

Liberal democracy

Liberal democracy is a form of democratic rule that balances the principle of limited government against the ideal of popular consent. Its 'liberal' features are reflected in a network of internal and external checks on government that are designed to guarantee liberty and afford citizens protection against the state. Its 'democratic' character is based on a system of regular and competitive elections, conducted on the basis of universal suffrage and political equality (see p. 69). Although it may be used to describe a political principle, the term 'liberal democracy' is more commonly used to describe a particular type of regime. The defining features of this type of regime are as follows:

- constitutional government based on formal, usually legal, rules
- guarantees of civil liberties and individual rights
- institutionalized fragmentation and a system of checks and balances
- regular elections that respect the principle of 'one person, one vote; one vote, one value'
- party competition and political pluralism
- the independence of organized groups and interests from government
- a private-enterprise economy organized along market lines.

Pact. Not infrequently, the 'nonaligned' third world was the battleground upon which this geopolitical struggle was conducted, a fact that did much to ensure its continued political and economic subordination.

Since the 1970s, however, this system of classification has been increasingly difficult to sustain. New patterns of economic development have brought material affluence to parts of the third world, notably the oil-rich states of the Middle East and the newly industrialized states of East Asia, South East Asia, and, to some extent, Latin America. In contrast, poverty has, if anything, become more deeply entrenched in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, which now constitutes a kind of 'fourth world'. Moreover, the advance of democratization (see p. 81) in Asia, Latin America and Africa, especially during the 1980s and 1990s, has meant that third-world regimes are no longer uniformly authoritarian. Indeed, the phrase 'third world' is widely resented as being demeaning, because it implies entrenched disadvantage. The term 'developing world' is usually seen as preferable.

Without doubt, however, the most catastrophic single blow to the three-worlds model resulted from the eastern European revolutions of 1989-91. These led to the collapse of orthodox communist regimes in the USSR and elsewhere, and unleashed a process of political liberalization and market reform. Indeed, Francis Fukuyama went as far as to proclaim that this development amounted to the 'end of history' (Fukuyama, 1989). He meant by this that ideological debate had effectively ended with the worldwide triumph of western liberal democracy. Quite simply, second-world and third-world regimes were collapsing as a result of the recognition that only the capitalist first world offered the prospect of economic prosperity and political stability.

Regimes of the modern world

Since the late 1980s, the regime-classification industry has been in a limbo. Older categories, particularly the 'three worlds' division, were certainly redundant, but the political contours of the new world were far from clear. Moreover, the 'end of history' scenario was only fleetingly attractive, having been sustained by the wave of

democratization in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and drawing impetus in particular from the collapse of communism. In some senses, this liberal-democratic triumphalism reflected the persistence of a western-centric viewpoint, and it may, anyway, have been a hangover from the days of the Cold War. The image of a 'world of liberal democracies' suggested the superiority of a specifically western model of development, based perhaps especially on the USA, and it implied that values such as individualism, rights and choice are universally applicable. One result of this was a failure to recognize the significance, for instance, of Islamic and Confucian political forms, which tended to be dismissed as mere aberrations, or simply as evidence of resistance to the otherwise unchallenged advance of liberal democracy.

However, one of the difficulties of establishing a new system of classification is that there is no consensus about the criteria upon which such a system should be based. No system of classification relies on a single all-important factor. Nevertheless, particular systems have tended to prioritize different sets of criteria. Among the parameters most commonly used are the following:

- Who rules? Is political participation confined to an elite body or privileged group, or does it encompass the entire population?
- How is compliance achieved? Is government obeyed as a result of the exercise or threat of force, or through bargaining and compromise?
- Is government power centralized or fragmented? What kinds of check and balance operate in the political system?
- How is government power acquired and transferred? Is a regime open and competitive, or is it monolithic?
- What is the balance between the state and the individual? What is the distribution of rights and responsibilities between government and citizens?
- What is the level of material development? How materially affluent is the society, and how equally is wealth distributed?
- How is economic life organized? Is the economy geared to the market or to planning, and what economic role does government play?
- How stable is a regime? Has the regime survived over time, and does it have the capacity to respond to new demands and challenges?

A *constitutional-institutional* approach to classification that was influenced by 'classical' typologies was adopted in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

between 1828 and 1926 and involved countries such as the USA, France and the UK; the second occurred between 1943 and 1962 and involved ones such as West Germany, Italy, Japan and India. Although polyarchies have in large part evolved through moves towards democratization and **liberalization**, the term 'polyarchy' is preferable to 'liberal democracy' for two reasons. First, liberal democracy is sometimes treated as a political ideal, and is thus invested with broader normative implications. Second, the use of 'polyarchy' acknowledges that these regimes fall short, in important ways, of the goal of democracy.

The term 'polyarchy' was first used to describe a system of rule by Dahl (p. 274) and Lindblom in *Politics, Economics, and Welfare* (1953), and it was later elaborated in Dahl's *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (1971). In the view of these authors, polyarchical regimes are distinguished by the combination of two general features. In the first place, there is a relatively high tolerance of opposition that is sufficient at least to check the arbitrary inclinations of government. This is guaranteed in practice by a competitive party system, by institutionally guaranteed and protected civil liberties, and by a vigorous and healthy civil society. The second feature of polyarchy is that the opportunities for participating in politics should be sufficiently widespread to guarantee a reliable level of popular responsiveness. The crucial factor here is the existence of regular and competitive elections operating as a device through which the people can control and, if necessary, displace their rulers. In this sense, there is a close resemblance between polyarchy and the form of democratic elitism described by Joseph Schumpeter (see p. 229) in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942). Both Lindblom (1977) and Dahl (1985) have nevertheless acknowledged the impact on polyarchies of the disproportional power of major corporations. For this reason, they have sometimes preferred the notion of 'deformed polyarchy'.

Thus defined, the term 'polyarchy' may be used to describe a large and growing number of regimes throughout the world. All states that hold multiparty elections have polyarchical features. Nevertheless, western polyarchies have a more distinctive and particular character. They are marked not only by representative democracy and a capitalist economic organization, but also by a cultural and ideological orientation that is largely derived from western liberalism. The most crucial aspect of this inheritance is the widespread acceptance of liberal individualism. Individualism (see p. 190), often seen as the most distinctive of western values, stresses the uniqueness of each human individual, and suggests that society should be organized so as to best meet the needs and interests of the individuals who compose it. The political culture of western polyarchies is influenced by liberal individualism in a variety of ways. It generates, for example, a heightened sensitivity to individual rights (perhaps placed above duties), the general perception that choice and competition (in both political and economic life) are healthy, and a tendency to fear government and regard the state as at least a potential threat to liberty.

Western polyarchies are not all alike, however. Some of them are biased in favour of centralization and majority rule, and others tend towards fragmentation and pluralism. Lijphart (1990, 1999) highlighted this fact in distinguishing between 'majority' democracies and 'consensus' democracies. Majority democracies are organized along parliamentary lines according to the so-called **Westminster model**. The clearest example of this is the UK system, but the model has also, in certain respects, been adopted by New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Israel and India. Majoritarian tendencies are associated with any, or all, of the following features:

Concept

Polyarchy

Polyarchy (literally 'rule by many') refers generally to the institutions and political processes of modern representative democracy. As a regime type, a polyarchy can be distinguished from all

Liberalization: The introduction of internal and external checks on government power and/or shifts towards private enterprise and the market.

Westminster model: A system of government in which the executive is drawn from, and (in theory) accountable to, the assembly or parliament.

- single-party government
- a lack of separation of powers between the executive and the assembly
- an assembly that is either unicameral or weakly bicameral
- a two-party system
- a single-member plurality or first-past-the-post electoral system (see p. 233)
- unitary and centralized government
- an uncodified constitution and a sovereign assembly.

In contrast, other western polyarchies are characterized by a diffusion of power throughout the governmental and party systems. The US model of pluralist democracy is based very largely on institutional fragmentation enshrined in the provisions of the constitution itself. Elsewhere, particularly in continental Europe, consensus is underpinned by the party system and a tendency towards bargaining and power sharing. In states such as Belgium, Austria and Switzerland, a system of **consociational democracy** has developed that is particularly appropriate to societies that are divided by deep religious, ideological, regional, cultural or other differences. Consensual or pluralistic tendencies are often associated with the following features:

- coalition government (see p. 264)
- a separation of powers between the executive and the assembly
- an effective bicameral system
- a multiparty system
- proportional representation (see p. 232)
- federalism or devolution
- a codified constitution and a bill of rights.

On another level, of course, each polyarchical regime, and, indeed, every regime, is unique, and therefore exceptional. US **exceptionalism**, for instance, is often linked to the absence of a feudal past and the experience of settlement and frontier expansion. This may explain the USA's deeply individualist political culture, which, uniquely amongst western polyarchies, does not accommodate a socialist party or movement of any note. The USA is also the most overtly religious of western regimes, and it is the only one, for instance, in which Christian fundamentalism has developed into a major political force.

India is a still more difficult case. It is certainly not part of the West in cultural, philosophical or religious terms. In contrast to the 'developed' polyarchies of Europe and North America, it also has a largely rural population and a literacy rate of barely 50 per cent. Nevertheless, India has functioned as an effective polyarchy since it became independent in 1947, even surviving Indira Gandhi's 'state of emergency' in the late 1970s. Political stability in India was undoubtedly promoted by the crosscaste appeal of the Congress Party and the mystique of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. However, the decline of the former and the end of the latter has perhaps transformed the India of the 1990s into something approaching a consociational democracy.

Consociational democracy: A form of democracy that operates through power-sharing and a close association amongst a number of parties or political formations.

Exceptionalism: The features of a political system that are unique or particular to it, and thus restrict the application of broader categories.

New democracies

A third wave of democratization began, according to Huntington (1991), in 1974. It witnessed the overthrow of right-wing dictatorships in Greece, Portugal and Spain,

Concept

Communism

the retreat of the generals in Latin America, and, most significantly, the collapse of communism. The collapse of communism in the eastern European revolutions of 1989-91 unleashed a process of democratization that drew heavily on the western liberal model. The central features of this process were the adoption of multiparty elections and the introduction of market-based economic reforms. In that sense, it can be argued that most (some would say all) former communist regimes are undergoing a transition that will eventually make them indistinguishable from western polyarchies. Nevertheless, for the time being at least, there are reasons for treating these systems as distinct. In the first place, the heritage of their communist past cannot be discarded overnight, especially when, as in Russia, the communist system had endured for over 70 years. Second, the process of transition itself has unleashed forces and generated problems quite different from those that confront western polyarchies. For these reasons they are perhaps better classified as **new democracies** or **semi-democracies**.

One feature of postcommunist regimes is the need to deal with the politico-cultural consequences of communist rule, especially the ramifications of Stalinist totalitarianism. The ruthless censorship and suppression of opposition that underpinned the communist parties' monopoly of power guaranteed that a civic culture emphasizing participation, bargaining and consensus failed to develop. In Russia this has produced a weak and fragmented party system that is apparently incapable of articulating or aggregating the major interests of Russian society. As a result, communist parties or former communist parties have often continued to provide a point of stability. In Romania and Bulgaria, for example, the institutions of the communist past have survived into the postcommunist era, while in states such as Hungary, Poland and Russia communist parties, now embracing, if with differing degrees of conviction, the principles of social democracy, have made an electoral comeback.

A second set of problems stem from the process of economic transition. The 'shock therapy' transition from central planning to *laissez-faire* capitalism, advocated by the International Monetary Fund, unleashed deep insecurity because of the growth of unemployment and inflation, and it significantly increased social inequality. Since

New democracies: Regimes in which the process of democratic consolidation is incomplete; democracy is not yet the 'only game in town' (Przeworski, 1991).

Semi-democracy: A regime in which democratic and authoritarian features operate alongside one another in a stable combination.

Concept

Confucianism

Confucianism is a system of ethics formulated by Confucius (551–479 BCE) and his disciples that was primarily outlined in *The Analects*. Confucian thought has concerned itself with the twin themes of human relations and the cultivation of the self. The emphasis on *ren* (humanity or love) has usually been interpreted as implying support for traditional ideas and values, notably filial piety, respect, loyalty and benevolence. The stress on *junzi* (the virtuous person) suggests a capacity for human development and potential for perfection realized in particular through education. Confucianism has been seen, with Taoism and Buddhism, as one of the three major Chinese systems of thought, although many take Confucian ideas to be coextensive with Chinese civilization itself.

the heady days of the early 1990s, the pace of economic liberalization has sometimes been greatly reduced as a consequence of a backlash against market reforms, often expressed in growing support for communist or nationalist parties. A final set of problems result from the weakness of state power, particularly when the state is confronted by centrifugal forces effectively suppressed during the communist era. This has been most clearly demonstrated by the reemergence of ethnic and nationalist tensions. The collapse of communism in the USSR was accompanied by the breakup of the old Soviet empire and the construction of 15 new independent states, several of which (including Russia) continue to be afflicted by ethnic conflict. Czechoslovakia ceased to exist in 1992 with the creation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Ethnic conflict has been most dramatic in Yugoslavia, where it precipitated full-scale war between Serbia and Croatia in 1991, and led to civil war in Bosnia in 1992-96.

Important differences between postcommunist states can also be identified. The most crucial of these is that between the more industrially advanced and westernized countries of 'central' Europe, such as the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, and the more backward, 'eastern' states such as Romania, Bulgaria and, in certain respects, Russia. In the former group, market reform has proceeded swiftly and relatively smoothly; in the latter, it has either been grudging and incomplete or it has given rise to deep political tensions. The former group of states is also eager to join the European Union at the earliest opportunity, providing further evidence of democratic consolidation. Another distinction is between the states upon which communism was 'imposed' by the Soviet Red Army at the end of the Second World War and those that were once part of the USSR. With the exception of the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), the former Soviet republics are marked both by their longer history of communist rule and by the fact that they were part of the Russian empire in Tsarist times as well as the Soviet period. There is, of course, a strong argument as well for Russian exceptionalism. This may be based on Russia's imperial past and the tendency for Russian nationalism to have an authoritarian and expansionist character, or on the fact that, since the time of Peter the Great, Russia has been divided by competing western and Slavic identities, and so is unclear about both its cultural inheritance and its political destiny.

East Asian regimes

The rise of East Asia in the late twentieth century may ultimately prove to be a more important world-historical event than the collapse of communism. Certainly, the balance of the world's economy shifted markedly from the West to the East in this period. In the final two decades of the twentieth century, economic growth rates on the western rim of the Pacific Basin were between two and four times higher than those in the 'developed' economies of Europe and North America. However, the notion that there is a distinctively East Asian political form is a less familiar one. The widespread assumption has been that modernization means westernization. Translated into political terms, this means that industrial capitalism is always accompanied by liberal democracy. Those who advance this position cite, for example, the success of Japan's 1946 constitution, bequeathed by the departing USA, and the introduction of multiparty elections in countries such as Thailand, South Korea and Taiwan in the 1980s and 1990s. However, this interpretation fails to take account of the degree to which polyarchical institutions operate differently in an Asian context from the way they do in a western one. Most importantly, it ignores the difference between cultures

influenced by Confucian ideas and values and ones shaped by liberal individualism. This has led to the idea that there are a specific set of **Asian values** that are distinct from western ones.

East Asian regimes tend to have similar characteristics. First, they are orientated more around economic goals than around political ones. Their overriding priority is to boost growth and deliver prosperity, rather than to enlarge individual freedom in the western sense of civil liberty. This essentially practical concern is evident in the 'tiger' economies of East and South East Asia (those of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia), but it has also been demonstrated in the construction of a thriving market economy in China since the late 1970s, despite the survival there of monopolistic communist rule. Second, there is broad support for 'strong' government. Powerful 'ruling' parties tend to be tolerated, and there is general respect for the state. Although, with low taxes and relatively low public spending (usually below 30 per cent of GDP), there is little room for the western model of the welfare state, there is nevertheless general acceptance that the state as a 'father figure' should guide the decisions of private as well as public bodies, and draw up strategies for national development. This characteristic is accompanied, third, by a general disposition to respect leaders because of the Confucian stress on loyalty, discipline and duty. From a western viewpoint, this invests East Asian regimes with an implicit, and sometimes explicit, authoritarianism. Finally, great emphasis is placed on community and social cohesion, embodied in the central role accorded to the family. The resulting emphasis on what the Japanese call 'group think' tends to restrict the scope for the assimilation of ideas such as individualism and human rights, at least as these are understood in the West.

There is also differentiation between East Asian regimes. In part, this stems from cultural differences between overwhelmingly Chinese states such as Taiwan, Hong Kong and China, and Japan and ethnically mixed states such as Singapore and Malaysia. For example, plans to introduce Confucian principles in Singapore schools were dropped for fear of offending the Malay and Indian populations. Similarly, Malaysian development has been based on a deliberate attempt to reduce Chinese influence and emphasize the distinctively Islamic character of Malay culture. An additional factor is that, although China's acceptance of capitalism has blurred the distinction between it and other East Asian regimes, this has certainly not eradicated the differentiation altogether. This is demonstrated, for instance, by the stark contrast between the 'market Stalinism' that prevails in China and the entrenched and successful electoral democracy of Japan. Moreover, whereas other East Asian regimes are now industrialized and increasingly urbanized, China is still predominantly agricultural. To some extent, this also explains different modes of economic development. In Japan and 'tiger' economies such as Taiwan and Singapore, growth is now based largely on technological innovation and an emphasis on education and training, whereas China continues, in certain respects, to rely on her massive rural population to provide cheap and plentiful labour.

Islamic regimes

The rise of Islam as a political force has had a profound effect on politics in North Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia. In some cases, militant Islamic groups have challenged existing regimes, often articulating the interests of an urban poor since the 1970s disillusionment with Marxism-Leninism. In other cases, however,

Concept

Theocracy

Theocracy (literally 'rule by God') is the principle that religious authority should prevail over political authority. A theocracy is therefore a regime in which government posts are filled on the basis of the person's position in the religious hierarchy. This contrasts with a secular state, in which political ar

Asian values: Values that supposedly reflect the history, culture and religious backgrounds of Asian societies; examples include social harmony, respect for authority and a belief in the family.

Concept

Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism is a belief in, or practice of, government 'from above', in which authority is exercised regardless of popular consent. Authoritarianism thus differs from authority. The latter rests on legitimacy (see p. 210), and in that sense it arises 'from below'. Authoritarian regimes therefore emphasize the claims of authority over those of individual liberty. However, authoritarianism is usually distinguished from totalitarianism. The practice of government 'from above' associated with monarchical absolutism, traditional dictatorships, and most forms of military rule is concerned with the repression of opposition and political liberty, rather than with the more radical goal of obliterating the distinction between the state and civil society. Authoritarian regimes may thus tolerate a significant range of economic, religious and other freedoms.

regimes have been constructed or reconstructed on Islamic lines. Since its inception in 1932, Saudi Arabia has been an Islamic state. The Iranian revolution of 1979 led to the establishment of an Islamic republic under Ayatollah Khomeini (1900-89), an example later followed in the Sudan and Pakistan. In countries such as Gaddafi's Libya, more idiosyncratic and disputed interpretations of Islam have been translated into political practice.

Islam is not, however, and never has been, simply a religion. Rather, it is a complete way of life, defining correct moral, political and economic behaviour for individuals and nations alike. The 'way of Islam' is based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (570-632) as revealed in the Koran, regarded by all Moslems as the revealed word of God, and the Sunna, or 'beaten path', the traditional customs observed by a devout Moslem that are said to be based on the Prophet's own life. Political Islam thus aims at the construction of a theocracy in which political and other affairs are structured according to 'higher' religious principles. Nevertheless, political Islam has assumed clearly contrasting forms, ranging from fundamentalist to pluralist extremes.

The fundamentalist version of Islam is most commonly associated with Iran. Until his death in 1989, Khomeini presided over a system of institutionalized clerical rule, operating through the Islamic Revolutionary Council, a body of 15 senior clerics. Although a popularly elected parliament has been established in the form of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, all legislation is ratified by the Council for the Protection of the Constitution, which ensures conformity to Islamic principles. Although a more pragmatic and less ideological approach was adopted in the 1990s under Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Shari'a* law continues to be strictly enforced throughout Iran as both a legal and a moral code. The forces of revolutionary fundamentalism nevertheless reasserted themselves through the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, 1997-2001, which was characterized by the imposition of strict theocratic rule and the exclusion of women from education, the economy and public life in general. Fundamentalism (see p. 63) is no less significant in Saudi Arabia, where it has similarly absolutist implications, although the temper of the essentially conservative Sunni regime in Saudi Arabia differs markedly from the revolutionary populism (see p. 354) of Shi'ite Iran.

Moslems themselves, however, have often objected to the classification of any Islamic regime as 'fundamentalist', on the grounds that this perpetuates long-established western prejudices against an 'exotic' or 'repressive' East. Evidence that Islam is compatible with a form of political pluralism can be found in Malaysia. Although Islam is the official state religion of Malaysia, with the Paramount Ruler serving as both religious leader and head of state, a form of 'guided' democracy operates through the dominance of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), headed by Prime Minister Dr Mahathir, within a multiparty framework. Mahathir's government has, since 1981, pursued a narrowly Islamic and pro-Malay strategy fused with an explicitly Japanese model of economic development. Authoritarian tendencies have nevertheless reemerged since 1988, when the independence of the judiciary effectively collapsed following a wave of political arrests and the imposition of press censorship.

Shari'a: Islamic law, believed to be based on divine revelation, and derived from the Koran, the Hadith (the teachings of Muhammad), and other sources.

Military regimes

Whereas most regimes are shaped by a combination of political, economic, cultural and ideological factors, some survive through the exercise, above all, of military

power and systematic repression. In this sense, military regimes belong to a broader category of authoritarianism. Military authoritarianism has been most common in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and South East Asia, but it also emerged in the post-1945 period in Spain, Portugal and Greece. The key feature of a military regime is that the leading posts in the government are filled on the basis of the person's position within the military chain of command. Normal political and constitutional arrangements are usually suspended, and institutions through which opposition can be expressed, such as elected assemblies and a free press, are either weakened or abolished.

Although all forms of military rule are deeply repressive, this classification encompasses a number of regime types. In some military regimes, the armed forces assume direct control of government. The classical form of this is the military **junta**, most commonly found in Latin America. This operates as a form of collective military government centred on a command council of officers who usually represent the three armed services: the army, navy and air force. Junta regimes are often characterized by rivalry between the services and between leading figures, the consequence being that formal positions of power tend to change hands relatively frequently.

The second form of military regime is a military-backed personalized dictatorship (see p. 381). In these cases, a single individual gains preeminence within the junta or regime, often being bolstered by a cult of personality (see p. 351) designed to manufacture charismatic authority. Examples are Colonel Papadopoulos in Greece in 1974-80, General Pinochet in Chile after the 1973 military coup, and General Abacha in Nigeria, 1993-98. In the final form of military regime, the loyalty of the armed forces is the decisive factor that upholds the regime, but the military leaders content themselves with 'pulling the strings' behind the scenes. This, for example, occurred in post-1945 Brazil, as the armed forces generally recognized that the legitimacy of the regime would be strengthened by the maintenance of a distinction between political and military offices and personnel. Such a distinction, however, may fuel an appetite for constitutional and representative politics, and reduce the scope for direct military intervention, thereby, over time, encouraging polyarchical tendencies. The character of military regimes is discussed at greater length in Chapter 18.

Summary

- Government is any mechanism through which ordered rule is maintained, its central feature being its ability to make collective decisions and enforce them. A political system, or regime, however, encompasses not only the mechanisms of government and institutions of the state, but also the structures and processes through which these interact with the larger society.
- The classification of political systems serves two purposes. First, it aids understanding by making comparison possible and helping to highlight similarities and differences between otherwise shapeless collections of facts. Second, it helps us to evaluate the effectiveness or success of different political systems.
- Regimes have been classified on a variety of bases. 'Classical' typologies, stemming from Aristotle, concentrated on constitutional arrangements and institutional structures, while the 'three worlds' approach highlighted material and ideological

Junta: Literally, a council; a (usually military) clique that seizes power through a revolution or *coup d'état*.

differences between the systems found in 'first world' capitalist, 'second world' communist and 'third world' developing states.

- The collapse of communism and advance of democratization has made it much more difficult to identify the political contours of the modern world, making conventional systems of classification redundant. It is nevertheless still possible to distinguish between regimes on the basis of how their political, economic and cultural characteristics interlock in practice, even though all systems of classification are provisional.
- 'End of history' theorists have proclaimed that history has ended, or is destined to end, with the worldwide triumph of western liberal democracy. Indeed, the most common form of regime in the modern world is now some form of democracy. However, there is evidence that regime types have become both more complex and more diverse. Significant differences can be identified among western polyarchies, new democracies, East Asian regimes, Islamic regimes and military regimes.

I Questions for discussion

- Does Aristotle's system of political classification have any relevance to the modern world?
- Is there any longer such a thing as the 'third world'?
- To what extent have postcommunist regimes discarded their communist past?
- Why have liberal-democratic structures proved to be so effective and successful?
- How democratic are western polyarchies?
- Do Confucianism and Islam constitute viable alternatives to western liberalism as a basis for a modern regime?

Further reading

Brooker, P. *Non-Democratic Regimes; Theory, Government and Politics* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, and New York: St Martin's Press). A useful and wide-ranging survey of the different forms of non-democratic regime.

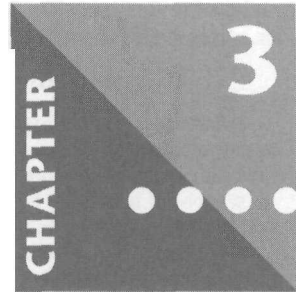
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Political Ideologies



'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways: the point is to change it.'

KARL MARX *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845)

No one sees the world as it is. All of us look at the world through a veil of theories, presuppositions and assumptions. In this sense, observation and interpretation are inextricably bound together: when we look at the world we are also engaged in imposing meaning upon it. This has important implications for the study of politics. In particular, it highlights the need to uncover the presuppositions and assumptions that we bring to political enquiry. At their deepest level, these assumptions are rooted in broad political creeds or traditions that are usually termed 'political ideologies'. Each of these 'isms' (liberalism, socialism, conservatism, feminism, fascism, and so on) constitutes a distinctive intellectual framework or paradigm, and each offers its own account of political reality - its own world view. However, there is deep disagreement both about the nature of ideology and about the role, for good or ill, that it plays in political life.

The central issues examined in this chapter are as follows:

Key issues

- ▶ What is political ideology?
- ▶ What are the characteristic themes, theories and principles of each of the major ideologies?
- ▶ What rival traditions or internal tensions does each ideology encompass?
- ▶ How have the major ideologies changed over time?
- ▶ How can the rise and fall of ideologies be explained?
- ▶ Has ideology come to an end? Could ideology come to an end?

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■ What is political ideology?

Ideology is one of the most controversial concepts encountered in political analysis. Although the term now tends to be used in a neutral sense, to refer to a developed social philosophy or world view, it has in the past had heavily negative or pejorative connotations. During its sometimes tortuous career, the concept of ideology has commonly been used as a political weapon to condemn or criticize rival creeds or doctrines.

The term 'ideology' was coined in 1796 by the French philosopher Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836). He used it to refer to a new 'science of ideas' (literally an idea-ology) that set out to uncover the origins of conscious thought and ideas. De Tracy's hope was that ideology would eventually enjoy the same status as established sciences such as zoology and biology. However, a more enduring meaning was assigned to the term in the nineteenth century in the writings of Karl Marx (see p. 53). For Marx, ideology amounted to the ideas of the 'ruling class', ideas that therefore uphold the class system and perpetuate exploitation. In their early work *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels wrote the following:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force in society, is at the same time the ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of mental production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production. (Marx and Engels, [1846] 1970:64)

The defining feature of ideology in the Marxist sense is that it is false: it mystifies and confuses subordinate classes by concealing from them the contradictions upon which all class societies are based. As far as capitalism is concerned, the ideology of the property-owning bourgeoisie (bourgeois ideology) fosters delusion or 'false consciousness' amongst the exploited proletariat, preventing them from recognizing the fact of their own exploitation. Nevertheless, Marx did not believe that all political views had an ideological character. He held that his own work, which attempted to uncover the process of class exploitation and oppression, was scientific. In his view, a clear distinction could be drawn between science and ideology, between truth and falsehood. This distinction tended, however, to be blurred in the writings of later Marxists such as Lenin (see p. 77) and Gramsci (see p. 203). These referred not only to 'bourgeois ideology' but also to 'socialist ideology' or 'proletarian ideology', terms that Marx would have considered absurd.

Alternative uses of the term have also been developed by liberals and conservatives. The emergence of totalitarian dictatorships in the interwar period encouraged writers such as Karl Popper (1902-94), J. L. Talmon and Hannah Arendt (see p. 9) to view ideology as an instrument of social control to ensure compliance and subordination. Relying heavily on the examples of fascism and communism, this Cold War liberal use of the term treated ideology as a 'closed' system of thought, which, by claiming a monopoly of truth, refuses to tolerate opposing ideas and rival beliefs. In contrast, liberalism, based as it is on a fundamental commitment to individual freedom, and doctrines such as conservatism and democratic socialism that broadly subscribe to liberal principles are clearly not ideologies. These doctrines are 'open' in the sense that they permit, and even insist upon, free debate, opposition and criticism.

A distinctively conservative use of the term 'ideology' has been developed by thinkers such as Michael Oakshott (see p. 209). This view reflects a characteristically conservative scepticism about the value of **rationalism** that is born out of the belief

Rationalism: The belief that the world can be understood and explained through the exercise of human reason, based on assumptions about its rational structure.

that the world is largely beyond the capacity of the human mind to fathom. As Oakeshott put it, in political activity 'men sail a boundless and bottomless sea'. From this perspective, ideologies are seen as abstract 'systems of thought': that is, as sets of ideas that distort political reality because they claim to explain what is, frankly, incomprehensible. This is why conservatives have traditionally dismissed the notion that they subscribe to an ideology, preferring instead to describe conservatism as a disposition, or an 'attitude of mind', and placing their faith in **pragmatism**, tradition (see p. 212) and history.

The drawback of each of these usages, however, is that, as they are negative or pejorative, they restrict the application of the term. Certain political doctrines, in other words, are excluded from the category of 'ideologies'. Marx, for instance, insisted that his ideas were scientific, not ideological, liberals have denied that liberalism should be viewed as an ideology, and conservatives have traditionally claimed to embrace a pragmatic rather than ideological style of politics. Moreover, each of these definitions is loaded with the values and orientation of a particular political doctrine. An inclusive definition of 'ideology' (one that applies to all political traditions) must therefore be neutral: it must reject the notion that ideologies are 'good' or 'bad', true or false, or liberating or oppressive. This is the virtue of the modern, social-scientific meaning of the term, which treats ideology as an action-orientated belief system, an interrelated set of ideas that in some way guides or inspires political action.

Liberalism

Any account of political ideologies must start with liberalism. This is because liberalism is, in effect, the ideology of the industrialized West, and is sometimes portrayed as a **meta-ideology** that is capable of embracing a broad range of rival values and beliefs. Although liberalism did not emerge as a developed political creed until the early nineteenth century, distinctively liberal theories and principles had gradually been developed during the previous 300 years. Liberalism was the product of the breakdown of feudalism and the growth, in its place, of a market or capitalist society. Early liberalism certainly reflected the aspirations of a rising industrial middle class, and liberalism and capitalism have been closely linked (some have argued intrinsically linked) ever since. In its earliest form, liberalism was a political doctrine. It attacked absolutism (see p. 28) and feudal privilege, instead advocating constitutional and, later, representative government. By the early nineteenth century, a distinctively liberal economic creed had developed that extolled the virtues of *laissez-faire* capitalism (see p. 183) and condemned all forms of government intervention. This became the centrepiece of classical, or nineteenth-century, liberalism. From the late nineteenth century onwards, however, a form of social liberalism emerged that looked more favourably on welfare reform and economic intervention. Such an emphasis became the characteristic theme of modern, or twentieth-century, liberalism.

Elements of liberalism

- **Individualism:** Individualism (see p. 190) is the core principle of liberal ideology. It reflects a belief in the supreme importance of the human individual as opposed to any social group or collective body. Human beings are seen, first and foremost, as individuals. This implies both that they are of equal moral worth and

Concept

Ideology

From a social-scientific viewpoint, an ideology is a more or less coherent set of ideas that provides a basis for organized political action, whether this is intended to preserve, modify or overthrow the existing system of power relationships. All ideologies therefore (a) offer an account of the existing order, usually in the form of a 'world view', (b) provide a model of a desired future, a vision of the Good Society, and (c) outline how political change can and should be brought about. Ideologies are not, however, hermetically sealed systems of thought: rather, they are fluid sets of ideas that overlap with one another at a number of points. At a 'fundamental' level, ideologies resemble political philosophies; at an 'operative' level, they take the form of broad political movements (Seliger, 1976).

Pragmatism: A theory or practice that places primary emphasis on practical circumstances and goals; pragmatism implies a distrust of abstract ideas.

Meta-ideology: A higher or second-order ideology that lays down the grounds on which ideological debate can take place.

that they possess separate and unique identities. The liberal goal is therefore to construct a society within which individuals can flourish and develop, each pursuing 'the good' as he or she defines it, to the best of his or her abilities. This has contributed to the view that liberalism is morally neutral, in the sense that it lays down a set of rules that allow individuals to make their own moral decisions.

- **Freedom:** Individual freedom (see p. 300), or liberty (the two terms are interchangeable), is the core value of liberalism; it is given priority over, say, equality, justice or authority. This arises naturally from a belief in the individual and the desire to ensure that each person is able to act as he or she pleases or chooses. Nevertheless, liberals advocate 'freedom under the law', as they recognize that one person's liberty may be a threat to the liberty of others; liberty may become licence. They therefore endorse the ideal that individuals should enjoy the maximum possible liberty consistent with a like liberty for all.
- **Reason:** Liberals believe that the world has a rational structure, and that this can be uncovered through the exercise of human reason and by critical enquiry. This inclines them to place their faith in the ability of individuals to make wise judgements on their own behalf, being, in most cases, the best judges of their own interests. It also encourages liberals to believe in **progress** and the capacity of human beings to resolve their differences through debate and argument rather than bloodshed and war.
- **Equality:** Individualism implies a belief in foundational equality: that is, the belief that individuals are 'born equal', at least in terms of moral worth. This is reflected in a liberal commitment to equal rights and entitlements, notably in the form of legal equality ('equality before the law') and political equality ('one person, one vote; one vote, one value'). However, as individuals do not possess the same levels of talent or willingness to work, liberals do not endorse social equality or an equality of outcome. Rather, they favour equality of opportunity (a 'level playing field') that gives all individuals an equal chance to realize their unequal potential. Liberals therefore support the principle of **meritocracy**, with merit reflecting, crudely, talent plus hard work.
- **Toleration:** Liberals believe that toleration (that is, forbearance: the willingness of people to allow others to think, speak and act in ways of which they disapprove) is both a guarantee of individual liberty and a means of social enrichment. They believe that pluralism (see p. 78), in the form of moral, cultural and political diversity, is positively healthy: it promotes debate and intellectual progress by ensuring that all beliefs are tested in a free market of ideas. Liberals, moreover, tend to believe that there is a balance or natural harmony between rival views and interests, and thus usually discount the idea of irreconcilable conflict.
- **Consent:** In the liberal view, authority and social relationships should always be based on consent or willing agreement. Government must therefore be based on the 'consent of the governed'. This is a doctrine that encourages liberals to favour representation (see p. 224) and democracy. Similarly, social bodies and associations are formed through contracts willingly entered into by individuals intent on pursuing their own self-interest. In this sense, authority arises 'from below' and is always grounded in legitimacy (see p. 210).
- **Constitutionalism:** Although liberals see government as a vital guarantee of order and stability in society, they are constantly aware of the danger that government may become a tyranny against the individual ('power tends to corrupt' (Lord Acton)).

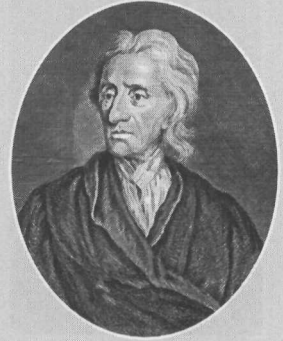
Progress: Moving forwards; the belief that **history is** characterized by human advancement based on **the** accumulation of knowledge and wisdom.

Meritocracy: Rule by the talented; the principle that rewards and positions should be distributed on the basis of ability.

John Locke (1632–1704)

English philosopher and politician. Locke was born in Somerset in the UK. He studied medicine at Oxford University before becoming secretary to Anthony Ashley Cooper, First Earl of Shaftsbury, in 1661. Locke's political views were developed against the backdrop of the English Revolution, and they are often seen as providing a justification for the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, which ended absolutist rule and established a constitutional monarchy in Britain under

William of Orange. Locke was a key thinker in the development of early liberalism, placing particular emphasis upon 'natural' or God-given rights, identified as the rights to life, liberty and property. As he was an exponent of representative government and toleration, his views had a considerable impact upon the American Revolution. Locke's most important political works are *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) and *Two Treatises of Government* ([1690] 1965).



They therefore believe in limited government. This goal can be attained through the fragmentation of government power, by the creation of checks and balances amongst the various institutions of government, and through the establishment of a codified or 'written' constitution embodying a bill of rights that defines the relationship between the state and the individual.

Classical liberalism

The central theme of classical liberalism is a commitment to an extreme form of individualism. Human beings are seen as egoistical, self-seeking and largely self-reliant creatures. In what C. B. Macpherson (1962) termed 'possessive individualism', they are taken to be the proprietors of their own persons and capacities, owing nothing to society or to other individuals. This **atomist** view of society is underpinned by a belief in 'negative' liberty, meaning noninterference, or the absence of external constraints upon the individual. This implies a deeply unsympathetic attitude towards the state and all forms of government intervention.

In Tom Paine's (see p. 226) words, the state is a 'necessary evil'. It is 'necessary' in that, at the very least, it establishes order and security and ensures that contracts are enforced. However, it is 'evil' in that it imposes a collective will upon society, thus limiting the freedom and responsibilities of the individual. The classical liberal ideal is therefore the establishment of a minimal or 'nightwatchman' state, with a role that is limited to the protection of citizens from the encroachments of fellow citizens. In the form of **economic liberalism**, this position is underpinned by a deep faith in the mechanisms of the free market and the belief that the economy works best when left alone by government. *Laissez-faire* capitalism is thus seen as guaranteeing prosperity, upholding individual liberty, and, as this allows individuals to rise and fall according to merit, ensuring social justice.

Modern liberalism

Modern liberalism is characterized by a more sympathetic attitude towards state intervention. Indeed, in the USA, the term 'liberal' is invariably taken to imply support for **big government** rather than 'minimal' government. This shift was born out of the recognition that industrial capitalism had merely generated new forms of

Atomism: The belief that society is made up of a collection of largely self-sufficient individuals who owe little or nothing to one another.

Economic liberalism: A belief in the market as a self-regulating mechanism tending naturally to deliver general prosperity and opportunities for all.

Big government: Interventionist government, usually understood to imply economic management and social regulation.
