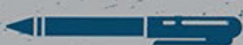


SECOND
EDITION



THE POLITICS AND IR COMPANION



ROBERT LEACH AND
SIMON LIGHTFOOT



THE POLITICS AND IR COMPANION

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SECOND EDITION

**ROBERT LEACH AND
SIMON LIGHTFOOT**



palgrave

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PREFACE



The Politics and International Relations Companion is the second edition of *The Politics Companion*, first published in 2008. That book was the eventual end product of a persuasive pitch by Steven Kennedy of Palgrave Macmillan over dinner with Robert Leach, its eventual author. At the time there was some discussion on whether there should be a separate volume on international relations. This did not materialise, so Robert Leach included some coverage on international relations. Robert later suggested that if and when a second edition was deemed necessary, an additional co-author should be involved who could provide both a fuller treatment of international relations and globalisation, as well as more up-to-date coverage of developments in pedagogy and student study skills, as Robert had by this time retired from teaching. Steven Kennedy once more used his considerable powers of persuasion to sign up Simon Lightfoot of Leeds University at a UACES Conference in Cork. Following Steven's retirement after a hugely successful career in publishing, the book was nudged towards completion in the capable hands of Lloyd Langman. Simon particularly wishes to thank Lloyd for his support and encouragement during what was a challenging period of his life. Caroline Domingo went beyond the role of copy editor suggesting some excellent additions to the manuscript and helping to bring the book to life. Chloe Osborne, Elizabeth Holmes, Ms. Soujanya Ganesh, Project Manager, Mr. Bagavathyperumal Thillainayagam and his composition team also deserve thanks for turning the draft into the finished manuscript. Any errors remain the responsibility of the authors.

Many other debts are almost too obvious, such as those to many authors, ancient and modern. In particular, Jack Holland and Laura Considine improved the sections on International Relations with supportive yet critical comments on earlier drafts. The inspiration for elements of 'researching your essay' came from a brilliant resource created by Alex Beresford, and Simon is extremely grateful to Alex for allowing the use of them here. Terry Hathaway and Mette Wiggen also suggested useful material for the study skills sections. The study skills examples were tried out on students at Leeds, and Simon thanks them for comments and feedback. Simon would also like to thank Robert, who remained supportive and encouraging throughout.

Simon wishes to record that Sam and Ben have been with him at every stage of this book. His love and thanks go out to them both. Robert once more would like to thank his loyal and supportive wife, Judith.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

Those familiar with the first edition of this book, published in 2008, will notice several significant changes in this new edition, including an additional author, Simon Lightfoot, working with Robert Leach; a change in title, to include International Relations specifically; major changes in structure; and expanded and updated content.

Additional author

The whole academic study of politics and International Relations has become so extensive and increasingly specialised that it is almost impossible for a single author to have the breadth and depth of knowledge to cover the entire discipline. In addition, Robert Leach, who is now retired from teaching, felt he needed a younger collaborator, in touch with current pedagogic developments in the delivery of the subject and with some different specialised interests within the disciplines of politics and International Relations, to help take the book forward into the future. The major contributions of Simon Lightfoot from the University of Leeds to this new edition, particularly on study skills, international relations and globalisation, should be obvious to those acquainted with the original book.

Politics and International Relations

Although the first edition was simply titled *The Politics Companion*, it included some material on international relations, as indeed any introduction to politics arguably must do. Yet it was not given extensive coverage, partly reflecting the development of International Relations as a substantially distinct discipline for much of the 20th century. Steven Kennedy, who commissioned the first edition of this book, has since written on the growth of the subject since his own time as an International Relations student in the early 1970s:

when it was a tiny subject taught (in almost all cases in small separate departments) in a number of universities you could count on your fingers. Today, by comparison it has become a dominant or central element in the curriculum of politics departments with introductory courses on global politics often the most popular with students and an increasing presence right through degree programmes. (Kennedy 2013)

We have, perhaps belatedly, acknowledged the importance of international relations to the study of politics in the title and also with expanded coverage in the text. One alternative might have been a separate volume on international relations. Yet, as International Relations already occupies such a crucial role in university politics departments, this might be a mistake. Moreover, it has become increasingly difficult to separate the politics and government of states from issues surrounding international relations, international political economy, and globalisation. Thus, there remains a strong case for studying politics and international relations together.

Changes in structure

The original structure of the book in large part reflected design and organisational constraints associated with the whole series of *Palgrave Student Companions*, which cover a diverse range of subjects, including both traditional university disciplines and more vocational courses. While the recommended framework sometimes seemed inappropriate for the study of politics, it was substantially followed in the first edition. Yet this involved an artificial separation of 'Theories and Approaches to the Study of Politics' (old Part II) and 'Key Research and Debates' (old Part V). Moreover, two essentially reference sections on key terms (old Part III) and key thinkers (old Part IV) divided the book in the middle. Both authors of the second edition argued successfully for a substantially revised (and hopefully more logical) structure. The new book is split into five parts, most of which are further subdivided into sections (as in the first edition), but the material has been significantly reordered.

The new structure

Part I 'What is Politics and What is International Relations?' is by far the shortest, although not necessarily the easiest. It discusses key issues about the nature of politics and of international relations and the interaction between them. It explores several definitions of the subject, and the continuing tension between facts and values (or positive political science and normative political theory), but concludes that politics is inherently controversial, which is part of its appeal.

Part II, entitled 'The Study of Politics and International Relations' is divided into four sections. Section 1 examines the evolution of Western political practices and ideas from the ancient Greeks to the early 20th century. Section 2 focuses on modern behavioural political science, including its implications for traditional studies of political philosophy, government and public administration. Section 3 explores the study of International Relations as an almost autonomous discipline for much of the 20th century. Section 4 discusses the impact of globalisation and international political economy both on the politics and government of states and on international relations.

Part III focuses on studying politics and international relations. Section 1 explores what students should expect from their course and the variety of programmes on offer. Section 2 provides practical advice on study skills, making the most of lectures and seminars, producing written assignments and dissertations, giving oral presentations, and revising for examinations. Section 3 concentrates on methodology. Section 4, entitled 'Research-led employability', advises on how the skills developed from studying politics and international relations can be used for employment or further study.

Part IV explores key political terms and concepts. This is a key reference source for the definition and further exploration of many of the concepts that have been highlighted in bold earlier in the text. Many of these concepts are 'essentially contested', their interpretation reflecting competing ideological perspectives, and it is important to appreciate alternative usages and shades of meaning.

Part V provides generally brief biographies, key works, and leading ideas of many of the political thinkers mentioned earlier (marked with an asterisk when first mentioned). Again, this is a key reference source. It is anticipated that students will often need to flick from earlier parts of the book to consult specific entries on both key terms and key thinkers.

Expanded and updated content

Together with the major changes outlined above in the authorship, title, and structure of the book, which have significant implications for content, every part and every section has been substantially revised and updated, to take account of more recent developments in politics and international relations and further advances in scholarship and research.

Referencing

Extensive cross-referencing is provided throughout the book. Key concepts that are defined in Part IV are highlighted in bold, and Part V provides generally brief biographies of some of the key thinkers mentioned earlier in the book (marked with an asterisk when first introduced). These include explanation of their main contribution to the study of politics, together with relevant details of their lives, work, and principal publications. There are also cross-references to other parts of the book (in brackets, with relevant page numbers) where particular theories or the ideas of key thinkers are discussed further.

References to other books and articles use the Harvard system, with brief reference to the author, date of publication, and page provided in the text and full details in the References [for an explanation of referencing systems see page 153]. We have sometimes departed slightly from the usual formula by providing the date of original publication in square brackets before the date of the edition used (and citing just this in the text where the date is significant). This is particularly important for older texts. For example, a reference only to the date of a modern translation of Rousseau or Tocqueville is unhelpful to students, who should be told when these works were actually written. Some less famous long-dead writers may even be mistaken by the unwary for modern authors.



PART I

What is Politics and What is
International Relations?



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INTRODUCTION

Assuming that most readers of this book are either already committed to, or seriously considering, studying politics and/or international relations, it seems sensible to begin by trying to define and explore these terms. After all, those who are planning to spend part of their life in studying a subject need to know what it is they are studying. Yet introductory chapters exploring the nature of a subject or discipline are often among the most difficult (and one suspects, the least read). Defining politics turns out to be far from straightforward. There are brief, snappy one-liners that are eminently quotable but often raise more questions than they answer (see [Box 1.1](#)).

Box 1.1 What is politics?

'Who gets what, when, how' (Harold Lasswell, American political scientist).

'The authoritative allocation of value' (David Easton, American political scientist).

'The art of the possible' (R. A. 'Rab' Butler, British Conservative politician).

'The personal is political' (Feminist slogan).

There are similar problems in defining international relations. Brown and Ainley (2009, 1) offer three. Firstly 'the *diplomatic-strategic* relations of *states*', secondly '*cross-border transactions* of all kinds, political, economic and social', and thirdly '*globalisation...for example world communication, transport and financial systems, global business corporations and the putative emergence of a global society*'.

Students commonly want to get to grips immediately with key issues, ideas, institutions, and processes that interest and concern them rather than abstruse debates over the nature of politics and international relations. In some respects such fundamental questions might be more easily answered at the end of a book or course than at the beginning. Certainly, they are questions to come back to and reconsider, again and again, in the light of further study. Yet they should not be ducked at the outset. None of us comes to study these subjects with a blank sheet. We all have preconceptions, notions of what politics and international relations are about, sometimes unconscious assumptions that we have not really explored. Each of us needs to confront these preconceptions, because they will shape how we approach the subject. We also need to question the assumptions of others about the nature of politics and international relations, because there are fundamentally conflicting views over what they are really about among some of the greatest thinkers who have analysed them. Different views on the nature of subjects inevitably influence what is studied and how it is studied.

POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: TWO SUBJECTS OR ONE?

One fundamental question is: are we talking here about two subjects or one? There are many courses and university departments entitled 'Politics and International Relations'. However, there are also many other courses and departments simply described as 'Politics' or 'Political Science', which do not specifically mention 'International Relations' in their title. Nevertheless, most of these may include, as compulsory elements or major options, aspects of international relations. In addition, there are other courses and departments simply entitled 'International Relations', often coexisting with quite separate courses and/or departments, described as 'Politics', 'Political Science', or sometimes 'Government', which may cover international relations only cursorily or not at all.

Indeed, for much of the twentieth century International Relations developed as a largely autonomous discipline. Very few academics were involved in research into both the domestic politics of states and international relations. Although both disciplines clearly dealt with aspects of power and conflict, and both focused on states from different perspectives, political scientists studied political institutions and processes *within* states, while international relations specialists were concerned principally with the interrelationships *between* states. Even so, as Brown and Ainley argue, 'the international and the domestic interact and cannot easily be separated.' Increasingly, as we shall see below, the politics of states and international relations are becoming more closely interdependent. Here we treat both, as distinctive, but necessarily related, aspects of politics. It is customary to refer to 'international relations' to mean the object of study (and actual relations between states/global actors) and 'International Relations' to mean the discipline. We apply this convention throughout the book to avoid confusion.

POLITICS AS GOVERNMENT, GOVERNING, OR GOVERNANCE

The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* simply defines politics as 'The science and art of government'. Certainly the institutions and personnel of government feature strongly in the treatment of politics in the media, as well as in virtually all politics textbooks. Yet what is **government**? In the media and in common speech 'the government' is generally identified with those national leaders who are currently in supreme charge of a country's domestic and foreign policy, such as the Chinese President, the German Chancellor, the UK Prime Minister, aided by other ministers, advisers and officials. This 'government of the day', as it is sometimes described, is transient and only part of a country's whole system of government or **constitution**, which includes not only the governing or '**executive**' role, but also law-making (or **legislation**) and adjudicating on

the law, the function of the **judiciary**. Additionally, those who are formally responsible for government are aided by an army of officials who advise on and subsequently implement (or sometimes fail to implement) government policy and decisions.

Even so, only the relatively few have been directly involved in government throughout recorded history. This remains true even in modern representative democracies. Abraham Lincoln's celebrated definition of **democracy** as 'government of the people, by the people, for the people' is misleading. The most that may be claimed is that the people have influence over government, but they are not, in any realistic sense, part of government. Thus, if politics is identified purely and simply with government, it effectively excludes the vast majority of ordinary people. If politics is for the many as well as the few, it must involve the governed as well as the governors. Thus government is part of politics, not the whole of it.

In so far as government is generally regarded as beneficial, or at least a necessary evil, it is because of the framework of peace, law and order that it provides within a political community or state, (although anarchists argue that we would be better off without any kind of government). Indeed, while both individual state governments and international institutions (such as the United Nations Organisation) are key players in **international relations**, the latter are still widely characterised in terms of **anarchy**, because there is no effective world government to maintain global peace, law and order. Thus if politics is simply equated with government, it hardly includes international relations.

B. Guy Peters (in Leftwich 2004, 23) argues that 'the ultimate and defining purpose of politics is governing and making public policy.' This focus on *governing*, rather than simply government, is rather broader and more inclusive. It shifts the focus from the institutions and personnel directly involved in government to the *process* of governing and to *public policy*. Many more people and organisations may be involved in the process of governing than 'the government'. Political parties, a huge range of interest groups, the media, private sector firms, and voluntary organisations of all kinds, as well as public opinion, may influence the making and implementation of public policy.

Yet governing, like government, still implies control, doing something to someone else. The few govern; the rest are governed. The fashionable term **governance** reduces this implication. Governance blurs the distinction between governors and governed and suggests we are all part of the process of governance. To quote a celebrated American book, 'Governance is the process by which we collectively solve our problems and meet our society's needs. Government is the instrument we use' (Osborne and Gaebler 1992, 24).

Within this broad process of governance the role of government itself is, arguably, changing. Modern government increasingly involves 'steering' rather than 'rowing', to employ the terminology of Osborne and Gaebler (1992, 25–48), or 'enabling' rather than 'providing'. Guy Peters (1997, 56–57) uses the term 'societal governance', while Rod Rhodes (1997, 46–60) even talks of 'governing without government'. An extreme example of the distinction is that Belgium, between the start of 2010 and the end of 2011, went 589 days without a government due to the complexity of the coalition negotiations following an election, yet the country kept functioning.

Politics is about the state

Another view is that politics is about the state. The state may be defined as a compulsory political and governmental unit that is sovereign over a particular territory. Much of the modern study of politics is clearly about the state, or states. It may sometimes focus

on the government and politics of a specific state. It may involve a more systematic comparative approach, but this in practice normally consists of comparisons between states. The study of international relations may imply a broader approach but still focuses principally on the interaction of independent sovereign states, each using its power and resources to protect and promote its own interests. While ‘supranational’ government of various kinds (for example the United Nations, the European Union) may have growing influence, as well as nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and, increasingly, transnational corporations (TNCs), many would argue that real power in international relations still rests largely with states.

Thus anyone studying politics will soon have to confront the concept of the state, which seems to involve much more than government but is difficult to define with any precision. According to some interpretations, the state appears rather sinister, something to fear (see [Box 1.2](#)). It is a compulsory association; you belong to it whether you want to or not. Moreover, both Max Weber* and Leon Trotsky* suggest that it ultimately rests on coercion or force. This matches some of our own experience and expectations. If we ignore the power of the state and flout its laws or refuse to pay its taxes, we can be punished by fines or imprisonment. Thus the state can deprive us of our property, our personal freedom, and even, in many countries, at many times, our lives. All this suggests that politics is inseparable from force and coercion (see for example Nicholson in Leftwich [2004](#), 41–52).

Box 1.2 The state

‘The state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory’ (Max Weber, German sociologist).

‘Every state is founded on force’ (Leon Trotsky, Russian Communist revolutionary).

Yet while an element of compulsion and coercion is inseparable from the conception of the state, it is also simply a political community to which people belong and to which they often feel some sense of allegiance and identity (although we acknowledge that that statement in itself is controversial). Moreover, the state protects its members from external threats and internal disorder. It provides law and security to enable people to go about their own business peacefully and pursue their own lives. The framework of the state seems the precondition of economic growth and development, as illustrated in the emergence of new states in East Asia. Modern states, moreover, can provide other services that we want and need – such as education, health care, social security, culture and civilisation. The modern state can be a ‘welfare state’.

Different conceptions of the state – the coercive and potentially oppressive state and the welfare state – underlie different views of the state and politics. Because the state has coercive power and may oppress its citizens, many have sought to limit its scope. Thus some liberals and conservatives would distinguish between the state and **civil society**, between a public sphere that is a legitimate field for state intervention and politics and a purely private sphere of home, family, and voluntary activities from which the state and politics should be firmly excluded. From some perspectives, the less the state does, the better. Economic liberals would distinguish between the state and the market and seek to exclude the state from most or all economic activity. This is a perspective that has been at the heart of the recent privatisation of many activities once run by the state.

Yet many conservatives have also emphasised the importance of maintaining the authority of the state to preserve order and protect property. Some **liberals** (sometimes called social liberals) and even some **conservatives** have sought to use the power of the state to provide opportunities to help individuals to realise their potential. Many **socialists** in the past sought to give the state much more power, to establish a political system in which the state owned the means of production and effectively controlled the economy. **Fascism** was associated with a **totalitarian** theory of the state, according to which the state was all-embracing and excluded from no sphere of activity.

All these perspectives stress the real or potential power of the state for good or evil. Yet states may not always appear so very powerful in practice. A focus on the formal institutions and processes of the state neglects the contribution to the political process of non-state organisations and interests, such as financial institutions, major manufacturers and retailers, trades unions, and other pressure groups. Some argue that it is such powerful interests that really determine key issues rather than states and their governments. Moreover, even very large and apparently powerful states may appear impotent in the grip of global economic forces they cannot control. Indeed, today large transnational corporations (TNCs) may have more effective power than many states. By contrast, we are also now familiar with the concept of failed or failing states, no longer capable of preserving law and order within their boundaries. One implication is that those who wish to study politics should focus on power rather than states or their governments.

POWER

The notion that politics and international relations are essentially about **power** implicitly or explicitly underpins many approaches to the study of the subject. Those who argue politics is about power do not necessarily accept that power rests where constitutions or laws claim. Indeed, some argue that effective political power may rest outside government and the formal apparatus of the state altogether, with, for example, the army, powerful economic interests, media moguls, religious leaders, and, in the international sphere, transnational corporations (TNCs). In such circumstances government ministers and state officials may appear mere puppets of others who control the real strings of power.

Box 1.3 What is power?

'Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun' (Mao Zedong*, Chinese Communist leader).

Power is 'the production of intended effects' (Bertrand Russell, British philosopher, 1938).

A has power over B to the extent that A can 'get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.' Robert Dahl*, American political scientist, 1957, 201).

'A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interest' (Steven Lukes 1974, 37).

'International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power' (Hans Morgenthau* 1948, 25).

However, those who argue that politics is about power often disagree over what political power is, who has it, and how far power is narrowly concentrated in the hands of the few or more widely dispersed. This is not an argument that can easily be resolved by appeal to the evidence, as the evidence is contentious, not least because there are considerable problems in defining power and even greater difficulties in measuring it.

Some would equate power simply with physical force or coercion. This view has already been touched upon in the discussion of the state (above) and appears to match aspects of reality. There are many examples both in the recent and more distant past of military leaders using the power of the armed forces to seize control of government (Finer [1962] 1988). The exercise of physical force seems only too obvious an aspect of modern politics around the world today, and not just within states. Military power has long been a major or decisive factor in the conduct of international relations. History shows a focus on 'Great Powers' as defined by military power and a quest for a 'balance of power'. When it was suggested that the pope might be involved in peace negotiations at the end of the Second World War, Stalin* cynically asked 'How many divisions does the pope have?' The birth of the nuclear age, whereby nuclear powers cancel each other out in defence terms, and the debates around globalisation meant that other types of state power became important within international relations. Thus we see the discussion around hard and soft power.

Thus, political power can not rest for long entirely on physical force alone. Those who seize power violently commonly seek to maintain it by other means. It is noteworthy that the three most notorious 20th-century dictators, Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin, owed neither their rise to power nor their exercise of power primarily on their control of the army and their readiness to use crude physical force, however ruthless they showed themselves to be. Instead their power rested, to a greater extent than is widely acknowledged, on the willing acceptance of their rule by many, and perhaps most, of those over whom it was exercised (although, of course, such compliance might significantly reflect government control of education and the media). The collapse of communism and the Arab Spring show that when the general population withdraw their consent for a regime, it can crumble very quickly.

Indeed, political power is more usually associated with other forms of influence than physical force. This has always been true, but it is particularly apparent in the modern world, where some form of **representative democracy** has become the most common form of government. Democracy implies that ultimately power rests with the people or at least with the majority of the people. Alexis de Tocqueville*, the generally sympathetic French observer of early 19th-century American democracy, concluded that the majority was 'all-powerful', to the extent that he was worried about the 'tyranny of the majority' (Tocqueville, [1835, 1840] tr. Bevan 2003, 287–322). Others since have talked (respectfully or critically) of the power of public opinion. Indeed, it is not difficult to find instances of governments altering course in response to a strong expression of public opinion. Yet others may point to the way public opinion may be influenced or manipulated, perhaps by government itself, perhaps by the media, perhaps by an influential minority. Indeed, the most subtle and sinister aspect of power, some would argue, is the power to shape how people think.

It has been plausibly argued, particularly by Marx* and his followers, that the ruling ideas in every age are the ideas of the ruling class. For Marx, the wealthy few, who control the 'means of production', are the real ruling class. Political power reflects economic power. Thus under **capitalism** it is the **bourgeoisie**, who own and control

capital, who really control the state and the international economy, whether they occupy a formal role in government or (more often) do not. It would be conceded, even by those American political scientists such as Dahl and Lindblom* (1953) who argue that political power is fairly widely dispersed, that business interests nevertheless wield an influence over government disproportionate to their numbers. However, although few would deny the importance of business power in modern politics, the extent of its influence and control over government is more contestable. Ultimately, the Marxist hypothesis can neither be proved nor disproved.

Others have different perspectives on who really exercises power (see [Box 1.4](#)). It has often appeared throughout history and across the modern world, that there is 'a power behind the throne'. Thus it may seem in some societies, both in the past and today, that some religious leaders have more extensive influence and real power than secular rulers and can tell them what they can or cannot do. It may be state officials, who are in theory mere functionaries only implementing government policy, who really exercise power behind the scenes. It may be simply men, who, from a radical feminist perspective, exercise power over women everywhere. It may be the rich who effectively 'call the shots', buying influence around the world without needing to exercise formal positions of power.

Box 1.4 Who has power? Various perspectives

Bureaucracy Rule of officials

Democracy Rule of the people

Oligarchy Rule of the few

Patriarchy Rule of men (literally, rule of the father)

Plutocracy Rule of the rich

Theocracy Literally rule of God; in practice rule of priests or religious leaders

Besides this question of who has power there is also the question, 'What is power for?' Is power simply an end in itself, or a means to an end? Admittedly, power itself seems to attract some people, and it has even been claimed that power is an aphrodisiac. Yet power is a capacity to do something, or 'produce intended effects' in Bertrand Russell's words ([Box 1.3](#)). Holding power is not necessarily the same as exercising it. Perhaps power should be judged in terms of outcomes. The failure to do much with power may reflect a cautious conservative political outlook or it may reflect a failure of will. However, it may also or alternatively have something to do with the constraints on power. Those who acquire prestigious political roles on the national or international stage often discover that they have less power to make real change than they expected.

Ultimately the long debate among political scientists over the nature and distribution of political power has been inconclusive. Some of the simpler definitions put forward by Dahl and others have been shown to be inadequate. However, broader and more subtle interpretations of power, including the power to set the political agenda or shape people's preferences, make it even more difficult to study its exercise. So, however power is defined, it is almost impossible to measure its distribution in the same way as, for example, the distribution of the population (by age, sex, occupation etc.) or the distribution of income and wealth. Thus Lincoln Allison (in McLean and McMillan 2009, 434) pessimistically concludes that 'the concept of power has not filled the central role in the study of politics which many pioneers hoped it would'.

CONFLICT, AND THE RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT

Some conceptions of politics and international relations make them sound rather too cosy and consensual, downplaying the inevitability of political conflict. Any decisions about who gets what, how, and when has the potential to bring different groups and organisations into conflict. In the making of public policy some win and others lose. The notion of a benign government 'steering' or 'enabling' rather ignores the point that governments often have to choose between unpalatable alternatives and take unpopular decisions. Government may also sometimes have to force its decisions on those who are strongly opposed. This is true not only of key domestic issues but of foreign policy, especially issues of peace and war, and the whole field of international relations, including defence policies and alliances with other states.

Indeed, in the conduct of international relations, while it is possible to talk of 'international governance' and the ways in which 'the international community' can work together to promote some agreed end, such as limiting climate change, or reducing global poverty, conflict has often appeared more evident than co-operation throughout much of recorded history.

A common perspective is that politics arises out of conflict. Indeed, much of the distaste that some people feel for politics seems to be related to the conflict it involves. It is sometimes imagined that much of this conflict is unnecessary, that it is artificially stimulated by politicians and political parties who feel bound to oppose whatever 'the other side' proposes or who appear to love conflict for the sake of it. Indeed, politics is often identified purely and simply with party politics and deplored for that reason. If only these partisan politicians could come together to form an all-party coalition to work for the interests of the whole country or if government could be put in the charge of some disinterested experts! Similarly, it is suggested that pressing global problems such as disarmament, third-world poverty, or climate change can be solved by international conferences of world leaders and experts. Behind such hopes there is an assumption that there is often a single 'right answer' to problems that men and women of good will, freed from partisan considerations, would discover.

Yet more commonly there is no such right answer but irreconcilable positions reflecting conflicting interests. If there were universal agreement on ends and means there would be no need for politics. Politics arises because humans disagree over issues where collective binding decisions on the whole political community are required. We have not just different but conflicting interests. States manifestly appear to have conflicting interests, which they pursue in their relations with other states.

For some, the essential conflict is between individual human beings. The English political thinker Thomas Hobbes* (1588–1679) graphically described the natural condition of humanity as a perpetual 'war of every man against every man', as they want the same things that they cannot all have, because of scarcity. This view of humanity as in ceaseless competition for scarce resources is the perspective of mainstream economics, from the classical economists such as Adam Smith* or David Ricardo down to modern neoliberal economists. Most economists assume that human beings are motivated by their own rational self-interest. It is competition between countless self-interested

individual consumers and producers in the marketplace that it is the motor of economic activity. Indeed, modern **rational choice** economists (such as Buchanan*, Tullock*, Olson*, or Niskanen*) are particularly scornful and dismissive of the notion that humans can behave altruistically and prefer someone else's interest to their own. Thus they do not accept the protestations that politicians and public servants commonly make that they are serving the public or national interest. These economists make the (fairly common) assumption that politicians and bureaucrats are in the business of government for what they themselves can get out of it.

Yet humans also appear to be naturally sociable. They belong to families, tribes, gangs, faiths, and larger groups of all kinds. Thus the conflict may seem to be between not so much individuals but groups pursuing their own collective interests. Much of politics seems to involve conflict between many different groups each expressing (or 'articulating') their own rival views and wishes. The conflict can be deeply divisive, passionate, and sometimes violent. Within states there are often bitter conflicts over, for example, specific building developments (e.g. new roads or airports), nuclear power, abortion, animal rights, civil liberties, and war. Some of these reflect opposed economic interests, while others reflect conflicting values that may not easily reduce to individual self-interest. Moreover, the choice, when it is made, is not one from which individuals can easily opt out. A political ruling on, for example, whether or not to ban hunting, build a new airport, increase tax on alcohol, change speed limits on cars, or declare war involves a decision that is binding on the whole community. In such conflicts, some win and others lose. Where a group feels the quality of their lives is adversely affected by a political decision, or simply that it is morally wrong, the outcome is not easily accepted.

Some would argue that such specific conflicts mask more fundamental divisions within human society such as conflicts between social classes, or between different ethnic or religious communities, or between men and women.

It appears even more obvious that politics is about conflict when one considers not just politics within states, but between states. The hitherto dominant realist interpretation of **international relations** assumes states use their resources to pursue vigorously their own conflicting national interests in conditions of **anarchy**.

Other perspectives have assumed rather fearsome antagonisms that threaten the future of humanity. These include the ideological 'Cold War' between Soviet **communism** and Western **democracy** and **capitalism** (until its abrupt end in 1989) or between faiths, cultures, or 'civilisations' (the view of Samuel Huntington*), a contentious interpretation that some would say is illustrated by the continuing 'war on terror'.

POLITICS IS ABOUT CONFLICT AND CONSENSUS

Altogether the notion that politics is about conflict has plenty of evidence to support it. Yet if politics is only about conflict, the outlook for humanity is gloomy indeed. Some

insist that politics is not just about conflict but about the reconciliation of conflict, the pursuit of compromise and **consensus** (or agreement). If politics is to succeed, it has to bring people together and not just reflect their conflicting interests.

The French political scientist Maurice Duverger* talks of the 'Janus face' of politics. (Janus was a Roman God with two faces, pointing in opposite directions.) Duverger argues that conflict and integration are two opposed but inseparable aspects of politics. He claims that 'politics involves a continual effort to eliminate physical violence.... Politics tends to replace fists, knives, clubs and rifles with other kinds of weapons', although, he sadly acknowledges that 'it is not always successful in doing so'. (Duverger, tr. Wagoner 1972, 221). This accords with the sense in which the words 'politics' and 'political' are commonly used. When people talk of a 'political solution' to a problem (for example, Northern Ireland or Syria) they mean a solution involving peaceful negotiation rather than violence and war. For Duverger, politics is about both conflict and the search for compromise and consensus.

This is often how politics seems to operate in democratic countries. Clearly, individual politicians and political parties represent conflicting interests. They do not, by and large, create political conflict but reflect real differences of interests and views in the wider community. In putting forward their own case and exposing the weaknesses of their opponents they are contributing to effective public debate and better evidence-based public policy. This is, or should be, many would argue, what the political process is all about (Crick [1962] 2000, and see also Crick in Leftwich 2004). Yet an engagement in debate almost presupposes a readiness to make concessions, to settle sometimes for half a loaf, echoing the aphorism of Conservative politician, Rab Butler that 'politics is the art of the possible' (see [Box 1.1](#)). On many issues politicians and parties must also be prepared to compromise, to accept an outcome that is, from their perspective, less than ideal, in order to secure some kind of agreement. Moreover, any political leader or party that hopes to win majority support cannot afford to articulate a single interest but must seek to represent and 'integrate' a range of interests, which means persuading others, including their own supporters, to understand different views and interests and make concessions. The same is true in international relations, when governments commonly seek to resolve conflict through negotiation and diplomacy rather than war. So politics is not just about conflict but also about resolving conflict.

Yet, while some object to the conflict involved in the political process, others criticise the search for compromise. Indeed compromise solutions are often denounced as a sell-out or betrayal, an abandonment of principle, a spineless appeasement of opponents. Thus the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher boasted that she was a conviction politician who abhorred consensus: 'For me, consensus seems to be the process of abandoning all beliefs, principles, values and policies' (Thatcher speaking in 1981, quoted in Kavanagh 1990, 7), although Mrs Thatcher was sometimes a rather more pragmatic politician than her own rhetoric suggested. Perhaps the most celebrated instance of the dangers of the pursuit of compromise and consensus was the appeasement of the dictators in the 1930s, culminating in the Munich agreement with Hitler in 1938. A year later even the known horrors of war seemed preferable to further appeasement, which became a pejorative term.

POLITICS IS ABOUT CONVICTIONS, IDEAS, AND PRINCIPLES

Much of the writing on politics that has come down to us from the past has been unashamedly normative. In other words, it is concerned with how politics should be, rather than how it is. Political philosophers for two and a half thousand years have argued over how human beings should live together, over the best form of government, over the justification for private property and its distribution, over how far citizens should obey the state and what rights and freedoms they should enjoy. Indeed, many of these rights and freedoms are now proclaimed as international, unconstrained by state borders. These ideas have continued to inform political debate and influence political change down the ages and through to the present day.

Thus, the US Declaration of Independence (1776) proclaimed, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.' The French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789) pronounced 'Men are born free and remain equal in rights.' These were bold, ambitious claims, and it is easy to point out how far reality fell short of the rhetoric. Yet there were substantially successful campaigns to apply some of these rights, to abolish the slave trade and the institution of slavery, to promote freedom of speech, to end religious and racial discrimination, to emancipate women, and much else. Many of these rights and freedoms have since been enshrined in state constitutions and in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the European Convention on Human Rights (1951). A commitment to international law and institutions, as well as to national self-determination, inspired the early liberal approach to international relations that emerged from the First World War and its immediate aftermath. There are also modern political creeds or ideologies, often linked with political parties, publicly committed to greater equality and social justice, or more freedom for the individual, or whatever. Thus, ideas, values, and principles seem central to much of modern political debate, yet they have been largely absent from this discussion over the nature of politics, so far at least.

There are reasons for the omission. As we have seen, at least one modern major theoretical approach to the study of politics assumes humans are motivated by rational self-interest and that any ideals they proclaim are just a form of protective colouring or simply self-delusion. Indeed there are abundant examples of political hypocrisy: politicians who extol the sanctity of marriage and family values while conducting extramarital affairs, or who accumulate wealth while preaching socialism, or who jet around the world promoting resource conservation. There are also sad reminders of how inspiring political ideals like freedom and equality can be perverted. As the French revolutionary Madame Roland mournfully observed as she passed the Statue of Liberty on the way to her own appointment with the guillotine in 1793, 'O Liberty! What crimes are committed in thy name' ('que de crimes on commet en ton nom'). One thinks of other political movements similarly inspired by high ideals that ended in tyranny, as portrayed in George Orwell's

bitter satire on the 1917 Russian revolution, *Animal Farm* (1945), in which the animals' dream of equality ends in the cynical slogan, 'All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.' Disillusion with the fruits of communism helped influence a wider rejection of political ideologies for the politics of **pragmatism** ('what matters is what works').

Yet it was not just because of the betrayal of such political ideals that traditional political philosophy and political ideologies fell from fashion. The emergence of logical positivism in the early 20th century revolutionised the study of philosophy and led to the rejection of 'metaphysics', under which title was included moral and political philosophy. This was among the influences on the development of a parallel revolution in the study of social sciences, including politics, which involved the rejection of **normative** political theory for the positive scientific analysis of political behaviour [see Part II, Section 2, below]. The **behavioural revolution** reached its climax in the 1950s, which also saw the announcement of the death of political philosophy (Laslett 1956) and, at the close of the decade, the end of ideology (D. Bell 1960).

Similarly, the early 20th-century liberal approach to international relations associated with US President Woodrow Wilson*, involving self-determination of peoples and the establishment of the League of Nations to peacefully resolve disputes, was undermined first by the determination of existing colonial states to protect their empires and later by the ruthless use of military force by dictators to secure territorial expansion. Thus liberal idealism was replaced by **realism**, and Morgenthau's ([1948] 1978) assumption that states pursue interests in terms of power.

It has since become clear that the obituaries on the study of political philosophy were premature. The study of political ideas is now very much alive. Even so, it remains marginalised in many accounts of the nature of politics, which continue to emphasise the political process over political aims and values. Yet politics without hopes, dreams, and values is ultimately a rather mean-spirited business. The growth of political apathy and alienation, particularly but not exclusively among the young, is often lamented, the reasons for it much discussed, and possible remedies put forward (Putnam 2000; Stoker 2017). Mainstream democratic politics faces growing apathy on one side and intolerant fanaticism on the other. It has to offer some ideals, inspiration, and hope that encourage people to engage with it.

Box 1.5 Normative political theory and positive political science

Normative political theory involves the prescription of norms of conduct and values and the study of what *ought to be* rather than what *is*.

Positive political science involves the 'positive' or 'objective' scientific analysis of political behaviour.

We are perhaps in danger of forgetting that politics can inspire as well as disappoint. There are those who have given their lives so that others can enjoy the rights and freedoms now largely taken for granted. They include Abraham Lincoln, who fought a war to abolish slavery and preserve democracy in the United States; Mahatma Gandhi*,

whose inspired nonviolent campaigns of **civil disobedience** eventually secured the establishment of a free democratic India; and Martin Luther King*, the black American civil rights leaders who dreamed 'of a day when the sons of former slaves and of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood'. One might think also of the defiant speech of Nelson Mandela*, on trial for his life in the South Africa of apartheid in 1964: 'I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.' Unlike Lincoln, Gandhi, and King, who died in pursuit of their political ideals, Mandela survived, to become the first black president of the new post-apartheid South Africa.

There is, unhappily, abundant evidence that political ideals can be betrayed or sold short, and they can also be dogmatically and fanatically pursued. Yet ideals can inspire, even if they are often only imperfectly realised. Thus, although proclamations of human rights may sometimes be more honoured in their breach than their observance, they set a standard of conduct that has already materially influenced political behaviour for what many of us would consider the better. The same hopes continue to drive international efforts to secure peace between nations, alleviate poverty, especially in the developing world, and conserve the global environment.

SO WHAT IS POLITICS (AND WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS)?

'What is politics?' is the title of an excellent edited volume of essays in which a number of distinguished political scientists provide their own answers – and incidentally rubbish the views of some of their fellow contributors and their editor (Leftwich 2004). Their vehement disagreement may not inspire confidence. Some politics students may feel dismayed that so many leading experts cannot even agree on what their subject is about. The same is true of International Relations, which now covers far more than diplomacy, alliances, and wars.

Some of the answers discussed (both here and elsewhere) may seem more plausible than others, but none seems totally satisfactory. Some are perhaps more appealing than others, but that does not necessarily make them correct. There are, indeed, no incontrovertibly right answers. There are many key concepts in the study of politics and international relations that are 'essentially contested', including, as we have seen, the definitions of both 'politics' and 'international relations'. These essentially contested concepts reflect differing and competing interpretations of the world and human society. A student needs to understand these competing perspectives and different answers and weigh them against the available evidence. But on many key issues the evidence is inconclusive. Ultimately, you will have to make up your own mind on many aspects of the subject and on the very nature of politics and international relations. That should not be a source of anxiety. These subjects are inherently controversial. To many of us that is what makes them so fascinating.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

You may consult entries on 'politics' and 'international relations' in ordinary dictionaries and encyclopaedias, but more usefully in specialist politics dictionaries. Most standard politics textbooks provide an introduction to the question 'What is politics?' Particularly useful is the discussion provided in the first chapter of Andrew Heywood's *Politics* (2013). The same question is addressed more extensively by a range of authors in the excellent collection of essays edited by Adrian Leftwich (2004). You may also want to consult the widely recommended and provocative book by Bernard Crick, *In Defence of Politics* ([1962] 2000) as well as the same author's contribution to Leftwich (2004) above. (However, Crick's view of politics is a little idiosyncratic, effectively excluding the politics and government of authoritarian states). A stimulating and thoughtful introduction to the literature is Gerry Stoker's *Why Politics Matters* (2017). Specifically on international relations, there is an excellent introductory chapter in Chris Brown and Kirsten Ainley's *Understanding International Relations* (2009).



PART II

The Study of Politics and
International Relations



PART 2 SECTION 1

THE EVOLUTION OF THE STUDY AND PRACTICE OF POLITICS

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INTRODUCTION

Politics has been studied and written about for at least two and a half thousand years. This section provides a very brief overview of the evolution of the theory and practice of politics in the West from the fifth century BCE to modern times. It discusses some of the major Western perspectives on politics of previous ages and their continuing importance for modern politics. Past political thinkers addressed big political questions of their day, many of which remain relevant. Where does power lie? What is the best form of government? What are the causes of political instability and change? How should scarce resources be distributed among individuals and communities? Why and how far should we obey the law? Why do states find it so difficult to live at peace with each other? How far can war ever be justified?

Past thinkers naturally focused on the key issues and problems of their time. Thus the ancient Greeks were familiar with a wide variety of political systems and frequent regime change, so it was natural that they should speculate on the best form of government and the causes of political stability and change. Similarly, from the late Roman Empire through to the end of the Middle Ages a key issue was the relationship between the temporal power of the state and the spiritual power of the church. Following the religious conflicts in Europe from the 16th century onwards, issues of political obligation and religious toleration loomed large, as they do again today.

Yet although people have speculated on politics for two and a half thousand years or more, it is only within the last century that it has become more systematically studied as a major discipline or social science in universities across the Western world. This is discussed in the following Section 2, which focuses on the important new theories and approaches that have transformed the modern study of politics, from the behavioural revolution onwards. Yet as new theories were exposed to criticism, older perspectives acquired a new lease of life, sometimes in fresh variants. Thus many of the theories and approaches discussed here in this section remain current and continue to shape the way politics is researched and studied today.

PAST AND PRESENT

Some writers from remote periods can seem startlingly modern, so much so that we can be in danger of forgetting the very different historical context in which they lived and worked. Today, most politics students read thinkers such as Plato*, Machiavelli*, or Rousseau* in modern translation. This of course makes them much easier to understand, but it can involve an element of distortion. There may be no exact modern language equivalent to the terms they use. Even apparently familiar concepts derived from ancient Greek or Latin, such as 'democracy', 'tyrant', 'republic', or 'dictator', which may bear some resemblance to the way in which they were originally employed by Greeks and Romans, also carry distinctive modern connotations.

There are similar problems even with less ancient texts written in our own language. Indeed, to an English-speaking student, 17th-century English texts by Hobbes* and Locke* can seem much more 'remote' and 'difficult' than modern English translations of Greek texts two thousand years older. One reason for this is that these 17th-century English writers use some expressions that are no longer common and employ other apparently more familiar terms, such as 'liberties' and 'rights', in distinctive ways. This is not to deny the continuing relevance of their ideas but simply to emphasise the importance of context. Some of the great political texts of the past may appear to have a timeless quality, and indeed are often written in abstract terms without reference to contemporary political institutions and events. Yet inevitably they were strongly influenced by contemporary political practice, even where this may not be immediately apparent. We need to understand the times the authors lived in, the specific historic situation in which they thought and wrote.

The various periods of history discussed here inevitably give a very abbreviated account of critical political developments. Some of the concerns of the past may seem to have little relevance to politics today. However, some ancient preoccupations that once appeared to belong to a vanished age (such as the conflict between religious and secular authority) have more recently been dramatically revived.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF GREECE AND ROME

(roughly from the 5th century BCE to the 5th century CE)

Why should anyone studying politics in the early 21st century be expected to pay serious attention to the political practices and ideas of some ancient Greeks and Romans who lived two to two and a half thousand years ago? One answer is that the Greeks virtually invented politics, both the term itself and its practice. Some of the key terms still employed in the study of politics today, particularly those used to describe systems of government, are derived from ancient Greek, while others are of Latin origin.

Yet however fascinating the politics of Greece and Rome, we would know little about them but for the quality of contemporary writing that has survived. It is the historian Thucydides* (460–404 BCE) who brings to vivid life the political debates within and between ancient Greek states and their very different systems of government, including the first known form of democracy in Athens of the 5th century BCE. Plato* (427–347 BCE) and Aristotle* (384–322 BCE) are widely regarded as two of the greatest philosophers and political theorists of all time. The speeches of Demosthenes are still studied as models of political oratory. While Roman political thought was rather less original, Roman political institutions and practices have been immensely influential. The term 'Republic' is derived from the Latin *Res Publica* ('public affairs' or 'the public sphere'). The republican ideal has had a long recurring impact on subsequent political history in the West. The letters and speeches of Cicero* (106–43 BCE) illuminate the politics of the last years of the Roman Republic, and we owe our knowledge of the late Republic and early Empire to a number of outstanding Roman historians. Roman law remains today the basis of the legal systems of much of continental Europe. Thus the ancient Roman world has an enduring legacy.

Athenian democracy

Whether or not the ancient Greeks invented politics, they certainly developed its systematic study. The ancient Greek world involved a virtual laboratory of different political systems. Although the Greeks shared a substantially common language and culture, and could on occasion sink their political differences to combine against a common enemy, they lived in a large number of small independent and often contending political communities, each with its own distinctive form of government. Some of these states involved government by a single ruler, a **monarchy** (rule of one) or tyranny (implying an illegitimate seizure of power). Others were ruled by a small minority, variously described as an **aristocracy** (literally, rule of the best), **oligarchy** (rule of the few), or plutocracy (rule of the rich).

Athens, followed by some other states, had developed a more broad-based system of government called **democracy**, meaning literally the rule of the people, although this did not in practice include all adult inhabitants but only full citizens (excluding women, slaves, and foreign residents). However, Athenian democracy, in marked contrast with modern **representative democracy**, did involve direct citizen participation in key decisions, including issues of taxation and spending, **justice**, defence, trade, diplomacy, and war.

The frequent wars between Greek states in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE arose not only from conflicts of interest but also from the states' contrasting political systems and values. Moreover, there were conflicting class interests within states, some of those living under tyrannies or oligarchies casting envious eyes in the direction of Athens, while a number of rich Athenians hankered after a system of government closer to that of Sparta, the great rival of Athens. Thus the long Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) between Athens and Sparta and their respective colonies and allies, described by the historian Thucydides, can be seen (like the recent Cold War between the West and Soviet communism) as an ideological struggle between rival political systems.

Some of the key participants were clearly conscious of this, as can be seen from the words Thucydides puts into the mouth of the Athenian leader Pericles* (c. 495–429 BCE) in a funeral oration near the beginning of the war. Although Thucydides himself was no friend of democracy, he sought to narrate the history of times he had lived through as accurately and dispassionately as possible. Whether he was recalling the words and arguments of Pericles himself, or simply reconstructing what he might have said, hardly matters. While the historian's own political sympathies were perhaps towards oligarchy, he supplies one of the most eloquent and powerful cases for democracy ever made. The speech continues to inspire modern democrats. Even though the institutions of Athenian democracy were very different from those of modern representative democracy, the values proclaimed by Pericles still resonate.

Thus, 'power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people' and 'everyone is equal before the law'. There is also toleration of the tastes and behaviour of others. 'We do not get into a state with our next-door neighbour if he enjoys himself in his own way, nor do we give him the kind of black looks which, though they do no harm, still do hurt people's feelings' (Thucydides 1972, 145). Yet Pericles assumes the need for active political participation. 'We do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all'. He emphasises the importance of rational public debate, maintaining that there is no incompatibility between words and deeds. 'The worst thing is to rush into action before the consequences have been properly debated...' (Thucydides 1972, 147).