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introduction to POLITICS

Robert GARNER
Peter FERDINAND
Stephanie LAWSON

fourth edition

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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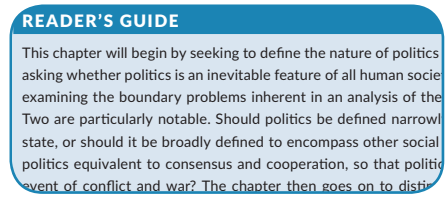
READER'S GUIDE

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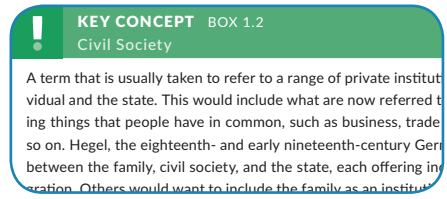
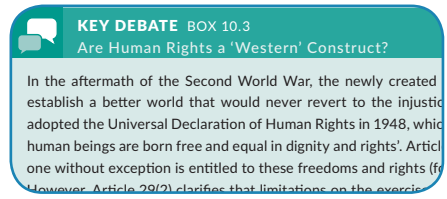
Key Concept Boxes throughout the text draw out and clearly explain important ideas.


KEY CONCEPT BOX 1.2
Civil Society

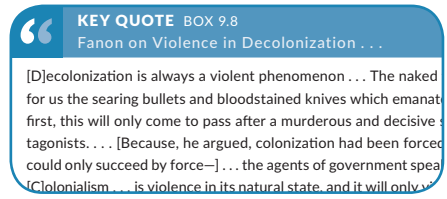
A term that is usually taken to refer to a range of private institut vidual and the state. This would include what are now referred t ing things that people have in common, such as business, trade so on. Hegel, the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Ger between the family, civil society, and the state, each offering in gration. Others would want to include the family as an institut

Key Debate Boxes in each chapter highlight key areas of contention and challenge you to think critically about important issues in the text.


KEY DEBATE BOX 10.3
Are Human Rights a 'Western' Construct?

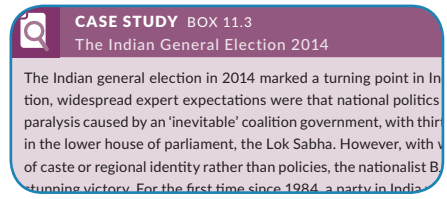
In the aftermath of the Second World War, the newly created establish a better world that would never revert to the injustic adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, whic human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'. Articl one without exception is entitled to these freedoms and rights (fr However, Article 29(2) clarifies that limitations on the exercis

Key Quote Boxes throughout the text draw out important and influential statements.


KEY QUOTE BOX 9.8
Fanon on Violence in Decolonization . . .

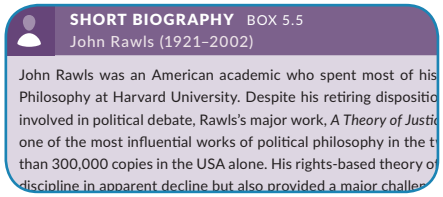
[D]ecolonization is always a violent phenomenon . . . The naked for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanat first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive tagonists. . . . [Because, he argued, colonization had been forced could only succeed by force—] . . . the agents of government spea [C]olonialism . . . is violence in its natural state, and it will only y

Case Study Boxes demonstrate how political ideas, concepts, and issues manifest in the real world.

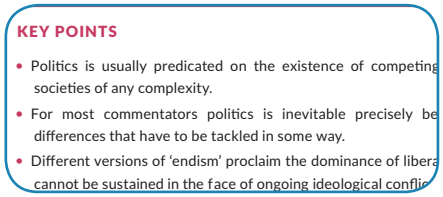

CASE STUDY BOX 11.3
The Indian General Election 2014

The Indian general election in 2014 marked a turning point in In tion, widespread expert expectations were that national politics paralysis caused by an 'inevitable' coalition government, with thir in the lower house of parliament, the Lok Sabha. However, with v of caste or regional identity rather than policies, the nationalist B stunning victory. For the first time since 1984, a party in India

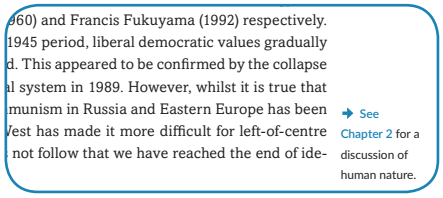
Short Biography Boxes provide you with more information on key political thinkers and their ideas.



Key Points at the end of each section draw out the most important points and arguments from the text.



Cross-references throughout the book help you to make connections between the chapters and deepen your understanding of particular topics.



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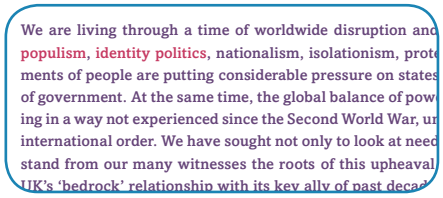
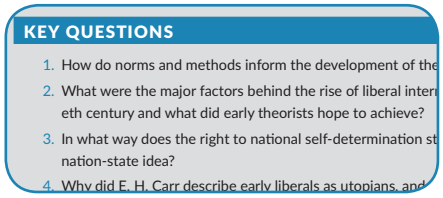
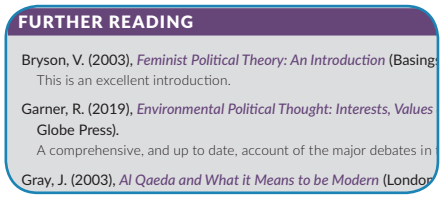


Key questions at the end of every chapter help you to check your understanding of core themes and critically reflect on the chapter material.



Further reading lists are provided at the end of each chapter to help you take your learning further and to locate they key academic literature relevant to the chapter topic.



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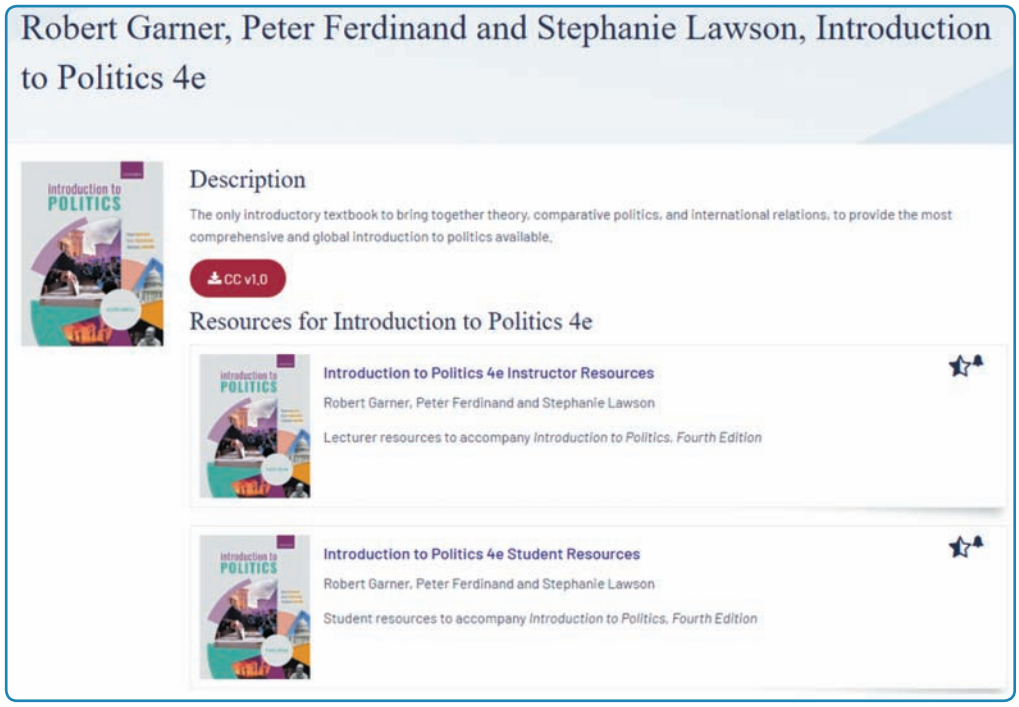

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- Learn more about the people behind the theory with the 'Key Thinkers' resource
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- Revise key terms and concepts with an online flashcard glossary

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GHANA
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SOUTH ATLANTIC OCEAN
Falkland Islands (UK)
South Georgia (UK)
Antarctic Circle
ANTARCTICA
undefined
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FRANCE
NEW ZEALAND
Prime Meridian
international boundary
disputed boundary
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1

INTRODUCTION: THE NATURE OF POLITICS AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

BY ROBERT GARNER

CHAPTER CONTENTS

READER'S GUIDE

This chapter will begin by seeking to define the nature of politics and the political before asking whether politics is an inevitable feature of all human societies. Some time is spent examining the boundary problems inherent in an analysis of the nature of the political. Two are particularly notable. Should politics be defined narrowly, in the context of the state, or should it be broadly defined to encompass other social institutions? Second, is politics equivalent to consensus and cooperation, so that politics does not exist in the event of conflict and war? The chapter then goes on to distinguish between different forms of political analysis—the empirical, the normative, and the semantic—and outlines different approaches to the study of politics. Finally, it is asked whether politics can ever be a science to rival subjects in the natural sciences.

1

WHAT IS POLITICS?

Politics is a many-sided activity which is impervious to one simple definition. A crucial question is to ask what are the boundaries of the political? Should we draw them narrowly, at the risk of rejecting much of what might fairly be described as politics, or should we draw them widely, at the risk of diluting the term to the point of meaninglessness?

Definitional rigour is not helped by the fact that politics is often popularly regarded in a pejorative sense, associated with corruption, intrigue, and conflict. The close association of politics with power, or more especially the abuse of power, compounds the negative associations, as does the perception that many politicians in the contemporary period are only 'in it for themselves'. US President Trump's promise, made during his 2016 election campaign, to 'drain the swamp' of Washington DC initially referred to conflicts of interest created by the political lobbying industry, but the phrase also stands as a more general metaphor, at least for Trump supporters, for almost everything that appears to be wrong at the centre of American politics.

One commentator has noted that the popular association of politics with the apparent pursuit of the material self-interest of politicians in the contemporary period is 'oddly antithetical to its very *raison d'etre*'—that is the realization of the 'collective good' (Hay, 2002: 3). Most contemporary politicians would say that this is actually what motivated them to seek public office in the first place, and there is no doubt that many do genuinely believe that it lies at the heart of their calling. The view of politics as essential to the realization of a common or collective good has appeared in the work of political thinkers from the ancient Greeks onwards.

In the ancient and pre-modern periods, in addition to Aristotle, political philosophers such as Plato (427–327 BC), Cicero (106–43 BC), St Augustine of Hippo (354–430), and St Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) all articulated conceptions of the common good, and highlighted the task of politics in achieving this. In the Arab/Muslim world, too, philosophers such as Ibn Rushd (1126–98) saw the purpose of government and politics as creating the conditions for the pursuit of the good life while much of classical Hindu political philosophy in South Asia and the Confucian tradition of thought in East Asia centred on similar themes. In the modern period, political philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) and John Stuart Mill (1806–73) regarded participation in political life as an honourable activity that ought to be encouraged. The essentially noble purpose of politics is therefore evident in a broad range of philosophical traditions. Here, it is interesting to note that in the ancient Greek world, the term *idiotes* (idiot) referred specifically to a citizen who took no interest in the affairs of the polis.

The pejorative critique of politics actually provides, though, a clue to what politics is about. For it might be argued that politics is associated with adversarial behaviour precisely because it reflects the conflictual nature of society, or, to use a less value-laden term, the fact that all societies of any complexity contain a range of different interests and values. Indeed, one popular definition of politics is that it is the process by which groups representing divergent interests and values make collective decisions. There are two assumptions here. The first is that all societies of any complexity must contain diversity, that humans will always have different interests and values, and therefore there will always be a need for a mechanism whereby these different interests and values are reconciled. The second assumption is that scarcity is also an inevitable characteristic of all societies. Since there is not enough to go around of the goods that people want, there needs to be some mechanism whereby these goods can be distributed.

Politics would seem, then, in the words of the American political scientist Harold Lasswell (1936), to be about 'Who Gets What, When, How?' Clearly, of great importance here is the way in which economic goods are distributed, as these are crucially important in determining the nature of society and the well-being of those who live within it. As we shall see in Chapter 5, competing theories of distributive justice focus on a particular ordering of economic goods. However, there are other goods that humans value. Status, for instance, is seen to be particularly important. For most people, for example, the granting of an honour, whether by the state or an organization within **civil society**, is regarded as valuable, even though no monetary reward is attached to it.

The study of politics prior to the nineteenth century was almost exclusively concerned with a study of values; that is, politics was equated with philosophy. Political philosophers asked, what is the good life? What, in other words, is the best kind of society for us to live in? Many different answers to this question have been provided but, as Stoker (2006: 6) points out, a 'central divide for much of the last two centuries has been between those who prefer liberty over equality and those who prefer equality over liberty'. This of course raises the question of the balance between the two. In the present period, there is evidence of a widening gap between rich and poor in many countries. Of equal importance in the twenty-first century is the conflict between liberty and the value of security—a theme which has become increasingly prominent in the wake of '9/11' and the heightened sense of threat from terror attacks.

IS POLITICS INEVITABLE?

If we define politics in terms of differences, conflicts, and scarcity, then it might be, and has by many been suggested, that politics is an inevitable feature of all societies. Not all agree with this. For some, such a claim seriously underestimates the possibility of greater social cohesion based around agreement on core values. Marxists, in particular, suggest that, since differences of interests in society centre on the existence of competing social classes, the creation of a classless society offers the prospect of a society based on consensus and cooperation, one in which politics and the state are not necessary.

Politics, for Marx then, is seen in negative terms. It is about class conflict. Political power, as Marx and Engels famously insisted in the *Communist Manifesto* (1976: 105), is 'merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another'. It logically follows from this that, once that conflict is ended through the overthrow of capitalism, there are no competing classes and therefore, by definition, no politics. For others, this Marxist vision is unrealistic—'ideal fancy' in Berlin's words (1969: 118) since it fails to take into account **human nature**'s tendency towards difference, striving, and competition.

Other, more recent versions of the 'end of politics' are associated with the 'end of ideology' and 'end of history' theses proposed by Daniel Bell (1960) and Francis Fukuyama (1992) respectively. An argument common to both is that in the post-1945 period, liberal democratic values gradually assumed a position of dominance across the world. This appeared to be confirmed by the collapse of communism as a viable economic and political system in 1989. However, whilst it is true that the Cold War is now a thing of the past, that communism in Russia and Eastern Europe has been dismantled, and that growing affluence in the West has made it more difficult for left-of-centre parties to garner political support, it simply does not follow that we have reached the end of ideology, let alone history.

→ See Chapter 2 for a discussion of human nature.

A cursory glance at world affairs seems to put this end of ideology thesis to the sword. As this book will reveal, in the world there are a number of alternatives to the liberal democratic model. Some of these alternatives have similarities with Western liberal democracy but also significant differences. The post-communist regimes of Eastern Europe, for instance, operate very differently because of their limited experience of democratic norms. Many East Asian regimes (such as China, Malaysia, Singapore, and so on) have put a greater focus on economic development, sometimes at the expense of civil liberty and democratic procedures. The difficulty of establishing liberal democratic principles in Iraq is also indicative of the limited application of the end of history approach. Finally, other alternatives are obviously completely different from the Western liberal democratic model. This applies to military regimes, often found in Africa, and Islamic regimes, particularly of the fundamentalist variety as in Iran, that put religious norms before liberty and democracy. The fact that some authoritarian regimes, such as China, have experienced rapid economic growth belies the claim that there is a causal relationship between prosperity and the existence of liberal democratic values and institutions (Dryzek and Dunleavy, 2009: 335).

Many fundamental conflicts remain in the world that require political resolution. Some are based on territory, others are based on political values, the most insoluble containing elements of both. Here, the uncompromising ideology of **nationalism** is all too apparent. The Israel/Palestine conflict, in which competing nationalisms make apparently irreconcilable claims, is one such case. And there have been cases in Western Europe where resort to violence has only recently been eliminated, as in Northern Ireland and the Basque country of Spain. Widely divergent views over such issues as immigration and multiculturalism have also generated much conflict as has the emergence of **identity politics.** As Gamble (2000: 108) points out, 'The notion that there are no longer any great ideological issues in the world . . . becomes bizarre in relation to the vast populations . . . in Africa, in Asia, in Latin America and in the former territories of the Soviet Union' who live under regimes that do not subscribe to all, or some, liberal democratic principles.

➔ See Chapter 6 for a discussion of nationalism.

➔ See Chapter 7 for a discussion of multiculturalism.

There is another sense in which politics is said to be superfluous, identified and challenged by Gamble (2000). Gamble seeks to challenge what he sees as the pessimistic acceptance in the modern world that humans can no longer influence their destiny. According to this position, the forces of 'bureaucracy, technology and the global market' have led to the 'disenchantment of the world, in which the ability to change that world . . . has been lost and lost irrevocably' (14). So-called **globalization**, in particular, signals the end of national autonomy. It no longer matters what allegedly sovereign governments do because we are controlled by global economic forces that no one can alter. As a result, the 'space for politics is shrinking, and with it the possibility to imagine or to realise any serious alternative to our present condition. This it seems is our fate' (Gamble, 2000: 2–3).

➔ See Chapter 2 for a discussion of identity politics.

➔ See Chapters 2, 21, and 22 for a discussion of globalization.

Such pessimism is, in part at least, a cause of the alleged 'crisis of politics' seen in declining political participation and the emergence of an 'anti-politics' discourse in Western democracies. (Flinders, 2012: 10–15; Heywood, 2013: 443–5). The term 'anti-politics' is now used variously to describe a distrust of career politicians, a rejection of partisan politics as embodied in dominant party systems, a disengagement with mainstream politics or 'politics as usual', and a turn to **populism.** Anti-politics has recently been identified with the 2016 'Brexit' vote in the UK, the campaign for which was spearheaded by the previously marginal UK Independence Party (UKIP), and in the 2016 US presidential election in which Donald Trump gained support from many who saw him as not a politician.

➔ See Chapters 7 and 15 for a discussion of populism.

➔ See Chapter 4 for a discussion of contemporary challenges to democracy.

Should we really be so pessimistic about contemporary politics and the prospect of positive change? It would be wrong to suggest that there are no constraints, some of them severe, acting upon human will. We may have to deal with the realities of the global market and dehumanizing technologies, but it would be equally wrong to conclude that human agency has no impact. Rather, there is a tension between impersonal forces and human will, a tension 'between politics and fate', that must be recognized and tackled.

KEY POINTS

- Politics is usually predicated on the existence of competing interests and values in all societies of any complexity.
- For most commentators politics is inevitable precisely because all societies contain differences that have to be tackled in some way.
- Different versions of 'endism' proclaim the dominance of liberal democratic values, but this cannot be sustained in the face of ongoing ideological conflicts around the world.
- Contemporary politics in Western democracies appears to have generated much pessimism about the capacity of politics to actually deliver the good life, as reflected in the phenomenon of 'anti-politics'.

POLITICAL QUESTIONS

Politics, then, is essentially a mechanism for deciding, in Lasswell's words, 'Who Gets What, When, How?' If we all had the same interests and values, and there was enough of everything to go around, there would be no need to make such decisions. We could have everything we wanted. Politics is predicated on the assumption that this is not the case. As a result, students of politics ask a number of questions about the decisions that are taken.

In the first place, they will ask what values do and what should the decisions made serve? Do they serve, for instance, the values of justice or liberty, and if so, what do we mean by justice and liberty? Is a just decision one that is made in the interests of the few, the many, or all? Second, students of politics will ask who makes and should make the decisions? Is it one person who makes the decisions, or a few, many, or all? Is there anything special, it will be asked further, about democratic forms of government? Are we more obliged to obey decisions taken in a democratic way than in other ways? These types of question formed the basis of Aristotle's famous six-fold classification of **political systems** (**see Box 1.1 and Table 1.1**).

The third main question that students of politics will ask is why are those taking decisions able to enforce them? Here, it is important to make a distinction between **power** and **authority**, concepts which are central to politics. We could say that rulers are able to enforce their decisions either because they have the power to do so or because they have the authority to do so. The former implies some form of coercion or sanction; that those with power are able to cause those without power to behave in a way they would not otherwise have done. Clearly, a regime that relies exclusively on the exercise of power, in the sense described above, is likely to be inefficient and unstable. Such a regime will only survive if it is able to impose coercion continually, a time-consuming and difficult exercise.

KEY CONCEPT BOX 1.1
Aristotle's Classificatory Schema

Aristotle (384–322 BC) argued that a symbol of good government was the degree to which the rulers ruled in the interests of all and not a sectional interest. As a result, he developed a six-fold classification containing three 'proper' forms of government and three 'deviant' forms of government. His preferred form of government was a monarchy. Democracy is regarded as a deviant form of government because it is regarded by Aristotle as the rule of the poor in their own interests, thereby equivalent to mob rule. However, he also thought (as was echoed by Winston Churchill's comment many centuries later) that democracy is the least bad form of government (Cunningham, 2002: 7).

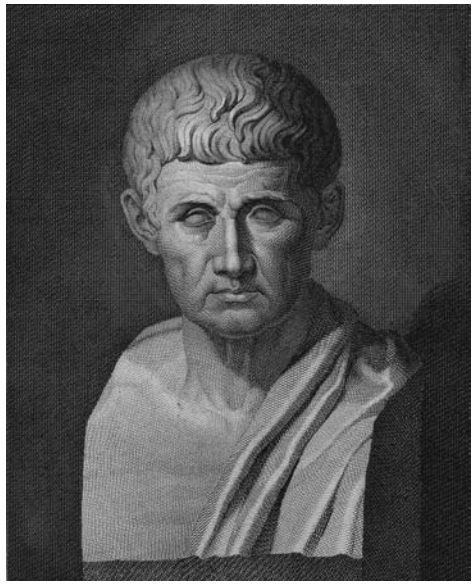


Photo 1.1 Aristotle, a Greek philosopher during the classical period in Ancient Greece. *Wellcome Collection*

Table 1.1 Political systems according to Aristotle

Number ruling	Rulers rule in interest of . . .	
	. . . All	. . . Themselves
One	Monarchy	Tyranny
Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many	Polity	Democracy

Source: Dahl (1991: 59).

If a set of rulers has authority, on the other hand, force will not be necessary since authority is defined in terms of legitimacy. Authority, then, is defined here as legitimate power in the sense that rulers can produce acceptance by the ruled, not because they can exercise coercion but because the ruled recognize the right of the rulers to exercise power. Converting power into authority, then, should be the goal of any set of rulers.

→ See Chapter 3 for an exploration of the concepts of power and authority.

KEY POINTS

- Assuming differences of values and interests, politics becomes a study of which values and interests come to dominate, who is responsible for these decisions, and with what justification.
- Politics involves the exercise of power, but issues of authority and legitimacy moderate the manner in which it is exercised.

THE BOUNDARIES OF THE POLITICAL: (1) STATE, SOCIETY, AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

We have seen that politics is presaged on differences that human beings have, and how these differences, in interests and values, can be managed in a world where scarcity is inevitable. However, this only takes us so far in a definitional sense, because it does not touch upon boundary problems. Much of the definitional controversy surrounding politics relates to these boundary problems. Where does politics begin and end? For Leftwich (1984: 10), this is the 'single most important factor involved in influencing the way people implicitly or explicitly conceive of politics'.

For some, politics ought to be defined narrowly. According to this view, politics is associated with the activities of the state and the public realm, or with a particular type of decision-making based on building compromise and consensus. As a result, institutions other than the state, and dispute-resolving through violence or suppression, although important in their own right, are beyond the scope of politics. For others, as we shall see later, this narrow drawing of the boundary is to miss much of importance that might fairly be described as political.

Politics has traditionally been associated with the activities of the state. This narrow definition certainly helps to distinguish politics, however artificially, from other social sciences such as sociology and economics. As a result, subfields of politics such as political sociology and political economy focus on the relationship between the state and society and the economy respectively. The state has traditionally been the centre of much political analysis because it has been regarded as the highest form of authority in a society. Put another way, in the words of the great German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920), the state has a 'monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in enforcing its order within a given territorial area' (Gerth and Mills, 1946: 77–8).

Such authority is tantamount to **sovereignty**. The state is sovereign in the sense that it is the supreme law-making body within a particular territory. Ultimately, it has the power of life and death over individuals. It can decide to put people to death for crimes they have committed, and it can demand that individuals fight for their country in wars with other sovereign states. Defined

in such a way, the state can be distinguished from the government in the sense that it is a much larger entity, containing not just political offices but also bureaucratic institutions, the judiciary, military, and police and security services. The state can also be distinguished from civil society which consists of those non-governmental institutions—such as pressure groups, business organizations, and trade unions—to which individuals belong. It is these institutions that provide linkages between the individual and the state. **See Box 1.2**.

→ See Chapter 14 for a discussion of civil society.

Without doubt, to include the activities of the state in a study of politics is necessary, albeit not necessarily sufficient. As we will see in Part 2 of this book, the study of government—its legislative, executive, and judicial functions—occupies a great deal of the political analyst's time. Moreover, Chapters 2 and 3 reveal that the question of state power is central to the study of politics. Since the sixteenth century, political theory has been associated with—and has helped shape the character of—the nation-state, the varying types of which are described in Chapter 2. Political theory is intrinsically linked to a study of **political obligation**. Why should we, it is asked, obey the state? Is there any particular form of the state that we can obey rather than others? Can we obey any state?

→ See Chapter 4 for a discussion of political obligation.

Similarly, concepts such as freedom and justice, examined in Chapter 5, were largely concerned with, in the former case, what limits ought to be placed on the state and, in the latter, what distribution of goods ought the state to pursue. Most of the ideologies covered in Chapters 6 and 7 are equally concerned with principles by which the state ought to be organized.

Although questions of political power tend to focus on the state, some seek to draw the boundaries of the political much wider. For these scholars, we can talk sensibly about politics existing in various types of group from the family to the international community. One fundamental question for students of politics, for instance, is the degree to which politics now exists beyond the state at a higher supranational level. There have always been those who have argued that the state is an oppressive institution and therefore ought not to exist (Hoffman, 1995). Arguably too, now, the focus of politics has begun to shift because in a practical sense we are living in a world which is becoming increasingly interdependent, where the forces of so-called globalization are placing increasing constraints on what individual so-called 'sovereign' states can do on their own.

→ See Chapter 17 for a discussion of realism.

It is certainly the case that the academic study of international relations has grown enormously in the past few years. The fact that a third of this book is devoted to the relationship between states—rather than politics within the state, or with comparisons between states—is a reflection of the growing importance of this field. That said, it should also be recognized that the traditional so-called 'realist' approach to international relations still has the state as the key actor. In this model, the difficulty of securing agreement between states can act as a significant handicap on the successful resolution of supranational problems.

KEY CONCEPT BOX 1.2
Civil Society

A term that is usually taken to refer to a range of private institutions existing between the individual and the state. This would include what are now referred to as interest groups representing things that people have in common, such as business, trade unions, religion, ethnicity, and so on. Hegel, the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German philosopher, distinguished between the family, civil society, and the state, each offering increasing degrees of social integration. Others would want to include the family as an institution within civil society.

The forces of globalization, discussed in various places in this book, question not only the sovereign state, but also political theory itself which grew up to theorize it. At the extremes, we could defend to the hilt the state-specific nature of much political thought by denying the claims made by advocates of globalization. Conversely, we could accept these claims and render the dominant state-specific school of political theory as redundant. What is certain is that political theorists will increasingly have to grapple with the impact of globalization. Indeed, this is already beginning to happen. The case for cosmopolitan theories of democracy and justice, for instance, is considered in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. Moreover, those ideologies—such as environmentalism and multiculturalism—which are predicated on the reality of increasing interconnectedness of the peoples and nations of the world, form part of the subject matter of Chapter 7.

Another dent in the argument of those who draw the boundaries of the political in a narrow sense comes from those who argue that politics exists in the institutions of society below the state. Hay (2002: 3), for instance, makes this abundantly clear when he insists that 'the political should be defined in such a way as to encompass the entire sphere of the social'. Leftwich (1984) substantially agrees, arguing that 'politics is at the heart of *all* collective social activity, formal and informal, public and private, in *all* human groups, institutions and societies'. The term **governance**, often preferred now to government, reflects this by drawing the boundaries of the governmental process much wider to include not just the traditional institutions of government but also the other inputs into decisions affecting society such as the workings of the market and the role of interest groups. Indeed, this concurs with everyday discourse where it is common to hear about politics taking place in business organizations, universities, churches, sport, and the family.

As Part 3 of this book will show, the student of international relations is faced with a very complex world of relations not just between states but with an enormous range of non-state actors and forces. This is reflected in fields as varied as international political economy, international organizations, and security studies. The challenge to international relations in the present period is to integrate insights from domestic and comparative studies, including studies in political theory, into a broader conception of the 'international'. As we shall see, this has prompted some scholars to abandon the very term 'international'—and 'relations'—favouring instead terms such as 'global politics' or 'world politics'.

Some ideological traditions concur with this wider view of politics. Radical feminists, for instance, see power deriving from **patriarchy** meaning literally the rule of the father—in personal relationships and the family, and therefore the personal realm is acutely political. This is what is meant by the radical feminism slogan 'the personal is the political'. Classical Marxists, likewise, insist that political power derives from dominance in the economic realm. Similarly, whatever its internal divisions, and there are many, Islamic thought, deriving from religious scriptures, delves into all aspects of the social sphere down to the family and normative prescriptions that individuals are meant to follow. To deny the political nature of this thought further alienates politics from much of importance in the contemporary world.

➔ See Chapters 7 and 18 for a discussion of feminism.

Despite Leftwich's limitation above, it can also be questioned whether the boundaries of the political should stop at the human species. There would seem to be a strong case for incorporating at least some species of non-human animals as beings who are morally considerable and ought to have their interests considered in the political process (Garner, 2005; Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2011). An even more radical position seeks to extend the boundaries of the political to encompass the whole of the natural world, a position designated as dark green ecology (Dobson, 2007).

➔ See Chapter 7 for a discussion on environmentalism.

There is an apparent danger in expanding the boundaries of the political in the ways suggested in the preceding discussion. If we do so, does not politics cease to be a distinctive discipline? How would we distinguish, say, between the work of the sociologist and that of the political analyst? Does not politics, in a very real sense, lose its separate identity?

Hay's response here is that this critique is confusing politics as an arena with politics as a process (2002: 72). For Hay, the distinctiveness of politics lies not in the arena within which it takes place but in 'the emphasis it places on the political aspect of social relations'. This 'political aspect' is then defined in terms of the 'distribution, exercise and consequences of power'. Politics, then, is about power, and occurs wherever the exercise of power takes place. Hay is not suggesting, then, that politics explains everything there is to be known, or even the most important things to be known, about social relationships. Other disciplines—sociology, economics, psychology, cultural studies—have important explanatory roles too. 'Though politics may be everywhere', Hay (2002: 75) continues, 'nothing is exhaustively political'. As Dahl (1991: 4) explains, people 'experience many relationships other than power and authority: love, respect, dedication, shared beliefs and so on'.

THE BOUNDARIES OF THE POLITICAL: (2) POLITICS AS CONSENSUS OR CONFLICT?

There are those who suggest that politics is the art of finding peaceful resolutions to conflict, through compromise and the building of consensus. In so far as this fails to happen and military conflict or any kind of violence results as a consequence, then politics can be said to have been rejected or failed. Bernard Crick is perhaps the best-known advocate of this position. For him, politics is 'only one possible solution to the problem of order' (1962: 18). It is, for Crick, the preferable way to resolve conflicts. Politics is, for him then, a 'great and civilizing human activity' associated with admirable values of toleration and respect and fortitude (15).

In contrast to tyranny and oligarchy, both of which are concerned with coercing those who disagree with the ruling elite, political rule, for Crick, is concerned with incorporating competing groups in society. He argues that conciliation is most likely to occur when power is widely spread in society so that no one small group can impose its will on others. Unfortunately, as he recognizes, politics is a rare activity that is too often rejected in favour of violence and suppression. He therefore calls for its values to be promoted and persevered with.

Similar arguments are put forward by Gerry Stoker (2006) and Matthew Flinders (2012). The former argues that politics not only expresses the reality of disagreement and conflict in society but is also 'one of the ways we know of how to address and potentially patch up the disagreements that characterize our societies without resource to illegitimate coercion or violence' (7). For Flinders (2012: 5) likewise, the 'simple essence' of politics is a 'commitment to stability and compromise through social dialogue'.

Both Flinders and Stoker further argue that much of the present discontent about politics is misplaced. Our expectations are too high and have increased at a time when politicians are increasingly able to achieve less (Flinders, 2012: 18–35). Rather than judging it by too exacting standards it should be recognized that politics, by its very nature, is messy, muddled, and, in a very real sense, 'designed to disappoint' (Stoker, 2006: 10). Although 'democratic politics may not be perfect . . . it remains vastly superior to any other form of regime' (Flinders, 2012: 2).

It might be best to describe the arguments put forward by Crick, Stoker, and Flinders as representing a particular kind of politics. Crick has been criticized for linking politics closely with

the practices of liberal democracies where power is commonly assumed to be widely dispersed. It would seem strange if our definition forces us into a position which holds that those countries governed undemocratically by economic, religious, or military elites are not practising politics but should, as Crick implies, aspire to it. Flinders and Stoker, as their arguments described in the last paragraph attest, avoid this lack of clarity by explicitly engaging in a defence of *democratic* politics rather than politics per se.

It is true that conflicts and differences are at the heart of politics, but if we can only talk about politics when agreements are reached, and compromises made then it would seem to be a very limited activity. In this sense, it is probably sensible to talk of the resort to force and violence and military conflict as politics by another means, as in the famous dictum by the nineteenth-century Prussian military strategist, Carl von Clausewitz. **See Box 1.3**.

KEY QUOTE BOX 1.3
The Nature of Politics

[A political system is] any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent, control, influence, power or authority. (Dahl, 1991: 4)

[Politics is the] art of governing mankind by deceiving them. (Issac D'Israeli, quoted in Crick, 1962: 16)

[Politics] can be simply defined as 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: 21)

Politics is a phenomenon found in and between all groups, institutions (formal and informal) and societies, cutting across public and private life. It is involved in all the relations, institutions and structures which are implicated in the activities of production and reproduction in the life of societies . . . Thus, politics is about power; about the forces which influence and reflect its distribution and use; and about the effect of this on resource use and distribution . . . it is not about Government or government alone. (Held and Leftwich, 1984: 144)

Politics is designed to disappoint—that is the way that the process of compromise and reconciliation works. Its outcomes are often messy, ambiguous and never final. (Stoker, 2006: 10)

KEY POINTS

- Defining politics is beset by boundary problems.
- Some argue that the boundaries of the political ought to be drawn narrowly, recognizing the state as the key political institution. Others argue that politics ought to be drawn far more broadly to encompass power relations in social institutions such as the family or political institutions at the supranational level.
- The second boundary problem concerns the subject matter of politics, rather than its location. Here, there are those, such as Crick, who seek to define politics in terms of consensus-building and cooperation. For many, however, this definition is unduly limiting. Politics is not absent in undemocratic regimes or in periods of civil or international strife.

1

THE STUDY OF POLITICS

The study of politics dates back to at least the Greeks in the fifth century BC, the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle credited with being the founding fathers. Despite this, politics only became an independent discipline in higher education at the beginning of the twentieth century, previously being subsumed under other disciplines such as law, philosophy, and history. The American Political Science Association, the body of academics specializing in political studies, was formed in 1903 and its British equivalent, the Political Studies Association, in 1950 (Lowndes, Marsh, and Stoker, 2018: 2). Canada, Finland, India, China, and Japan all had political studies associations before the UK did. There are now over 50 national and regional studies associations affiliated to the International Political Science Association which was established in 1949 (see http://www.ipsa.org/about-ipsa/history).

The teaching of politics has traditionally distinguished between the study of political ideas (sometimes also referred to as theory or philosophy), the study of political institutions and processes within states, and the relations between states. This book is structured around these distinctions, yet, as we shall have cause to emphasize later in this introduction, they are far from being mutually exclusive. As Part 1 of this book shows, the study of political ideas contains a mix of conceptual analysis, coverage of the key figures in the history of political thought, and discussion of ideologies. The study of institutions and processes, too, covered in Part 2, can take a number of forms such as the examination of the institutions of a single state, comparisons of the institutions and processes of a number of states, political history, electoral politics, and public administration. Finally, students of international politics, examined in Part 3, focus, among other things, on the role of states or of a range of supranational actors and institutions, either historically or contemporaneously.

THE RISE AND FALL OF NORMATIVE ANALYSIS

In all three branches of the study of politics at least three major kinds of political analysis are utilized. First, students of politics engage in **normative analysis**. This type of political analysis asks questions of a valuational kind and seeks to identify what is good or better with a view to recommending what we ought to want. It asks, for instance, whether, when, and why we ought to value freedom, or democracy or equality and why we should obey the state. Many of the so-called 'greats' in the history of political thought, ranging from Plato's *Republic* through Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* to a more recent major work of political philosophy, John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, have all sought to set out what constitutes the 'good life', the kind of society and polity within which it would be desirable for us to live.

For much of the twentieth century, among the three forms of analysis identified above, normative analysis was the poor relation. In academia, a great deal of emphasis was placed on empirical political science and also on 'analytical' political philosophy, in which the meaning of concepts and the relation between them was considered. This was the so-called 'behavioural' revolution in which number crunching, particularly in relation to the study of electoral behaviour, was the gold standard. In this climate, pontificating on what kind of society and polity we ought to have—the basis of normative analysis—was regarded as, at best, unnecessary and, at worst, meaningless.

A variety of intellectual and practical political reasons have been put forward to explain what Peter Lasslett (1956: vii) described as the 'death of political philosophy'. Some see the nineteenth

century as the last great age of political philosophy and put its decline down to the growth of secularism. As Dahl (1991: 120) points out, 'values could no longer be successfully justified by basing them on divinely revealed religious truths'. In addition, the status of philosophy in general had taken a hammering by virtue of the fact that the senseless destruction of human life in the Holocaust had occurred in what was regarded as the most philosophically sophisticated country in Europe (Horton, 1984: 115).

Another factor was the emergence, in the 1950s and 1960s—in the West at least—of consensus politics whereby widespread agreement on fundamental political principles was accompanied by economic prosperity. There was little purchase in justifying alternative political arrangements when the present ones—based on the mixed economy, the welfare state, and the nuclear deterrent—were working so well.

In the academic world, the decline of normative analysis was partly a product of the rise in status of **positivism**, an approach that seeks to apply the scientific methodology of the natural sciences to social phenomena (**see Box 1.4**). This approach was associated in particular with the French social scientist Auguste Comte (1798–1856), who argued that the scientific stage of history now upon us would dominate.

An extreme version of positivism was a school of thought known as logical positivism, centring around a group of philosophers known as the 'Vienna Circle' (see Ayer, 1971). For logical positivists, only statements which are empirically verifiable *and* those which sought to say something about the meaning of concepts and the relations between them are legitimate. Normative statements, seeking to make claims of a valuational kind, are regarded as meaningless.

Normative political philosophy began to make a comeback in the 1960s and 1970s, partly as a result of the decline in consensus politics, itself a product of mounting economic problems, and partly because of the emergence of new and innovative works of political philosophy, most notably Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. Despite this, however, it should be recognized that a great deal of contemporary political philosophy is much more cautious and tentative than the grand narratives of the past. A number of contemporary political philosophers have noted the discrepancy between the abstract normative work of some political philosophy, in which ideal political and moral principles are advocated, and the difficulty of applying such principles in the non-ideal real world. John Rawls's theory of justice, discussed in Chapter 5, is often taken to be the classical example of an ideal theory. As he writes (1971: 9), 'the nature and aims of a perfectly just society is the fundamental part of the theory of justice'.

Advocates of so-called 'non-ideal' theory are not claiming simply that political pragmatism should prevail over normative political philosophy, but rather that any political philosophy which

KEY CONCEPT BOX 1.4
Positivism

An approach which holds that science must limit itself to those things that are observable, thereby insisting upon a clear separation between fact and value. At the extreme, positivism—in the form of the doctrine known as logical positivism—holds that only those statements that can be investigated by observation, and those that can be examined semantically, are worthwhile. Normative questions are regarded as more or less meaningless.

does not take account of the non-ideal world in which it is attempting to influence, and address is *normatively* deficient (Farrelly, 2007). That is, it is being claimed here that normative political principles, such as those present in many theories of justice, are not logically independent from questions relating to non-ideal constraints, whether they concern unsympathetic social, economic, or historical circumstances, moral disagreement, or human nature. This boils down to the well-known moral principle that 'ought implies can'. As Farrelly (2007: 845) points out, 'there is some conceptual incoherence involved in saying "This is what justice involves, but there is no way it could be implemented" '. In other words, a valid *theory* of justice must be relevant to the eradication of at least some current injustices.

What is clear is that normative questions present problems of a peculiar nature for the student of politics. As we shall see later, empirical facts can play a part in the resolution of normative questions. However, for most scholars it still remains impossible to derive normative statements merely from empirical facts. This is the famous dictum that it is impossible to derive an ought from an is. Consider the premise that 'she is old and lonely, and her health is frail' followed by the conclusion that 'you ought to help her' (Thomas, 1993: 14). Clearly, the conclusion does not follow from the premise unless we add another clause along the lines that 'we ought to help those who are old, lonely, and frail'. This, of course, is another normative statement not capable of empirical confirmation.

Given that we cannot resolve normative questions merely by invoking empirical facts, how then can we judge the validity of a normative statement? In other words, does this not mean that the logical positivists were right after all that normative statements are meaningless and attempts to adjudicate between competing values is a worthless exercise? As Dahl (1991: 118) asks, does this mean that asking the question whether democracy is better than dictatorship is equivalent to asking whether 'you like coffee better than tea'?

There is 'no easy answer' (Wolff, 1996: 3) to this normative conundrum. One possible solution is offered by Dworkin (1987: 7–8), who cleverly argues that it is mistaken to regard modern political theories as offering different foundational values. Rather, he suggests, they all have a commitment to egalitarianism in the sense that they all hold that humans are worth the same and have an equal value. Even if Dworkin is right, and it might be argued that he overestimates the compatibility between mainstream ideologies such as liberalism and socialism, it still remains the case that other political ideologies clearly do not hold that humans have an equal value; and yet, without any apparent means of assessing their worth, we are committed to saying that, say, slavery is as good as freedom, or racism is as good as racial tolerance. Intuitively, most of us would want to deny this relativism. How are we to judge between competing political and moral values?

In the first place, a relativist position does exaggerate the degree to which judgements on the validity of competing belief systems are not possible. Nagel (1987: 232), for instance, argues convincingly that it is possible to dismiss a particular belief 'in terms of errors in their evidence, or identifiable errors in drawing conclusions from it, or in argument, judgement and so forth'. Moreover, there are surely some conceptions of the good—health, bodily integrity, wealth, even liberty—to which everyone might aspire (Waldron, 1989: 74–5) as well as 'conceptions of the good which are manifestly unreasonable' (Arneson, 2000: 71). Of course, we may never be certain about the competing value of many conceptions of the good but, as Arneson (2000: 77) points out, 'if one sets the threshold of supporting reasons for public policy at the level of certainty, it is doubtful that any proposed policy can pass'.

EMPIRICAL AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

The second type of analysis common to politics, as well as most other academic disciplines, is empirical. **Empirical analysis** seeks to identify observable phenomena in the real world with a view to establishing what is, rather than what ought to be. Empirical analysis, of course, is the basis of the natural sciences, and many so-called *positivist* political analysts seek to bring to bear what they see as the impartial and value-free methods of the natural sciences to the study of political phenomena.

The third type of analysis commonly used in politics is analysis of a semantic kind. As its name suggests, this form of analysis is concerned with clarifying the meaning of the concepts we use. This is an important function in political studies. Many of the concepts used in politics have no commonly accepted definition, and, indeed, have been described as 'essentially contested concepts' (Gallie, 1955–6). Defining what we mean by key terms such as democracy and freedom, then, is a crucial starting point.

In reality, the three forms of political analysis described above are not used independently of each other. As Wolff (1996: 3) succinctly points out, 'studying how things are helps to explain how things can be and studying how they can be is indispensable for assessing how they ought to be'. Thus, in the first place, normative claims are, at least partly, based on empirical knowledge. In the case of Hobbes, to give one example, the normative claim that we ought to rely on an all-powerful sovereign to protect us derives from the largely empirical assumption that human nature is so brutally competitive that there is a great risk to our security without the protection of the so-called 'Leviathan'. Conversely, a great deal of empirical analysis presupposes some normative assumptions. This can be seen, in particular, in our choice of investigation. Thus, students of politics choose, say, to investigate the causes of war because it is assumed that war is undesirable and therefore, we should try to eliminate it.

→ See Chapter 2 for a discussion on human nature.

It is instructive at this point to appreciate the differences between what might be called empirical and normative political theory. From a positivist perspective, the former refers to the generation of testable hypotheses of political phenomena. An example would be a hypothesis which postulated that democracy can only flourish in societies with a market economy and private ownership. The latter, on the other hand, is usually taken to mean the normative goal of judging to which political goals we ought to aspire. In other words, it would ask whether a democratic political framework or a capitalist economic framework is desirable in the first place.

Two main responses should be made to the claim that we can separate political 'theory' from the study of political institutions and processes. First, those who study government without recognition of the key normative questions raised by political philosophers will only receive a partial picture of their discipline. Systems of government created by human beings are a reflection of normative beliefs. The American Constitution, to give one prime example, is a product of the vision of the 'Founding Fathers' of what a modern polity ought to be like, and developments in the constitution since its creation, allowing, for example, for universal suffrage for the election of the President, reflect modern normative thinking.

In addition to the importance of normative theorizing, it should also be noted that theorizing of an empirical kind is also, as we will see in the chapters in Part 2, a central part of the study of political institutions and processes (Savigny and Marsden, 2011: 5–8). Theories are used in empirical work to try to order and make sense of the mass of information political researchers unearth,

and to try and identify and explain relationships between observable phenomena. Knowing about particular political institutions or sets of them is only part of the objective and doing so properly is obviously essential. But locating them within a broader pattern of regularities is equally important and ultimately more satisfying. These sorts of issues provoke questions such as: why do parties exist? Is it possible to identify general patterns of their interactions? What general principles underlie electoral systems? How can we explain the behaviour of interest groups? In a similar vein, much of the theoretical literature surrounding the study of relationships between states, considered in Chapters 17 and 18, has an empirical dimension, although it should also be noted that most of these theories—whether it is explicit or not—also have a distinctive normative basis.

A key element of the empirical approach to the study of political institutions and processes is the comparative method. Here, political analysts seek to develop testable generalizations by examining political phenomena across different political systems or historically within the same political system. To attempt an answer to the hypothesis posed above—that democracy requires the free market and private ownership—it is necessary to engage in a comparative examination of different regimes so that the relationship between political and economic variables can be better understood. It also, it might be added, requires semantic analysis of the concept of democracy, a term subject to many different definitions, as discussed in Chapter 4. To take another example, the proposition that electoral systems using a form of proportional representation tend to produce political and economic instability can be tested by comparing their use with regimes using alternatives such as the first-past-the-post system.

This book deliberately sets out to introduce you to politics from all regions of the world. A great many politics students concentrate on Europe and the USA. Many students become passionately interested in them. So later chapters, for example, outline the reasons why political parties emerged in the USA, and contrast the different approaches to policy-making in the UK and France. Other students are more attracted by politics in the developing world or in other regions. This is an equally legitimate object of study. So we discuss Islamic understandings of justice, the problems of the African state, and the debate over the merits of presidentialism in Latin America and the Philippines. What is vital is that we use consistent and compatible approaches to the analysis of institutions, whether in the developed or the developing world, so that we can identify similarities and differences in the ways in which apparently similar institutions operate in different parts of the world. There is no doubt that institutions such as the state, political parties, or civil society look different when they are studied in Europe or the USA, as compared with other regions of the world. We want to encourage you to develop a sophisticated understanding of the similarities and the differences, their strengths and weaknesses.

DEDUCTIVE AND INDUCTIVE METHODS

The most important approaches to the empirical study of politics can be divided into those using deductive reasoning, on the one hand, and those using inductive reasoning, on the other. The **deductive method**, sometimes known as the top-down approach, starts from a general theoretical proposition and works down to the specific, aiming to test the theory in question by examining the relevant data. The **inductive method**, which works in the opposite, bottom-up, direction, moves from the observation of specific data to general propositions, aiming to generate rather than test theories. The deductive method is associated with so-called rational choice

theories of politics, and the inductive approach is most often associated with an approach known as **behaviouralism**. (**See Box 1.5**.) Both approaches had the effect of moving politics away from the formalistic and legalistic study of institutions and, particularly, constitutions.

Rational choice approaches to politics have become an increasingly important branch of the discipline. They focus on politics being a response to the problem of collective action, which, as this book will show, has applications in both the study of political institutions and processes, and the study of international relations. In general, rational choice approaches start by making certain fundamental assumptions about human behaviour from which hypotheses or theories are deduced before being tested against the facts in the real world. The assumptions made are that human beings are essentially rational, utility maximizers, who will follow the path of action most likely to benefit them. This approach has been used in so-called 'game theory' where individual behaviour is applied to particular situations. These 'games' reveal how difficult it can be for rational individuals to reach optimal outcomes, not least because of the existence of free-riders—actors who calculate that they can reap the benefits of collective action without paying any of the costs. In political science, the best-known applications can be found in the fields of voting and party competition and in interest group politics.

See Chapter 4 for a discussion of Downs's model of party competition.

One problem with the deductive method is precisely that its fundamental assumptions remain just that: assumptions which many regard as, at best, simplifications and, at worst, entirely inaccurate descriptions of human behaviour. Moreover, rational choice theory is awash with hypotheses about various aspects of the political process but is short on empirical tests of these hypotheses (Hay, 2002: 39–40). It is evident that rational choice theory is better able to predict outcomes deriving from certain stated premises than developing accurate empirical theories of the real world.

Inductive approaches to politics, in contrast to deductive approaches, start with empirical observation from which explanatory generalizations are generated. For deductive approaches, then, theory is deduced from first principles before being tested, whereas for inductive approaches, theory follows observation and generalization. A classic version of inductivism is an approach known as behaviouralism which dominated Western, and particularly American, political studies, in the 1950s and 1960s (**see Box 1.5**). The behaviouralists focused on political topics which, like voting behaviour, are quantifiable. Thus, to give one commonly cited example, empirical data on British voting behaviour during this period generated the generalization that voting is class-based, with the working class tending to vote Labour and the middle and upper classes tending to vote Conservative.

See Chapter 14 for a discussion of interest groups.

KEY CONCEPT BOX 1.5
Behaviouralism

An approach that developed, particularly in the USA, in the post-1945 period. It stresses the importation of the scientific method in the study of social phenomena. Objective measurement of the social world is the goal, values to be completely jettisoned from social enquiry. There is an assumption that human behaviour is capable of being measured in a precise way and generalizations derived from it. It reached its height of influence in political studies in the 1960s. Since then, it has been increasingly challenged by those who doubt the value-free nature of political studies and social enquiry in general.

The weaknesses of the inductive method mirror those of the deductive method. While, as we saw, the latter approach is strong on theory but not so much on empirical testing, the reverse is true of the former. The inductive approach, in other words, tends to focus more on gathering empirical data than it does on the generation of theory. This traditional positivism was famously revised by the philosopher of science Karl Popper (1902–94), who argued that rather than generating empirical data from which a hypothesis can be derived, the scientific method should be concerned with seeking to falsify a hypothesis. This had the effect, among other things, of making truth claims temporary; only as good as the next successful attempt to refute them. Verification can never be conclusive, but falsification can be. More to the point, for our purposes here, it meant that positivists have tended, since Popper, to move away from using the inductive method and have shown more interest in the generation of hypotheses to be refuted.

Another weakness of the inductive method is that the type of hypotheses generated by inductivism tends not to be explanatory—in the sense of offering a causal link between generalizations. Rather, they tend to be merely patterns of statistical correlation (Hay, 2002: 79). Finding correlations between phenomena is not the same as the one explaining the other. To give an example, the identification of a statistical correlation between, say, social class and voting behaviour does not, by itself, explain why this correlation exists.

KEY POINTS

- Political analysis involves three main approaches: empirical, normative, and semantic.
- Theorizing normatively about politics remains difficult and often contentious. While recognizing this, it should be noted that one can exaggerate these difficulties, and a moral relativism is not the inevitable consequence of political philosophy.
- In practice, these three forms of political analysis are not mutually exclusive. We need to know what is, before we can talk sensibly about what ought to be. Similarly, empirical analysis presupposes some normative assumptions.
- Empirical political analysis tends to use either inductive or deductive reasoning. The former can be illustrated by behaviouralism, the latter by rational choice theory.

CAN POLITICS BE A SCIENCE?

It is often asked whether social sciences, such as politics, can be, or ought to aim to be, scientific. This debate is a ‘complex, voluminous and multi-faceted’ one (Hay, 2002: 75), and we can only touch upon its major themes here. To a certain extent, the answer to the question depends on whether we adopt a loose or rigid definition of science. Politics is quite clearly a science in the sense that it ‘offers ordered knowledge based on systematic enquiry’ (Lowndes, Marsh, and Stoker, 2018: 9). Indeed, according to this definition, even normative analysis, when undertaken in a systematic way, can be described as scientific. A more rigid definition would involve applying the methodology of the natural sciences to the political realm, as is attempted in the behavioural approach discussed above. Here, an appropriate definition of science might be ‘the ability to generate neutral, dispassionate and objective knowledge claims’ (Hay, 2002: 87).

The attractions of developing a value-free and objective account of politics where we can identify the 'truth' about political phenomena are obvious. However, the claims about a science of politics at this more rigid level can be challenged on two main grounds. In the first place, one can question whether the methods of natural science can be transferred to a social science such as politics. At a second, more fundamental, level, one can question whether the whole scientific enterprise, in both natural and social settings, is a valid and useful exercise.

At the first level, it is the social element of politics which is the key. Human beings, it is suggested, are unpredictable and are not amenable to unbending scientific laws in the way that, say, the workings of molecules are in the natural sciences. In other words, as Hay (2002: 50) points out, what makes the social sciences qualitatively different from the natural sciences is that the 'former must deal with conscious and reflective subjects, capable of acting differently under the same stimuli, whereas the units which comprise the latter can be assumed inanimate, unreflexive and hence entirely predictable in response to external stimuli'.

The unpredictability of human beings not only leads us to question the application of the 'scientific' method to the field of social studies, it also reminds us that social researchers often face ethical dilemmas in their work. We cannot treat human, or indeed animal, subjects with the same impunity that natural sciences treat inanimate objects. Humans and animals, can feel emotional and physical distress that researchers have to take into account. Moreover, the prescriptions that might emanate from social research, or that might be derived from it by others, can have important ethical dimensions. An example here would be the implications of social research that led to claims being made about the importance of race, or gender, in determining intelligence and, therefore, moral and political worth.

The only way of avoiding the conclusion that a science of society is difficult, if not impossible, because of the unpredictable nature of human beings, is to adopt an approach which claims that human behaviour can be determined. As we saw in the case of rational choice theory, however, it is doubtful if assumptions about human behaviour made in such accounts would stand the test of empirical observation. In addition, the study of politics is not value-free. As we saw earlier, we impose our own assumptions and norms on our work from the very start of a research project, the choice of which is imbued with our own sense of its importance. We might want to argue, too, that politics *should* be about values and norms. To attempt to exclude them is to miss much of what is valuable in a study of the political.

At a more fundamental level, the core of the scientific project has been challenged. Here, it might be argued that it is unfair to criticize politics for not being a science because there is no true value-free science in the first place. We should therefore question the claim that there can be a value-free exercise to which we can attach the label 'science', rather than solely questioning the scientific merits of politics. As Hay (2002: 87) remarks, the natural scientist, just like the social scientist, is 'socially and politically embedded within a complex and densely structured institutional and cultural landscape which they cannot simply escape by climbing the ivory tower of academe to look down with scientific dispassion and disinterest on all they survey'.

This idea that 'scientific' knowledge is, in part at least, socially constructed is the basis of the contemporary, so-called, 'interpretivist' approach which has emerged to challenge positivism (see Bevir and Rhodes, 2002). To understand this critique a little better, it is important to understand the difference between the terms ontology and epistemology. Following Hay (2002: 61), we can say that **ontology** 'relates to *being*, to what *is*, to what *exists*'. In other words, an ontology asks

what is there to know? For our purposes here, the key ontological question relates to whether there is a political world out there capable of being observed or whether this 'reality' is, at least to some degree, created by the meanings or ideas we impose upon it. **Epistemology** refers to the task of 'acquiring knowledge of that which exists' (63). In other words, it concerns itself with what can be known about what exists.

The definitional diversion is important because it enables us to make sense of the fundamental claims being made by those who insist that the study of politics can be a science. Thus, those adopting behavioural or rational choice approaches adopt a foundationalist ontology and a positivist epistemology, meaning, in short, an acceptance that a real world exists out there which can be discovered by empirical observations. Increasingly, though, this approach has been challenged by those writing from a so-called interpretivist standpoint. These scholars have ontologically challenged the very idea that there is an objective reality out there that is waiting for us to discover. As a result, rather than seeking to discover an objective reality that does not really exist, we should seek to examine the meanings that human beings themselves impose. From this perspective, then, a science of politics is impossible.

KEY POINTS

- Behaviouralists, in particular, suggest that politics can have the scientific rigour of the natural sciences.
- Two challenges to this view were noted. In the first place, one can question whether the methods of natural science can be transferred to a social science such as politics.
- At a second, more fundamental, level, one can question whether the whole scientific enterprise, in both natural and social settings, is a valid and useful exercise.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to introduce you to certain basic definitional features of politics, and some central themes within political analysis. The difficulty of studying politics, because of the lack of consensus on its meaning, has not been disguised. We suggest that having an open mind to what is 'political' prevents undue conservatism which would miss much that is important in the real world. The rest of this book operates in this vein.

Part 1, Chapters 2–7, continues the exploration of political ideas and ideologies, focusing on the state, power and democracy, freedom and justice, and traditional and new political ideologies. Part 2, Chapters 8–15, focuses on the study of political institutions and processes, with chapters on the main elements of the political system: institutions and states; law, constitutions, and federalism; voters, elections, legislatures, and legislators; executives, bureaucracies, policy studies, and governance; political parties; civil society, interests groups, and the media; and democratization and authoritarianism. It will become apparent that the vast majority of political thinkers whose ideas are discussed in this book are white European males. This is an understandable reflection of the dominance of white men in Western political thought. As something of a corrective to this, though we have also added in this edition a separate chapter on non-Western approaches

to politics. Part 3, Chapters 16–22, deals with relationships between states. This section starts with a definition of key terms, and a historical account of the development of the states' system, before going on to examine international relations theory, international security, diplomacy and foreign policy, international organizations, and, finally, international political economy.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. What is politics?
2. Is politics synonymous with the state?
3. Is politics an inevitable feature of all societies?
4. What is the difference between normative and empirical analysis in the study of politics?
5. Can politics be a science?
6. Should politics be seen in a positive light?
7. What is the case for defining politics narrowly?
8. How can we evaluate between competing normative claims?
9. What is meant by inductive and deductive approaches to political studies?
10. 'Politics is generally disparaged as an activity which is shrinking in importance and relevance' (Andrew Gamble). Discuss.

FURTHER READING

Crick, B. (1962), *In Defence of Politics* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson).
This is a classic case for a particular interpretation of politics.

Dahl, R. (1991), *Modern Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall).
This is a classic account of the study of politics by a legendary American academic.

Gamble, A. (2000), *Politics and Fate* (Cambridge: Polity Press).
Like Crick, this seeks to defend politics, but from the perspective of those who would decry the ability of humans to control their destiny.

Hay, C. (2002), *Political Analysis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave).
This cannot be bettered as a comprehensive and accessible account of different approaches to political science. Hard going at times but worthwhile.

Lowndes, V., Marsh, D., and Stoker, G. (eds) (2018), *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (London: Palgrave, 4th edn).
This is an extremely useful collection of articles setting out the field.

Savigny, H., and Marsden, L. (2011), *Doing Political Science and International Relations: Theories in Action* (Basingstoke: Palgrave).
A very accessible account of the nature of political analysis which adopts an issue-based approach in order to make sense of some very complex ideas.

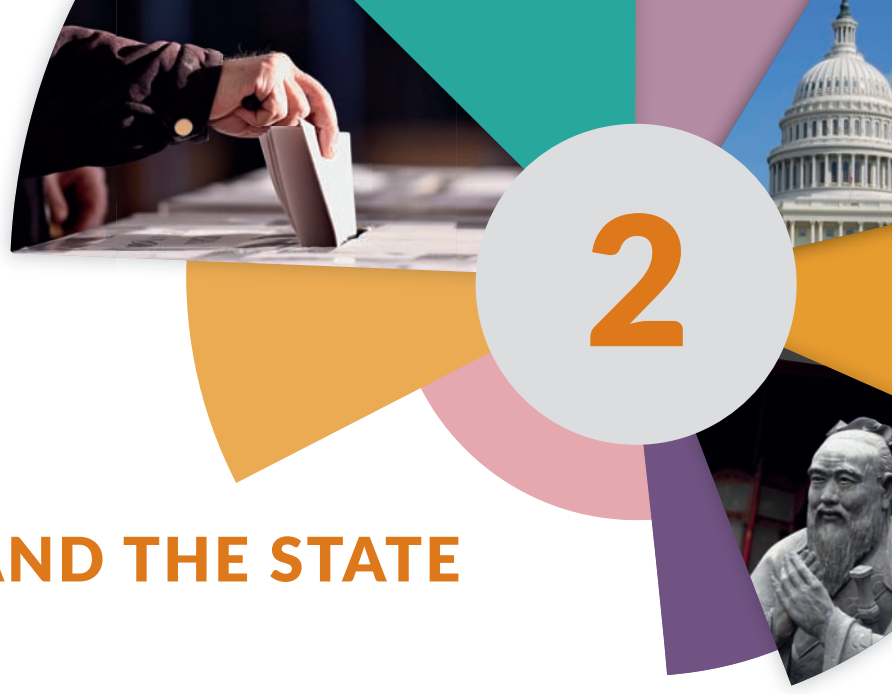
Stoker, G. (2006), *Why Politics Matter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave).
This is a modern version of Crick's work, which defines politics in terms of consensus and democracy.

For additional material and resources, please visit the Online Resources at:
www.oup.com/he/garner4e

PART 1

concepts and **IDEOLOGIES**

by Robert Garner



2

POLITICS AND THE STATE

CHAPTER CONTENTS

READER'S GUIDE

This chapter begins by stressing the importance of the state and sovereignty to the study of politics. An attempt is made to provide an empirical typology of the state, before going on to outline various theories about the distribution of power in the state—namely pluralism, elitism, Marxism, and New Right theories. The chapter then proceeds to examine different views about what the role of the state ought to be, from the minimalist state recommended by classical liberal theory, to the pursuit of distinctive social objectives as recommended, in particular, by communitarian thinkers. Finally, empirical and normative challenges to the state are reviewed.

THE POLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE STATE

For many centuries, the state has been the dominant form of political organization such that 'no concept is more central to political discourse and political analysis' (Hay and Lister, 2006: 1). It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the state determines how we live and how we die. Virtually all of the land in the world is claimed by a state, of which there are now nearly 200. Indeed, the state's role in the economy and society has increased progressively, particularly since the advent of the 'welfare' state in the post 1945 period.

Despite its political importance, the state is a notoriously difficult concept to define. Some argue that 'the state is not a suitable concept for political theory, since it is impossible to define it'

2

(Hoffman and Graham, 2006: 22). The fact that the state is difficult to define, however, does not seem to be reason enough to refuse to try and define it, unless it is thought that the state does not actually exist, which virtually no one is claiming.

A classic definition of the state is provided by Weber who regards it as an institution claiming a 'monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in enforcing its order within a given territorial area'. The state is therefore inextricably linked with **sovereignty**. Above all, this concept was developed by the French political philosopher Jean Bodin (1529–96) and the English jurist William Blackstone (1723–80). The idea of the sovereign state denotes its superiority as the highest form of **authority** in a particular territory. There is, therefore, no higher authority within that territory, and, equally importantly, no external challenge to this authority. As Chapters 8 and 17 will describe in detail, sovereign states emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Europe, replacing feudal societies which shared authority between the aristocracy and the Catholic Church (Tilly, 1975). Subsequent to this, most countries in the world have adopted, often through colonial rule, the sovereign state model, although stateless societies still exist in small communities of people, such as nomadic tribes.

→ See Chapter 8 for a discussion of the rise of the European state system.

The usefulness of the concept of sovereignty as a description of political reality, however, is debatable. In constitutional theory, states are sovereign but, in reality, states have always faced challenges from within and outside their borders, thereby, in practice, limiting their autonomy. In this sense, sovereignty has always been something of a myth. Here, there is a crucial distinction between *de jure* sovereignty, which refers to a legal right to rule supremely, and *de facto* sovereignty, which refers to the actual distribution of political power. As Held (1989: 216) points out: 'Sovereignty has been an important and useful concept for legal analysis, but it can be a misleading notion if applied uncritically as a political idea.' For example, the concept of sovereignty is of little use when discussing the phenomena of so-called 'failed states', where—as in Somalia—the state is unable to perform the functions of sovereignty.

A TYPOLOGY OF THE STATE

A classification of the state is usually organized around the degree to which it intervenes in society and the economy. At one end of this continuum is the so-called **night-watchman state** in which the state concentrates on ensuring external and internal security, playing little role in civil society and the economy where the economic market is allowed to operate relatively unhindered. The idea of a night-watchman state was a central characteristic of classical liberal thought and played a large part in shaping nineteenth-century British politics. It sees the state as having a protective role, seeking to uphold the rights—to life, liberty, and property—of individuals against external and internal threats.

→ See Chapter 8 for a discussion of weak states.

The notion of a minimal state is an ideal type which has probably existed nowhere in reality. The degree, and character, of state intervention in the world today, however, differs enormously. In the so-called **developmental state**, for instance, there is a strong relationship between state and private economic **institutions** with the goal of securing rapid economic development. This model has been particularly prevalent in East Asia, where states have developed rapidly since 1945. Japan is the prime example of a developmental state (Johnson, 1995), but the model is also relevant to South Korea and even Malaysia, a so-called **illiberal democracy**, a concept which will be discussed later.

→ See Chapter 22 for an exploration of the relationship between the state and economic institutions.

Developmental states should not be confused with **social democratic** states which have a broader social and political objective. They are associated with attempts to secure greater social and economic equality, rather than just economic development. One of the criticisms of post-1945 British political and economic development is that Britain adopted a social democrat approach but neglected the developmental aspect (Marquand, 1988). This failure, it is argued, has hindered the social democratic project because greater social and economic equality is greatly assisted by general economic prosperity which provides a great deal more resources to redistribute.

States can also be defined in terms of their relationship to democracy or popular control of political leaders. Here, a useful distinction is to be made between **liberal democracies**, illiberal democracies, and **authoritarian** regimes (Hague and Harrop, 2007: 7–9). Liberal democracies—such as the USA, the UK, and Germany—are characterized by free and fair elections involving universal suffrage, together with a liberal political framework consisting of a relatively high degree of personal liberty and the protection of individual rights. Liberal democracy is now the dominant state form existing in much of the world, in Europe, North and South America, Australasia, Japan, India, and South Africa, although in recent years democracy would seem to be in retreat (see Chapter 4).

➔ See Chapter 4 for an account of democratic recession.

Illiberal democracies—such as Russia and Malaysia—are characterized by elections but relatively little protection of rights and liberties, and state control over the means of communication. This creates a situation where opposition leaders and parties are disadvantaged and, as a result, there are relatively few transfers of power through elections.

Authoritarian regimes can be characterized in terms of the absence of fair elections and therefore the accountability of political rulers. About a third of people in the world live under regimes that can be described as authoritarian, most notably China—which contains just under 20 per cent of the world's population—and many states in the Middle East. The political elites in such regimes can derive from the military, royalty, ruling parties, or merely be individual dictators.

The degree of intervention in the economy and society can vary enormously in authoritarian regimes. At the extreme end is the totalitarian state, so-called because the state intervenes—often through a brutal and oppressive state police—in all aspects of social and economic life,

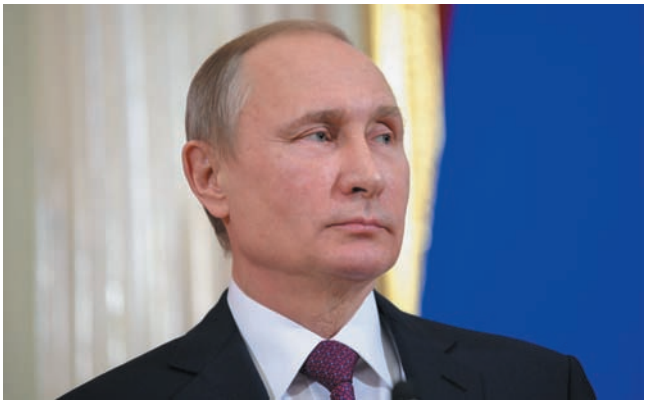


Photo 2.1 Vladimir Putin, President of Russia (2012–present), which can be categorized as an illiberal democracy. *The Russian Presidential Press and Information Office*

under the guise of a transformative ideology. While liberal state theory postulates the existence of a civil society in which the state intervenes relatively rarely, in totalitarian states civil society is eclipsed. **Totalitarianism** is very much a twentieth-century phenomenon—associated, in particular, with Nazi Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union, and East Germany—although Iran, since the Islamic revolution in the late 1970s, has a number of totalitarian features.

KEY POINTS

- However difficult it is to define, the state is undoubtedly a crucial institution for the political analyst.
- Sovereignty is a key, defining feature of the state, although it is a concept that, arguably, has greater legal than political importance.
- It is possible to develop an empirical typology of the state from the minimalist night-watchman state, approximated to by nineteenth-century capitalist regimes at one end of the spectrum, to the totalitarian state of the twentieth century at the other.

THE STATE AND POWER

Another dimension of the state relates to the relationship with **power**. Theories of the state more often than not provide different accounts of power distribution. These theories are primarily empirical accounts, seeking to describe the reality of power distribution rather than a normative aspiration. Clearly, it is essential to have an understanding of the concept of power itself, a task which is undertaken in Chapter 3. For now, it is necessary to note that an evaluation of the validity of the empirical theories of the state discussed in this chapter depends, to a large extent, on the way in which the concept of power is defined and operationalized.

The need for an overarching theory of the state emerges from the need to be selective, to have some guide to the choosing of relevant information from the mass of factual evidence that can be unearthed. Choosing a theory of the state constitutes the analyst's criteria for selection and enables him or her to avoid drowning in a sea of information. In this chapter, we will look at three major theories of the state: pluralism, elitism, and Marxism, as well as considering the New Right approach to the state. The feminist approach to the state is outlined in Chapter 3.

→ See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the feminist approach to the state.

Pluralism

By the end of the 1960s, the pluralist approach, associated above all with the work of the American political scientist Robert Dahl (1963, 1971), dominated Western political science. It is possible to distinguish between different varieties of **pluralism**. In the classical pluralist position, society is seen as being composed of thousands of activities that have the effect of creating many different groups of all shapes and sizes. For pluralists, the existence of, often competing, groups is a natural feature of all societies of any complexity. The only way in which these groups can be prevented is through suppression, as they had been, for instance, in the old Soviet system.

For pluralists, the role of the state can also be defined in terms of the activities of groups. In this *political* pluralism, the state's role is to regulate and mediate between these groups. Some pluralists see the state as a neutral arbiter in this system, whereas some see it as a group in itself competing against others in society. The outputs of government are the result of group pressure. What governments do will be a mirror image of the **balance of power** of groups within society (**see Figure 2.1)**. It is important to note that pluralists are not saying here that all groups or interests are equal. Rather, pluralists are claiming that there are no predominant classes or interests within society, that all groups are able to make their voices heard in the political process, and that all groups get at least something of what they want.

→ See Chapter 14 for a detailed discussion of interest groups.

Power in society for pluralists is diffuse or fragmented. In other words, in a pluralist state, most **interest groups** will be able to influence public policy outcomes to at least some extent. Dahl defines modern liberal democratic politics in terms of 'minorities rule' rather than majority rule, or **polyarchy** rather than democracy, to illustrate that politics is based upon the permanent interplay of numerous groups each constituting a minority. Successful political parties, then, are those that are able to forge a majority coalition of minority groups.

The pluralist conclusion that power is fragmented is based upon a number of related arguments. The first is that the bases upon which power rests are variable; that is, political influence is not dependent upon one particular resource. Rather, there are a variety of important resources—wealth, organization, public support, a group's position in the economy, the ability to exercise, or threaten to exercise, sanctions—which are not the preserve of a small number of groups. For example, a group of key workers such as miners or doctors may not be particularly wealthy or even have public support but can garner influence through the crucial functions they perform. Second, even though it may seem that in a particular issue area one group or small set of groups is influential, the same groups are not influential in other issue areas. Farmer's organizations, for instance, do not have a role in, say, health or education policy. Third, more often than not, it is the case that an influential group in a policy arena is challenged by a 'countervailing influence'. In the economic sphere, for instance, the influence of business groups is checked by the role of trade unions.

Pluralism to Elitism Continuum

The position we have just described can be classified as classical pluralism. It is possible to envisage a number of other approaches or theories of the state on a continuum between classical pluralism and classical elitism. The first of these is elite pluralism, sometimes described as **democratic elitism**. This revision of classical pluralism came about in the late 1950s and early 1960s following a sustained criticism of it. One of the major challengers was the American sociologist C. Wright Mills (1956), who argued that power in American society is concentrated in the hands of a powerful elite, dominating the economic, military, and governmental spheres.

→ See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the elitist theory of democracy.

The pluralist response to this led by Dahl (1958) was to accept that the classical pluralist assumption, that there is widespread participation in decision-making and that groups are themselves internally egalitarian, was misplaced. The existence of political elites, a small group of people playing a disproportionate role in groups, was accepted. Far from undermining the pluralist position, however, scholars such as Dahl suggested that it still existed because these political elites have divided interests and compete with each other to achieve their aims. Politics may be

hierarchical, then, but rather than one homogeneous elite group, there are a multiplicity of competing elites. Pluralists, for instance, would see business as divided between, say, a financial and a manufacturing sector. Political power for pluralists can be represented diagrammatically, then, by a succession of pyramids and not just one (**see Figure 2.2**).

Yet further down the continuum between pluralism and elitism is **corporatism** (**see Box 2.1)**. Traditionally, corporatism referred to the top-down model where the state, as in the fascist model, incorporates economic interests in order to control them and civil society in general. This is also the corporatist model that can be applied to authoritarian states, particularly in Asia. Modern societal or neo-corporatism, on the other hand, reflects a genuine attempt by governments to incorporate economic interests into the decision-making process (Held, 1989: 65). This modern version of societal corporatism shares, with pluralism, the belief that groups are a crucial part of the **political system**. Corporatism denies, however, that the competition between groups was as widespread, equitable, and fragmented as pluralists had suggested. Instead, corporatism points to the critical role played by economic elites. Government outputs are a product of a tripartite relationship between elites in government, business, and the trade unions. The insider role of economic elites was sanctioned by the state in return for the cooperation of these key interests in securing the support of their members for government policy.

CASE STUDY BOX 2.1
Corporatism in Europe

Corporatism, or neo-corporatism to be precise, has been traditionally prevalent in certain European states—such as Austria, Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands—whereas New Zealand, Canada, the UK, and the USA have traditionally been regarded as the least corporatist, and thereby closer to the pluralist model (Lijphart and Crepaz, 1991). Until the 1970s, corporatism was largely applauded for its economic success. Since then, corporatism has decayed to some extent. A survey of Scandinavian corporatism, for instance, reveals that since the mid-1970s there has been a decline in the number of corporatist actors in public bodies, and the degree to which governments base decisions on corporatist-style agreements (Blom-Hansen, 2000).

The form of corporatism we have been describing is shorn of much of the negative connotations associated with the top-down variety, associated with fascist regimes and authoritarian regimes such as China, which involve the state incorporating key interests in order to control them. Neo-corporatism, by contrast, is seen as a way of incorporating, and modifying, the key interests within civil society. It is argued that it has served a vital aggregation function.

Neo-corporatism has not, however, escaped criticism. In the first place, it is argued that governments tend, in practice, to be unduly influenced by business interests in corporatist arrangements. Even if trade unions are successfully integrated, neo-corporatism is still regarded as less open and democratic than a pluralist system because it is hierarchically organized, with power residing in the hands of economic elites. From the perspective of the New Right corporatism is condemned for failing to allow the market free rein, and thereby acceding to the, it is argued, unrealistic demands of sectional interests.