

# Introduction to Politics

**What is Politics?**

**Monsoon 2024**



**“Man is by nature a  
political animal.”  
-Aristotle**

**Aristotle-** In *Politics*, Aristotle declared that 'man is by nature a political animal', by which he meant that it is only within a political community that human beings can live the 'good life'. According to him, Politics is an ethical activity concerned with creating a 'just society; and that is why Political Science is a master Science.

# What is Politics?

## Defining Politics

- Origin from the Greek word “Polis” (city-state: General form of political organisation in ancient Greece)
- Politics is an ‘essentially contested’ concept, in the sense that the term has a number of acceptable or legitimate meanings.
- Politics, in its broadest sense, is the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live.
- Politics is inextricably linked to the phenomena of conflict and cooperation.
- Politics can be defined in different ways: as the exercise of power, the science of government, the making of collective decisions, the allocation of limited resources, the practice of deception and manipulation, and so on.



# What is Politics?

## Defining Politics

- Politics as art of Government
- Politics as Public Affairs
- Politics as compromise and consensus
- Politics as Power

A quote by Charles de Gaulle is displayed in white, bold, sans-serif text against a blurred background of a sunset or sunrise over water. The text is arranged in four lines, with the first three lines being larger and the fourth line being smaller. The background shows a gradient of colors from dark blue at the top to light yellow at the bottom, with horizontal lines suggesting water or a distant shore.

Politics is too  
serious a matter to  
be left to the  
politicians.

Charles de Gaulle

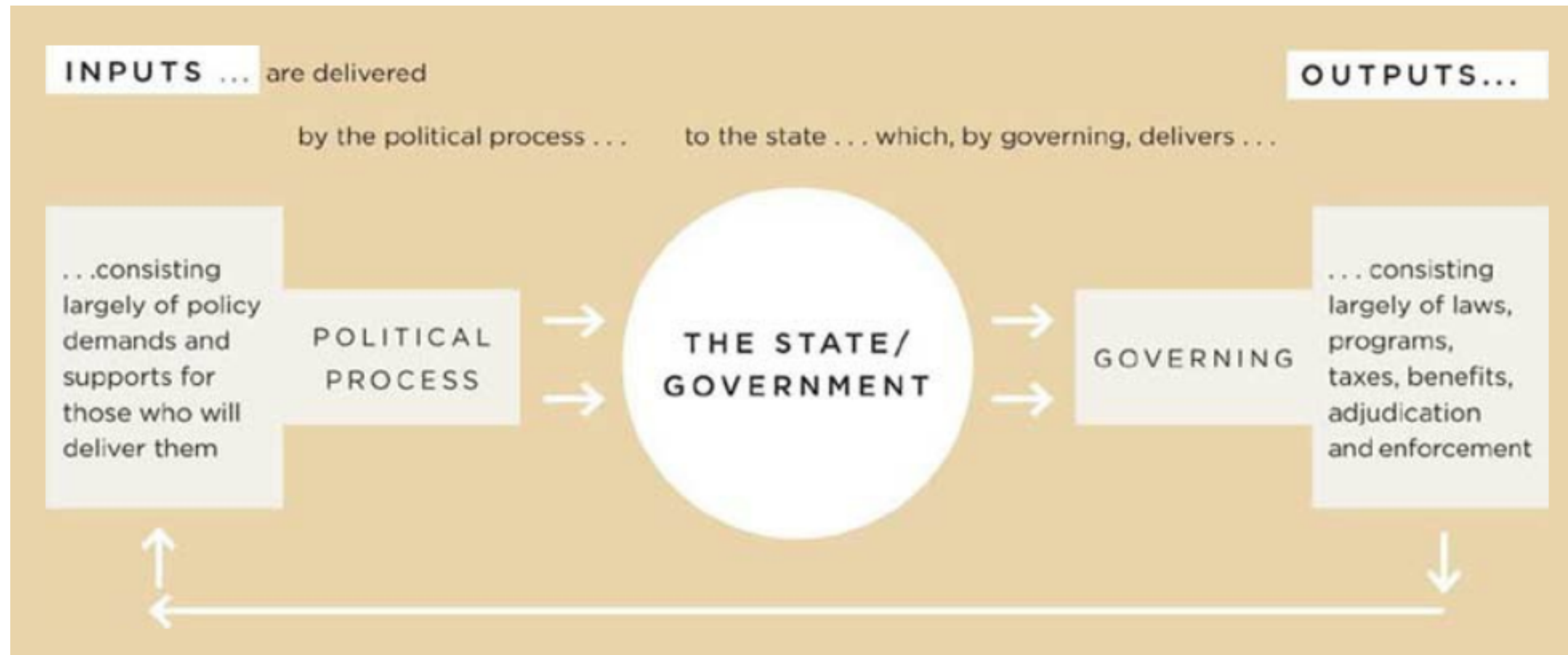
# What is Politics?

## Defining Politics: Politics as art of government

- Bismark- Politics is not a science, its an art. It is the art of government, the exercise of control within society through the making and enforcement of collective decisions.
- Davis Easton- Politics can be defined as the ‘authoritative allocation of values.’ Politics encompasses the various processes through which government responds to pressures from the larger society, in particular by allocating benefits, rewards or penalties.
- ‘Authoritative values’ are those that are widely accepted in society, and are considered binding by the mass of citizens. In this view, politics is associated with ‘policy’ that is, with formal or authoritative decisions that establish a plan of action for the community. Without some kind of mechanism for allocating authoritative values, society would simply disintegrate into a civil war of each against all, as the early social- contract theorists argued.

# What is Politics?

## Defining Politics: Politics as Art of Government



David Easton's  
'authoritative  
allocation of values'



# What is Politics?

## Defining Politics: Politics as Public Affairs

- As per this definition, distinction between ‘the political’ and ‘the non-political’ coincides with the division between public and private sphere of life.
- Traditionally, the distinction between the public realm and the private realm was thought to conform to the division between the state and civil society.
- Alternately, it is conceived as the **distinction between ‘the political’ and ‘the personal’**. This notion regards institutions such as businesses, community groups, clubs and trade unions as ‘public’.

# What is Politics?

## Defining Politics: Politics as Public Affairs

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



# What is Politics?

## Defining Politics: Politics as Compromise and Consensus

- **Bernard Crick-** Politics [is] the activity by which differing interests within a given unit of rule are conciliated by giving them a share in power in proportion to their importance to the welfare and the survival of the whole community.
- This conception of politics relates not to the arena within which politics is conducted but to the way in which decisions are made. Specifically, politics is seen as a particular means of resolving conflict: that is, by compromise, conciliation and negotiation, rather than through force and naked power. This is what is implied when politics is portrayed as ‘the art of the possible’.
- **Stoker (2006)-** ‘Politics is designed to disappoint’; its outcomes are ‘often messy, ambiguous and never final’.

# What is Politics?

## Defining Politics: Politics as Power

- **Harold Lasswell's** book **Politics: Who Gets What, When, How?** (1936) – advances this notion. Politics is, in essence, power: the ability to achieve a desired outcome, through whatever means.
- **Kate Millett** in *Sexual Politics* (1969), defined politics as ‘power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another’.

Power  
corrupts,  
and  
absolute  
power  
corrupts  
absolutely.

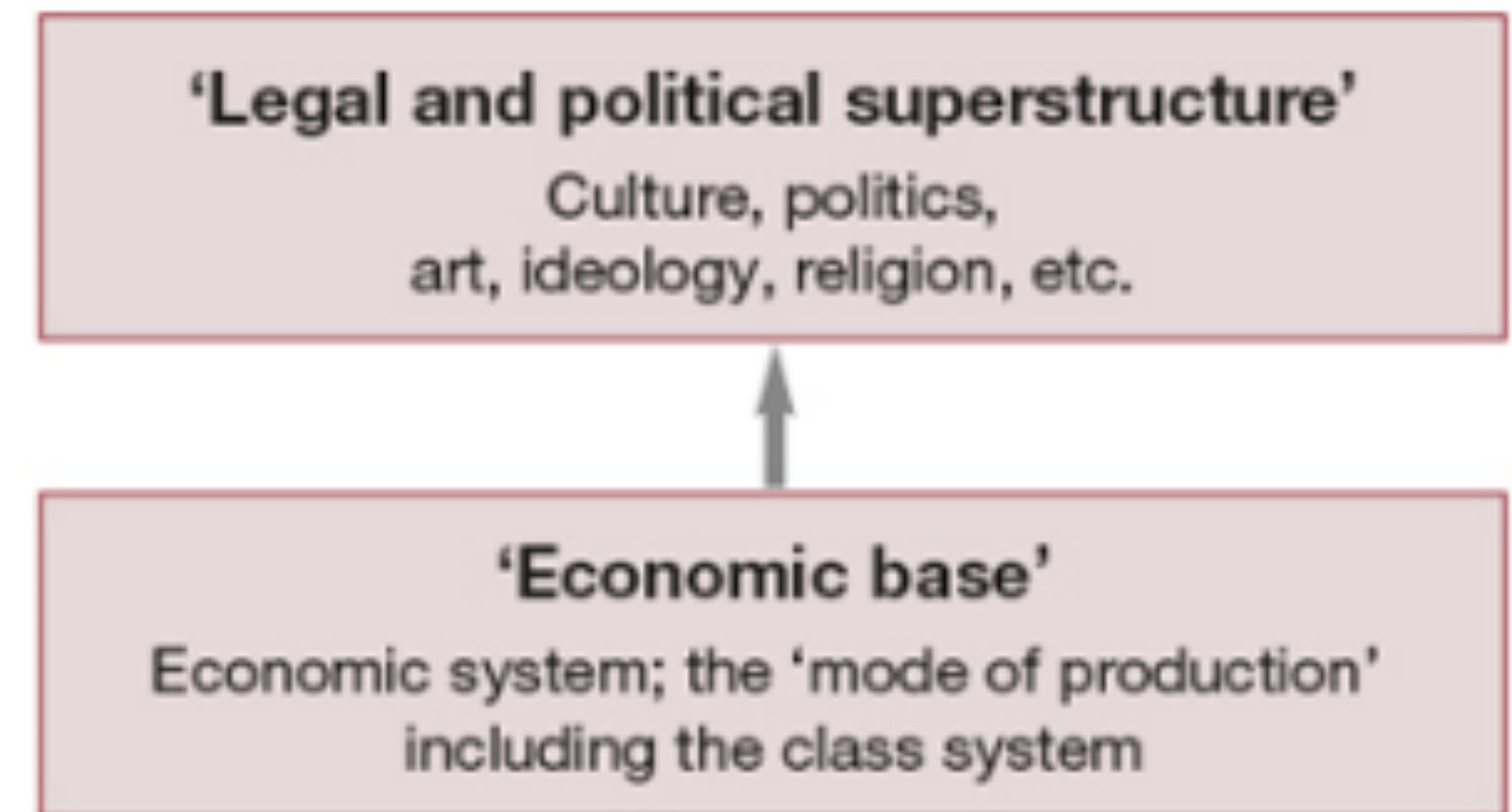
- Lord Acton



# What is Politics?

## Defining Politics: Politics as Power

- Marx used politics in two senses
  - To refer to the state – as ‘merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another’.
  - Politics, together with law and culture, are part of a ‘superstructure’ that is distinct from the economic ‘base’. He believed that the ‘superstructure’ arose out of, and reflected, the economic ‘base’. Political power, is therefore, rooted in the class system.





# What is Politics?

## Defining Politics: Politics as Power

### Three faces of power

Decision-making	Agenda setting	Thought control
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Ability to influence the content of decisions</b></li><li>• Dahl's Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City (1961) - assessment of who holds power based on the decision-making abilities of the actors involved.</li><li>• Keith Boulding: difference between force (the stick), productive exchanges (the deal), and the creation of loyalty (the kiss)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bachrach and Baratz (1962): ability to prevent decisions being made: that is, in effect, 'non-decision-making'</li><li>• Involves the ability to set or <b>control the political agenda</b>, thereby preventing issues or proposals from being aired in the first place</li><li>• Eg: Lobbying</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ability to influence another by <b>shaping what he or she thinks, wants, or needs</b></li><li>• Ideological indoctrination or psychological control</li><li>• Eg: Advertisements, propaganda</li></ul>

# What is Politics?

## Defining Politics: Politics as Power

### Waves of Feminism

- **First Wave** – from the mid **19<sup>th</sup> century**. It involved the pursuit of equality in political and legal areas, particularly the **right to vote**. It ended with the achievement of female suffrage, introduced first in New Zealand in 1893. (US – 1920, UK – 1918)
- **Second Wave** – emerged in the **1960s** and **1970s** and was characterized by a radical concern with ‘women’s liberation’, including that in the private sphere. This reflected the belief that redressing the status of women required not just political reform, but a process of radical, and particularly cultural, change, brought about by ‘consciousness raising’ amongst women and the **transformation of family, domestic and personal life**. Because sexual inequality seen as rooted in the sexual division of labour that runs through the society.
- **Third Wave** – during the **90s**. Allowed the voices of, among others, low income women, women in the developing world, ‘women of colour’ to be heard more effectively. For example, ‘**Black Feminism**’ portrays sexism and racism to be linked systems of oppression.

# What is Politics?

## Theoretical and Applied Politics

Theoretical Politics	Applied Politics
1. Theory of the State (Origin, nature, development, classification of the forms of government, sovereignty)	1. The State (Actual existing forms of government)
2. Theory of Government (Forms of institutions, executive, developments, province and limits of law)	2. Government (The working of the government and administration etc)
3. Theory of Legislation (Object of Legislation, philosophy of law, interpretation and administration and process of law making)	3. Law and Legislation (Legislative procedure and court of law)
4. Theory of State as an artificial person (Relation to other states and international law)	4. The State Personified (Diplomacy, Peace, War, conferences and other international dealings)



# What is Politics?

## Approaches to the Study of Politics

- **Philosophical Tradition-** This involved a preoccupation with essentially ethical, prescriptive or normative questions, reflecting a concern with what ‘should’, ‘ought’ or ‘must’ be brought about, rather than with what ‘is’. Plato and Aristotle are usually identified as the founding fathers of this tradition.
- **Empirical Tradition-** It is based on observation and experience. The empirical approach to political analysis is characterized by the attempt to offer a dispassionate and impartial account of political reality. The approach is ‘descriptive’, in that it seeks to analyse and explain, whereas the normative approach is ‘prescriptive’, in the sense that it makes judgements and offers recommendations.

**Should students of  
politics seek to be  
objective and politically  
neutral?**

- **Is politics inevitable?  
Could politics ever be  
brought to an end?**