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# THE SUBJECT MATTER

**Abstract**
Politics is a (if not the) quintessential human activity – the "master science" of the sphere within which all other human activities must take place. Its goal is to domesticate the inevitable conflicts that arise from our need to live together in communities under conditions of scarcity. This requires coordination, which, in turn, necessarily involves the controlled exercise of power. Politics involves the development of mutually agreed upon rules, norms, institutions and/or reliably applied practices that permit conflicts to be resolved pacifically to preclude the resort to violence. Yet, it also produces constant contestation, which makes politics inherently dynamic and always unbalanced. It also involves units that are not equivalent, and that are conscious and themselves transformed as they interact. They do so through highly imperfect processes of communication. Politics is also inherently historical, since humans are always affected by their experiences and institutions. For all these reasons, politics is a very different kind of realm from the natural world, with its predictable regularities and objective processes. So is the "science" that studies it. Thus, it would be appropriate to give the study of politics its own name that captures its uniqueness as a science: politology.

## 1.1 The Core: Power and Politics

Politics is **a** (if not **the**) quintessential human activity.[1] It brings to bear on the relations between persons many of the qualities that are unique to the human species. Ever since they have lived together in communities large enough to

1 Should politics be singular or plural? In this text, we have tried consistently to use the former when referring to its generic properties and the latter when referring to its diverse practices.

require interdependent action in order to survive, human beings have, even when just hunting and gathering, had to do so in a social context. Often (and increasingly often, as they moved into more complex processes of production), they have had to coordinate their efforts and, therefore, to make decisions about what, how and how much to produce and how to distribute it. Just the existence of scarcity, not to mention innate differences in individual preferences and resources, has compelled them to attempt to resolve the inevitable conflicts of interest and sentiment that this requires. If all such decisions were so-called "Pareto Optimal" – *i.e.,* benefitted everyone without harming anyone – politics would be unnecessary. They are very rarely so, and this means that some persons will have to either convince or compel others to contribute or to conform.

**Power** is what we commonly call this process – the capacity to make others do what we want them to do which they would not otherwise wish or choose to do.[2] It always has at least "two faces." The one that is easier to observe and eventually to measure involves coercion – the use or threat of physical force to bring about an intended outcome. The second is much less visible and, hence, potentially more insidious. It involves the multifarious ways in which the powerful manipulate the knowledge, preferences and patterns of thought of the less powerful in order to convince them to conform "voluntarily" to the "legitimate" demands of those in power. The study of politics is dedicated to making sense of both of these – and any of the other – faces of power.[3]

2 In a recent book, Stefano Bartolini has dedicated 27 pages in an effort to define what politics is. (Stefano Bartolini, *The Political* (London: ECPR Press/Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018), ch. 5.) The definition he proposes

> (a) the process through which ordinary citizens unite their wills in the form of authority fields and constitute politically relevant actors (the politics of participation and collective action); (b) the process in which authority fields as politically relevant actors exchange support resources with factions of the elite competing for authority positions (the politics of support and pressure); and (c) the process in which these factions struggle among themselves for public authority (the politics of competition).

is not incompatible with our more parsimonious focus on the exercise of power and its consequences. Nevertheless, there is at least one way in which our approaches differ quite significantly. Bartolini focuses exclusively on politics in what we have called "real-existing" democracies (hence, the reference to citizens, participation and competition). We are equally concerned with politics in "real-existing" autocracies, as well as a large number of "hybrids" of the two. He is also much more preoccupied with probing the ambiguity of the very concept of power itself:

> [T]here is a world of difference whether bindingness over others is applied via a direct utilisation of power/resources in dealings with other actors or whether compliance is stabilised over time and generalised to the entire membership of a system, including those against which no 'power' has been used and no conflict has been waged (p. 125).

We raise the same questions in the rest of this paragraph and *infra,* but much more summarily.

3 Antonio Gramsci recognized as much when he focused on the dyad of *dominio* and *direzione* (coercion and consent). See his *Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971). Since then, scholars have been competing to discover the most "faces" of power. For the original

All of those involved in politics – be they politicians or ordinary citizens/subjects[4] – are **agents** of some kind or another.[5] Their actions are not completely pre-determined by the physical or social contexts in which they find themselves. They have, or at least believe they have, choices to make among alternative courses of action. Moreover, they are intrinsically "restless" with regard to their environment.[6] Some agents are dissatisfied with their existing situation and, hence, willing to try to change it. In so doing, they are very likely to provoke a response from those who are not so dissatisfied. The latter will react to defend the *status quo* and, therefore, also become agents.[7] To effect

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two, see Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, "Two Faces of Power," *American Political Science Review* 56, no. 4 (December 1962): 947–952. For three, see Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (New York: Macmillan, 1973); for four, see Peter Digeser, "The Fourth Face of Power," *Journal of Politics* 54, no. 4 (November 1992): 977–1007; for all five, see Iris M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990). By now, there may be a sixth that we have not yet encountered.

4 What concept should be used when referring to the political behavior of the vast majority of people who are not self-declared politicians or political activists? This genotype (*i.e.,* generic concept) requires immediate specification into observable phenotypes (*i.e.,* sub-types) that vary according to régime. Politologists usually refer to people who live in democracies in which people have political rights as **citizens**, and those living in those kinds of régimes which do not have such rights as **subjects**. We have adopted here the somewhat awkward term "citizens/subjects" when we have to refer to the genotype. (Even "subject," with its connotation of those living under a royal sovereign, is not quite right – and somewhat ideologically loaded – when referring to "the people" of non-monarchical autocracies, especially state socialist ones.) We are convinced that a central objective of politology should be to focus more on the phenotypes, *i.e.,* what they have in common. For further discussion of the problem of genotypes and phenotypes, and of its specific application to the problem of how to conceptualize and analyze politics involving ordinary people, see page 21 *ff.* and especially footnote 26 there.

5 *N.b.* Agents are not actors. They do not perform exclusively according to roles established by others beforehand. They are potentially capable of writing their own scripts, even though many politicians and citizens/subjects may in routine practice behave as they are told, trained or induced to do.

6 This encapsulated description of the generic nature of the political agent combines the very well-known observation of Aristotle that human beings are *zoon politikon* (political animals) and, therefore, intrinsically disposed to use power over others to realize their goals (or to protect themselves from the efforts of others to do so) with the much less well-known observation of the philosophical anthropologist, Arnold Gehlen, that human beings are distinctively "incomplete" with regard to their environment and, thus, intrinsically disposed to being dissatisfied with it and seeking to change it – by institutions if possible, by force if necessary. A. Gehlen, *Der Mensch: Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt*, ed. Karl-Siegbert Rehberg (Frankfurt: Verlag Vittorio Klosterman, 2016). The fact that Gehlen was a convinced and unrepentant Nazi no doubt has contributed to the reluctance to attribute this important observation to him. It also probably did not help that his brother, Reinhard, was a Nazi general in charge of intelligence on the Eastern Front who subsequently became a US intelligence asset and later the founder of the West German equivalent of the CIA.

7 Some would argue that those who passively support the status quo are also agents in that they contribute to the imposition of a system of domination that generates dissatisfaction

change or prevent it, both types have to be able to imagine future conditions and the alternative actions that might improve or threaten the quality of that environment and their existence within it.[8]

If these generic characteristics of agents are true, politics as a form of human behavior is likely to be in almost permanent violation of two of the foundational principles of the physical sciences: the First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics. First, the agents involved will not normally be able to contain their actions and reactions within a closed homeostatic system and, hence, will be continuously subjected to exogenously induced changes in their relative power resources to which they will have to respond by changing their behavior or preferences. Second, given that entropy – the tendency toward disorder – is inevitable in any system, even if agents do succeed in isolating, controlling and/or satisfying these disturbing outside influences, they will never be completely successful in sustaining an equilibrium between conflicting and competing forces. Proponents of change – whom we will call "progressives" in a generic sense[9] – may tire of "the costs of politics" and be tempted to withdraw from the struggle.[10] Their opponents – "conservatives," by which we mean simply opponents of change – may welcome the stability of the institutions and policies that brought them to power and that protect their resources. But this does not prevent the latter from inventing new motives for being dissatisfied, not to mention the perpetual presence in politics of progressives who are, by definition, dissatisfied with the magnitude or distribution of collective goods.

In other words, politics is an intrinsically dynamic and unbalanced process. The quest for stability has been an eternal component of its practice (not to mention the principal objective of conservative agents), but even when it has seemed to prevail, the result has been either illusory or momentary in the

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in others. Even if their contribution is unintentional or unnoticed, they could be considered agents even before they react overtly to the actions of their dissatisfied fellow members. Thanks to Tony Spanakos for this point.

8 The implication here is that politics is never purely immediate and material, but is always affected by the capacity of individuals and groups to imagine different potential futures. The Chilean social scientist, Norbert Lechner, wrote similarly that politics involve not only the conduct of administration, the protection of life and the maintenance of economic security, but also "the common sense [notion] that politics is above all a project of the future, the design of a referential horizon which makes the present intelligible." See Norbert Lechner, *Obras Escogidas de Norbert Lechner*: Volume II (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2007), 331. Thanks to Tony Spanakos for this point.

9 See page 29. In this usage, "progressives" can come from any direction and have widely divergent objectives. All they have in common is opposition to the existing rules and practices and some conception of what they think are "better" alternative ones. Likewise, "conservatives" can hail from the left, center or right, depending on the prevailing power relations produced by the outcome of previous conflicts.

10 For a consequential example, see page 26, footnote 40.

grand scheme of things, and is likely to remain so. Unlike other animals, humans are condemned to be repeatedly dissatisfied with their individual and collective accomplishments. There is no finite status or outcome that can induce them to remain inactive. That may well be the first principle of political thermodynamics.

Despite dealing with a subject matter that is a constantly moving target, students of politics are still expected to produce reliable and reasonable findings of causality and consequence – like all scientists. Unlike the physical sciences where cause and effect are usually invariant in direction and magnitude (after controlling for all other factors), the social sciences (and political science more than the others) face two unavoidable problems of inference: (1) different antecedent conditions can, nevertheless, produce the same outcome (**equifinality**); and (2) the same conditions can lead to different outcomes (**polyfinality**). Moreover, researchers are almost never capable of controlling for all of those other potentially intervening factors. Just think of the different historical trajectories that eventually led to the establishment of relatively similar liberal, parliamentary democracies in Western (and now, even, some of Eastern) Europe. Or, to the different trajectories followed by the component republics of the former Soviet Union since 1989. Or, to the survival of state socialism[11] in Asia and Cuba in the face of its collapse in Eastern Europe and Russia.

Moreover, the units of politics – even the irreducible ones such as members of the species *homo sapiens* – are not homologous. $H_2O$ will always form water, and its component atoms have no choice in or views about the matter. But even identical twins reared together who manage to share historical, social and physical characteristics cannot be expected to have the same politics. Humans cannot but reflect on their experiences, environment and makeup. They bring their own will to bear on politics in unpredictable ways that cannot be completely reduced to the material of which they are made and the histories and structures in which they find themselves.

And, if this were not enough, to be effective, political agents have to communicate their complex thoughts to other human beings through a shared spoken and (usually also) written language. Numerous problems arise here.

11 The conceptual coin of the realm for Leninist régimes such as the USSR and those in Eastern Europe, East Asia and Cuba has been "communist." Yet for all of them, communism was mainly an aspiration which they generally admitted they had not yet reached in which property itself, rather than just private property, and, with it, most forms of inequality, had disappeared. Moreover, in the West, it became an ideologically charged epithet. For more strictly analytical purposes, then, we prefer, when referring to actual régimes, the more neutral and analytically precise concept of "state socialism." We have retained "communism" when referring to the overarching ideology that produced state socialism, and to Western (mis)perceptions of the Leninist, state socialist régimes.

Language is naturally full of ambiguities.[12] And politicians can intentionally take advantage of this.[13]

Political communication is also subject to corruption, increasingly so as it moves online. Candidates for office have been distorting their descriptions of "reality," and both their own and their opponents' records and positions, since the dawn of public campaigning. The problem grew more serious and impactful with the rise of mass media and advertising and, more recently, when campaigns developed the capacity to micro-target voters with distorted and downright false messages online.

Turning to autocratic political régimes,[14] effective political communication is often blocked by the state. Political leaders in Iran, Syria, North Africa, China, Eastern Europe and many other countries, not to mention politologists, have puzzled over the ways that massive protests can materialize often literally overnight without the slightest prior organization or signals. One explanation is that a critical mass of people prepared to rise up existed all along, but no one knew it because almost everyone was too frightened to talk about politics, much less to act politically.[15]

Moreover, in order to formulate and communicate the as yet unrealized conditions they desire to satisfy, political agents must possess sufficient analytical acuity about other human beings to be able to anticipate their responses and to seek their approval – and they regularly make miscalculations in these respects. Empathy is a particular problem, given the vast and, in recent decades, ever-increasing economic, social and cultural segmentation and inequality.[16] The problem has been made worse by the decline of in-depth humanistic

12 Schmitter was reminded of this linguistic ambiguity when he interviewed the leader of an ultra-conservative civic association in São Paulo. When asked about their political activities, she responded: "We are completely apolitical. So apolitical that we ran our own candidate for mayor in the last election." She did not have to worry about the immediate future since an ensuing military coup in 1964 (which her apolitical organization enthusiastically supported) abolished all elections in large Brazilian cities.

13 In the US, Joseph Lieberman and Barack Obama were famous for crafting utterances that could persuade voters with widely contradictory preferences that they agreed with them. In a series of essays in the *London Review of Books*, David Bromwich, a professor of English at Yale, marveled angrily at President Obama's talent for obfuscation and contradiction. See, for example, David Bromwich, "The Fastidious President," *London Review of Books* 32, no. 22 (18 November 2010); and "The World's Most Important Spectator," *London Review of Books* 36, no. 13 (3 July 2014). During the Chinese Cultural Revolution, warring factions all claimed their linguistic fealty to Mao Zedong Thought, even as they proceeded from radically opposed aspects of his writings and historical practice.

14 For our definition of régimes, see page 58. "Authoritarian" and "autocratic" are often used interchangeably, but we prefer the latter; see pages 59–60.

15 Timur Kuran, "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989," *World Politics* 44, no. 1 (1991): 7–48.

16 Mao Zedong worried about this both before and after the victory of the Chinese Revolution, and developed an innovative set of practices that forced party cadres to spend significant time and energy working at the grassroots.

narrative – in literature or oral traditions – which can foster empathy.[17] Even professionals in political communication and strategy have major problems understanding what will work. Finally, large bureaucracies – be they government departments, political parties or civil society organizations – are prone to suffering significant failures of effective communication both upward and downward. Messages become garbled over long chains of transmission – as in the parlor game of "telephone." Or they can be blocked by political pressures and crises.[18]

If political agents do manage to avoid these myriad problems and communicate effectively, they still can rarely achieve their goals alone. Politics is inherently social, after all, and all political agents must work with other humans. At least three broad categories come into play here. They can do so by deploying or threatening coercion, which is all too common; Weber's view that the *sine qua non* of the state is its monopoly on violence reflects as much – even if very few states have ever completely managed to suppress private political violence. They can also try to contract with others, which usually requires mutual trust, and which, in turn, can emerge either from strong affective social bonds or from ethical norms grounded in long historical practice or, most commonly, from robust institutions resting on mutually recognized norms and respect for the rule of law. Finally, agents can act strategically to create a situation in which other agents face no alternative.[19]

Human political agents are also collectively capable of committing acts of malice, cruelty, vengeance and violence on a scale of which no other species seems capable. This generates memories of past treatment that persist and can impede present and subsequent agreement – even when the conditions for a mutually satisfactory outcome and, hence, some degree of institutional stability do objectively exist.[20]

17 Jade Schiff, *Burdens of Political Responsibility: Narrative and the Cultivation of Responsiveness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

18 Perhaps the most stunning example in human history was the massive famine induced by the Chinese Great Leap Forward, whose scope remained hidden for a disastrously long time because local officials were under intense pressure to produce wildly exaggerated positive reports.

19 A classic work on such "boxing in" of one's interlocutors is Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960). Of course, the efficacy of such a strategy depends on how much the listener is dependent upon the more powerful caller.

20 This is not to say that all aspects of politics are unique to *homo sapiens*. Most primates are capable of physically coercing others of their species to comply with their demands, and some of them also seem to have the capacity to command obedience without using force. While elaborate language seems to be beyond their comprehension, they can "read" the meanings of gestures and sounds. And some animal species can form mutually beneficial alliances that may be based on implicit contracts.

Finally, all these problems iterate continuously and always under changing conditions.[21] Politics is nothing if not historical. It is in constant flux, and each move and moment re-shapes the potentialities for and constraints upon the next. The common search in political science for repeating patterns is always subject to being frustrated by the possibility that each instance in which one appears can "contaminate" its replication in the subsequent one.

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To sum up, politics as a sphere of human activity has very specific characteristics, dynamics and a logic all its own, and its study ought to reflect that.

- It is, as Aristotle claimed, the "master science" in that it is the practice of politics that sets the preconditions for all but the narrowest forms of human activity.
- Political agents are irreducible to their own physical, social or historical characteristics, much less to wider structures. They are reflective about and reflexive to their endogenous makeup and their exogenous worlds.
- They possess the capacity for forming and exercising will in their efforts to control the behavior of others.
- Thus, what political agents do is almost never completely pre-determined and always contingent upon the (often unpredictable) response of others.
- Political agents are restless, constantly seeking to change the outcomes of politics and, not infrequently, often the very processes by which they are produced.
- Their agency is also indeterminate because it depends on the pursuit of or defense against *imagined* future conditions, not just the existing ones.
- Hence, politics always takes place in non-homeostatic contexts in which the appearance of stability is illusory and unlikely to persist.
- Politics is beset with all manner of communicative problems and dysfunctions, even when it is conducted among persons who share the same language and culture.
- Therefore, it always involves the problem of acting conjointly or contracting voluntarily (which includes but is certainly not limited to the rationalist dilemma of "collective action").[22]

21 Tony Spanakos has observed that

> The ontology implied here necessarily sees human motivation and action in an indeterminate range between the desirable and the 'good' and the undesirable and the 'evil.' Rather than standing with authoritarians who see 'man as sinful and in need of community' or with liberals who see 'man as good and whole in himself,' they regard human beings as incomplete and in need of communication with each other which can lead to a variety of only partially predictable political outcomes.
>
> (Personal communication)

22 The notion that collective action in pursuit of public goods is intrinsically irrational unless conducted in small groups where everyone contributes to the success of the

- Because politics is centrally about power, and because power has a corrupting influence upon those who exercise it, it is particularly prone to mobilizing *homo sapiens's* capacity for insensitivity and brutality toward others.
- It is always historical, with each instance of political action inevitably producing new conditions, memories and forms of conflict that cannot be easily ignored or eliminated.
- Politics always occurs in "open systems" and, therefore, is always subject to random effects generated by exogenous forces.
- All this makes politics a human activity that is particularly uncertain, dynamic and consequential.

Other spheres of human activity share some of these characteristics. But it is the *complex set* of them that imparts a specific *logic* all its own to politics. Thus, we argue that the study of politics might usefully be renamed: politology.[23]

## 1.2 The Exercise of Power

What we think of as politics rests on the exercise (or the threat of the exercise) of **power** and the resistance to it**.** What is also unique to human beings is their capacity to "domesticate" this activity by inserting conditions that serve to channel the actions and reactions of agents according to mutually agreed upon

collectivity is associated with the work of Mancur Olson; see *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). The very existence of many such large groups – historically and contemporarily – is self-evident proof that factors other than individualistic marginal calculation must be at work in politics.

23 Literally, the study of the logic of politics. In proposing "politology," we are not launching a presumptuous campaign to rename our field. Whether it gains any currency is for our colleagues – especially our younger ones – to decide. Rather, we deploy it in this book to emphasize our core point that politics as a human activity possesses characteristics all its own that are distinct from and irreducible to the other forms of behavioral activity studied by social scientists and, even more, by physical scientists. We argue that, if the assignment of labels to scholarly specializations and academic departments, institutes or faculties followed some consistent logical-linguistic principle, the study of politics should not in the first place have been called "political science," but "politology" – following the examples of anthropology, psychology and sociology, whose names convey the appropriate message that each of these subject matters has its own logic of explanation, and, even, more importantly, that these are distinct from those of the physical sciences. Actually, in French, Italian, Russian, Spanish and German, one does increasingly find references to "*politologie*," "*politologiya*" (*политология*) or "*politologia*," and their practitioners have been called "*politicologues*," "*politistes*," "*politologi*," "*politologisti*" *e così via*. This labeling is even further complicated in some Latin languages when the subject matter itself has been pluralized: "*les sciences politiques*" or "*le scienze politiche*." In China, our profession is generally called, literally, "political studies" (*zhengzhi xue* [政治学]), which is closer to politology (the *logos* of politics) since it eschews the word for "science" (*ke xue* [科学] ) that could easily have been adopted by adding the single character *ke* [科].

**rules, norms** and/or reliably applied **practices**.[24] These regulated exchanges, negotiations, deliberations and decision-making processes permit conflicts to be resolved pacifically and, thereby, preclude the resort to violence that could otherwise be needed to resolve the differences in resources and preferences that give rise to political activity in the first place. Needless to say, the effort is not always successful, hence the long list of atrocities in human history. Put differently, the "quality" of politics can be measured at least in part by the extent to which it has succeeded in domesticating the exercise of power – *i.e.,* preventing the use of individual or collective violence to resolve disputes – without removing citizens/subjects from participating by killing them, torturing them, violating them, incarcerating them or forcing them into exile.

Power, in turn, rests on the uneven distribution of resources and returns among human beings living within a given unit (usually a demarcated geographic space whose definition itself may become contested). Some of these asymmetries may be "natural," given the different physiological endowments that human beings receive upon birth, but most will be "social" and rooted in subsequent accomplishments (or non-accomplishments) during their respective life-cycles, the unequal inheritance of previously acquired social, economic and political privileges, and/or the institutions of market exchange that systematically generate and perpetuate inequality.[25]

24 The attentive reader will note our repeated references to "rules, norms and practices." This is our attempt to indicate that politics always involves different combinations of formally enacted rules, informally recognized norms and empirically established practices. All three can serve to domesticate the exercise of power – although rules are usually more reliable (perhaps, because they are backed up by a set of specialized juridical and penal institutions). The latter two have only custom, convenience and mutual advantage going for them. In some polities, the informal element has been especially prominent. Brazilians even have an expression for this: "*um jeito*" – an unorthodox and ingenious way of solving problems and avoiding conflicts that cannot be accomplished through legal procedures, but only by relying on "inconfessable," but often well-known, consensual arrangements that usually shift the burden to others. Italians have taken this notion further and made it into an alternative régime form: *il sottogoverno*. In both of these countries, the public scrutiny and competitiveness built into "real-existing" democracy eventually led to a major institutional crisis over corruption that, in the Italian case, destroyed its party system and, in the Brazilian case, to a profound challenge to the government in power. In China, informal *banfa* – literally, "ways to make something happen" – have been indispensable responses for the operation of politics within the country's highly formalized and rigid institutions from time immemorial. The term connotes creative and often widely understood ways to skirt but not flout the rules in the interest of efficiency and that do not necessarily involve or connote corruption. It has a positive normative loading – of cleverness and effectiveness.

25 Huge debates swirl here. Perhaps the most controversial one pits those who believe that unequal social and economic (and therefore political) outcomes are the result of systematically unequal birth endowments among groups against those who see only socially random ones among individuals. Herbert Spencer argued that inequalities throughout history developed because some people were less "fit" at birth. Blecher has

Agents seeking to change the *status quo* – "progressives" in the generic sense of those seeking change, whether of the left or right and whether individuals or organizations – will be tempted to exploit asymmetries when they try to compel others to conform to their preferences. The former may threaten to deprive the latter of resources, promise to reward them with greater resources, take advantage of a crisis, mobilize new participants as supporters or allies, raise new issues, make new kinds of appeals, put social or political pressure on them and/or organize themselves and their supporters in new or more effective ways. The defenders of the *status quo* – "conservatives" – will resist these efforts and will usually have an intrinsic advantage due precisely to their incumbency. They will try to control the agenda of public disputation, reinvigorate arguments for the *status quo*, influence the course of decision-making, suppress and/or de-legitimate demands for change, undermine the organization and alliances of the "progressives," offer tactical compromises that do not shift the strategic balance, and/or alter the preferences of the challengers and their allies. The "normal" outcome of these challenges and conflicts should be a reaffirmation (or, in some cases, a revision) of the *status quo ante*. This is especially likely if (1) they are contained within a pre-established set of rules and norms that the opponents also respect as **legitimate** and that are enshrined in **institutions** which, going still further, are woven together into a coherent **régime**; and (2) the incumbents have come to and remained in power by observing those rules and norms and by working within those institutions.[26]

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often wondered whether, when the gates are closed in the evenings at London's Highgate Cemetery, where Spencer is buried just opposite Karl Marx, furious battles still break out between them. Marx, of course, chalked up the biggest cleavages in history to the operations of successive modes of production – especially the capitalist one. Social Darwinism has lived on, drawing liberal as well as radical critics. In our time, it has reappeared in the work of Richard Herrenstein and Charles Murray, who have argued that African-Americans are intellectually, psychologically and morally inferior to white Americans. See Richard Herrenstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press, 1994). In 2017, a nocturnal debate about this work at Middlebury College led to a punch-up. Less dramatic but more serious arguments have proliferated among center leftists (known in the US as political "liberals") and radicals of various stripes. The former generally seek the roots of inequality in social discrimination and/or government policies, while the latter look for deeper roots (the actual meaning of "radical") in underlying forces such as capitalism, patriarchy or racism.

26 A recent example is the fact that in 2016, no one in the US advocated refusing to seat Donald Trump in the White House, notwithstanding his loss of the popular vote, his palpable unfitness for the job and the profound threat he posed to the very institutions that put him there. Indeed, even Trump, who did not expect or, arguably, want to win the election still followed the rules of the game and took up office even as he had to know that doing so posed enormous personal and financial risks for him.

Yet, of course, there are also many "abnormal" outcomes in politics. As we have argued,[27] the logic of action-reaction that underlies the exercise of power is not "thermodynamic." Politics tends to produce reciprocal interactions, but the conflicting agents are rarely equal in their power or effect; the conflicts may be more oblique than strictly opposite; and the eventual outcome may not produce a stable equilibrium, just a temporary arrangement; institutions are not always self-enforcing, and require periodic injections of energy – in political rather than thermodynamic terms, adaptations – from other sources in order to survive any change. Incumbents may well have resisted these, because their incumbency blinds them to the need for change, renders them ideologically rigid, or because they believe that even minor "reform" may invite further demands that would endanger the core of their power.[28] In other words, incumbents do not always prevail. The "institutional paths of dependency" they claim everyone should rely upon are not always followed. Not only may the decision rules and the means for coming to power be ambiguous in specific instances, but also the prior conditions presumed by these rules may have changed in ways that incumbents have not discerned or responded to adequately – especially if they involve unfamiliar and surprising crises and/or exogenous shocks. Incumbents' performance once in office may have alienated their supporters and/or those previously indifferent, by not doing what was expected of them, by pursuing policies that backfired or by political missteps they committed in order to ramp up their leadership, organization and participation. Most importantly, the rules themselves may turn out to have embodied only a temporary compromise that proves vulnerable to contestation. For opponents to win, it will help if these clusters of rules have not become **institutions** that are valued for themselves by most agents even above the political outcomes they produce; if they are not protected in power by the **legitimacy** of the institutions they govern; and especially if these institutions are not clustered together into a coherent **régime**.[29]

This is one reason why power has proven so elusive to observe and difficult to measure. It is most effective when those who have it do not have to exercise or even display it, *i.e.,* when their power is so overwhelming that it intimidates

27 Page 3.

28 They may have read Samuel Huntington – many did – who famously observed: "In some circumstances…reform may well exacerbate tensions, precipitate violence, and be a catalyst of rather than a substitute for revolution." Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 6–7.

29 See page 58 *ff.* This reminds Schmitter of an Austrian expression he once heard: *die Rute im Fenster* ("the Whip in the Window"). It referred to the fact that, while the negotiations between social partners (capital and labor) were ostensibly between private (or, in the Austrian case, semi-public) institutions, the participants were fully aware that the state, *i.e.,* the whip, was always present, and if agreement could not be reached or if it exceeded anticipated limits, someone would break the glass and the state would intervene. In other words, in normal, "domesticated" political situations – regardless of appearances – public authority (and potential coercion) is never far away.

or pre-empts any response by subordinates, and, even more so, when it is accepted by subordinates as legitimate. Nevertheless, the entropy embedded in such relations may not remain manageable when threatened by significant exogenous transformations in the power resources of conflicting agents or by the endogenous emergence of new expectations, preferences or sources of discontent among them. Yet, incumbents may also remain in place for a long time in the absence of such conditions, due to sheer inertia – *i.e.,* the failure of challenges and challengers to produce enough pressure to reach the reforming point. It is, then, easier to observe or measure the absence or insufficiency of power at critical moments (also known as "crises") when incumbent leaders and régimes have succumbed to political entropy than when they remain in place, whether on strong or weak foundations.