurt theorists developed what was called ‘critical theory’, a blend of Marxist political economy, Hegelian philosophy and Freudian psychology, which had a considerable impact on the New Left in the 1960s. A later generation of Frankfurt members included Jürgen Habermas (see p. 83).

While early critical theorists were primarily concerned with the analysis of discrete societies, later theorists have tended to give greater attention to uncovering inequalities and asymmetries in world affairs. This has been evident in an emphasis on the hegemonic power of the USA (Cox, R., 1987) and the analysis of capitalism as a ‘world-system’ (Wallerstein, 1984).

Social democracy

Social democracy lacks the theoretical coherence of, say, classical liberalism or **fundamentalist socialism**. Whereas the former is ideologically committed to the market, and the latter champions the cause of common ownership, social democracy stands for a balance between the market and the state, a balance between the individual and the community. At the heart of social democracy there is a compromise between, on the one hand, an acceptance of capitalism as the only reliable mechanism for generating wealth and, on the other, a desire to distribute wealth in accordance with moral, rather than market, principles. For socialists, this conversion to the

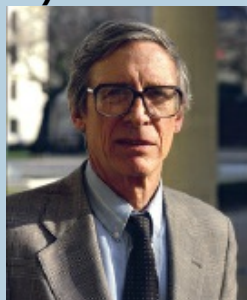
market was a difficult, and at times painful, process that was dictated more by practical circumstances and electoral advantage than by ideological conviction.

Fundamentalist socialism: A form of socialism that seeks to abolish capitalism and replace it with a qualitatively different kind of society.

KEY THINKER



JOHN RAWLS (1921–2002)



Source: Getty Images/Gamma-Rapho

US academic and political philosopher. His major work, *A Theory of Justice* (1970), is regarded as the most important work of political philosophy written in English since World War II. It has influenced modern liberals and social democrats alike. Rawls proposed a theory of 'justice as fairness' that is based on the belief that social inequality can be justified only if it is of benefit to the least advantaged. This presumption in favour of equality is rooted in Rawls' belief that most people, deprived of knowledge about their own talents and abilities, would choose to live in an egalitarian society, rather than an inegalitarian one. As, for most people, the fear of being poor outweighs the desire to be rich, redistribution and welfare can be defended on grounds of fairness. Rawls' other works include *Political Liberalism* (1993) and *The Law of Peoples* (1999).

The chief characteristic of modern social democratic thought is a concern for the underdog in society, the weak and vulnerable. There is a sense, however, in which social democracy cannot simply be confined to the socialist tradition. It may draw on a socialist belief in compassion and a common humanity, a liberal commitment to positive freedom and equal opportunities, or, for that matter, a conservative sense of paternal duty and care. Whatever its source, it has usually been articulated on the basis of principles such as welfarism, redistribution and social justice. In the form

of Keynesian social democracy, which was widely accepted in the early period after World War II, it was associated with a clear desire to 'humanize' capitalism through state intervention. It was believed that Keynesian economic policies would secure full employment, a mixed economy would help government to regulate economic activity, and comprehensive welfare provision funded via progressive taxation would narrow the gap between rich and poor. Since the 1980s, however, linked to what has been called 'new' social democracy, a further process of revisionism has taken place within social democracy.

CONCEPT

Third way

The term the third way encapsulates the idea of an alternative to both capitalism and socialism. Initially used by fascists, the term is now firmly linked to 'new' or modernized social democracy. In this context the third way is an alternative to old-style social democracy and neoliberalism. The former is rejected because it is wedded to statist structures that are inappropriate to the modern knowledge-based and market-orientated economy. The latter is rejected because it generates a free-for-all that undermines the moral foundations of society.

'New' social democracy

'New' social democracy (sometimes called 'neo-revisionism' or the 'third way') is a term that refers to a variety of attempts by social-democratic parties, in countries ranging from Germany, Italy and the Netherlands to the UK and New Zealand, to reconcile old-style social democracy with, at least, the electorally attractive aspects of neoliberalism. Although 'new' social democracy is imprecise and subject to a number of interpretations, certain characteristic themes can nevertheless be identified. The first of these is the belief that socialism, at least in the form of 'top-down' state intervention, is dead: there is no alternative to what Clause 4 of the UK Labour Party's constitution, rewritten in 1995, refers to as 'a dynamic market economy'. With this goes a general acceptance of globalization and the belief that capitalism has mutated into a 'knowledge economy', which places a premium on information technology, individual skills, and both labour and business flexibility. In this light, the state came to be seen not as a vehicle for wholesale social restructuring, but as a means of promoting international competitiveness; particularly by building up education and skills.

A further feature of 'new' social-democratic politics is that it has broken

with socialist egalitarianism (which is seen as a form of ‘levelling’) and embraced, instead, the liberal ideas of equality of opportunity and meritocracy. Neorevisionist politicians typically endorse welfare reform. They reject both the neoliberal emphasis on ‘standing on your own two feet’ and the ‘traditional’ social-democratic commitment to ‘cradle to grave’ welfare in favour of an essentially modern liberal belief in ‘helping people to help themselves’, or, as the former US president Bill Clinton put it, giving people ‘a hand up, not a hand out’. This has led to support for what has been called a ‘workfare state’, in which government provision in terms of benefits or education is conditional on individuals seeking work and becoming self-reliant. Critics of ‘new’ social democracy, on the other hand, argue either that it is contradictory, in that it simultaneously endorses the dynamism of the market and warns against its tendency to social disintegration, or that, far from being a centre-left project, it amounts to a shift to the right.

OTHER IDEOLOGICAL TRADITIONS

Liberalism, conservatism and socialism by no means exhaust the field of ideological politics. Other ideological traditions have nevertheless tended to develop either out of, or in opposition to, these core ideologies. Where they have drawn, to a significant extent, on liberal, conservative and/or socialist thinking, these other ideologies have a ‘cross-cutting’ character, in that they incorporate elements from ‘bigger’ ideological traditions. Nationalism and multiculturalism are examined in Chapters 6 and 8, respectively. The present chapter considers the following ideologies:

- anarchism
- fascism
- feminism
- green ideology
- cosmopolitanism
- religious fundamentalism
- populism.

Anarchism

Anarchism is unusual amongst political ideologies in that no anarchist party has ever succeeded in winning power, at least at national level. Nevertheless, anarchist movements were powerful in, for example, Spain, France, Russia and Mexico through to the early twentieth century, and anarchist ideas continue to fertilize political debate by challenging the conventional belief that law, government and the state are either wholesome or indispensable. Anarchist thinking has also been influential within the modern anti-capitalist, or anti-globalization, movement. The

central theme within anarchism is the belief that political authority in all its forms, and especially in the form of the state, is both evil and unnecessary (anarchy literally means ‘without rule’). Nevertheless, the anarchist preference for a stateless society in which free individuals manage their own affairs through voluntary agreement and cooperation has been developed on the basis of two rival traditions: liberal individualism, and socialist communitarianism. Anarchism can thus be thought of as a point of intersection between liberalism and socialism: a form of both ‘ultraliberalism’ and ‘ultrasocialism’.

The liberal case against the state is based on individualism, and the desire to maximize liberty and choice. Unlike liberals, individualist anarchists such as William Godwin (1756–1836) believed that free and rational human beings would be able to manage their affairs peacefully and spontaneously, government being merely a form of unwanted coercion. Modern individualists have usually looked to the market to explain how society would be regulated in the absence of state authority, developing a form of **anarcho-capitalism**, an extreme version of free-market economics. The more widely recognized anarchist tradition, however, draws on socialist ideas such as community, cooperation, equality and common ownership. Collectivist anarchists (sometimes called social anarchists) stress the capacity for social solidarity that arises from our sociable, gregarious and essentially cooperative natures. On this basis, the French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (see p. 395), for instance, developed what he called ‘**mutualism**’. Other anarchists, such as the Russian Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921), advanced a form of **anarcho-communism**, the central principles of which were common ownership, decentralization and workers’ self-management. Modern thinkers influenced by anarchism include Noam Chomsky (see p. 205) and the US libertarian and social ecologist Murray Bookchin (1921–2006).

Anarcho-capitalism: An anarchist tradition which holds that unregulated market competition can and should be applied to all social arrangements, making the state unnecessary.

Mutualism: A system of fair and equitable exchange, in which individuals or groups trade goods and services with one another without profiteering or exploitation.

Anarcho-communism: An anarchist tradition which takes common ownership to be the sole reliable basis for social solidarity, thereby linking statelessness to classlessness.

ADOLF HITLER (1889–1945)



Source: Getty Images/Heinrich Hoffmann/Stringer

German Nazi dictator. Hitler was the son of an Austrian customs official. He joined the German Worker's Party (later the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP), or Nazi Party) in 1919, becoming its leader in 1921. He was appointed Chancellor of Germany in 1933, and declared himself Führer (Leader) the following year, by which time he had established a one-party dictatorship. The central feature of Hitler's world-view, outlined in *Mein Kampf* ([1925] 1969), was his attempt to fuse expansionist German nationalism and virulent anti-Semitism into a theory of history in which there was an endless battle between the Germans and the Jews, who represented, respectively, the forces of good and evil. Hitler's policies contributed decisively to both the outbreak of World War II and the Holocaust.

Fascism

Whereas liberalism, conservatism and socialism are nineteenth-century ideologies, fascism is a child of the twentieth century. Some would say that it is specifically an interwar phenomenon. Although fascist beliefs can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, they were fused together and shaped by World War I and its aftermath and, in particular, by the potent mixture of war and revolution that characterized the period. The two principal manifestations of fascism were Mussolini's Fascist dictatorship in Italy in 1922–43, and Hitler's Nazi dictatorship in Germany in 1933–45. Forms of neofascism and neo-Nazism have also resurfaced in recent decades, taking advantage of the combination of economic crisis and political instability that often followed the collapse of communism or, more widely, of increased anxieties over immigration and multiculturalism.

In many respects, fascism constituted a revolt against the ideas and values that had dominated Western political thought since the French Revolution: in the words of the Italian Fascist slogan, '1789 is dead'. Values such as

rationalism, progress, freedom and equality were thus overturned in the name of struggle, leadership, power, heroism and war. In this sense, fascism has an 'anti-character'. It is defined largely by what it opposes: it is a form of anti-capitalism, anti-liberalism, anti-individualism, anti-communism, and so on. A core theme that, nevertheless, runs throughout fascism is the image of an organically unified national community. This is reflected in a belief in 'strength through unity'. The individual, in a literal sense, is nothing; individual identity must be absorbed entirely into that of the community or social group. The fascist ideal is that of the 'new man', a hero, motivated by duty, honour and self-sacrifice, prepared to dedicate his life to the glory of his nation or race, and to give unquestioning obedience to a supreme leader.

Not all fascists, however, think alike. Italian Fascism was essentially an extreme form of statism (see p. 71) that was based on unquestioning respect and absolute loyalty towards a 'totalitarian' state. As the Fascist philosopher Gentile (1875–1944) put it, 'everything for the state; nothing against the state; nothing outside the state'. German National Socialism (or Nazism), on the other hand, was constructed largely on the basis of racialism (see p. 142). Its two core theories were Aryanism (the belief that the German people constitute a 'master race' and are destined for world domination), and a virulent form of anti-Semitism (see p. 143) that portrayed the Jews as inherently evil, and aimed at their eradication. This latter belief found expression in the 'Final Solution'.

Feminism

Although feminist aspirations have been expressed in societies dating back to Ancient China, they were not underpinned by a developed political theory until the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's (see p. 49) *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* ([1792] 1985). Indeed, it was not until the emergence of the women's suffrage movement in the 1840s and 1850s that feminist ideas reached a wider audience, in the form of so-called 'first-wave feminism'. The achievement of female suffrage in most Western countries in the early twentieth century deprived the women's movement of its central goal and organizing principle. 'Second-wave feminism', however, emerged in the 1960s. This expressed the more radical, and sometimes revolutionary, demands of the growing Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). Feminist theories and doctrines are diverse, but their unifying feature is a common desire to enhance, through whatever means, the social role of women. The underlying themes of feminism are therefore, first, that society is characterized by sexual or gender inequality and, second, that this structure of male power can, and should, be

overturned.

Feminist thinking has traditionally been analysed in terms of a division between liberal, socialist and radical schools of thought. **Liberal feminists**, such as Wollstonecraft and Betty Friedan (see p. 288), have tended to understand female subordination in terms of the unequal distribution of rights and opportunities in society. This 'equal-rights feminism' is essentially reformist. It is concerned more with the reform of the 'public' sphere; that is, with enhancing the legal and political status of women, and improving their educational and career prospects, than with reordering 'private' or domestic life. In contrast, **socialist feminists** typically highlight the links between female subordination and the capitalist mode of production, drawing attention to the economic significance of women being confined to a family or domestic life where they, for example, relieve male workers of the burden of domestic labour, rear and help to educate the next generation of capitalist workers, and act as a reserve army of labour.

Liberal feminism: A feminist tradition whose core goal is equal access for women and men to the public realm, based on a belief of genderless personhood.

Socialist feminism: A feminist tradition that seeks to restructure economic life to achieve gender equality, based in links between patriarchy and capitalism.

However, the distinctive flavour of second-wave feminism results mainly from the emergence of a feminist critique that is not rooted in conventional political doctrines; namely, **radical feminism**. Radical feminists believe that gender divisions are the most fundamental and politically significant cleavages in society. In their view, all societies, historical and contemporary, are characterized by patriarchy (see p. 66), the institution whereby, as Kate Millett (1970) put it, 'that half of the population which is female is controlled by that half which is male'. Radical feminists therefore proclaim the need for a sexual revolution, a revolution that will, in particular, restructure personal, domestic and family life. The characteristic slogan of radical feminism is thus 'the personal is the political'. Only in its extreme form, however, does radical feminism portray men as 'the enemy', and proclaim the need for women to withdraw from male society, a stance sometimes expressed in the form of political lesbianism. However, since the 1970s, feminism has, in many ways, moved beyond the threefold division into liberal, socialist and radical traditions. Although 'new feminism' or 'third-wave feminism' are disparate, they tend to be characterized by doubts about the conventional

goal of gender equality, placing an emphasis instead on differences, both between women and men and between women themselves. (More recent developments in feminism are discussed in [Chapter 8](#), in connection with gender and identity.)

Radical feminism: A feminist tradition that aims to overthrow patriarchy through a radical transformation of all spheres of life, but especially 'the personal'.

KEY IDEAS



FEMINISM

Sex and gender: Feminists have traditionally drawn a sharp distinction between sex and gender. 'Sex', in this sense, refers to differences between females and males that are biologically based and therefore 'natural'. The most important sex differences are those that are linked to reproduction. 'Gender', on the other hand, is a cultural term; it refers to the different roles society ascribes to women and men. Gender differences are typically imposed through contrasting stereotypes of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. The central purpose of the sex/gender distinction is to counter the idea that 'biology is destiny', in the sense that a woman's physical make-up suits her to a subordinate and domestic role in society. (See [Chapter 8](#) for a fuller account of gender.)

Patriarchy: The concept of patriarchy is used within feminism to describe the power relationship between women and men. The term literally means 'rule by the father'. Some feminists employ patriarchy only in this specific and limited sense, to describe the structure of the family and the dominance of the husband/father within it. However, feminists believe that the dominance of the father within the family symbolizes male supremacy in all other institutions. Many would argue, moreover, that the patriarchal family lies at the heart of a systematic process of male domination, in that it reproduces male dominance in all other walks of life.

The personal is the political: Feminists have typically challenged the conventional belief that 'politics' is an activity that is confined to the affairs of government and other public bodies. Instead, they insist that politics takes place within all social

groups. Politics exists whenever and wherever conflict is found. Radical feminists have been the keenest opponents of the idea that politics stops at the front door. Since, in their view, gender divisions are the deepest and most abiding divisions in society, the political process originates in the family itself, and specifically in the process of conditioning that structures gender relations in all other arenas.

Gender equality: Feminism is often characterized as a movement for the achievement of gender equality. However, feminists have embraced contrasting notions of equality. Liberal feminists, for instance, have championed legal and political equality with men. They have supported an equal rights agenda which would enable women to compete in public life on equal terms with men, regardless of sex. Equality thus means equal access to the public realm. Socialist feminists, in contrast, argue that equal rights may be meaningless unless women also enjoy equality in terms of economic power. Radical feminists, for their part, are primarily concerned about equality in family and personal life.

The politics of difference: A key fault line within feminism is between those feminists who favour equality and those who instead embrace the idea of difference. The latter position is usually based on the essentialist assumption that women and men are fundamentally different at a psycho-biological level. The aggressive and competitive nature of men and the creative and empathetic character of women therefore reflect deeper hormonal and other genetic differences, rather than the structure of society. Women should recognize and celebrate the distinctive characteristics of the female sex; they should seek liberation *through* difference, as developed and fulfilled women, not as sexless 'persons'.

KEY THINKER 

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT (1759–97)



Source: Getty Images/Print Collector

UK social theorist and feminist. Deeply influenced by the democratic radicalism of Rousseau, Wollstonecraft developed the first systematic feminist critique some 50 years before the emergence of the female-suffrage movement. Her most important work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* ([1792] 1985), was influenced by Lockean liberalism, and it stressed the equal rights of women, especially the right to education, on the basis of the notion of 'personhood'. However, the work developed a more complex analysis of womanhood itself that is relevant to the concerns of contemporary feminism. Wollstonecraft was married to the anarchist William Godwin, and she was the mother of Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein*.

CONCEPT

Sustainable development

Sustainable development refers to 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Brundtland Report (1987)). However, there are contrasting models of sustainable development. So-called 'weak sustainability' takes economic growth to be desirable but simply insists that growth levels must be limited to ensure that environmental costs do not threaten the prosperity of future generations. *Strong* sustainability rejects the pro-growth implications of weak sustainability, and focuses on the need to preserve 'natural capital'.

Green ideology

Although green ideology, or ecologism (see p. 51), is usually seen as a new ideology that is linked to the emergence of the environmental movement since the late twentieth century, its roots can be traced back to the nineteenth-century revolt against industrialization. Green ideology therefore reflects concern about the damage done to the natural world by

the increasing pace of economic development (exacerbated since the second half of the twentieth century by the advent of nuclear technology, acid rain, ozone depletion, global warming, and so on), and anxiety about the declining quality of human existence and, ultimately, the survival of the human species. Such concerns are sometimes expressed through the vehicle of conventional ideologies. For instance, ecosocialism explains environmental destruction in terms of capitalism's rapacious desire for profit. Ecoconservatism links the cause of conservation to the desire to preserve traditional values and established institutions. And ecofeminism locates the origins of the ecological crisis in the system of male power, reflecting the fact that men are less sensitive than women to natural processes and the natural world.

However, what gives green ideology its radical edge is the fact that it offers an alternative to the **anthropocentric**, or human-centred, stance adopted by all other ideologies; it does not see the natural world simply as a resource available to satisfy human needs. By highlighting the importance of ecology, green ideology develops an ecocentric world-view that portrays the human species as merely part of nature. One of the most influential theories in this field is the Gaia hypothesis, advanced by James Lovelock (1979, 2002). This portrays the planet Earth as a living organism that is primarily concerned with its own survival. Others have expressed sympathy for such radical **holism** by drawing on the ideas of Eastern religions that emphasize the oneness of life, such as Taoism and Zen Buddhism (Capra, 1983). 'Shallow' or humanist ecologists, such as those in some environmental pressure groups, believe that an appeal to self-interest and common sense will persuade humankind to adopt ecologically sound policies and lifestyles, usually in line with the principle of sustainable development (see p. 49). 'Deep' ecologists, on the other hand, insist that nothing short of a fundamental reordering of political priorities, and a willingness to place the interests of the ecosystem before those of any individual species, will ultimately secure planetary and human survival. Members of both groups can be found in the 'anti-party' green parties that have sprung up in Germany, Austria and elsewhere in Europe since the 1970s.

Anthropocentrism: The belief that human needs and interests are of overriding moral and philosophical importance; the opposite of ecocentrism.

Holism: The belief that the whole is more important than its parts, implying that understanding is gained only by studying relationships among its parts.

**GREEN IDEOLOGY**

- **Ecology:** The central principle of all forms of green ideology is ecology. Ecology conflicts dramatically with the notion of humankind as 'the master of nature', and instead suggests that a delicate network of interrelationships that had hitherto been ignored sustains each human community, indeed the entire human species. Green thinkers argue that humankind currently faces the prospect of environmental disaster precisely because, in its passionate but blinkered pursuit of material wealth, it has upset the balance of nature, endangering the very ecosystems that make human life possible.
- **Shallow and deep ecology:** The most important distinction in green ideology is between what are termed 'shallow' ecology and 'deep' ecology. Shallow ecology is a green ideological perspective that harnesses the lessons of ecology to human needs and ends, and is associated with values such as sustainability and conservation. Deep ecology, in contrast, rejects anthropocentrism, or human-centredness, and gives priority to the maintenance of nature; it is associated with values such as biocentric equality, diversity and decentralization.
- **Holism:** Green thinkers have been attracted to the idea of holism as an alternative to the reductionist or mechanistic scientific theories that have sustained the delusion that the natural world is merely a resource available to satisfy human needs. Holism is the belief that the whole is more important than its parts. It implies that understanding is gained by studying relationships among the parts of a larger entity, rather than by treating the parts as entities in their own right. In their search for new paradigms of holistic thinking, green theorists have looked, variously, to quantum mechanics, non-Western religions and the Gaia hypothesis.
- **Sustainability:** Green thinkers who subscribe to shallow ecological perspectives typically argue that humankind will only survive and prosper if it recognizes that it is merely one element of a complex biosphere, and that only a healthy,

balanced biosphere will sustain human life. Policies and actions must therefore be judged by the principle of 'sustainability', the capacity of a system to maintain its health and continue in existence over time. Sustainability sets clear limits on human ambitions and material dreams because it requires that production does as little damage as possible to the fragile global ecosystem.

- **Rejection of conventional ethics:** Green ideology is concerned with extending moral thinking in a number of directions. This is because conventional ethical systems are clearly anthropocentric, orientated around the pleasure, needs and interests of human beings. In such philosophies, the non-human world is invested with value only to the extent that it satisfies human needs. In sharp contrast, deep ecologists, in particular, suggest that nature has value in its own right; that is, intrinsic value. From this perspective, environmental ethics have nothing to do with human instrumentality, and cannot be articulated through the extension of human values to the non-human world.
- **Postmaterialism:** Green thinkers have advanced a critique of materialism and consumerism that emphasizes their negative implications for both resource depletion and personal well-being. As a priority, humankind must therefore liberate itself from a 'having' attitude of mind. With this in mind, green thinkers have often advocated a shift in emphasis from 'having' to 'being'. 'Being' represents satisfaction that is derived from experience and sharing, leading to personal growth and even spiritual awareness. The key feature of 'being' as an attitude of mind is that it seeks to transcend the self, or individual ego, and to recognize that each person is intrinsically linked to all other things, and, indeed, to the universe itself.

CONCEPT

Ecologism

Ecology (a term first used by Ernst Haeckel in 1873) is the study of the relationship between living organisms and their environment. It thus draws attention to the network of relationships that sustain all forms of life. Ecologism is a political doctrine or ideology that is constructed on the basis of ecological

assumptions, notably about the essential link between humankind and the natural world: humans are part of nature, not its 'masters'. Ecologism is sometimes distinguished from environmentalism, in that the former implies the adoption of a biocentric perspective, while the latter is concerned with protecting nature, ultimately for human benefit.

Cosmopolitanism

Although cosmopolitan ideas can be traced back to the Cynics of Ancient Greece and the Stoics of Ancient Rome, cosmopolitanism has only been treated as an ideological tradition in its own right since the 1990s. This occurred as the moral, political and cultural implications of growing global interconnectedness became increasingly apparent. In that sense, cosmopolitanism can be viewed as the ideological expression of globalization (although the relationship between the two is complex, cosmopolitans often calling for radical changes in the currently dominant forms of globalization). In a literal sense, cosmopolitanism means a belief in a *cosmopolis* or 'world state'. However, such 'political' cosmopolitanism, which is reflected in the quest to establish global political institutions, has limited relevance to modern cosmopolitan thinking, due to its association with the unfashionable idea of **world government**. Modern cosmopolitanism therefore tends to have a moral or cultural character.

World government: The idea of all of humankind united under one common political authority, whether a unitary world state with supranational authority or a federal body that shares sovereignty with nation-states.

'Moral' cosmopolitanism, the notion that underpins much anti-globalization activism, is the belief that the world constitutes a single moral community. This implies that people have obligations (potentially) towards all other people in the world, regardless of nationality, religion, ethnicity, and so forth. Such ethical thinking is based on the core idea that the individual, rather than any political community, is the principal focus of moral concern. Most commonly, this is asserted through the doctrine of human rights (see p. 304). Nevertheless, moral cosmopolitanism has taken contrasting liberal and socialist forms.

Liberal cosmopolitanism has been expressed in two ways. The first is the attempt to universalize civic and political rights, especially classic 'liberal' rights such as the right to life, liberty and property, freedom of expression, and freedom from arbitrary arrest. The second form of liberal cosmopolitanism derives from economic liberalism, and places particular

stress on attempts to universalize market society, seen as a means of widening individual freedom and promoting material advancement. In marked contrast, socialist cosmopolitanism is rooted in the Marxist belief that proletarian class solidarity has a transnational character. Modern versions of such thinking are, nevertheless, more likely to be based on the idea of economic and social rights than on Marxist analysis. The key theme in this form of cosmopolitanism is the quest for global social justice, implying both a substantial redistribution of wealth from the global North to the global South.

Such thinking is often associated with ‘cultural’ cosmopolitanism, which highlights the extent to which people’s values and lifestyles have been reconfigured as a result of intensified global interconnectedness. In this sense, political community is in the process of being redefined as people come to think of themselves as ‘global citizens’, rather than merely citizens of a particular state. The supposed evidence for this is the shift from nationalism to multiculturalism, or, at least, a form of multiculturalism that emphasizes hybridity and cultural mixing, or ‘mongrelization’ (Waldron, 1995). However, although cosmopolitanism has had a growing impact on ethical thinking, it has had only a limited impact in terms of cultural restructuring and has certainly not displaced nationalism as an ideological force.

CONCEPT

Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism refers to a style of thought in which certain principles are recognized as essential ‘truths’ which have unchallengeable and overriding authority. Substantive fundamentalisms have little or nothing in common, except that their supporters tend to evince an earnestness or fervour born out of doctrinal certainty. Although it is usually associated with religion and the literal truth of sacred texts, fundamentalism can also be found in political creeds. The term is controversial because it is often used pejoratively, to imply inflexibility, dogmatism and authoritarianism.

Religious fundamentalism

Religious fundamentalism has been a growing political force since the 1970s. Its most politically significant form has been Islamic fundamentalism, sometimes called Islamism (see p. 191). Often associated with the 1979 ‘Islamic Revolution’ in Iran, Islamic fundamentalism has been evident throughout the Middle East and parts of north Africa and

Asia. However, forms of Christian fundamentalism (USA), Hindu fundamentalism and Sikh fundamentalism (India), and even Buddhist fundamentalism (Sri Lanka and Myanmar) have also emerged. It is difficult to generalize about the causes of this fundamentalist upsurge, because in different parts of the world it has taken different doctrinal forms and displayed different ideological features. It is nevertheless clear that fundamentalism arises in deeply troubled societies, particularly societies afflicted by an actual or perceived crisis of identity. Among the factors that have contributed to such crises since the final decades of the twentieth century have been the spread of **secularism** and the apparent weakening of society's 'moral fabric', and the search in postcolonial states for a non-Western and perhaps anti-Western political identity.

Secularism: The belief that religion should not intrude into secular (worldly) affairs, usually reflected in the desire to separate the state from institutionalized religion.

The core idea of religious fundamentalism is that religion cannot and should not be confined to the private sphere; instead, it finds its highest and proper expression in the politics of popular mobilization and social regeneration. As Ayatollah Khomeini (see p. 191) put it, 'politics is religion'. This implies that religious values and beliefs constitute the organizing principles of public existence, including law, social conduct and the economy as well as politics. While some claim that such a tendency can be identified in all of the world's major religions, others argue that it is restricted to Islam, Protestant Christianity, and possibly Catholicism, as only these religious traditions have the capacity to throw up comprehensive programmes of political renewal. In the case of Islam, this tendency may be particularly pronounced, as Islam has never been just a 'religion' as such; rather, it is a complete way of life, with instructions on moral, political and economic behaviour for both individuals and nations alike. In this light, politics may be more integral to Islam than it is to, say, Christianity, which has traditionally relied on the distinction between God and Caesar (representing human government) to separate the holy from the worldly. As Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and Buddhist forms of fundamentalism tend to be more narrowly concerned with helping to clarify or redefine national or ethnic identity, they are perhaps better classified as examples of ethnic nationalism (discussed in [Chapter 6](#)).

Populism

The period since the early 2000s, and especially since the global financial crisis of 2007–09, has sometimes been dubbed the 'age of populism', associated with the emergence of figures such as Donald Trump (USA),

Marine Le Pen (France), Geert Wilders (Netherlands), Rafael Correa (Ecuador) and Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil), and movements including Syriza (Greece) and the Five Star Movement (Italy). Populism, nevertheless, is not a new political phenomenon. Its origins are usually traced back to the late nineteenth century and the advent of the so-called *Narodniki* (a term derived from the expression ‘Going to the people’) in Russia and the People’s Party (also called the Populist Party) in USA, with a further wave of populism taking place in Latin America in the mid-twentieth century. However, much confusion surrounds the definition of populism and the nature of the political phenomenon that it represents. At different times it has been treated as an ideology, a movement, a syndrome and a political style.

CONCEPT

Populism

Populism (from the Latin *populus*, meaning ‘the people’) has been used to describe both distinctive political movements and a particular tradition of political thought. Movements or parties described as populist have been characterized by their claim to support the common people in the face of ‘corrupt’ economic or political elites. As a political tradition, populism reflects the belief that the instincts and wishes of the people provide the principal legitimate guide to political action. Populist politicians, therefore, make a direct appeal to the people, and claim to give expression to their deepest hopes and fears.

Viewed as an ideology, the central feature of populism is the idea that society is divided into two warring groups: the ‘pure’ people and the ‘corrupt’ elite. From the populist perspective, ‘the people’ constitute the only source of moral worth in politics, their instincts and wishes providing the sole legitimate guide to political action. However, not only is this conception of the people highly selective, excluding all those who are not deemed to be ‘real people’, but the people are also taken to be strictly unified and homogeneous. Populism is therefore always anti-pluralist in character, putting it at odds with liberalism in general and liberal democracy in particular. Nevertheless, populist hostility towards liberalism also has other sources. Not only does populism’s image of a society starkly divided into rival homogeneous groups – the people and the elite – clash starkly with liberalism’s emphasis on the individual, but populism has also been viewed as a cultural backlash against the seemingly relentless advance of liberal social values (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). The ‘corrupt’

elite(s) against which populists rail, and the institutions through which they rule, are therefore commonly thought to have an essentially liberal character.



Source: Getty Images/Milos Bicanski /Stringer

Alexis Tsipras greets supporters of his left-wing populist party, Syriza, in Athens, 2012. Tsipras is one of a number of successful populist figures and parties to have emerged in recent years.

Although populists are unified in portraying society in terms of a battle between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’, left-wing and right-wing populists usually invest these terms with quite different meanings. Left-wing populists typically conceive of the people in class terms, and so tend to prioritize socio-economic concerns such as poverty, inequality and job insecurity. This form of populism is sometimes called egalitarian populism. Right-wing populists, by contrast, typically view the people in narrower and often ethnically restricted terms. As their focus is primarily on matters related to identity, they tend to prioritize sociocultural concerns such as immigration, crime and corruption. Right-wing populism is sometimes divided into forms that place a particular emphasis on the culture and interests of the nation (national populism) and forms that primarily stress the imposition of social and moral order, often linked to cynicism about individual rights (authoritarian populism).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are all political ideas

2. In what ways do the Marxist and mainstream concepts of ideology differ?
3. Why do liberals reject unlimited freedom?
4. What forms of equality do liberals support, and which do they reject?
5. To what extent, and with what implications, do conservatives favour pragmatism over principle?
6. Is conservatism merely ruling class ideology?
7. To what extent is socialism defined by a rejection of capitalism?
8. Is social democracy really a form of socialism?
9. Do anarchists demand the impossible?
10. Are all fascists racists, or only some?
11. To what extent is feminism compatible with liberalism?
12. How does green ideology challenge conventional approaches to politics?
13. Could cosmopolitanism ever displace nationalism?
14. To what extent is populism associated with a coherent set of political ideas?



FURTHER READING

Freeden, M., L. Tower Sargent and M. Stears, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (2015). A comprehensive study of the nature of political ideologies and their main manifestations.

Heywood, A., *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* (6th edn) (2017). An accessible, up-to-date and comprehensive guide to the major ideological traditions.

Good introductions to particular ideologies include the following: Freeden (2015) on liberalism, O'Sullivan (1976) on conservatism, Wright (1987) on socialism, Giddens (2001) on the 'third way', Marshall (1991) on anarchism, Laqueur (1979) on fascism, Bryson (2016) on feminism, Dobson (2007) on green politics, Appiah (2007) on cosmopolitanism, Marty and Appleby (1993) on religious fundamentalism, and Muller (2017) on populism.



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CHAPTER 3

Politics and the State

'The purpose of the State is always the same: to limit the individual, to tame him, to subordinate him, to subjugate him.'

MAX STIRNER, *The Ego And His Own* (1845)

PREVIEW

The shadow of the state falls on almost every human activity. From education to economic management, from social welfare to sanitation, and from domestic order to external defence, the state shapes and controls; where it does not shape or control it regulates, supervises, authorizes or proscribes. Even those aspects of life usually thought of as personal or private (marriage, divorce, abortion, religious worship, and so on) are ultimately subject to the authority of the state. It is not surprising, therefore, that politics is often understood as the study of the state, the analysis of its institutional organizations, the evaluation of its impact on society, and so on. Ideological debate and party politics, certainly, tend to revolve around the issue of the proper function or role of the state: what should be done by the state and what should be left to private individuals and associations? The nature of state power has thus become one of the central concerns of political analysis. This chapter examines the features that are usually associated with the state, from both a domestic and an international perspective. It considers the issue of the nature of state power, and, in the process, touches on some of the deepest and most abiding divisions in political theory. This leads to a discussion of the contrasting roles and responsibilities of the state and the different forms that states have assumed. Finally, it looks at whether, in the light of globalization and other developments, the state is losing its central importance in politics.

KEY ISSUES

- What is the state, and why does it play such a crucial role in politics?
- How has state power been analysed and explained?
- Is the state a force for good or a force for evil?
- What roles have been assigned to the state? How have responsibilities been apportioned between the state and civil society?
- To what extent does politics now operate outside or beyond the state?

DEFINING THE STATE

Origins and development of the state

The state is a historical institution: it emerged in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe as a system of centralized rule that succeeded in subordinating all other institutions and groups, including (and especially) the Church, bringing an end to the competing and overlapping authority systems that had characterized Medieval Europe. By establishing the principle of territorial sovereignty (see p. 59), the Peace of Westphalia (1648), concluded at the end of the Thirty Years' War, is often taken to have formalized the modern notion of statehood, by establishing the state as the principal actor in domestic and international affairs.

CONCEPT

The state

The state is a political association that establishes sovereign jurisdiction within defined territorial borders, and exercises authority through a set of permanent institutions. These institutions are those that are recognizably 'public', in that they are responsible for the collective organization of communal life, and are funded at the public's expense. The state thus embraces the various institutions of government, but it also extends to the courts, nationalized industries, social security system, and so forth; it can be identified with the entire 'body politic'.

There is less agreement, however, about why the state came into existence. According to Charles Tilly (1990), for instance, the central factor that explains the development of the modern state was its ability to fight wars. In this view, the transformation in the scale and nature of military encounters that was brought about from the sixteenth century onwards (through, for instance, the introduction of gun powder, the use of

organized infantry and artillery, and the advent of standing armies) not only greatly increased the coercive power that rulers could wield, but also forced states to extend their control over their populations by developing more extensive systems of taxation and administration. As Tilly (1975) thus put it, 'War made the state, and the state made war'. Marxists, in contrast, have explained the emergence of the state largely in economic terms, the state's origins being traced back to the transition from feudalism to capitalism, with the state essentially being a tool used by the emerging bourgeois class (Engels, [1884] 1972). Michael Mann (1993), for his part, offered an account of the emergence of the state that stresses the state's capacity to combine ideological, economic, military and political forms of power (sometimes called the 'IEMP model').

The state nevertheless continued to evolve in the light of changing circumstances. Having developed into the **nation-state** during the nineteenth century, and then going through a process of gradual democratization, the state acquired wider economic and social responsibilities during the twentieth century, and especially in the post-1945 period, only for these, in many cases, to be 'rolled back' from the 1980s and 1990s. The European state model, furthermore, spread to other lands and other continents. This occurred as the process of decolonization accelerated in the decades following World War II, independence implying the achievement of sovereign statehood. One result of this process was a rapid growth in UN membership. From its original 51 member states in 1945, the UN grew to 127 members by 1970, and reached 193 members by 2011 (with the recognition of South Sudan). The state has therefore become the universal form of political organization around the world.

Nation-state: A sovereign political association within which citizenship and nationality overlap; one nation within a single state (see p. 131).

Approaches to the state

Nevertheless, the term 'state' has been used to refer to a bewildering range of things: a collection of institutions, a territorial unit, a philosophical idea, an instrument of coercion or oppression, and so on. This confusion stems, in part, from the fact that the state has been understood in four quite different ways; from an **idealist** perspective, a functionalist perspective, an organizational perspective and an international perspective.

Idealism: A view of politics that emphasizes the importance of morality and ideals; philosophical idealism implies that ideas are more 'real' than the material world.

The *idealist* approach to the state is most clearly reflected in the writings

of G. W. F. Hegel (see p. 60). Hegel identified three ‘moments’ of social existence: the family, civil society and the state. Within the family, he argued, a ‘particular altruism’ operates that encourages people to set aside their own interests for the good of their children or elderly relatives. In contrast, civil society was seen as a sphere of ‘universal egoism’ in which individuals place their own interests before those of others. Hegel conceived of the state as an ethical community underpinned by mutual sympathy – ‘universal altruism’. The drawback of idealism, however, is that it fosters an uncritical reverence for the state and, by defining the state in ethical terms, fails to distinguish clearly between institutions that are part of the state and those that are outside the state.

Functionalist approaches to the state focus on the role or purpose of state institutions. The central function of the state is invariably seen as the maintenance of social order (see p. 57), the state being defined as that set of institutions that uphold order and deliver social stability. Such an approach has, for example, been adopted by neo-Marxists (see p. 64), who have been inclined to see the state as a mechanism through which class conflict is ameliorated to ensure the long-term survival of the capitalist system. The weakness of the functionalist view of the state, however, is that it tends to associate any institution that maintains order (such as the family, mass media, trade unions and the church) with the state itself. This is why, unless there is a statement to the contrary, an organizational approach to the definition of the state is adopted throughout this book.

The *organizational* view defines the state as the apparatus of government in its broadest sense; that is, as that set of institutions that are recognizably ‘public’, in that they are responsible for the collective organization of social existence and are funded at the public’s expense. The virtue of this definition is that it distinguishes clearly between the state and **civil society**. The state comprises the various institutions of government: the bureaucracy (see p. 374), the military, the police, the courts, the social security system, and so on; it can be identified with the entire ‘body politic’. The organizational approach allows us to talk about ‘rolling forward’ or ‘rolling back’ the state, in the sense of expanding or contracting the responsibilities of the state, and enlarging or diminishing its institutional machinery.

Civil society: A private sphere of autonomous groups and associations, independent from state or public authority (see p. 4). In this light, it is possible to identify five key features of the state:

CONCEPT 

Sovereignty

Sovereignty, in its simplest sense, is the principle of absolute and unlimited power. However, sovereignty can be understood in different ways. Legal sovereignty refers to supreme legal authority, defined in terms of the 'right' to command compliance, while political sovereignty refers to absolute political power, defined in terms of the 'ability' to command compliance. Internal sovereignty is the notion of supreme power/authority within the state (for example, parliamentary sovereignty: see p. 300). External sovereignty relates to a state's place in the international order and its capacity to act as an independent and autonomous entity.

- The state is sovereign. It exercises absolute and unrestricted power, in that it stands above all other associations and groups in society. Thomas Hobbes (see p. 61) conveyed the idea of sovereignty (see p. 59) by portraying the state as a 'leviathan', a gigantic monster, usually represented as a sea creature.
- State institutions are recognizably 'public', in contrast to the 'private' institutions of civil society. Public bodies are responsible for making and enforcing collective decisions, while private bodies, such as families, private businesses and trade unions, exist to satisfy individual interests.
- The state is an exercise in legitimation. The decisions of the state are usually (although not necessarily) accepted as binding on the members of society because, it is claimed, they are made in the public interest, or for the common good; the state supposedly reflects the permanent interests of society.
- The state is an instrument of domination. State authority is backed up by coercion; the state must have the capacity to ensure that its laws are obeyed and that transgressors are punished. For Max Weber (see p. 81), the state was defined by its monopoly of the means of 'legitimate violence'.
- The state is a territorial association. The jurisdiction of the state is geographically defined, and it encompasses all those who live within the state's borders, whether they are citizens or non-citizens. On the international stage, the state is therefore regarded (at least, in theory) as an autonomous entity.

The *international* approach to the state views it primarily as an actor on the world stage; indeed, as the basic 'unit' of international politics. This highlights the dualistic structure of the state; the fact that it has two faces,

one looking outwards and the other looking inwards. Whereas the previous definitions are concerned with the state's inward-looking face, its relations with the individuals and groups that live within its borders, and its ability to maintain domestic order, the international view deals with the state's outward-looking face, its relations with other states and, therefore, its ability to provide protection against external attack. The classic definition of the state in international law is found in the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of the State (1933). According to Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention, the state has four features:

- a defined territory
- a permanent population
- an effective government
- the capacity to enter into relations with other states.

This approach to the state brings it very close to the notion of a 'country'. The main difference between how the state is understood by political philosophers and sociologists, and how it is understood by international relations (IR) scholars is that, while the former treat civil society as separate from the state, the latter treat civil society as part of the state, in that it encompasses not only an effective government, but also a permanent population. For some, the international approach views the state essentially as a legal person, in which case statehood depends on formal recognition by other states or international bodies. In this view, the United Nations (UN) is widely accepted as the body that, by granting full membership, determines when a new state has come into existence. However, in order to assess the significance of the state, and explore its vital relationship to politics, two key issues have to be addressed. These deal with the nature of state power and the roles and responsibilities the state has assumed and should assume.

KEY THINKER



GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL (1770–1831)



Source: SUPERSTOCK

German philosopher. Hegel was the founder of modern idealism

and developed the notion that consciousness and material objects are, in fact, unified. In *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), he sought to develop a rational system that would substitute for traditional Christianity by interpreting the entire process of human history, and indeed the universe itself, in terms of the progress of absolute Mind towards self-realization. In his view, history is, in essence, a march of the human spirit towards a determinate endpoint. His major political work, *Philosophy of Right* (1821), portrays the state as an ethical ideal and the highest expression of human freedom. Hegel's work had a considerable impact on Marx and other so-called 'young Hegelians'. It also shaped the ideas of liberals such as T. H. Green (1836–82), and influenced fascist thought.

DEBATING THE STATE

Rival theories of the state

What is the nature of state power, and whose interests does the state represent? From this perspective, the state is an 'essentially contested' concept. There are various rival theories of the state, each of which offers a different account of its origins, development and impact on society. Indeed, controversy about the nature of state power has increasingly dominated modern political analysis and goes to the heart of ideological and theoretical disagreements in the discipline. These relate to questions about whether, for example, the state is autonomous and independent of society, or whether it is essentially a product of society, a reflection of the broader distribution of power or resources. Moreover, does the state serve the common or collective good, or is it biased in favour of privileged groups or a dominant class? Similarly, is the state a positive or constructive force, with responsibilities that should be enlarged, or is it a negative or destructive entity that must be constrained or, perhaps, smashed altogether? Four contrasting theories of the state can be identified as follows:

- the pluralist state
- the capitalist state
- the leviathan state
- the patriarchal state.

The pluralist state

The **pluralist** theory of the state has a very clear liberal lineage. It stems from the belief that the state acts as an 'umpire' or 'referee' in society. This view has also dominated mainstream political analysis, accounting for a tendency, at least within Anglo-American thought, to discount the state

and state organizations and focus instead on ‘government’. Indeed, it is not uncommon in this tradition for ‘the state’ to be dismissed as an abstraction, with institutions such as the courts, the civil service and the military being seen as independent actors in their own right, rather than as elements of a broader state machine. Nevertheless, this approach is possible only because it is based on underlying, and often unacknowledged, assumptions about state neutrality. The state can be ignored only because it is seen as an impartial arbiter or referee that can be bent to the will of the government of the day.

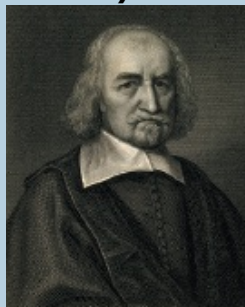
Pluralism: A belief in, or commitment to, diversity or multiplicity; or the belief that power in modern societies is widely and evenly distributed (see p. 5).

The origins of this view of the state can be traced back to the social-contract theories (see p. 62) of thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke (see p. 30). The principal concern of such thinkers was to examine the grounds of **political obligation**, the grounds on which the individual is obliged to obey and respect the state. They argued that the state had arisen out of a voluntary agreement, or social contract, made by individuals who recognized that only the establishment of a sovereign power could safeguard them from the insecurity, disorder and brutality of the **state of nature**. Without a state, individuals abuse, exploit and enslave one another; with a state, order and civilized existence are guaranteed and liberty is protected. As Locke put it, ‘where there is no law there is no freedom’.

Political obligation: The duty of the citizen towards the state; the basis of the state’s right to rule.

KEY THINKER

THOMAS HOBBES (1588–1679)



Source: Wellcome Collection

English political philosopher. Hobbes was the son of a minor clergyman who subsequently abandoned his family. He became tutor to the exiled Prince of Wales Charles Stewart, and lived

under the patronage of the Cavendish family. Writing at a time of uncertainty and civil strife, precipitated by the English Revolution, Hobbes developed the first comprehensive theory of nature and human behaviour since Aristotle (see p. 6). His classic work, *Leviathan* (1651), discussed the grounds of political obligation and undoubtedly reflected the impact of the Civil War. It provided a defence for absolutist government but, by appealing to reasoned argument in the form of the social contract, also disappointed advocates of **divine right**.

State of nature: A society devoid of political authority and of formal (legal) checks on the individual; usually employed as a theoretical device.

Divine right: The doctrine that earthly rulers are chosen by God and thus wield unchallengeable authority; a defence for monarchical absolutism.

In liberal theory, the state is thus seen as a neutral arbiter amongst the competing groups and individuals in society; it is an ‘umpire’ or ‘referee’ that is capable of protecting each citizen from the encroachments of fellow citizens. The neutrality of the state reflects the fact that the state acts in the interests of all citizens, and therefore represents the common good or public interest. In Hobbes’ view, stability and order could be secured only through the establishment of an absolute and unlimited state, with power that could be neither challenged, nor questioned. In other words, he held that citizens are confronted by a stark choice between absolutism (see p. 112) and **anarchy**. Locke, on the other hand, developed a more typically liberal defence of the limited state. In his view, the purpose of the state is very specific: it is restricted to the defence of a set of ‘natural’ or God-given individual rights; namely, ‘life, liberty and property’. This establishes a clear distinction between the responsibilities of the state (essentially, the maintenance of domestic order and the protection of property) and the responsibilities of individual citizens (usually seen as the realm of civil society). Moreover, since the state may threaten natural rights as easily as it may uphold them, citizens must enjoy some form of protection against the state, which Locke believed could be delivered only through the mechanisms of constitutional and representative government.

Anarchy: Literally, ‘without rule’; anarchy is often used pejoratively to suggest instability, or even chaos.

These ideas were developed in the twentieth century into the pluralist theory of the state. As a theory of society, pluralism asserts that, within liberal democracies, power is widely and evenly dispersed. As a theory of

the state, pluralism holds that the state is neutral, insofar as it is susceptible to the influence of various groups and interests, and all social classes. The state is not biased in favour of any particular interest or group, and it does not have an interest of its own that is separate from those of society. As Schwarzmantel (1994) put it, the state is 'the servant of society and not its master'. The state can thus be portrayed as a 'pincushion' that passively absorbs pressures and forces exerted upon it. Two key assumptions underlie this view. The first is that the state is effectively subordinate to government. Non-elected state bodies (the civil service, the judiciary, the police, the military, and so on) are strictly impartial and are subject to the authority of their political masters. The state apparatus is, therefore, thought to conform to the principles of public service and political accountability. The second assumption is that the democratic process is meaningful and effective. In other words, party competition and interest-group activity ensure that the government of the day remains sensitive and responsive to public opinion. Ultimately, therefore, the state is only a weather vane that is blown in whichever direction the public-at-large dictates.

FOCUS ON ...

SOCIAL-CONTRACT THEORY

A social contract is a voluntary agreement made amongst individuals through which an organized society, or state, is brought into existence. Used as a theoretical device by thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau (see p. 98), the social contract has been revived by modern theorists such as John Rawls (see p. 44). The social contract is seldom regarded as a historical act. Rather, it is used as a means of demonstrating the value of government and the grounds of political obligation; social-contract theorists wish individuals to act as if they had concluded the contract themselves. In its classic form, social-contract theory has three elements:

- The image of a hypothetical stateless society (a 'state of nature') is established. Unconstrained freedom means that life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short' (Hobbes).
- Individuals therefore seek to escape from the state of nature by entering into a social contract, recognizing that only a sovereign power can secure order and stability.
- The social contract obliges citizens to respect and obey the state, ultimately in gratitude for the stability and security that

only a system of political rule can deliver.

Modern pluralists, however, have often adopted a more critical view of the state, termed the neopluralist (see p. 63) theory of the state. Theorists such as Robert Dahl (see p. 275), Charles Lindblom and J. K. Galbraith (see p. 176) have come to accept that modern industrialized states are both more complex and less responsive to popular pressures than classical pluralism suggested. Neopluralists, for instance, have acknowledged that business enjoys a 'privileged position' in relation to government that other groups clearly cannot rival. In *Politics and Markets* (1980), Lindblom pointed out that, as the major investor and largest employer in society, business is bound to exercise considerable sway over any government, whatever its ideological leanings or manifesto commitments. Moreover, neopluralists have accepted that the state can, and does, forge its own sectional interests. In this way, a state elite, composed of senior civil servants, judges, police chiefs, military leaders, and so on, may be seen to pursue either the bureaucratic interests of their sector of the state, or the interests of client groups. Indeed, if the state is regarded as a political actor in its own right, it can be viewed as a powerful (perhaps the most powerful) interest group in society. This line of argument encouraged Eric Nordlinger (1981) to develop a state-centred model of liberal democracy, based on 'the autonomy of the democratic state'.

CONCEPT

Neopluralism

Neopluralism is a style of social theorizing that remains faithful to pluralist values while recognizing the need to revise or update classical pluralism in the light of, for example, elite, Marxist and New Right theories. Although neopluralism embraces a broad range of perspectives and positions, certain central themes can be identified. First, it takes account of modernizing trends, such as the emergence of postindustrial society. Second, while capitalism is preferred to socialism, free-market economic doctrines are usually regarded as obsolete. Third, Western democracies are seen as 'deformed polyarchies', in which major corporations exert disproportionate influence.

The capitalist state

The Marxist notion of a capitalist state offers a clear alternative to the pluralist image of the state as a neutral arbiter or umpire. Marxists have typically argued that the state cannot be understood separately from the

economic structure of society. This view has usually been understood in terms of the classic formulation that the state is nothing but an instrument of class oppression: the state emerges out of, and in a sense reflects, the class system. Nevertheless, a rich debate has taken place within Marxist theory in recent years that has moved the Marxist theory of the state a long way from this classic formulation. In many ways, the scope to revise Marxist attitudes towards the state stems from ambiguities that can be found in Marx's (see p. 40) own writings.

Marx did not develop a systematic or coherent theory of the state. In a general sense, he believed that the state is part of a 'superstructure' that is determined or conditioned by the economic 'base', which can be seen as the real foundation of social life. However, the precise relationship between the base and the superstructure, and in this case that between the state and the capitalist mode of production, is unclear. Two theories of the state can be identified in Marx's writings. The first is expressed in his often-quoted dictum from *The Communist Manifesto* ([1848] 1967): 'The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie'. From this perspective, the state is clearly dependent on society and entirely dependent on its economically dominant class, which in capitalism is the **bourgeoisie**. Lenin (see p. 100) thus described the state starkly as 'an instrument for the oppression of the exploited class'.

Bourgeoisie: A Marxist term, denoting the ruling class of a capitalist society, the owners of productive wealth.

A second, more complex and subtle, theory of the state can nevertheless be found in Marx's analysis of the revolutionary events in France between 1848 and 1851, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* ([1852] 1963). Marx suggested that the state could enjoy what has come to be seen as 'relative autonomy' from the class system, the Napoleonic state being capable of imposing its will upon society, acting as an 'appalling parasitic body'. If the state did articulate the interests of any class, it was not those of the bourgeoisie, but those of the most populous class in French society, the smallholding peasantry. Although Marx did not develop this view in detail, it is clear that, from this perspective, the autonomy of the state is only relative, in that the state appears to mediate between conflicting classes, and so maintains the class system itself in existence.

Both these theories differ markedly from the liberal and, later, pluralist models of state power. In particular, they emphasize that the state cannot be understood except in a context of unequal class power, and that the state arises out of, and reflects, capitalist society, by acting either as an

instrument of oppression wielded by the dominant class, or, more subtly, as a mechanism through which class antagonisms are ameliorated. Nevertheless, Marx's attitude towards the state was not entirely negative. He argued that the state could be used constructively during the transition from capitalism to communism in the form of the 'revolutionary dictatorship of the **proletariat**'. The overthrow of capitalism would see the destruction of the bourgeois state and the creation of an alternative, proletarian one.

Proletariat: A Marxist term, denoting a class that subsists through the sale of its labour power; strictly speaking, the proletariat is not equivalent to the working class.

CONCEPT

Neo-Marxism

Neo-Marxism (sometimes termed 'modern' or 'Western' Marxism) refers to attempts to revise or recast the classical ideas of Marx while remaining faithful to certain Marxist principles or aspects of Marxist methodology. Neo-Marxists typically refuse to accept that Marxism enjoys a monopoly of the truth, and have thus looked to Hegelian philosophy, anarchism, liberalism, feminism and even rational-choice theory. Although still concerned about social injustice, neo-Marxists reject the primacy of economics over other factors and, with it, the notion that history has a predictable character.

In describing the state as a proletarian 'dictatorship', Marx utilized the first theory of the state, seeing the state as an instrument through which the economically dominant class (by then, the proletariat) could repress and subdue other classes. All states, from this perspective, are class dictatorships. The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' was seen as a means of safeguarding the gains of the revolution by preventing counter-revolution mounted by the dispossessed bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, Marx did not see the state as a necessary or enduring social formation. He predicted that, as class antagonisms faded, the state would 'wither away', meaning that a fully communist society would also be stateless. Since the state emerged out of the class system, once the class system has been abolished, the state, quite simply, loses its reason for existence.

Marx's ambivalent heritage has provided modern Marxists, or neo-Marxists, with considerable scope to further the analysis of state power. This was also encouraged by the writings of Antonio Gramsci (see p. 198), who emphasized the degree to which the domination of the ruling class is

achieved by ideological manipulation, rather than just open coercion. In this view, bourgeois domination is maintained largely through ‘hegemony’ (see p. 197): that is, intellectual leadership or cultural control, with the state playing an important role in the process.

Since the 1960s, Marxist theorizing about the state has been dominated by rival instrumentalist and structuralist views of the state. In *The State in Capitalist Society* ([1969] 2009), Miliband portrayed the state as an agent or instrument of the ruling class, stressing the extent to which the state elite is disproportionately drawn from the ranks of the privileged and propertied. The bias of the state in favour of capitalism is therefore derived from the overlap of social backgrounds between, on the one hand, civil servants and other public officials, and, on the other, bankers, business leaders and captains of industry. Nicos Poulantzas, in *Political Power and Social Classes* (1968), dismissed this sociological approach, and emphasized instead the degree to which the structure of economic and social power exerts a constraint on state autonomy. This view suggests that the state cannot but act to perpetuate the social system in which it operates. In the case of the capitalist state, its role is to serve the long-term interests of capitalism, even though these actions may be resisted by sections of the capitalist class itself. Neo-Marxists have increasingly seen the state as the terrain on which the struggle amongst interests, groups and classes is conducted. Rather than being an ‘instrument’ wielded by a dominant group or ruling class, the state is thus a dynamic entity that reflects the balance of power within society at any given time, and the ongoing struggle for hegemony.

The leviathan state

The image of the state as a ‘leviathan’ (in effect, a self-serving monster intent on expansion and aggrandizement) is one associated in modern politics with the New Right. Such a view is rooted in early or classical liberalism and, in particular, a commitment to a radical form of individualism (see p. 179). The New Right, or at least its neoliberal wing, is distinguished by a strong antipathy towards state intervention in economic and social life, born out of the belief that the state is a parasitic growth that threatens both individual liberty and economic security. In this view, the state, instead of being, as pluralists suggest, an impartial umpire or arbiter, is an overbearing ‘nanny’, desperate to interfere or meddle in every aspect of human existence. The central feature of this view is that the state pursues interests that are separate from those of society (setting it apart from Marxism), and that those interests demand an unrelenting growth in the role or responsibilities of the state itself. New Right thinkers

therefore argue that the twentieth-century tendency towards state intervention reflected not popular pressure for economic and social security, or the need to stabilize capitalism by ameliorating class tensions but, rather, the internal dynamics of the state.

New Right theorists explain the expansionist dynamics of state power by reference to both demand-side and supply-side pressures. Demand-side pressures are those that emanate from society itself, usually through the mechanism of electoral democracy. As discussed in [Chapter 4](#) in connection with democracy, the New Right argues that electoral competition encourages politicians to 'outbid' one another by making promises of increased spending and more generous government programmes, regardless of the long-term damage that such policies inflict on the economy in the form of increased taxes, higher inflation and the 'crowding out' of investment. Supply-side pressures, on the other hand, are those that are internal to the state. These can therefore be explained in terms of the institutions and personnel of the state apparatus. In its most influential form, this argument is known as the 'government oversupply thesis'.

The oversupply thesis has usually been associated with public-choice theory (see p. 277), which examines how public decisions are made based on the assumption that the individuals involved act in a rationally self-interested fashion. Niskanen (1971), for example, argued that, as budgetary control in legislatures such as the US Congress is typically weak, the task of budget-making is shaped largely by the interests of government agencies and senior bureaucrats. Insofar as this implies that government is dominated by the state (the state elite being able to shape the thinking of elected politicians), there are parallels between the public-choice model and the Marxist view discussed above. Where these two views diverge, however, is in relation to the interests that the state apparatus serves. While Marxists argue that the state reflects broader class and other social interests, the New Right portrays the state as an independent or autonomous entity that pursues its own interests. In this view, bureaucratic self-interest invariably supports 'big' government and state intervention, because this leads to an enlargement of the bureaucracy itself, which helps to ensure job security, improve pay, open up promotion prospects and enhance the status of public officials. This image of self-seeking bureaucrats is plainly at odds with the pluralist notion of a state machine imbued with an ethic of public service and firmly subject to political control.

The patriarchal state

Modern thinking about the state must, finally, take account of the implications of feminist theory. However, this is not to say that there is a systematic feminist theory of the state. As emphasized in [Chapter 2](#), feminist theory encompasses a range of traditions and perspectives, and has thus generated a range of very different attitudes towards state power. Moreover, feminists have usually not regarded the nature of state power as a central political issue, preferring instead to concentrate on the deeper structure of male power centred on institutions such as the family and the economic system. Some feminists, indeed, may question conventional definitions of the state, arguing, for instance, that the idea that the state exercises a monopoly of legitimate violence is compromised by the routine use of violence and intimidation in family and domestic life. Nevertheless, sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly, feminists have helped to enrich the state debate by developing novel and challenging perspectives on state power.

CONCEPT

Patriarchy

Patriarchy literally means ‘rule by the father’, the domination of the husband–father within the family, and the subordination of his wife and his children. However, the term is usually used in the more general sense of ‘rule by men’, drawing attention to the totality of oppression and exploitation to which women are subject. Patriarchy thus implies that the system of male power in society at large both reflects and stems from the dominance of the father in the family. Patriarchy is a key concept in radical feminist analysis, in that it emphasizes that gender inequality is systematic, institutionalized and pervasive.

Liberal feminists, who believe that sexual or gender (see p. 187) equality can be brought about through incremental reform, have tended to accept an essentially pluralist view of the state. They recognize that, if women are denied legal and political equality, and especially the right to vote, the state is biased in favour of men. However, their faith in the state’s basic neutrality is reflected in the belief that any such bias can, and will, be overcome by a process of reform. In this sense, liberal feminists believe that all groups (including women) have potentially equal access to state power, and that this can be used impartially to promote justice and the common good. Liberal feminists have therefore usually viewed the state in positive terms, seeing state intervention as a means of redressing gender inequality and enhancing the role of women. This can be seen in

campaigns for equal-pay legislation, the legalization of abortion, the provision of child-care facilities, the extension of welfare benefits, and so on.

Nevertheless, a more critical and negative view of the state has been developed by radical feminists, who argue that state power reflects a deeper structure of oppression in the form of patriarchy. There are a number of similarities between Marxist and radical feminist views of state power. Both groups, for example, deny that the state is an autonomous entity bent on the pursuit of its own interests. Instead, the state is understood, and its biases are explained, by reference to a 'deep structure' of power in society at large. Whereas Marxists place the state in an economic context, radical feminists place it in a context of gender inequality, and insist that it is essentially an institution of male power. In common with Marxism, distinctive instrumentalist and structuralist versions of this feminist position have been developed. The instrumentalist argument views the state as little more than an agent or 'tool' used by men to defend their own interests and uphold the structures of patriarchy. This line of argument draws on the core feminist belief that patriarchy is rooted in the division of society into distinct 'public' and 'private' spheres of life, men dominating the former while women are confined to the latter. Quite simply, in this view, the state is run by men, and for men.

Whereas instrumentalist arguments focus on the personnel of the state, and particularly the state elite, structuralist arguments tend to emphasize the degree to which state institutions are embedded in a wider patriarchal system. Modern radical feminists have paid particular attention to the emergence of the welfare state, seeing it as the expression of a new kind of patriarchal power. Welfare may uphold patriarchy by bringing about a transition from private dependence (in which women as 'home makers' are dependent on men as 'breadwinners') to a system of public dependence in which women are increasingly controlled by the institutions of the extended state. For instance, women have become increasingly dependent on the state as clients or customers of state services (such as child-care institutions, nursery education and social work) and as employees, particularly in the so-called 'caring' professions (such as nursing, social work and education).

The role of the state

Contrasting interpretations of state power have clear implications for the desirable role or responsibilities of the state. What should states do? What functions or responsibilities should the state fulfil, and which ones should be left in the hands of private individuals? In many respects, these are the

questions around which electoral politics and party competition revolve. With the exception of anarchists, who dismiss the state as fundamentally evil and unnecessary, all political thinkers have regarded the state as, in some sense, worthwhile. Even revolutionary socialists, inspired by the Leninist slogan ‘smash the state’, have accepted the need for a temporary proletarian state to preside over the transition from capitalism to communism, in the form of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’. Nevertheless, there is profound disagreement about the exact role the state should play, and therefore about the proper balance between the state and civil society. Among the different state forms that have developed are the following:

- minimal states
- developmental states
- social-democratic states
- collectivized states
- totalitarian states
- religious states.

Minimal states

The minimal state is the ideal of classical liberals, whose aim is to ensure that individuals enjoy the widest possible realm of freedom. This view is rooted in social-contract theory, but it nevertheless advances an essentially ‘negative’ view of the state. From this perspective, the value of the state is that it has the capacity to constrain human behaviour and thus to prevent individuals encroaching on the **rights** and liberties of others. The state is merely a protective body, its core function being to provide a framework of peace and social order within which citizens can conduct their lives as they think best. In Locke’s famous simile, the state acts as a nightwatchman, whose services are called upon only when orderly existence is threatened. This nevertheless leaves the ‘minimal’ or ‘nightwatchman’ state with three core functions. First and foremost, the state exists to maintain domestic order. Second, it ensures that contracts or voluntary agreements made between private citizens are enforced, and, third, it provides protection against external attack. The institutional apparatus of a minimal state is thus limited to a police force, a court system and a military of some kind. Economic, social, cultural, moral and other responsibilities belong to the individual, and are therefore firmly part of civil society.

Rights: Legal or moral entitlements to act or be treated in a particular way; civil rights differ from human rights.

The cause of the minimal state has been taken up in modern political

debate by the New Right. Drawing on early liberal ideas, and particularly on free-market or classical economic theories, the New Right has proclaimed the need to 'roll back the frontiers of the state'. In the writings of Robert Nozick, this amounts to a restatement of Lockean liberalism based on a defence of individual rights, especially property rights. In the case of free-market economists such as Friedrich von Hayek (see p. 36) and Milton Friedman (see p. 160), state intervention is seen as a 'dead hand' that reduces competition, efficiency and productivity. From the New Right perspective, the state's economic role should be confined to two functions: the maintenance of a stable means of exchange or 'sound money' (low or zero inflation), and the promotion of competition through controls on monopoly power, price fixing and so on.

KEY THINKER

ROBERT NOZICK (1938–2002)



Source: Getty Images/Martha Holmes

US academic and political philosopher. Nozick's major work, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974), had a profound influence on New Right theories and beliefs. He developed a form of libertarianism that was close to Locke's and clearly influenced by nineteenth-century US individualists such as Spooner (1808–87) and Tucker (1854–1939). He argued that property rights should be strictly upheld, provided that wealth has been justly acquired in the first place, or has been justly transferred from one person to another. This position means support for minimal government and minimal taxation, and undermines the case for welfare and redistribution. Nozick's rights-based theory of justice was developed in response to the ideas of John Rawls (see p. 44). In later life, Nozick modified his extreme libertarianism.

Developmental states

The best historical examples of minimal states were those in countries

such as the UK and the USA during the period of early industrialization in the nineteenth century. As a general rule, however, the later a country industrializes, the more extensive will be its state's economic role. In Japan and Germany, for instance, the state assumed a more active 'developmental' role from the outset. A developmental state is one that intervenes in economic life with the specific purpose of promoting industrial growth and economic development. This does not amount to an attempt to replace the market with a 'socialist' system of planning and control but, rather, to an attempt to construct a partnership between the state and major economic interests, often underpinned by conservative and nationalist priorities.

The classic example of a developmental state is Japan. During the Meiji Period (1868–1912), the Japanese state forged a close relationship with the *zaibutsu*, the great family-run business empires that dominated the Japanese economy up until World War II. Since 1945, the developmental role of the Japanese state has been assumed by the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), which, together with the Bank of Japan, helps to shape private investment decisions and steer the Japanese economy towards international competitiveness (see p. 385). A similar model of developmental intervention has existed in France, where governments of both left and right have tended to recognize the need for economic planning, and the state bureaucracy has seen itself as the custodian of the national interest. In countries such as Austria and, to some extent, Germany, economic development has been achieved through the construction of a 'partnership state', in which an emphasis is placed on the maintenance of a close relationship between the state and major economic interests, notably big business and organized labour. More recently, **economic globalization** has fostered the emergence of '**competition states**', examples of which are found amongst the **tiger economies** of East Asia. Competition states are distinguished by their recognition of the need to strengthen education and training as the principal guarantee of economic success in a context of intensifying transnational competition.

Economic globalization: The incorporation of national economies into a single 'borderless' global economy, through transnational production and capital flows.

Competition state: A state which pursues strategies to ensure long-term competitiveness in a globalized economy.

Tiger economies: Fast-growing and export-orientated economies modelled on Japan: for example, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore.

Social-democratic states

Whereas developmental states practise interventionism in order to stimulate economic progress, social-democratic states intervene with a view to bringing about broader social restructuring, usually in accordance with principles such as fairness, equality (see p. 470), and **social justice**. In countries such as Austria and Sweden, state intervention has been guided by both developmental and social-democratic priorities. Nevertheless, developmentalism and social democracy do not always go hand in hand. As Marquand (1988) pointed out, although the UK state was significantly extended in the period immediately after World War II along social-democratic lines, it failed to evolve into a developmental state. The key to understanding the social-democratic state is that there is a shift from a 'negative' view of the state, which sees it as little more than a necessary evil, to a 'positive' view of the state, in which it is seen as a means of enlarging liberty and promoting justice. The social-democratic state is thus the ideal of both modern liberals and democratic socialists.

Social justice: A morally justifiable distribution of material rewards; social justice is often seen to imply a bias in favour of equality.

Rather than merely laying down the conditions of orderly existence, the social-democratic state is an active participant; in particular, helping to rectify the imbalances and injustices of a market economy. It, therefore, tends to focus less upon the generation of wealth and more upon what is seen as the equitable or just distribution of wealth. In practice, this boils down to an attempt to eradicate poverty and reduce social inequality. The twin features of a social-democratic state are therefore Keynesianism and social welfare. The aim of Keynesian economic policies is to 'manage' or 'regulate' capitalism with a view to promoting growth and maintaining full employment. Although this may entail an element of planning, the classic Keynesian strategy involves 'demand management' through adjustments in fiscal policy; that is, in the levels of public spending and taxation. The adoption of welfare policies has led to the emergence of so-called '**welfare states**', whose responsibilities have extended to the promotion of social well-being amongst their citizens. In this sense, the social-democratic state is an 'enabling state', dedicated to the principle of individual empowerment.

Welfare state: A state that takes primary responsibility for the social welfare of its citizens, discharged through a range of social security, health, education and other services (albeit different in different societies).

DEBATING . . .

IS THE STATE A FORCE FOR GOOD?

Political and ideological debate so often revolves around the issue of the state and, in particular, the proper balance between the state and civil society. At one extreme, anarchists claim that states and, for that matter, all systems of rule are illegitimate. Other views range from a grudging acceptance of the state as a necessary evil to a positive endorsement of the state as a force for good. Does the state have a positive or negative impact on our lives? Should it be celebrated or feared?

YES	NO
Key to civilized existence. The most basic argument in favour of the state is that it is a vital guarantee of order and social stability. A state is absolutely necessary because only a sovereign body that enjoys a monopoly of the means of coercion is able to prevent (regrettable, but inevitable) conflict and competition from spilling over into barbarism and chaos. Life in the absence of a state would be, as Hobbes famously put it, 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. This is a lesson that is underlined by the sad misfortunes suffered by so-called 'failed' states (see p. 75), where civil war and warlordism take hold in the absence of a credible system of law and order. Foundation of public life. The state differs from other bodies and institutions in that it is the only one that represents the common or collective interests,	Cause of disorder. As anarchists argue, the state is the cause of the problem of order, not its solution. The state breeds conflict and unrest because, by robbing people of their moral autonomy and forcing them to obey rules they have not made themselves, it 'infantilizes' them and blocks their moral development. This leaves them under the sway of base instincts and allows selfishness, greed and aggression to spread. As moral development flourishes in conditions of freedom and equality, reducing the authority of the state or, preferably, removing it altogether, will allow order to arise 'from below', naturally and spontaneously. Enemy of freedom. The state is, at best, a necessary evil. Even when its benefits in terms of upholding order are

rather than the selfish or particular ones. The state speaks for the whole of society, not just its parts. As such, the state makes possible a 'public' realm of existence, which allows people to be involved in something larger than themselves, discharging responsibilities towards fellow citizens and, where appropriate, participating in making collective decisions. In a tradition that dates back to Aristotle and Hegel, the state can therefore be seen to be morally superior to civil society.

Agent of social justice. The state is a key agent of modernization and delivers a range of economic and social benefits. Even supporters of free-market economics acknowledge this in accepting that the economy can only function in a context of civic order that can only be established by the state. Beyond this, the state can counter the inherent instability of a market economy by intervening to ensure sustainable growth and full employment, and it can protect people from poverty and other forms of social disadvantage by delivering publicly funded welfare services that no amount of private philanthropy can rival

accepted, the state should be confined to a strictly minimal role. This is because, as state authority is sovereign, compulsory and coercive, the 'public' sphere is, by its nature, a realm of oppression. While anarchists therefore argue that all states are illegitimate, others suggest that this only applies when the state goes beyond its essential role of laying down the conditions for orderly existence. Freedom is enlarged to the extent that the 'public' sphere contracts, civil society being morally superior to the state.

Recipe for poverty. The economy works best when it is left alone by the state. Market economies are self-regulating mechanisms; they tend towards long-term equilibrium, as the forces of demand and supply come into line with one another. The state, in contrast, is a brute machine: however well-meaning state intervention in economic and social life may be, it inevitably upsets the natural balance of the market and so imperils growth and prosperity. This was a lesson most graphically illustrated by the fate of orthodox communist systems, but it has also been underlined by the poor economic performance of over-regulated capitalist systems.

in terms of reach and quality.

Collectivized states

While developmental and social-democratic states intervene in economic life with a view to guiding or supporting a largely private economy, collectivized states bring the entirety of economic life under state control. The best examples of such states were in orthodox communist countries such as the USSR and throughout Eastern Europe. These sought to abolish private enterprise altogether, and set up centrally planned economies administered by a network of economic ministries and planning committees. So-called ‘command economies’ were, therefore, established and were organized through a system of ‘directive’ planning that was ultimately controlled by the highest organs of the communist party. The justification for state **collectivization** stems from a fundamental socialist preference for common ownership over private property. However, the use of the state to attain this goal suggests a more positive attitude to state power than that outlined in the classical writings of Marx and Engels (1820–95).

Collectivization: The abolition of private property in favour of a system of common or public ownership.

CONCEPT

Statism

Statism (or, in French, *étatisme*) is the belief that state intervention is the most appropriate means of resolving political problems, or bringing about economic and social development. This view is underpinned by a deep, and perhaps unquestioning, faith in the state as a mechanism through which collective action can be organized and common goals can be achieved. The state is thus seen as an ethical ideal (Hegel), or as serving the ‘general will’ or public interest. Statism is most clearly reflected in government policies that regulate and control economic life, possibly extending to Soviet-style state collectivization.

Marx and Engels by no means ruled out nationalization; Engels, in particular, recognized that, during the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, state control would be extended to include factories, the banks, transportation, and so on. Nevertheless, they envisaged that the proletarian state would be strictly temporary, and that it would ‘wither away’ as class antagonisms abated. In contrast, the collectivized state in the USSR became permanent, and increasingly powerful and bureaucratic. Under Stalin, socialism was

effectively equated with statism, the advance of socialism being reflected in the widening responsibilities and powers of the state apparatus. Indeed, after Khrushchev announced in 1962 that the dictatorship of the proletariat had ended, the state was formally identified with the interests of ‘the whole Soviet peoples’.

Totalitarian states

The most extreme and extensive form of interventionism is found in totalitarian states. The essence of **totalitarianism** is the construction of an all-embracing state, the influence of which penetrates every aspect of human existence. The state brings not only the economy, but also education, culture, religion, family life, and so on under direct state control. The classic examples of totalitarian states are Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s USSR, although modern regimes such as North Korea have similar characteristics. The central pillars of such regimes are a comprehensive process of surveillance and terroristic policing, and a pervasive system of ideological manipulation and control. In this sense, totalitarian states effectively extinguish civil society and abolish the ‘private’ sphere of life altogether. This is a goal that only fascists, who wish to dissolve individual identity within the social whole, are prepared openly to endorse. It is sometimes argued that Mussolini’s notion of a totalitarian state was derived from Hegel’s belief in the state as an ‘ethical community’ reflecting the altruism and mutual sympathy of its members. From this perspective, the advance of human civilization can clearly be linked to the aggrandisement of the state and the widening of its responsibilities.

Totalitarianism: An all-encompassing system of political rule, involving pervasive ideological manipulation and open brutality (see p. 113).

Religious states

On the face of it, a religious state is a contradiction in terms. The modern state emerged largely through the triumph of civil authority over religious authority, religion increasingly being confined to the private sphere, through a separation between church and state. The advance of state sovereignty thus usually went hand in hand with the forward march of secularization. In the USA, the secular nature of the state was enshrined in the First Amendment of the constitution, which guarantees that freedom of worship shall not be abridged, while in France the separation of church and state has been maintained through a strict emphasis on the principle of **laïcité**. In countries such as Norway, Denmark and the UK, ‘established’ or **state religions** have developed, although the privileges these religions enjoy

stop well short of theocratic rule, and their political influence has generally been restricted by a high level of social secularization.

Laïcité: (French) The principle of the absence of religious involvement in government affairs, and of government involvement in religious affairs.

State religion: A religious body that is officially endorsed by the state, giving it special privileges, but (usually) not formal political authority.



Source: Getty Images/Hulton Deutsch

The most well-known example of a totalitarian state was Nazi Germany (1933–45), led by Adolf Hitler, pictured here addressing a rally in the 1930s.

Nevertheless, the period since the 1980s has witnessed the rise of the religious state, driven by the tendency within religious fundamentalism (see p. 52) to reject the public/private divide and to view religion as the basis of politics. Far from regarding the political realm as inherently corrupt, fundamentalist movements have typically looked to seize control of the state and to use it as an instrument of moral and spiritual regeneration. This was evident, for instance, in the process of ‘Islamization’ introduced in Pakistan under General Zia-ul-Haq after 1978, the establishment of an ‘Islamic state’ in Iran as a result of the 1979 revolution, and, despite its formal commitment to secularism, the close links between the Sri Lankan state and Sinhala Buddhism, particularly during the years of violent struggle against Tamil separatism. Although,

strictly speaking, religious states are founded on the basis of religious principles, and, in the Iranian model, contain explicitly theocratic features, in other cases religiously orientated governments operate in a context that retains a commitment to constitutional secularism. This applies in the case of the AKP rule in Turkey.

ECLIPSE OF THE STATE?

Since the late 1980s, debate about the state has been overshadowed by assertions about its 'retreat' or 'decline'. The once-mighty leviathan – widely seen to be co-extensive with politics itself – had seemingly been humbled, state authority having been undermined by the growing importance of, amongst other things, the global economy, the market, major corporations, non-state actors and international organizations. The clamour for 'state-centric' approaches to domestic and international politics to be rethought, or abandoned altogether, therefore grew. However, a simple choice between 'state-centrism' and 'retreat-ism' is, at best, misleading. For instance, although states and markets are commonly portrayed as rival forces, they also interlock and complement one another. Apart from anything else, markets cannot function without a system of property rights that only the state can establish and protect. Moreover, although states may have lost authority in certain respects; in others, they may have become stronger.

Decline and fall of the state

The challenge of globalization

The rise of globalization (see p. 161) has stimulated a major debate about the power and significance of the state in a globalized world. Three contrasting positions can be identified. In the first place, some theorists have boldly proclaimed the emergence of 'post-sovereign governance' (Scholte, 2005), suggesting that the rise of globalization is inevitably marked by the decline of the state as a meaningful actor. Power shifts away from the state and towards global marketplaces and transnational corporations (TNCs) (see p. 168) in particular. In the most extreme version of this argument, advanced by so-called 'hyperglobalists', the state is seen to be so 'hollowed out' as to have become, in effect, redundant. Others, nevertheless, deny that globalization has altered the core feature of world politics, which is that, as in earlier eras, sovereign states are the primary determinants of what happens within their borders, and remain the principal actors on the world stage. In this view, globalization and the state are not separate or, still less, opposing forces; rather, and to a surprising degree, globalization has been created by states and thus exists to serve their interests. Between these two views, however, there is a third position,

which acknowledges that globalization has brought about qualitative changes in the role and significance of the state, and in the nature of sovereignty, but emphasizes that these have transformed the state, rather than simply reduced or increased its power.

Developments such as the rise of international migration and the spread of **cultural globalization** have tended to make state borders increasingly 'permeable'. However, most of the discussion about the changing nature and power of the state has concerned the impact of economic globalization (discussed in more detail in [Chapter 7](#)). The central feature of economic globalization is the rise of '**supraterritoriality**', the process through which economic activity increasingly takes place within a 'borderless world' (Ohmae, 1989). This is particularly clear in relation to financial markets that have become genuinely globalized, in that capital flows around the world seemingly instantaneously; meaning, for example, that no state can be insulated from the impact of financial crises in other parts of the world. If borders have become permeable and old geographical certainties have been shaken, state sovereignty, at least in its traditional sense, cannot survive. This is the sense in which governance in the twenty-first century has assumed a genuinely post-sovereign character. It is difficult, in particular, to see how **Economic sovereignty** can be reconciled with a globalized economy. Sovereign control over economic life was only possible in a world of discrete national economies; to the extent that these have been, or are being, incorporated into a single globalized economy, economic sovereignty becomes meaningless. However, the rhetoric of a 'borderless' global economy can be taken too far. For example, there has been, if anything, a growing recognition that market-based economies can only operate successfully within a context of legal and social order that only the state can guarantee (Fukuyama, 2005).

Cultural globalization: The process whereby information, commodities, and images produced in one part of the world enter into a global flow that tends to 'flatten out' cultural differences between nations and regions.

Supraterritoriality: The reconfiguration of geography that has occurred through the declining importance of state borders, geographical distance and territorial location.

Economic sovereignty: The absolute authority of the state over national economic life, involving independent control of fiscal and monetary policies, and control over trade and capital flows.

CONCEPT 

Governance

Governance is a broader term than government (see p. 110). Although lacking a settled or agreed definition, it refers, in its widest sense, to the various ways through which social life is coordinated. Government can therefore be seen as one of the institutions involved in governance; it is possible to have 'governance without government' (Rhodes, 1996). The wider use of the term reflects a blurring of the state/society distinction, resulting from changes such as the development of new forms of public management and the growth of public-private partnerships. (See multilevel governance, p. 395.)

Non-state actors and international bodies

A further manifestation of the decline of the state is evident in the rise of non-state or transnational actors and the growing importance of international organizations. This reflects the fact that, increasingly, major aspects of politics no longer take place merely in or through the state but, rather, outside or beyond the state. Amongst non-state actors, TNCs are often regarded as the most significant. They often dwarf states in terms of their economic size. Based on the (rather crude) comparison between corporate sales and countries' GDP, 51 of the world's 100 largest economies are corporations; only 49 of them are countries. General Motors is broadly equivalent, in this sense, to Denmark; Wal-Mart is roughly the same size as Poland; and Exxon Mobil has the same economic weight as South Africa. However, economic size does not necessarily translate into political power or influence. States, after all, can do things that TNCs can only dream about, such as make laws and raise armies. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (see p. 273) have also steadily grown in number and influence, particularly since the 1990s. Estimates of the total number of international NGOs usually exceed 30,000, with over 1,000 groups enjoying formal consultative status by the UN. Their expertise, moral authority and high public profiles enable NGOs such as Greenpeace, Amnesty International and Care International to exert a level of influence within international organizations that may at times rival, or even surpass, that of national governments. Other non-state actors range from the women's movement and the anti-capitalist movement to terrorist networks, such as ISIS, guerrilla armies and transnational criminal organizations. As such groups have a 'trans-border' character, they are often able to operate in ways that elude the jurisdiction of any state.

The growth of politics beyond the state has also been apparent in the trend towards **political globalization**. However, its impact has been complex and,

in some ways, contradictory. On the one hand, international bodies such as the UN, the European Union (EU) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) have undermined the capacity of states to operate as self-governing political units. As the range and importance of decisions that are made at intergovernmental or supranational level has increased, states have been forced to exert influence in and through regional or global bodies, or to operate within frameworks established by them. In the case of the EU, a growing range of decisions (for example, on monetary policy, agriculture and fisheries policy, defence and foreign affairs) are made by EU institutions, rather than member states. This has led to the phenomenon of multilevel governance, (as discussed in [Chapter 17](#)), but it has also led to tensions with member states, especially the UK (see p. 76). The WTO, for its part, acts as the judge and jury of global trade disputes and serves as a forum for negotiating trade deals between and amongst its members. On the other hand, political globalization opens up opportunities for the state as well as diminishes them. This occurs through the ‘pooling’ of sovereignty. For example, the EU Council of Ministers, the most powerful policy-making body in the EU, is very much a creature of its member states and provides a forum that allows national politicians to make decisions on a supranational level.

Political globalization: The growing importance of international bodies and organizations, and of transnational political forces generally.

Failed states

In the developing world, debate about the decline of the state has sometimes been displaced by concern about weak, failing or collapsed states. Cooper (2004) portrayed what he called the ‘pre-modern’ world as a world of postcolonial chaos, in which such state structures as exist are unable to establish (in Weber’s words) a legitimate monopoly of the use of force, thus leading to endemic **warlordism**, widespread criminality and social dislocation. Such conditions do not apply consistently across the developing world, however. In cases such as India, South Korea and Taiwan, developing world states have been highly successful in pursuing strategies of economic modernization and social development. Others, nevertheless, have been distinguished by their weakness, sometimes being portrayed as ‘quasi-states’ or ‘failed states’, examples include Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and Democratic Republic of Congo. These states fail the most basic test of state power: they are unable to maintain domestic order and personal security, meaning that civil strife and even civil war become almost routine.

CONCEPT

Failed state

A failed state is a state that is unable to perform its key role of ensuring domestic order by monopolizing the use of force within its territory. Examples of failed states in recent years include Cambodia, Haiti, Rwanda, Liberia and Somalia. Failed states are no longer able to operate as viable political units, in that they lack a credible system of law and order. They are no longer able to operate as viable economic units, in that they are incapable of providing for their citizens and have no functioning infrastructure. Although relatively few states collapse altogether, a much larger number barely function and are dangerously close to collapse.

Warlordism: A condition in which locally based militarized bands vie for power in the absence of a sovereign state.

The failure of such states stems primarily from the experience of colonialism (see p. 144), which, when it ended (mainly in the post-1945 period), bequeathed formal political independence to societies that lacked an appropriate level of political, economic, social and educational development to function effectively as separate entities. As the borders of such states typically represented the extent of colonial ambition, rather than the existence of a culturally cohesive population, postcolonial states also often encompass deep ethnic, religious and tribal divisions. Although some explain the increase in state failure since the 1990s primarily in terms of domestic factors (such as a disposition towards authoritarian rule, backward institutions and parochial value systems which block the transition from pre-industrial, agrarian societies to modern industrial ones), external factors have also played a major role. This has applied not least through the tendency of globalization to re-orientate developing world economies around the dictates of global markets, rather than domestic needs, and to widen inequality.

Return of the state?

Discussion about the state in the early twenty-first century has been dominated by talk of retreat, decline or even collapse. The reality is more complex, however. For instance, although globalization may make state borders more 'porous', globalization has not been imposed on unwilling states; rather, it is a process that has been devised by states in pursuit of what they identify as their national interests. Similarly, international organizations typically act as forums through which states can act in concert over matters of mutual interest, rather than as bodies intent on

usurping state power. Moreover, a number of developments in recent years have helped to strengthen the state and underline its essential importance. What explains the return of the state? In the first place, the state's unique capacity to maintain domestic order and protect its citizens from external attack has been strongly underlined by new security challenges that have emerged in the twenty-first century; notably, those linked to transnational terrorism (as discussed in [Chapter 18](#)). This underlines what Bobbitt (2002) viewed as a basic truth: 'The State exists to master violence'; it is therefore essentially a 'warmaking institution'. The decline in military expenditure that occurred at the end of the Cold War, the so-called 'peace dividend', started to be reversed in the late 1990s, with global military expenditure rising steeply after the September 11 terrorist attacks and the launch of the 'war on terror'. Furthermore, counterterrorism strategies have often meant that states have imposed tighter border controls and assumed wider powers of surveillance, control and sometimes detention, even becoming 'national security states'. In Europe, the USA and elsewhere, borders have also been strengthened in response to increased migratory flows (see p. 412).

POLITICS IN ACTION . . .



BREXIT: TAKING BACK CONTROL?

Events: In January 2013, the then UK prime minister, David Cameron, promised to call an in/out referendum on the UK's membership of European Union should his Conservative Party win the upcoming 2015 general election. Confident in the belief that the referendum (if it were held) would endorse EU membership, he hoped that the referendum pledge would both bring an end to the decades-old Conservative civil war over Europe and halt the defection of Conservative voters to the anti-EU UK Independence Party. However, Cameron's high-stakes gamble went badly wrong. When the EU referendum was eventually held in June 2016, it resulted in a 52 to 48 per cent victory for the 'Leave' campaign. In March 2017, the UK government formally notified the European Council of its intention to leave the EU, thereby invoking Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). This marked the start of a maximum two-year process of negotiations between the UK and Brussels on the conditions of the UK's exit from the EU, with 29 March 2019 being set as the intended date of the UK's departure.



Source: Getty Images/John Thys

Significance: The issues of sovereignty and statehood have been central to debates over Brexit. Although those who campaigned for a Leave outcome in the EU referendum rarely made reference to the terminology of 'sovereign statehood', this was only because they recognized that the language of power and control (and especially the slogan 'Take Back Control') would be more intelligible and have greater political resonance. As 'control', in this context, largely meant control over the making of laws and the administration of national borders, it served as code for reclaiming sovereignty, based on the belief that EU membership is incompatible with a free and independent – that is, a sovereign – UK. This could be seen number of ways. For example, the Treaty of Rome (1957), the founding treaty of what was then called the European Economic Community (EEC), established the principle that European law is 'higher' than national law, thereby robbing member states of their status as sovereign legal entities. Similarly, the recognition in the Treaty on European Union (1993) of the principle of the free movement of labour as one of the four freedoms of the Union curtailed member states' jurisdiction over their borders and, in the process, compromised their territorial integrity.

However, the idea that the UK could reclaim sovereign statehood through Brexit has also been questioned. First, sovereignty may be little more than a diplomatic nicety. This is because no state, not even the most dominant of states, ever commands absolute and unlimited power. Indeed, the constraints upon states have grown substantially in recent decades, especially as a globalized economy has drawn states into a web of interdependence. Brexit, thus, could not mean replacing interdependence with

independence but, rather, swapping one pattern of interdependence for another (perhaps one based on closer ties with USA, China or Asia generally). Second, any conceivable post-Brexit relationship with the EU is likely to impinge on the UK's status as a sovereign power. This can be seen most clearly in the case of a so-called 'soft' Brexit (in which the UK continues to participate in, or has access to, elements of the EU) but it even applies, if to a lesser extent, in the case of a 'hard' Brexit, as the EU is certain to remain the UK's major trading partner. Finally, an alternative argument suggests that instead of threatening or diminishing state sovereignty, EU membership may enhance the power and influence of member states by allowing them to 'pool' their sovereignty. This view is based on the assumption that member states can achieve more when they work together through the institutions of the EU than they can when they operate as independent states.

Furthermore, the resurgence of the state has had an important economic dimension. Although the days of command-and-control economic management may be over, the state has sometimes reasserted itself as an agent of modernization. Competition states have done this by improving education and training in order to boost productivity and provide support for key export industries. States such as China and Russia each modernized their economies by making significant concessions to the market, but an important element of state control has been retained or re-imposed (these developments are examined in more detail in [Chapter 7](#) in relation to 'state capitalism'). On a wider level, the state's vital role in economic affairs was underlined by the 2007–09 global financial crisis. Although the G20 (whose members include key developing powers as well as major developed ones) may have provided states with a forum to develop a coordinated global response, the massive packages of fiscal and other interventions that were agreed were, and could only have been, implemented by states. Indeed, one of the lessons of the 2007–09 crash, and of subsequent financial and fiscal crises, may be that the idea that the global economy works best when left alone by the state (acting alone, or through international organizations) has been exposed as a myth.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what different ways has the state been understood?
2. Is sovereignty the defining feature of the state?
3. Would life in a stateless society really be 'nasty, brutish and

short'?

4. Why has politics traditionally been associated with the affairs of state?
5. Can the state be viewed as a neutral body in relation to competing social interests?
6. How and why has the pluralist theory of the state been criticized?
7. Does the nature and background of the state elite inevitably breed bias?
8. To what extent is there a coherent feminist theory of the state?
9. What is the proper relationship between the state and civil society?
10. Why have proletarian states failed to 'wither away'?
11. Is the religious state a contradiction in terms?
12. Does globalization mean that the state has become irrelevant?
13. Have nation-states been transformed into market states?
14. To what extent has state power been revived in contemporary circumstances?

FURTHER READING



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CHAPTER 4

Democracy and Legitimacy

'Democracy is the worst form of government except all the other forms that have been tried from time to time.'

WINSTON CHURCHILL, Speech, UK House of Commons (11 November 1947)

PREVIEW

Although states may enjoy a monopoly of coercive power, they seldom remain in existence through the exercise of force alone. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau put it, 'The strongest is never strong enough unless he turns might into right and obedience into duty'. This is why all systems of rule seek legitimacy or 'rightfulness', allowing them to demand compliance from their citizens or subjects. Legitimacy is thus the key to political stability; it is nothing less than the source of a regime's survival and success. In modern politics, debates about legitimacy are dominated by the issue of democracy, so much so that 'democratic legitimacy' is sometimes viewed as the only meaningful form of legitimacy. However, the link between legitimacy and democracy is both a relatively new idea and one that is culturally specific. Until well into the nineteenth century, the term 'democracy' continued to have pejorative implications, suggesting a form of 'mob rule'; and, in parts of the developing world, democracy promotion continues to be associated with 'Westernization'. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which we are all now democrats. Liberals, conservatives, socialists, communists, anarchists and even fascists are eager to proclaim the virtues of democracy and to demonstrate their own democratic credentials. Indeed, as the major ideological systems have faltered or collapsed since the late twentieth century, the flame of democracy has appeared to

burn yet more strongly. As the attractions of socialism have faded, and the merits of capitalism have been called into question, democracy has emerged as perhaps the only stable and enduring principle in the postmodern political landscape.

KEY ISSUES

- How do states maintain legitimacy?
- Are modern societies facing a crisis of legitimation?
- Why is political legitimacy so often linked to the claim to be democratic?
- What are the core features of democratic rule?
- What models of democratic rule have been advanced?
- How do democratic systems operate in practice?

LEGITIMACY AND POLITICAL STABILITY

The issue of legitimacy, the rightfulness of a regime or system of rule, is linked to the oldest and one of the most fundamental of political debates, the problem of political obligation. Why should citizens feel obliged to acknowledge the authority of government? Do they have a duty to respect the state and obey its laws? In modern political debate, however, legitimacy is usually understood less in terms of moral obligations, and more in terms of political behaviour and beliefs. In other words, it addresses not the question of why people should obey the state, in an abstract sense, but the question of why they do obey a particular state or system of rule. What are the conditions or processes that encourage people to see authority as rightful, and, therefore, underpin the stability of a regime? This reflects a shift from philosophy to sociology, but it also highlights the contested nature of the concept of legitimacy.

CONCEPT

Legitimacy

Legitimacy (from the Latin *legitimare*, meaning 'to declare lawful') broadly means 'rightfulness'. Legitimacy therefore confers on an order or command an authoritative or binding character, thus transforming power (see p. 5) into authority (see p. 4). Political philosophers treat legitimacy as a moral or rational principle; that is, as the grounds on which governments may demand obedience from citizens. The claim to legitimacy is thus more important than the fact of obedience. Political scientists, however, usually see legitimacy in sociological terms; that is, as a willingness to comply with a system of rule regardless of how this is achieved.

Legitimizing power

The classic contribution to the understanding of legitimacy as a sociological phenomenon was provided by Max Weber (see p. 81). Weber was concerned to categorize particular ‘systems of domination’, and to identify in each case the basis on which legitimacy was established. He did this by constructing three ideal types (see p. 18), or conceptual models, which he hoped would help to make sense of the highly complex nature of political rule. These ideal types amount to three kinds of authority:

- traditional authority
- charismatic authority
- legal–rational authority.

Each of these is characterized by a particular source of political legitimacy and, thus, different reasons that people may have for obeying a regime. In the process, Weber sought to understand the transformation of society itself, contrasting the systems of domination found in relatively simple traditional societies with those typically found in industrial and highly bureaucratic ones.

KEY THINKER



MAX WEBER (1864–1920)



Source: Getty Images/Hulton Archive

German political economist and sociologist. Following a breakdown in 1898, Weber withdrew from academic teaching, but he continued to write and research until the end of his life. He was one of the founders of modern sociology, and he championed a scientific and value-free approach to scholarship. He also highlighted the importance to social action of meaning and consciousness. Weber’s interests ranged from social stratification, law, power and organization to religion. He is best known for the thesis that the Protestant ethic encourages the development of capitalism, and for his analysis of bureaucracy. Weber’s most influential works include *The Protestant Ethic and*

the Spirit of Capitalism (1905), *The Sociology of Religion* (1920) and *Economy and Society* (1922).

CONCEPT

Tradition

Tradition may refer to anything that is handed down or transmitted from the past to the present (long-standing customs and practices, institutions, social or political systems, values and beliefs, and so on). Tradition thus denotes continuity with the past. This continuity is usually understood to link the generations, although the line between the traditional and the merely fashionable is often indistinct. 'Traditional' societies are often contrasted with 'modern' ones, the former being structured on the basis of status (see p. 173) and by supposedly organic hierarchies, and the latter on the basis of contractual agreement and by democratic processes.

Weber's first type of political legitimacy is based on long-established customs and traditions (see p. 81). In effect, *traditional* authority is regarded as legitimate because it has 'always existed': it has been sanctified by history because earlier generations have accepted it. Typically, it operates according to a body of concrete rules: that is, fixed and unquestioned customs that do not need to be justified because they reflect the way things have always been. The most obvious examples of traditional authority are found amongst tribes or small groups in the form of patriarchy (the domination of the father within the family, or the 'master' over his servants) and gerontocracy (the rule of the aged, normally reflected in the authority of village 'elders'). Traditional authority is closely linked to hereditary systems of power and privilege, as reflected, for example, in the survival of dynastic rule in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Morocco. Although it is of marginal significance in advanced industrial societies, the survival of monarchy (see p. 324), albeit in a constitutional form, in the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain, for example, helps to shape political culture by keeping alive values such as deference, respect and duty.

Weber's second form of legitimate domination is *charismatic* authority. This form of authority is based on the power of an individual's personality; that is, on his or her 'charisma' (see p. 82). Owing nothing to a person's status, social position or office, charismatic authority operates entirely through the capacity of a leader to make a direct and personal appeal to

followers as a kind of hero or saint. Although modern political leaders such as de Gaulle, Kennedy and Thatcher undoubtedly extended their authority through their personal qualities and capacity to inspire loyalty, this did not amount to charismatic legitimacy, because their authority was essentially based on the formal powers of the offices they held. Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler (see p. 46), Ayatollah Khomeini (see p. 191), Fidel Castro and Colonel Gaddafi are more appropriate examples.

However, charismatic authority is not simply a gift or a natural propensity; systems of personal rule are invariably underpinned by 'cults of personality' (see p. 335), the undoubted purpose of which is to 'manufacture' charisma (see p. 82). Nevertheless, when legitimacy is constructed largely, or entirely, through the power of a leader's personality, there are usually two consequences. The first is that, as charismatic authority is not based on formal rules or procedures, it often has no limits. The leader is a Messiah, who is infallible and unquestionable; the masses become followers or disciples, who are required only to submit and obey. Second, so closely is authority linked to a specific individual, that it is difficult for a system of personal rule to outlive its founding figure. This certainly applied in the case of the regimes of Napoleon, Mussolini and Hitler.

Weber's third type of political legitimacy, *legal-rational* authority, links authority to a clearly and legally defined set of rules. In Weber's view, legal-rational authority is the typical form of authority operating in most modern states. The power of a president, prime minister or government official is determined in the final analysis by formal, constitutional rules, which constrain or limit what an office holder is able to do. The advantage of this form of authority over both traditional and charismatic authority is that, as it is attached to an office rather than a person, it is far less likely to be abused or to give rise to injustice. Legal-rational authority, therefore, maintains limited government and, in addition, promotes efficiency through a rational division of labour. However, Weber also recognized a darker side to this type of political legitimacy. The price of greater efficiency would, he feared, be a more depersonalized and inhuman social environment typified by the relentless spread of bureaucratic (see p. 374) forms of organization.

CONCEPT

Charisma

Charisma was originally a theological term meaning the 'gift of grace'. This was supposedly the source of the power that Jesus

exerted over his disciples. As a sociopolitical phenomenon, charisma refers to charm or personal power: the capacity to establish leadership (see p. 332) through psychological control over others. Charismatic authority therefore includes the ability to inspire loyalty, emotional dependence, and even devotion. Although it is usually seen as a 'natural' capacity, all political leaders cultivate their charismatic qualities through propaganda, practised oratory, and honed presentational skills.

Although Weber's classification of types of legitimacy is still seen as relevant, it also has its limitations. One of these is that, in focusing on the legitimacy of a political regime or system of rule, it tells us little about the circumstances in which political authority is challenged as a result of unpopular policies, or a discredited leader or government. More significantly, as Beetham (2013) pointed out, to see legitimacy, as Weber did, as nothing more than a 'belief in legitimacy' is to ignore how it is brought about. This may leave the determination of legitimacy largely in the hands of the powerful, who may be able to 'manufacture' rightfulness through public-relations campaigns and the like.

Beetham suggested that power can only be said to be legitimate if three conditions are fulfilled. First, power must be exercised according to established rules, whether these are embodied in formal legal codes or in informal conventions. Second, these rules must be justified in terms of the shared beliefs of the government and the governed. Third, legitimacy must be demonstrated by an expression of consent on the part of the governed. This highlights two key features of the legitimisation process. The first is the existence of elections and party competition, a system through which popular consent can be exercised (as discussed below in connection with democratic legitimacy). The second is the existence of constitutional rules that broadly reflect how people feel they should be governed (which are examined in [Chapter 13](#)).

Legitimation crises and revolutions

An alternative to the Weberian approach to legitimacy has been developed by neo-Marxist (see p. 64) theorists. While orthodox Marxists were inclined to dismiss legitimacy as bogus, seeing it as nothing more than a bourgeois myth, modern Marxists, following Gramsci (see p. 198), have acknowledged that capitalism is in part upheld by its ability to secure political support. Neo-Marxists such as Jürgen Habermas (see p. 83) and Claus Offe (1984) have therefore focused attention not merely on the class system, but also on the machinery through which legitimacy is maintained (the democratic process, party competition, welfare and social reform, and

so on). Nevertheless, they have also highlighted what they see as the inherent difficulty of legitimizing a political system that is based on unequal class power. In *Legitimation Crisis* (1973), Habermas identified a series of ‘crisis tendencies’ within capitalist societies that make it difficult for them to maintain political stability through consent alone. At the heart of this tension, he argued, lie contradictions and conflicts between the logic of capitalist accumulation, on the one hand, and the popular pressures that democratic politics unleashes, on the other.

From this perspective, capitalist economies are seen to be bent on remorseless expansion, dictated by the pursuit of profit. However, the extension of political and social rights in an attempt to build legitimacy within such systems has stimulated countervailing pressures. In particular, the democratic process has led to escalating demands for social welfare, as well as for increased popular participation and social equality. The resulting expansion of the state’s responsibilities into economic and social life, and the inexorable rise of taxation and public spending, nevertheless constrain capitalist accumulation by restricting profit levels and discouraging enterprise. In Habermas’ view, capitalist democracies cannot permanently satisfy both popular demands for social security and welfare rights, and the requirements of a market economy based on private profit. Forced either to resist popular pressures or to risk economic collapse, such societies would find it increasingly difficult, and eventually impossible, to maintain legitimacy. (The implications for political stability of economic and financial crises are discussed in [Chapter 7](#).)

KEY THINKER

JÜRGEN HABERMAS (born 1929)



Source: Getty Images/Raphael Gaillarde

German philosopher and social theorist. After growing up during the Nazi period, Habermas was politicized by the Nuremberg trials and the growing awareness after the war of the concentration and death camps. Drawn to study with Adorno

(1903–69) and Horkheimer (1895–1973), he became the leading exponent of the ‘second generation’ of the Frankfurt School of critical theory. Habermas’ work ranges over epistemology, the dynamics of advanced capitalism, the nature of rationality, and the relationship between social science and philosophy. During the 1970s, he developed critical theory into what became a theory of ‘communicative action’. Habermas’ main works include *Towards a Rational Society* (1970), *Theory and Practice* (1974) and *The Theory of Communicative Competence* (1984, 1988).

A very similar problem has been identified since the 1970s in the form of what is called government ‘overload’. Writers such as Anthony King (1975) and Richard Rose (1980) argued that governments were finding it increasingly difficult to govern because they were subject to over-demand. This had come about both because politicians and political parties were encouraged to outbid one another in the attempt to get into power, and because pressure groups were able to besiege government with unrelenting and incompatible demands. Government’s capacity to deliver was further undermined by a general drift towards corporatism (see p. 276) that created growing interdependence between government agencies and organized groups. However, whereas neo-Marxists believed that the ‘crisis tendencies’ identified in the 1970s were beyond the capacity of capitalist democracies to control, overload theorists tended to call for a significant shift of political and ideological priorities in the form of the abandonment of a ‘big’ government approach.

In many ways, the rise of the New Right since the 1980s can be seen as a response to this legitimization, or overload, crisis. Influenced by concerns about a growing **fiscal crisis of the welfare state**, the New Right attempted to challenge and displace the theories and values that had previously legitimized the progressive expansion of the state’s responsibilities. In this sense, the New Right amounted to a ‘hegemonic project’ that tried to establish a rival set of pro-individual and pro-market values and theories. This constituted a public philosophy that extolled rugged individualism, and denigrated the ‘nanny state’. The success of this project is demonstrated by the fact that socialist parties in states as different as the UK, France, Spain, Australia and New Zealand have accommodated themselves to broadly similar goals and values. As this happened, a political culture that once emphasized social justice, welfare rights and public responsibilities gave way to one in which choice, enterprise, competition and individual responsibility are given prominence.

WHY DO REVOLUTIONS OCCUR?

Why do regimes collapse? Should revolutions be understood primarily in political terms, or are they more a reflection of deeper economic or social developments? Contrasting theories of revolution have been advanced by Marxists and non-Marxists. In Marxist theory, revolution emerges out of contradictions that exist at a socio-economic level. Marx (see p. 40) believed that revolution marks the point at which the class struggle develops into open conflict, leading one class to overthrow and displace another. Just as the French Revolution was interpreted as a 'bourgeois' revolution, the Russian Revolution was later seen as a 'proletarian' revolution that set in motion a process that would culminate in the establishment of socialism and, eventually, full communism. However, revolutions have not come about as Marx forecast. Not only have they tended to occur in relatively backward societies, not (as he predicted) in the advanced capitalist countries, but Marxist revolutions were often *coup d'états* rather than popular revolutions.

A variety of non-Marxist theories of revolution have been advanced. Systems theorists have argued that revolution results from 'disequilibrium' in the political system, brought about by economic, social, cultural or international changes to which the system itself is incapable of responding – the 'outputs' of government become structurally out of line with the 'inputs'. The idea of a 'revolution of rising expectations' suggests that revolutions occur when a period of economic and social development is abruptly reversed, creating a widening gap between popular expectations and the capabilities of government. The classic statement of this theory is found in Ted Gurr's *Why Men Rebel* (1970), which links rebellion to 'relative deprivation'.

The social-structural theory of revolution implies that regimes usually succumb to revolution when, through international weakness and/or domestic ineffectiveness, they lose their ability, or the political will, to maintain control through the exercise of coercive power. Theda Skocpol (1979) explained the outbreak of the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions in these terms, but they could equally be applied to the swift and largely bloodless

collapse of the Eastern European communist regimes in the autumn and winter of 1989.

Fiscal crisis of the welfare state: The crisis in state finances that occurs when expanding social expenditure coincides with recession and declining tax revenues.

However, legitimisation crises may have more dramatic consequences. When faltering support for a regime can no longer be managed by adjustments in public policy or a change in leadership, legitimacy may collapse altogether, leading either to a resort to repression, or to **revolution**. While evolutionary change is usually thought of as **reform**, revolution involves root-and-branch change. Revolutions recast the political order entirely, typically bringing about an abrupt and often violent break with the past. Although there is considerable debate about the causes of revolution, there is little doubt that revolution has played a crucial role in shaping the modern world. The American Revolution (1776) led to the creation of a constitutional republic independent from Britain and gave practical expression to the principle of representation. The French Revolution (1789) set out to destroy the old order under the banner of 'liberty, equality and fraternity', advancing democratic ideals and sparking an 'age of revolution' in early nineteenth-century Europe. The Russian Revolution (1917), the first 'communist' revolution, provided a model for subsequent twentieth-century revolutions, including the Chinese Revolution (1949), the Cuban Revolution (1959), the Vietnamese Revolution (1975) and the Nicaraguan Revolution (1979). The Eastern European Revolutions (1989–91) nevertheless re-established the link between revolution and the pursuit of political democracy. Nevertheless, the ideological character of a revolutionary upheaval may be significantly out of step with subsequent developments. This can be seen in the case of the Arab Spring (2011) (see p. 87).

Revolution: A popular uprising, involving extra-legal mass action, which brings about fundamental change (a change in the political system itself) as opposed to merely a change of policy or governing elite.

Reform: Change brought about within a system, usually by peaceful and incremental measures; reform implies improvement.



Source: Getty Images/Popperfoto

George Washington en route to the Battle of Trenton (1776) during the American War of Independence that led to the creation of a constitutional republic.

DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY

Modern discussions about legitimacy are dominated by its relationship to democracy, so much so that democratic legitimacy is now widely accepted as the only meaningful form of legitimacy. The claim that a political organization is legitimate may therefore be intrinsically linked to its claim to be democratic. The next main section examines competing models of democratic rule and debates how democracy operates in practice, but this section considers how, and how reliably, democracy is linked to legitimacy.

Democracy can be seen to promote legitimacy in at least three ways. In the first place, it does so through **consent**. Although citizens do not explicitly give their consent to be governed, thereby investing political authority with a formal 'right to rule', they do so implicitly each time they participate in the political process. In this respect, democracy underpins legitimacy by expanding the opportunities for political participation, most importantly through the act of voting, but also through activities such as joining a political party or interest group or by engaging in protests or demonstrations. Political participation, in this sense, binds government and the people, encouraging the latter to view the rules of the political game as rightful and so to accept that they have an obligation to respect and obey those in authority.

Consent: Assent or permission; in politics, usually an agreement to be governed or ruled.

Second, the essence of democratic governance is a process of compromise, conciliation and negotiation, through which rival interests and groups find a way of living together in relative peace, rather than resorting to force and the use of naked power. The mechanisms through which this non-violent conflict resolution takes place, notably elections, assembly debates, party competition, and so forth, thus tend to enjoy broad popular support as they ensure that power is widely dispersed, each group having a political voice of some kind or other. Third, democracy operates as a feedback system that tends towards long-term political stability, as it brings the 'outputs' of government into line with the 'inputs' or pressures placed upon it. As democracy provides a mechanism through which governments can be removed and public policy changed, it tends to keep 'disequilibrium' in the political system to a minimum, enabling legitimisation crises to be managed effectively and substantially undermining the potential for civil strife, rebellion or revolution.

Nevertheless, the notion of an intrinsic link between legitimacy and democracy has also been questioned. Some, for example, argue that the high levels of political stability and low incidence of civic strife and popular rebellion in democratic societies can be explained more persuasively by factors other than democracy. These include the fact that, having in the main advanced capitalist economies, democratic societies tend to enjoy widespread prosperity and are effective in 'delivering the goods'. This is known as **performance legitimacy**. Democratic legitimacy may therefore be less significant than 'capitalist legitimacy'. A further factor is that democratic societies tend to be liberal as well as democratic, liberal democracy (see p. 89) being the dominant form of democracy worldwide. Liberal societies offer wide opportunities for personal freedom, self-expression and social mobility, and these may be as important, or perhaps more important, in maintaining legitimacy than the opportunities that democracy offers for political participation.

Performance legitimacy: The capacity of a regime to generate public acceptance and a sense of rightfulness through the delivery of favourable economic and social outcomes.

Is democracy failing to deliver?

Even if democracy is accepted as the principal mechanism through which legitimacy is promoted, there are reasons for thinking that its effectiveness in this respect may be faltering. In particular, a growing number of mature democratic societies appear to be afflicted by a sense of political

disenchantment and disaffection. This ‘democratic malaise’, seen by some as a crisis in democracy, has been expressed in two main ways. First, there has been a trend towards popular disengagement with established political processes, reflected in the decline in levels of political participation. Many mature democracies have thus experienced falls in electoral turnout, as well as falls in the membership and activist base of mainstream political parties. (This development is examined in greater detail in [Chapter 11](#).) Second, new political forces have emerged to threaten, or at least sit uneasily with, conventional democratic structures. This has been evident in the rise of political ‘outsiders’, such as Donald Trump, and the advance, especially across much of Europe, of populist or anti-establishment parties and movements. The relationship between populism (see p. 53) and democracy is nevertheless both complex and contested (see p. 88).

POLITICS IN ACTION . . .



THE ARAB SPRING: REVOLUTION REVERSED?

Event: The ‘Arab Spring’ was a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests that swept through North Africa and parts of the Middle East during 2011, toppling four dictators. The process was initiated by Tunisia’s ‘Jasmine’ revolution, in which a growing wave of anti-government rallies in early January turned into a nationwide revolt due to incidences of police repression. On 14 January, President Ben Ali fled the country, bringing an end to his 23-year rule. Inspired by events in Tunisia, Egyptian demonstrators took to the streets on 25 January, calling for the removal of President Hosni Mubarak, Tahir Square in Cairo becoming the centre of protests. Under growing pressure from the Egyptian military and after 18 days of protests, Mubarak resigned on 11 February. In Libya, the 42-year rule of President Muammar Gaddafi was brought to an end by an 8-month civil war in which rebel forces were supported by NATO aerial attacks. Gaddafi’s death on 22 October signalled the final collapse of his regime. Other significant popular uprisings in the Arab world occurred in Yemen (where President Saleh was forced from power in November 2011), in Syria (against President Assad) and in Bahrain.

Significance: The Arab Spring provided a dramatic demonstration of the unpredictability of revolutions, in that it may take years before the full consequences of a revolution become

clear. The dominant initial interpretation of the Arab Spring, at least among Western commentators, was that it constituted the first stage in the transition of the wider region from autocratic to democratic rule. Democracy, in short, was coming to the Arab world. Certainly, the key demands of the overwhelmingly secular protesters were the introduction of Western-style democratic reform, notably freeing elections, the rule of law and protection for civil liberties. Furthermore, where regimes collapsed, this was usually accompanied by a promise to hold free elections, as duly occurred in October 2011 in Tunisia and during November–December of the same year in Egypt. Indeed, although its future remains uncertain in view of continuing popular discontent over corruption and economic stagnation, Tunisia has come closest to realizing the expectation of a democratic transition. In 2014, for example, a new Tunisian constitution, which increased human rights and gender equality and laid the basis for a new parliamentary system of government, came into force. Elections, which were also held later in the year, were widely deemed to be relatively free and fair.



Source: Getty Images/Monique Jaques

However, the nascent democratic revolution quickly went into reverse in other countries. In Egypt, for example, Mubarak's overthrow gave rise to an increasingly brutal struggle for power between the Muslim Brotherhood and resurgent armed forces, previously the linchpin of the Mubarak regime. This struggle was eventually resolved in 2014 when Mohamed Morsi, who had been elected president in June 2012 with the support of the Muslim Brotherhood, was overthrown in a military coup. The installation of General el-Sisi as the new president marked the effective end of the Arab Spring in Egypt. In the case of Libya, the ousting of

Gaddafi was followed by a descent into post-revolutionary chaos and confusion, in which local warlords, foreign terrorist groups and elements from the Gaddafi regime vied for power. The most profound and disturbing consequences of the Arab Spring were felt in Syria, however. The conflict in Syria escalated quickly after the Syrian army was deployed to suppress demonstrations against the Assad regime, within months developing into a highly complex and seemingly intractable civil war in which hundreds of thousands of people have died. These events demonstrate the long-term resilience of authoritarianism, when popular demonstrations fail to dislodge the institutional props of the 'old' regime, especially the military, and when foreign powers are prepared to intervene to safeguard an unpopular government, as occurred in Syria in the case of Iran and Russia.

FOCUS ON ...

IS POPULISM A DEMOCRATIC FORCE?

The relationship between populism and democracy has been surrounded by debate and controversy. From one perspective, populism has an essentially democratic character, reflected in the fact that both populism and democracy endorse the principles of popular sovereignty and majority rule. Some, indeed, argue that populism operates as a corrective to democracy, in that it serves as a mouthpiece for groups that feel excluded from the collective decision-making process. This is why populist upsurges typically occur in the context of flawed or dysfunctional democratic systems that are failing, for whatever reason, to give a political voice to significant sections of the public.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny that populism is at odds with the dominant liberal model of democracy. This is because the populist assertion that the instincts and wishes of the people constitute the *sole* legitimate guide to political action implies that nothing should be allowed to stand in the way of the popular will. Populists are therefore likely to show little respect for the 'liberal' aspects of liberal democracy; those that are designed to uphold limited government, such as protections for individual and minority rights, media freedom, the rule of law, and institutional checks and balances.

Finally, populism has simply been viewed as a threat to

democracy. The undemocratic side of populism derives from its monistic nature, 'the (pure) people' being conceived of as a single, homogeneous entity. This means that populists always oppose pluralism, and so are inclined to deny the legitimacy of their opponents. Moreover, populists are, at best, bogus democrats, in that, rather than leaving the people to speak for themselves, they typically rely on personal leadership to construe and articulate the people's 'true' interests. This both creates the danger that populist leaders may, in effect, substitute themselves for the people, and highlights parallels between populism and the fascist 'leader principle' (discussed in [Chapter 14](#)).

How and why have mature democratic societies succumbed to this upsurge in populism? Democracy's traditional success in generating legitimacy was linked to its ability, as a mechanism for dispersing power, to ensure that all individuals and groups had a political voice, even if this extended little beyond having the right to vote. Democracy, as an essentially egalitarian force, thus tended to counteract capitalism's inherent tendency towards inequality. This, in practice, was achieved through the construction of systems of social protection, aimed at alleviating poverty and other forms of hardship.

However, in a process that started in the final decades of the twentieth century, but which has become more acute since the global financial crisis of 2007–09, democracy's ability to generate legitimacy has been compromised by developments that have left growing sections of society feeling politically excluded. People therefore believe that the conventional democratic system does not 'work' for them. Chief among the developments have been the trend towards neoliberalism (see p. 163) and the advance of globalization (see p. 161). Neoliberalism has had challenging implications for democracy, in that the shift it seeks to foster – away from the state and in favour of the market – has typically led to a widening gap between the rich and the poor. While tax cuts and financial deregulation have mainly benefited people who are well-off, the 'rolling back' of welfare provision has tended to disadvantage people who are less well-off. The advent of neoliberalism, from the 1980s onwards, thus reversed the general post-1945 trend towards greater equality.

CONCEPT

Liberal democracy

A liberal democracy is a political regime in which a 'liberal'

commitment to limited government is blended with a 'democratic' belief in popular rule. Its key features are: (1) the right to rule is gained through success in regular and competitive elections, based on universal adult suffrage; (2) constraints on government imposed by a constitution, institutional checks and balances, and protections for individual and minority rights; and (3) a vigorous civil society including a private enterprise economy, independent trade unions, and a free press. The terms liberal democracy and pluralist democracy (see p. 102) are often used interchangeably.

As far as globalization is concerned, its tendency to destabilize the democratic system derives, in part, from the markedly reduced capacity of governments to control their 'borderless' economies. However, at least as significant has been the generation, especially in mature democratic societies, of new social cleavages, in the form of tensions between the winners and losers of the globalization process. The problem for democracy is that those that have lost out in the new world of intensified foreign competition, transnational production, increased migratory flows and, sometimes, global slumps are difficult to reach because they tend to believe that conventional political processes are biased in favour of elite or establishment interests. This, then, makes them susceptible to the appeal of other political messages and other political voices.

Non-democratic legitimacy

If democracy is taken to be the only genuine basis for legitimacy, this implies that non-democratic regimes are, by their nature, illegitimate. Nevertheless, some authoritarian regimes survive for many decades with relatively little evidence of mass political disaffection, still less concerted opposition. Clearly, this can very largely be explained through the use of coercion and repression, fear rather than consent being the principal means through which citizens are encouraged to obey the state. However, non-democratic regimes rarely seek to consolidate their hold on power through coercion alone. They typically adopt a two-pronged approach in which political control is exercised alongside claims to legitimacy. But, in the absence of democracy, what means of legitimation are available to such regimes?

Three key forms of non-democratic legitimation have been used. First, elections, albeit one-party, sometimes non-competitive or 'rigged', have been used to give a regime a democratic façade, helping both to create the impression of popular support and to draw people into a ritualized acceptance of the regime. This legitimation device was used in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, and has also been used in African one-party

states and communist regimes. Second, non-democratic regimes have sought to compensate for their lack of political rights by performance legitimization, based on their ability to deliver, amongst other things, rising living standards, public order, improved education and health care, and so forth. Communist regimes thus emphasize the delivery of a package of socio-economic benefits to their citizens, a strategy that continues to be practised by China through its capacity to generate high and sustained levels of economic growth. Indeed, some have argued that non-democratic regimes may enjoy advantages over democratic ones in this respect, not least because of their ability to undertake major projects of economic restructuring, resisting the pressures generated by short-term unpopularity in the hope of giving long-term rewards.

Third, ideological legitimization has been used, either in an attempt to uphold the leader's, military's or party's right to rule, or to establish broader goals and principles that invest the larger regime with a sense of rightfulness. Examples of the former include Gamal Abdel Nasser's portrayal of the Egyptian military as the 'vanguard of the revolution' after its 1952 coup, and Colonel Gaddafi's proclamation of a 'Green revolution' after seizing power in Libya in 1969. Examples of the latter include the emphasis on Marxism-Leninism in communist states and the use of Wahhabism to support monarchical rule in Saudi Arabia. However, when such strategies fail, all semblance of legitimization evaporates and non-democratic regimes are forced either to resort to progressively more draconian means of survival, or else they collapse in the face of popular uprisings.

DEMOCRACY

Understanding democracy

Debates about democracy extend well beyond its relationship to legitimacy. These stem, most basically, from confusion over the nature of democracy. The origins of the term 'democracy' can be traced back to Ancient Greece. Like other words ending in 'cracy' (for example, autocracy, aristocracy and bureaucracy), democracy is derived from the Greek word *kratos*, meaning power, or rule. Democracy thus means 'rule by the *demos*' (the *demos* referring to 'the people', although the Greeks originally used this to mean 'the poor' or 'the many'). However, the simple notion of 'rule by the people' does not get us very far. The problem with democracy has been its very popularity, a popularity that has threatened the term's undoing as a meaningful political concept. In being almost universally regarded as a 'good thing', democracy has come to be used as little more than a 'hurrah! word', implying approval of a particular

set of ideas or system of rule. In Bernard Crick's (2000) words, 'democracy is perhaps the most promiscuous word in the world of public affairs'. A term that can mean anything to anyone is in danger of meaning nothing at all. Amongst the meanings that have been attached to the word 'democracy' are the following:

- a system of rule by the poor and disadvantaged
- a form of government in which the people rule themselves directly and continuously, without the need for professional politicians or public officials
- a society based on equal opportunity and individual merit, rather than hierarchy and privilege
- a system of welfare and redistribution aimed at narrowing social inequalities
- a system of decision-making based on the principle of majority rule
- a system of rule that secures the rights and interests of minorities by placing checks upon the power of the majority
- a means of filling public offices through a competitive struggle for the popular vote
- a system of government that serves the interests of the people regardless of their participation in political life.

Perhaps a more helpful starting point from which to consider the nature of democracy is Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address (1863). Lincoln extolled the virtues of what he called 'government of the people, by the people, and for the people'. What this makes clear is that democracy links government to the people, but that this link can be forged in a number of ways: government of, by and for the people. This section explores the implications of these links by considering three questions. Who are the people? In what sense should the people rule? And how far should popular rule extend?

Who are the people?

One of the core features of democracy is the principle of political equality, the notion that political power should be distributed as widely and as evenly as possible. However, within what body or group should this power be distributed? In short, who constitutes 'the people'? On the face of it, the answer is simple: 'the *demos*', or 'the people', surely refers to all the people; that is, the entire population of the country. In practice, however, every democratic system has restricted political participation, sometimes severely.

CONCEPT 

Political equality

Political equality means, broadly, an equal distribution of political power and influence. Political equality can thus be thought of as the core principle of democracy, in that it ensures that, however 'the people' is defined, each individual member carries the same weight: all voices are equally loud. This can be understood in two ways. In liberal-democratic theory, political equality implies an equal distribution of political rights: the right to vote, the right to stand for election, and so on. In contrast, socialists, amongst others, link political influence to factors such as the control of economic resources and access to the means of mass communication.

As noted, early Greek writers usually used *demos* to refer to 'the many': that is, the disadvantaged and usually propertyless masses. Democracy therefore implied not political equality, but a bias towards the poor. In Greek city-states, political participation was restricted to a tiny proportion of the population, male citizens over the age of 20, thereby excluding all women, slaves and foreigners. Strict restrictions on voting also existed in most Western states until well into the twentieth century, usually in the form of a property qualification or the exclusion of women. Universal suffrage was not established in the UK until 1928, when women gained full voting rights. In the USA, it was not achieved until the early 1960s, when African-American people in many Southern states were able to vote for the first time, and in Switzerland universal suffrage was established in 1971 when women were eventually enfranchised. Nevertheless, an important restriction continues to be practised in all democratic systems in the form of the exclusion of children from political participation, although the age of majority ranges from 21 down to as low as 15 (as in Iranian presidential elections up to 2007). Technical restrictions are also often placed on, for example, the certifiably insane and imprisoned criminals.

Although 'the people' is now accepted as meaning virtually all adult citizens, the term can be construed in a number of different ways. The people, for instance, can be viewed as a single, cohesive body, bound together by a common or collective interest: in this sense, the people are one and indivisible. Such a view tends to generate a model of democracy that, like Rousseau's (see p. 98) theory, examined in the next main section, focuses upon the 'general will' or collective will, rather than the 'private will' of each individual. Alternatively, as division and disagreement exist within all communities, 'the people' may in practice be taken to mean 'the majority'. In this case, democracy comes to mean the strict application of

the principle of **majority rule**. This can, nevertheless, mean that democracy degenerates into the ‘tyranny of the majority’. Finally, there is the issue of the body of people within which democratic politics should operate. Where should be the location or ‘site’ of democracy? Although, thanks to the potency of political nationalism, the definition ‘the people’ is usually understood in national terms, the ideas of local democracy and, in the light of globalization (see p. 161), **cosmopolitan democracy** (discussed in the final section of the chapter) have also been advanced.

Majority rule: The rule that the will of the majority, or numerically strongest, overrides the will of the minority, implying that the latter should accept the views of the former.

Cosmopolitan democracy: A form of democracy that operates at supranational levels of governance and is based on the idea of transnational or global citizenship.

How should the people rule?

Most conceptions of democracy are based on the principle of ‘government by the people’. This implies that, in effect, people govern themselves – that they participate in making the crucial decisions that structure their lives and determine the fate of their society. This participation can take a number of forms, however. In the case of direct democracy, popular participation entails direct and continuous involvement in decision-making, through devices such as referendums (see p. 223), mass meetings, or even interactive television. The alternative and more common form of democratic participation is the act of voting, which is the central feature of what is usually called ‘representative democracy’. When citizens vote, they do not so much make the decisions that structure their own lives as choose who will make those decisions on their behalf. What gives voting its democratic character, however, is that, provided that the election is competitive, it empowers the public to ‘kick the rascals out’, and thus makes politicians publicly accountable.

There are also models of democracy that are built on the principle of ‘government for the people’, and that allow little scope for public participation of any kind, direct or indirect. The most grotesque example of this was found in the so-called ‘**totalitarian democracies**’ that developed under fascist dictators such as Mussolini and Hitler. The democratic credentials of such regimes were based on the claim that the ‘leader’, and the leader alone, articulated the genuine interests of the people, thus implying that a ‘true’ democracy can be equated with an absolute dictatorship. In such cases, popular rule meant nothing more than ritualized submission to the will of an all-powerful leader, orchestrated

through rallies, marches and demonstrations. This was sometimes portrayed as plebiscitary democracy. Although totalitarian democracies have proved to be a travesty of the conventional notion of democratic rule, they demonstrate the tension that can exist between ‘government by the people’ (or popular participation), and ‘government for the people’ (rule in the public interest). Advocates of representative democracy, for example, have wished to confine popular participation in politics to the act of voting, precisely because they fear that the general public lack the wisdom, education and experience to rule wisely on their own behalf.

Totalitarian democracy: An absolute dictatorship that masquerades as a democracy, typically based on the leader’s claim to a monopoly of ideological wisdom.

How far should popular rule extend?

Now that we have decided who ‘the people’ are, and how they should rule, it is necessary to consider how far their rule should extend. What is the proper realm of democracy? What issues is it right for the people to decide, and what should be left to individual citizens? In many respects, such questions reopen the debate about the proper relationship between the public realm and the private realm that was discussed in [Chapter 1](#). Models of democracy that have been constructed on the basis of liberal individualism have usually proposed that democracy be restricted to political life, with politics being narrowly defined. From this perspective, the purpose of democracy is to establish, through some process of popular participation, a framework of laws within which individuals can conduct their own affairs and pursue their private interests. Democratic solutions, then, are appropriate only for matters that specifically relate to the community; used in other circumstances, democracy amounts to an infringement of liberty. Not uncommonly, this fear of democracy is most acute in the case of direct or participatory democracy (see p. 93).

However, an alternative view of democracy is often developed by, for example, socialists and radical democrats. In **radical democracy**, democracy is seen not as a means of laying down a framework within which individuals can go about their own business but, rather, as a general principle that is applicable to all areas of social existence. People are seen as having a basic right to participate in the making of any decisions that affect their lives, with democracy simply being the collective process through which this is done. This position is evident in socialist demands for the collectivization of wealth and the introduction of workers’ self-management, both of which are seen as ways of democratizing economic life. Instead of endorsing mere political democracy, socialists have

therefore called for 'social democracy' or '**economic democracy**'. Feminists, similarly, have demanded the democratization of family life, understood as the right of all to participate in the making of decisions in the domestic or private sphere. From this perspective, democracy is regarded as a friend of liberty, not as its enemy. Only when such principles are ignored can oppression and exploitation flourish.

Radical democracy: A form of democracy that favours decentralization and participation, the widest possible dispersal of political power.

Economic democracy: A broad term that covers attempts to apply democratic principles to the workplace, ranging from profit-sharing and the use of workers' councils to full workers' self-management.

FOCUS ON ...

DIRECT DEMOCRACY OR REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY?

Direct democracy (sometimes 'classical', 'participatory' or 'radical' democracy) is based on the direct, unmediated and continuous participation of citizens in the tasks of government. Direct democracy thus obliterates the distinction between government and the governed, and between the state and civil society; it is a system of popular self-government. It was achieved in ancient Athens through a form of government by mass meeting; its most common modern manifestation is the use of the referendum (see p. 223). The merits of direct democracy include the following:

- It heightens the control that citizens can exercise over their own destinies, as it is the only pure form of democracy.
- It creates a better-informed and more politically sophisticated citizenry, and thus it has educational benefits.
- It enables the public to express their own views and interests without having to rely on self-serving politicians.
- It ensures that rule is legitimate, in the sense that people are more likely to accept decisions that they have made themselves.

Representative democracy is a limited and indirect form of democracy. It is limited in that popular participation in government is infrequent and brief, being restricted to the act of voting every few years. It is indirect in that the public do not exercise power themselves; they merely select those who will rule on their behalf. This form of rule is democratic only insofar as representation (see p. 219) establishes a reliable and effective link between the

government and the governed. This is sometimes expressed in the notion of an electoral mandate (see p. 222). The strengths of representative democracy include the following:

- It offers a practicable form of democracy (direct popular participation is achievable only in small communities).
- It relieves ordinary citizens of the burden of decision-making, thus making possible a division of labour in politics.
- It allows government to be placed in the hands of those with better education, expert knowledge, and greater experience.
- It maintains stability by distancing ordinary citizens from politics, thereby encouraging them to accept compromise.

CONCEPT

Plebiscitary democracy

Plebiscitary democracy is a form of democratic rule that operates through an unmediated link between the rulers and the ruled, established by plebiscites (or referendums). These allow the public to express their views on political issues directly. However, this type of democracy is often criticized because of the scope it offers for demagoguery (rule by political leaders who manipulate the masses through oratory, and appeal to their prejudices and passions). This type of democracy may amount to little more than a system of mass acclamation that gives dictatorship a populist (see p. 53) gloss.

Models of democracy

All too frequently, democracy is treated as a single, unambiguous phenomenon. It is often assumed that what passes for democracy in most Western societies (a system of regular and competitive elections based on a universal franchise) is the only, or the only legitimate, form of democracy. Sometimes this notion of democracy is qualified by the addition of the term 'liberal', turning it into liberal democracy. In reality, however, there are a number of rival theories or models of democracy, each offering its own version of popular rule. This highlights not merely the variety of democratic forms and mechanisms, but also, more fundamentally, the very different grounds on which democratic rule can be justified. Even liberal democracy is a misleading term, as competing liberal views of democratic organization can be identified. Four contrasting models of democracy can be identified as follows:

- classical democracy

- limited or 'protective' democracy
- developmental democracy
- people's or 'socialist' democracy.

Classical democracy

The classical model of democracy is based on the polis, or city-state, of Ancient Greece, and particularly on the system of rule that developed in the largest and most powerful Greek city-state, Athens. The form of direct democracy that operated in Athens during the fourth and fifth centuries BCE is often portrayed as the only pure or ideal system of popular participation. Nevertheless, although the model had considerable impact on later thinkers such as Rousseau and Marx (see p. 40), Athenian democracy (see p. 96) developed a very particular kind of direct popular rule, one that has only a very limited application in the modern world. Athenian democracy amounted to a form of government by mass meeting. What made Athenian democracy so remarkable was the level of political activity of its citizens. Not only did they participate in regular meetings of the Assembly, but they were also, in large numbers, prepared to shoulder the responsibility of public office and decision-making. The most influential contemporaneous critic of this form of democracy was the philosopher Plato (see p. 13). Plato attacked the principle of political equality on the grounds that the mass of the people possess neither the wisdom nor the experience to rule wisely on their own behalf. His solution, advanced in *The Republic*, was that government be placed in the hands of a class of philosopher kings, Guardians, whose rule would amount to a kind of enlightened dictatorship. On a practical level, however, the principal drawback of Athenian democracy was that it could operate only by excluding the mass of the population from political activity. Participation was restricted to Athenian-born males who were over 20 years of age. Slaves (the majority of the population), women and foreigners had no political rights whatsoever. Indeed, Athenian citizens were able to devote so much of their lives to politics only because slavery relieved them of the need to engage in arduous labour, and the confinement of women to the private realm freed men from domestic responsibilities. Nevertheless, the classical model of direct and continuous popular participation in political life has been kept alive in, for instance, the township meetings of New England in the USA, the communal assemblies that operate in the smaller Swiss cantons, and in the wider use of referendums.

DEBATING . . .

IS DEMOCRACY ALWAYS THE BEST FORM OF GOVERNMENT?

In modern politics, democracy has come to be so widely accepted that it appears to be almost politically incorrect to question it. The 'right' solution to a political problem is thus the democratic solution; that is, one made either by the people themselves or, more commonly, by politicians who are accountable to the people. But why is democracy so widely revered? And are there circumstances in which democratic rule is inappropriate or undesirable?

YES	NO
The highest form of politics. The unique strength of democracy is that it is able to address the central challenge of politics – the existence of rival views and interests within the same society – while containing the tendency towards bloodshed and violence. In short, democratic societies are stable and peaceful. This occurs because democracy relies on open debate, persuasion and compromise. People with rival views or competing interests are encouraged to find a way of living together in relative harmony because each has a political voice. Democracy is therefore a kind of political safety valve, democratic participation preventing the build-up of anger and frustration and, thereby, containing political extremism. Democracy as a universal	The disharmony of democracy. Far from being a guarantee of stability, democracy is biased in favour of conflict and disharmony. This is because democracy sets up an ongoing electoral battle between opponents who are encouraged to condemn one another, exaggerating their faults and denying their achievements. Democratic politics is often, as a result, noisy and unedifying. While the disharmony of democracy is unlikely to threaten structural breakdown in mature and relatively prosperous societies, democracy in the developing world may make things worse rather than better (Hawksley, 2009). 'Democratization' may therefore deepen tribal, regional or ethnic tensions, and strengthen the tendency towards charismatic leadership, thereby breeding

value. It is now widely argued that democracy is a human right: a fundamental and absolute right that belongs to all people, regardless of nationality, religion, gender and other differences. Rights of political participation and access to power, especially the right to vote, are universally applicable because they stem from the basic entitlement to shape the decisions that affect one's own life – the right to self-rule. Indeed, an equal access to power and the right to political participation could be viewed not simply as virtues in their own right, but as preconditions for the maintenance of all other rights and freedoms.

Keeping tyranny at bay. All systems of rule are apt to become tyrannies against the people, reflecting the fact that those in power (and, for that matter, all people) are inclined to place self-interest before the interests of others. Governments and leaders therefore need to be checked or constrained, and there is no more effective constraint on power than democracy. This is because democratic rule operates through a mechanism of accountability, which ultimately allows the public to 'kick the rascals out'.

authoritarianism.

Democracy as Westernization. Rather than being universally applicable, democracy is based on values and assumptions that betray the cultural biases of its Western heartland. Democracy is rooted in ideas such as individualism, notably through the principle of equal citizenship and 'one person, one vote', and notions of pluralism and competition that are intrinsically liberal in character. The dominant form of democracy is therefore Western-style democracy, and its spread, sometimes imposed and always encouraged, to the non-Western world can therefore be viewed as a form of cultural imperialism.

Good government not popular government. Democratic solutions to problems are often neither wise nor sensible. The problem with democracy is that the dictates of wisdom and experience tend to be ignored because the views of the well-educated minority are swamped by those of the less well-educated majority. Being committed to the principle of political equality, democracy cannot cope with the fact that the majority is not always right. This is a particular concern for economic policy,

Democratic societies are therefore not only the most stable societies in the world, but also the societies in which citizens enjoy the widest realm of freedom.

where options, such as raising taxes or cutting government spending, which may best promote long-term economic development, may be ruled out simply because they are unpopular.

CONCEPT

Athenian democracy

Athenian democracy is characterized by the high level of citizen involvement in the affairs of the city-state. Major decisions were made by the Assembly, or *Ecclesia*, to which all citizens belonged. When full-time public officials were needed, they were chosen on a basis of lot or rota to ensure that they constituted a microcosm of the larger citizenry. A Council, consisting of 500 citizens, acted as the executive or steering committee of the Assembly, and a 50-strong Committee, in turn, made proposals to the Council. The President of the Committee held office for only a single day, and no Athenian could hold this honour more than once in his lifetime.

Limited or 'protective' democracy

When democratic ideas were revived in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they appeared in a form that was very different from the classical democracy of Ancient Greece. In particular, democracy was seen less as a mechanism through which the public could participate in political life, and more as a device through which citizens could protect themselves from the encroachments of government, hence 'protective democracy'. This view appealed particularly to early liberal thinkers whose concern was, above all, to create the widest realm of individual liberty. The desire to protect the individual from over-mighty government was expressed in perhaps the earliest of all democratic sentiments, Aristotle's response to Plato: 'who will guard the Guardians?'

This same concern with unchecked power was taken up in the seventeenth century by John Locke (see p. 30), who argued that the right to vote was based on the existence of **natural rights** and, in particular, on the right to property. If government, through taxation, possessed the power to expropriate property, citizens were entitled to protect themselves by controlling the composition of the tax-setting body: the legislature. In

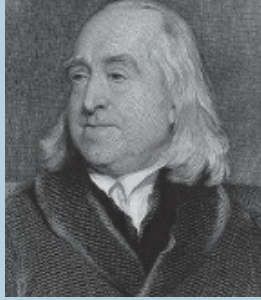
other words, democracy came to mean a system of ‘government by consent’ operating through a representative assembly. However, Locke himself was not a democrat by modern standards, as he believed that only property owners should vote, on the basis that only they had natural rights that could be infringed by government. The more radical notion of universal suffrage was advanced from the late eighteenth century onwards by utilitarian theorists such as Jeremy Bentham and James Mill (1773–1836). The utilitarian (see p. 366) case for democracy is also based on the need to protect or advance individual interests. Bentham came to believe that, since all individuals seek pleasure and the avoidance of pain, a universal franchise (conceived in his day as manhood suffrage) was the only way of promoting ‘the greatest happiness for the greatest number’.

Natural rights: God-given rights that are fundamental to human beings and are therefore inalienable (they cannot be taken away).

However, to justify democracy on protective grounds is to provide only a qualified endorsement of democratic rule. In short, protective democracy is but a limited and indirect form of democracy. In practice, the consent of the governed is exercised through voting in regular and competitive elections. This thereby ensures the accountability of those who govern. Political equality is thus understood in strictly technical terms to mean equal voting rights. Moreover, this is, above all, a system of constitutional democracy that operates within a set of formal or informal rules that check the exercise of government power. If the right to vote is a means of defending individual liberty, liberty must also be guaranteed by a strictly enforced separation of powers via the creation of a separate executive, legislature and judiciary, and by the maintenance of basic rights and freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and freedom from arbitrary arrest. Ultimately, protective democracy aims to give citizens the widest possible scope to live their lives as they choose. It is therefore compatible with *laissez-faire* capitalism (see p. 154) and the belief that individuals should be entirely responsible for their economic and social circumstances. Protective democracy has therefore particularly appealed to classical liberals and, in modern politics, to supporters of the New Right.

KEY THINKER 

JEREMY BENTHAM (1748–1832)



Source: Wellcome Collection

UK philosopher, legal reformer and founder of utilitarianism. Bentham developed a moral and philosophical system that was based on the idea that human beings are rationally self-interested creatures or utility maximizers, which he believed provided a scientific basis for legal and political reforms. Using the 'greatest happiness' principle, his followers, the Philosophic Radicals, were responsible for many of the reforms in social administration, law, government and economics in the UK in the nineteenth century. A supporter of *laissez-faire* economics, in later life Bentham also became a firm advocate of political democracy. His utilitarian creed was developed in *Fragments on Government* ([1776] 1948), and more fully in *Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789).

Developmental democracy

Although early democratic theory focused on the need to protect individual rights and interests, it soon developed an alternative focus: a concern with the development of the human individual and the community. This gave rise to quite new models of democratic rule that can broadly be referred to as systems of developmental democracy. The most novel, and radical, such model was developed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In many respects, Rousseau's ideas mark a departure from the dominant, liberal conception of democracy, and they came to have an impact on the Marxist and anarchist traditions as well as, later, on the New Left. For Rousseau, democracy was ultimately a means through which human beings could achieve freedom (see p. 302) or autonomy, in the sense of 'obedience to a law one prescribes to oneself'. In other words, citizens are 'free' only when they participate directly and continuously in shaping the life of their community. This is an idea that moves well beyond the conventional notion of electoral democracy and offers support for the more radical ideal of direct democracy. Indeed, Rousseau was a strenuous critic of the practice of elections used in England, arguing in *The Social Contract*

([1762] 1913) as follows:

The English people believes itself to be free, it is gravely mistaken; it is only free when it elects its member of parliament; as soon as they are elected, the people are enslaved; it is nothing. In the brief moment of its freedom, the English people makes such use of its freedom that it deserves to lose it.

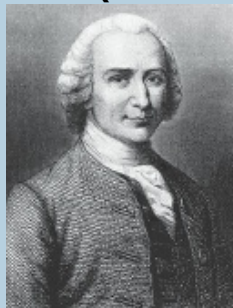
However, what gives Rousseau's model its novel character is his insistence that freedom ultimately means obedience to the **general will**. Rousseau believed the general will to be the 'true' will of each citizen, in contrast to his or her 'private' or selfish will. By obeying the general will, citizens are therefore doing nothing more than obeying their own 'true' natures, the general will being what individuals would will if they were to act selflessly. In Rousseau's view, such a system of radical developmental democracy required not merely political equality, but a relatively high level of economic equality. Although not a supporter of common ownership, Rousseau nevertheless proposed that 'no citizen shall be rich enough to buy another and none so poor as to be forced to sell himself' ([1762] 1913).

General will: The genuine interests of a collective body, equivalent to the common good; the will of all, provided each person acts selflessly.

KEY THINKER



JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU (1712–78)



Source: SUPERSTOCK

Geneva-born French moral and political philosopher, perhaps the principal intellectual influence upon the French Revolution. Rousseau was entirely self-taught. He moved to Paris in 1742, and became an intimate of leading members of the French Enlightenment, especially Diderot. His writings, ranging over education, the arts, science, literature and philosophy, reflect a deep belief in the goodness of 'natural man' and the corruption of

‘social man’. Rousseau’s political teaching, summarized in *Émile* (1762) and developed in *The Social Contract* ([1762] 1913), advocates a radical form of democracy that has influenced liberal, socialist, anarchist and, some would argue, fascist thought. His autobiography, *Confessions* (1770), examines his life with remarkable candour and demonstrates a willingness to expose weaknesses.

Rousseau’s theories have helped to shape the modern idea of participatory democracy taken up by New Left thinkers in the 1960s and 1970s. This extols the virtues of a ‘participatory society’, a society in which each and every citizen is able to achieve self-development by participating in the decisions that shape his or her life. This goal can be achieved only through the promotion of openness, **accountability** and decentralization within all the key institutions of society: within the family, the workplace and the local community just as much as within ‘political’ institutions such as parties, interest groups and legislative bodies. At the heart of this model is the notion of ‘grass-roots democracy’; that is, the belief that political power should be exercised at the lowest possible level. Nevertheless, Rousseau’s own theories have been criticized for distinguishing between citizens’ ‘true’ wills and their ‘felt’ or subjective wills. The danger of this is that, if the general will cannot be established by simply asking citizens what they want (because they may be blinded by selfishness), there is scope for the general will to be defined from above, perhaps by a dictator claiming to act in the ‘true’ interests of society. Rousseau is therefore sometimes seen as the architect of so-called ‘totalitarian democracy’ (Talmon, 1952).

Accountability: Answerability; a duty to explain one’s conduct and be open to criticism by others.

However, a more modest form of developmental democracy has also been advanced that is compatible with the liberal model of representative government. This view of developmental democracy is rooted in the writings of John Stuart Mill (see p. 220). For Mill, the central virtue of democracy is that it promotes the ‘highest and harmonious’ development of individual capacities. By participating in political life, citizens enhance their understanding, strengthen their sensibilities, and achieve a higher level of personal development. In short, democracy is essentially an educational experience. As a result, Mill proposed the broadening of popular participation, arguing that the franchise should be extended to all but those who are illiterate. In the process, he suggested (radically, for his time) that suffrage should also be extended to women. In addition, he

advocated strong and independent local authorities in the belief that this would broaden the opportunities available for holding public office.

On the other hand, Mill, in common with all liberals, was also aware of the dangers of democracy. Indeed, Mill's views are out of step with mainstream liberal thought in that he rejected the idea of formal political equality. Following Plato, Mill did not believe that all political opinions are of equal value. Consequently, he proposed a system of plural voting: unskilled workers would have a single vote, skilled workers two votes, and graduates and members of the learned professions five or six votes. However, his principal reservation about democracy was derived from the more typical liberal fear of what Alexis de Tocqueville (see p. 271) famously described as 'the tyranny of the majority'. In other words, democracy always contains the threat that individual liberty and minority rights may be crushed in the name of the people. Mill's particular concern was that democracy would undermine debate, criticism and intellectual life in general by encouraging people to accept the will of the majority, thereby promoting uniformity and dull conformism. Quite simply, the majority is not always right; wisdom cannot be determined by the simple device of a show of hands. Mill's ideas therefore support the idea of **deliberative democracy** or parliamentary democracy.

Deliberative democracy: A form of democracy that emphasizes the need for reasoned discussion and debate to help to formulate legitimate political outcomes.

CONCEPT

Parliamentary democracy

Parliamentary democracy is a form of democratic rule that operates through a popularly elected deliberative assembly, which mediates between government and the people. Democracy, in this sense, means responsible and representative government. Parliamentary democracy thus balances popular participation against elite rule: government is accountable not directly to the public but to the public's elected representatives. The alleged strength of such a system is that representatives are, by virtue of their education and experience, better able than citizens themselves to define their best interests.

Deliberation, or reasoned discussion, may take place on either a micro or a macro level. Micro deliberation occurs at a set time and place and usually involves face-to-face interaction, with examples including parliamentary debates, committee meetings, town hall gatherings, and so on. Macro

deliberation is deliberation that takes place in the wider public sphere; it is an ongoing and disaggregated process that comprises, for instance, public debate, the free media, ministerial statements and interest group lobbying. However, deliberation can only be said to have a democratic character if it involves all citizens who are substantially affected by the issue or question under consideration, and their participation is both free and meets at least minimal standards of equality (Chappell, 2012). Among the arguments advanced in favour of deliberative democracy are that engagement in reasoned and reciprocal debate encourages citizens to better appreciate the viewpoints and preferences of others, so fostering consensus, if not unanimity, and that the 'power of the best argument' helps to bring policy-making in line with the public interest. Critics of deliberative democracy nevertheless claim, among other things, that, as deliberation typically favours the views of better-educated citizens who are skilled in the arts of persuasion, it tends to promote exclusion and inequality in practice.

People's or 'socialist' democracy

The term 'people's democracy' is derived from the orthodox communist regimes that sprang up on the Soviet model in the aftermath of World War II. It is here used, however, to refer broadly to the various democratic models that the Marxist tradition has generated. Although they differ, these models offer a clear contrast to the more familiar liberal democratic ones. Marxists have tended to be dismissive of liberal or parliamentary democracy, seeing it as a form of 'bourgeois' or 'capitalist' democracy. Nevertheless, Marxists were drawn to the concept or ideal of democracy because of its clear egalitarian implications. The term was used, in particular, to designate the goal of social equality brought about through the common ownership of wealth ('social democracy' in its original sense), in contrast to 'political' democracy, which establishes only a façade of equality.

Marx believed that the overthrow of capitalism would be a trigger that would allow genuine democracy to flourish. In his view, a fully communist society would come into existence only after a transitional period characterized by 'the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat'. In effect, a system of 'bourgeois' democracy would be replaced by a very different system of 'proletarian' democracy. Although Marx refused to describe in detail how this transitional society would be organized, its broad shape can be discerned from his admiration for the Paris Commune of 1871, which was a short-lived experiment in what approximated to direct democracy.

KEY THINKER

ROSA LUXEMBURG (1871–1919)



Source: Getty Images/Universal Images Group

A Polish-born socialist and exponent of revolutionary Marxism, Luxemburg advanced the first Marxist critique of the Bolshevik tradition from the point of view of democracy. Emphasizing the benefits of a broadly based democratic organization, she condemned Lenin's conception of a tightly centralized vanguard party as an attempt to exert political control over the working class. By associating vanguardism with the rise of despotism, she predicted the subsequent course of Russian communism. In her most important theoretical work, *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), Luxemburg examined the intrinsic connections between capitalism, nationalism, militarism and imperialism. In *Social Reform or Revolution* (1899), she condemned the revisionism of Eduard Bernstein and others for denying the objective foundations of the socialist project.

The form of democracy that was developed in twentieth-century communist states, however, owed more to the ideas of V. I. Lenin than it did to those of Marx. Although Lenin's 1917 slogan 'All power to the Soviets' (the workers' and soldiers' and sailors' councils) had kept alive the notion of commune democracy, in reality power in Soviet Russia quickly fell into the hands of the Bolshevik party (soon renamed the 'Communist Party'). In Lenin's view, this party was nothing less than 'the vanguard of the working class'. Armed with Marxism, the party claimed that it was able to perceive the genuine interests of the proletariat and thus guide it to the realization of its revolutionary potential. This theory became the cornerstone of '**Leninist democracy**', and it was accepted by all other orthodox communist regimes as one of the core features of Marxism–Leninism. However, Leninist thinking about democracy has by no means commanded universal support within Marxism. For example, Rosa

Luxemburg associated the notion of the vanguard party with the problem of ‘substitutionism’, in which a ruling party substitutes itself for the proletariat and, eventually, a supreme leader substitutes himself or herself for the party.

Leninist democracy: A form of democracy in which the communist party, organized on the basis of ‘democratic centralism’, articulates the interest of the proletariat.

KEY THINKER

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN (1870–1924)



Source: Unsplash/Jim Manchester

Russian Marxist theorist and active revolutionary. As leader of the Bolsheviks, Lenin masterminded the 1917 Russian Bolshevik Revolution, and became the first leader of the USSR. His contributions to Marxism were his theory of the revolutionary (or vanguard) party, outlined in *What is to be Done?* ([1902] 1968); his analysis of colonialism as an economic phenomenon, described in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* ([1916] 1970); and his firm commitment to the ‘insurrectionary road to socialism’, developed in *State and Revolution* (1917). Lenin’s reputation is inevitably tied up with the subsequent course of Soviet history; he is seen by some as the father of Stalinist oppression, but by others as a critic of bureaucracy and a defender of debate and argument.

Democracy in practice: rival views

Although there continues to be controversy about which is the most desirable form of democracy, much of contemporary debate revolves around how democracy works in practice and what ‘democratization’ (see p. 120) implies. This reflects the fact that there is broad, even worldwide, acceptance of a particular model of democracy, generally termed liberal democracy. Despite the existence of competing tendencies within this broad category, certain central features are clear:

CONCEPT

Pluralism

In its broad sense, pluralism is a belief in, or a commitment to, diversity or multiplicity (the existence of many things). As a descriptive term, pluralism may be used to denote the existence of party competition (political pluralism), a multiplicity of moral values (ethical pluralism), or a variety of cultural norms (cultural pluralism). As a normative term, it suggests that diversity is healthy and desirable, usually because it safeguards individual liberty and promotes debate, argument and understanding. More narrowly, pluralism is a theory of the distribution of political power. It holds that power is widely and evenly dispersed in society.

- Liberal democracy is an indirect and representative form of democracy, in that political office is gained through success in regular elections that are conducted on the basis of formal political equality.
- It is based on competition and electoral choice. These are achieved through political pluralism, tolerance of a wide range of contending beliefs, and the existence of conflicting social philosophies and rival political movements and parties.
- It is characterized by a clear distinction between the state and civil society. This is maintained through the existence of autonomous groups and interests, and the market or capitalist organization of economic life.
- It provides protection for minorities and individuals, particularly through the allocation of basic rights that safeguard them from the will of the majority.

Nevertheless, there is a considerable amount of disagreement about the meaning and significance of liberal democracy. Does it, for instance, ensure a genuine and healthy dispersal of political power? Do democratic processes genuinely promote long-term benefits, or are they self-defeating? Can political equality coexist with economic inequality? In short, this form of democracy is interpreted in different ways by different theorists. The most important of these interpretations are advanced by:

- pluralism
- elitism
- corporatism
- the New Right
- Marxism.

Pluralist view

Pluralist ideas can be traced back to early liberal political philosophy, and notably to the ideas of Locke and Montesquieu (see p. 344). Their first systematic development, however, is found in the contributions of James Madison (see p. 351) to *The Federalist Papers* (Hamilton *et al.*, [1787–89] 1961). In considering the transformation of America from a loose confederation of states into the federal USA, Madison's particular fear was the 'problem of factions'. In common with most liberals, Madison argued that unchecked democratic rule might simply lead to majoritarianism, to the crushing of individual rights and to the expropriation of property in the name of the people. What made Madison's work notable, however, was his stress upon the multiplicity of interests and groups in society, and his insistence that, unless each such group possessed a political voice, stability and order would be impossible. He therefore proposed a system of divided government based on the separation of powers (see p. 345), bicameralism and federalism (see p. 397), that offered a variety of access points to competing groups and interests. The resulting system of rule by multiple minorities is often referred to as '**Madisonian democracy**'. Insofar as it recognizes both the existence of diversity or multiplicity in society, and the fact that such multiplicity is desirable, Madison's model is the first developed statement of pluralist principles.

Madisonian democracy: A form of democracy that incorporates constitutional protections for minorities that enable them to resist majority rule.

CONCEPT

Pluralist democracy

The term pluralist democracy is sometimes used interchangeably with liberal democracy. More specifically, it refers to a form of democracy that operates through the capacity of organized groups and interests to articulate popular demands and ensure responsive government. The conditions for a healthy pluralist democracy include: (1) a wide dispersal of political power amongst competing groups; (2) a high degree of internal responsiveness, group leaders being accountable to members; and (3) a neutral governmental machine that is sufficiently fragmented to offer groups a number of points of access.

The most influential modern exponent of pluralist theory is Robert Dahl (see p. 275). As described in *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (1961), Dahl carried out an empirical study of the distribution of power in New Haven, Connecticut, USA. He concluded

that, although the politically privileged and economically powerful exerted greater power than ordinary citizens, no ruling or permanent elite was able to dominate the political process. His conclusion was that 'New Haven is an example of a democratic system, warts and all'. Dahl recognized that modern democratic systems differ markedly from the classical democracies of Ancient Greece. With Charles Lindblom, he coined the term 'polyarchy' (see p. 117) to mean rule by the many, as distinct from rule by all citizens. The key feature of such a system of pluralist democracy is that competition between parties at election time, and the ability of interest or pressure groups to articulate their views freely, establishes a reliable link between the government and the governed, and creates a channel of communication between the two. While this may fall a long way short of the ideal of popular self-government, its supporters nevertheless argue that it ensures a sufficient level of accountability and popular responsiveness for it to be regarded as democratic.

However, the relationship between pluralism and democracy may not be a secure one. For instance, one of the purposes of the Madisonian system was, arguably, to constrain democracy in the hope of safeguarding property. In other words, the system of rule by multiple minorities may simply have been a device to prevent the majority (the propertyless masses) from exercising political power. A further problem is the danger of what has been called 'pluralist stagnation'. This occurs as organized groups and economic interests become so powerful that they create a log jam, resulting in the problem of government 'overload'. In such circumstances, a pluralist system may simply become ungovernable. Finally, there is the problem identified by Dahl in later works, such as *A Preface to Economic Democracy* (1985); notably, that the unequal ownership of economic resources tends to concentrate political power in the hands of the few, and deprive the many of it. This line of argument runs parallel to the conventional Marxist critique of pluralist democracy, and has given rise to neopluralism (see p. 63).

Elitist view

Elitism (see p. 104) developed as a critique of egalitarian ideas such as democracy and socialism. It draws attention to the fact of elite rule, either as an inevitable and desirable feature of social existence, or as a remediable and regrettable one. Classical elitists, such as Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), Gaetano Mosca (1857–1941) and Robert Michels (1876–1936), tended to take the former position. For them, democracy was no more than a foolish delusion, because political power is always exercised by a privileged minority: an elite. For example, in *The Ruling Class*

([1896] 1939), Mosca proclaimed that, in all societies, ‘two classes of people appear – a class that rules and a class that is ruled’. In his view, the resources or attributes that are necessary for rule are always unequally distributed, and, further, a cohesive minority will always be able to manipulate and control the masses, even in a parliamentary democracy. Pareto suggested that the qualities needed to rule conform to one of two psychological types: ‘foxes’ (who rule by cunning and are able to manipulate the consent of the masses), and ‘lions’ (whose domination is typically achieved through coercion and violence). Michels developed an alternative line of argument based on the tendency within all organizations, however democratic they might appear, for power to be concentrated in the hands of a small group of dominant figures who can organize and make decisions. He termed this ‘the iron law of oligarchy’ (see p. 256).

Whereas classical elitists strove to prove that democracy was always a myth, modern elitist theorists have tended to highlight how far particular political systems fall short of the democratic ideal. An example of this can be found in C. Wright Mills’ influential account of the power structure in the USA. In contrast to the pluralist notion of a wide and broadly democratic dispersal of power, Mills, in *The Power Elite* (1956), offered a portrait of a USA dominated by a nexus of leading groups. In his view, this ‘power elite’ comprised a triumvirate of big business (particularly defence-related industries), the US military and political cliques surrounding the President. Drawing on a combination of economic power, bureaucratic control, and access to the highest levels of the executive branch of government, the power elite is able to shape key ‘history-making’ decisions, especially in the fields of defence and foreign policy, as well as strategic economic policy. The power-elite model suggests that liberal democracy in the USA is largely a sham. Elitists have, moreover, argued that empirical studies have supported pluralist conclusions only because Dahl and others have ignored the importance of non-decision-making as a manifestation of power (see p. 9).

Certain elite theorists have nevertheless argued that a measure of democratic accountability is consistent with elite rule. Whereas the power-elite model portrays the elite as a cohesive body, bound together by common or overlapping interests, competitive elitism (sometimes called ‘democratic elitism’) highlights the significance of elite rivalry (see [Figure 4.1](#)). In other words, the elite, consisting of the leading figures from a number of competing groups and interests, is fractured. This view is often associated with Joseph Schumpeter’s (see p. 224) ‘realistic’ model of

democracy outlined in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942):

The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.

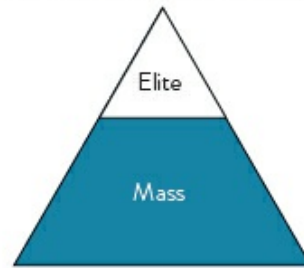
The electorate can decide which elite rules, but cannot change the fact that power is always exercised by an elite. This model of competitive elitism was developed by Anthony Downs (1957) into the 'economic theory of democracy'. In effect, electoral competition creates a political market in which politicians act as entrepreneurs bent upon achieving government power, and individual voters behave like consumers, voting for the party with the policies that most closely reflect their own preferences. Downs argued that a system of open and competitive elections guarantees democratic rule because it places government in the hands of the party whose philosophy, values, and policies correspond most closely to the preferences of the largest group of voters. As Schumpeter put it, 'democracy is the rule of the politician'. As a model of democratic politics, competitive elitism at least has the virtue that it corresponds closely to the workings of the liberal-democratic political system. Indeed, it emerged more as an attempt to describe how the democratic process works than through a desire to prescribe certain values and principles – political equality, popular participation, freedom, or whatever.

CONCEPT

Elitism

Elite originally meant, and can still mean, 'the highest', 'the best' or 'the excellent'. Used in an empirical sense, it refers to a minority in whose hands power, wealth or privilege is concentrated. Elitism is a belief in, or practice of, rule by an elite or minority. Normative elitism suggests that political power should be vested in the hands of a wise or enlightened minority. *Classical* elitism claims to be empirical (although normative beliefs often intrudes), and sees elite rule as an unchangeable fact of social existence. *Modern* elitism is also empirical, but it is more critical and discriminating about the causes of elite rule.

Power elite model: single, coherent elite



Competitive elite model: fractured elite

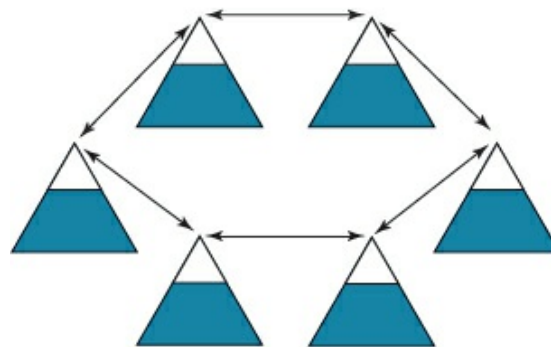


Figure 4.1 Elite models

Corporatist view

The origins of corporatism (see p. 276) date back to the attempt in Fascist Italy to construct a so-called ‘corporate state’ by integrating both managers and workers into the processes of government. Corporatist theorists, however, have drawn attention to parallel developments in the world’s major industrialized states. In the form of **neocorporatism**, or liberal corporatism, this gave rise to the spectre of ‘tripartite government’, in which government is conducted through organizations that allow state officials, employers’ groups, and unions to deal directly with one another. To a large extent, this tendency to integrate economic interests into government (which was common in the post-1945 period, and particularly prominent in, for example, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Austria) was a consequence of the drift towards economic management and intervention. As government sought to manage economic life and deliver an increasingly broad range of public services, it recognized the need for institutional arrangements that were designed to secure the cooperation and support of major economic interests. Where attempts have been made to shift economic policy away from state intervention and towards the free market (as in the UK since 1979), the impact of corporatism has markedly diminished.

Neocorporatism: A tendency found in Western polyarchies for organized interests to be granted privileged and institutionalized access to policy formulation.

The significance of corporatism in terms of democratic processes is clearly considerable. There are those who, like the British guild socialists, argue that corporatism makes possible a form of functional representation, in that individuals' views and interests are articulated more by the groups to which they belong than through the mechanism of competitive elections. What is called 'corporate pluralism' thus portrays tripartism as a mechanism through which the major groups and interests in society compete to shape government policy. Some commentators, however, see corporatism as a threat to democracy. In the first place, corporatism only advantages groups that are accorded privileged access to government. 'Insider' groups therefore possess a political voice, while 'outsider' groups are denied one. Second, corporatism can work to the benefit of the state, rather than major economic interests, in that the **peak associations** that the government chooses to deal with can be used to exert discipline over their members and to filter out radical demands. Finally, corporatism threatens to subvert the processes of electoral or parliamentary democracy. Policy is made through negotiations between government officials and leaders of powerful economic interests, rather than through the deliberations of a representative assembly. Interest-group leaders may thus exert considerable political power, even though they are in no way publicly accountable and their influence is not subject to public scrutiny.

Peak association: A group recognized by government as representing the general or collective interests of businesses or workers.

New Right view

The emergence of the New Right from the 1970s onwards has generated a very particular critique of democratic politics. This has focused on the danger of what has been called 'democratic overload': the paralysis of a political system that is subject to unrestrained group and electoral pressures. One aspect of this critique has highlighted the unsavoury face of corporatism. New Right theorists are keen advocates of the free market, believing that economies work best when left alone by government. The danger of corporatism from this perspective is that it empowers sectional groups and economic interests, enabling them to make demands on government for increased pay, public investment, subsidies, state protection, and so on. In effect, corporatism allows well-placed interest groups to dominate and dictate to government. The result of this,

according to the New Right, is an irresistible drift towards state intervention and economic stagnation (Olson, 1984).

Government 'overload' can also be seen to be a consequence of the electoral process. This was what Brittan (1977) referred to as 'the economic consequences of democracy'. In this view, electoral politics amounts to a self-defeating process in which politicians are encouraged to compete for power by offering increasingly unrealistic promises to the electorate. Both voters and politicians are held to blame here. Voters are attracted by promises of higher public spending because they calculate that the cost (an increased tax burden) will be spread over the entire population. Politicians, consumed by the desire to win power, attempt to outbid one another by making ever more generous spending pledges to the electorate. According to Brittan, the economic consequences of unrestrained democracy are high levels of inflation fuelled by public borrowing, and a tax burden that destroys enterprise and undermines growth. As characterized by Marquand (1988), the New Right view is that 'democracy is to adults what chocolate is to children: endlessly tempting; harmless in small doses; sickening in excess'. New Right theorists therefore tend to see democracy in strictly protective terms, regarding it essentially as a defence against arbitrary government, rather than a means of bringing about social transformation.

Marxist view

As pointed out in relation to people's democracy, the Marxist view of democratic politics is rooted in class analysis. In this view, political power cannot be understood narrowly in terms of electoral rights, or in terms of the ability of groups to articulate their interests by lobbying and campaigning. Rather, at a deeper level, political power reflects the distribution of economic power and, in particular, the unequal ownership of productive wealth. The Marxist critique of liberal democracy thus focuses upon the inherent tension between democracy and capitalism; that is, between the political equality that liberal democracy proclaims and the social inequality that a capitalist economy inevitably generates. Liberal democracies are thus seen as 'capitalist' or 'bourgeois' democracies that are manipulated and controlled by the entrenched power of a **ruling class**.

Ruling class: A Marxist term, denoting a class that dominates other classes and society at large by virtue of its ownership of productive wealth.

Marxism thus offers a distinctive critique of pluralist democracy. Power cannot be widely and evenly dispersed in society as long as class power is unequally distributed. Indeed, in many respects, the Marxist view parallels

the elitist critique of pluralism. Both views suggest that power is ultimately concentrated in the hands of the few, the main difference being whether the few is conceived of as a 'power elite' or as a 'ruling class'. However, significant differences can also be identified. For instance, whereas elitists suggest that power derives from a variety of sources (education, social status, bureaucratic position, political connections, wealth, and so on), Marxists emphasize the decisive importance of economic factors; notably, the ownership and control of the means of production. Modern Marxists, however, have been less willing to dismiss electoral democracy as nothing more than a sham. **Eurocommunists**, for example, abandoned the idea of revolution, embracing instead the notion of a peaceful, legal and democratic 'road to socialism'.

Eurocommunism: A form of deradicalized communism that attempted to blend Marxism with liberal-democratic principles.

Towards cosmopolitan democracy?

The idea of cosmopolitan democracy has received growing attention due to the advance of globalization and the evident 'hollowing out' of domestic democratic processes focused on the nation-state. If global interconnectedness means that policy-making authority has shifted from national governments to international organizations, surely democracy should be recast in line with this? However, what would cosmopolitan democracy look like, and how would it operate? Two basic models have been advanced. The first would involve the construction of a world parliament, a body whose role would be to introduce greater scrutiny and openness to the process of global decision-making by calling to account established international organizations, such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and so forth. Very few advocates of such an idea contemplate the creation of a fully fledged world government or global state; most, instead, favour a multilevel system of post-sovereign governance in which no body or level is able to exercise final authority. Held (1995) proposed a package of measures, including the establishment of a 'global parliament', reformed and more accountable international organizations, and the 'permanent shift of a growing proportion of a nation state's coercive capacity to regional and global institutions'. Monbiot (2004), for his part, backed the creation of a popularly elected world parliament, composed of 600 representatives, each with a constituency of about 10 million people, many of which would straddle national borders.

Global civil society

Global civil society refers to a realm in which transnational non-governmental groups and associations interact. These groups are typically voluntary and non-profitmaking, setting them apart from TNCs (see p. 168). However, the term 'global civil society' is complex and contested. In its 'activist' version, transnational social movements are the key agents of global civil society, giving it an 'outsider' orientation, and a strong focus on cosmopolitan ideals. In its 'policy' version, NGOs are the key agents of global civil society, giving it an 'insider' orientation and meaning that it overlaps with global governance (see p. 449).

The alternative model of cosmopolitan democracy is less ambitious and formalized, relying less on the construction of new bodies and more on the reform of existing international organizations, often linked to the strengthening of global civil society. This model places its faith in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (see p. 273) to reconfigure global power by offering an alternative to top-down corporate globalization. This idea of 'globalization from below' amounts to a bottom-up democratic vision of a civilizing world order. Such an approach would be effective to the extent that NGOs and transnational social movements could introduce an element of public scrutiny and accountability to the working of international bodies, conferences, summits, and the like, meaning that global civil society functions as a channel of communications between the individual and global institutions.

However, the prospects for cosmopolitan democracy are far from rosy. In the first place, states, and especially major states, are likely to block any trend towards global democracy, or ensure that any 'alternative' bodies that may be created will lack credibility and remain peripheral to global decision-making. In a wider sense, the egalitarian thrust implicit in the idea of cosmopolitan democracy is simply out of step with the deep economic, political, and military disparities of the existing global system. Aside from the obstacles confronting the transition to cosmopolitan democracy, critics have argued that the project itself may be profoundly misconceived. In the first place, however structured and composed, any global institution that is tasked with ensuring public accountability is doomed to failure. The inevitable 'gap' between popularly elected global political institutions and ordinary citizens around the world would mean that any claim that these institutions are democratic would be mere pretence. Democracy, in this light, is perhaps only meaningful if it is local or national, and all international organizations, whether these are regional

or global, are destined to suffer from a debilitating ‘democratic deficit’. Second, the democratic credentials of NGOs and, for that matter, social movements may be entirely bogus. Large memberships, committed activists, and the ability to mobilize popular protests and demonstrations undoubtedly give social movements and NGOs political influence, but they do not invest them with democratic authority. Quite simply, there is no way of testing the weight of their views against those of the population at large.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why does power need legitimation?
2. Are capitalist societies inevitably prone to legitimation crises?
3. What is the relationship between populism and democracy?
4. Is democratic legitimacy the only meaningful form of legitimacy?
5. How, and to what extent, is democracy’s capacity to deliver legitimacy faltering?
6. Is government *by* the people compatible with government *for* the people?
7. Does direct democracy have any relevance in modern circumstances?
8. Have the virtues of democracy been overstated?
9. How do classical democracy and protective democracy differ?
10. Which model of democracy is the most attractive, and why?
11. Do modern forms of representative democracy deserve to be described as democratic?
12. Should democratic systems encompass guarantees of minority rights?
13. What are the major threats to democracy in modern society?
14. Is cosmopolitan democracy possible, or desirable?



FURTHER READING

Beard, M., *Women and Power: A Manifesto* (2017). A powerful gender manifesto which uses insights from the ancient world to advocate feminist action.

Dahl, R. A., *On Democracy* (2nd edn) (2015). An explanation of the nature, value, and mechanics of democracy, written by a leading democratic theorist.

Held, D., *Models of Democracy* (3rd edn) (2006). A rigorous and

stimulating examination of rival models of democracy and the present state of democratic theory.

Levi, M., 'The Who, What, and Why of Performance-based Legitimacy' (2018). The concluding article in a special issue focused on virtuous circles of governance.

Levitsky, S., and D. Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (2018). An accessible account of key debates on democratic backsliding and what can be done to arrest the trend.

Tilly, C., *Democracy* (2007). A critical summary of the processes causing democratization and de-democratization at a national level across the world over the last few hundred years.

Whelan, F. G., *Democracy in Theory and Practice* (2018). An authoritative overview of democratic theory today, linking theory with practice.



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