

Politics

Politics is the set of activities associated with the governance of a country, state or an area. It involves making decisions that apply to groups of members.^[1]

It refers to achieving and exercising positions of governance—organized control over a human community, particularly a state.^[2] The academic study focusing on just politics, which is therefore more targeted than general political science, is sometimes referred to as politology (not to be confused with politicology, a synonym for political science).^[3]

In modern nation-states, people often form political parties to represent their ideas. Members of a party often agree to take the same position on many issues and agree to support the same changes to law and the same leaders.^[4]

An election is usually a competition between different parties.^[5] Some examples of political parties worldwide are: the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, the Democratic Party (D) in the United States, the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in Germany and the Indian National Congress in India which has the highest number of political parties in the world (2546 political parties)^[6]. Politics is a multifaceted word. It has a set of fairly specific meanings that are descriptive and nonjudgmental (such as "the art or science of government" and "political principles"), but does often colloquially carry a negative connotation.^{[1][7][8]} The word has been used negatively for many years: the British national anthem as published in 1745 calls on God to "Confound their politics",^[9] and the phrase "play politics", for example, has been in use since at least 1853, when abolitionist Wendell Phillips declared: "We do not play politics; anti-slavery is no half-jest with us."^[10]

A variety of methods are deployed in politics, which include promoting one's own political views among people, negotiation with other political subjects, making laws, and exercising force, including warfare against adversaries.^{[11][12][13][14][15]} Politics is exercised on a wide range of social levels, from clans and tribes of traditional societies, through modern local governments, companies and institutions up to sovereign states, to the international level. During the past decade two tendencies (1.Concern for theoretical explication and methodological rigor, and 2. The emphasis on field studies of the “emerging,” “new,” and “non-Western” nations) made it possible to overlook comparative politics.^[16]

A political system is a framework which defines acceptable political methods within a given society. The history of political thought can be traced back to early antiquity, with seminal works such as Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics*, the works of Confucius^[17] and Arthashastra and Chanakya neeti by Chanakya in 3rd Century BCE.

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Etymology

The word comes from the same Greek word from which the title of Aristotle's book *Politics* (from Ancient Greek: Πολιτικά, romanized: *Politiká or Polis*, meaning "affairs of the cities"). The book title was rendered in Early Modern English in the mid-15th century as "Polettiques";^[18] it became "politics" in Modern English. The singular *politic* first attested in English 1430 and comes from Middle French *politique*, in turn from Latin *politicus*,^[19] which is the Latinization of the Greek πολιτικός (*politikos*), meaning amongst others "of, for, or relating to citizens", "civil", "civic", "belonging to the state",^[20] in turn from πολίτης (*polites*), "citizen"^[20] and that from πόλις (*polis*), "city".^[20]

Classifications

Formal politics refers to the operation of a constitutional system of government and publicly defined institutions and procedures.^[21] Political parties, public policy or discussions about war and foreign affairs would fall under the category of Formal Politics.^[21] Many people view formal politics as something outside of themselves, but that can still affect their daily lives.^[21]

Semi-formal politics is politics in government associations such as neighborhood associations, or student governments where student government political party politics is often important.



Women voter outreach from 1935.

Informal politics is understood as forming alliances, exercising power and protecting and advancing particular ideas or goals. Generally, this includes anything affecting one's daily life, such as the way an office or household is managed, or how one person or group exercises influence over another.^[21] Informal Politics is typically understood as everyday politics, hence the idea that "politics is everywhere".^[21]

History of state politics

The history of politics is reflected in the origin, development, and economics of the institutions of government.

The state

The origin of the state is to be found in the development of the art of warfare. Historically speaking, all political communities of the modern type owe their existence to successful warfare.^[22]

Kings, emperors and other types of monarchs in many countries including China and Japan, were considered divine. Of the institutions that ruled states, that of kingship stood at the forefront until the American Revolution put an end to the "divine right of kings". Nevertheless, the monarchy is among the longest-lasting political institutions, dating as early as 2100 BC in Sumeria^[23] to the 21st century AD British Monarchy. Kingship becomes an institution through the institution of hereditary monarchy.

The monarch often, even in absolute monarchies, ruled their kingdom with the aid of an elite group of advisors, a council without which they could not maintain power. As these advisors and others outside the monarchy negotiated for power, constitutional monarchies emerged, which may be considered the germ of constitutional government.^{[24][25]}

The greatest of the monarch's subordinates, the earls and dukes in England and Scotland, the dukes and counts in Continental Europe, always sat as a right on the council. . India during the reign of the Gupta empire followed a decentralized system in which great autonomy was given to the governors of the provinces. Ancient China on the other hand followed a feudal system.^[26] A conqueror wages war upon the vanquished for vengeance or for plunder but an established kingdom exacts tribute. One of the functions of the council is to keep the coffers of the monarch full. Another is the satisfaction of military service and the establishment of lordships by the king to satisfy the task of collecting taxes and soldiers.^[27]

Themes

Forms of political organization

There are many forms of political organization, including states, non-government organizations (NGOs) and international organizations such as the United Nations. States are perhaps the predominant institutional form of political governance, where a state is understood as an institution and a government is understood as the regime in power.

According to Aristotle, states are classified into monarchies, aristocracies, timocracies, democracies, oligarchies, and tyrannies. Due to changes across the history of politics, this classification has been abandoned.

All states are varieties of a single organizational form, the sovereign state. All the great powers of the modern world rule on the principle of sovereignty. Sovereign power may be vested on an individual as in an autocratic government or it may be vested on a group as in a constitutional government. Constitutions are written documents that specify and limit the powers of the different branches of government. Although a constitution is a written document, there is also an unwritten constitution. The unwritten constitution is continually being written by the legislative and judiciary branch of government; this is just one of those cases in which the nature of the circumstances determines the form of government that is most appropriate.^[28] England did set the fashion of written constitutions during the Civil War but after the Restoration abandoned them to be taken up later by the American Colonies after their emancipation and then France after the Revolution and the rest of Europe including the European colonies.



Activism is a form of politics.

There are many forms of government. One form is a strong central government as in France and China. Another form is local government, such as the ancient divisions in England that are comparatively weaker but less bureaucratic. These two forms helped to shape the practice of federal government, first in Switzerland, then in the United States in 1776, in Canada in 1867 and in Germany in 1871 and in 1901, Australia. Federal states introduced the new principle of agreement or contract. Compared to a federation, a confederation has a more dispersed system of judicial power.^[29] In the American Civil War, the argument by the Confederate States that a State could secede from the Union was deemed unconstitutional by the supreme court.^[30]

According to professor A. V. Dicey in *An Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, the essential features of a federal constitution are: a) A written supreme constitution in order to prevent disputes between the jurisdictions of the Federal and State authorities; b) A distribution of power between the Federal and State governments and c) A Supreme Court vested with the power to interpret the Constitution and enforce the law of the land remaining independent of both the executive and legislative branches.^[31]

Global politics

Global politics include different **practices** of political globalization in relation to questions of social power: from global patterns of governance to issues of globalizing conflict. The 20th century witnessed the outcome of two world wars and not only the rise and fall of the Third Reich but also the rise and relative fall of communism. The development of the atomic bomb gave the United States a more rapid end to its conflict in Japan in World War II. Later, the hydrogen bomb became the ultimate weapon of mass destruction.

Global politics also concerns the rise of global and international **organizations**. The United Nations has served as a forum for peace in a world threatened by nuclear war, "The invention of nuclear and space weapons has made war unacceptable as an instrument for achieving political ends."^[32] Although an all-out final nuclear holocaust is radically undesirable for man, "nuclear blackmail" comes into question not only on the issue of world peace but also on the issue of national sovereignty.^[33] On a Sunday in 1962, the world stood still at the brink of nuclear war during the October Cuban Missile Crisis from the implementation of U.S. vs Soviet Union nuclear blackmail policy.

After the Soviet Union collapsed in December of 1991 the world moved from being bi-polar to being uni-polar with United States firmly ahead. However this lead has been continuously shrinking in the 21st Century with the rapid economic growth of China threatening the current American hegemony. Other world powers such as India and a resurgent Russia are also threatening America's position as the leader of the world. ^[34]

According to political science professor Paul James, global politics is affected by *values*: norms of human rights, ideas of human development, and beliefs such as cosmopolitanism about how we should relate to each:

Cosmopolitanism can be defined as a global politics that, firstly, projects a sociality of common political engagement among all human beings across the globe, and, secondly, suggests that this sociality should be either ethically or organizationally privileged over other forms of sociality.^[35]

Political corruption

William Pitt the Elder, speaking before the British House of Lords, 9 January 1770, observed: "Unlimited power is apt to corrupt the minds of those who possess it."^[36] This was echoed more famously by John Dalberg-Acton over a century later: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."^[37]

Political corruption is the use of legislated powers by government officials for illegitimate private gain. Misuse of government power for other purposes, such as repression of political opponents and general police brutality, is not considered political corruption. Neither are illegal acts by private persons or corporations not directly involved with the government. An illegal act by an officeholder constitutes political corruption only if the act is directly related to their official duties and/or power.^[38] The corruption in third World dictatorships is usually more blatant. For example, government cronies may be given exclusive right to make arbitrage profit by exploiting a fixed rate mechanism in government currency. In democracies corruption is often more indirect. Trade union leaders may be given priority in housing queues, giving them indirectly a worth of millions.^[39]

Forms of corruption vary, but include corruption, extortion, cronyism, nepotism, patronage, graft, and embezzlement. While corruption may facilitate criminal enterprise it may be legal but considered immoral.^[40] Worldwide, bribery alone is estimated to involve over 1 trillion US dollars annually.^[41] A state of unrestrained political corruption is known as a kleptocracy, literally meaning "rule by thieves".^[42]

Political parties

A **political party** is a political organization that typically seeks to attain and maintain political power within government, usually by participating in electoral campaigns, educational outreach or protest actions. Parties often espouse an expressed ideology or vision bolstered by a written platform with specific goals, forming a coalition among disparate interests.^[43]

Politics as an academic discipline

Political science, the study of politics, examines the acquisition and application of power.^[44] Political scientist Harold Lasswell defined politics as "who gets what, when, and how".^[45] Related areas of study include political philosophy, which seeks a rationale for politics and an ethic of public behaviour, as well as examining the preconditions for the formation of political communities;^[46] political economy, which attempts to develop understandings of the relationships between politics and the economy and the governance of the two; and public administration, which examines the practices of governance.^[47] The philosopher Charles Blattberg, who has defined politics as "responding to conflict with dialogue", offers an account which distinguishes political philosophies from political ideologies.^[48]

The first academic chair devoted to politics in the United States was the chair of history and political science at Columbia University, first occupied by Prussian émigré Francis Lieber in 1857.^[49]

Political values

Several different political spectra have been proposed.

Left–right

Political analysts and politicians divide politics into left wing and right wing politics, often also using the idea of center politics as a middle path of policy between the right and left. This classification is comparatively recent (it was not used by Aristotle or Hobbes, for instance), and dates from the French Revolution era, when those members of the National Assembly who supported the republic, the common people and a secular society sat on the left and supporters of the monarchy, aristocratic privilege and the Church sat on the right.^[50]

The meanings behind the labels have become more complicated over the years. A particularly influential event was the publication of the Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848. The *Manifesto* suggested a course of action for a proletarian revolution to overthrow the bourgeois society and abolish private property, in the belief that this would lead to a classless and stateless society.^{[51][52]}

The meaning of left-wing and right-wing varies considerably between different countries and at different times, but generally speaking, it can be said that the right wing often values tradition and inequality while the left wing often values progress and egalitarianism, with the center seeking a balance between the two such as with social democracy, libertarianism or regulated capitalism.^[53]

According to Norberto Bobbio, one of the major exponents of this distinction, the Left believes in attempting to eradicate social inequality – believing it to be unethical or unnatural^[54] while the Right regards most social inequality as the result of ineradicable natural inequalities, and sees attempts to enforce social equality as utopian or authoritarian.^[55] Some ideologies, notably Christian Democracy, claim to combine left and right wing politics; according to Geoffrey K.



Freedom of Hope for Politics poster



Political views differ on average across nations. A recreation of the Inglehart–Welzel Cultural Map of the World based on the World Values Survey.

Roberts and Patricia Hogwood, "In terms of ideology, Christian Democracy has incorporated many of the views held by liberals, conservatives and socialists within a wider framework of moral and Christian principles."^[56] Movements which claim or formerly claimed to be above the left-right divide include Fascist Terza Posizione economic politics in Italy and Peronism in Argentina.^{[57][58]}

Authoritarian-libertarian

Authoritarianism and libertarianism refer to the amount of individual freedom each person possesses in that society relative to the state. One author describes authoritarian political systems as those where "individual rights and goals are subjugated to group goals, expectations and conformities",^[59] while libertarians generally oppose the state and hold the individual as sovereign. In their purest form, libertarians are anarchists^[60], who argue for the total abolition of the state, of political parties and of other political entities, while the purest authoritarians are, by definition, totalitarians who support state control over all aspects of society.^[61]

For instance, classical liberalism (also known as *laissez-faire liberalism*,^[62]) is a doctrine stressing individual freedom and limited government. This includes the importance of human rationality, individual property rights, free markets, natural rights, the protection of civil liberties, constitutional limitation of government, and individual freedom from restraint as exemplified in the writings of John Locke, Adam Smith, David Hume, David Ricardo, Voltaire, Montesquieu and others. According to the libertarian Institute for Humane Studies, "the libertarian, or 'classical liberal,' perspective is that individual well-being, prosperity, and social harmony are fostered by 'as much liberty as possible' and 'as little government as necessary.'"^[63] For anarchist political philosopher L. Susan Brown "Liberalism and anarchism are two political philosophies that are fundamentally concerned with individual freedom yet differ from one another in very distinct ways. Anarchism shares with liberalism a radical commitment to individual freedom while rejecting liberalism's competitive property relations."^[64]

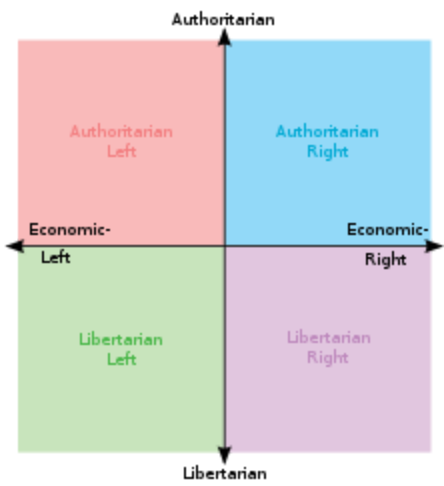


Chart showing the political positions Authoritarian to Libertarian and Left-wing to Right-wing on a 2D plane.

Critiques of political spectrum

The critics of political spectrum criticize the uni dimensional and bi-dimensional nature of it. They also point towards it's inability to incorporate other cultures. This rigidity leads to bizarre results. An example of this would be the fact that both fascist Adolf Hitler and libertarian Milton Friedman are on the “far right,” yet Hitler advocated nationalism, socialism, militarism, authoritarianism, and anti-Semitism, while Milton Friedman advocated internationalism, capitalism, pacifism, civil liberties, and was himself a Jew. Another critic of political spectrum is it's tendency to promote tribalism by needlessly sorting people into different groups.

There are also many alternatives to political spectrum and political compass. The popular among these being the ideological triangle i.e a way of organizing political ideology using the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The location of a political ideology on the triangle is a function of its preference for the three values. As one moves closer to the bottom corner, the preference for liberty increases. As one moves closer to the upper left-hand corner, the preference for equality increases. And as one moves closer to the upper right-hand corner, the preference for fraternity increases and political horseshoe i.e the **horseshoe** theory asserts that the far-left and the far-right, rather than being at opposite and opposing ends of a linear **political** continuum, closely resemble one another, analogous to the way that the opposite ends of a **horseshoe** are close together.

See also

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- [Outline of political science](#) – structured list of political topics, arranged by subject area
- [Political lists](#) – lists of political topics
- [Politics of present-day states](#)
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