

EPIS Study Guide

- Concepts, Theories & Definitions -
in
Foreign Affairs & Security Policy



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Preface

Welcome to the **EPIS Think Tank Study Guide on International Relations!**

If you are beginning your studies in political science or a related field, **this guide is for you!** We believe that understanding **political foundations** is essential for anyone who wants to engage with the world in an informed and critical way. Whether you are a first-year student or simply look to strengthen your knowledge in political studies, this guide will help you navigate **key concepts and debates** in the field.

Political science is not just about elections, governments, or international diplomacy. It is about **power, influence, and the structures that shape our societies**. Political decisions affect everything: from economic policies to human rights and global security. Political science equips you with the tools to analyse these dynamics, question assumptions, and develop well-informed perspectives on the world around us.

This study guide aligns with the core mission of EPIS: making international politics accessible. By bringing together key concepts, theories, and debates in a clear and structured format, we want to bring **clarity** to the often complex and overwhelming field of political science, and make it more approachable and engaging for you. **Join us on a journey through the study of politics and its subfields, and make a difference!**

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1. Fundamentals

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1. Fundamentals

1.1. Introduction

Definition:

Political science can be defined as the **academic study of politics**. This encompasses the analysis of political systems, institutions, processes, and behaviour.

Political Science



πόλις, pólis
ancient Greek
'state,' polis

sciēns, scientem
knowing, aware;
having expertise



Political science is important to:

- describe political processes from an **analytical** point of view.
- explain **how and why** decisions are made.
- work out **solutions** that solve social and economic problems in societies.

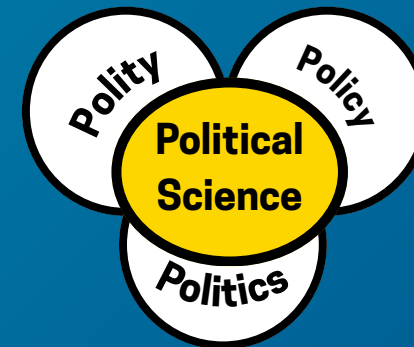
In a Nutshell:

- Definition: Study of power, governance, institutions, and behaviour
- Interdisciplinary in nature (law, economics, history, philosophy, etc.)
- Explains how societies organise authority and resolve conflicts

3 Main Concepts

Polity: The domain of the political community, its institutions, laws, and values. It defines the framework and asks: "Where...?"

Policy: The domain of programs and decisions shaping society. It covers actions by governments or actors to address issues and asks: "What...?"



Politics: The processes through which power is contested, resources allocated, and decisions made — including elections, voting, and lobbying. It asks: "How...?"

1. Fundamentals

1.2. History

Plato (428–348 BC):

Founder of the Academy; in the Republic (Politeia) he probes what a just state is.

Aristotle (384–322 BC):

Plato's student and Alexander's tutor; in Politics he analyzes forms of government.

In a Nutshell:

- Origins in ancient political thought (Plato, Aristotle, Confucius).
- Medieval perspectives (religion and authority, e.g. Augustine, Aquinas).
- Renaissance & Enlightenment (Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau).
- Emergence of political science as a modern academic discipline (19th–20th centuries).

Late Antiquity & Medieval (400–1500 AD)

- Christian synthesis: Augustine (city of God vs. earthly city), Aquinas (natural law, common good).
- Islamic political thought: al-Fārābī, Ibn Rushd (Averroes); Ibn Khaldūn on state formation and 'asabiyya.

Saint Augustine (354–430)

in The City of God redefined the citizen–state relationship from a **Christian view**.

Classical Antiquity (c. 5th–1st c. BCE, Greece & Rome):

- Greek polis thought: Plato (Republic), Aristotle (Politics) on virtue, constitutions, citizenship.
- Roman contributions: Cicero on natural law; mixed constitution and civic republicanism. republicanism.

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), drawing on Aristotle, examined the **best** form of government.



1. Fundamentals

1.2. History

Renaissance & Early Modern (Italy/Florence; France; Holy Roman Empire)

- Machiavelli: power, republican virtue, and ragion di stato.
- Bodin: sovereignty; Westphalian settlement shapes interstate order and territorial sovereignty.



John Locke (1632–1704): Two Treatises of Government grounds rule in natural rights and consent, shaping **constitutionalism** and **separation of powers**.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679): Leviathan (1651) defends a **strong sovereign** via social contract to secure order and defines citizen–state and church–state relations.



Enlightenment & Founding Era (England/UK; France; German states/Prussia; USA)

- Hobbes and Locke: social contract, consent, rights, limited government.
- Montesquieu: separation of powers; Rousseau: general will; Kant: republicanism and cosmopolitan right.
- Federalist Papers (USA): checks and balances, factions, extended republic.



1. Fundamentals

1.2. History



John Stuart Mill (1806-1873): Emphasized that liberty should only be limited to prevent harm to others.

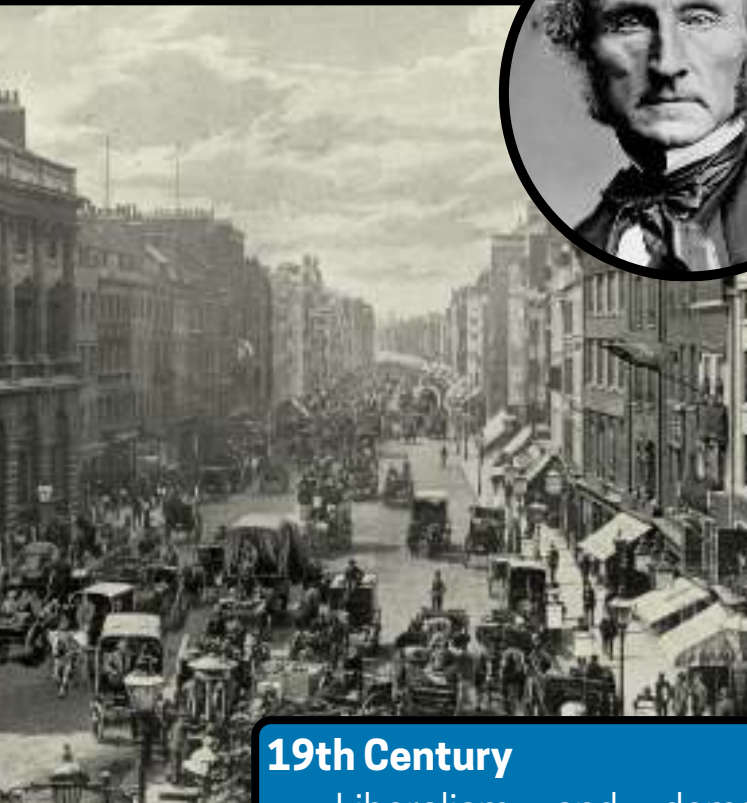
Despite the cross-border impact of ideologies, scientific advances, and industrialisation, **national contexts** were more influential. Some states moved to separate political science from philosophy and assert its autonomy. A unified push for diversification and full disciplinary status emerged only **after** the Second World War.

Karl Marx (1818-1883): The Communist Manifesto and The Capital laid the **foundation** for modern **socialism** and critical political economy.



19th Century

- Liberalism and democracy: J.S. Mill (liberty, representation), Tocqueville (associations, equality).
- Political economy & class: Marx/Engels (state, capitalism); nationalism and the rise of the modern nation-state.



1. Fundamentals

1.3. An Overview of the Field



1. Fundamentals

1.4. Current Challenges

Current political issues reflect both **global** and **domestic pressures**. Geopolitical **rivalry**, climate **change**, and **migration** challenge the international system, while **polarisation**, democratic **backsliding**, and debates over **inequality** reshape **domestic** politics. **Technological change** - from AI to digital surveillance - further transforms how states **govern** and how citizens **engage**. Political science examines these trends to **understand** their causes and implications.



1. Fundamentals

1.5. Criticism

Western Bias

Political science has long been criticised for **privileging Western perspectives**, theories, and case studies, often treating European or North American experiences as universal. This bias **limits the discipline's ability** to capture diverse political realities and marginalises non-Western knowledge systems.

Overemphasis on Theory

Some scholars argue that political science focuses too heavily on **abstract theorising** at the expense of solving practical political problems. The **gap between academic research and policymaking** can make the discipline appear detached from pressing global challenges.

Normative vs Empirical Approaches

Political science often **struggles to balance** studying how politics is (empirical) with how it ought to be (normative). This tension raises questions about whether the discipline should prioritise **objective analysis or moral and ethical guidance** in addressing political issues.

Detachment from Public Concerns

Political science is sometimes seen as **dominated by academic elites** and inaccessible language, limiting engagement with broader publics. Critics call for more inclusive, transparent, and publicly relevant research that connects scholarship with everyday political life.

1. Fundamentals

1.6. Practice Questions

1. How is **political science** defined, and what **problems** does it deal with?
2. How do the terms **politics, policy, and polity** differ from each other in the context of political science?
3. Which **interdisciplinary connection** appeals to you the most and why?
4. In what ways are **political science** and **economics intertwined** in the study of politics and economic systems?
5. How does political science **benefit** from the **interdisciplinary connection** with history, particularly when understanding political events?
6. What **influence** does **philosophy** have on political science?
7. How did the political theories of **Plato** and **Aristotle** influence the **development** of political science?
8. What role did thinkers like **Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau** play in the **evolution of political science** during the 17th and 18th centuries?
9. How did political science develop in **your** country in the **20th century**?
10. What are the **most pressing issues** in your country at the moment?

2. Political Systems and Institutions

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2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.1 Introduction

What Is a Political System?

= **framework** that determines how a society **organises governance, allocates resources, and resolves conflicts**.

It includes **formal institutions** (e.g., governments, courts, legislatures) and **informal norms** (e.g., customs, traditions). Political systems are **shaped** by factors such as:

Historical Context:

Legacies of colonisation, revolutions, or transitions from monarchy to democracy

Cultural Value:

Attitudes toward authority, individualism, and equality

Economic Conditions:

Levels of wealth and industrialisation

In a Nutshell:

Political systems and institutions organise how power is **exercised**, decisions are **made**, and authority is **constrained**

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2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.2. Types of Political Systems

Political systems can be broadly categorised based on who holds **power**, how **decisions** are made, and the level of **citizen participation**. This section presents the most common types of political systems.

Democracy

Power is vested with the people

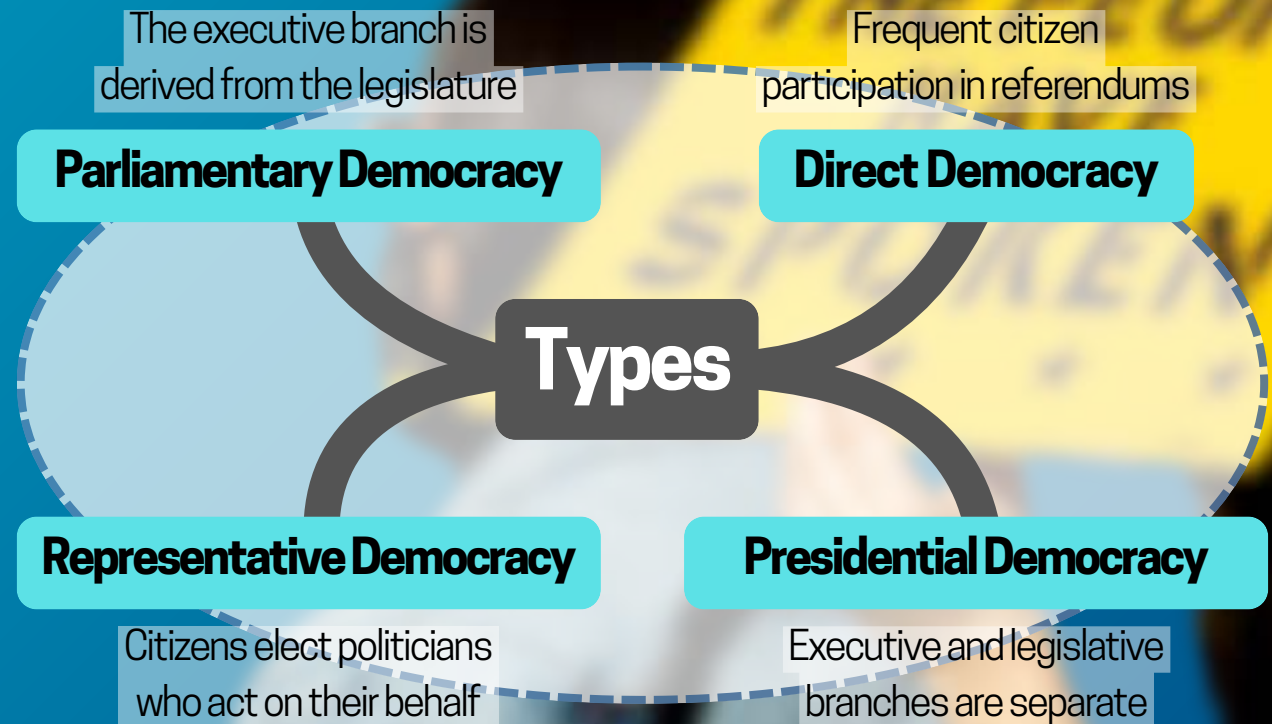
Characteristics

- **Popular Sovereignty**
Authority rests with the people
- **Rule of Law** Laws apply equally to all citizens, including leaders
- **Free and Fair Elections** Leaders are selected through regular, competitive elections
- **Civil Liberties** Protection of individual rights

Strengths and Critique

- + Promotes Accountability
- + Protects Freedoms
- + Facilitates Peaceful Power Transfers

- Risks of Populism, Inefficiency and Underrepresentation of Minorities



Modern Examples



Representative Democracy



Direct Democracy



Parliamentary Democracy

2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.2. Types of Political Systems

Autocracy

Power is concentrated within a limited leadership

Characteristics

- **Centralised Power** Authority is concentrated in one entity or group.
- **Control of Information** Media and public discourse are regulated.
- **Limited Political Pluralism** Opposition and dissidence is often suppressed.
- **Limited Accountability** Leaders lack regular elections or checks and balances.

Strengths and Critique

- + Often Stable
- + Rapid Decision-Making
- Low Human Rights Protection
- Lack of Accountability

Power is concentrated in a **single leader**; often accompanied by a **personality cult**



Personalist Regime



Military Dictatorship

Power is held by **military leaders**; the state is **administered** primarily by the military



Government is comprised of members of a **ruling family**

Monarchy



One-Party State



The **political organisation** of the state is facilitated through a **single party**

Photo: Saudi Press Agency (SPA), CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons



Crown Prince
Mohammad bin Salman
is Saudi Arabia's
de facto leader.

2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.2. Types of Political Systems

Totalitarianism *Extreme form of authoritarianism with total state control over all aspects of life*

Characteristics

- **Ideological Dominance** A single ideology governs over all spheres.
- **State Control** Over media, education, and the economy.
- **Surveillance & Suppression** Tight monitoring of citizens and suppression of dissent.
- **Personality Cult** Often accompanied by a glorification of leaders through propaganda.

Modern Examples



North Korea's
leadership is highly
present in daily life



2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.2. Types of Political Systems

Monarchy *System where power is centralised within a ruling family*

Types

- **Absolute Monarchy** The monarch holds **unrestricted power**, controlling all branches of government
- **Constitutional Monarchy** The monarch's powers are **limited** by a **constitution** or **legislature**, which allows **democratic governance**. The monarch's role is largely **symbolic** or ceremonial.

Comparison to Other Forms of Dictatorship

A monarchy shares similarities with a dictatorship in that both involve concentrated power in one individual. However, two **key distinctions** exist:

- **Perception:** Monarchies are often viewed as **more benign** due to **historical** and **cultural significance**, while dictatorships are seen negatively. However, history reveals that kings and queens have been **as brutal** as many modern dictators.
- **Transfer of Power:** In a dictatorship, power **may not transfer smoothly**, often ending with the leader's death or passing to a chosen successor. Monarchies, on the other hand, typically follow a **hereditary system**, where the first-born child (usually a son) ascends to the throne.

Queen Elizabeth II's 70-year reign is the longest in UK history.

Picture:
UK Home Office



Strengths and Critique

- + Continuity & Stability
- + Clear Line of Leadership
- No Accountability to the People
- No Checks & Balances
- Political Freedom Limited

Modern Examples



Absolute
Monarchy



Parliamentary
Monarchy

2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.2. Types of Political Systems

Anocracy *Hybrid system of democracy and autocracy*

Characteristics

- **Elections with Limitations** Elections are competitive but flawed.
- **Political Competition** Partially open, but opposition systematically impeded.
- **Weak Institutions** Rule of law present, but weak and undermined.
- **Civil Liberties** Selective tolerance based on contexts.
- **Press Freedom** Semi-free, often self-censorship and large gov't-controlled media.

Strengths and Critique

- + **Stability with Limited Participation**
- No genuine accountability & representation

Case Studies

Russia (Turned Anocracy in the 2000s)

- **Hybrid Regime Structure:** Regular elections but heavily-controlled media, opposition parties, and civil society
- **Power Centralisation:** Vladimir Putin's consolidation of power has hollowed out institutions; parliament and judiciary lack autonomy.
- **Controlled Pluralism:** Some local and regional elections exist, but outcomes are predictable and opposition leaders face intimidation or disqualification.

Turkey (Turned Anocracy in the 2010s)

- **Democratic Backsliding:** Once a competitive democracy, Turkey shifted after 2013 toward centralised executive control under Erdoğan.
- **Institutional Erosion:** Judiciary independence curtailed; media largely captured or censored; opposition parties face legal harassment.
- **Elections Still Matter:** Competitive but unfair - ruling party dominates through state resources and media control.
- **Civil Rights:** civil liberties curtailed under state-of-emergency laws.

2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.2. Types of Political Systems

Comparison

Political systems vary in how **power is distributed**, the level of **citizen participation**, and the extent of **institutional control**. This comparison helps illustrate the **fundamental differences** between the different political systems and their **impact** on political structures and societies.

Measure
regime types
empirically
through the
Polity Project

Aspect	Democracy	Authoritarianism	Totalitarianism	Monarchy
Power Distribution	Decentralised	Centralised	Highly centralised	Centralised/Symbolic
Citizen Participation	High	Low	Minimal	Limited
Rule of Law	Strong	Weak	Subordinate to ideology	Varies
Accountability	Regular elections	Limited	Absent	Varies
Examples	United States, Germany	China, Saudi Arabia	North Korea, Nazi Germany	Saudi Arabia

2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.3. Political Institutions

Definition:

Political institutions are the **structures, rules, and organisations** that guide political decision-making and governance. They are **formalised** entities, such as legislatures, courts, and executives, that carry out the functions of government.

Key Characteristics

Stability

Institutions are designed to provide continuity and predictability in governance.

Authority

Institutions possess legitimate power to make and enforce decisions.

Rule-Governed

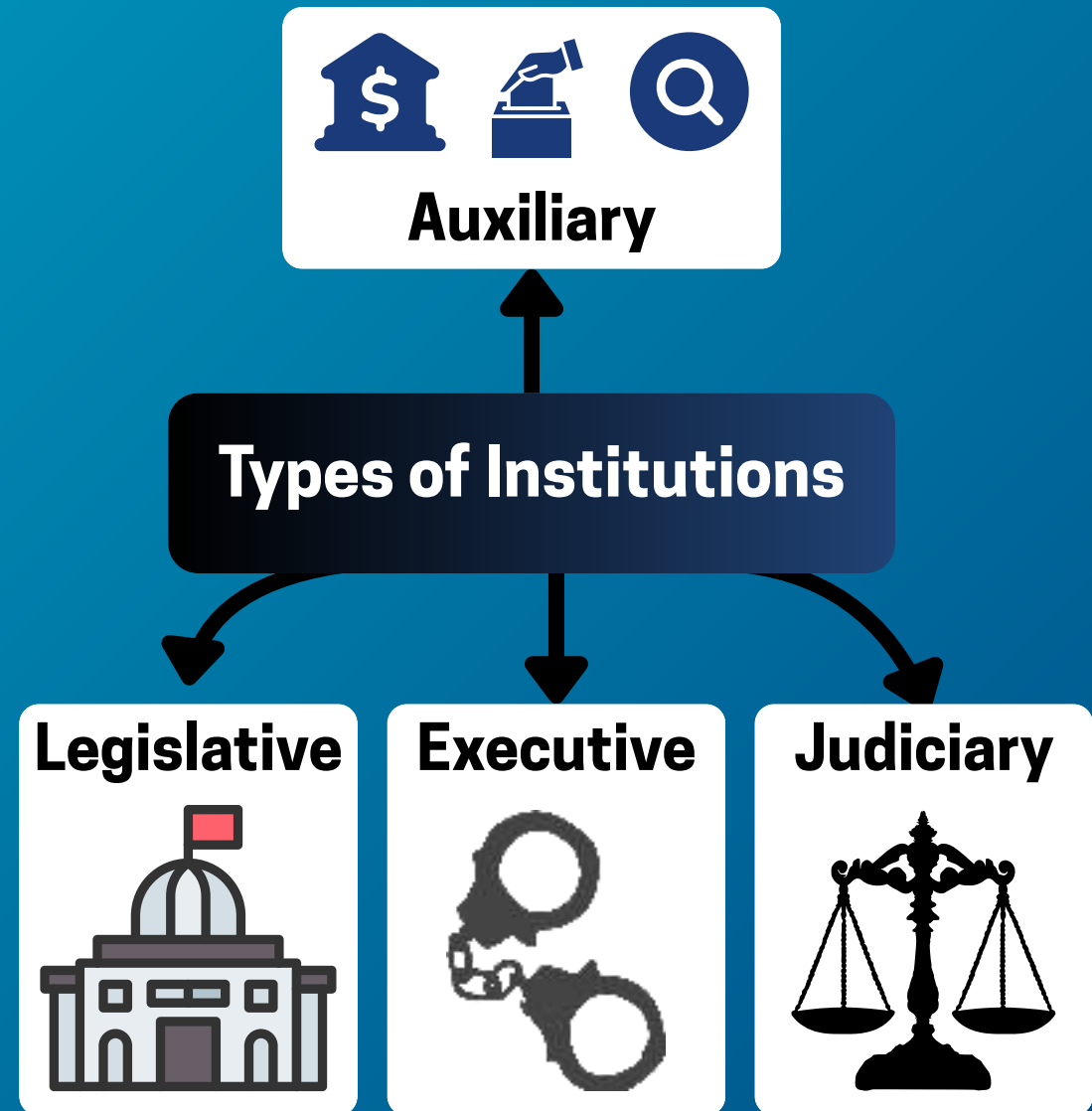
Operation within established legal and constitutional frameworks.

Adaptability

Evolution over time in response to societal and political changes.

Institutions are important because they ...

- shape the distribution of power and authority.
- influence policy outcomes and societal well-being.
- reflect and reinforce cultural and historical contexts.

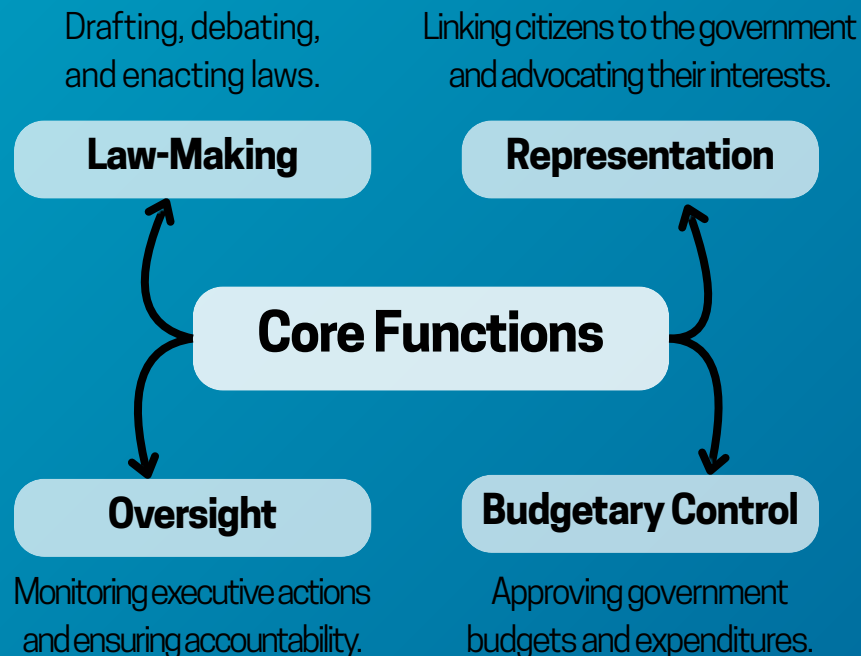


2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.3. Political Institutions

Legislative Institutions

Legislatures are political bodies responsible for **making laws, representing citizens, and overseeing the executive branch**. They exist in nearly every country, playing a significant role even in non-democratic systems.

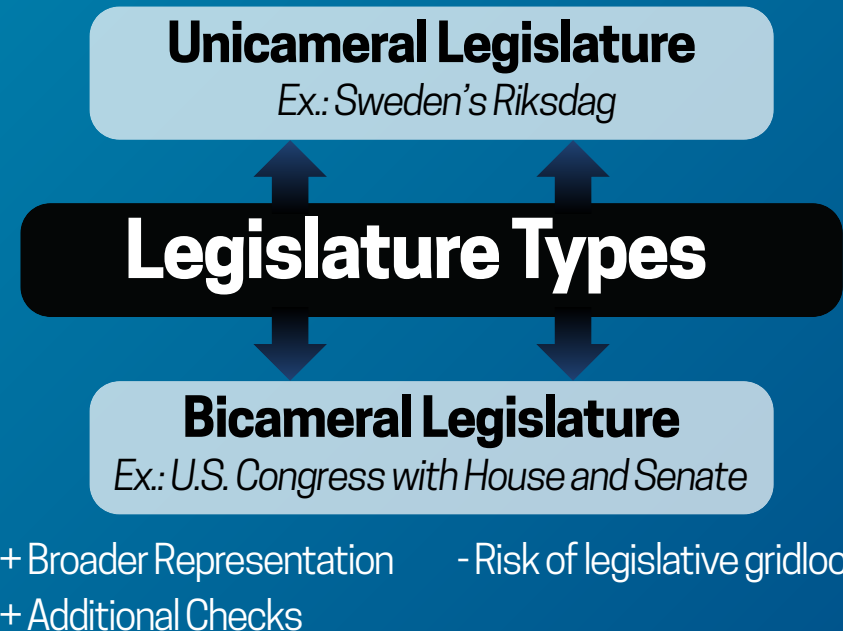


Assembly: General term for a gathering with a purpose (e.g., school assembly). Becomes legislative when tied to political or law-making roles.



Parliament and Congress: Specific types of legislatures, often hierarchical institutions.

- + More efficient
- + streamlined decision-making
- Weaker checks and balances



2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.3. Political Institutions

Legislatures in Parliamentary vs. Presidential Systems

Parliaments:

- Found in **fused-power systems**.
- Executive is selected by and accountable to the legislature (e.g., UK).
- **Mutual dependence** between branches; the executive can be removed mid-term.

VS

Congresses:

- Found in **separation-of-powers systems** (e.g., U.S.).
- Legislative and executive branches are independently **elected** and **separate**.

Internal Organisation

Chambers

Uni-vs Bicameral

Committees

Specialisation improves legislative **efficiency and oversight**.
Permanent committees foster expertise and collaboration with the executive.

Size & Time

Larger legislatures may face decision-making **delays**, while **smaller legislatures** may **lack representation**.

Case Study: The Bicameral Parliament of India

Bicameral Structure:

Lok Sabha (House of the People)

↳ Population-based Representation

Rajya Sabha (Council of States)

↳ Territory-based Representation

Committees:

Specialised Committees (e.g. Committee on Defence; Public Accounts Committee)

Permanent Committees ensure long-term knowledge and facilitate coordination with the executive.

Size & Time:

788 members across Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha lead to lengthy deliberation. The committee system fosters detailed reviews of legislation before debates in the chambers.

Impact:

Broad representation thanks to the bicameral system. Committees enhance policy expertise and ensure thorough legislative processes.

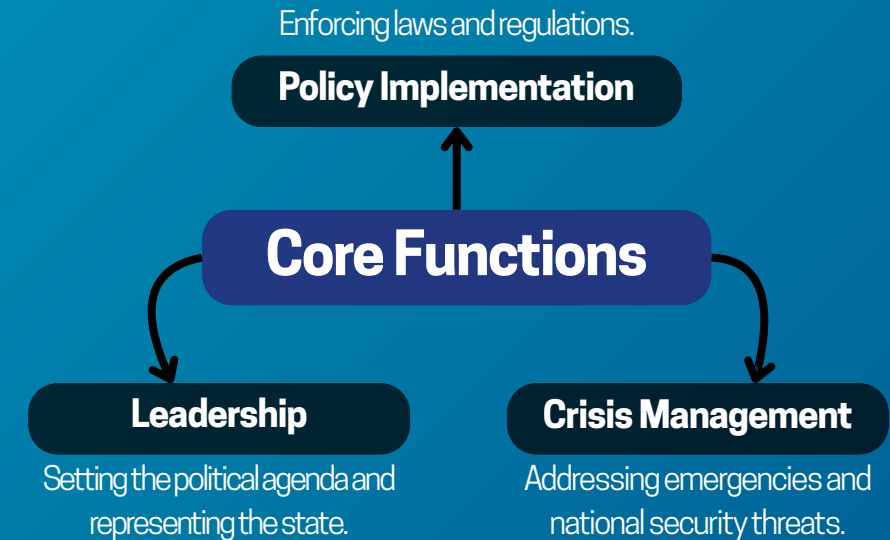
2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.3. Political Institutions

Executive Institutions

The executive branch is the political heart of the government, responsible for **implementing laws** passed by the legislature, **managing public administration**, and **representing the state** both domestically and internationally.

➔ Main Types:



Presidential System

The president is both the head of state and head of government.

Ex.: United States

- + Clear separation of powers between the executive and legislature.
- Potential for executive-legislative conflict.
- The fixed-term presidency may limit adaptability to political crises.

Parliamentary System

The executive is derived from the legislature, typically led by a **Prime Minister**; the head of state is often ceremonial.

Ex.: Germany, The Netherlands

- + Greater integration between the executive and legislature.
- + Flexibility in forming or dissolving governments based on parliamentary support.
- Risk of executive dominance over the legislature.

Semi-Presidential System

Combines elements of presidential and parliamentary systems; executive power shared between a president and a prime minister.

Ex.: Poland, France

- + Flexibility in power-sharing arrangements.
- Potential internal conflict between the president and prime minister.
- Varying degrees of power concentration depending on the system's design.

2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.3. Political Institutions

Executive Institutions

Core Responsibilities

- **Implementing laws** passed by parliament (although influence over legislation is possible).
- **Administering the state** through ministries, agencies, and interfacing with regional/local authorities.

Differences Between Systems

- In **presidential systems** (e.g., USA), the **president is directly elected** and heads the executive independently of the legislature.
- In **parliamentary systems** (e.g., Germany), the Prime Minister (or Chancellor) is **supported by a parliamentary majority** and is **legally subordinate** to a separate, often **ceremonial** head of state (e.g., President Steinmeier).
- **Semi-presidential systems** balance power between a **directly elected president** and a **prime minister** supported by the legislature, with variations in dominance depending on the country.

Case Study: The US Presidential System

Historical Context:

The US Constitution (1787) created a **federal system** with **checks and balances** among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches to **prevent tyranny**.

Checks and Balances:

The president **appoints administration officials** and **Supreme Court justices**.

Congress holds **legislative power** and can impeach the president.

The judiciary, led by the Supreme Court, can **review executive and legislative actions** for constitutionality.

Key Features:

The president serves as both **head of state** and **head of government**.

Elected via the Electoral College for fixed four-year terms (**maximum two terms**).

Presidential **veto power** over legislation, subject to override by a two-thirds majority in Congress.

Challenges:

Balancing governance across 50 states with **varying priorities**.

Adapting to **political gridlock** between the executive and Congress.



2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.3. Political Institutions

Judiciary Institutions

The judiciary **interprets and applies laws**, ensuring compliance with the constitution and protecting individual rights. In countries with judicial review, this branch can strike down laws that violate the constitution. The judiciary is meant to act as a **neutral arbiter** in disputes among individuals, economic actors, and political actors.



Acting without bias to resolve disputes and enforce constitutional principles.

Ensuring that laws are applied in accordance with their intended meaning.

Neutrality

Interpretation of Laws

Core Functions

Dispute Resolution

Settling legal conflicts between individuals, organisations, and the state.

Constitutional Review

Assessing whether laws and policies align with the constitution.

Examples of Judicial Systems

- **Germany** 🇩🇪: Strong constitutional review, with judges appointed by cross-party support. The court addresses constitutional complaints, rights disputes, and institutional conflicts.
- **France** 🇫🇷: Primarily conducts a priori review of proposed laws. Members often come from political backgrounds rather than the judiciary.
- **United Kingdom** 🇬🇧: Limited constitutional review due to the absence of a codified constitution. Judges interpret laws but cannot strike them down based on incompatibility with constitutional principles.

Judicialisation of Politics

The growing influence of the judiciary in governance is termed **judicialisation**, where legislators anticipate judicial reactions to laws, particularly regarding rights enshrined in the constitution. This reflects a tug of war between branches of government over power and authority.

2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.3. Political Institutions

Judiciary Institutions

James Madison (1751-1836) is widely regarded as the "Father of the U.S. Constitution" for his pivotal role in drafting and promoting the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights



The Constitution and the Judiciary

- A constitution enshrines **fundamental rights** and outlines how legal rules are to be produced, applied, and interpreted.
- Written constitutions often grant judges the power to review legislative acts, serving as a **check on legislative and executive powers**.

Why Grant Constitutional Review?

Political elites may empower judges with constitutional review despite limiting their own power because:

- It provides a **check against potential abuses** by other branches of government.
- It ensures **long-term stability** in the political system by resolving inevitable conflicts between institutions.

Constitutions are often **incomplete contracts**, unable to anticipate all future contingencies, leaving judges to **interpret and enforce** rules in unforeseen situations.

Constitutional Review

Constitutional review allows judges to **examine the constitutionality** of laws and **strike down** those that conflict with constitutional principles. This power varies across countries.

Judicial Review in the US

- **Decentralised System:** All judges have the power to **strike down laws violating the constitution**.
- **US Supreme Court:** The highest appellate court with jurisdiction over constitutional and other legal matters. Judicial review is concrete, arising from **specific cases** brought before the courts.

Constitutional Review in Europe

- **Specialised Courts:** Conducted by independent constitutional courts with **narrow mandates** focused on constitutional matters.
- **Abstract Review:** Courts assess laws before enforcement to **filter unconstitutional measures preemptively**.

2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.3. Political Institutions

Auxiliary Institutions

In addition to the primary branches of government, **auxiliary institutions** play essential roles in governance.

Central Banks

- Regulate **monetary policy** and financial stability
- Ex.: The European Central Bank

Electoral Commissions

- Manage and oversee elections to **ensure fairness** and **transparency**
- Ex.: The Election Commission of India

Ombudsman Offices

- Investigate **complaints** against public officials and institutions
- Ex.: The Parliamentary Ombudsman in Sweden

Increasingly **threatened** by politically extreme movements that **intimidate** officials, **interfere** with administration, and spread **disinformation** to **erode** public trust - as seen in the United States, the Netherlands, and South Korea.

The United States' central bank, the Federal Reserve ("Fed"), operates independently from the federal government. This limited presidential control over monetary policy has at times led to clashes between President Trump and the Fed.



2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.4. Comparing Political Institutions

Political Institutions Across Systems

Different political systems - democracy, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism - exhibit distinct institutional structures and levels of independence across their legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

Legislature

Democracies

Independent and representative, ensuring a balance of power and accountability.

Autocracies

Primarily a rubber-stamp for the executive; lacks true legislative independence.

Totalitarian Systems

Non-existent or purely symbolic, with real power concentrated in the executive.



With almost 3000 members, China's National People's Congress is the world's largest parliament.

Executive

Democracies

Accountable to the legislature and operating under checks and balances.

Autocracies

Executive power is centralised and often unchecked.

Totalitarian Systems

Executive power is supreme and all-encompassing, controlling all aspects of governance and society.

The oldest judiciary is associated with ancient Mesopotamia, which developed the first written law codes around 2100 BCE



Judiciary

Democracies

Operates independently, ensuring the rule of law and protecting citizens' rights.

Autocracies

Judiciary is subordinate to the executive, often serving to legitimise state actions.

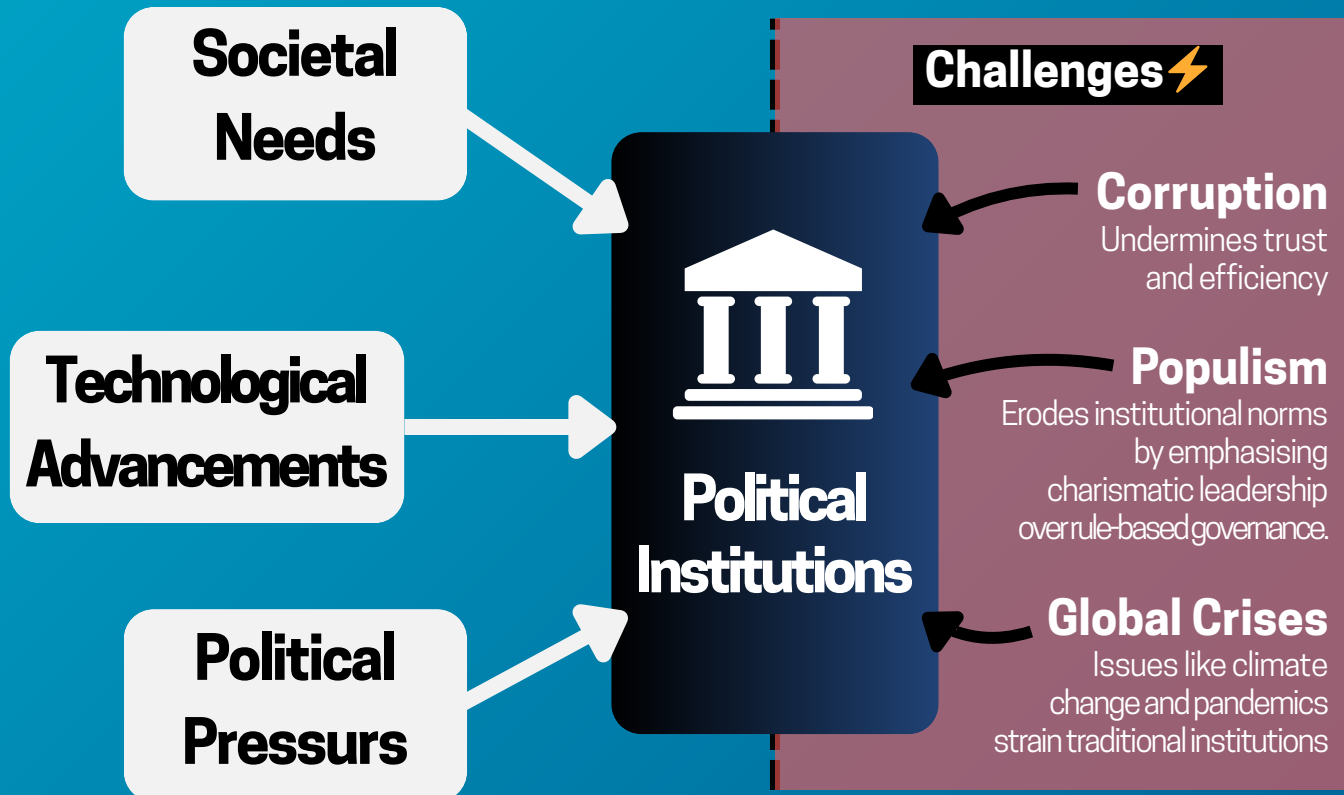
Totalitarian Systems

Judiciary functions as a tool for enforcing state ideology rather than ensuring justice.

2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.5. The Evolution of Political Institutions

Political systems evolve **in response to internal and external pressures**, shaped by historical contexts, economic developments, social movements, and technological advancements. The nature of these changes can be **gradual or abrupt**, influenced by revolutions, reforms, or crises.



Contemporary Pressures for Evolution

Modernisation:

Institutions adapt to reflect **economic and social changes**, such as the rise of welfare states in the 20th century.

Globalisation:

International organisations like the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation influence domestic institutions.

Digitalisation:

E-governance and digital tools are reshaping how institutions interact with citizens.

2. Political Systems and Institutions

Democratic Backsliding as a prominent research topic

2.5. The Evolution of Political Institutions

System Transformation

States may **transition** from one governance model / regime type to another. Key drivers include **mass mobilisation**, **elite bargaining**, **economic crises**, **demographic changes**, and **international pressures**.

Examples:

Nepal (2006): Transitioned from a **monarchy** to a **secular federal republic** following a civil war and mass protests.

South Africa (1990s): Moved from apartheid **authoritarianism** to an inclusive **constitutional democracy** through **negotiated settlement**, not violent overthrow.

Institutional Erosion

Occurs when checks on power **weaken**, media or civil society becomes **restricted**, or leaders **centralise** authority.



Can lead to **Institutional Consolidation**, where states **reinforce** institutions after crises or **strengthen** rule-making bodies. As this is often associated with a centralisation of power, it may lead to stronger authoritarian tendencies in a country.

Example:

Hungary (2010s): Gradual concentration of power under the Fidesz party that included media capture, judicial influence, and weakened checks and balances.

Pressures for Stability

Elite Cohesion
Strong Institutions
Security Structures

Pressures for Change

Protests
Economic Shifts
External Influence



Political systems evolve **continuously** and are shaped by a **range of factors**. In that, they converge toward forms that reflect their **unique contexts**.

2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.5. The Evolution of Political Institutions

The Role of Constitutions

A constitution is the **foundational legal document** of a political system, outlining the principles, rules, and structures that govern a state. In a democracy, the constitution plays a pivotal role in ensuring that power is exercised in a manner that is **accountable, transparent, and respectful of individual rights**.

The **Bill of Rights** consists of the **first ten amendments** to the **U.S. Constitution**.

These were proposed after the contentious 1787–88 debate over the Constitution's ratification.



What is a Constitution?

A constitution is a set of **fundamental principles** or established precedents that constitute the **legal basis** of a political entity. It defines the organisation of the government, the distribution of power, and the rights and duties of citizens.

Written Constitution

A single document that codifies the rules and principles.

Ex.: 🇺🇸

Unwritten Constitution

A combination of statutes, conventions, judicial decisions, and legal documents.

Ex.: 🇬🇧

Key Features of Democratic Constitutions

- **Rule of Law:** Establishes legal equality and the supremacy of law over arbitrary power.
- **Separation of Powers:** Divides government authority into legislative, executive, and judicial branches.
- **Protection of Rights:** Safeguards civil liberties and political freedoms.
- **Checks and Balances:** Prevents abuse of power by ensuring mutual oversight among branches of government.

2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.5. The Evolution of Political Institutions

Constitutions in Democracies

A democratic constitution serves as both a framework for governance and a safeguard against an erosion of individual rights, checks and balances, and the rule of law.

Providing Legitimacy

By reflecting the **collective will of the people**, constitutions lend legitimacy to governmental authority.

Example: Democratic constitutions often emerge from processes such as constitutional conventions or referenda.

Limiting Government Power

Constitutions impose **legal constraints** on the exercise of power, ensuring that no single branch or individual dominates.

Example: Judicial review allows courts to invalidate laws that violate constitutional principles.

Guaranteeing Rights and Liberties

Constitutions enshrine **fundamental rights**, such as freedom of speech, religion, and assembly, to protect individuals against state overreach.

Example: The Bill of Rights in the U.S. Constitution guarantees essential freedoms.

Structuring Government

Defining Institutions: Constitutions specify the **powers and responsibilities** of government bodies, such as parliaments, executives, and courts.

Establishing Federal or Unitary Systems: Determines the **distribution of power** between central and regional governments.

Example: Federal systems (e.g., United States) vs. unitary systems (e.g., France).

Guaranteeing Rights and Liberties

Constitutions offer **mechanisms for resolving disputes**, whether between branches of government, levels of government, or citizens and the state.

Example: Germany's Federal Constitutional Court mediates conflicts in its federal system.

2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.5. The Evolution of Political Institutions

Constitutionalism

= principle that **government authority** is **derived from** and **limited** by a **constitution**. It is a cornerstone of democratic governance.

Accountability

Governments **must answer** to the people and the law.

Core Principles

Transparency

The decision-making processes must be **open** and **understandable**.

Predictability

Citizens can rely on the **consistent** and **impartial** application of the law.

Case Study:

The Constitution of Brazil

Rule of Law: In Brazil, the Constitution of 1988 ensures that no one, including the government, is above the law. For example, when a president was found guilty of corruption, the courts held him accountable, showing the rule of law in action.

Separation of Powers: Brazil's government is divided into three branches:

- **Legislative:** The National Congress makes the laws.
- **Executive:** The President of Brazil enforces the laws.
- **Judicial:** The Supreme Federal Court (STF) interprets the laws and ensures they follow the Constitution.

Protection of Rights: Brazil's Constitution protects rights such as freedom of speech, privacy, and equality. In 2019, the Supreme Court ruled that discrimination against LGBTQ+ people is a crime, safeguarding their rights.

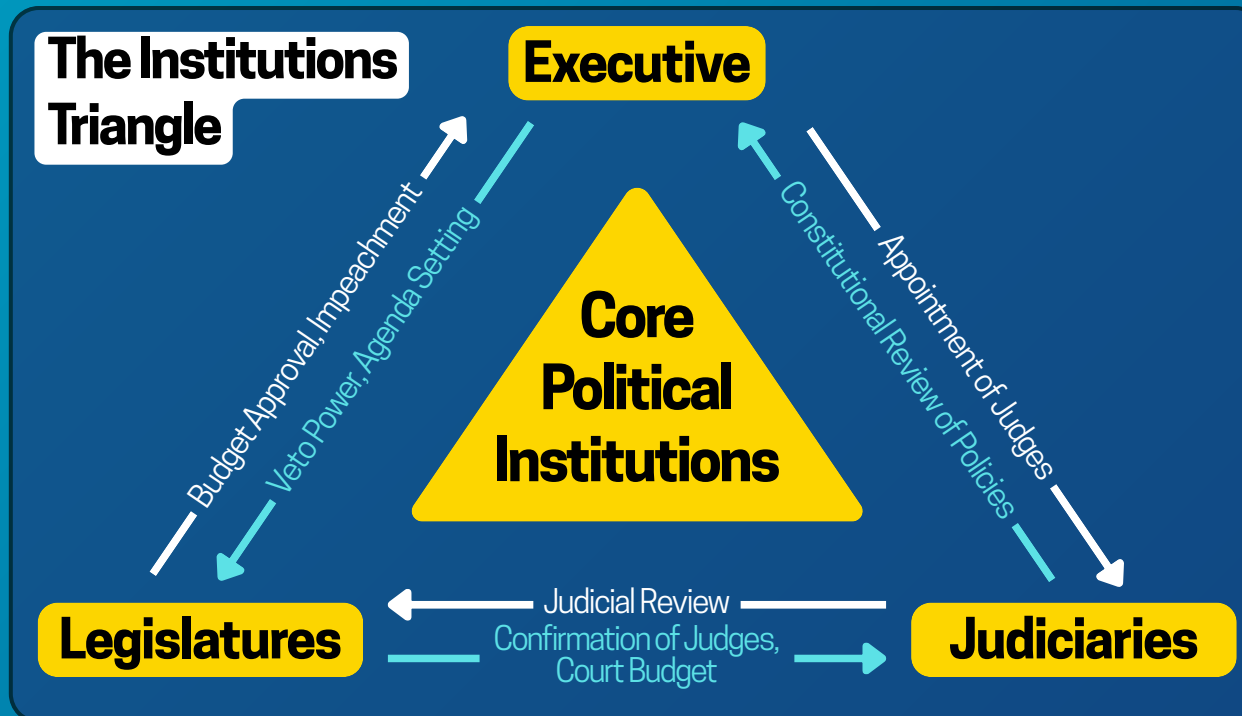
Checks and Balances: Each branch of government keeps the others in check. The National Congress can impeach the president, but the Supreme Federal Court ensures that the process is fair. This stops any branch from becoming too powerful.

National Congress
in Brasilia



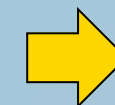
2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.6. Summary



Why do Institutions Matter?

- Shape political behaviour
- Provide stability and predictability
- Influence policy outcomes
- Centerpiece of political legitimacy



Are often important variables in political science studies

2. Political Systems and Institutions

2.7. Practice Questions

1. What is a political system, and what **key functions** does it perform in society?
2. What factors influence the **development** of a political system? Name at least three.
3. What are the **key characteristics** of a **democracy**, and how do direct and representative democracies differ?
4. What are the main features of an **authoritarian regime**, and what **types** of authoritarianism exist?
5. How does a **totalitarian system** differ from ordinary authoritarian rule?
6. What are possible causes for the **transition** from one polity type to another?
7. What are **political institutions**, and why are they **important** in governance?
8. How do legislatures function differently in **parliamentary** and **presidential** systems?
9. What are the three main types of **executive systems**, and how do they differ?
10. How does the **judiciary** function differently in **democracies** versus **authoritarian** regimes?
11. How do political institutions **evolve over time**, and what challenges do they face today?

3. Political Philosophy

3.1. Introduction

3.2. Ancient Philosophy: Plato and Aristotle

3.3. Renaissance: Machiavelli

3.4. The Social Contract Theory

3.5. Idealism and Dialectics

3.6. Materialism and Dialectics

3.7. Critical Theory

3.8. Feminist Theory

3.9. Ideologies

3.10. Summary

3.11. Practice Questions

3. Political Philosophy

3.1. Introduction

Theory vs. Ideology

Political theory can be regarded as lenses through which political phenomena are explained. **Theories** originate from different assumptions about the **structures** and **motivations** of states, institutions, and individuals.

An **ideology** is a system of **beliefs** and **values** that prescribes a specific way of organising political life. Ideologies are accounts of how politics *should* work.

Important Terms

ἰδέα, Idea	θεωρία, Theoria	λόγος, Logos
form, concept, vision	contemplation, understanding	word, reason, discourse

Political Theory is important to ...

- approach problems from different angles.
- guide political judgement.

In a Nutshell:

- Political philosophy examines how societies **should** be organised, who should hold power, and what principles **justify** political authority

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Approaches

Theories can be ...

- **Descriptive:** explain **why** it has happened
- **Predictive:** suggest **what** might happen
- **Normative:** explore **what** should happen

Distinctions



3. Political Philosophy

3.1. Introduction

Normative Theories

Focus:

How the political world *should be*

Central Questions:

What is justice?

How should society be organised?

Key Thinkers:

Plato, Marx, Rousseau

Empirical Theories

Focus:

How the political world *is*

Central Questions:

How do power and institutions actually function?

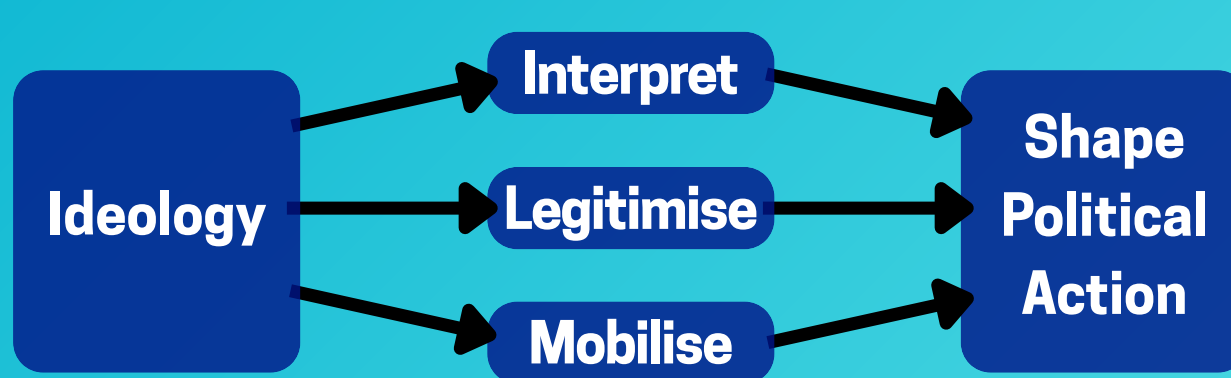
Key Thinkers:

Machiavelli, Hobbes

Theories seek to explain how political systems and behaviour function. **Ideologies** offer normative visions that promote particular values and goals for how society should be organised.

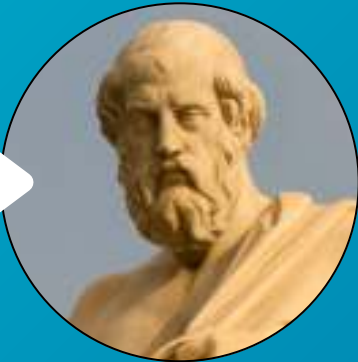


Functions of Ideologies



3. Political Philosophy

3.2. Ancient Philosophy: Plato and Aristotle



Plato
(427–347 BC)

One of the **most influential** philosophers in **Western thought**. Plato founded the Academy in Athens, the **first institution of higher learning** in the Western world. His philosophy is deeply rooted in metaphysics, ethics, and **political theory**.

Plato is famous for ...

The Ideal State: Vision of an ideal society governed by philosopher-kings, who would rule with **wisdom and justice**. Plato also emphasised **education** as a means to cultivate virtuous citizens.

The Theory of Forms: The physical world is merely an imperfect reflection of a more perfect, abstract realm of Forms or Ideas. These Forms are eternal, unchanging, and can only be understood through reason.

The **Allegory of the Cave** depicts prisoners who **mistake** shadows on a wall for reality, having never seen the world outside. When one escapes and sees the truth, they realise the shadows were mere **illusions**. This illustrates how enlightenment requires **questioning** appearances and seeking **deeper understanding**.



3. Political Philosophy

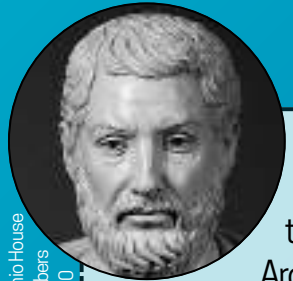
3.2. Ancient Philosophy: Plato and Aristotle

Further Reading:

Plato: The Republic, The Allegory of the Cave (within The Republic)

Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics, The Politics

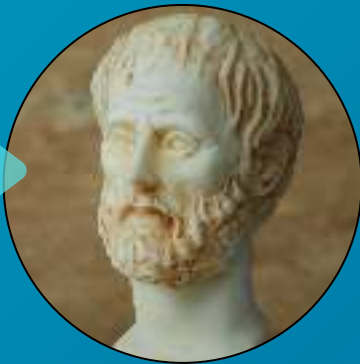
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The Athenian statesman **Cleisthenes** is known as the **Father of Democracy**.

Around **508 BCE**, he reformed Athens' political system, breaking aristocratic power, creating new citizen tribes, and founding the **Council of 500**, which laid the **groundwork** for **democratic governance**.

Photo: Anna Christoforidis / Ohio House and Senate Chambers
CCBY-NC-SA 2.0



Aristotle

(384–322 BC)

A **student of Plato** who broke away from his teacher's metaphysical dualism and developed a **more empirical approach** to philosophy.

Key Ideas

Politics: In *The Politics*, Aristotle analysed different forms of government, concluding that the best regime is a **mixed constitution** combining elements of democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy.

Metaphysics and Science: Aristotle's work laid the foundation for empirical science. He **categorised** living things and studied **causation**, emphasising the importance of observing the natural world.

Ethics: Aristotle focused on the concept of **eudaimonia** (*happiness* or *flourishing*), which he believed was achieved through **virtuous activity**. Virtue lies in **moderation between extremes**, as outlined in his book *Nicomachean Ethics*.

3. Political Philosophy

3.3. Renaissance: Machiavelli



Niccolò Machiavelli
(1469–1527)

Italian philosopher, statesman, and writer. His works marked a shift from medieval scholasticism to **Renaissance humanism**, focusing on **practical political power** rather than abstract moral ideals.

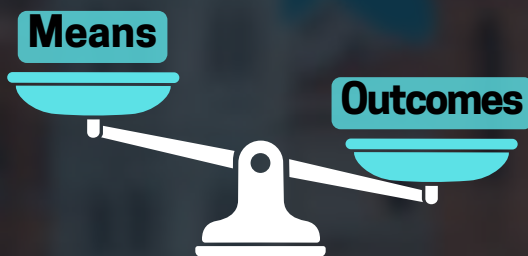
The Prince, Machiavelli's most famous work, offers **pragmatic advice** for rulers. He argued that **maintaining power** is more important than adhering to moral principles. This manifests in the concept of **Virtù** as the guiding principle for a ruler.

Separation of Power and Morality:

Machiavelli believed that political actions should be **judged by** their **outcomes** rather than their morality. A ruler must be **cunning** and **decisive** to maintain control.

Legacy: Machiavelli's ideas laid the **groundwork** for modern **realpolitik**, influencing thinkers like Thomas Hobbes and later Enlightenment philosophers.

Political
Evaluation
should
weigh ...



3. Political Philosophy

3.4. The Social Contract Theory

The Relationship between the State and the People

The Social Contract Theory explains how **political authority** arises from an **implicit agreement** among individuals to form a society and accept rules for **mutual benefit**. Thinkers like Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant used it to explore the balance between freedom, order, and legitimacy, asking **what people owe the state**, and **what the state owes them**.



Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) was an English philosopher who developed one of the earliest and most influential theories of social contract. His work **Leviathan** is a cornerstone of modern political philosophy.



State of Nature:

Hobbes described life in the state of nature as **“nasty, brutish, and short.”** Without government, humans would live in constant fear of violence and conflict

The Social Contract:

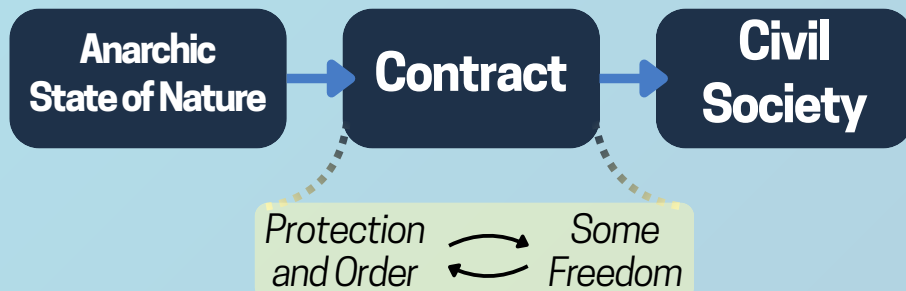
To escape this chaos, individuals agree to **surrender their natural rights** to a **sovereign authority** in exchange for protection and order

Absolute Sovereignty:

Sovereign must have **absolute power** to maintain stability. Dissent is **dangerous** because it risks returning society to its anarchic state

Legacy:

Hobbes’ ideas **influenced** later **Enlightenment thinkers** like John Locke, though Locke’s version of the social contract emphasised individual rights and limited government



3. Political Philosophy

Further Reading:

Rousseau: The Social Contract

Kant: Critique of Pure Reason; Perpetual Peace

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3.4. The Social Contract Theory



Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) was a French philosopher whose work **The Social Contract** redefined political theory. He focused on the relationship between **individuals, society, and the state.**

General Will:

Rousseau argued that true freedom lies in obeying the “**general will**,” which represents the **collective interests** of all citizens rather than individual desires.

Sovereignty:

Sovereignty **resides in the people** and cannot be transferred to a ruler or institution. The state exists only to serve the **common good.**

Forms of Government:

Direct Democracy

Represents the General Will

Representative Democracy

Potential for Corruption

Legacy:

Rousseau's ideas inspired the Enlightenment and democratic revolutions, emphasising **sovereignty participation** and **popular and civic**.

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), a German philosopher, integrated moral philosophy into social contract theory. His work *The Metaphysics of Morals* and *Perpetual Peace* explored the **foundations of political obligation** and **international relations.**



Categorical Imperative:

Kant's moral philosophy centers on the concept that **actions should be guided by universal maxims.** A just society must operate according to principles **everyone can agree upon.**

Autonomy & Freedom:

Individuals are free only when they act according to their **own rational laws**, not external dictates.

The Role of the State:

The state exists to **protect individual autonomy** and **ensure justice.** Its authority derives from the **collective will** of citizens.

Legacy:

Kant's synthesis of morality and politics influenced **modern human rights** theory and international law.

3. Political Philosophy

3.5. Idealism and Dialectics

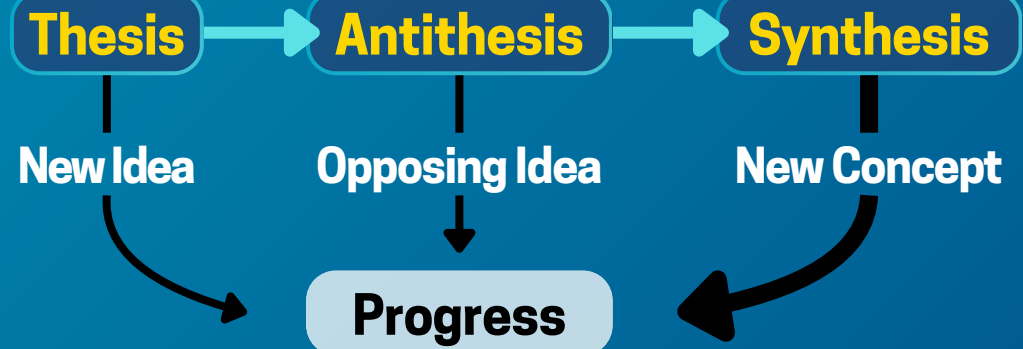


Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) was a German philosopher whose work on **dialectics** and historical progress shaped modern philosophy.



Dialectics:

Hegel's dialectical method sees progress as emerging from conflict. Every idea (**thesis**) generates its opposite (**antithesis**), and their tension produces a **synthesis** - a higher understanding that transcends both. This **cycle** repeats, driving the evolution of thought, society, and history.



History & Spirit:

In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel depicts history as the unfolding of the World Spirit (Geist), i.e. humanity's **growing self-awareness and freedom** through time. **History**, therefore, is a **rational process**, not a random sequence of events.

State and Rational Freedom:

For Hegel, the **state** embodies **Reason** in the world: the structure through which individual freedom becomes actualised. True liberty isn't isolation but **participation** in a rational and ethical community.

Legacy:

Hegel's dialectical idealism shaped later thinkers: **Marx** reinterpreted it materially (conflict between classes), **Sartre** applied it to existential freedom, and the **Frankfurt School** used it to critique modern society.

3. Political Philosophy

Further Reading:

Marx: The Capital, The Communist Manifesto

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3.6. Materialism and Dialectics



Karl Marx (1818–1883)

was a German philosopher, economist, and revolutionary whose work laid the **foundation** for modern **socialism** and historical **materialism**.

Material Conditions

Economic base determines social relations

Class Conflict

The bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat, causing tension.

Alienation

Workers become detached from their labour and others.

Revolution

Growing contradictions lead to revolution against the capitalist order.

Communism

Classless, cooperative society where production serves human needs.

Key Ideas

Revolution & Communism:

The **contradictions of capitalism** lead to **crisis** and class struggle, paving the way for a socialist revolution and a **classless, stateless society**.

Alienated Labour:

Under capitalism, workers **lose control** over their work and its products, becoming **alienated** from their human potential.

Historical Materialism:

Society evolves through **material** (economic) **conditions**, not abstract ideas.

Class conflict between owners (bourgeoisie) and workers (proletariat) drives historical change.

Legacy:

Marx's analysis **reshaped** political thought, inspiring **socialist movements** and **disciplines** like sociology, economics, and critical theory.

3. Political Philosophy

Further Reading:

Horkheimer & Adorno: Dialectic of Enlightenment

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3.7. Critical Theory

Barbara Niggel Radloff, CC BY-SA 4.0
via Wikimedia Commons

Max Horkheimer (1895–1973):

German philosopher and sociologist, co-founder of the Frankfurt School. His work linked reason, power, and social domination, laying the **groundwork** for Critical Theory.



Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969):

Philosopher, sociologist, and music theorist. Known for his analyses of **mass culture** and **modernity**, Adorno warned that rationalisation can **erode** individuality and critical thought.



Jeremy J. Shapiro, CC BY-SA 3.0
via Wikimedia Commons

Critical Theory reframes IR beyond states and institutions, asking **who benefits** from current global systems.

It has inspired **postcolonial, feminist, and constructivist approaches** that analyse **how power operates** through norms, culture, and knowledge.

Legacy

Code Ideas

Critical Theory emerged from the Frankfurt School as a response to the **failures** of **Enlightenment rationality**. While reason was meant to liberate humanity, Horkheimer and Adorno argued it became a **tool for domination**. This is evident in totalitarianism, consumer culture, and economic exploitation.

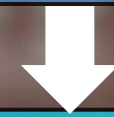


Dialectic of Enlightenment

Reason and science, when stripped of morality, serve **control** rather than freedom. Modern systems - whether capitalist markets or bureaucratic states - rationalise **domination** and **suppress dissent**.

Dialectic of Enlightenment

Reason and science, when stripped of morality, serve **control** rather than freedom. Modern systems - whether capitalist markets or bureaucratic states - rationalise **domination** and **suppress dissent**.



Application to Int'l Relations

Global governance, surveillance, and technocratic decision-making often **reproduce power hierarchies** under the guise of progress or “rational management.”

Application to Int'l Relations

Narratives of “free trade,” “development aid,” or even “security cooperation” can **hide asymmetries** of power and **dependency** between North and South.

3. Political Philosophy

3.8. Feminist Theory

Feminist philosophy challenges **gender inequalities** and seeks to promote **justice and equality for women**. It encompasses **diverse perspectives** on epistemology, ethics, and social theory.

Further Reading:

Hall & Asta: The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Philosophy

Wollstonecraft: A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

De Beauvoir: The Second Sex

Walker: Becoming the Third Wave



Mary Wollstonecraft

First-Wave Feminism

19th - early 20th Century

Focus on suffrage and legal rights, with figures like Mary Wollstonecraft and Susan B. Anthony advocating for women's political participation.

Second-Wave Feminism

1960s-1970s

Explored cultural and economic inequalities, emphasising the "personal is political." Thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan critiqued traditional gender roles.



Simone de Beauvoir

Third-Wave Feminism

since 1990s

Addresses intersectionality, challenging essentialist views of womanhood and focusing on diverse experiences of race, class, and sexuality.

Rebecca Walker



David Fenton,
<http://www.rebeccawalker.com/presskit.htm>
(presskit Rebecca Walker) / CC BY-SA 2.5

Legacy:

Feminist philosophy has reshaped academia, activism, and public discourse, advocating for a **more inclusive** understanding of justice and human rights.

3. Political Philosophy

3.9. Ideologies

Ideologies define how societies **interpret** freedom, justice, and power. 53

In international relations, they shape foreign policy, e.g. nations emphasise **cooperation** or national **self-assertion**.



3. Political Philosophy

3.10. Summary

Core Question: How *should* power be organised, justified, and exercised?

→ This section traced how thinkers across history answered this question in fundamentally different ways

Foundations of Political Thought

Plato & Aristotle

- Society functions through hierarchy, purpose, and moral order

Machiavelli

- Effective leadership may require coercion, deception, and strategic pragmatism

Structure, Power, and Conflict

Materialism & Dialectics

- Political systems reflect economic structures
- Conflict drives historical change

Critical Theory

- Power is reproduced through culture, ideology, and institutions

**How humans
justify authority,
organise society,
and define justice,
power, and
legitimacy**

The Individual & the State

Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau

- Political authority arises from agreements among individuals
- Legitimacy requires consent, rights, and civic duties

Modern Perspectives

Feminist Theory

- Power relations are gendered
- Calls for inclusive, intersectional political analysis

Ideologies

- Coherent worldviews about freedom, justice, and the role of the state

3. Political Philosophy

3.11. Practice Questions

1. What is **political philosophy**, and how does it seek to apply **fundamental principles** to contemporary society?
2. What are the **key ideas** in **Plato's** philosophy, and how do they relate to political theory?
3. What are **Aristotle's** main **contributions** to political philosophy, and how does his approach **differ** from Plato's?
4. What are the key ideas in **Niccolò Machiavelli's** The Prince, and how did his work mark a **shift** in political thought?
5. How does Thomas Hobbes' **Leviathan** describe the state of nature, and what is his theory of the **social contract**?
6. What are the central ideas in Jean-Jacques **Rousseau's** The Social Contract, and how does he view **sovereignty** and the **general will**?
7. How do Immanuel **Kant's** writings, particularly Critique of Pure Reason and Perpetual Peace, and **Hegel's** dialectical method contribute to theories of **autonomy**, **freedom**, and the **state**?
8. What is Karl **Marx's** theory of **historical materialism**, and how does it **critique** capitalism?
9. How does **feminist** philosophy interpret events in the international sphere? Apply to a case of your choice.
10. What is the **difference** between an **ideology** and a **political theory**?

4. International Relations

4.1. Introduction

4.2. History

4.3. Theories

4.3.1. Classical Political Theories

4.3.2. Modern Political Theories

4.4. The Question of Size

4.5. International Organisations

4.6. Current Issues

4.7. Summary

4.8. Practice Questions

4. International Relations

4.1. Introduction

Definition:

The field of international relations examines **interactions among states and other global actors**, including international organisations, non-governmental organisations, multinational corporations, and transnational networks, across political, economic, social, and security dimensions.

International Relations



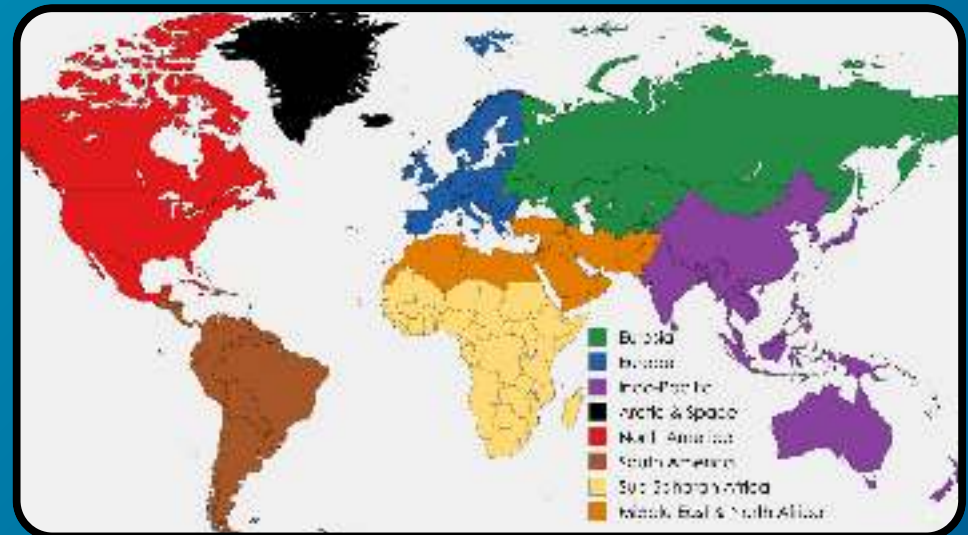
International Relations is important to:

- understand how power, interests, ideas, and institutions shape exchange among states.
- make better choices that promote stability, security, and sustainable global development.

In a Nutshell:

- IR examines how states and other actors pursue power, security, and collaboration
- IR connects abstract theoretical concepts to real-world challenges such as climate change, trade, and war.

Area Studies



Thematic Studies

Climate & Environment Policy

Int'l Economic Relations

Security Policy & Defence

Int'l Relations & Diplomacy

Artificial Intelligence & Cybersecurity

Human Rights & Humanitarian Aid

Peacekeeping & Conflict Prevention

4. International Relations

4.2. History

Classical foundations (5 BC) — Greece (Athens/Sparta):

- tracing back to interactions among ancient city-states like Sumer
- The Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) framed enduring IR themes of fear, honor, and interest.

Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War is often treated as IR's **origin story** for thinking about power, fear, and interests.



Metternich's diplomacy after 1815 is often seen as a cornerstone of European international order, emphasising **balance of power**, conservative **stability**, and the management of revolutionary change.

The Early Modern State System (17th–18th AD) — Europe (esp. the Holy Roman Empire/German lands, France, England)

- Consolidation of sovereign states and balance-of-power politics set the stage for modern interstate relations.
- The **Peace of Westphalia (1648)** is often cited (contentiously) as crystallizing state sovereignty in Europe.

The Concert Era (1815–1914) — Europe (Austria, Prussia/Germany, Russia, France, UK)

- After Napoleon, the great powers managed continental order via congresses and diplomatic coordination - the Concert of Europe - to preserve equilibrium and avoid great-power war.



4. International Relations

4.2. History



Hans J. Morgenthau (1904-1980) argued that states pursue power and national interest, shaping U.S. foreign-policy debates for decades.

Interwar Experiment (1919-1939) — Switzerland/Europe (League of Nations in Geneva; UK/France)

- Collective security and legal-institutional approaches competed with power politics;
- The League of Nations failed to stop Italy's invasion of Ethiopia (1935), undermining collective security.

Contemporary Drift (2010s-2020s) —

United States / China / EU / Russia / India (contested multipolarity)

- Moving away from stable unipolarity amid China's rise and **renewed great-power rivalry**.
- China's Belt and Road Initiative (launched 2013) expanded Beijing's geoeconomic reach across Eurasia/Africa.

Bi- & Monopolar Era (1945-2000s) — United States & Soviet Union (bipolarity), Europe/Asia as key theaters.

- The **Cold War** was characterised by a balance of power between two superpowers and their alliances (NATO/Warsaw Pact). Proxy wars and nuclear deterrence defined the era;
- Unipolar order under the lead of the United States after the fall of the Soviet Union. Some lauded this era's stability, while others worry that **counterbalancing** pressures grow.
- The 1991 Gulf War showcased US-led coalition power under UN mandates, reinforcing talk of unipolarity.



4. International Relations

4.3. Theories

Political theories **evolve in response** to historical and intellectual developments. They can be divided into **classical and modern schools of thought**.

4.3.1. Classical Political Theories 🏛️

I) Realism

Origin: Thucydides, Machiavelli & Hobbes; developed in modern International Relations after World War II.

Core Ideas: Politics is driven by **power** and **self-interest**; Since there is no higher authority in the international system, the system itself is **anarchic**.

Goals: States aim to survive, maintain security & maximise power.

Methods: Military strength, alliances, and deterrence; diplomacy as power management.

Key Thinkers: Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz

Historical Cases: Cold War Balance of Power; U.S. - China Rivalry

Criticism: **Overemphasises conflict**, ignores cooperation, and underestimates international institutions.

Core Concepts:

+Relative Gains

+Deterrence

+State Sovereignty

4. International Relations

4.3. Theories

I) Realism

Why do States Want Power? - Key Assumptions

Anarchy

The international system is anarchical; there is no global government or higher authority overseeing state actions.

Survival as the Primary Goal

The primary goal of all states is survival to maintain their territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Rationality

States are rational actors that make decisions based on cost-benefit analyses aimed at ensuring survival.

Offensive Military Capability

All states have some offensive military capabilities, which they can potentially use to threaten or defend themselves.

Uncertainty of Intentions

States cannot be certain of other states' intentions. They must rely on inferences and assumptions about whether other states seek to maintain or change the status quo.

Classification

There is significant **debate** within structural realism about **how much power** a state needs to ensure its security. This debate primarily divides scholars into two camps: **defensive realists** and **offensive realists**.

Defensive Realism

argues for "enough" power, and **cautions** that overreach may **provoke** balancing coalitions

Offensive Realism

argues for **maximising power** to ensure survival and believes that pursuing **hegemony** is **necessary**.

Application:

Nuclear Arms

Both camps agree that nuclear deterrence **complicates** power dynamics.

4. International Relations

4.3. Theories

I) Realism

Key Concepts

Balance of Power

States seek to **prevent** any one actor from becoming **too powerful** by forming **alliances** or **building military capacity**.

→ **Logic:** **Equilibrium** among powers **reduces** the risk of domination and **preserves sovereignty**



Strategies: **Balancing vs. Bandwagoning**

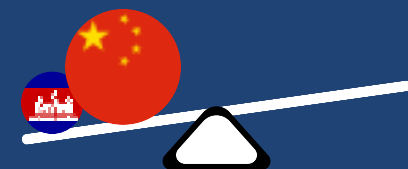
When confronted with a **larger power**, states must decide whether to **balance against** it or **bandwagon with** it. For both purposes, states form alliances with others.



Balancing

Ally in opposition to the principal source of threat

Preserves autonomy but risks confrontation



Bandwagoning

Ally with the state that poses the major threat

Ensures short-term security but increases dependence

Deterrence

Deterrence is based on the idea that states can **prevent adversaries** from taking hostile action by credibly **threatening severe retaliation**.



4 Conditions for Success

Credibility

Threats must be believable - capability and resolve matter

Communication

The adversary must clearly understand the deterrent threat

Capability

The deterring state must have the means to inflict unacceptable costs

Rationality

Both sides must behave rationally and weigh costs vs. benefits



Example: Europe's Military Modernisation

Through investments in military **modern military equipment** and **greater coordination** within NATO, Europe aims to **raise the costs of aggression** and demonstrate **collective resolve** to prevent future conflict

Two Views:

States balance against the **strongest actor**



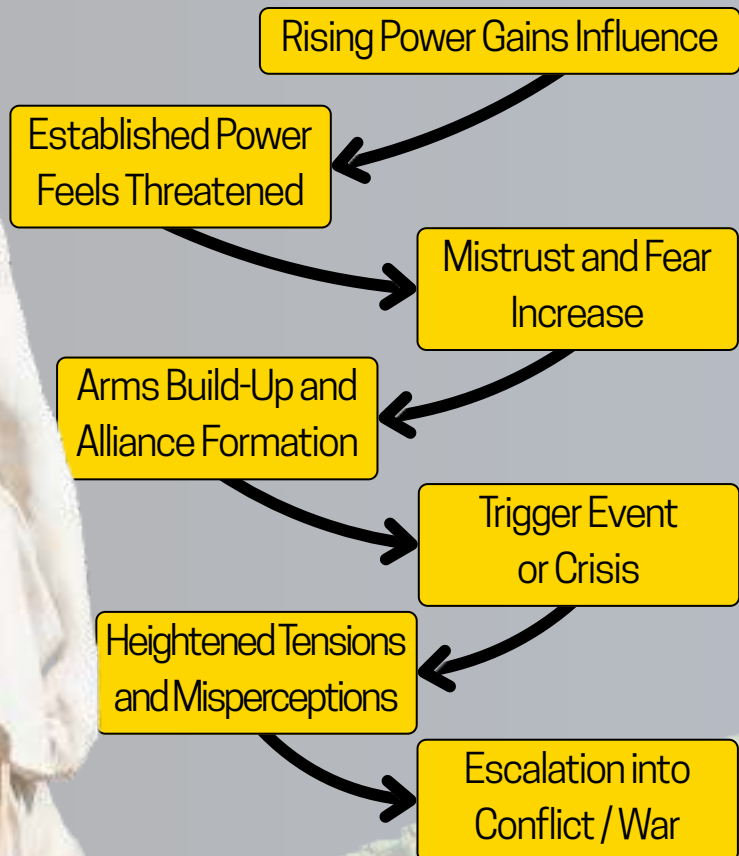
States balance against the **greatest threat**

4. International Relations

4.3. Theories

Important Realist Theorems

Thucydides Trap



Herz' (1950) Security Dilemma



Big Ideas Made Simple.

EPIS Basics



4. International Relations

4.3. Theories

4.3.1. Classical Political Theories

II) Liberalism

Origin: Emerged from Enlightenment thought (17th–18th centuries) and democratic revolutions in America and France.

Core Ideas: Individual freedom, equality before the law, representative democracy, free markets, and human rights.

Goals: **Limit** state power, protect **individual rights**, promote **cooperation** among states.

Methods: Rule of law, elections, international organisations, diplomacy, trade.

Key Thinkers: John Locke, Immanuel Kant; Later Woodrow Wilson.

Historical Cases: U.S. and French Revolutions; United Nations; European Union.

Criticism: At times ignores social inequality; accused of being **idealistic** about international cooperation.

Core Concepts:

+Interdependence

+Freedom

+Democratic Peace

4. International Relations

4.3. Theories

II) Liberalism

Liberalism in international relations emphasises the possibility of **cooperation** among states and other international actors. The theory maintains that the international system is **not inherently anarchic** in the way that realism argues. Instead, institutions and international organisations help to **foster cooperation** and **reduce the friction** between states.



Trade and Peace in Liberal Theory

A myriad of studies indicate that trade has a **pacifying effect** in interstate relations.

These are the two **main mechanisms** scholars propose:



When states are deeply connected through trade, war would **disrupt** vital economic flows, **harming both sides**. This creates **incentives** to maintain peace.

→ "Trade makes war too expensive."

States can use economic actions, such as sanctions, investment cuts, or trade offers, as **signals of intent**. These "costly signals" can **prevent misperceptions** that lead to escalation.

→ "Trade builds trust through credible signals."

4. International Relations

4.3. Theories & Ideologies

Important Liberal Theorems

Democratic Peace Theory

The Democratic Peace Theory argues that democracies tend **not to fight each other**. Shared norms, transparent decision-making, and institutional checks make war between democracies rare. However, critics argue that democracies are **no less likely** to wage war against **non-democracies**.

Democratic Systems

Shared Norms & Institutions

Mutual Trust & Transparency

Reduced Conflict Probability

Peace Among Democracies



Weaponisation of Trade

States can turn economic interdependence into **strategic leverage** by controlling access to critical goods, such as **energy**, **semiconductors**, and **rare earths**. Through sanctions, export bans and restrictions on the supply chain, states can force other nations to **make concessions**.

➔ *Farrell & Newman (2019): **Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion***

Control Over Critical Goods

Economic Leverage

Strategic Coercion

Economic Fragmentation

Erosion of the Liberal Trade Order

Disrupted Supply Chains

4. International Relations

4.3. Theories & Ideologies

4.3.1. Classical Political Theories

III) Constructivism

Origin: Emerged in the late 1980s–1990s as a response to Realism and Liberalism.
Key Moment: The end of the Cold War challenged materialist explanations.

Core Ideas: International politics is socially constructed through **ideas, norms, and identities**. The meaning of power depends on **shared understanding**.

Goals: **Construct Identities** (e.g. Regional Leader, Peace Broker); receive recognition

Methods: **Social Interaction** in IOs; Performing identities that align with desired roles

Key Thinkers: Alexander Wendt, Nicholas Onuf, Martha Finnemore

Historical Cases: EU Integration, Peaceful shift after the collapse of the Soviet Union

Criticism: Lacks predictive power; Focuses more on interpretation than causation;
Underestimates material and strategic interests.

Core Concepts:

+Shared Norms

+Identity

+Social Interaction

4. International Relations

4.3. Theories

III) Constructivism

Constructivism argues that the international system is **socially constructed**: states, institutions, and alliances exist not just materially, but through **shared meanings, norms, and interactions** shaped by **historical** and **cultural contexts**.

Central Themes

Contextual Reality

Reality is not uniform; it **differs** across time and space based on the **context** and **social construction** of meaning.

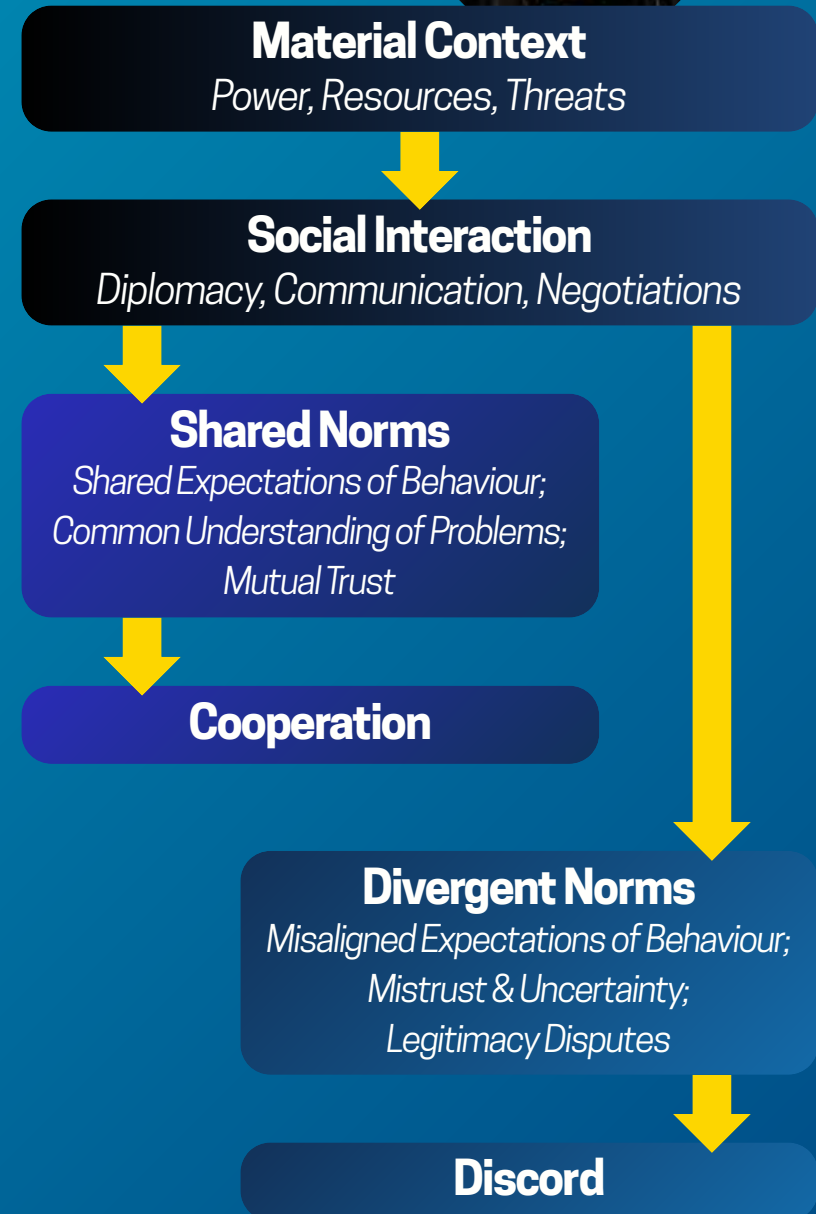
The Role of Rules and Norms

Constructivists argue that the study of IR must consider the **social dimensions**, particularly the role of norms, rules, and language in shaping state behaviour.

Agency and Interaction

Constructivists emphasise the role of **human agency**, countering theories that focus solely on material structures (such as realism and liberalism). Actors in the international system are not entirely constrained by prevailing structures; they have the **ability to shape their environment** through **social interaction**.

Alexander Wendt's "**Anarchy Is What States Make Of It**" is one of the most important works of the constructivist paradigm.



4. International Relations

4.3. Theories

4.3.2. Modern Political Theories



Javier Milei's pledge for deregulation has propelled him into the Argentinian presidency.
"Javier Milei" by Gage Skidmore, CC BY-SA 2.0

Neoliberalism:

+Economic Exchange

+Market Freedom

An evolution of classical liberalism, neoliberalism focuses on the **role of global institutions, free markets, and economic interdependence** in fostering peace and cooperation. Scholars like Robert Keohane argue that international organisations, such as the WTO and IMF, create frameworks for cooperation even in an anarchic world. Neoliberalism has influenced global economic policies, emphasising **deregulation, privatisation, and reduced state intervention** in markets.

Marxism:

+Core-Periphery

+Dependency

Focuses on the role of **economic structures** and **class relations** in shaping global politics. It views the international system as **driven by capitalist exploitation**, where wealthy states and elites dominate poorer nations through trade, finance, and production. Conflict and inequality arise from this global capitalist order rather than from power politics alone. Marxist IR highlights how economic dependence **limits sovereignty** and **sustains global hierarchies**.

Anarchic Int'l System

Repeated Interactions

N

Institutional Rules & Norms

N

Transparency & Flow of Information

N

Trust & Reciprocity

N

Cooperation under Anarchy

N

M

Global Capitalism

M

Class Division (Core vs Periphery)

M

Economic Exploitation

M

Political Dependence & Inequality

M

Conflict & Calls for Change

4. International Relations

4.3. Theories

4.3.2. Modern Political Theories

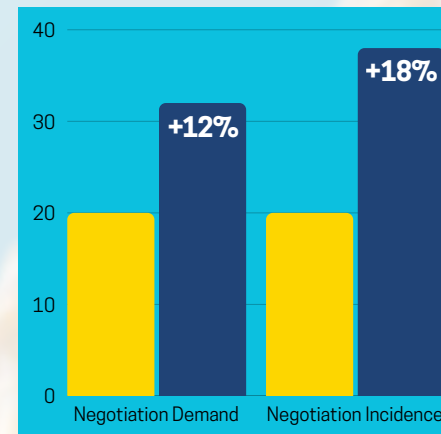
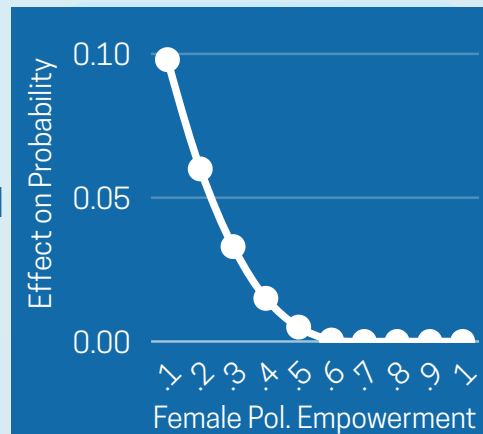
Feminism: Analyses how **gender dynamics influence international politics**, often critiquing the male-dominated nature of global power structures. Feminist scholars examine how war, peace, and development **policies impact men and women differently**. Women's participation in peace negotiations and international organisations has expanded significantly due to feminist critiques.

+WPS Agenda

+Market Freedom

If women empowerment in a state is low, female leaders are more likely to initiate conflict than their male counterparts.

Madison Schramm & Alexandra Stark (2020) *Peacemakers or Iron Ladies? A Cross-National Study of Gender and International Conflict*, *Security Studies*, 29:3, 515-548. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1763450>



Rebel groups with female members are more likely to request negotiations with the government.

Brannon, E. L., Thomas, J. L., & DiBlasi, L. L. (2024). *Fighting for Peace? The Direct and Indirect Effects of Women's Participation in Rebel Groups on Peace Negotiations*. *The Journal of Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1086/726965>

Post-Colonialism: Challenges Eurocentric theories and focuses on the **impact of imperialism and colonial legacies**. Thinkers like Edward Said and Frantz Fanon highlight **how historical power imbalances shape contemporary global relations**. Postcolonial critiques of Western dominance shaped the **independence movements** across Africa and Asia in the mid-20th century.

+Imperialism

+Power Imbalances

4. International Relations

4.3. Theories

4.3.2. Modern Political Theories



Postmodernism:

+Narratives

+Social Construction

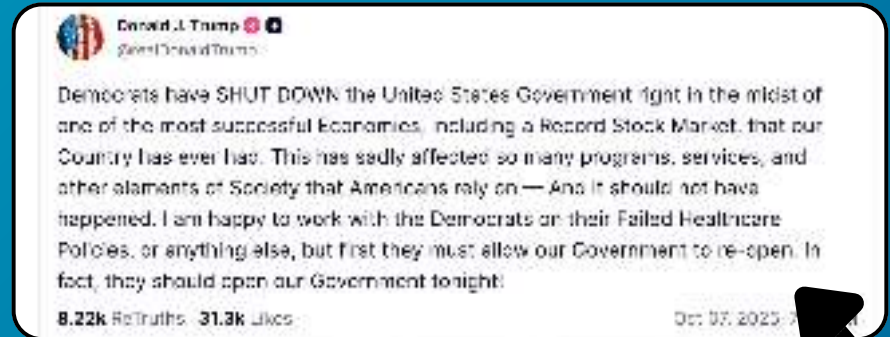
Challenges the idea that political theories can provide objective, universal truths. Postmodernist scholars, such as Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard, argue that **power is dispersed through language, discourse, and social constructions**. In IR, postmodernism **critiques grand narratives** such as realism and liberalism, suggesting that they reflect dominant power structures rather than objective realities.

Materialism:

+Inequality

+Resource Distribution

A broad framework that emphasises the **importance of economic and material conditions** in shaping political and social relations. Rooted in Marxist thought, materialism argues that the structures of production, resource distribution, and economic power fundamentally determine international politics. This approach **critiques ideational theories** by asserting that global conflicts, alliances, and hegemonic struggles are best understood **through material inequalities and the interests of dominant economic classes**.



4. International Relations

4.3. Theories

4.3.2. Modern Political Theories

Environmentalism:

+Ecological Limits

+Sustainability

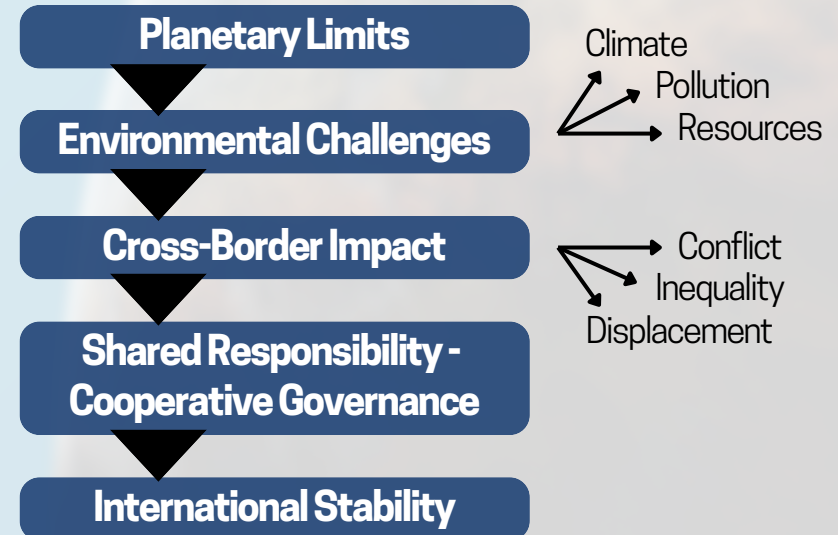
Environmentalism examines international relations through **ecological sustainability**. It sees global politics as shaped by **planetary limits** and stresses states' **shared responsibility** to manage the global commons (atmosphere, oceans, biodiversity). Unlike power- or economy-centred perspectives, it highlights that climate change, resource depletion, and pollution cross borders and require **cooperation**. Environmental degradation threatens ecosystems and exacerbates inequality, conflict, and displacement, making **ecological stewardship** essential for international stability.

English School:

+International Society

+Institutions

The English School bridges realism and idealism by exploring the “**international society**.” Despite anarchy, states form a society guided by **shared norms, rules, and institutions** that promote **order** and **coexistence**. It identifies three traditions: **realist** (Hobbesian), **rationalist** (Grotian), and **revolutionist** (Kantian), capturing both **moral and structural dimensions** of global politics.



4. International Relations

4.4. The Question of Size

Size matters in international relations. The size of a state determines its **strategies, options,** and **vulnerabilities.** Small states often compensate for limitations through alliances and diplomacy, while large states leverage their power but must manage complex responsibilities.

Small States

Characteristics:

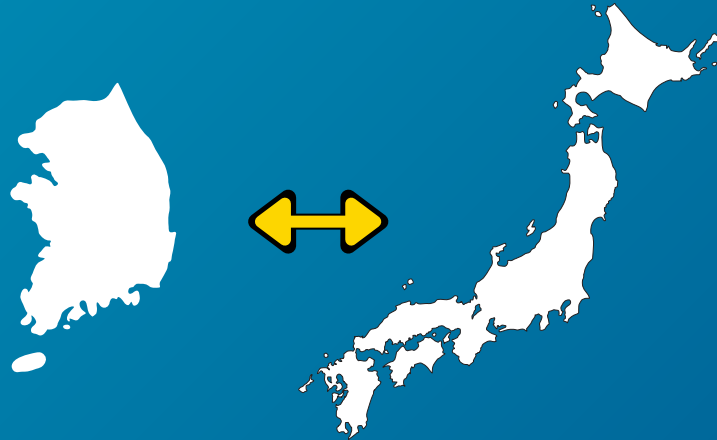
- Small Population & Domestic Market
- Vulnerable to External Pressure

Strategic Options:

- Niche Influence
- Coalition-Building

Challenges:

- Dependence on Alliances
- Limited Autonomy



Large States

Characteristics:

- Large Economy
- Potent Military

Strategic Options:

- Setting Norms
- Economic Leverage
- Military Presence

Challenges:

- Domestic Pressures
- Must Balance Multiple Global Interests

4. International Relations

4.5. International Organisations (IO)

International institutions **coordinate** actions, manage conflicts, and address shared problems across borders. They were created to help countries **overcome the anarchic nature** of the international system and to make cooperation more **predictable** and **effective**.

Types of International Organisations

Intergovernmental
Organisations
NATO, EU, UN

Non-Governmental
Organisations
Oxfam, WWF

International Financial Institutions
IMF, World Bank

Functions of IOs

Coordinate
collective action
(on peace, trade,
climate, etc.)

Provide forums
for discussion
and negotiation

Set
international
norms and rules

How do IR Theorists View International Organisations?

Realists

"IOs reflect state power and interests"



Constructivists

"IOs shape global norms and identities"



Liberals

"IOs promote cooperation and peace"



4. International Relations

4.5. International Organisations (IO)



4. International Relations

4.5. International Organisations

The Current Incapacity of the WTO

From Trade Court to Deadlock

For two decades, the WTO's Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM) was hailed as the **"crown jewel"** of global trade law. Since December 2019, however, the system has **stalled**: the **Appellate Body** - its final court - no longer functions.

Why Did It Collapse?

The **United States** long **blocked** the **appointment** of new judges, accusing the WTO of judicial overreach

As mandates expired, seats remained empty until **fewer** than the required three **judges** were left.

Appeals of member states can **no longer** be processed. This essentially **freezes enforcement**.

Wider Paralysis

- Negotiation **gridlock** since the 2001 Doha Round.
- Regional trade deals (EU, CPTPP, RCEP) increasingly **bypass** WTO rules.
- Emerging issues (digital trade, green subsidies, SOEs) remain **unresolved**.

The (Intended) WTO Settlement Mechanism

Member State A files complaint against Member State B

Consultations Phase
(60 days to resolve)

Panel Formation
Experts examine case
Draft & Final Report

Appellate Body Review
Final legal judgement
Binding decision


No Quorum
(3/7 Judges)
Enforcement
not possible

Implementation Phase
Compliance monitored
Possible sanctions

4. International Relations

4.6. Current Issues

Climate Change

1988

Creation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

1992 - Rio Conference

Framework on stabilising greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere

1997 - Kyoto Protocol

- Legally binding emission targets for 2020
- World's only int'l treaty on global warming (until Paris Agreement)

2009 - Copenhagen Conference

Raises issue of climate finance

2015 - Paris Agreement

- Pledge to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 C
- Funding for underdeveloped economies to tackle climate change
- Participation of the U.S. and China

Key Issues Remain:

Insufficient Implementation

Ambitious targets not reflected in **domestic policies**

North-South Divide

Developing countries emit fewer emissions but face larger mitigation and adaption costs

Energy Security Concerns

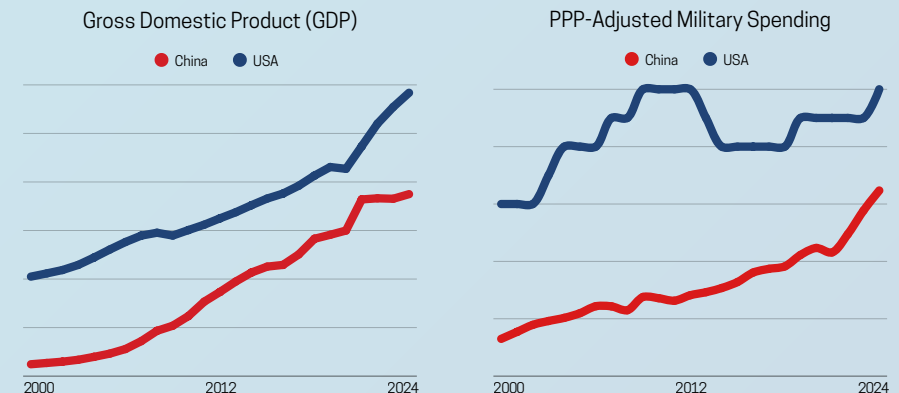
Short-term energy crises have led to renewed **fossil fuel investments**, challenging decarbonization efforts

Weak Enforcement

The Paris system relies on voluntary commitments and peer pressure, but there are **no real sanctions** for noncompliance

The Transition Toward a Bipolar World

The international system is shifting toward a new **bipolar structure**, driven primarily by the rising **strategic rivalry** between the United States and China.



As China is moving to close the gap to the United States, **challenges** emerge:

- Weaponisation of Trade
 - Tariffs vs. Access to rare earths*
- Regional tensions, e.g. in the Indo-Pacific
- Fragmentation of rules & erosion of global institutions

4. International Relations

4.6. Current Issues

The Russia-Ukraine War

Each of the major theories in International Relations offers a **different lens** through which to interpret **Russia's 2022 Invasion of Ukraine**.

Realism

From a realist perspective, Russia's actions reflect a **pursuit of power** and security in an anarchic international system. Realists argue that Russia perceived Ukraine's growing alignment with Western institutions (like NATO and the EU) as a direct threat to its strategic interests and sphere of influence. The invasion is seen as a **preemptive move** to prevent Ukraine from becoming a Western-aligned, potentially hostile neighbour.

Offensive realists would claim Russia seeks to **maximise power** and **reassert its dominance** in its vicinity, while **defensive realists** would argue that Russia felt **compelled to act** due to NATO expansion and the erosion of its regional buffer zone.

Liberalism

Liberals interpret the war as a breakdown in international cooperation and institutions. From this view, the failure of diplomacy and institutions such as the United Nations and OSCE to prevent the war highlights the limitations of international governance when state interests collide.

However, liberal theorists also point to the **strength** of the **Western liberal order** in responding: Western democracies, through institutions like the EU and NATO, coordinated unprecedented sanctions, military aid, and refugee assistance, showcasing the power of **international cooperation** and norms in resisting aggression.

Constructivism

Russian political elites have framed Ukraine not as a sovereign nation with an independent identity but as a culturally and historically **inseparable part** of a greater "Russian World." This **perception** shaped Russia's foreign policy choices.

On the other hand, Ukraine's growing identification with European and democratic values has **deepened its divide** with Russia.

Constructivists argue that the war is not merely about power or interests, but about **competing national identities** and the **social meaning** attached to sovereignty and territorial integrity.

4. International Relations

4.6. Current Issues

The Russia-Ukraine War



The English School

The English School would see the conflict as a **breakdown of shared norms**. Russia's invasion is seen as a **violation of the normative rules** underpinning international order, particularly state sovereignty and the prohibition of aggressive war.

A **pluralist view** would stress the threat to sovereignty and non-intervention principles, while a **solidarist view** would support international intervention on behalf of Ukraine, emphasising human rights and the moral obligation to defend a sovereign nation under attack.

Marxism

Marxist theorists interpret the war as a struggle rooted in **capitalist competition and imperialism**. To them, it is a clash of two rival capitalist blocs: Russia seeking **regional dominance**, and Western powers defending **economic and geopolitical interests**.

The expansion of NATO and global markets reflects capitalist states' drive to **secure resources, labour, and influence**. Ordinary citizens, not elites, bear the costs through displacement and economic hardship. From this lens, the war exposes how capitalist structures perpetuate inequality under the guise of national security.

Postmodernist Theory

Postmodernist theorists approach the war by questioning dominant **narratives** and the **construction of truth** itself. They argue that competing discourses, framed through media, political rhetoric, and digital platforms, shape perceptions of legitimacy, aggression, and victimhood.

The **spread of misinformation** exemplifies how truth becomes **contested** in the postmodern era. From this view, the conflict is not only fought on the battlefield but also within narratives, where meaning and morality are constantly negotiated and manipulated.

Feminism

Feminist theorists highlight how war reinforces **gendered power structures** and **disproportionately affects women** and marginalised groups. They examine the social consequences particularly on women, such as displacement and sexual violence, that often go **overlooked** in traditional analyses.

Feminists critique the militarised, male-dominated framing of security and call attention to **women's roles** in peacebuilding. From this perspective, the conflict illustrates how patriarchal systems sustain violence and how genuine security must also consider **structural social factors**.

4. International Relations

4.7. Summary

This section provides an overview of the **history**, **theories**, **structures**, and **contemporary challenges** of international relations, highlighting key concepts for understanding global politics.

Core Theories

Realism

Power & Competition

Liberalism

Trade & Cooperation

Constructivism

Norms & Identity



Seek to Explain State Behaviour from Different Viewpoints

- States seek to **survive**, which drives them to invest in their **security**
- In theory, **cooperation** is more beneficial than conflict
 - ↳ Cooperation is a strong **incentive for peace**
- Problems persist in solving problems that concern a **large number** of countries
- Current behaviours are a **consequence** of experiences in the **past**

Important International Organisations

Inter-Governmental Organisations (IGOs)

- based on a formal agreement between the governments of nation states
- including three or more nation states as parties to the agreement
- **Examples:** European Union, NATO, United Nations, Arab League, Group of 77 (G77)

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

- non-profit organisation, group or institution that operates independently from a Government
- often has humanitarian or development objectives
- **Example:** Doctors Without Borders



Seek to ...

- enforce rules
- resolve conflicts
- overcome coordination problems

4. International Relations

4.8. Practice Questions

1. Which theory of IR do you instinctively **align** with the most and why? What experiences or beliefs **influence** your preference?
2. Describe North Korea-U.S. relations through the lens of the **security dilemma**.
3. How does **economic interdependence** influence the likelihood of conflict between major powers? Use a historical or contemporary case to support your answer.
4. Constructivism claims that international reality is **socially constructed**. Can you identify an example in recent news where a country's behaviour seemed to be driven more by **identity, norms, or cultural narratives** than material power?
5. Each theory offers different lenses on international politics. Do you think it's possible to **combine** insights from multiple theories, or is it more effective to **stick to one**? Why?
6. Does the rise of China constitute a **Thucydides Trap**?
7. How have **non-state actors** like terrorist groups, multinational corporations, or NGOs influenced international relations in the last two decades?
8. How is **climate change** reshaping international security and state behaviour? Give an example of a potential conflict caused by environmental stress.
9. You are the foreign minister of a **small state** caught between two rival powers. How would you handle alliances, economic ties, and security guarantees to **maximise** your country's security and influence?

5. Political Economy

5.1. Introduction

5.2. Mercantilism

5.3. Classical Political Economy

5.4. Neoclassical Political Economy

5.5. Keynesianism

5.6. Neoliberalism

5.7. Critical Political Economy: Post-Colonial Perspectives

5.8. Green Political Economy

5.9. Summary

5.10. Practice Questions

5. Political Economy

5.1. Introduction

Definition:

Political Economy (PE) studies how political forces and institutions shape economic systems, and how economic interests and power influence politics in turn. It lies at the **intersection** of **economics**, **politics**, and **society**, and explores how decisions about production, trade, and wealth distribution reflect broader struggles over power, values, and governance.



Key Question: How do politics and the economy interact?

Why Does Political Economy Matter?

- Examines how states use economic tools (sanctions, aid, investment) for **strategic purposes**.
- Connects **domestic policies** (e.g., welfare, taxation, energy) with **international structures** (e.g., global markets, debt regimes).

In a Nutshell:

- Political Economy examines the relationship between political institutions and the economy
- Scholars particularly debate the extent of state intervention

Evolution of Political Economy Thought

Mercantilism

(1500s-1700s)

National Wealth = Accumulation of gold & trade surpluses

Classical PE

(1700s-1800s)

Markets seen as natural and self-regulating

Neoclassical PE

(Late 1800s)

Individuals act rationally to maximise utility

Keynesianism

(1930s-1970s)

Markets fail without government intervention

Neoliberalism

(1970s-2000s)

Deregulation, privatisation, and free capital flows.

Critical PE

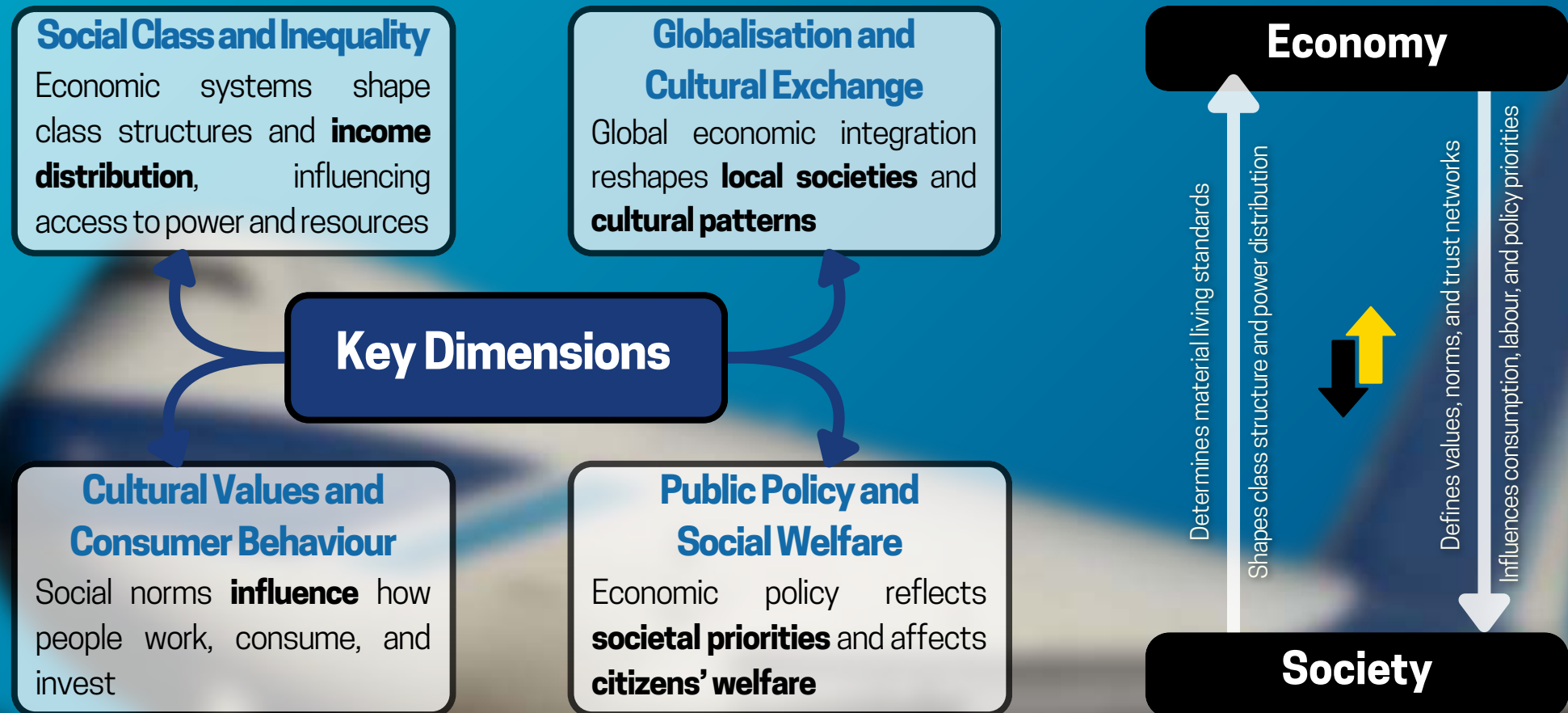
(1970s-current)

Questions power, inequality, and postcolonial dependence

5. Political Economy

5.1. Introduction

Political economy views society and the economy as **mutually constitutive** systems. The economy provides the **material foundation** for social life, while society shapes the **values, norms, and institutions** that regulate economic behaviour. Their interaction determines how wealth, power, and opportunity are **distributed** across and within nations.



5. Political Economy

5.1. Introduction

Types of Goods - Ostrom: Governing the Commons (1990)

Elinor Ostrom classified goods into four categories based on two key characteristics: **excludability** and **subtractability** (also known as rivalry in consumption).



Excludability: Ability to **prevent** individuals from accessing or using a good if they **have not paid** for it or met certain conditions

Subtractability: Extent to which one person's use or consumption of a good **reduces the availability** of that same good for others.

Private Goods: **Excludable and Rivalrous**. If one person consumes a good, another cannot consume the same item. People can further easily be prevented from using a good if they don't pay.

Public Goods: **Non-excludable and non-rivalrous**. It is difficult to exclude anyone from consuming them, and one person's consumption does not reduce the supply available for others.
 → Subject to **Freeriding**

Club Goods: **Excludable but non-rivalrous** (at least until congestion). Access can be restricted, but one person's use does not diminish the availability of the good for others.

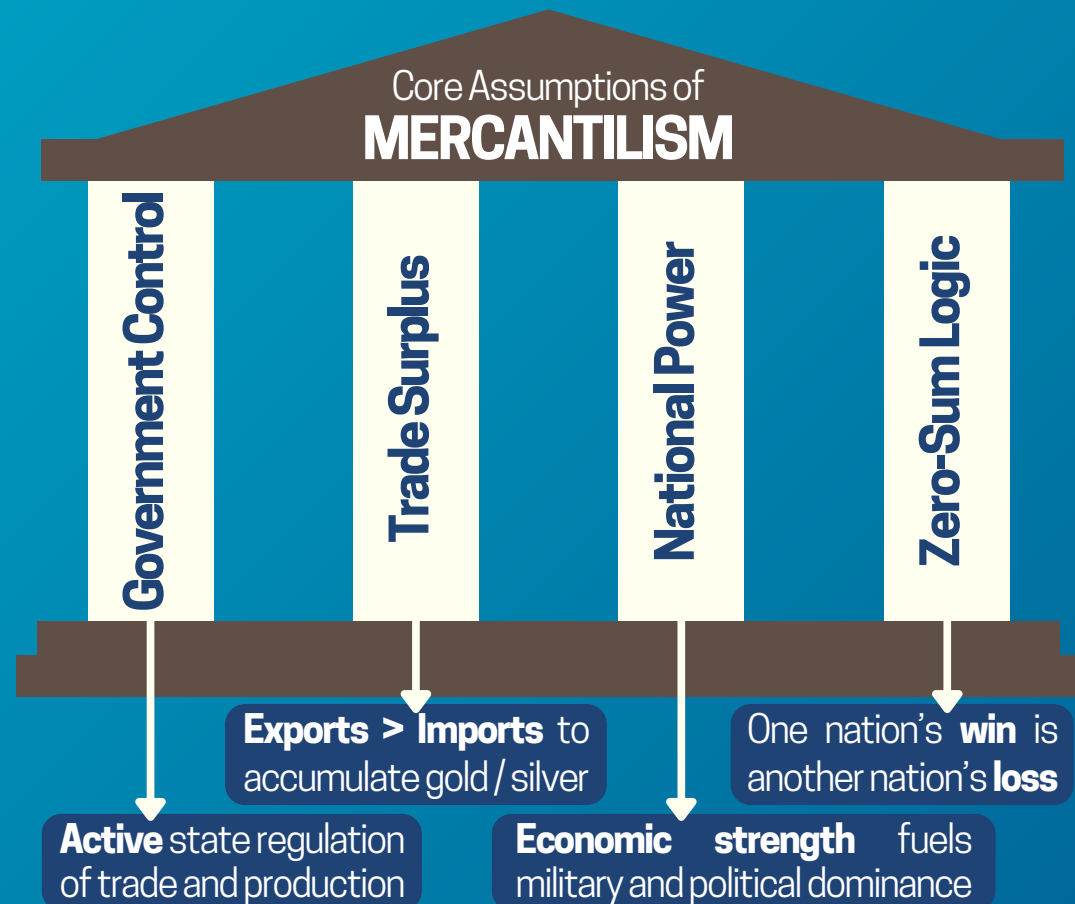
Common-Pool Resources (CPRs): **Rivalrous but non-excludable**. It is difficult or costly to prevent people from accessing them, but one person's consumption subtracts from the amount available for others.
 → Subject to the "**Tragedy of the Commons**" (= Overuse)

Often subject of study in
political science

5. Political Economy

5.2. Mercantilism

Mercantilism views wealth and power as intertwined, arguing that national prosperity **depends on** accumulating precious metals and maintaining a **positive balance of trade**.



Mercantilism was first described by the French Minister of Finance **Jean-Baptiste Colbert** (Under Louis XIV) in the 17th century



5. Political Economy

5.2. Mercantilism

Though gold and silver no longer define national wealth, the mercantilist principle **endures**. Today, states pursue **technological dominance**, **resource control**, and **trade advantages** as tools of geopolitical influence, echoing the idea that **economic power is national power**.

Mercantilism in the 21st Century

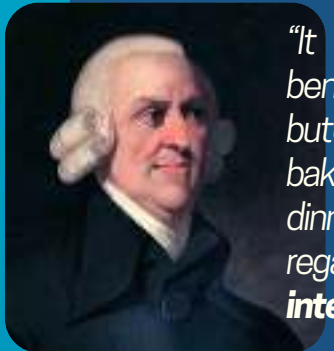
Principle	Modern Application	
State Intervention in the Economy	Interventions through subsidies , industrial policy , and strategic investment screening .	U.S. Inflation Reduction Act and CHIPS Act protect domestic manufacturing
Trade Surplus & Export Orientation	Technological and industrial dominance to boost exports and maintain positive trade balances .	China's Automotive Industry, Germany's emphasis on machinery
Zero-Sum View of Global Wealth	Zero-sum views materialise in protectionist trade policies .	U.S.–China trade war (tariffs, export bans, decoupling rhetoric)
Accumulation of Strategic Resources	Focus shifts from gold to control over energy , rare earths , data , and critical infrastructure .	Competition surrounding semiconductors , telecom technology and lithium
Economic Policy as Foreign Policy	Economic tools such as sanctions, tariffs and investment bans become instruments of power .	Export controls on advanced chips or rare earths

5. Political Economy

5.3. Classical Political Economy

Adam Smith

(1723–1790)

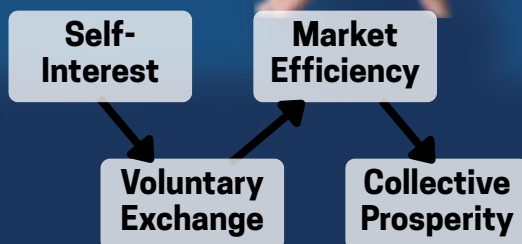


*"It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their **own interest**."*

Core Ideas

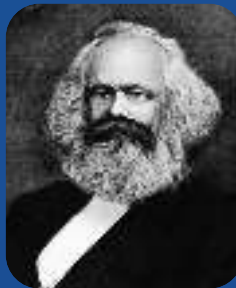
Argued **against** government intervention:

- Markets operate efficiently through the **invisible hand**
- The state's role should be limited to the provision of public goods



Karl Marx

(1818–1883)



*"All economists share the **error** of examining **surplus-value** not as such, in its pure form, but in the particular forms of **profit and rent**."*

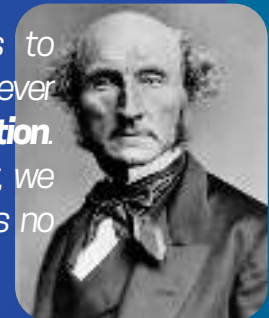
Core Ideas

Envisioned a **classless, stateless** society and argued that ...

- states serve the interests of the **capitalist class**, perpetuating **inequality** and **exploitation**
- markets **exploit** labour by **extracting** surplus value from workers

John Stuart Mill

(1806–1873)



*"What a country wants to make it **richer** is never consumption, but **production**. Where there is the latter, we may be sure that there is no want of the former."*



Core Ideas

Supported a more active role of the state

- Advocated free markets but acknowledged social limits
- The state should correct market failures and promote education and welfare

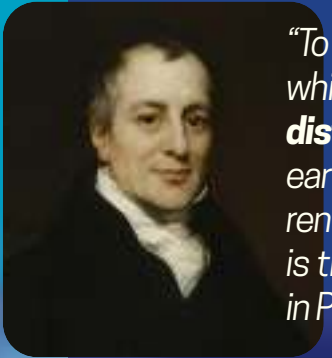
5. Political Economy

5.3. Classical Political Economy

Empirically confirmed
in numerous studies

David Ricardo

(1772-1823)



*"To determine the laws which regulate this **distribution** [of the earth's produce among rent, profit, and wages], is the **principal problem** in Political Economy"*

Core Ideas

Argued for **minimal** government intervention:

- A key function of the state is the **enforcement** of property rights and contracts
- Trade enables **efficient resource allocation** and **maximises global output**
- Recognised **tensions** between landowners, workers, and capitalists

Key Contribution: The Comparative Advantage

Comparative advantage explains that even if one country is less efficient in producing all goods, it can still benefit from trade by **specialising** in the goods it produces **relatively more efficiently**.

- ➔ What matters is not absolute productivity, but **relative opportunity costs**
- ➔ Countries gain by **specialising** where they have the lowest opportunity cost and **trading** for the rest.

Output per hour	📱	🚗
🇬🇧	6	4
🇺🇸	1	2

Example

The UK can produce 6 phones or 4 cars per hour of labour.
The US can produce 1 phone or 2 cars per hour of labour.
Both states trade the produce one-for-one.

The **UK** now specialises in phones. If it produces **6 phones in one hour** and trades these for 6 US cars, it would end up with **2 more cars** per hour of labour than it could produce domestically.

The **US** similarly trades 6 cars for 6 phones. It invests products **worth 3 hours of labour** (6 cars need 3 hours to be produced), and gets out products **worth 6 hours of domestic labour**. In effect, the US **saves 3 hours** of labour time. Overall, **both states benefit from trade**.

Key Takeaways

- trade is not zero-, but positive-sum
- trade helps maximise growth

Criticism

- assumes full factor mobility
- overlooks strategic industries

5. Political Economy

5.4. Neoclassical Political Economy

Emerging in the late 19th century, neoclassical political economy redefined value and market behaviour around individual choice and marginal utility, rather than production or labour. It assumes that individuals act **rationally** to **maximise utility**, firms **maximise profit**, and markets naturally tend toward **equilibrium**.

Important Thinkers:



Alfred Marshall

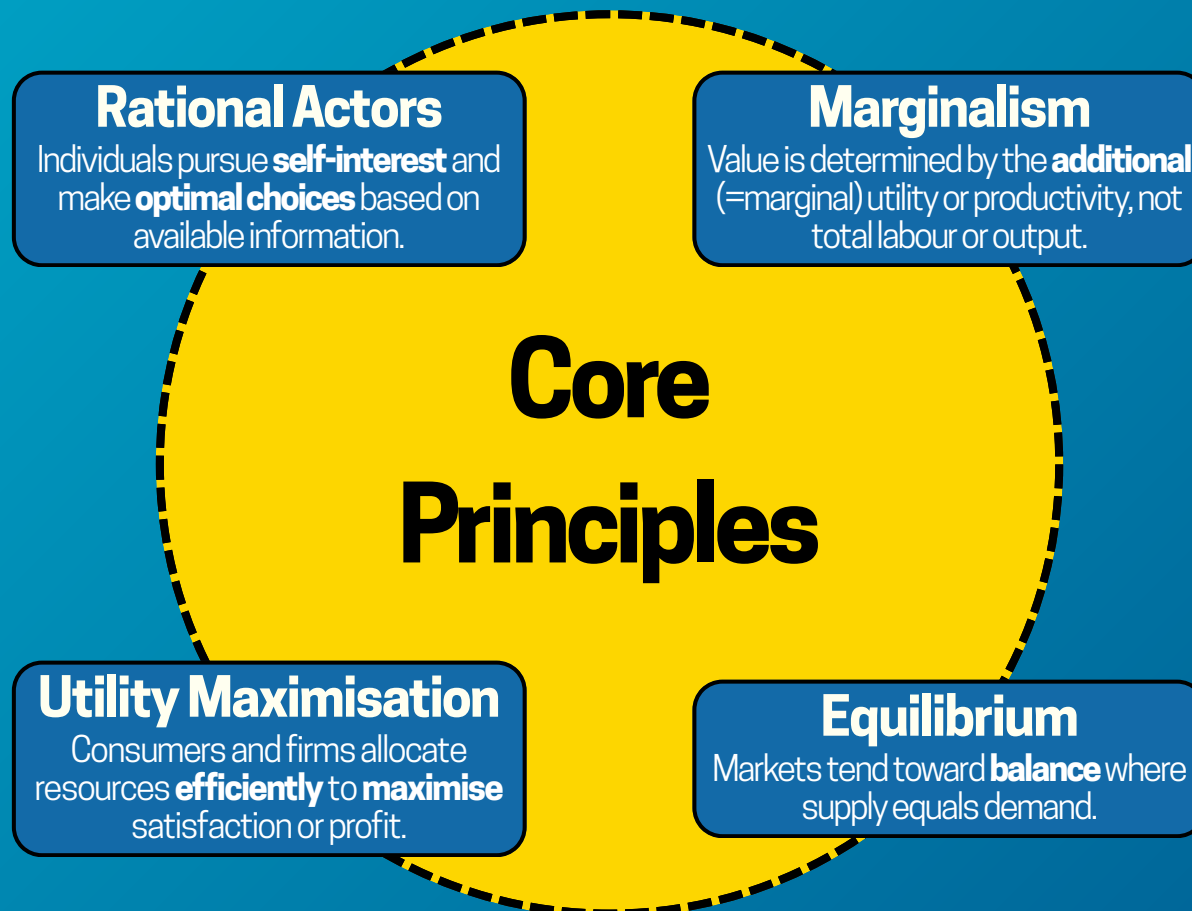


William Jevons



Léon Walras

Philippe-Félix Dupuis (painter). Photographic reproduction by Claude Bornand, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons



Utility in Intl'l Relations

Market Liberalism:

Forms the **intellectual base** for **economic interdependence theory** - the idea that open markets foster stability and peace.

Global Institutions:

Inspired frameworks of neoliberal **institutionalism** and **trade liberalisation** (e.g., Bretton Woods, WTO, IMF).

Policy Legacy:

Influences modern cost-benefit analysis, rational choice, and game theory - all tools that are **widely used** in diplomacy and international policy analysis.

5. Political Economy

5.5. Keynesianism

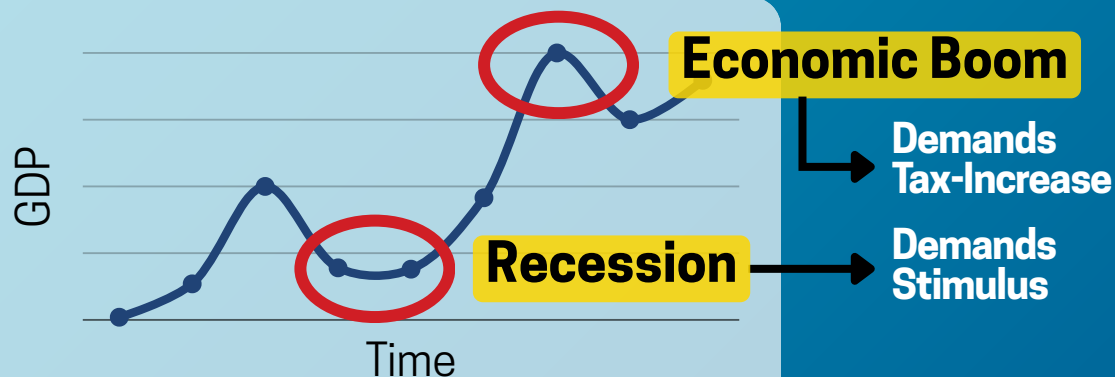


Keynesianism emerged in the 1930s as a response to the Great Depression and the perceived failures of classical and neoclassical economics. **John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946)** argued that markets **do not automatically self-correct** and that insufficient aggregate demand can trap economies in **prolonged recessions**, requiring **active state intervention** to restore growth and employment.

Keynesian policy aims to **flatten the curve** of economic volatility: **stimulating** during **recessions**, **cooling** during **booms**. 91

Core Ideas

- Role of Government** The state must step in to **manage demand** through fiscal and monetary policy.
- Multiplier Effect** Government spending can **boost** income and consumption, leading to **economic recovery**.
- Counter-Cyclical Policy** Spend in downturns, save in booms. This **stabilises** the economy across business cycles.
- Short-Term Focus** "In the long run, we are all dead." - Keynes argues that policy should address **current crises**, not only future equilibrium.



Utility in Intl'l Relations

- Justifies **active** state intervention
- Influenced **post-WWII reconstruction** (Marshall Plan) and **welfare states**
- Underpinned the **Bretton Woods System** - fixed exchange rates and IMF lending for stability.

5. Political Economy

The Bretton Woods System and Global Economic Governance

After World War II, the 1944 **Bretton Woods Conference** established a new international economic order aimed at stability, reconstruction, and growth. It created **institutions** to manage trade, finance, and development, embedding **economic cooperation** (and *U.S. Dominance*) within a **liberal world order**.

Key Organisations

IMF (International Monetary Fund)

Ensures **monetary stability**; provides short-term **financial support** to countries in crisis

➡ Central in managing debt crises, e.g. the Asian Financial Crisis 1997

World Bank

Provides **long-term** development loans and **poverty reduction** programmes

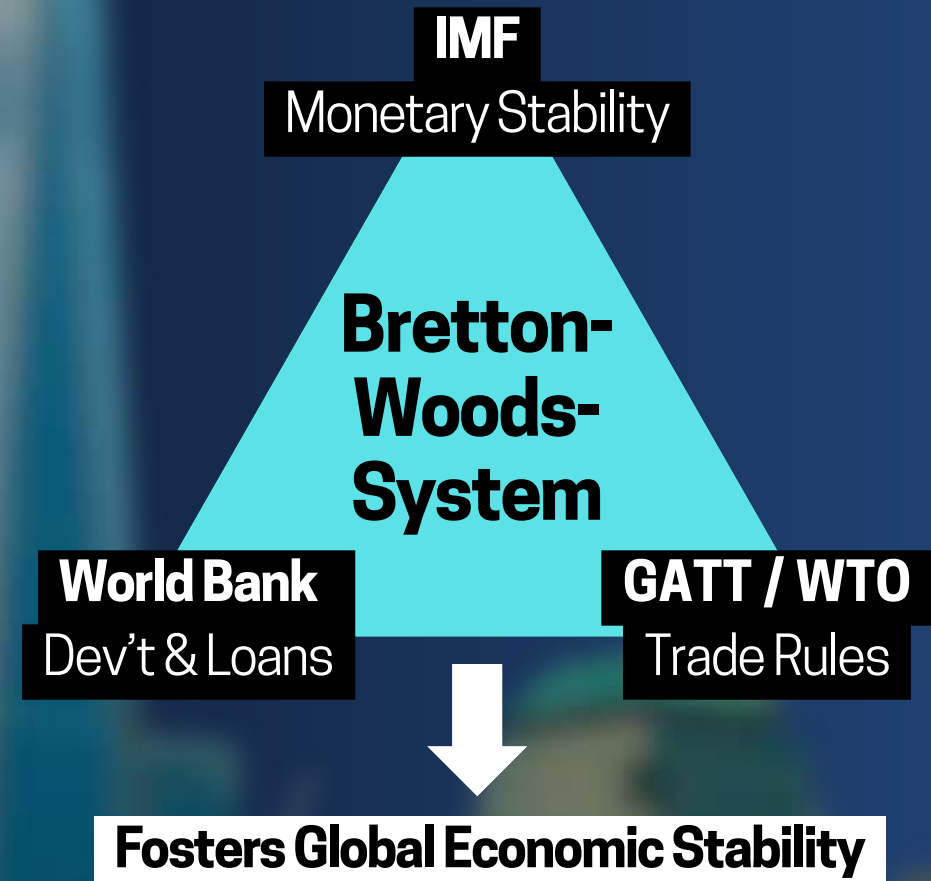
➡ Key actor in sustainable development & post-conflict reconstruction

GATT → WTO (World Trade Organisation)

Promotes **free trade** by reducing tariffs and trade barriers

➡ Central forum for trade disputes and rule-making

Read more on the **Impact of Trade Wars on the Bretton Woods System** in Matthew Malliband's Article in the first **EPIS Report on International Economic Relations**



5. Political Economy

5.6. Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism emerged in the late 20th century as a response to Keynesian interventionism and state-led development. At its core is the view that **markets**, not governments, constitute the **most efficient means to organise society**. In that, Neoliberalist theory promotes **market efficiency**, **deregulation**, and **limited government**.

Key Theory: **Public Choice Theory** (Buchanan & Tullock)

Public Choice Theory analyses political decision-making by applying **microeconomic principles**. It posits that individuals in the political process, such as voters, legislators, and bureaucrats, are motivated by **self-interest**, not the public good. This theory is used to explain phenomena like **government growth**, the influence of **special interest groups**, and the **behaviour of elected officials**.



Implications for International Relations

Explains why states may pursue **national interest** over collective goods.

Associated with **austerity politics**, which may deepen inequality and weaken public institutions.

Important Thinkers:

Joshua Paquin,
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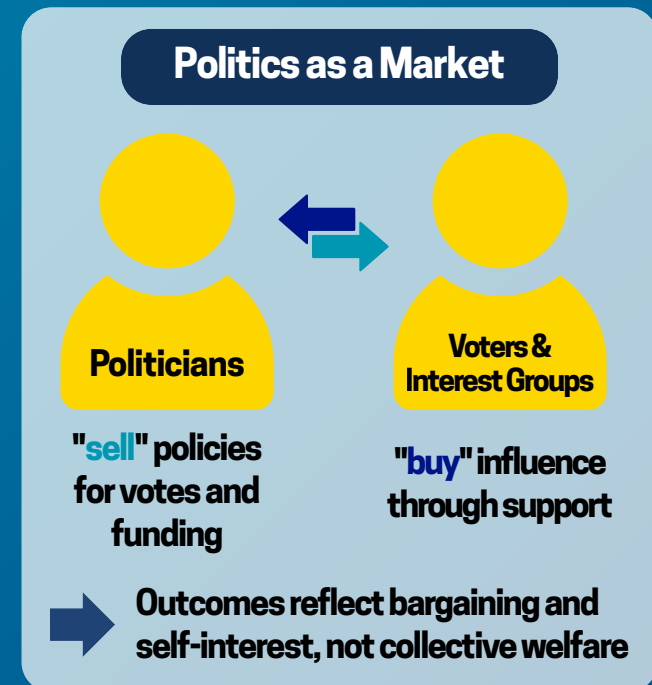


Gordon Tullock



James Buchanan

Atlas Network Official
website, CC BY-SA 3.0
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5. Political Economy

5.7. Critical Political Economy: Post-Colonial Perspectives

Post-colonial political economy (PE) critiques how global capitalism **perpetuates** hierarchies **rooted in colonialism**. It argues that “independence” did not end economic dependency, as the Global South remains integrated into a world economy designed to **serve the Global North’s interests**.

Key Mechanisms

- **Unequal Exchange** Peripheral states export low-value goods, import high-value goods.
- **Structural Dependency** Institutions like the IMF and World Bank **reinforce dependency** via debt and conditionalities.
- **Global Value Chains** Modern trade still mirrors **colonial patterns**: resource extraction in the South, production and profit in the North.

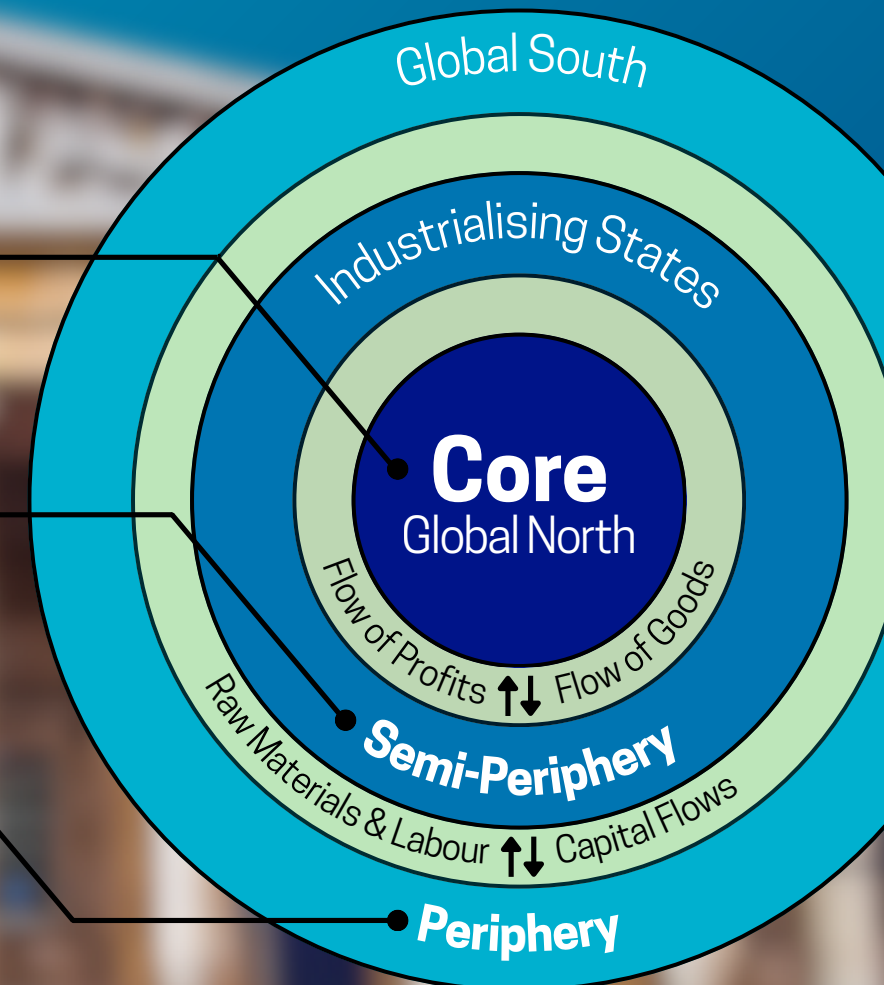
Current-Day Relevance

- **Extractive industries** and **climate injustice**
- Cooperation **outside** the Global North (BRICS, G77) as **pushback** against systemic inequality

- High-income economies
- Capital & tech control
- Extract value via trade and finance

- Industrialising nations
- Buffer zone between core periphery
- Mixed dependence

- Resource exporters
- Low-value production
- Dependent on foreign investment and markets



5. Political Economy

5.8. Green Political Economy

Green Political Economy analyses how economic systems interact with **ecological limits**. It critiques conventional economic models that prioritise growth and often **ignore ecological costs**, advocating instead for a "green economy" that improves well-being while reducing **environmental risk**. This approach examines the political and institutional factors that influence the transition to sustainability, including trade, finance, and energy, and explores solutions like **green growth, degrowth**, and **new policy frameworks**.

Perspectives on Economic Growth

Conventional Growth (Neoliberal Paradigm)

- Economic growth = measure of progress
- Technology and markets as solutions to environmental problems
- Focus on efficiency and innovation within existing systems

Green Growth (Reformist Approach)

- Seeks to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation
- Promotes renewable energy, circular economies, and green technology
- Full decoupling remains empirically unproven

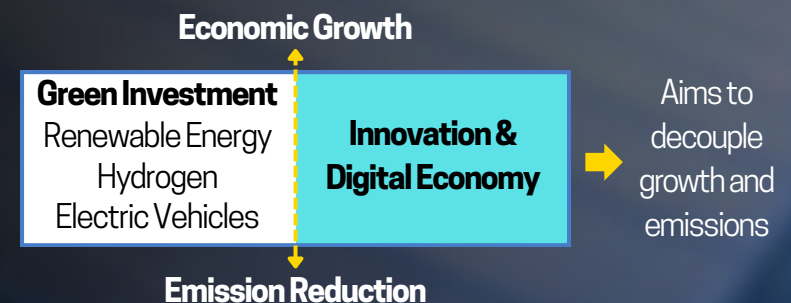
Degrowth (Transformative Approach)

- Calls for a reduction in production and consumption
- Prioritises wellbeing, equality, and ecological balance over GDP
- Politically challenging & Implementation strategies unclear

Case Study: South Korea's Green New Deal

South Korea's Green New Deal seeks to achieve sustainable economic recovery through **green infrastructure, renewable energy**, and **low-carbon innovation**. Key measures include large-scale investments in **solar and wind power**, support for **electric and hydrogen vehicles**, the construction of **zero-energy buildings**, and **digital solutions** for energy efficiency.

➡ Green Growth Approach



5. Political Economy

5.9. Summary

Political economy explores **how politics and economics interact**, shaping wealth, power, and societal structures. Understanding these frameworks helps explain **global trade, development, and economic policy**.

Historical & Classical PE

Mercantilism: State-Controlled Trade and Power

Classical PE: Value & Growth Mechanisms
Ricardo, Smith, Mill

Reincarnation in current-day trade protectionism

Market & Liberal Approaches

Neoclassical: Markets & Efficiency

Keynesianism: Gov't Spending Stabilises the Economy

Neoliberalism: Free Trade; Public Choice Theory



Critical & Alternative PE

Post-Colonial: Global Inequalities and Dependency

World-Systems Perspective



Sustainability & Society

Green PE: Environmental Constraints on Growth

→ **De-Growth vs Green Growth**

Economic growth is not unlimited

The green transition brings new growth potential

5. Political Economy

5.10. Practice Questions

1. Why is it important for policymakers to understand Political Economy when **dealing with other countries**?
2. How do classical, neoclassical, and Keynesian economic theories **differ** in their **approach to government intervention** and **market functioning**?
3. How does **Marx's theory** critique capitalism in comparison to **classical** or **neoclassical** approaches to political economy?
4. To what extent do **Public Choice** theorists challenge the idea of the government as a **neutral actor** in economic policy?
5. In what ways does **post-colonial political economy** challenge the **mainstream understanding** of global economics?
6. How is **mercantilism** still relevant in **contemporary** global politics, such as in trade wars or industrial policy?
7. How does the **interrelationship** between **society** and the **economy** affect issues such as inequality, social class, and globalisation?
8. How does the theory of the **Comparative Advantage** justify international trade, and what are its **limitations** in the context of today's globalised economy?
9. In what ways does **Green Political Economy** challenge traditional growth paradigms? Do you find the concept **convincing**?
10. **Which approach** to political economy do you align with **the most**, and why?

6. Political History

6.1. Introduction

6.2. The Birth of the State

6.3. The Middle Ages and the Feudal Order

6.4. The Rise of the Early Modern State

6.5. Enlightenment, Napoleonic Wars & The Rise of the Nation-State

6.6. The Industrial Revolution and the Rise of Modern Society

6.7. Two World Wars and a Shift in Global Power Structures

6.8. Anti-Colonial Movements and Emerging New States

6.9. The Cold War: Ideology, Alliances, and Proxy Conflicts

6.10. The 21st Century: Multipolarity and Fragmentation

6.11. Summary

6.12. Practice Questions

6. Political History

6.1. Introduction

Political history examines the **evolution** of political institutions, leaders, and ideologies, focusing on **power dynamics** and **governance**. It provides a **chronological foundation** for understanding political change and is closely linked to political science.

In a Nutshell:

- Political history studies the long-term development of states, institutions, and power relations
- By analysing turning points, it connects past dynamics with contemporary international politics

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Subjects of Study



Actors

Leaders, parties, and movements shaping political events.



Institutions

The development of governments, legal frameworks, and political organisations.



Ideas

The influence of political philosophies and ideologies.

Core Themes

Chronology & Context

Political events are shaped by the **historical moment** in which they occur. Understanding **revolutions, reforms, and conflicts** requires situating them within their wider socio-economic, cultural, and international **contexts**.

Institutions & Constitutions

Political history investigates the **development of formal structures** such as parliaments, courts, monarchies, and bureaucracies. **Constitutional history**, i.e. how legal frameworks evolve to define rights, sovereignty, and governance, is a **key subfield**.

Ideological & Political Thought

From classical republicanism to liberalism, socialism, fascism, and nationalism, political history examines **how ideas shape institutions and justify authority**. Intellectual currents often drive or accompany **political transformation**.

Reforms & Revolutions

Transformative episodes like the French Revolution, the Meiji Restoration, or post-colonial transitions mark points of rupture and redirection, when new political orders emerge from conflict or negotiation.

Power Dynamics

A central concern is how power is **acquired, exercised, and resisted**. This includes analyzing conquests, state-building, colonisation, and diplomacy, as well as internal dynamics like succession crises, civil wars, or regime changes.

6. Political History

6.2. The Birth of the State

A state is a political organisation that holds the **monopoly on the legitimate use of force** within a defined territory (Weber). It maintains order, enforces laws, and represents its citizens both domestically and internationally. The state combines sovereignty, territory, population, and institutions, which together form the **basis of modern governance**.



Why do we need states?

Without a central authority, individuals face **collective action problems**: a situation where everyone benefits from cooperation, but each has an incentive to free-ride.

A state helps **coordinate** collective action, **enforce** cooperation, and **provide public goods** that private actors cannot efficiently deliver, such as defence or justice.

Historical Emergence

Early Civilisations

- **Mesopotamia & Egypt** centralised rule and legitimised it by divine authority
- **Ancient China** established bureaucratic governance and merit-based administration

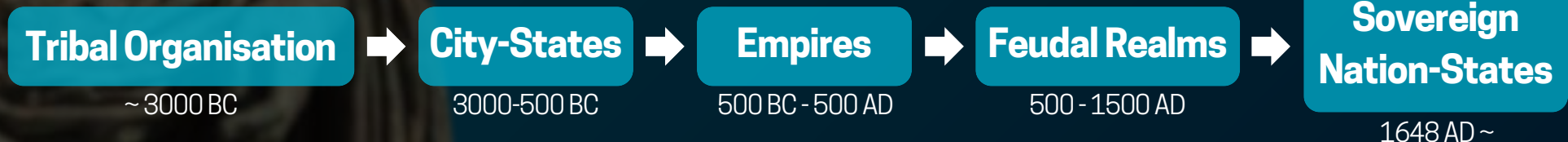
City-States and Citizenship

- **Ancient Greece** introduced participatory governance, foreshadowing democracy
- **Rome** developed the res publica - the foundation of civic identity and citizenship

Sovereignty & the Modern State

- The **Peace of Westphalia (1648)** formalised **state sovereignty** based on non-interference and territorial integrity
- This time marked the transition from **feudal** and **religious** authority to **secular statehood**

The Evolution into the Modern Nation State



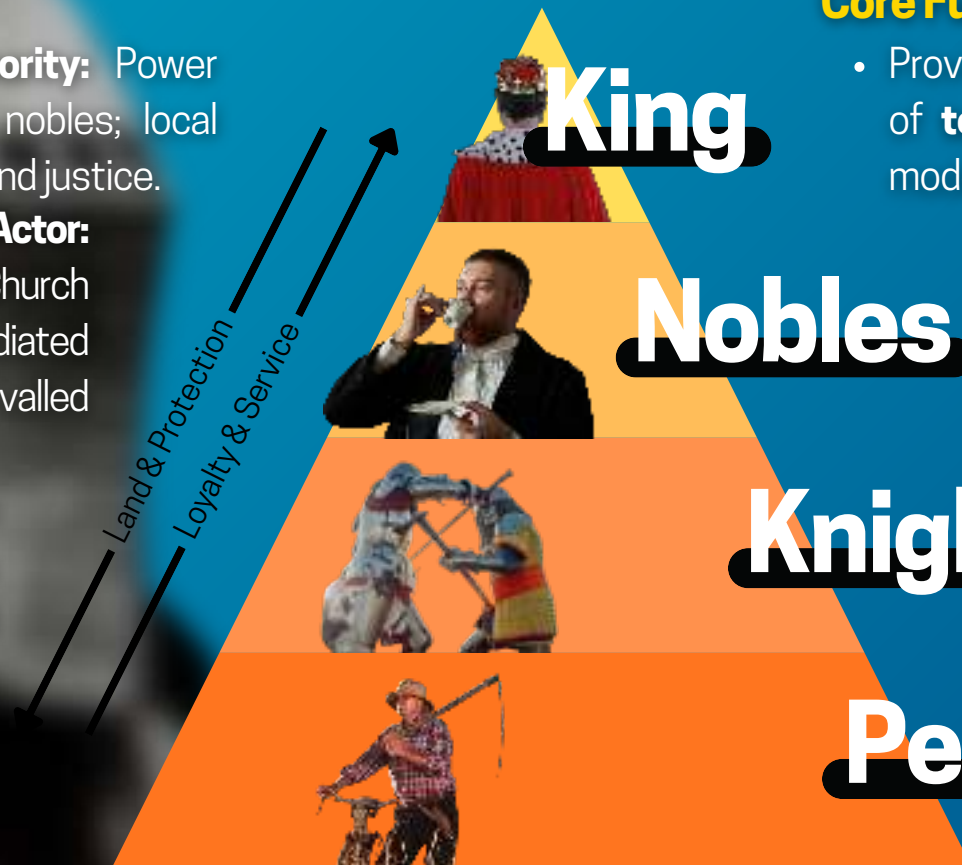
6. Political History

6.3. The Middle Ages and the Feudal Order

After the collapse of the Roman Empire (5th century CE), Europe fragmented into a feudal system: a **decentralised** political order built on **land ownership**, **loyalty**, and **hierarchy** rather than centralised state authority. **Power was personal**, not territorial: kings, nobles, and the Church shared overlapping spheres of influence, and allegiance flowed through **vassalage** rather than citizenship.

Characteristics:

- **Decentralised Authority:** Power was divided among nobles; local lords controlled land and justice.
- **Church as a Political Actor:** The Catholic Church legitimised rule, mediated disputes, and often rivalled monarchs in power.
- **Fealty & Vassalage:** Political relationships based on loyalty and mutual obligation, not formal law.



Core Functions of the Feudal Order:

- Provided the **foundation** for the emergence of **territorial monarchies** and, eventually, modern states
- Maintained **stability** and **protection** in an era without strong central states
- Created **hierarchical social structures** that shaped later **class relations**

6. Political History

6.4. The Rise of the Early Modern State - The Treaty of Westphalia

From the 15th century onward, Europe saw the gradual **centralisation of political power** and the **decline of feudal fragmentation**. Monarchs **consolidated** authority, bureaucracies expanded, and standing armies replaced feudal levies. This era laid the foundations for the **modern sovereign state**.

Key Developments

Centralisation of Authority:

Monarchs weakened feudal lords and created professional administrations

Taxation and Bureaucracy:

Regular taxation and permanent bureaucracies emerged to fund wars and governance

Military Revolution:

Advances in warfare required central control and fiscal capacity

Mercantilism:

Economic thought aligned with state power: wealth and trade were tools of national strength

The Treaty of Westphalia

Ended the **Thirty Years' War** (1618–1648), one of Europe's most devastating religious conflicts between Catholic and Protestant powers. The treaty was a series of peace agreements signed in Münster and Osnabrück.

Its key significance lies in the **principles of state sovereignty, legal equality** between states, and the **non-interference** in domestic affairs, which shifted power from empires and religious authorities to **individual rulers and states**. The treaty also promoted **religious tolerance** by allowing rulers to determine their state's religion, **decreasing** the role of religion in international conflicts.

➡ The negotiations set a precedent for **diplomatic congresses** as a way to **resolve conflicts**, establishing a new approach to peacemaking.

➡ The treaty established the **Westphalian state system**, which rests on the principles of sovereignty and remains central to international relations today.

6. Political History

6.5. Enlightenment, Napoleonic Wars & The Rise of the Nation-State

The late 18th and early 19th centuries marked a turning point in global political history. Enlightenment ideals **challenged hereditary rule**, giving rise to **revolutions** that replaced dynastic rule with **popular sovereignty**. The American (1776) and French (1789) Revolutions ignited waves of political transformation, leading to the reorganisation of Europe under Napoleon Bonaparte. The ensuing **Congress of Vienna** (1815) sought to restore order by re-establishing monarchies and introducing a diplomatic **balance of power system** that defined 19th-century international relations.

Enlightenment

Philosophers questioned divine monarchy and argued that legitimate authority derives from the **consent of the governed**. This laid the **intellectual groundwork** for modern democracy and constitutionalism.

Napoleonic Wars

Napoleon's conquests exported revolutionary reforms, such as legal equality and meritocracy, **across Europe**, but also **provoked resistance and nationalism**. His wars reshaped Europe's **political map** and exposed the **instability** of unbalanced power systems.

National Unification

Driven by **nationalism** and **industrial ambition**, fragmented regions consolidated into unified **nation-states** (Germany, Italy). These new states shifted Europe's **power balance** and set the stage for **imperial competition** in the early 20th century.

Propelled Germany's Unification in the 19th century: **Otto von Bismarck**

17th-18th centuries latter 18th century

1799-1815

1815

second half of the 19th century

Revolutions in FR & the U.S.

Enlightenment gave rise to **revolutionary movements** that challenged monarchic rule and established **republican** forms of government.

- French Revolution
- American Revolution

The Congress of Vienna (1815)

European powers met to **restore monarchies** and create a **stable diplomatic order** after Napoleon's defeat. The resulting Concert of Europe established **norms of collective security** and **multilateral diplomacy** that anticipated modern international cooperation.



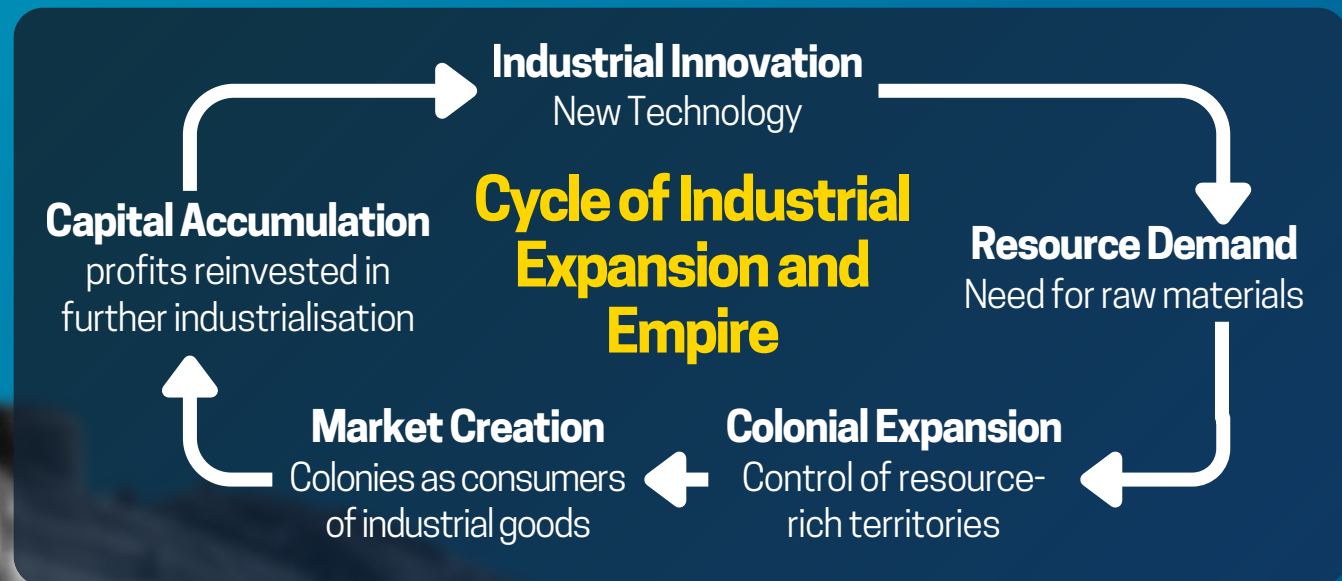
6. Political History

6.6. The Industrial Revolution and the Rise of Modern Society

The **Industrial Revolution** (mid-18th to 19th century) transformed economies, societies, and political structures. Originating in **Britain**, it marked the shift from agrarian economies to **industrial production**, **urbanisation**, and **technological innovation**, which redefined power relations in the international arena.

Key Developments

- **Economic Transformation:** Mechanisation, factories, and mass production increased **productivity and trade**, laying the foundation for **capitalism**
- **Urbanisation:** Rapid population growth in industrial cities changed **social hierarchies** and created a **new working class**
- **Political Change:** The rise of the bourgeoisie and labour movements demanded **political participation** and **workers' rights**
- **Global Impact:** Industrial powers sought **raw materials** and **markets abroad**, fuelling imperial expansion and global inequality



Industrialisation enabled the **mass production** of **standardised** weapons and supplies and the **rapid deployment** of forces, which **revolutionised** warfare

Gave rise to the concept of **Total War**, where nation mobilises **all of its resources**, including its entire population, industry, and finances, to **wage war**

Facilitated **colonialisation** by providing the **technological means** (steamships, advanced weaponry) to **project power overseas** and creating **economic demands** for raw materials and new markets

6. Political History

6.7. Two World Wars and a Shift in Global Power Structures

The two World Wars of the 20th century **transformed** the global political and economic order. They **dismantled empires**, **accelerated** technological and industrial **change**, and redefined power relations. After 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as **superpowers**, replacing Europe as the centre of world politics and marking the beginning of a bipolar international system.



The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria led to a chain reaction that triggered WWI

World War I (1914–1918):

- **Ended** the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, German, and Russian **empires**
- Introduced the concept of **collective security** through the League of Nations
- **Redrew borders** in Europe and the Middle East, sowing seeds for future conflict



The Treaty of Versailles contributed to Germany's political instability after WWI

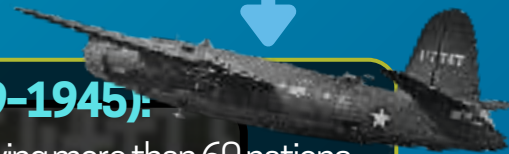
Interwar Period (1919–1939):

- **Economic instability** (Great Depression) and **political extremism** weakened democracies
- Rise of **fascism** and **militarism** in Europe and Asia



World War II (1939–1945):

- Global conflict involving more than 60 nations
- **Massive destruction** led to the **UN's creation** in 1945 to promote peace and cooperation
- Colonial troops' participation spurred post-war **decolonisation** movements



Post-War Order (1945~):

- **Power shifts** from Europe to U.S.–Soviet bipolarity
- Foundation of the **Bretton Woods institutions** (IMF, World Bank) to rebuild the global economy
- Beginning of the **Cold War competition** shapes international alignments



6. Political History

6.8. Anti-Colonial Movements and Emerging New States

The 20th century saw the dismantling of colonial empires and the **emergence** of new, independent states. As European powers weakened after two world wars, **demands** for sovereignty, equality, and dignity grew louder across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. **Anti-colonial movements** arose as political struggles for independence, but later became **intellectual projects** that redefined concepts of modernity, development, and identity. These movements **challenged** the **Eurocentric idea** that progress and order flowed only from the West, seeking instead to establish **autonomous** paths of governance, culture, and economy.

Mahatma Gandhi:

Advocated **nonviolent resistance** and **moral legitimacy** as tools against imperial domination

Frantz Fanon:

Argued that decolonisation required **psychological liberation** from the coloniser's worldview and sometimes **violent resistance**

Amílcar Cabral:

Emphasised **national liberation** as both a political and cultural revolution

Post-World War II Context:

- The **devastation** of Europe and the **rise** of the U.S. and USSR **weakened** colonial powers
- The Atlantic Charter (1941) and UN Charter (1945) promoted the principle of **self-determination**, giving moral and legal **weight** to independence movements

➡ Three Waves of Decolonisation



Asia

India (1947) led by Gandhi's nonviolent resistance; Indonesia (1949) under Sukarno's nationalist mobilisation; Vietnam's armed struggle (1954).



Middle East

Egypt's 1952 revolution under Nasser combined Arab nationalism with anti-imperialist solidarity.



Africa

Ghana's independence (1957) inspired a continental wave; Algeria (1962) achieved independence after a brutal anti-colonial war.

Can the rise of Global South cooperation (e.g. G77) be seen as a 'fourth wave' of decolonisation?

The Bandung Conference

Held in 1955 in Indonesia, the Bandung Conference brought together **29 Asian and African nations** - newly independent or still under colonial rule - to coordinate a **shared postcolonial vision**.

Implications for International Relations

- **Expanded** the international system to over 120 states by the 1970s
- Sparked **South-South cooperation** and a push for a **New International Economic Order (NIEO)** in the 1970s

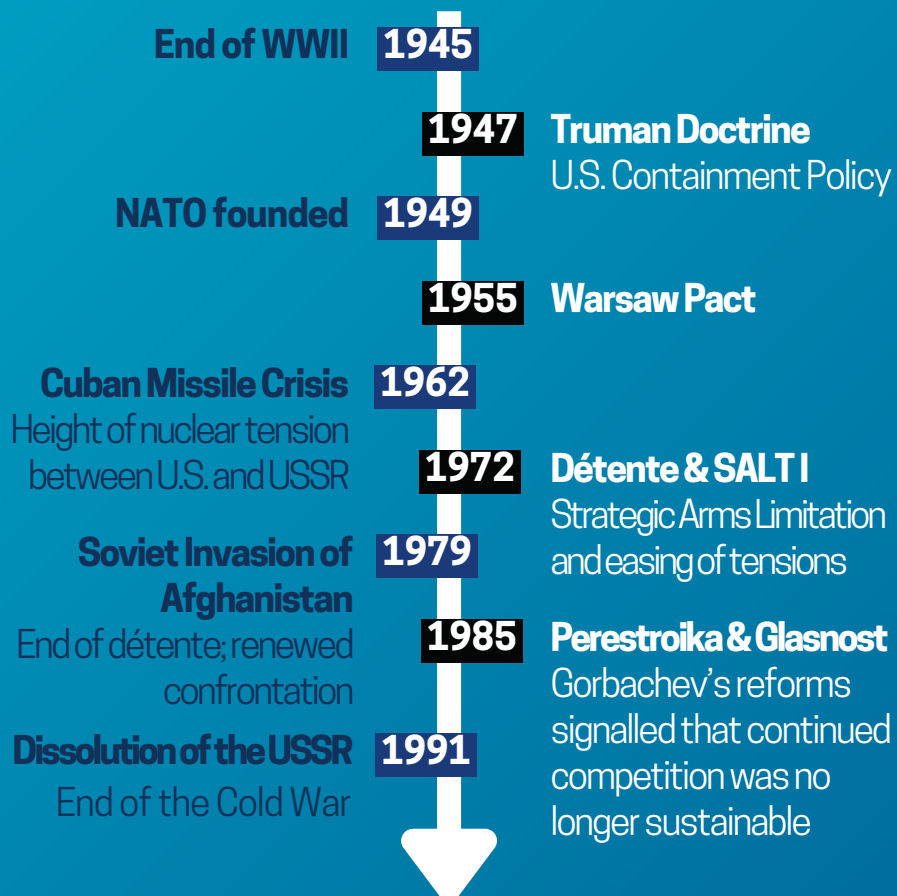
➡ Laid the groundwork for the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)**

6. Political History

6.9. The Cold War: Ideology, Alliances, and Proxy Conflicts

The Cold War marked the **division** of the international system into two **opposing ideological and geopolitical blocs** led by the United States and the Soviet Union. Rather than direct military confrontation, competition unfolded through **proxy wars**, **arms races**, **technological rivalry**, and the struggle for **ideological influence** in newly independent states.

Important Cold War Events



Western Bloc (U.S.-led)

Political System: Liberal Democracy

Economic System: Market Capitalism

Security Alliance: NATO (since 1949)

Ideological Tools: Freedom, democracy, prosperity

Soft Power: Hollywood Movies, Consumer Culture

Political System: One-Party Socialism

Economic System: State Planning, COMECON

Security Alliance: Warsaw Pact (Since 1955)

Ideological Tools: Equality, Anti-Imperialism

Soft Power: Socialist movements, education exchanges



Eastern Bloc (USSR-led)



Both blocs used **economic and ideological appeal** to **win influence** in the “Third World,” giving rise to the **Non-Aligned Movement**

6. Political History

6.10. The 21st Century: Multipolarity and Fragmentation

1991 – End of the Cold War

The collapse of the Soviet Union leaves the United States as the **sole superpower**; optimism about a **liberal, rules-based global order**

1995 – Globalisation Peaks

Creation of the **WTO** and expansion of **free trade**; **liberal democracy** seen as the dominant model

2001 – 9/11 and the War on Terror

Shift from liberal peace to **security-driven foreign policy**. U.S. **interventions** in Afghanistan and Iraq strain global alliances and legitimacy

2010s – Regional Power Assertion

- China's **Belt and Road Initiative** (2013) expands economic and strategic influence
- Russia's **resurgence** (Crimea 2014, Syria 2015)

2008 – Global Financial Crisis

Erodes faith in Western economic models; accelerates the **rise of China** and calls for **reform** of global financial governance

2020 – COVID-19 Pandemic

Exposes the **fragility** of globalisation and supply chains; nationalism and protectionism **rise**; digital and health governance gain **strategic value**

2022 – Russia Invades Ukraine

Marks **open confrontation** between **liberal** democracies and **revisionist** powers; NATO revitalised; **energy geopolitics** reshaped

2020s – The Multipolar Era

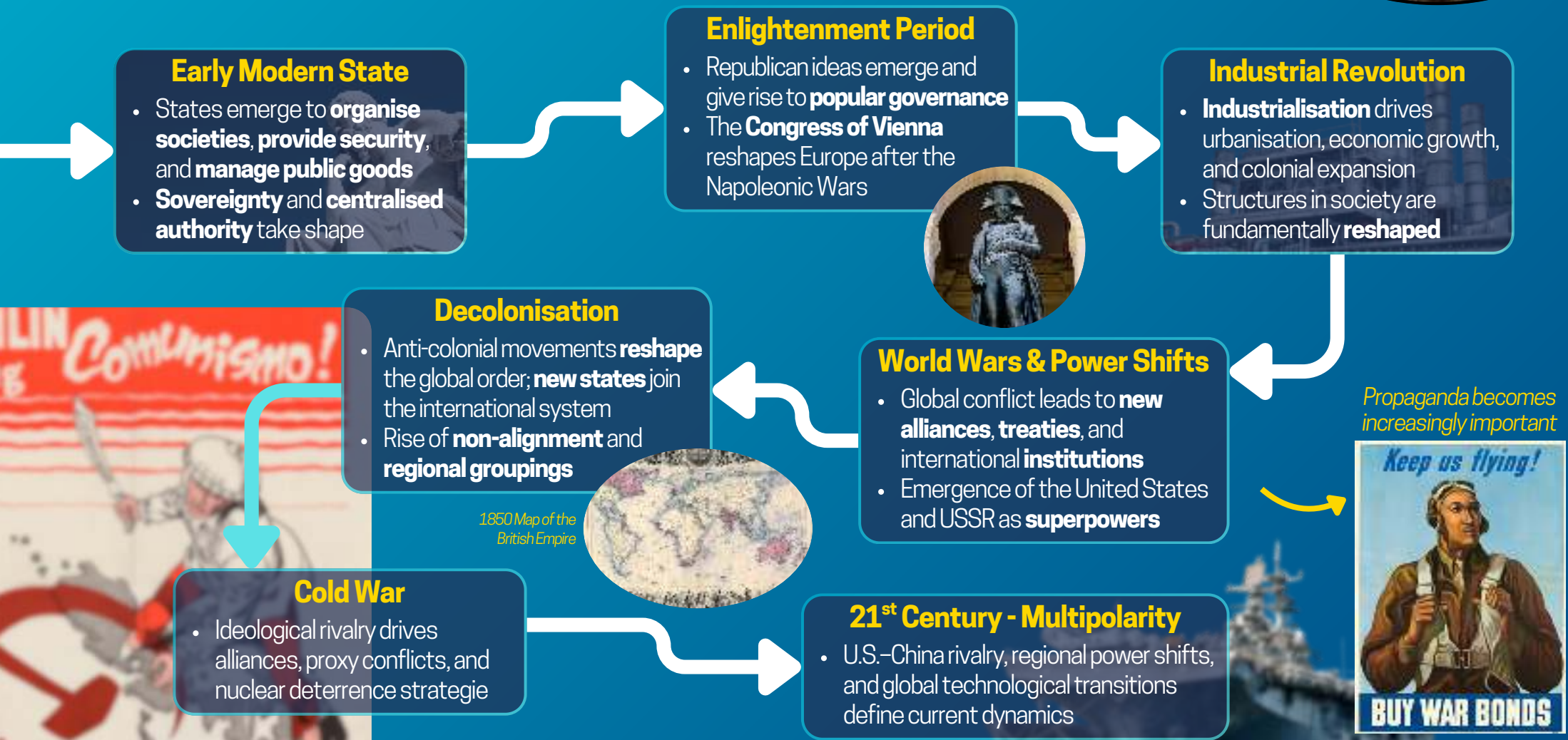
The 2020s are defined by a **multipolar world**, where **U.S.-China rivalry** shapes global politics and emerging alliances such as **BRICS**, **AUKUS**, and the **Quad** reflect competing power centres.

Technological races in AI, semiconductors, and the implementation of **green industrial policies** create new arenas of competition, while the **Global South** increasingly asserts itself through **non-alignment** and **issue-based diplomacy**.

6. Political History

6.11. Summary

Political history helps us **understand** how states, societies, and global power structures have **evolved**. These **historical developments** shape **contemporary** international relations, governance, and social organisation.



6. Political History

6.12. Practice Questions

1. What are the **defining features** of a state, and how do they **differ** from earlier political organisations such as tribes or empires?
2. How did the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) **transform** the structure of international relations?
3. How might the principles of the Treaty of Westphalia be **challenged by modern issues** such as humanitarian intervention or cyber warfare?
4. In what ways did the Enlightenment **challenge traditional authority** and contribute to the rise of **modern political thought**?
5. How did the Industrial Revolution contribute to the “**Scramble for Africa**”?
6. How did **decolonisation** reshape global politics and **redefine** sovereignty in the **mid-20th century**?
7. What institutional legacy did the **Bretton Woods system** leave for **today’s global economy**?
8. Compare the power politics of the Cold War with today’s **U.S.-China rivalry**. Are there **similarities** in strategy and ideology?
9. What were the major **geopolitical** and **economic consequences** of the **collapse** of the Soviet Union?
10. How do **current global institutions** reflect or depart from the balance-of-power logic of the **19th century**?
11. Can the **European integration project** be seen as a **response** to the failures of early 20th-century **nationalism**?

7. Political Sociology

7.1. Introduction

7.2. Major Theoretical Approaches

7.3. The State, Power, and Participation

7.4. Identity, Ideology, and Contemporary Challenges

7.5. Critique and Challenges

7.6. Summary

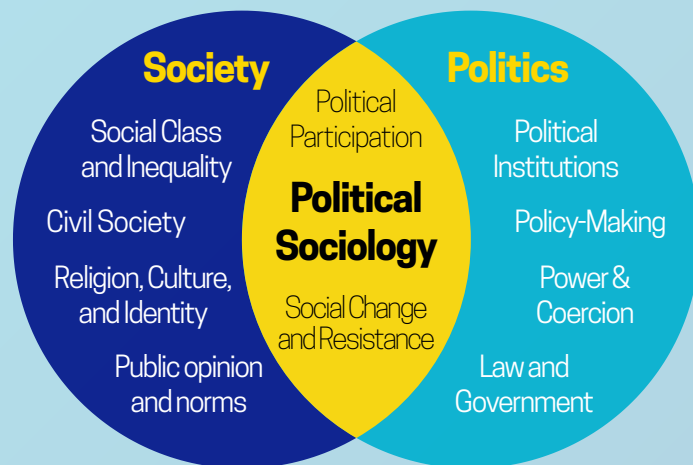
7.7. Practice Questions

7. Political Sociology

7.1. Introduction

Definition:

Political sociology examines the **relationship** between **society and political power**: how social structures, values, and identities shape political life, and how political institutions, in turn, influence social organisation. It explores questions such as **who holds power**, how it is **exercised**, and why people **obey or resist** authority.



Political sociology is important to understand ...

- The **root causes** of political inequality and conflict
- The **role of culture** in shaping political ideologies
- The **mechanisms** through which social movements achieve change

In a Nutshell:

- Investigates the interplay between politics and the society
- Explores how different actors shape political outcomes

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Political sociology emerged in the 19th and early 20th centuries and grew out of the foundational theories that each offered **distinct approaches** to understanding power and governance.



Max Weber
emphasised
legitimacy and
bureaucracy



Karl Marx
saw the state as
an instrument of
class domination



Emile Durkheim
focused on **social cohesion**
and **institutional stability**

7. Political Sociology

7.1. Introduction

Core Concepts

State and Society: A Site of Contestation

The state is often viewed as the central locus of power, but political sociology sees it as a **contested space**, where competing social forces **vie for influence**.

Example

The **Arab Spring** demonstrated how grassroots mobilisation can **challenge** entrenched political power

Based on **bureaucratic structures** and **codified laws** (e.g., modern democracies, the European Union, and administrative states).

Legal-Rational Authority

Weber's Typology of Legitimacy

Traditional Authority

Rooted in **historical continuity, customs, and hereditary rule** (e.g., the British monarchy or tribal leadership in Afghanistan).

Charismatic Authority

Derived from the **personal qualities** of leaders who **inspire devotion** (e.g., Napoleon Bonaparte, Mahatma Gandhi, or Barack Obama).

Citizenship and Political Participation

Political sociology examines how individuals **engage** in the **political process** beyond just voting - through **protests, lobbying, civil disobedience, and digital activism**.

Examples

The **Yellow Vests Movement** in France (2018-2020) signaled deep **economic grievances** among working-class citizens

The **Hong Kong Pro-Democracy Movement** (2019-2020) mobilised millions in protest against reductions in Hong Kong's political autonomy

7. Political Sociology

7.2. Major Theoretical Approaches

Durkheimian Perspective: Political Stability and Social Order

Émile Durkheim emphasised that societies require **institutions** that **foster cohesion** to **prevent instability**. Political sociology examines how welfare states, legal systems, and cultural norms maintain stability (e.g., Scandinavian social democracy).

Weberian Sociology: Power Beyond Class

Max Weber suggested that power is derived from class, status, and party. Unlike Marx, he argued that **bureaucracy** and **rationalisation** shape modern governance (e.g., the rise of technocratic governance in the EU).

Classical Theories

Modern Political Sociology

Key Concepts

- Class Conflict:** Power is **dispersed** among competing interest groups (→ lobbying)
- Postmodernism:** Power operates through **discourse**, **knowledge**, and **surveillance**
- Elite Theory:** A small group of **elites control power**, shaping policy to **benefit themselves** (e.g., Wall Street influence on U.S. economic policy).

Marxism: Politics as Class Struggle

Power is a function of economic structures, with the ruling class using the state to maintain dominance over the working class

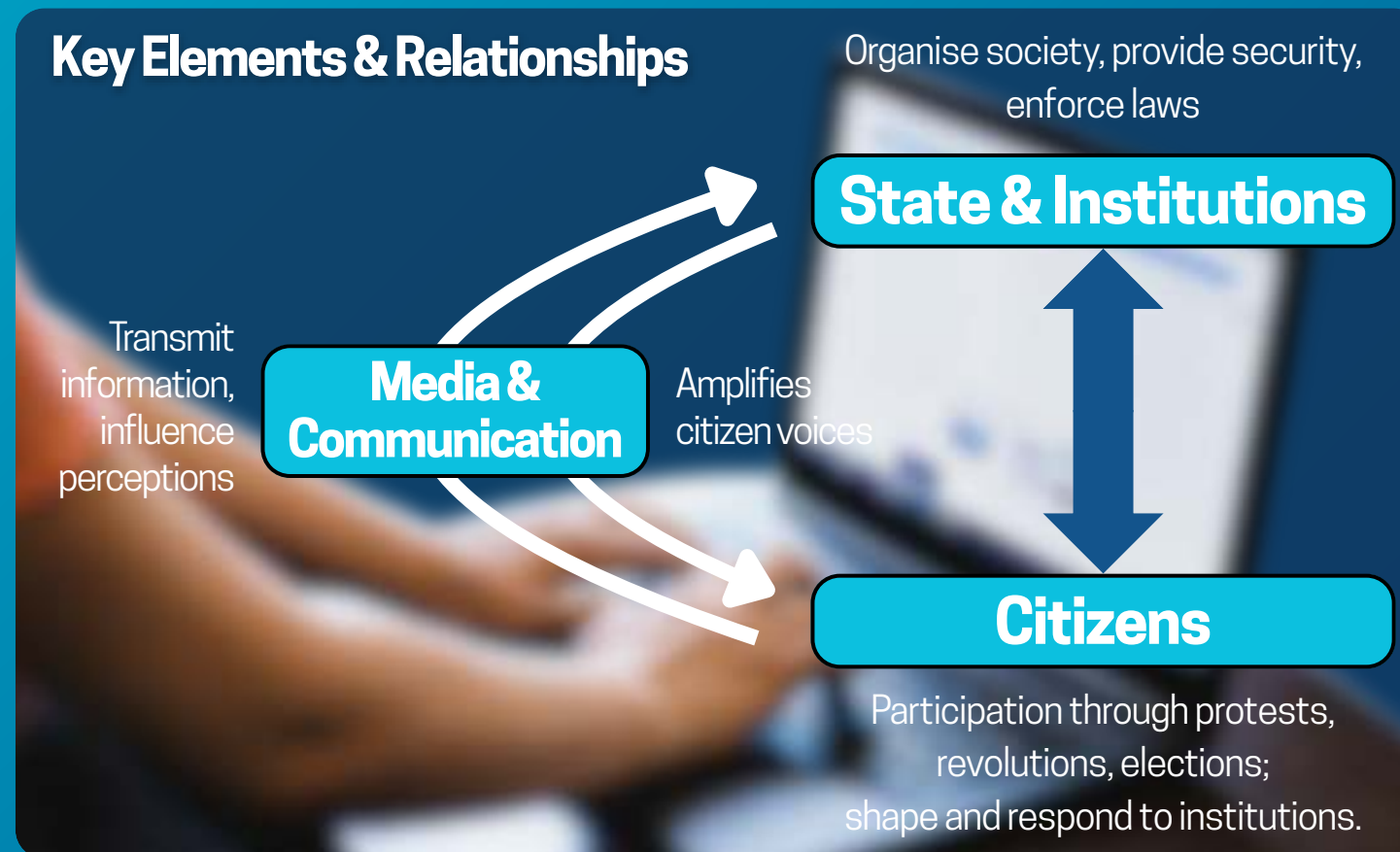
Key Concepts

- Class Conflict:** Political struggle stems from **economic exploitation**
- Revolutionary Change:** Marx foresaw **capitalism's collapse** and the **rise of socialism**

7. Political Sociology

7.3. The State, Power, and Participation

The modern nation-state, emerging from the **Treaty of Westphalia** in 1648, provides the **framework** for political authority, law, and collective action. **Democracies distribute power** through elections and the rule of law, while **authoritarian regimes centralise control** and suppress dissent. **Political participation**, from protests to revolutions, shows how citizens influence or challenge state authority. **Media and communication** shape political mobilisation, amplifying voices and framing public discourse.



Important Historical Developments

Treaty of Westphalia

Emergence of the modern state

Democratic vs. Authoritarian Evolution

Development of power distribution over time

Political Participation through Protest and Popular Uprisings

Media Evolution

Digital and Social Media alter Citizen Participation

7. Political Sociology

7.4. Identity, Ideology, and Contemporary Challenges

Power is shaped not only by institutions but also by **social identities**, **ideologies**, and **global trends**. Political sociology examines how **race**, **gender**, **religion**, and **contemporary phenomena** influence political behaviour, governance, and social inequality.

Social Roots of Power

Feminist sociology highlights **barriers** to political power (e.g., Angela Merkel vs. glass ceiling effects).

Theocratic vs. secular governance shapes law and policy (e.g., Iran vs. France)

Gender & Leadership

Religion & the State

Power Outcomes

Race & Politics

Structural inequalities affect representation and political participation (e.g., U.S. voter suppression laws).

Contemporary Challenges

Populism & Polarisation

Rise of leaders and movements **challenging traditional elites**, often framing politics as a **struggle** between “the people” and “the establishment.” Intensifies **social divisions** and **reduces** trust in democratic institutions.

Digital Surveillance

Expansion of state and corporate **monitoring technologies**, including AI, facial recognition, and big data analysis. Impacts **civil liberties**, shapes **political behaviour**, and enables **social control**.

Globalisation vs. Sovereignty

Growing **tension** between **interconnected** global economies and **national** political **autonomy**

Undermine Political Stability

7. Political Sociology

7.5. Critique and Challenges

Political sociology remains indispensable for **understanding power, resistance, and governance** in an era of rapid social change. Whether analysing elections, revolutions, or digital activism, it reminds us that politics is not just something that happens to society - it is **shaped by society itself**. Yet, the field faces ongoing **challenges**: theoretical biases, gaps in representation, and the need to adapt methods to new social and technological realities.



7. Political Sociology

7.6. Summary

Political sociology studies the **interplay between society and politics**, exploring how power, identity, institutions, and social movements shape governance and political outcomes.

Core Concepts

- **The State & Institutions** 🏛️
Organises society, enforces law, and structures power; democracies vs. authoritarian regimes
- **Political Participation & Movements** 🗣️
Citizens, protests, and media shape political outcomes; revolutions and digital activism illustrate dynamics.
- **Identity & Ideology** 👤
Race, gender, religion, and social norms influence access to power and policy preferences.
- **Contemporary Challenges** 🌐
Populism, polarisation, surveillance, globalisation tensions, and democratic erosion.
- **Biases & Methodological Challenges** ⚠️
Overemphasis on structures, Western-centric research, adapting to digital societies.



7. Political Sociology

7.7. Practice Questions

1. What are Max Weber's **three types of authority**, and how do they influence political legitimacy?
2. How does Karl Marx's theory of class struggle explain the **relationship** between **economic** and **political power**?
3. How do **pluralist** and **elite theories** of power **differ** in explaining political decision-making?
4. What role does the **state** play in political sociology, and why is it considered a **contested space**?
5. How can **social movements** challenge political structures? Provide historical or contemporary **examples**.
6. What are the different ways citizens engage in politics **beyond voting**, and how do these actions **shape** political outcomes?
7. What factors contribute to **democratic erosion**, and what are **recent global examples** of this phenomenon?
8. How has **digital activism** transformed political participation? What are its potential advantages and risks?
9. What is **populism**, and how does it challenge **traditional** political elites? Provide **examples** of populist leaders and their impact.
10. How does political sociology explain the relationship between **identity** (race, gender, religion) and **political representation**?

Conclusion

The EPIS Think Tank Study Guide on International Relations

We founded **EPIS Think Tank** to cultivate **informed** discussions and **critical thinking** about **Foreign Affairs and Security Policy** and their real-world applications. Understanding **political systems, theories, and ideologies** is essential for anyone seeking to engage meaningfully in academic, professional, or public policy **debates**. This study guide provides a **structured introduction** to political science for students beginning their academic journey, and makes complex concepts accessible while encouraging **independent analysis**.

Political science is not just about governments and policies, it examines **how power is distributed, how societies organise themselves, and how ideas shape the world**. It is a **dynamic field** that evolves with global developments and shifts in public discourse. By equipping you with **foundational knowledge**, we aim to **empower** you to critically assess political structures, **engage** in debates, and **apply** your understanding to real-world issues.

We emphasise an **interdisciplinary approach**. Political science intersects with economics, sociology, history, and philosophy, offering a **broader perspective** on the phenomena that shape our world. Throughout this guide, we explore these connections and **encourage** thinking beyond rigid academic boundaries.

Conclusion

As a **think tank**, our commitment extends beyond academics. We **promote** research, discussions, and public engagement through **various initiatives**. Our **Blog** provides analyses of contemporary political topics, while our **Working Groups** and **Report Groups** contribute to research and policy recommendations. **EPIS Basics** breaks down **complex concepts**, and the **Magazine** offers **well-founded** and **diverse perspectives** on political issues. Through **EPIS TenTalks**, we keep you updated on what matters in the field.

Political science is more than an academic discipline: it is a tool for **understanding** the world and **shaping** the future. We hope this guide provides a **strong foundation** and inspires **continued exploration** of political questions with **curiosity** and **critical thinking**. Whether your path leads to academia, policymaking, activism, or **our think tank**, the knowledge gained here will be a **valuable** resource for your intellectual and professional **growth**.

Thank You For Reading!

The Chairman and the Editors





Engage & Enact.