

Intro to Politics

What is Politics?

What is Politics?

- Origin – Greek word "polis" (means city state, the administrative unit in Ancient Greece)
- Politics is an 'essentially contested' concept
- Refers to the activity as well as study of the activities such as the specific mode of decision making within and about the community; collective power of the entire community; exercise of power over others; functioning of the state etc. (Bhargava & Acharya, 2009)
- Broad definition - **activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live.**
- Involves a 'search for conflict resolution' - mediate conflict and cooperation

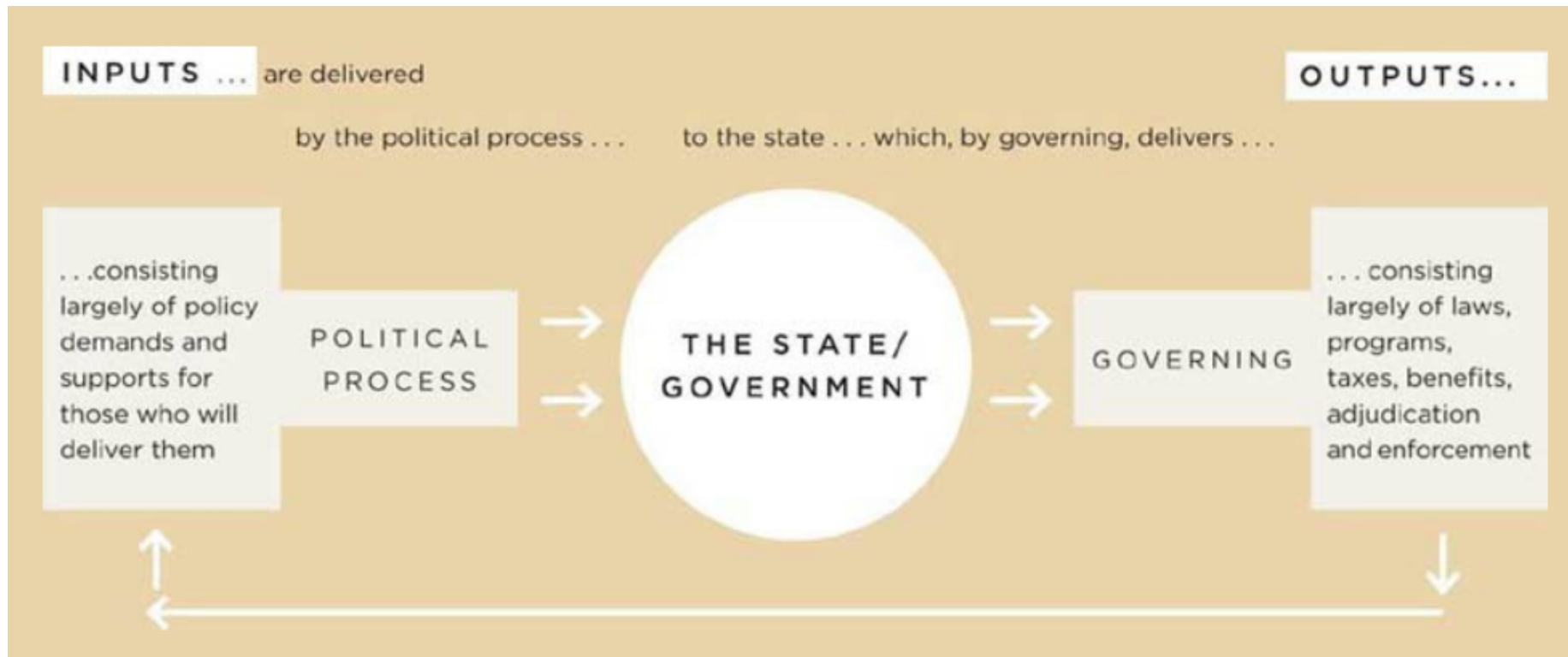
What is Politics?

Defining Politics: Politics as Art of Government

- A study of government or exercise of authority. Refers to the affairs of the polis – in effect, **‘what concerns the polis’**.
- Bismark: Politics is not a science, it is an art. It is the art of government, the **exercise of control within society through the making and enforcement of collective decisions**.
- Davis Easton: as the ‘authoritative allocation of values.’
 - encompasses the various processes through which government responds to pressures from the larger society, in particular by allocating benefits, rewards or penalties.
 - ‘Authoritative values’ - widely accepted in society, and are considered binding by the mass of citizens
- Restricted view of politics
- Gives rise to pejorative connotation of the word as well. Lord Acton: ‘power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely’.

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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’.
- Still a restricted view for feminists.

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

Figure 1.2 Two views of the public/private divide

What is Politics?

Defining Politics: Politics as Public Affairs

- Feminist thinkers: politics as public affairs implies that politics effectively stops at the front door; as if it does not take place in the family, in domestic life, or in personal relationships
- Politics as ‘public’ activity – positive connotation
 - Hannah Arendt: politics is the most important form of human activity because it involves **interaction amongst free and equal citizens**
 - Rousseau and Mill on participation in political life as a **good in itself**. Rousseau argued that only through the direct and continuous participation of all citizens in political life can the state be bound to the **common good** or General Will. For Mill, involvement in public affairs is educational and leads to **personal moral development**.
- Negative connotation of 'politics' for liberal theorists - narrow the realm of ‘the political’, commonly expressed as the wish to ‘keep politics out of’ private activities.

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Defining Politics: Politics as Public Affairs



Chipko Movement – movement against government’s deforestation policies.
“...the response of a whole culture to the central problems related to the survival of the hill people.” (Shiva & Bandhopadhyay, 1986)

What is Politics?

Defining Politics: Politics as Compromise and Consensus

- Politics as a particular means of resolving conflict: that is, by **compromise, conciliation and negotiation**, rather than through force and naked power. Politics as the ‘art of the possible’.
- Involves **wide dispersal of power**.
- Political solution - peaceful debate and **arbitration** (as opposed to military solution)
- 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.

What is Politics?

Defining Politics: Politics as Power

- Adrian Leftwich: politics is at the heart of all collective social activity, formal and informal, public and private, in all human groups, institutions and societies
- 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.
- Advocates of the view of politics as power include feminists and Marxists. Politics as power is **also seen as emancipatory force** – via proletarian revolution for Marxists & sexual liberation for feminists

What is Politics?

Defining Politics: Politics as Power

- Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* (1969): politics as ‘**power-structured relationships**, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another’.



The now ubiquitous slogan 'personal is political' originated during the second wave of feminism in the 60s

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Defining Politics: Politics as Power

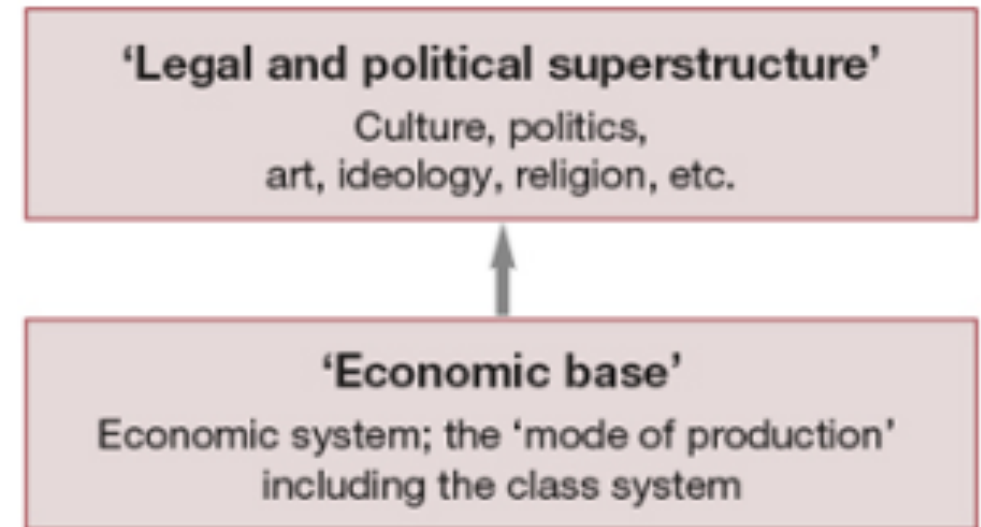
Waves of Feminism

- **First Wave** – from the mid 19th 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.

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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">• Ability to influence the content of decisions• 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.• Keith Boulding: difference between force (the stick), productive exchanges (the deal), and the creation of loyalty (the kiss) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bachrach and Baratz (1962): ability to prevent decisions being made: that is, in effect, 'non-decision-making'• Involves the ability to set or control the political agenda, thereby preventing issues or proposals from being aired in the first place• Eg: Lobbying | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to influence another by shaping what he or she thinks, wants, or needs• Ideological indoctrination or psychological control• Eg: Advertisements, propaganda |

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.

What is Politics?

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

| YES | NO |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Desire to Explain | Myth of Neutrality |
| Objective Knowledge | Emancipatory Knowledge |
| Free- Floating Intellectuals | Competing Relaities |