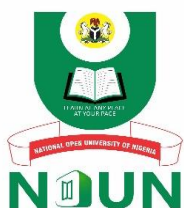


COURSE GUIDE

POL 101 INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL SCIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to POL 101: Introduction to Political Science

This course is a two-credit unit course for undergraduate students in Political Science. The materials have been developed to meet global standards. This course guide gives you an overview of the course. It also provides you with relevant information about the organisation and the course requirements.

COURSE AIMS

The aims are to help you understand basic principles and concepts in Political Science. The broad aims will be achieved by:

- (i) Introducing you to Political Science, its nature, scope and subdivisions, as well as the validity or otherwise of the claim of Political Science to the status of a science.

Equip you with basic concepts in Political Science such as power, authority and legitimacy as well as sovereignty, including the important place they occupy in any political discourse, and how their use or misuse can affect the workings of a political system.

- (ii) Examining the nature and character of the political systems of major developed countries, the manner in which they have contributed to relative political stability in these societies and how the knowledge gained from their experience can be applied to the politics of the developing world.
- (iii) Exposing you to the knowledge of different forms of governments and ideologies and how they have contributed either to the expansion or denial of human rights or economic opportunities among different strata of the population
- (iv) Enabling you to understand how peaceful and orderly political change can be brought about through a widely acceptable procedure and agreed mechanism.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

To achieve the aims set out above, POL 101 has broad objectives. In addition, each unit also has specific objectives. The unit objectives are at the beginning of each unit. I advise that you read them before you start working through the unit. You may refer to them throughout the unit to monitor your progress.

On successful completion of the course, you should be able to:

- define Political Science, its nature, scope and approaches, and how it developed through its systematic methodology into a Social Science discipline.
- understand the concepts of the state, nation and nation-state, their coercive and integrative roles in societies, as well as their differences and relationships.
- know the meanings of major concepts in Political Science, their usage and how they can be applied in political discourse.
- Understand the meanings and differences between power, authority and legitimacy
- appreciate the intrinsic merits of democracy as a preferable form of government that can facilitate the enthronement of a responsible government
- explain how political change can be brought about either through the conventional electoral process or through unorthodox revolutionary means.

WORKING THROUGH THIS COURSE

To complete the course, you are required to read the study units and other related material. You will also need to undertake practical exercises for which you will need a pen, a notebook, and other materials listed in this guide. The exercises are intended to aid your understanding of the concepts and issues presented. At the end of each unit, you will be required to submit written assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of the course, you will write a final examination.

COURSE MATERIALS

The major materials you will need for this course are:

- Course guide
- Study units
- Assignment file
- Relevant textbooks, including the ones listed under each unit.

You may also need to listen to programmes and news on the radio and television, local and foreign.

As a beginner, you need to read newspapers, magazines, and journals, and, if possible, log on to the internet.

STUDY UNITS

There are 21 units (each consisting of four modules) in this course. They are listed below.

Module 1 Scope and Methods of Political Science

Unit 1	Definition and Scope of Political Science
Unit 2	Nature and Status of Political Science
Unit 3	Evolution and Methods of Political Science
Unit 4	Constitution and Constitutionalism

Module 2 Political Ideas and Concepts

Unit 1	The Origins and Theories of the State
Unit 2	The State and Nation-Characteristics and Functions
Unit 3	The Doctrine of Sovereignty and Its Limitations
Unit 4	Citizenship, Duties and Rights
Unit 5	Power, Authority and Legitimacy
Unit 6	Major Forms of Government
Unit 7	Democracy as a Form of Government

Module 3 Political/Party Systems and Electoral Systems

Unit 1	Major Components of a Political System
Unit 2	The meaning and nature of Political Parties
Unit 3	Pressure and Interest Groups
Unit 4	The British Political System
Unit 5	American Political System
Unit 6	Electoral System and Process
Unit 7	Electoral Reforms and Democratic Sustainance

Module 4 Theories of Political and Social Change

Unit 1	Spectrum of Political Attitudes
Unit 2	Major Political Ideologies
Unit 3	Revolution and Social Change

TEXTBOOKS AND REFERENCES

Certain books have been recommended in the course. You will have to supplement them by reading from the library or purchasing them.

ASSESSMENT FILE

An assessment file and a marking scheme will be made available to you. In the assessment file, you will find details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. There are five aspects of the assessment of this course: the tutor-marked and the written examination. The marks you obtain in these two areas will make up your final marks. The assignment must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadline stated in the presentation Schedules and the Assignment file. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will account for 30% of your total score.

TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS (TMAS)

You will have to submit a specified number of TMAs. Every unit in this course has a tutor-marked assignment. You will be assessed on four of them, but the best three performances from the TMAs will be used for computing your 30%.

When you have completed each assignment, send it together with a Tutor-marked Assignment form to your Tutor. Make sure each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the submission deadline. If, for any reason, you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor for a discussion on the possibility of an extension.

Extensions will not be granted after the due date unless under exceptional circumstances.

FINAL EXAMINATION AND GRADING

The final examination will be a three-hour test. All areas of the course will be examined. Find time to read the unit all over before your examination. The final examination will attract 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions, which reflect the kind of self-assessment exercise and tutor-marked assignment you have previously encountered. You should use the time between completing the last unit and taking the examination to revise the entire course.

COURSE MARKING SCHEME

The following table shows how the actual course mark is allocated.

Table: Course Marking Scheme

ASSESSMENT	MARKS
Assignments (Best Three): Assignment out of Four Marked	=
Final Examination	=
Total	=

PRESENTATION SCHEDULE

The submission dates for all assignments will be communicated to you. You will also be told the dates for completing the study units and for examinations.

COURSE OVERVIEW AND PRESENTATION SCHEDULE

Unit	Title of work	Weeks Activity	
Course Guide	Scope and Methods		
Module 1			
Unit 1	Definition and Scope of Science	Week 1	Assignment 1
Unit 2	Nature and Status of	Week	Assignment 2
Unit 3	History and Evolution of Political Science	Week 2	Assignment 3
Unit 4	Constitution and	Week	Assignment 4
Module 2	Political Ideas Concepts		
Unit 1	The Origins and Theories	Week	Assignment 1
Unit 2	The State and Nation-Characteristics and Functions		Assignment 2
Unit 3	Concept of Sovereignty and its Limitations		Assignment 3
Unit 4	Citizenship, Duties and Rights-		Assignment 4
Unit 5	Power, Authority and Legitimacy		Assignment 5
Unit 6	Major Forms of Government		Assignment 6
Unit 7	Democracy as a form of Government		Assignment 7
Module 3	Political/ Party Systems and Electoral Systems		
Unit 1	Components of a Political System		Assignment 1
Unit 2	Meaning and Nature of Political Parties		Assignment 2
Unit 3	Meaning and Nature of Pressure Groups		Assignment 3
Unit 4	The British Political System		Assignment 4
Unit 5	The American Political System		Assignment 5
Unit 6	Electoral System and Process		Assignment 6
Unit 7	Electoral Reforms and Democratic Sustainability		Assignment 7
Module 4	Theories of Political and Social Change		
Unit 1	Spectrum of Political Attitudes		Assignment 1
Unit 2	Major Political Ideologies	Week 14	Assignment 2
Unit 3	Revolution and Social Change	Week 15	Assignment 3
	REVISION	1	
	Examination	1	
	Total	17	

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS COURSE

In distance learning, study units replace university lectures. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suits you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to the lecturer. In the same way, a lecturer might give you some reading to do; the study units tell you where to read and which texts or set books to use. You are provided exercises to do at appropriate points, just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise. Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the unit's subject matter and its integration with the other units and the course as a whole. Next to this is a set of learning objectives. These objectives indicate what you should be able to do by the time you complete the unit. These learning objectives are meant to guide your study. The moment a unit is finished, you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course. The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually come from either your set books or a Reading section. The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into any trouble, telephone your tutor. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need assistance, do not hesitate to call your tutor.

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly; it is your first assignment.
2. Organise a Study Schedule. Design a 'Course Over' to guide you through the Course. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the Assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you choose, you should decide on and write your own dates and work schedule for each unit.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything to stay faithful to it. The main reason students fail is that they fall behind on their coursework. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late to help.
4. Turn to Unit I and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. You will need your set books and the unit you are studying at all times. As you work through the unit, you will know what sources to consult for further information.
6. Keep in touch with your study centre. Up-to-date course information will be available there continuously.
7. Well before the relevant due dates (about 4 weeks before due dates), keep in mind that you will learn a lot by doing the assignment carefully. They have been designed to help you meet the objectives of the course and, therefore, will help you pass the examination. Submit all assignments not later than the due date.
8. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have

achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study materials or consult your tutor.

9. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course, and try to pace your studies so you stay on schedule.
10. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also the written comments on the ordinary assignments.
11. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in the Course Guide)

TUTORS AND TUTORIALS

Information relating to the tutorials will be provided at the appropriate time. Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must take your tutor-marked assignments to the study centre well before the due date (at least two working days in advance). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor if you need help. Contact your tutor if you do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings.

- You have difficulty with the exercises
- You have a question or problem with an assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment, or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face-to-face contact with your tutor and have questions answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a list of questions before attending them. You will learn a lot by actively participating in discussions.

SUMMARY

The course guide gives you an overview of what to expect in the course of this study. The course teaches you the basic principles and concepts in Political Science. It also acquaints you with the central role of power and its limitations within the political process.

We wish you success with the course and hope that you will find it both interesting and useful.

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MODULE 1 SCOPE AND METHODS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Unit 1	Definition and Scope of Political Science
Unit 2	Nature and Status of Political Science
Unit 3	Evolution and Methods of Political Science
Unit 4	Constitution and Constitutionalism

Unit 1 Definition and Scope of Political Science

Unit Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Learning outcome
- 1.3 Definitions of Political Science
 - 1.3.1 Basic Assumptions in Political Science
 - 1.3.2 Subdivisions in Political Science
- 1.4 Summary
- 1.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources/Web Sources
- 1.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise



1.1 Introduction

Welcome to the first unit of Module One. We are delighted to begin this learning journey with you as you explore the fascinating field of Political Science. In this unit, you will be introduced to the discipline from a broad academic perspective and discover the key ideas that will shape your understanding throughout the course. Together, we will explore the nature of the discipline, its scope, the assumptions that guide its study, and the different approaches used to examine political issues. This unit provides the foundation for the topics you will encounter in later units, so take your time to engage fully with the learning activities. As you begin, reflect on your own observations of political life and then participate in the discussion forum to share your thoughts and learn from your fellow learners.



1.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- **explain** the major definitions and perspectives of politics in Political Science.
- **compare** the views of David Easton, Harold Lasswell, and Aristotle on the nature and purpose of politics.
- **evaluate** the relevance of these perspectives to understanding contemporary Political Science and political processes.



1.3 Part of Political Science

Welcome! Have you ever wondered how governments make decisions, why political systems differ from one country to another, or how citizens influence public policy? You are about to find out! In this section

The whole essence of the first unit is to attempt to examine and explain the parts of Political Science seriously. In other words, this unit is an attempt to identify what is studied in the discipline or its “content”, and its “structure”, or how the content is studied. The first thing to know is the concept of “politics” or the “political”, while the second is the suffix, “science”, which will form the subject matter of the next unit. When Political Scientists examine the meanings attached to these concepts, they, in effect, seek to conceptualise or understand the discipline and delineate the boundaries of Political Science.

In the course of the discipline's development, several political philosophers and political scientists have advanced various definitions. Most definitions can be classified into two types. Some scholars associate “politics” with “government”, “legal government”, or the “state”, while others discuss it within the precinct of “power”, “authority” and/or “conflict”. We shall consider a few of these definitions, offer a critique of them, or their limitations, and leave you to determine which of them has more contemporary relevance to the understanding of Political Science.

1.3.1 Different definitions of Political Science

A good starting point is to ask, "What is politics?" Every citizen appears to have a commonsense notion of what politics is. However, some Political Scientists are dissatisfied with the common-sense meaning of politics, as they believe that to understand politics truly, one should formulate a more explicit definition; failure to do so, in their view, restricts the growth of Political Science.

Their position is that Political Science should be examined in context. This suggests that the outer limits of Political Science can be determined by listing all the topics which interest scholars in the field at a given time (Bello-Imam, 2007).

One view is Politics as Government: To an average citizen, politics and government are synonymous.

In Alfred de Grazia's view, “politics” or the “political” includes the events that occur around the decision-making centres of government. Charles

Hyneman also said that most Political Scientists have assumed that legal government is the subject matter of their discipline.

However, if Political Scientists equate “politics” with “government” or “legal government”, we need to know what we mean by government. Government, in this context, refers to the legally based institutions of a society that may make legally binding decisions. This merely shows that Hyneman’s definition is more specific than de Grazia’s. Whichever definition a Political Scientist may eventually decide to adopt, what is obvious is that this definition focuses more on formal institutions than anything else.

We must, however, caution that a definition equating politics with government has a commonsensical basis but serious limitations. This is because it is inadequate and restrictive in scope. For instance, if a Political Scientist elects to study the politics of pre-colonial African societies, he would be examining ethnic societies without governmental institutions.

However, the traditional rulers and elders within such societies would be seen as making political decisions for the community, but not within identifiable, elaborate political and legal institutions, such as parliament, congress, and courts. Since such actions are taken outside government or state, are they to be classified as non-political? This obviously makes the definition narrow and hence dangerous for you.

In an attempt to escape this weakness, there is a need to look beyond governmental institutions for the elements that make or qualify an activity as political. This brings us to David Easton’s definition, which emphasises the kind of activity that manifests through a variety of institutions (Oyediran, 2003).

In-text Question: Pause and Reflect

Imagine a traditional African community without a parliament, courts, or formal government institutions. If community elders make decisions that affect everyone, would you consider these decisions political? Why or why not?

1.3.1.1 David Easton’s view of politics

Now that you have examined various definitions of political science, let us explore David Easton’s view of politics. His ideas provide a fresh and practical way to understand how political systems respond to society’s needs and demands.

The crux of the definition advocated by the Eastonian school is the equation of politics with “power,” “authority”, or “conflict.” Foremost in this school is William Bluhm, a Political Scientist, who defined politics “as a social process characterised by activity involving rivalry and co-operation in the exercise of power, culminating in the making of decisions for a group.” The appeal of this definition lies in its apparent flexibility and wider scope.

It sees politics wherever power relationships or conflicts situation exist. This means that Political Scientists can legitimately study the politics of a labour or student union, a corporation, or an African tribe or ethnic group, as well as what goes on in the legislative arm of government or an administrative agency.

Here, emphasis is placed on activity or behaviour rather than a particular kind of institution.

A step further from the restrictive “government” definition and the “power” variety takes us to David Easton’s definition, which sees politics as the “authoritative allocation of values for a society” within the political system.

This definition restricts the Political Scientist to only those decisions that are authoritative for society. According to Easton, “a policy is authoritative if when the person to whom it is intended to apply, or who is affected by it, considers that they must or ought to obey it” ().

In other words, such a policy must be considered binding. However, not every authoritative decision is made within the political system. Following Easton’s definition, it means that the A political scientist is interested only in authoritative decisions that apply to all members of society, even though only a few might be affected (Dahl, 1984).

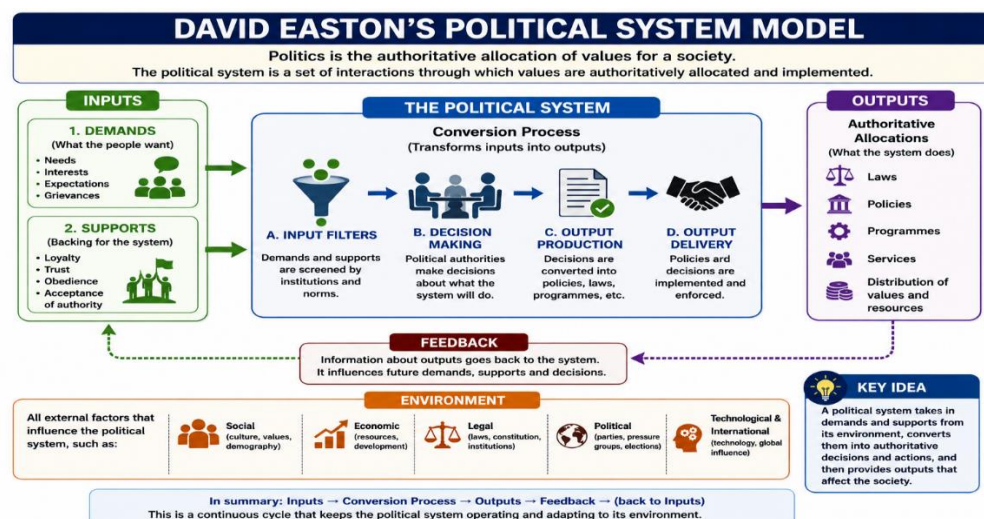


Fig. 1.1 David Easton Political System Model

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

1.3.1.2 Harold Lasswell's view of politics

Having examined David Easton's perspective on politics, let us now explore Harold Lasswell's view.

Politics, in one of its lucid definitions by Harold Lasswell (1936), is 'the study of who gets what, when, and how.' The unfolding picture is that there is no major difference between Easton's definition and the one based on power. Both of them assume a political world of scarce values and insatiable appetites.

The basic question of politics then becomes: "How are values distributed?" or, in Harold Lasswell's classic phraseology, "who gets what, when, and how?" The difference is mainly one of emphasis.

Whereas power theorists such as Lasswell emphasise the role of power in the distribution process, the Eastonian variant or typology examines the relationship between what goes into a system as "demand" and what comes out as "decision" or "output". Thus, Easton focuses on the entire political system; Lasswell, on the other hand, concentrates on individuals who have the greatest impact on the distribution process, namely those with power. The overriding argument for an Eastonian-type definition of politics rests on the desirability of a compromise position that is neither too restrictive nor overly broad. This does not mean that the Eastonian definition is free from criticism. Its critics have asked what is meant by the decision "for society", and how this differs from one which is not made for society. To many Political Scientists, any elaborate attempt to answer these questions is a mere academic exercise or even superfluous.

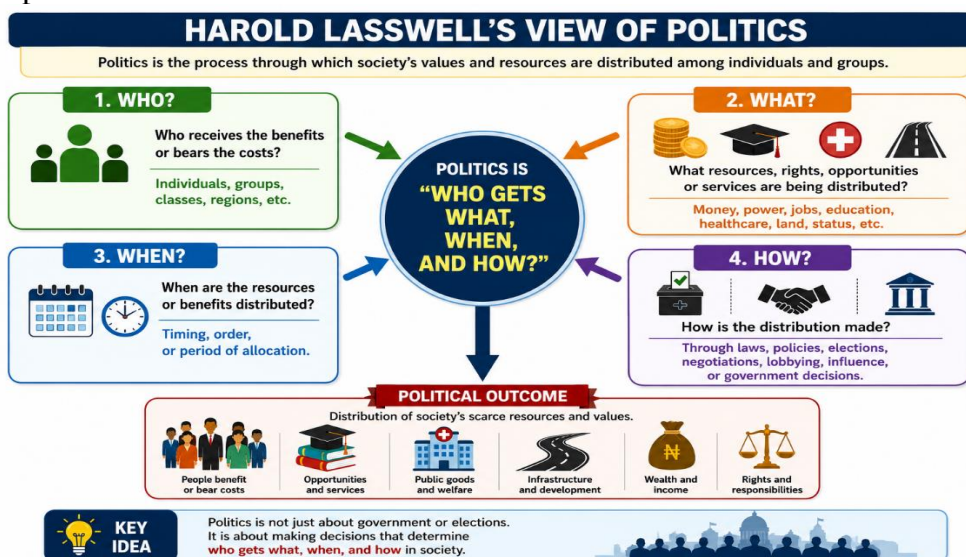


Fig. 1.2. Harold Lasswell's view of politics

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

1.3.1.3 Aristotle's view of Politics

Having explored Harold Lasswell's perspective on politics, let us now turn to one of the earliest and most influential thinkers in political thought, Aristotle. His ideas continue to shape the study of politics today.

Politics arises, according to Aristotle, in organised states, which recognise themselves to be an aggregate of many members, not a single tribe, religion, interest, or tradition. Politics arises from the coexistence of different traditions within a territorial unit under a common rule. According to Aristotle, politics is a plausible response to the problem of governing, or maintaining order, in a complex society.

However, the establishment of order is not just any order at all; politics, if properly played, marks the end of tyranny and recognition of freedom. To him, politics represents at least some tolerance of opposing views and, indeed, best conducted where open canvassing of rival interests is allowed and possible (Crick, 1982, p. 18).

Politics, as Aristotle pointed out, is only one possible solution to the problem of order. Tyranny - the rule of one strong man in his own interest, oligarchy - the rule of one group in their own interest, are alternatives, which he did not approve of.

The method of a tyrant and an oligarchy is to coerce all or most of these other groups for their own benefit. The political method of rule is to listen to these other groups to conciliate, or reconcile them as far as possible, and to give them a legal position, a sense of security, and some clear and reasonable safe means of articulation.

More importantly, Aristotle viewed politics as the “master science.” Politics is the master science, not in the sense that it includes or explains all other sciences, but in that it gives them some priority.

The way to establish these priorities is to allow the right institutions to develop, through which the various sciences can demonstrate their actual importance in the common task of survival (Crick, 1982, p. 23).

In-Text Question: Use the concepts you have just learned to answer the question below

A government makes decisions about how to allocate limited resources while balancing the interests of different groups in society. How would David Easton, Harold Lasswell, and Aristotle each explain this political process?

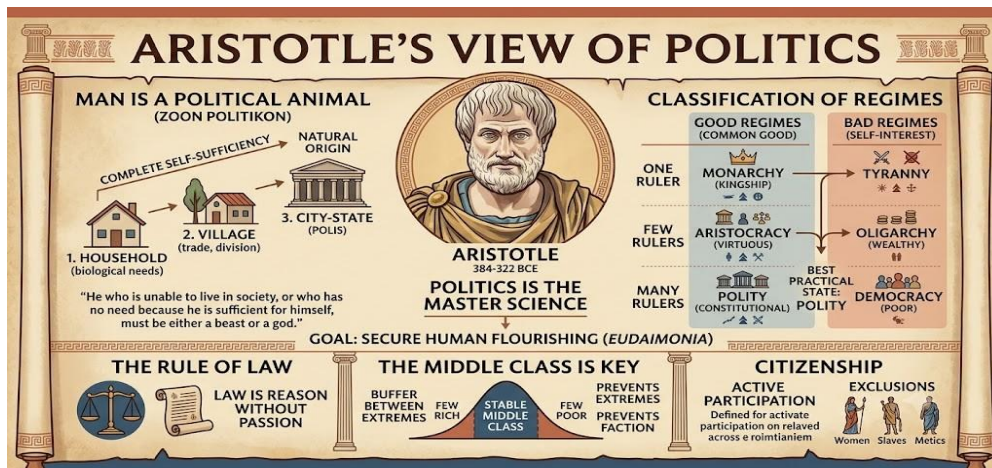


Fig. 1.3 Aristotle's view of Politics

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Define Political Science and examine the most significant theme of Aristotle's opinion on Political Science.

Question 1 Political Science is best defined as the study of _____.

- A. Power, authority, and allocation of values in society
- B. Natural laws governing matter
- C. Religious doctrines and beliefs
- D. Biological processes in human beings

Question 2

Which of the following best captures Harold Lasswell's view of Political Science?

- A. The study of who gets what, when, and how
- B. The study of natural selection
- C. The study of moral philosophy only
- D. The study of economic production

Question 3

The most significant theme of Aristotle's view of Political Science is that it is a _____.

- A. Master science is concerned with achieving the good life
- B. Purely economic activity
- C. Mechanical process of governance
- D. Scientific study of nature

3.2 Basic Assumptions in Political Science

Having explored the different views of politics, you are now ready to examine the basic assumptions that underpin the study of political science.

There are some assumptions, if properly noted, that will help you in the understanding of political science both as an academic discipline and as a practical endeavour. The first assumption is that all human societies face the problem of scarce resources. Whether the primary resource is wealth, status or power, demand always exceeds supply.

The second assumption is that, to prevent conflict over the distribution of scarce resources from destroying the fabric of society, the dominant groups in all societies evolve a mechanism, generally referred to as government, to resolve it.

This mechanism, otherwise known as government, may range from the massive government apparatus of modern industrialised states such as the United States, Britain, or Japan to the simple headship of a simple, undifferentiated ethnic group in Africa.

The third assumption is that the government allocates resources to some individuals while depriving others. Accordingly, government policies are inherently unequal.

This is true in both authoritarian and democratic states. It is equally true of socialist and capitalist societies. The fourth assumption is that there is constant pressure to reallocate scarce resources. Whether it takes the form of civil war, riots, voting, or diffuse grumbling, pressure from the 'have-nots' for the reallocation of resources is pervasive in all societies. The fifth assumption is that, because of the pervasive pressure from the 'have-nots' for the allocation of resources, those individuals who benefit from the existing distribution of resources in society, the 'haves', actively engage in pervasive efforts to maintain the *status quo* while the "have-nots" seek to overthrow the system.

The sixth assumption is that the more the rulers of a society can persuade the masses that the established system of government is legitimate, and really serves the best interest of the masses, the more secured the position of the ruler otherwise and the halves will be in a pervasive struggle with the 'have-nots'. The rulers of all societies thus attempt to secure their privileged positions by justifying their right to rule in terms of a grand religious or national myth, usually developed as a rallying point (Mbah, 2007).

Taken collectively, the above assumptions stress the dynamic nature of the political process. Politics is, therefore, the constant interplay between the rulers (elite) and the ruled (masses).

Politics is also a pervasive conflict among competing institutions such as parliaments, political parties, and courts, which are the institutionalised focal points of this struggle. For the elite, formal institutions are the means of controlling the masses and of securing their position against the competing elites. For the masses, formal institutions symbolise the status quo and are the primary target of change.

Also, because formal political institutions are the focal point of political conflict, they too are under constant pressure to adapt to change. Such changes may be peaceful, as in the evolution of American and British political institutions, or abrupt and violent, as in many third-world countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. They may even include the implosion of political institutions and structures, as witnessed in the former Soviet Union in 1991.

Underlining the assumptions above is the unstated but vital role of human activity, or what is technically called political behaviour, in the completely political process. The conflict over scarce resources that lies at the heart of the political process is a conflict between or among human beings.

It is human beings (as elites) who exercise control over and manipulate society's formal political institutions. It is human beings (as masses) who are both the object of elite control and the pervasive threat to its existence. The removal of the human element from the political equation would render any political analysis a sterile exercise.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Explain how Political Science is related to Economics.

3.3 Subdivisions of Political Science

Having examined the basic assumptions of political science, let us now explore its major subdivisions. Understanding these areas will help you appreciate the broad scope of the discipline.

Political Science can be broadly divided into two branches: political theory and political organisation. The concern of political theory, otherwise known as the normative aspect, is to provide answers to questions like: What are the purposes of political organisations? What are the best means of realising them? What is the nature of the authority of the state? Does the state have unlimited power? How do we reconcile the authority of the state with the liberty of the citizens? The answers to these

different posers constitute the preoccupation of political philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, J. J. Rousseau, etc. In short, these scholars were concerned with the formulation of the ends and limits of authority (Appadurai, 1981:3- 12).

The second division of Political Science- political organisation - otherwise known as empirical studies, focuses on the organisation of government. Government is the instrument by which the purpose of the state is realised.

The form and workings of government differ from one country to another. Over the years, forms of government have ranged from monarchy and aristocracy through oligarchy to democracy. A country like Britain, for example, practices a constitutional monarchy and yet, to all intents and purposes, qualifies as a democratic government. The United States, on the other hand, operates a republican democracy, having no room for a king. Before the break-up of the Soviet Union, her form of government was essentially an oligarchy of a select few who constituted the top hierarchy of the Communist Party (Almond et al., 2005, pp. 40-43).

In all forms of government, what is common to them is power: how power is acquired, retained, consolidated or lost. While the retention of power is the preoccupation of the rulers, what is of more relevance to the ruled is the use or abuse/misuse of power. History tells us, and as confirmed by Lord Acton, that 'power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. Therefore, to guard against abuse of power, most societies provide institutional and constitutional safeguards to check the possible excesses of government.

In America, for example, the Constitution enshrined the systems of separation of powers and checks and balances. In contrast, the British unwritten constitution recognises conventions, including parliamentary enactments, meant to secure the liberty of the citizens. Without these forms of restraints on the authority of government as well as the rights of the citizens, the society will degenerate either into rule of men, rather than law, or into the other extreme of anarchy, which Thomas Hobbes described as a "state of nature."

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Differentiate between the normative and empirical studies of Political Science.

Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

QUESTION 1

The..... study of Political Science is concerned with what ought to be, focusing on values, ethics, and ideals.

QUESTION 2

The approach to Political Science relies on observation, evidence, and verifiable data to explain political phenomena.

QUESTION 3

While normative studies emphasise....., empirical studies focus on facts and observable realities.

**1.4 Summary**

In this unit, we gave some definitions of Political Science as an academic discipline. We also discussed some basic assumptions made in the study of the course, without which Political science would be devoid of the rigour expected of an academic discipline. The Unit also outlined the two broad divisions of Political Science that have made it a nice blend of political theory and practice.

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1.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

Possible Answer to SAE 1

1. Answer A
2. Answer A
3. Answer A

Possible Answer to SAE 2

The relationship between political science and economics is best understood as one of mutual interdependence within the study of societal resource allocation and governance. Political science is concerned with how authoritative decisions are made and implemented, while economics focuses on how scarce resources are produced, distributed, and consumed. In practice, these domains intersect because economic outcomes are shaped by political decisions, and political stability often depends on economic conditions.

From an institutional perspective, governments design and enforce economic policies such as taxation, public expenditure, monetary regulation, and trade controls. These policies are inherently political because they involve choices about who gets what, when, and how, echoing the distributive logic identified in classical definitions of politics. Consequently, economic planning, budgeting, and welfare distribution cannot be separated from political authority and decision-making structures.

Conversely, economic conditions significantly influence political behaviour and governance outcomes. Issues such as unemployment, inflation, inequality, and poverty often shape voter preferences, public opinion, and the legitimacy of political systems. Empirical observations suggest that economic instability can generate political unrest, while sustained economic growth tends to reinforce regime stability and citizen satisfaction.

At a theoretical level, both disciplines converge in areas such as public policy analysis, political economy, and development studies, where scholars examine how power relations influence economic decisions and how economic structures affect political institutions. Thus, political science provides the framework for understanding decision-making authority, while economics supplies the analytical tools for evaluating resource outcomes, making their relationship both complementary and indispensable.

Possible Answer for SAE 3

1. **Answer:** Normative
2. **Answer:** Empirical
3. **Answer:** value judgement

Unit 2 Nature and Status of Political Science

Unit Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Learning outcome
- 2.3 Nature of political science
 - 2.3.1 The Subject matter of a science discipline
 - 2.3.2 The Status of Political Science
 - 2.3.3 Science or Art controversy on the status of Political Science
 - 2.3.4 Political Science and other disciplines
 - 2.3.4.1 Political Science and Ethics
 - 2.3.4.2 Political Science and Economics
 - 2.3.4.3 Political Science and Law
 - 2.3.4.4 Political Science and Geography
 - 2.3.4.5 Political Science and Sociology
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources/web Resources
- 2.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise



2.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. In the previous unit, you explored the nature, scope, and major perspectives of Political Science. Building on that foundation, we now turn to an important debate that has shaped the discipline for many years.

You may already have noticed that political issues are often studied in different ways, raising questions about how the discipline should be understood and practised. In this unit, we will examine the different viewpoints surrounding this debate and consider the arguments that have influenced scholarly thinking over time.

Rather than seeking a final answer, the unit will guide you in evaluating these perspectives and appreciating why the discussion remains relevant. As you begin, take part in the discussion forum to reflect on your own views and engage with those of your fellow learners.



2.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the nature and key characteristics of Political Science as an academic discipline.
- explain the status of Political Science by identifying the features that qualify it as a social science.

- compare the arguments that present Political Science as a science, an art, or both.
- analyse the relationship between Political Science and other disciplines in understanding political issues and societal development.



2.3 Nature of political science

You have already built a solid foundation in political science. Now, let us take the next step by exploring the nature of the discipline and how it helps us understand politics and society.

The nature of Political Science refers to its essential characteristics, scope, and the way it studies political life, government, and the state. It explains what political science is like as an academic discipline.

Nature of Political Science

To better understand the nature of Political Science, let us begin with a few familiar examples from everyday life.

1. It is a Social Science

- Political science studies human behaviour in relation to politics, government, and society. It uses scientific methods to understand political phenomena.

2. It is Both a Science and an Art

- It is regarded as a **science** because it employs systematic observation, research, and analysis to study political issues.
- It is also considered an **art** because it involves practical skills such as leadership, governance, diplomacy, negotiation, and decision-making.

3. It is Dynamic

- Political science evolves continuously as political institutions, ideologies, constitutions, and government policies change over time.

4. It is Interdisciplinary

- Political science draws knowledge from other disciplines such as economics, sociology, history, law, psychology, geography, and philosophy to explain political behaviour and institutions.

5. **It is Both Theoretical and Practical**
 - It develops theories and concepts about politics while also addressing practical issues such as governance, public administration, elections, public policy, and conflict resolution.
6. **It is Concerned with Power and Authority**
 - A central focus of political science is the acquisition, distribution, exercise, and control of political power and authority within society.
7. **It Studies the State and Government**
 - Political science examines the origin, organisation, functions, and operations of the state and government, as well as their relationships with citizens.
8. **It is Normative and Empirical**
 - **Normative political science** focuses on what government and society ought to be, emphasising values, justice, and ethics.
 - **Empirical political science** studies political realities through observation, data collection, and evidence-based analysis.
9. **It Has Universal Relevance**
 - Political science examines political systems and institutions across different countries, making its principles applicable in diverse political contexts.

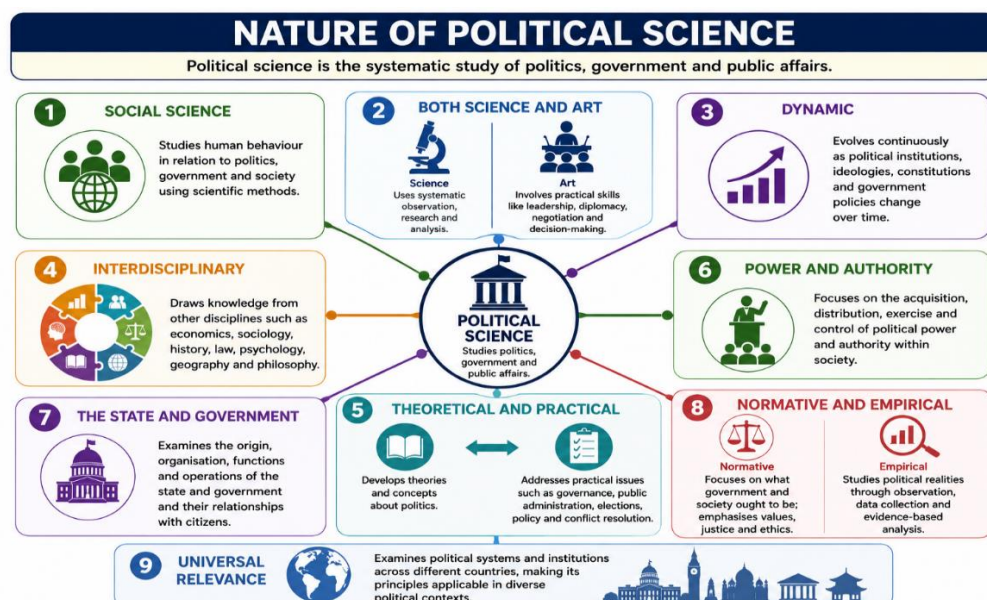


Fig. 2.1 Nature of Political Science

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

In-Text Question: Reflect on what you have learned and answer the question below.

Political science is often described as both a science and an art. Based on what you have learned about its nature, why do you think both descriptions are appropriate? Support your answer with at least two characteristics of political science.

2.3.1 The subject matter of science

First, we need to know the subject matter of science, or to put it differently, what science is. Science is a branch of knowledge or study dealing with a body of facts or truths systematically arranged and showing the operation of general laws. Science, therefore, gathers facts and links them together in their causal sequence to draw valid inferences. Scientific knowledge is therefore based on reason and evidence, as well as on conclusions that are verifiable, communicable, and replicable across national frontiers. Any scientific discipline must therefore possess the following characteristics:

- The possibility of a consistent, concise and connected formulation.
- The capacity to generalise and make predictions.
- The possibility of verification of the data, as well as the generalisations.
- An agreement on methods, and
- The adequate training of those who are engaged in scientific work (Mbah, 2007:17).

Comparative Politics, one of the major branches of Political Science, is a field of study in which the five listed above characteristics of a scientific discipline apply best; the other three branches are Political Theory, Public Administration, and International Relations. For example, in Comparative Politics, there are some minimal scientific requirements for any comparative analysis.

They include the definition of terms and an accurate description of the subject matter of study, the formulation of a hypothesis in the form of a causal relationship (if A, then B), and the acceptance, rejection, or modification of the hypothesis when tested with available data. When a hypothesis is accepted, a grand theory of politics may be developed that can be used for either a single-country or a cross-country study.

The scientific approach in Political Science, therefore, refers to the methods employed by practitioners of the discipline. It should be noted that the methodology which a Political Scientist adopts, and the basic assumptions he makes, will, to some extent, influence the image he has of his discipline.

This is because “scope” and “method” cannot be completely divorced - they are intertwined. Methodology can and should be studied in its own right, but in addition, it ought to be considered as an important influence on the scope of Political Science, especially as methodology indicates, not what the discipline is but, to some extent, what Political Science can and cannot do.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Explain the major criteria or requirements of a scientific discipline.

Question 1

Which of the following is a fundamental requirement of a scientific discipline?

- A. Systematic observation and verification
- B. Personal opinions and beliefs
- C. Religious doctrines
- D. Emotional judgments

Question 2

A scientific discipline must be characterized by _____.

- A. Subjective interpretation only
- B. Objectivity and empirical evidence
- C. Traditional beliefs
- D. Speculative assumptions

Question 3

The ability to formulate general laws or principles from observed facts is known as _____.

- A. Imagination
- B. Intuition
- C. Generalization
- D. Guesswork

2.3.2 The status of Political Science

Now that you have explored the nature of political science, let us examine its status as a discipline. As you work through this topic, consider what makes political science a distinct and valuable field of study.

Political science is a social science discipline because it deals with human beings. It is different from the natural or physical sciences, which deal with matters, atoms and molecules. Unlike the natural sciences like physics, chemistry, and biology, where the laws governing them are uniform, exact, and certain, this is not so in the social sciences like Politics, Economics, Geography, and Sociology, whose central theme is human beings.

For these reasons, the premises or assumptions of Political Science are weak, its conclusions at best, tentative, and at worst, dubious. Despite these limitations, what qualifies Political Science as a Social Science discipline is its reliance on scientific research methods, including describing political concepts, testing and using hypotheses to forecast or predict future phenomena that can be generalised across nations, subject to certain environmental variables. Political Science relies on knowledge gained from other disciplines such as Economics, Sociology, Geography, and History.

to build hypotheses and formulate theories. History, for example, is usually regarded as the laboratory of Political Science.

As Professor Seeley aptly puts it, “Political Science is the fruit of history and History is the root of Political Science.” Several assumptions and principles characterise the sciences or scientific methods. First, scientists assume some laws or principles of determinism or the law of universal causation.

S/N	Social Sciences	Natural Sciences
1.	Economics, Politics, Sociology, etc.	Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, etc,
2.	Studies Man as Social Beings in a given	Studies nature through Matter, Atoms and Molecules
3.	Uses scientific methods as tools of analysis	Uses scientific methods as tools of analysis
4.	No certainty or universal validity of results or	There is universal validity of results and predictions
5.	No precise definition of concepts, it is subject to some endogenous variables,	Concepts are uniform and standard irrespective of the environment, e.g., the Law of Gravity, the Pythagorean Theorem, and Formulae.
6.	Uses the field as a laboratory without special tools or instruments for the	Laboratories are in a controlled room with specialised tools and chemicals.
7.	No agreement on methodology of research	There is agreement on the methodology of research and level of training
8.	Research work is affected by sentiments, habits, moods	Research work is not affected by sociological, political or any sentiment

This means that a political scientist who accepts scientific methods plunges into his work assuming that nothing in politics happens. The second major characteristic of science is its empirical basis. This implies several features, including an observational foundation, intersubjectivity, and the value-free nature of science. The objectives of science are summarised in its characteristics: being systematic in nature, its empirical generalisations, the development of systematic theory, and finally, explanations and predictions.

However, the arguments against the possibility of a science of politics invariably attempt to demonstrate that Political Science does not/or cannot have one or more of these characteristics.

The controversy generated by this latter view (which we shall return to and examine in detail in the next section) is that political science, by its nature, does not possess the character of a scientific discipline. Those who hold this position have gone so far as to advise behaviorally oriented approaches.

political scientists to abandon all pretences, put the brakes on their fantasies, admit the futility of their efforts, and return to the traditional ways of doing things. The table below compares and contrasts the Social and Natural Sciences.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Discuss those features which qualify Political Science as an academic discipline.

Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

Question 1

Political Science qualifies as an academic discipline because it adopts a approach that involves systematic observation and analysis of political phenomena.

Question 2

One key feature of Political Science as a discipline is, which requires that findings be based on observable and verifiable evidence.

Question 3

The ability of Political Science to develop.....from empirical observations enables it to explain and predict political behaviour.

2.3.3 The Science or Art debate or controversy on the status of Political Science

Having examined the status of political science, let us now explore the long-standing debate about whether it is a science, an art, or both.

From what we have discussed above, it is obvious that any scientific discipline is concerned with the rational and systematic organisation of ideas. To the extent that politics remains the study of human activities and interactions as they relate to the struggle to seek and retain power through legitimate means, we can say it qualifies as a scientific discipline. In addition, as far as the political behaviour of some practitioners resonates a pattern, which is consistent and easily predictable, we can Also, say that the tenets or requirements of science have been met. From the array of studies that Political Scientists carry out, it is possible to discern a pattern, or develop a theory from which assumptions, deductions or inferences, as well as generalisations and conclusions can be drawn.

We can also develop models or ideal constructs that can be verified or replicated in other societies with little or no modification. To this extent, we are right to conceive politics as a scientific discipline.

The interdisciplinary approach also states that there are inescapable yet beneficial relationships among the major social science disciplines, be it Economics, Psychology, Sociology or Anthropology. This will be taken on more rigorously in the next section. Despite this symmetry or linkage among the various disciplines, however, the central issues in the study of Political Science can still be identified.

They include power, how it is acquired and used; authority and legitimacy, how it is secured and maintained. Nation-states and supra-national organisations: how they can be made to survive; governmental institutions: how they are structured, organised, and interrelated.

However, before we jump into the conclusion about the status of political science as a scientific discipline, we must recognise the complexity of political phenomena and what is called “human indeterminacy”.

First, a major point raised against the science of politics is that it is difficult to discover regularities in political phenomena, and that the variety of meanings or uses usually ascribed to political concepts often makes their meaning unclear or imprecise. Second, Russel Kirk is a foremost critic of the science of politics, when he argued: “Human beings are the least controllable, verifiable, law-obeying and predictable of

subjects”. Kirk’s argument addresses the presence of freedom in politics, which enables individuals to choose their course of action at any point in the political process. For this reason, it will be difficult to classify such behaviour, hindering the generation and formulation of theories about it. Despite the above, we can still make a proposition regarding this art-versus-science controversy. If the study of Political Science is systematic, the practice of politics appears to have the characteristics of an art in the developed climes and of organised chaos in the developing world.

Most rulers in Africa for example, often conceive politics from the perspective of Isaac Disrael who defines politics as the “art of governing mankind by deceiving them” (Crick, 1962, p. 16) or Harold Lasswell who took a trip from his popular and apt definition of politics, and described a politician as “a person with private motives, translated into public objects and rationalized as being in the public interest”.

Politics thus becomes the rationalisation of human interests, embodied in institutional relationships that are presented as promoting the public good. Indeed, what politics and leadership have been turned into in developing societies are clearly very different from Aristotle’s view of politics as an ennobling and elevating human activity, or that of Jeremy Bentham, who conceived politics as “a means of achieving the greatest good for the greatest number.”

Even in advanced democracies, political dishonesty, especially during elections, has reached such a level of sophistication that political leaders can deceive their people. The manipulation is done by appealing to different primordial sentiments to persuade the populace to become uncritical supporters of the government of the day, no matter how narrow, self-centred, or ruinous its policies might be. However, when the trend of deceit becomes persistent, citizens begin to view the government with disdain and may even encourage them to resort to disloyalty.

It would be interesting to know why citizens may resort to anarchism. Government is created to strive for the well-being of the people in the polity, while maintaining peace and order in society. However, when government becomes an impediment to the fulfilment of human potential, the alternative is either to eliminate it in parts or abolish it completely.

It is also important to note that the institutions and apparatus of the state, as well as their operators, do not operate in a value-free setting. If they are not properly structured to reflect the common will, they may be hijacked by a cabal for selfish ends rather than the interest of the generality of the people. There must be goals that every society sets for itself, including order, justice and progress. We may want to know who sets the goals for a society and what criteria are used to determine those

goals. It is here that subjectivism, which violates the objective approach of a normal scientific inquiry, is introduced.

In practical terms, what is accorded primacy will depend on the level already attained by the people of a given society. However, no country can endure for too long if any of these goals is consistently sacrificed for another. Therefore, only a carefully moderated, scientifically grounded, and less mechanical approach to political science can make the discipline relevant to the specific needs of every society.

The undiscerning and less elevated scholar or student may consider the issue of ethics to be outside the purview of political science or even outside the realms of science generally. This is not true in reality.

For instance, despite the Machiavellian popular phrase that “the end justifies the means”, there is also the equally plausible proposition that “what is morally wrong cannot be politically right”. Indeed, we cannot separate ethics from politics because the foundation of effective human authority over fellow human beings has both moral and ethical content. Where morality is impaired, authority is ineffective. In any case, the goal of justice cannot be attained if the leadership is not attuned to the society's acceptable moral and ethical norms.

We will explore this further when we discuss the relationships between Political Science and other disciplines in the following section.

To deepen your understanding, click the link or scan the QR code below to watch a short video on Political Science as an Art or a Science.

https://youtu.be/IASLA7JLqGY?si=_NQpj6W_QrXGuA2E



Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Critically examine whether Political Science is an art or a social science discipline.

2.3.4 Political Science and other disciplines

Having explored the status of political science, let us now examine how it connects with other disciplines. You will discover how these relationships enrich the study of politics and broaden your understanding of society.

2.3.4 Political Science and History

E. H. Carr defined history as “the unending dialogue between the present and the past.” Professor Renier emphasised the social role of history and thus defined the discipline as “the memories of societies” (Rao, 2004, pp. 1-2). While comparing the two disciplines, Professor Seely J. R. stated that Political Science is the fruit of history, and history is the root of Political Science.

For this reason, Political Scientists rely on historical facts to make predictions and to address the full gamut of challenges posed in comparative political analysis. Professor R. G. Collingwood conceives the explorative role of history thus: “Science is finding things out, and in that sense history is science”. In this vein, since political Science also seeks to find things out, we can say the two disciplines do make a relentless search for truth.

In his own comparison of Political Science and History, Sidgwick wrote: “The primary interest of history is the presentation of facts; the primary interest of politics is abstract, the formulation of general law and principle.” Harold Laski once remarked in his treatise on human rights that “it is a lesson of history that people who are denied a share in political power are also denied a share in the benefit of power.” Therefore, history constitutes a consistent and fertile source of political analysis and predictions.

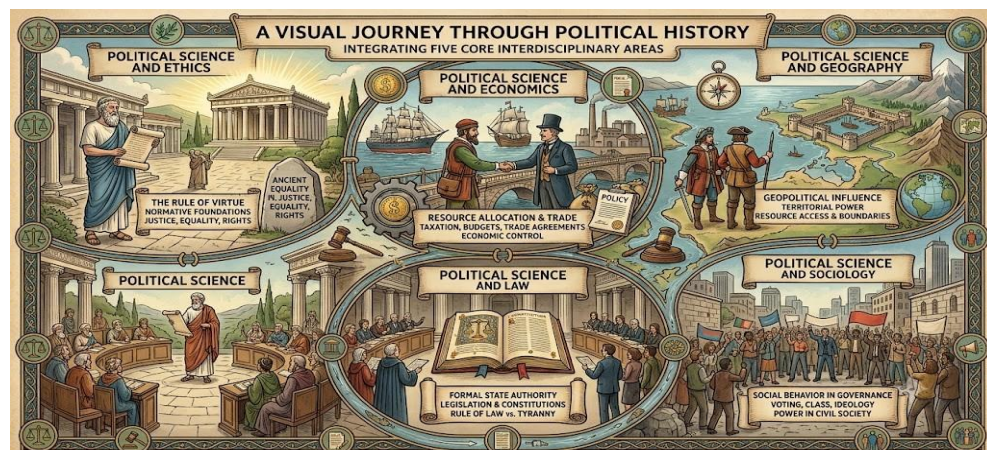


Fig. 2 .2 Political Science and History

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

2.3.4.1 Political Science and Ethics

Ethics is a branch of study that investigates the laws of morality and formulates the rules of conduct, that is, what is right and wrong, the dos and don'ts. The utilitarian doctrine of Jeremy Bentham, who prescribes "the greatest happiness of the greatest numbers" as the purpose of government, better illustrates the union of ethics and politics. Moreover,

2.3.4.2 Political Science and Ethics

When Harold Laski stated that rebellion is a contingent obligation of citizenship, he was only recommending this extreme option to a government that violates the social contract.

Indeed, from Socrates to St. Thomas Aquino, the defining characteristic of political thinking was the presumed unity of ethics and politics. However, the general thrust of modern political thought, from Machiavelli to the present day, has been to call that presumption into question.

While Socrates said there is such a thing as moral excellence that produces not merely limited happiness but complete happiness, Aristotle believed that the state ought to possess an ethical character. Indeed, Aristotle believed that while the state comes into existence for the sake of life, it continues to exist for the sake of a good life. Ideology, which is a political weapon, therefore seeks to reaffirm the unity of ethics and politics.

On the other hand, in advising that the Prince should eschew ethical standards, Machiavelli believes in the actions of men, and especially princes, from where there is no appeal; the end justifies the means. It was in reaction to Machiavelli's amoral and desperate bid to deny humanity's essential ethical capacity that ideologies developed.

A former United States Secretary of State, James Baker (1995), shared this view of the unity of politics and ethics when he stated, "It is only through politics that we can transform philosophy into policy."

2.3.4.2 Political Science and Economics

Briefly defined, Economics is the science of wealth; it is concerned with the allocation and use of limited resources among the various groups in a society. Thus, while money is the currency of economics, power is the currency of politics, and both are scarce in relation to the desire for them. The acquisition of both necessarily engenders competition and the need to set rules to prevent conflict, thereby achieving economic prosperity or political stability.

Economics and politics intersect at many points because the political leadership takes vital economic decisions in a country, even in a capitalist system.

The enduring lesson of the Great Depression of the 1930s and the global economic meltdown of 2007/8 is that it is dangerous for any government to allow market forces free rein; there is a need for some form of regulation or state intervention to maintain equilibrium.

Not a few hold the view that American economic prosperity can only be explained by its stable political system. It is also believed that the more well-to-do a nation is, the greater its chances of political stability, all things being equal.

In the immediate post-independence era in Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah thought that political freedom did not automatically deliver a better life to his people; he qualified his often-quoted statement: “seek you.

First, the political kingdom and every other thing shall be added unto it” With “political independence is meaningless without economic self-determination.” Using democracy as a variable, Nkrumah further explained the link between politics and economics thus: “economic growth is a condition for the growth of democracy, not for its establishment.” It is therefore safe to conclude that Politics and Economics are like Siamese twins: there can hardly be political stability without economic prosperity, and the economy can hardly grow without political stability; both must cooperate to produce a good result.

2.3.4.3 Political Science and Law

Political Science, as a discipline, can also be meaningful in the context of law, or what is known as the constitutional order. It is well known that no society can be governed without the constitution, either written or unwritten, being the legal basis of authority in a society. The legislative processes in parliament, the enforcement or implementation of the law by the executive, and the judiciary's business of interpreting the constitution are major areas where political science and law intersect.

2.3.4.4 Political Science and Geography

Since Alfred Thayer and Sir Halford Mackinder coined the term geopolitics to explain the interaction between politics and human geography, the relationship between the two disciplines has been widely accepted. Both scholars have particularly stressed the deterministic relationship between a country's geographical endowments and its foreign policy reflexes. It is a fact today that the wealth and power of a nation are a function, among other factors, of its location. Resources are located within the territorial confines of a state, and territory is an attribute of a state within which its citizens live, over which its government rules and exercises sovereignty.

2.3.4.5 Political Science and Sociology

Just as political science has borrowed concepts such as centripetal and centrifugal forces from physics and system analysis from biology, it has also taken from sociology a popular conceptual framework known as structural functionalism, which is particularly relevant in comparative political analysis.

Indeed, the idea of the socialisation of societal norms and values, a major area of study in sociology, is relevant to political science, as it is essential to achieving congruence or balance in society.

Political Scientists have also adopted Max Weber's typologies of authority in their common endeavour with sociologists to distinguish between power and authority, the former being a central concept in political science.

Self-Assessment Exercise 4

Distinguish between political science and other social sciences.

Question 1

Political Science is primarily concerned with the study of _____, while other social sciences focus on different aspects of human society.

- A. Power, authority, and governance
- B. Production and consumption of goods
- C. Human physical development
- D. Chemical reactions in nature

Question 2

Which of the following best distinguishes Political Science from Economics?

- A. Political Science studies political institutions, while Economics studies resource allocation
- B. Political Science studies culture, while Economics studies religion
- C. Political Science studies biology, while Economics studies physics
- D. Political Science studies language, while Economics studies history

Question 3

Political Science differs from Sociology because it mainly focuses on _____.

- A. Social relationships and family structure
- B. Political power, state, and government
- C. Market forces and trade
- D. Human anatomy and physiology



2.4 Summary

In this unit, we have discussed the nature of political science and established that it is a social science discipline.

We have taken this position notwithstanding, or without prejudice to the debate on whether political science is an art or a science discipline.

In line with the interdisciplinary approach often adopted in the Social Science faculty, we also examined the relationships between political science and other disciplines. This engagement has helped to deepen the breadth and rigour of political discourse and analysis.



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2.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

Possible Answers to SAE 1

1. Answer: A
2. Answer: B
3. Answer: C

Possible Answers to SAE 2

1. Answer: Scientific
2. Answer: Objectivity
3. Answer: Generalisations

Possible Answer to SAE 3

The question of whether political science is an art or a social science discipline has long occupied scholars, and the evidence suggests that it is most appropriately understood as a social science with enduring artistic dimensions.

On the one hand, political science satisfies the core criteria of a social science. It adopts a systematic and methodical approach to the study of political phenomena such as power, authority, institutions, and behaviour. Modern political analysis relies on empirical observation, hypothesis formulation, data collection, and verification, particularly under the influence of the behavioural revolution. Scholars examine voting patterns, public opinion, policy outcomes, and institutional performance using quantitative and qualitative techniques.

This orientation reflects a commitment to objectivity, generalisation, and causal explanation, even if the resulting laws are probabilistic rather than deterministic. In this sense, political science operates within the same epistemological framework as other social sciences, seeking to explain and, to a limited extent, predict political outcomes.

Furthermore, political science has developed theoretical frameworks and models that organise knowledge and guide analysis. Approaches such as systems theory, structural-functionalism, and political economy illustrate attempts to impose conceptual order on complex realities.

The discipline also benefits from interdisciplinary integration, drawing on economics, sociology, psychology, and history, thereby reinforcing its scientific character. These features collectively support the view that political science is fundamentally a social science discipline.

However, the argument that political science is an art arises from its engagement with normative questions and practical judgment. Classical political thinkers, especially Aristotle, conceived politics as the “master science” concerned with the good life and ethical governance. In this tradition, political inquiry is not limited to describing what is, but extends to prescribing what ought to be. Issues such as justice, equality, liberty, and legitimacy cannot be resolved purely through empirical methods; they require value judgments, philosophical reasoning, and interpretive insight.

Possible Answers to SAE 4

1. Answer: A
2. Answer: A
3. Answer: B

Unit 3 Evolution and Methods of Political Science

Unit Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Learning Outcome
- 3.3 Evolution of Political Science
 - 3.3.1 The Era of Traditionalism in Political Science
 - 3.3.2 The Era of Behavioural Revolution
 - 3.3.3 The Era of Post-behaviourism:
 - 3.3.4 Approaches to the Study of Political Science
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- 3.4 Methods of Political Science
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- 3.7 Possible Answers to SAE



3.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. Having explored the nature and status of Political Science in the previous unit, we now take the next step by tracing the discipline's development over time. This journey will allow you to see how Political Science moved through different stages of growth, with changing approaches and methods influencing its development. As you work through the unit, we will consider the major phases in this journey and how they contributed to the discipline as we know it today. Keep an open mind as you explore these developments and think about how the study of politics has changed over time. The knowledge and insights you gain here will prepare you for the next topic, in which we will turn our attention to Democracy and the Constitution. To begin, engage with the learning activity that follows.



3.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the major stages in the evolution of Political Science from traditionalism to behaviouralism and post-behaviourism;
- compare the traditional, behavioural and post-behavioural approaches to the study of political phenomena;
- analyse how different approaches provide alternative ways of understanding political behaviour, institutions and political realities; and
- apply appropriate methods of Political Science to the study of political phenomena and issues.



3.3 Evolution of Political Science

Welcome to this new topic! Let us take a brief journey through the development of political science and discover how the study of politics has evolved.

3.3.1 The Era of Traditionalism in Political Science

Let us begin by exploring the era of traditionalism. Political science is a branch of social science. It developed from a mere descriptive and prescriptive area of knowledge to a scientific status, with a wide range of techniques and methods of understanding, analysing, and predicting political phenomena.

Rodee et al., in their book, *Introduction to Political Science*, noted that the term political science could be traced to Jean Bodin (1530–1596), a French political philosopher and lawyer who termed the study of politics "Science Politique" and gave Political science an abiding concern for the organisation of institutions related to law.

Another French Philosopher, Montesquieu (1689 - 1755), argued that all functions of government could be encompassed within the categories of legislation, execution, and adjudication.

The term Political Science is one of the oldest in the pedigree of the social sciences, in particular, and of the sciences in general (Varma, 1975, p. 1; Dryzek and Leonard, 1988: 1246).

In a more deductive sense, we can say that political science as an academic field of study originated from the works of the ancient Greek philosophers whose major preoccupation was how to create an ideal state (Varma 1975: 1), or to avoid what was later described by social contract theorists as the state of nature.

However, this is not to suggest that the study of politics in the ancient Greek city-states was the study of the "Science" of politics as it is known in modern times. Rather, the main preoccupation of political thinkers of the time was a historical and descriptive understanding of political phenomena.

Thus, to understand the different phases in the development of the field of political science, Varma (1975:1) has clearly delineated four characteristic features of the classical tradition for understanding political science: the historical-analytical, legal-institutional, normative-prescriptive, and descriptive taxonomy.

Mbah (2007:28-9) also identified five main phases in the development and evolution of the discipline: the philosophical and deductive phase, the historical and comparative phase, the juridical and constitutional phase, the observational and measurement phase and the psychological phase. Political science has therefore developed from a historical perspective, dealing with the study of past and present political phenomena and with a view to predicting the future of political processes.

The first political scientist known to have analysed information systematically was the Greek philosopher Aristotle. He compared the constitutions of Greek city-states during the 4th century B.C. and generalised about the political consequences of the different constitutional systems (Appadorai, 2004).

The study of Political Science also flourished in ancient Greece during the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., in the Roman Republic from 509 to 31 B.C., in the republic of Italy during the 15th and 16th centuries, amidst the political turmoil of 17th-century Britain, and during the French and American Revolutions towards the end of the 18th century.

The concern of political scientists at the time was how to provide rulers with useful advice on how to organise government more effectively.

However, Political Science, as it is studied and taught today, was developed more recently. In the 19th century, German academics developed a systematic science called "Staatlehre" to provide useful information to governments. The first Professor of Political Science in the United States was German emigre Francis Lieber, who was appointed

Chairman of Political Science at Columbia College (now Columbia University) in New York City in 1857.

The next generation of Political Scientists sought to establish the discipline's identity and influence in the emerging American university system, rather than through the American government. During the 1920s and 1930s, Charles E. Merriam and his colleagues at the University of Chicago formed the Chicago School. Merriam's many interests included the history of political thought and education. Most notably, Harold Gosnell and Harold Lasswell conducted research that focused on voting, mass political participation, the psychology of political behaviour, leadership, and wartime propaganda.

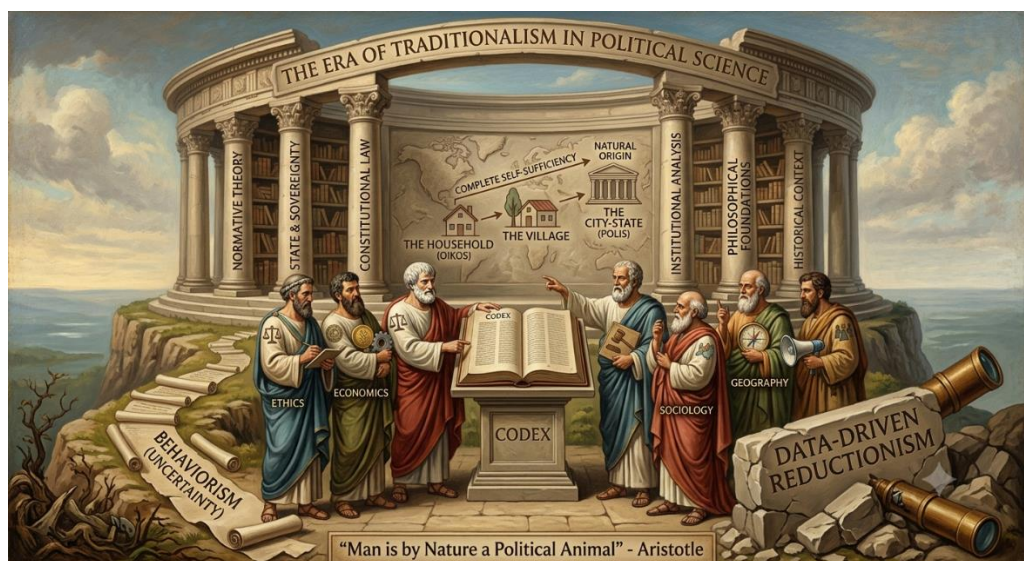


Fig. 3.1 The Era of Traditionalism in Political Science

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

3.3.2 The Era of Behavioural Revolution

Ready for the next step? Let us explore the behavioural revolution and see how it changed the way political scientists studied politics. As you go along, think about what made this new approach different and why it mattered.

The Chicago school was the forerunner of what became known as the behavioural revolution of the 1950s, which influenced political science during the last half of the 20th century. Many behavioralists served the U.S. government during World War II (1939 - 1945) and conducted economic and social analyses as part of the war effort.

This marked the genesis of the groundbreaking work of behavioural scholars who emphasised the need to introduce new scientific methods and techniques. The tradition of scientific methods in political science

was also informed by what is considered by the proponents of scientific study of politics as "Behavioural Revolution.

Behaviourism was the development of research in political science using scientific methods and procedures. According to the major founder of the behavioural revolution, David Easton, several assumptions and objectives underpin the idea of the revolution. These are regularities, verification, techniques, quantification, values, systematisations, pure science, and integration. Thus, while the discipline of political science originated from the works of ancient philosophers such as Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle, the credit for its development as a scientific discipline should go to leading English and American writers of the 20th century.

Indeed, since the 1930s, the Political scientists of the University of Chicago, popularly known as the Chicago school, had made a clean break with the study of philosophical, historical and institutional approaches and, Instead, began to lay stronger emphasis on the observable behaviour of man as a political creature" (Johari, 1979, p. 79). The work of modern intellectuals in political science led to the development of theories, prominent among which are general systems theory, structural-functional analysis, communication group theory, and cybernetic theory.

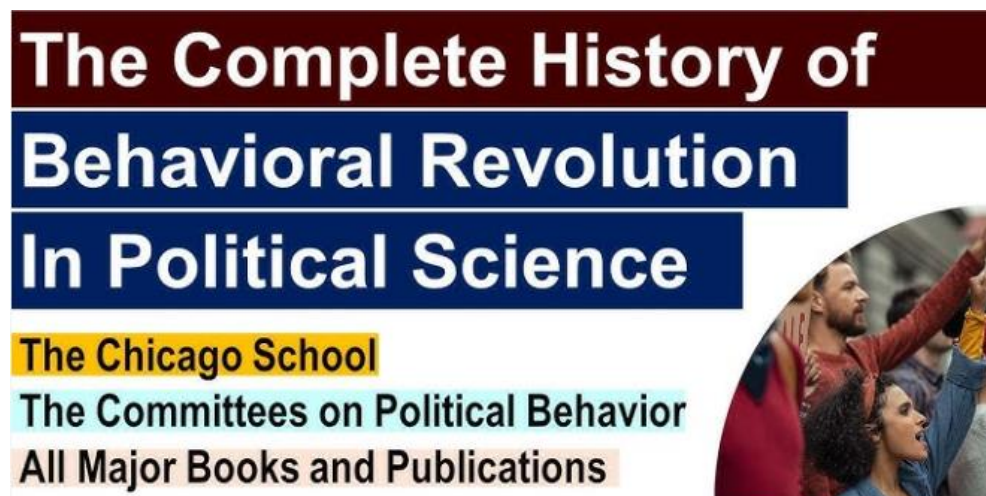


Fig 3.2 The Era of Behavioural Revolution

Source: Google

3.3.3 The Era of Post-behaviourism:

Let us keep going! Having explored the behavioural revolution, we now turn to post-behaviourism and discover why political scientists began to rethink some of its ideas. As you explore, look out for the changes that shaped this new era.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Explain the traditional and the behavioural eras in the development of political science.

Question 1

The study of _____ primarily characterizes the traditional era of political science.

- A. Political institutions, legal frameworks, and normative ideas
- B. Statistical analysis of voting behaviour
- C. Experimental research on political attitudes
- D. Quantitative modelling of political systems

Question 2

The behavioural era in political science emphasizes _____ in the study of political phenomena.

- A. Philosophical speculation and moral reasoning
- B. Empirical observation and scientific methods
- C. Religious doctrines and traditions
- D. Historical narratives without data

Question 3

A key difference between the traditional and behavioural eras is that the traditional approach focuses on _____, while the behavioural approach focuses on observable political behaviour.

- A. empirical data
- B. value judgments and normative analysis
- C. experimental methods
- D. quantitative techniques

3.3.4 Approaches to the Study of Political Science

How we study politics can change depending on what we want to understand. Imagine you are trying to understand why citizens support a particular political party. You might examine the political institutions, study people's behaviour and attitudes, or consider the historical and social conditions that shaped their choices. Each approach gives you a different way of looking at the same political reality.

As Political Science developed through different epochs, scholars introduced approaches that reflected the major concerns and ideas of their time. In this section, we will explore these approaches and see how each has contributed to our understanding of political life and political phenomena.

From the different epochs in the evolution and development of political science, separate approaches emerged that correspond to the dominant theme of each era. We will discuss each of these approaches in turn.

3.3.4.1 Philosophical/Traditional Approach

Imagine a community asking, “What makes a government good and just?” To answer this, we may consider ideas such as justice, freedom, authority and the purpose of government.

Under the traditional approach, certain basic questions dominated the attention of great traditional political philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. They include: What is justice? What makes the exercise of political power legitimate? What should be the proper role of the state in the generation, distribution and regulation of wealth in society? What importance should be given to such political values as justice, natural rights, freedom, obedience and liberty? These questions are understandable since they fall under the normative- philosophical approach, which is the oldest and least scientific approach to the study of politics.

The approach is also consistent with the preoccupation of early scholars with philosophical reflections on universal political values regarded as essential to the just state and the good citizen. Within the broad traditional school is the other sub-school known as the prescriptive-institutional Approach.

It focuses on the evolution and operation of the legislative, executive, and judicial arms, which, respectively, are the institutions for making, executing, and interpreting the law. As the approach developed, however, the list of institutions also included political parties, constitutions, bureaucracies, interest groups and other institutions or associations that are more or less permanently engaged in politics.

This approach seeks to answer questions such as "What are the historical sources of parliamentary supremacy in Britain?" What is the procedure followed before a bill can become law in the United States? By what electoral arrangements are the rulers chosen in a democracy? (Suberu, 1991:4-5)

From the study of these institutions, you, as a researcher or student, can gain valuable knowledge about their organisation and operations, make proposals or recommendations for their reforms, and arrive at a general conclusion. However, it later dawned on the traditional scholars that this approach was no longer adequate for a proper understanding of politics.

science. For that reason, the approach was criticised for being too static, overly reliant on history, overly qualitative, or based on value judgments, and therefore lacking objective criteria, since it cannot be scientifically or empirically validated. This was the background to the development of the scientific or behavioural approach.



Fig. 3.3. Philosophical/Traditional Approach

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

List the major postulates of the Traditional Approach.

Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

Question 1

The traditional approach to political science emphasizes the study of political institutions using _____ and descriptive methods.

Question 2

One major postulate of the traditional approach is its focus on _____ analysis, which deals with what ought to be in politics.

Question 3

The traditional approach relies heavily on _____ reasoning rather than empirical.

3.3.4.2 The Behavioural Approach

Imagine researchers trying to understand why people vote for a particular candidate. Instead of focusing mainly on political institutions, they observe people's actual political behaviour, attitudes and actions.

Proponents of this approach not only emphasise facts over values but also argue that the behaviour of individual operators in the political theatre, rather than the institutions within which they operate, is the essence of politics. The behavioralists also emphasise the use of scientific and empirical methods in political research and, in fact, believe that political science can become as sophisticated and rigorous as the natural and physical sciences. Behavioralists also call for greater integration of political science with other social science disciplines such as psychology, sociology, geography and economics.

The interdisciplinary perspective of the behavioural approach to political science may be traced to the publication in 1908 of Graham Wallas's *Human Nature in Politics* and Arthur Bentley's *The Process of Government*. Both books focused on the behavioural and informal processes of political activity, rather than on a philosophical approach to highlight the complex role of human nature in political conduct. Bentley used a sociological approach to arrive at the new concept of "groups" in politics. With the end of the First World War in 1918, the behavioural revolution blossomed in the United States, which remained the only country where the behavioural approach was most fully developed.

Although the behavioural approach experienced a relative decline in popularity from 1925 to the end of the Second World War, it experienced a tremendous revival after the war in 1945. It dominated the study of politics through the 1950s.

The major behavioralists in this era included notable intellectuals such as David Easton, Robert Dahl, Karl Deutsch, Gabriel Almond, David Truman, and others. The behavioralist approach continued to dominate the study of politics, particularly in the United States, until the late sixties, when some behavioralists argued that the approach should be revised and refined to accommodate new developments in world politics. This revisionist argument, known as the post-behavioural movement, was spearheaded by David Easton.

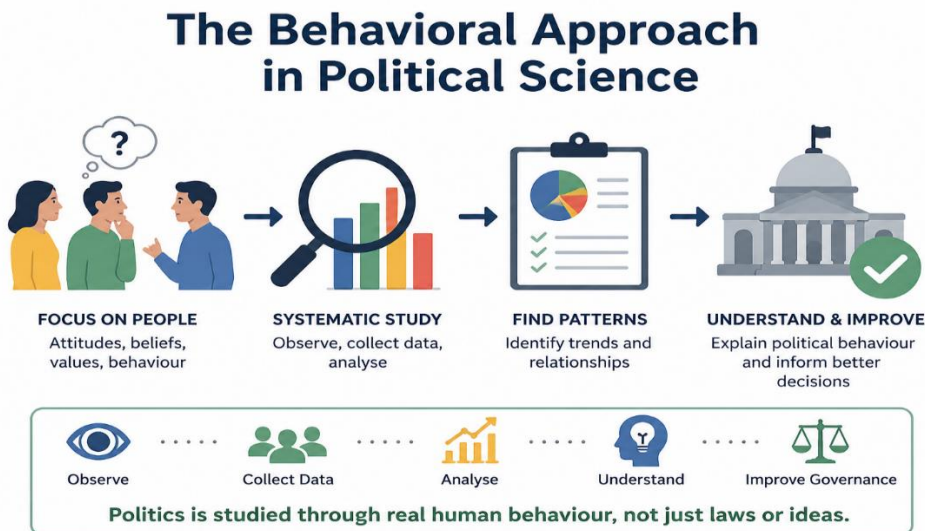


Fig. 3.4 The Behavioural Approach

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Examine the difference between the Traditional and the behavioural school.

Question 1

The Traditional School of political science is mainly concerned with _____, while the Behavioural School focuses on observable political behaviour.

- A. normative and institutional analysis
- B. empirical data and statistical methods
- C. scientific experimentation
- D. quantitative modelling

Question 2

Which of the following best distinguishes the Behavioural School from the Traditional School?

- A. Emphasis on philosophical reasoning
- B. Focus on legal and constitutional structures
- C. Use of empirical and scientific methods
- D. Reliance on historical analysis

Question 3

A major limitation of the Traditional School compared to the Behavioural School is its lack of _____.

- A. empirical verification
- B. normative focus
- C. institutional analysis
- D. philosophical reasoning

3.3.4.3 Post-Behavioural Approach

Now, let's build on what we have learned by examining these approaches more closely. Both the traditionalists and the post-behavioralists challenged the major assumptions and premises of the behavioural approach. According to the traditionalist, the assumptions of regularities or uniformities in human behaviour cannot be sustained because human behaviour is so complex and fluid that it cannot be subjected to rigorous scientific inquiry.

Also, due to many forces, including ideological ones, it is difficult to generalise or verify. Rather than offering a mere critique of the behavioural approach, the post-behavioralists sought to remove some of its inadequacies while retaining its more useful assumptions and principles. The four pillars of the post-behavioural approach include: The need to give greater primacy to the substance or subject of political investigation than the techniques of research and analysis.

- i). Political science should transcend the social conservatism of the behavioural approach, and instead should concentrate on how to achieve and sustain progressive and constructive change in society.
- ii). Contemporary political science cannot afford to ignore the unfortunate realities of political existence, such as the North-South poverty gap and the digital divide. Instead, it must address global crises and conflicts and contribute to their resolution. The study of politics must be people-centred and guided by the positive and progressive values of justice, equality, and freedom. The idea of value-neutrality in politics is not only a myth but also something that should be discouraged.

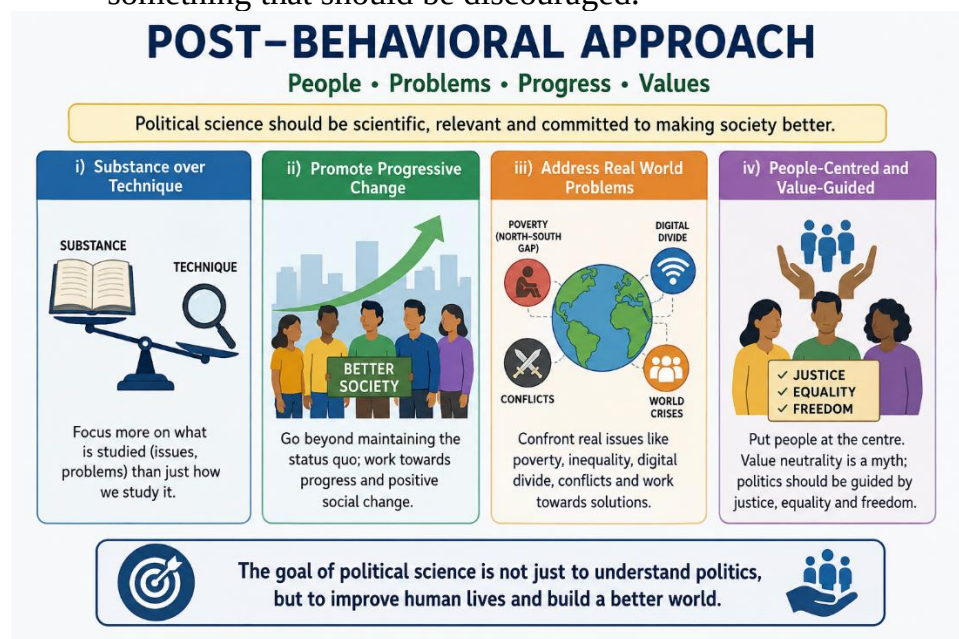


Fig. 3.4 Post-Behavioral Approach

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 4

Examine the difference between the Traditional and the behavioural school.

Question 1

The Traditional School of political science is mainly concerned with _____, while the Behavioural School focuses on observable political behaviour.

- A. normative and institutional analysis
- B. empirical data and statistical methods
- C. scientific experimentation
- D. quantitative modelling

Question 2

Which of the following best distinguishes the Behavioural School from the Traditional School?

- A. Emphasis on philosophical reasoning
- B. Focus on legal and constitutional structures
- C. Use of empirical and scientific methods
- D. Reliance on historical analysis

Question 3

A major limitation of the Traditional School compared to the Behavioural School is its lack of _____.

- A. empirical verification
- B. normative focus
- C. institutional analysis
- D. philosophical reasoning

Examine the difference between the Traditional and the behavioural school.

Question 1

The Traditional School of political science is mainly concerned with _____, while the Behavioural School focuses on observable political behaviour.

- A. normative and institutional analysis
- B. empirical data and statistical methods
- C. scientific experimentation
- D. quantitative modelling

Question 2

Which of the following best distinguishes the Behavioural School from the Traditional School?

- A. Emphasis on philosophical reasoning
- B. Focus on legal and constitutional structures
- C. Use of empirical and scientific methods
- D. Reliance on historical analysis

Question 3

A major limitation of the Traditional School compared to the Behavioural School is its lack of _____.

- A. empirical verification
- B. normative focus
- C. institutional analysis
- D. philosophical reasoning

Before progressing, kindly click the link or scan the QR code below to explore other Approaches to the Study of Political Science and broaden your understanding of how political phenomena can be examined from different perspectives.

<https://youtu.be/SFMYHKpcRIY?si=NgEaoW3YFZC0zXwD>



3.4 Methods of Political Science

We have followed the evolution of political science. Now, let us explore the methods used to study political issues and understand political behaviour.

Over more than a century of the evolution of Political Science as an academic discipline, several methods, also called methodology, have been and continue to be used. Without its own method, Political Science will not qualify as a discipline. However, over time, the methods are changing to cope with new challenges, and as John Mason stated: “the man who uses yesterday’s method in today’s world will not be in business tomorrow”. Methods of political science can be seen as the rational working of the mind in the quest for knowledge of political realities. It can also be seen as a technical device for gathering data. Therefore, the generally recognised methods of political science include the following:

3.4.1 Historical Method

The central idea here is that the historical method seeks an explanation of what past institutions are, to appreciate what they have been and to know their enduring value, if any. It is also pointed out that with experience, one can avoid repeating blunders. The human race draws upon the experience of past generations, the social heritage, and history, being a great teacher of wisdom, and a record of experience, is better placed to provide this. The historical method has the additional advantage of enlarging the mental horizon, improving perspective, and building an attitude towards past events. The importance of this method lies in the fact that it not only

explains the past but also enables us to draw dependable conclusions. The historical method also supplies us with basic principles for interpreting the future.

3.4.2 Observational Method

This method entails a close observation of the political phenomena under study. This is because things are best studied by direct observation; in politics, personal conversations or interactions with legislators and administrators may yield many fruitful results. The observational method involves great difficulties because the authentication of facts is far more laborious in political science than in other subjects. This is because the process of government presents many perspectives, and one may not be able to see them all at once. What appears on the surface may be but a small part of the reality beneath. Also, an observer may confuse personal or accidental causes or be lost in a maze of numerous and conflicting facts. He may also introduce value judgment, which may distort observable facts and cloud his capacity for sound judgment.

3.4.3 Experimental Method

It should be admitted at the onset that “scientific” experimentation, as it is done in the natural sciences, is not possible in political science. However, it should be noted that political experiments are being made, consciously or unconsciously, at all times.

By adopting counterfactual analysis, which relies on plausible sequences of historical facts, political scientists can arrive at conclusions that are close to verifiable scientific findings. The law of parsimony, which enables a scholar to say much with few words, also allows for precision in presentation, clarity of expression, and analysis.

August Comte argues that every political change, whether conscious or otherwise, is a sort of experiment. Every new policy, every new law passed, and every change made in the political structure and organisation is experimental in the sense that such a change is merely tentative or provisional. Political science is therefore experimental, not in the sense that laboratory-controlled experiments are possible, but only in the very limited sense that conscious and unconscious experimental data from direct observation can be collected, hypotheses formulated and valid political theories formulated.

3.4.4 Comparative Method

This method is employed in the study of political phenomena of different countries and environments using similar or dissimilar political concepts. The objective is to note similarities and differences in the circumstances

and conditions of the states under comparative study. At the beginning, this method relied on single-country studies, as political science was predominantly focused on countries with similar cultures in Europe and North America. However, in the aftermath of World War II, countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa also became subjects of comparative political analysis, and the cross-country approach became a more acceptable way to distil facts useful for comparative analysis.

3.4.5 Philosophical Method

This method is either deductive or inductive. It starts from the premise that it is necessary to construct theories of the state and the purpose of government, while others use an inductive method. It thus provides students with the norms and principles on which political realities can be examined and assessed, as well as suggestions for improvement. According to Sait, “Philosophical argument develops the intelligence; it impacts resourcefulness and elasticity of mind, and it is very doubtful if political science can deal with the multi-various problems confronting it. without the benefit of the normative approach inherent in the philosophical method.

3.4.6 Legal Method

This method seeks to benefit from the relationship between politics and the legal process, through the institutions established by the constitution and the laws enacted by the legislature, to maintain order in society. Here, issues of law and justice are discussed not as purely matters of jurisprudence. Rather, the state is seen as the maintainer of an effective and equitable system of law and order. The notion of the independence of the judiciary, problems of judicial administration and dispensation of justice, though legal in nature, are at the same time of equal concern to political scientists.

This method treats the state not only in terms of its political relevance but also as an organisation created equally for the purpose of making and enforcing laws. Examples of works based on the legal approach include Jean Bodin and his “Doctrine of Sovereignty, J. Rawls’ “A Theory of Justice,” and J. S. Mill’s “On Liberty.” Like the other methods, the legal approach has not escaped criticisms for its highly narrow orientation. This is because law embraces only a single part of a people’s lives and, as such, cannot cover the entire behaviour of man as a political animal (Mbah, 2007, pp. 28-34).

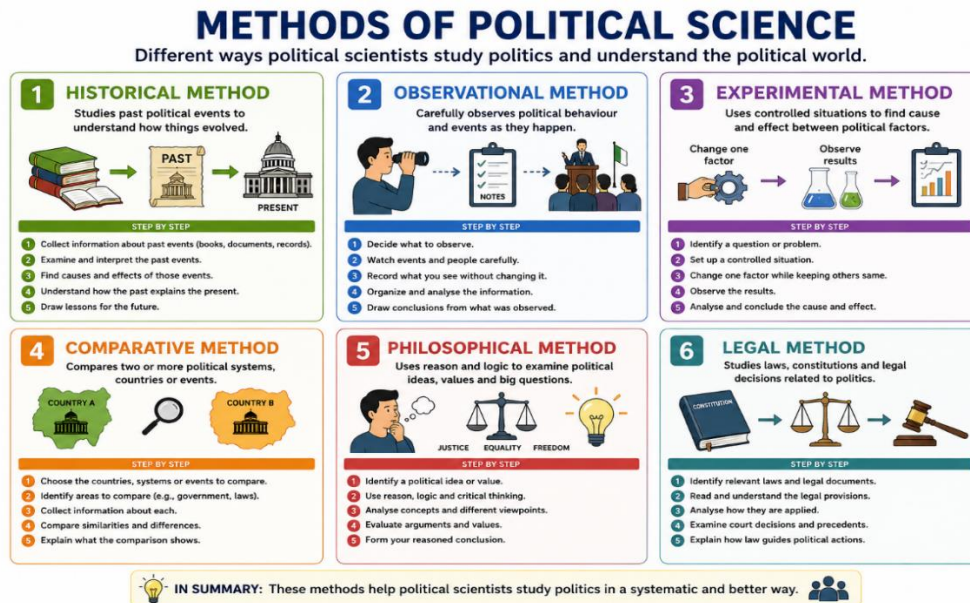


Fig. 3.5 Method of Political Science

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David



3.5 Summary

In this unit, we have examined the history, evolution and methods of political science. We observed that political science had its own period of apprenticeship, during which a parent discipline fostered it before it matured. We also noted that the approach in the early days of the discipline was rather historical and philosophical than descriptive, quantitative, or scientific. However, today, its study has become more rigorous and scientific, combining the fluidity of content analysis with the precision of a well-developed methodology.



3.6 References/Further Reading/Web Resources/Web Resources

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3.8 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

Possible Answers to SAE 1

1. Answer: A
2. Answer: B
3. Answer: B

Possible Answers to SAE 2

1. Answer: historical
2. Answer: normative
3. Answer: philosophical

Possible Answers to SAE 3

1. Answer: A
2. Answer: C
3. Answer: A

Possible Answers to SAE 4

1. Answer: A
2. Answer: B
3. Answer: B

Unit 4 Constitution and Constitutionalism

Unit Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Learning Outcome
- 4.3 The Meaning of the Constitution
 - 4.3.1 Types of constitution
 - 4.3.2 Written constitution
 - 4.3.3 Unwritten constitution
 - 4.3.4 Flexible and Rigid Constitutions
 - 4.3.5 Unitary Constitution
 - 4.3.6 Federal Constitution
 - 4.3.7 Confederal Constitution
 - 4.3.8 Some importance of the constitution
- 4.4 Summary
- 4.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources/Web Resources
- 4.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise



4.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit on Democracy and Constitution. Having explored the evolution of Political Science in the previous unit, we now turn from the discipline's development to the structures and principles that shape political life.

In this unit, we will turn our attention to the place of the constitution in organising government, regulating the exercise of power, and protecting citizens within a political system. You will explore the different types of constitutions, their significance, and the features associated with constitutional government.

As you work through the unit, consider how constitutional arrangements influence the relationship between government and citizens, and how they shape the exercise of political authority. Take your time with each learning activity, reflect on the examples provided, and prepare to connect these ideas with the wider study of democratic government.



4.2 Learning Outcome

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning and significance of the constitution and constitutionalism in a political system;
- differentiate between the major types of constitutions based on their characteristics and structures;

- compare unitary, federal and confederal constitutions in terms of the distribution and exercise of political power; and
- analyse the importance of a constitution in regulating government, protecting citizens' rights and maintaining political order.



4.3 The Meaning of Constitution and Constitutionalism

Welcome to this unit! You have done well so far, so let us build on what you have learned as we explore the Meaning of the Constitution and Constitutionalism.

In the modern world, no country lacks a constitution, a body of fundamental laws by which a country is governed. It is inconceivable that the modern government, with all its complex apparatus, can operate without a constitution. Even in pre-modern societies with less elaborate institutions, a constitution would still be needed; otherwise, the simple tasks of lawmaking, execution, and adjudication would be imprecise, lack proper delineation, or be problematic.

A constitution is therefore a fundamental prerequisite for the political stability, economic well-being and social cohesion of a country. A constitution provides the framework and principles that govern the organisation of government, its institutions, the nation's political philosophy and aspirations, and the relationships between citizens and the state.

A constitution is literally the system of laws and basic principles by which a state, country, or organisation is governed. A constitution, in general terms, is the body of rules which directly or indirectly affect the distribution of power or the exercise of the sovereign power in any nation-state.

Classically, it is the collection of principles according to which the powers of the government, the rights of the governed and the relations between the two are adjusted (Bello Imam, 2007, p. 1). The word constitution has been defined in various ways by scholars. A. V. Dicey explained that a constitution is a document with special legal sanctity.

According to Austin Ranney (cited in Ojo, 1973), "a constitution is a whole body of fundamental rules, written or unwritten, legal and extra legal according to which a particular government operates".

According to Black's Dictionary, a constitution is the organic and fundamental law of a nation or state, which may be written or unwritten, establishing the character and conception of its government, laying the

basic principles to which its internal life is to conform, organising the government, regulating, distributing, as well as limiting the functions of its different departments/organs.

There are two ways we can view a constitution. One can look at it as an “ethno-cultural arrangement” which brings together the way of life of a people. In this sense, a constitution is concerned with establishing a standard by which a people judge themselves and their leaders.

In another sense, a constitution can be seen as simply a legal document that defines the powers, structure, and institutional sources corresponding to that power structure.

For example, when the question is asked: What is the basis of the power exercised by the legislature in confirming executive appointments or approving treaties, or that of the judiciary in determining the legality or otherwise of legislation or executive actions? One should look into the constitution to find the rationale.

The Constitution is therefore a charter of governance; it prescribes how the state's power is distributed among its institutions and the process for amending it. Constitutions define the limits of a government's authority, thereby automatically establishing and safeguarding human rights.

A constitutional democracy is therefore a form of government which is regulated by a constitution and whose procedure cannot be altered except by a method accepted by its citizens. Constitutionalism deals with the rule of law. What this suggests is that a government established by a constitution should conduct itself in accordance with the rule of law, not the rule of men. In other words, it must operate according to agreed procedures.

S. N. Ray (2006: 109) defines constitutionalism as “a body of normative thought which seeks to realise by means of institutional arrangements, the dominant values...” of a political system. Constitutionalism, therefore, stands for the principle that the exercise of political power shall be bounded by rules to curb its arbitrariness.

Put differently, constitutionalism is government by limitations, both procedural and substantive. Moreover, as W. G. Andrew (1961:13) observes, under a constitutional government, power is proscribed and procedure prescribed. In short, a constitutional government is the antithesis of a dictatorship.

Constitutionalism is also based on the principle of shared power. Shared power exists when several independent power-holders or state organs participate in the exercise of political power, and the power

assigned to each organ is subject to reciprocal control (Ray, 2006, p. 110). It should, however, not be misconstrued that constitutionalism is restricted to adherence to a codified or written constitution.

Rather, it also embodies respect for the unwritten customs and conventions as practised in British democracy.

Broaden your knowledge by watching this short clip. Click the link or scan the QR code below, and be sure to watch the video to strengthen your understanding of the topic.

<https://youtu.be/0wUBjdkYLDY?si=dOaEVEWXdqcm1KI7>



Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Explain the difference between the Constitution and Constitutionalism.

Question 1

A Constitution refers to _____, while Constitutionalism emphasizes the limitation of governmental powers.

- A. a set of fundamental laws guiding the state
- B. public opinion about governance
- C. economic policies of a country
- D. informal traditions only

Question 2

Which of the following best explains Constitutionalism?

- A. The existence of a written constitution alone
- B. The practice of limiting government power through adherence to constitutional rules
- C. The process of electing political leaders
- D. The study of international law

Question 3

The major difference between Constitution and Constitutionalism is that the Constitution is _____, while Constitutionalism is concerned with how those rules are applied in practice.

- A. a legal framework of rules
- B. a political party system
- C. a cultural belief
- D. an economic structure

4.3.1 Types of constitution

You may already be familiar with different types of constitutions. How many have you encountered, and what differences did you notice? Let us explore the major types together and discover what makes each one unique.

4.3.2 Written constitution

Imagine you are asked to find the rules that govern a country. Where would you look? In a written constitution, these rules are clearly recorded in a formal document. Let us explore how it works.

When a Constitution is described as written, it means that the body of rules and regulations by which a country is governed is written or codified in a single document that can be consulted. This presupposes that the Constitution becomes a document through a process that involves (or accommodates the views of) the majority of the people who participate, either directly or through their representatives, in drafting, debating, reviewing, and adopting its contents before it can be regarded as the fundamental law of a nation.

The American Constitution readily satisfies this requirement, as it was adopted by the Constitutional Convention held in Philadelphia in 1787. To some extent, the 1979 Nigerian Constitution can also be regarded as having partially met this requirement since it originated from the Constitution Drafting Committee of '49 wise men' set up by Gen. Murtala Muhammed's regime in 1975. The draft was debated by a group of elected Nigerians from each Local Government Area in the federation, called 'Constituent Assembly', that was put in place by Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo in 1975.

The document was enacted into law by a decree of the Supreme Military Council (Ojiako, 1979). The major difference is that, unlike the United States Constitution, which was ratified by nine of the thirteen pioneer states, Nigeria's Constitution was not subjected to a referendum or plebiscite.

This is why the preamble "We the people of Nigeria" at the beginning of Nigeria's successive Constitutions since 1979 is viewed in some quarters as dubious.

We can now identify the salient features of a written Constitution as follows: It usually contains a preamble at the beginning, which is a statement expressing the essence, goals, aspirations and vision of the people of the country. It is otherwise known as the spirit of the

Constitution. It also specifies the organs of government, defines their respective powers and their relationships with one another, and sets out the eligibility requirements for individuals to occupy government positions.

- 1). A written Constitution usually states Fundamental Human Rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of movement, as listed in Chapter IV, Section. 33-45 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It also contains their limitations and safeguards, including the obligations the citizens in a state owe to themselves and the state (Awolowo, 1966).

Most written Constitutions, like those of the USA and Nigeria, contain elaborate procedures for amendment, which often make them rigid because of the stringent process required to alter them. Sec.

Section 9(1-4) of the Nigerian Constitution, 1999, sets out the cumbersome procedure for amending the Constitution.

- 2). The power-sharing arrangement is also enshrined in a written Constitution. For instance, the Second Schedule, Parts I and II of the Nigerian Constitution, 1999, contains the Legislative Powers shared among the Federal, States, and Local Government Councils under the Exclusive, Concurrent, and Residual powers. The document gives the Federal government the powers to legislate on all items under the Exclusive List. In contrast, both the Federal and State governments can legislate on every item under the Concurrent Legislative List; only the Local Councils have Residual Powers over items not listed under the two Legislative Lists.

It is also noteworthy that the consistent addition in the Nigerian Constitution, since 1979, the introduction of a chapter called the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy, which explains the fundamental obligations which are encoded as Political, Economic, Social, Educational, Foreign and Environmental Objectives (See Secs. 13-20, Nigerian Constitution, 1999).

However, scholars see the provisions as a façade of honesty because the Constitution did not make it justiciable (i.e. violations by the state cannot be challenged in a court of law). There are no provisions to guarantee the rights of any aggrieved citizen dissatisfied with the government's performance in meeting its Social Contract obligations, as enshrined in the sections, to seek legal redress or judicial intervention under the fundamental enforcement.

4.3.3 Unwritten constitution

Imagine a country where its governing rules are not contained in one single document. Instead, they are drawn from laws, customs, conventions and judicial decisions. This is the idea behind an unwritten constitution. Let us explore how it works.

When we refer to any state as having an unwritten Constitution, it means that the guiding principle by which the country is governed is not traditionally set out in a single document. This implies that the fundamental laws governing the given state are based on *conventions, customs, usages*, etc.

Great Britain is a good example of a country operating under an unwritten constitution for more than 500 years of democracy. The British Constitution is drawn from diverse sources, extending from the 13th century to the present. This means that the British Constitution is more or less a product of historical evolution that led to the transition from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy in 1215.

There was never a period when the people of Great Britain deliberately proposed to make a Constitution, but this should not be misconstrued as meaning that they do not have a Constitution that sets out how the affairs of the British people are run. What is important to note is that there is no single book that could be referred to as the British Constitution; rather, it is a system of government which has not been written down in a documentary form. In this regard, it must be stressed that some parts of the Constitution are contained in different statute books.

The fact that there was no period in British history when they actually convened a constitutional conference to make a Constitution makes it impossible to find the British Constitution in a single document.

Given its nature, the British Constitution comprises not only statutes or Acts of Parliament but also customary laws of the land and conventions, which together qualify as the Constitution (albeit unwritten). Sources of the unwritten Constitution, therefore, include statutes such as the Magna Carter (1215), the Petition of Right (1628), the Bill of Rights (1689), the Reform Act (1832), and the Parliamentary Act (1911), Common Law and Case Law, conventions or customs, and judicial decisions.

4.3.4 Flexible and Rigid Constitutions

Imagine a country where changing its constitution is as simple as passing an ordinary law, while another requires a special and more demanding process. What might explain this difference? Let us explore Flexible and Rigid Constitutions.

a) **Flexible Constitution**

These are the Constitutions whose fundamental laws can be changed or amended by simple majority votes of the members of the Parliament. This form of Constitution is used by small countries that operate a unitary system of government. The amendment can be made to such constitutions by the same procedures used to pass ordinary laws in parliament.

Some of the countries operating flexible constitutions include Great Britain, Ghana during the first Republic, Italy and New Zealand. Flexible constitutions may or may not be written. It is also possible to have a flexible written constitution, as in New Zealand.

b) **Rigid Constitution**

Rigid Constitutions are those that cannot be easily changed or amended because they require a special, usually difficult, process. This implies that amending such a constitution differs from the ordinary law-making process; it is not only difficult but also complicated. This process is actually laid down in the Constitution itself. Examples of countries with rigid constitutions are Australia, the United States of America, Canada and Nigeria.

Some reasons have been advanced for adopting the special procedures. It is said that such rigid constitutions should be changed only with proper deliberation, and that such a process should give the people, at least through their elected representatives, or via a referendum, the opportunity to express their views whether a change is necessary or not before such an amendment is made.

The amendment process is therefore made difficult, thereby protecting the people's interests. For example, the Nigerian Constitution can only be amended with the concurrence of a two-thirds majority of all members of the National Assembly (i.e., the Senate and the House of Representatives), and approved by resolution of the Houses of Assembly of not less than two-thirds of all the States in the federation. Another important reason for a federal state to adopt a rigid constitution is to prevent the union from disintegrating through secession.

4.3.5 Unitary Constitution

Imagine a country where most of the government's power is concentrated in a single central authority. How might this affect the way decisions are made across the country? Let us explore the Unitary Constitution.

A government is regarded as unitary when the national or central government is supreme over other levels of government that might exist

in a given state. Other levels of government referred to in the above definition are the local governments or units.

The central government has the full legal right to overrule such Local governments. They are not only created by the centre but also owe their existence to it and are subordinate to the national Government. The principle that governs a unitary constitution is Unitarianism.

The word 'Unitarianism' means the concentration of political power in the hands of one visible sovereign power, be it that of a parliament or a legitimate dictator. In short, a unitary constitution means that sovereignty is exercised by a single source rather than by many. It is a unit centre of power, meaning that power emanates from a single source.

4.3.6 Federal Constitution

Imagine a country where governmental powers are shared between the central government and state or regional governments. How might this arrangement work? Let us explore the Federal Constitution.

A country with a federal constitution is called a federation, and its system of government is called a federal system. A federal constitution or system is a constitutional arrangement in which the powers of government are distributed between the central and component units.

In its strict sense, it refers to the distribution of powers between the federal government and the federating or constituent states, which are relatively autonomous.

This means, in effect, that the powers exercised by these component states are distributed between what is known in America as reserved or shared powers and, in Nigeria, as Exclusive, Concurrent, and Residual powers. From the above definition, we can easily see that a federation is a union of autonomous states that have come together to become a larger political entity, as in the USA, or a dis-aggregative federation, where a large country is broken into smaller units, as is the case in Nigeria (Ayoade, 1980, pp. 5-8).

In a federal state, each of the component states, like the federal government, derives its powers from the same source- the Constitution. This is why Kenneth Wheare (1963), a foremost authority on federalism, defined it as a constitutional arrangement in which "Neither the central nor regional governments are subordinate to each other, but rather the two levels of government are coordinate and equal." Wheare also set out conditions that can make a federal constitution/system succeed.

According to him, the component units must be fairly equal in size and population to prevent any one unit from dominating another, or a combination of two or more units from dominating the entire federation. As he puts it:

One or two units in a federation should not be so powerful that they can overrule the others and bend the will of the Federal Government to themselves.

There must be a reasonable balance that ensures all units can maintain their independence within the sphere allotted to them and that no one can dominate others.

J. S. Mill elaborated on this principle thus:

It is essential in a federation that there should not be any one state so much more powerful than the rest as to be capable of vying in strength with many of them combined.

If there be such a one, it will insist on being the master of the joint deliberations; if there be two, they will be irresistible when they agree; and whenever they differ, everything will be decided by a struggle for ascendancy between the rivals.

While the American federal constitution can be said to have met this requirement, the Nigerian federal constitution in the First Republic, during which the Northern region bestrode the entire federation like a colossus, clearly violated this principle.

The state creation exercises undertaken by the successive military regimes in 1967, 1976, 1987, 1990 and 1996 were meant to redress the imbalance inherent in the colonial-inherited Nigerian federation. Federalism encourages unity in diversity and is a very potent instrument for national integration in plural societies.

It is an ideal system for large and heterogeneous countries such as the United States, China, Russia, and India. It is a delicate arrangement that requires mutual tolerance. In any federal state, the role of the judiciary, or the courts, is vital to ensure that no level encroaches on another. Its major disadvantage is that it is expensive to run due to the duplication of government departments.

4.3.7 Confederal Constitution

Imagine several independent states choosing to work together while keeping most of their powers. How might such an arrangement function? Let us explore the Confederal Constitution.

A confederation is a league or union of many sovereign states for a common purpose. A confederation has also been defined as an arrangement in which two or more sovereign and independent states agree to come together under a central but weak government. In other words, the term of a confederation applies to a union of states, which is less binding in character than a federation. Examples of confederal states are the United States between 1776 and 1789, the United Netherlands in 1579, the German constitutions of 1815 to 1867 and 1867 to 1871 (before and after the unification of Prussia with other German states).

The features of a confederal constitution include the states in a confederation not losing their separate identities under the political arrangement and retaining the right to secede.

The supreme power belongs to the coordinate states. Therefore, the coordinate states dominate the central government; the constitution may be rigid, the central authority is weak, and the confederal units are strong. Judging from the experience of the United States, the confederation has not proved to be a successful model, even for those who adopted it after the Americans discarded it in 1789.

Other examples of confederacy are the African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), European Union (EU), and the Commonwealth of Nations, to mention a few.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Discuss the major features that distinguish a federal from a confederal constitution.

Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

Question 1

In a federal system, sovereignty is _____ between the central government and the constituent units, whereas in a confederal system it resides mainly with the member states.

Question 2

A key feature of a federal constitution is that it is usually _____, making it difficult to amend, while a confederal arrangement is often more flexible.

Question 3

In a confederal system, the central authority is typically _____, relying on the voluntary cooperation of member states.

4.3.8 Some importance of the constitution

Imagine a country without clear rules to guide its government, protect citizens and define responsibilities. What could happen? Let us explore the importance of a constitution and how it helps organise and regulate government.

A constitution is critical to understanding government and how a country's citizens are governed. It is an instrument for consolidating state power. A constitution traditionally explains the powers and limitations of the government in a society.

With this, citizens can measure the government's performance over time. Being the embodiment of the general will or the legal sovereign in a state, provisions of a constitution are supreme and superior to any other laws in the land.

Every other law in the land must be consistent with the Constitution; otherwise, such law or laws shall be null and void to the extent of their inconsistency.

A constitution serves as a medium for setting out the code of conduct or pattern of behaviour acceptable in a given society. More importantly, a state's constitution usually sets the direction of the ship of state by outlining the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy.

The constitution not only defines the powers of each organ but also demarcates the responsibilities of each, thereby eliminating unnecessary friction or overlap of functions among different levels or agencies of the government.

A constitution may, however, not anticipate every situation that may arise. As a result, at the point of drafting, not all sentiments, assumptions and aspirations of the people may find expression in a written form.

For this reason, a distinction is often made between the letters and the spirit of a constitution. Being a product of human engineering, a constitution is not necessarily a perfect document. It may contain defects, anomalies, or ambiguities, including lacunas that may not come to light until it is put into practice.

At times, judicial interpretations might be required to make such provisions more precise; at other times, an amendment may be necessary to remove ambiguities. In Nigeria, for example, the controversy over the offshore/onshore dichotomy and the seizure of funds by the Lagos State government was not resolved until the Supreme Court intervened.

Similarly, the decision by the two chambers of the National Assembly on February 9, 2010, to pass separate resolutions empowering the Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, as Acting President of Nigeria was one example of finding a political solution to a constitutional crisis. As Senate President, David Mark surmised:

The doctrine of necessity requires that we do what is necessary when faced with a situation that the Constitution did not contemplate...In doing so, we have maintained the sanctity of our constitution as the ultimate law of the land (The Guardian, February 10, 2010)

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Examine the role of a constitution in a political system

Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

Question 1

A constitution serves as the _____ law of a state, guiding the operation of government institutions.

Question 2

One major role of a constitution is the _____ of powers among different organs of government to prevent abuse of authority.

Question 3

A constitution protects the _____ rights of citizens against arbitrary actions by the government.



4.5 Summary

In this unit, we have examined the concepts of constitution and constitutionalism and established that we cannot discuss either without the other. We also discussed different types of constitutions, citing examples of countries where each type is in operation. The unit finally discussed the significance of a constitution in any political system, where we stressed that a constitution is important not only from the point of view of its written or codified letters, which must be adhered to, but also from the point of view of its unwritten assumptions, which constitute its spirit and must also be respected.



4.6 References/Further Reading/Web Resources

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4.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

Possible Answer to SAE 1

- 1 Answer: A
- 2 Answer: B
- 3 Answer: A

Possible Answer to SAE 2

- 1 Answer: shared
- 2 Answer: rigid
- 3 Answer: weak

Possible Answer to SAE 3

- 1 Answer: supreme
- 2 Answer: separation
- 3 Answer: fundamental

MODULE 2 POLITICAL IDEAS AND CONCEPTS

Unit 1	The Origins and Theories of the State
Unit 2	The State and Nation-Characteristics and Functions
Unit 3	The Doctrine of Sovereignty and Its Limitations
Unit 4	Citizenship, Duties and Rights
Unit 5	Power, Authority and Legitimacy
Unit 6	Major Forms of Government
Unit 7	Democracy as a Form of Government

Unit 1 The Origins and Theories of the State

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Learning Outcome
- 1.3 The Origins and development of the modern State
 - 1.3.1 The City-state
 - 1.3.2 The Nation-State
 - 1.3.2.1 The Natural Theory
 - 1.3.2.2 The Force Theory
 - 1.3.2.3 The Divine Rights of the King Theory
 - 1.3.2.4 The Social Contract Theory
 - 1.3.2.5 Thomas Hobbes's version
 - 1.3.2.6 The Marxian Theory
 - 1.3.2.7 The Family Theory
 - 1.3.2.8 Sir Henry Maine and the Patriarchal Theory
 - 1.3.2.9 Evolutionary Theory
- 1.4 Appraisal of the Theories of the State
- 1.5 Summary
- 1.6 References/Further Reading/Web Resources/Web Resources
- 1.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise



1.1 Introduction

Welcome to this new module. As we begin, we turn our attention to one of the central subjects in the study of Political Science, the state and its development over time. This unit takes you on a journey from the early city-states to the emergence of the modern state, while introducing the different ideas that have shaped our understanding of its origins. As you work through the unit, we will examine the major theories proposed to explain how the state came into existence and consider the arguments associated with each perspective. You will also have opportunities to reflect on how these ideas help us understand political organisation and authority in society. Take your time, engage with the learning activities, and relate the issues discussed to political life around you. Let us begin this new learning journey by exploring the origins and evolution of the state.



1.2 Learning Outcome

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the development of political communities from the city-state to the modern nation-state;
- describe the major theories explaining the origin and development of the state;
- compare the major theories of the state, highlighting their different explanations of political authority and state formation; and
- evaluate the strengths, limitations and contributions of the theories to understanding the origin and development of the state.



1.3 The Origins and development of the modern State

Have you ever wondered how small communities and ancient kingdoms gradually developed into the modern states we know today? Let us take a journey through history to explore how political communities evolved from early city-states and kingdoms into organised modern states with defined territories, governments, citizens, and sovereignty.

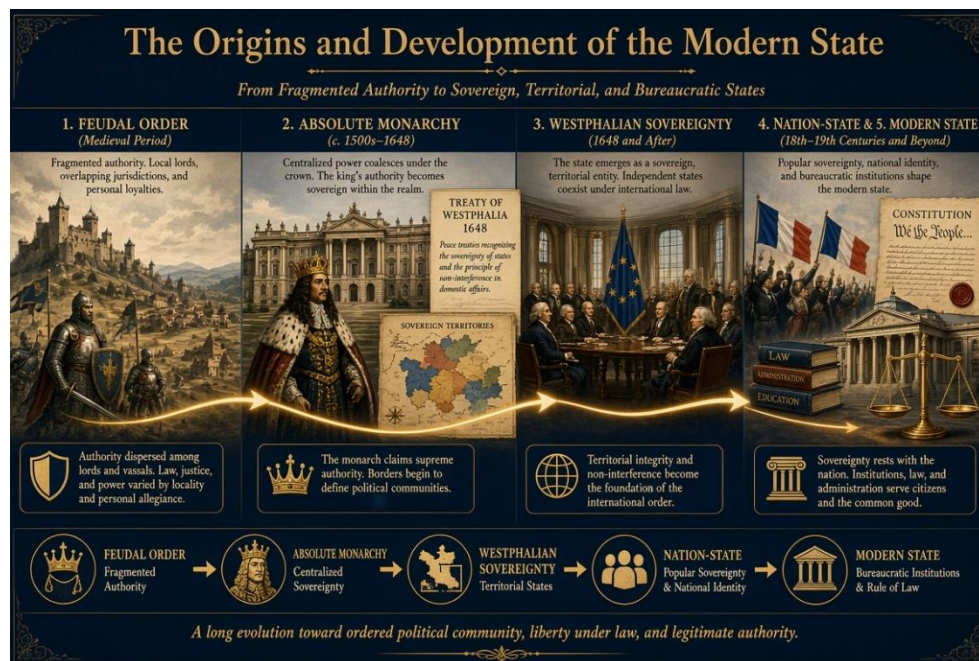


Fig. 1.1 The Origins and development of the modern State

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

1.3.1 The City-state

The city-state was an organised society of people living in what the Greeks called “polis.” The Greek city-state shared three basic characteristics: small size, love of independence, and all-inclusiveness.

Appadorai (2004:175-7) has suggested that geographical factors may be responsible for this preference for small size in the days of the Greek city-states. Greece is a land dotted with mountains and small valleys, making it impossible for large, linear settlements. Consequently, this natural division encouraged the development of small, separate communities, popularly called city-states. The Greek city-states also preferred their separate, independent status, for reasons that ranged from the freedom to practice their different religions to the pursuit of different economic activities.

By its nature, a city-state was an isolated community that rarely admitted strangers who could pollute its purity. Citizenship status or rights could only be granted by virtue of birth. All the activities of the state: political, economic and social were restricted to the city. According to Aristotle, a city-state must be large enough to be economically viable or self-supporting, but not so large as to prevent unity or personal feelings among its members.

The city-state also approximates to the Platonic notion of an ideal state: something that is close to the idea of an individual, in which if a part of the body suffers, other parts will feel it and sympathise with the affected part, in the manner of the saying that the “pain of the toe is that of the whole body”.

However, the city-states could not endure for long and collapsed due to quarrels and disagreements among them, which peaked when a powerful state in the north, under Philip of Macedon, emerged. In contemporary times, the Vatican, with its seat in Rome, can be regarded as a city-state because it fulfils the features of modern sovereign states under the post-1648 Treaty of Westphalia.

Scan the QR code or click the link below to learn more about the Origins and Development of the Modern State and deepen your understanding of its evolution.

<https://youtu.be/cLWZleBHJAg?si=6TA8ZtiwSlKWlrLm>



1.3.2 The Nation-State

Imagine a country where people share a common political identity and are governed by a recognised authority within defined boundaries. How does such a political community come together? Let us explore the Nation-State.

The modern state is a nation-state, which is larger than the city-state. Its territory is far larger than the capital city. While in city-states like Athens, the citizens are called Athenians, a name derived from the city's capital, Athens, this is not the case in a modern state. In a modern state, the citizens of Britain or India are not called Londoners or Delhiites, but rather by the names of their respective capital cities. Rather, they are called Britons or Indians. Other features of the modern country-state include the following:

- (i) In a nation-state, because of its size, only indirect democracy or representative government is possible, unlike in a city-state, where participatory or direct democracy is the rule.
- (ii) The modern state also faces more daunting social, economic and political challenges and problems due to its complexity than a city-state.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

List the characteristics of a city-state in comparison with those of a nation-state

3.1 Different Theories of the State There are many theories on how and when the state came into existence. The origin of the state has, over the centuries, generated disagreements among scholars. While some have argued that the institution of the state originated from the will of God (the fall of man from the Garden of Eden), others have proffered different theories. We will examine these different theories in this section.

1.3.2.1 The Natural Theory

Imagine people living together, forming families and communities, and gradually developing organised political life. How might this natural development have led to the emergence of the state? Let us explore the Natural Theory.

According to Aristotle, humans are by nature social beings; that is, they naturally gather and interact with one another in a community. Beyond the biological necessity of this interaction, human beings also find greater

fulfilment when they come together socially. This coming together in a community or state is the only way men seek to achieve moral perfection. This, therefore, makes the state the natural environment in which a man could be truly human, and as Aristotle pointed out, an individual outside the state is either “a beast or a god.”

1.3.2.2 The Force Theory

Let us imagine a powerful group taking control of others and using its strength to establish authority. Could this be how the first states emerged? Let us explore the Force Theory to find out.

The force theory has two components: the negative and the positive. The negative conception of the force theory holds that the state was created by conquest and force, i.e., by the subjugation of the weak by the strong. A powerful group of bold and cunning men came together and made themselves masters of the rest of society.

They took over the society's resources and ran it in their own interest, thereby making the rest of the people their servants. The Greek Sophist, Thrasymachus, once observed: “Justice is the interest of the stronger.” Marx equally shares this view when he agrees that the conquering band imposes its dominion on the conquered. Machiavelli was also a fanatical believer in force theory, admonishing every prince (leader) to combine force with guile to sustain himself in power.

In some respects, it could be argued that Rousseau is also of this view when he argued, “the strongest is never strong enough always to be master, unless he transforms strength into right and obedience into duty”. During the interwar years, Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler used the force theory to convert Italy and Germany into a police and totalitarian state, respectively. Mussolini's idea of a police state is the forerunner of what is today known as Statism.

According to him, the State has mystical properties; it is the centre of life, with incomparable purpose and meaning. Just as an individual has a personality and a will of its own, the State, Mussolini argued, draw from each developing a personality and will of its own. The will of the state is therefore a measure of values, virtue and wisdom.

As the late Italian fascist declared: “The power of the state is total, and commitment of the individual must be total...everything for the state; nothing against the state; nothing outside the state”.

Likewise, Hitler employed German mythology, elitism, militarism and the concept of a corporate state to foist a one-person power regime in Germany. Hitler declared:

When those with the strongest will to power dominated others, the most perfect possible existence would have been achieved...The stronger has the right before God and the world to enforce his will" (quoted in Baradat 2000:251).

All the scholars quoted above agree with Coulumbi, who wrote, "Consideration of justice arises between parties of equal strength, and there is no dishonour, but only prudence when the weak capitulate to the poor." MacIves, however, is one scholar who opposed force, since, according to him, force is destructive violence. "Force does not create right."

History has also shown that, though many leaders have acquired power through force (revolution), not all have been able to keep the power thus acquired through the same means. Because of this origin, the state is sometimes viewed as an evil contrivance that could be resisted in the cause of righteousness. Harold Laski (1982) was of this view when he described rebellion against the state as a contingent duty of a citizen, especially if it departs from its utilitarian purpose.

This conception of the state has therefore encouraged revolutionary groups who consider opposition to the state a worthy and altruistic cause. Thus, in history, we saw Protestants reject the doctrine of the two swords (Roman Catholic doctrine), as well as Republicans challenge monarchical tyranny.

On the other hand, the positive conception of the force theory was developed in 19th-century Germany. Rather than being born of, or the incarnate of evil; it is a force said to dignify the state (Baradat, 2000, p. 52). The concept of "might is right" is meant to legitimise the rule of the strong over the weak. Nietzsche, a prominent member of this school, argues that by institutionalising the power of the strong over the weak, the state was doing the right thing, since the weak should be ruled by the strong.

1.3.2.3 The Divine Rights of the King Theory

This theory states that the state is a supernatural authority created by God and that God appointed certain people to preside over the state's government on His behalf. In other words, the Chiefs, Emperors, and Presidents are said to be anointed or very close to God; hence, their subjects must obey them. Disobeying them means direct opposition to God.

The divine Theory was used to justify the rule of monarchs, as best exemplified in the rule of the Tudors in Britain. As Appadorai (2004:229) explains, “monarchy is a divinely ordained institution”; Kings are accountable only to God, and God enjoins non-resistance and passive obedience.” Other example of leaders who have claimed divine right in both ancient and modern governments include the Hindu Maharajahs, who was regarded as the incarnate of the God Krishna, the Egyptian kings reputed to be the son of Ra, and the Mikados of Japan who was said to have carried the claim to divine right to rule to the extreme, when they asserted that they were the incarnations of the sun-God who ruled the entire universe.

1.3.2.4 The Social Contract Theory

There are many versions of this theory. However, the core of the theory is that the government came into existence through a contract between the ruler(s) and the ruled.

The understanding is that individuals surrender their rights to self-rule to the government or a constituted authority, in the hope of obtaining security and the necessities of life in return. However, why the contract was established or how it came about is where opinions differ.

1.3.2.5 Thomas Hobbes’s version

His version of the social contract appeared in his popular book *The Leviathan*. According to Hobbes, in the beginning, men lived in a “state of nature” where life was “poor, solitary, nasty, brutish and short.” To free themselves from the state of nature, which was characterised by selfishness and unbridled desires, men decided to surrender all liberties to one man (the Leviathan or king) or an assembly of men.

The aim was to transform the state of nature, with its insecurity of life and property, into a civil society in which peace and order prevail.

This was the origin of the social contract, or, as Hobbes observed, the creation of the great Leviathan. Hobbes wrote *The Leviathan* in 17th-century England to justify the restoration of the Stuart dynasty.

Hobbes’ *Leviathan* was a response to the problem of social order, and was specifically meant to regulate the relations between society and man, and between the sovereign and the citizen. In 17th-century England, the forces of absolutism, allied with Anglican traditionalism, competed with those of puritan reform, allied with parliamentary assertiveness.

To justify the absolute power he recommended for the monarch or Leviathan, Hobbes had to appeal to natural law (Nisbet, 1973, p. 24). There are also John Locke and J. J. Rousseau's versions of the theory of Social Contract that are different from that of Hobbes' only in emphasis, but not in substance.

1.3.2.6 The Marxian Theory

Let us now explore the Marxian Theory and discover how Karl Marx explained the development of society through class relations, economic interests, and the power struggle.

The basic claim of this theory is that in the beginning, life was not in a state of nature, but was peaceful. There were no selfish people who harboured egoistic interest in appropriating the resources of the society, for their selfish interest, as the society's resources were shared fairly equally by every member of the society.

According to the Marxists, this period was known as communalism. However, with the collapse of communalism came feudalism. This period witnessed the emergence of social fragmentation. Some powerful individuals assumed the status of lords and took total control of the means of production. Other members of the society were relegated to the status of serfs and were used by the lords as instruments of production on their property.

Those serfs had no property of their own, and the feudal lords appropriated all that was produced through their labour. During the feudal epoch, the lords formed a government that protected their personal safety and property, and the government kept their serfs under perpetual subjection.

After the demise of feudalism, especially in Western Europe, came capitalism. In the capitalist epoch of development, those who control the means of production are the industrial bourgeoisie, and their main instrument of production is the proletariat. In the capitalist state, the government that emerged was the bourgeoisie's.

Hence, Marx and Engels declared in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* that the "executive of the modern state is a committee of the bourgeoisie." All laws made in every capitalist state are meant to protect private property, or to be specific, protect the properties (banks, industries, cars, etc.) of the capitalists.

The bourgeoisie controls the government and monopolises the instruments of coercion to protect their private interests. The Marxists further argue that after the demise of the capitalist state, a socialist state will be instituted under which the government will impose its dictatorship on the bourgeoisie. However, after all pockets of resistance by the bourgeoisie and injustice have been eliminated, the state will wither away and give way to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

1.3.2.7 The Family Theory

Let us now explore the Family Theory and discover how early family structures and relationships are believed to have contributed to the development of the state.

There are also different versions of this theory; however, there is consensus that the state or government began with the family, expanded to the clan or kinship group, then to the community, and finally to the state.

This means that a single family expanded, and the rules set by the nuclear family were transferred to the enlarged family, which later developed into the modern state. Hence, MacIver has observed that government is continuous with the more inclusive society, a process of regulation that is already highly developed within the family. How this happened is where opinion differs.

1.3.2.8 Sir Henry Maine and the Patriarchal Theory

Let us now explore Sir Henry Maine's Patriarchal Theory and see how he explained the development of early political communities through family authority and social relationships. As you read on, consider how family structures may have influenced the growth of political organisation.

Maine has argued vehemently that the modern State or government is traceable to the male descent in every family; hence, the evolution of the state is patriarchal in nature.

His arguments run as follows: The unit of primitive society was the family in which the eldest male parent was supreme. His power extended to life and death and was as qualified over his children and their houses as masters over his slaves.

The single family branches out into many families, all held together under the head of the first family (the chief or patriarch), forming the tribe. An aggregation of tribes makes the state. In his opinion, Milennan believed that the state evolved into a matriarchal one.

It is contended that the primitive group had no common male head and that Kinship among them could be traced only through women. It is only through women that blood relationship can be traced, not through men. Hence, he observed that “maternity is a fact, paternity an opinion.”

1.3.2.9 Evolutionary Theory

This theory considers the state mechanism neither a divine institution nor a deliberate human contrivance, but rather the result of natural evolution. However, J. W. Buress holds that the evolution of the state has been due to the gradual and continuous development of human society from a gross, imperfect beginning, through crude but improving forms of manifestation, toward a perfect and universal organisation of humanity.

Sharing this view, conservative British philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-1777) believed that the state evolved from a complex set of human needs and that neither these needs nor the state's characteristics can be fully understood by human reason. He therefore advised against tampering with existing institutions and social relationships because they are the sinews that hold society together.

Furthermore, Greece et al. (1976) observed that the ancient Greeks accorded the evolutionary or natural theory of the state the highest prominence. They had viewed man as inseparable from the state, which they considered not only a necessity for human survival, but also the means whereby man could achieve the “good life.” Aristotle argued that man was “by nature a political animal” who could fulfil himself only through the state, and that man outside the state was not a man at all, but either a god or a beast.

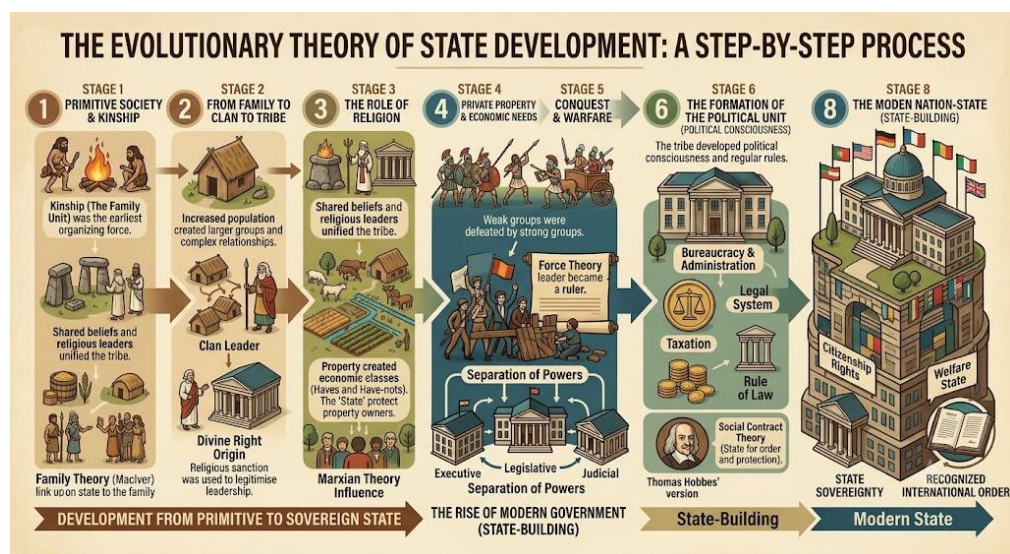


Fig.1.2 The Evolutionary theory of state Development

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Articulate the contradictions between the Divine Right of the King and the Social Contract Theory.

Question 1

The Divine Right of Kings holds that political authority originates from _____, whereas Social Contract Theory argues that authority is derived from the people.

- A. divine will or God
- B. economic systems
- C. military strength
- D. cultural traditions

Question 2

Which of the following best reflects a key contradiction between the two theories?

- A. Both emphasise popular sovereignty
- B. The Divine Right supports absolute monarchy, while the Social Contract Theory supports limited government based on consent
- C. Both reject the idea of government authority.
- D. Both promote dictatorship

Question 3

Under Social Contract Theory, citizens have the right to _____, which directly contradicts the Divine Right of Kings.

- A. obey without question
- B. Overthrow unjust rulers
- C. accept divine authority
- D. support absolute monarchy

1.4 Appraisal of the Theories of the State

You have now explored different theories about the origin of the state. Let us bring these ideas together and assess their strengths, limitations, and contributions to our understanding of how states developed.

We can broadly classify the theories discussed above into two, and to use Saint Augustine's terminology, one serving the city of God, and the other the city of man: one spiritual and the other temporal. In its early days, the state was subsumed within the Church.

Nevertheless, in the wake of the successive impact of the Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment, otherwise called the Age of Reason, the doctrine of the infallibility of the Papacy was challenged. The decline in the primacy of the Church in secular matters was assisted by what was called the indulgences.

What is today known as the corruption of the Church's leadership was initially mildly challenged by Erasmus and later more forcefully by Luther, who led the revolt against the Church and the demand for the separation of the State from the Church.

However, despite its defects or imperfections, until it yielded to the temporal order, the spiritual order from which the theory of Divine Right of the King found its justification, remained an anchor of societal stability. The rise in secularism and the increasing attention to non-religious values marked the beginning of an emphasis on private initiatives in economic matters and on human rights in politics.

However, it was realised that individualism, if left unchecked, could descend into anarchy. Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and J. J. Rousseau, the prime philosophers of this era, all agreed that individuals should be free, but they disagreed on the definition of freedom or on the limits to be imposed on its exercise.

Hobbes argued that freedom was possible only when individuals in society completely subordinate themselves to the monarch, hence his *Leviathan*. Locke, a liberal, believed that freedom could be maximised when the individual was left alone; hence his preference for a parliamentary republic, while Rousseau preferred an “infallible” general will, through the democratic process (Baradat, 2000, pp. 64-5).

Historically, the Greek city-state in which direct democracy was practised was the highest expression of individualism, at least in political matters. Similarly, Adam Smith's notion of the “invisible hand” in his *The Wealth of Nations*, before the rise of Mercantilism, known today as the state's involvement in business foreign trade, is its equivalent in the economic realm.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Explain a theory of the state you think will be able to achieve its true purpose.



1.5 Summary

In this unit, we have examined the origins of the state, from its simple city-state origins to the more complex and modern country-state of today. We also discussed different theories of the state and finally appraised them, thereby moving our discussion from theoretical exposition to practical analysis.



1.6 References/Further Reading/Web Resource

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1.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

Possible Answers to SAE 1.

The distinction between a city-state and a nation-state in political science rests on differences in scale, structure, identity, and political organisation.

A city-state is a small, independent political unit consisting of a single city and its surrounding territory. Its key characteristics include:

- Limited geographical size and population
- Direct or close-knit governance, often allowing greater citizen participation.
- Political and social homogeneity in many historical cases
- Strong sense of local identity tied to the city
- Simple administrative structure, typical of early political systems such as the ancient Greek polis

In contrast, a nation-state is a larger political entity where a sovereign state governs a defined territory, and the population shares a sense of national identity. Its main characteristics include:

- Large geographical area and population
- Complex administrative and institutional structures
- Centralised or federal system of governance
- Diverse population, often with multiple ethnic or cultural groups

- Strong sense of national identity and sovereignty recognised internationally.

Thus, while the city-state represents an early, localised form of political organisation, the nation-state reflects a modern, complex, and sovereign political system with broader territorial and institutional scope.

Possible Answers to SAE 2

- 1 Answer: A
- 2 Answer: B
- 3 Answer: B

Possible Answers to SAE 3

The social contract theory of the state appears most capable of achieving the state's true purpose, which is the protection of life, maintenance of order, and promotion of collective welfare.

The central strength of this theory lies in its premise that the state originates from an agreement among individuals who consent to be governed in exchange for security and the protection of their rights. This foundation introduces the principle of popular sovereignty, meaning that political authority ultimately resides with the people rather than a monarch or external force.

Unlike the divine right theory, which justifies absolute rule, the social contract framework supports accountability and limited government. If rulers fail to protect citizens or act unjustly, the theory legitimises resistance or the replacement of such authority. This ensures that governance remains responsive and aligned with public interest.

Furthermore, the theory accommodates modern democratic ideals such as the rule of law, equality before the law, and the protection of fundamental rights, making it adaptable to contemporary political systems. It also provides a basis for constitutional governance, where powers are defined and constrained.

Thus, because it combines consent, accountability, rights protection, and legitimacy, social contract theory offers a more practical and enduring foundation for achieving the state's true purpose in modern society.

Unit 2 The State and Nation: Characteristics and Functions

Unit Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Learning outcomes
- 2.3 The Concept and Characteristics of a State
 - 2.3.1 Functions of the State
 - 2.3.2 The Class Character of the State
 - 2.3.3 The Concept of Nation
 - 2.3.4 The Nation-State
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources
- 2.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise



2.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. In the previous unit, you examined the various theories that explain how the state came into existence, providing a strong foundation for understanding one of the central concepts in political science. Building on that knowledge, we will now move from theoretical perspectives to a closer examination of the state's practical features, roles, and distinguishing characteristics. As you progress through this unit, you will also explore how the state differs from government and from a nation or nation-state, helping you develop a clearer and more accurate understanding of these closely related ideas. By connecting what you have already learnt with the topics ahead, this unit will strengthen your understanding and prepare you for the learning activities that follow. We encourage you to approach each section with curiosity and confidence.



2.2 Learning Outcome

By the end of this unit, you will be able to

- explain the meaning and characteristics of a state;
- discuss functions and purposes of a state within a society; and
- differentiate between the state, nation and nation-state.



2.3 Definition and Characteristics of a State

Now, let us take a closer look at what makes a state a state. We will explore its meaning and the key features that distinguish it from other forms of political organisation.

Scholars have approached the concept of a state and its definitions from different perspectives. Harold Laski (1982) defines a state as “a territorial society divided into government and subjects claiming within its allotted physical area, a supremacy over all other institutions. In this definition, four elements can be identified: people, territory, government and sovereignty.

Although the words ‘state’ and ‘nation’ are closely related, they do not mean the same thing. The term state applies to that political authority which maintains domination over a specific geographical area. It is the means by which people are organised for legal coercion.

To Borlatsky (1978), the state mechanism is usually regarded as “an autonomous entity set off from the society by a system of norms, rules and prejudices that reflect a certain specialisation of labour within the society.”

On his part, Max Weber (1964) defines the state as “a regime or supreme authority, which gives order to all and receives orders from all.” Northedge (1971) also gave the state an international dimension by defining it as a means by which people are organised for participation in the international system.

This conceptualization is closer to that of Woodrow Wilson who defines a state as “a people organized for law within a political community. Karl Marx introduced the ideological dimension to his definition, when he defines the modern state as “a committee for managing the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” Common to all these conceptualizations is that above all, the state is a political community that recognizes the importance of law in its internal organization and its external relations.

A state also functions within a deliberately structured institutional framework. It possesses compulsory jurisdiction over those who live within its territory. Employing his inimitable expressive language to compare the state with other associations, Harold Laski (1982:39) states: With the state, the case is different. I can dissent from its conclusions only at a cost of penalty. I cannot, in any fundamental way, withdraw from its jurisdiction... It may choose to tax me out of existence... It may compel me to sacrifice my life in a war that I believe to be morally wrong.

“The state,” according to Leeds (1981:7), “is a territorial association, an area with a clearly defined boundary within which a government is responsible for law and order.” Every person becomes a member of a state at birth, and the membership cannot be disowned, but citizenship can be transferred through naturalisation.

The state has a monopoly on coercive power over every person domiciled within the defined territory. This implies that all individuals and groups living within the state are subject to its authority. The authority exercised by the state is usually defined by the constitution, which establishes the institutions of government necessary to ensure internal stability and external security.

For any polity to be regarded as a state, it must have the following fundamental elements: *population, defined territory, government and sovereignty*. These characteristics differentiate a state (properly so-called, e.g. Nigeria, USA, etc.) from a state (a component unit in a federation, e.g. Kwara, Lagos, New York, Illinois, etc.,) and such other sociopolitical institutions like a nation, a society, etc.

Since the state is an artificial person, it operates through an agent called ‘the government’, an administrative institution capable of resolving conflicts between groups within society by making enforceable decisions without necessarily resorting to force.

Although the government, as the agent of a state, is the body which exclusively exercises the legitimate use of force in making regulations and in enforcing its rules within the given territorial boundary.

However, the allegiance and loyalty of the citizenry in a state are to the state, but expressed through the agents of the state - the government. In addition, states seldom apply force to maintain their authority, as threats of sanctions or punishments, which constitute the basis of justice, are sufficient to obtain obedience.

One of the main purposes of government is to minimise or eliminate the likelihood of any challenge to the state’s authority. Otherwise, the possibility of internal conflicts and instability that could lead to state failure is imminent. It should be noted that the government (in this context) is a narrow concept, a sub-structure within the superstructure of the state; since the state includes both the government and the governed, while government is only the machinery through which the state realises its purpose. In addition, sovereignty is a characteristic of the state, not of the government, even though the government exercises sovereignty on behalf of the state. Another distinction is that while the state is relatively more permanent than government, government is temporary and changes more frequently.

It is, however, possible that one state may dissolve into several other states, as the former Soviet Union did, which broke into fifteen new states. Yugoslavia also split into six republics after a civil war, which led to the country's disappearance from the world map. At the same time, Czechoslovakia dissolved into two states - the Czechs and Slovak.

The random and arbitrary ways in which frontiers are superimposed on the world map mean that states vary enormously in their sizes, mineral deposits, access to the sea, vulnerability and cohesiveness. Part of the state's authority came from other states recognising its sovereignty, i.e., the state's ability to exercise supreme power over its citizens without external interference.

In international law, there are two kinds of recognition: *de facto* and *de jure*. De facto recognition of one state by another is given when a state agrees that another can exercise proper governmental control over its territory. De jure recognition is given if the recognising state thinks that the method by which the government in the other state was formed is in accordance with the accepted constitutional traditions and procedure of that state.

The table below summarises the relationship between the state and the government:

The State	The Government
The state is the principal.	Government is the agent.
Life expectancy is permanency; Lives in	Life span is ephemeral/temporary; It changes hands periodically
Membership includes every	Only a few employed or elected are
Existence is abstract	Exists in concrete terms, could be seen
Power and authority are	Exercises delegated powers and
Powers and authority are absolute.	The constitution limits powers and authority.
States are not different in nature.	There are different forms and types of
Membership is compulsory	Membership is optional

can either scan the QR code or click the link below to watch a short video on the four characteristics of a State and the three branches of government.

As you watch, take note of the key ideas and examples presented.

<https://youtu.be/yChvGFuUrHI?si=RoCQN5hDLlv5QdW>



Self-Assessment Exercise 1

List the major characteristics of a State and a government.

Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

Question 1

A State must possess a defined _____, which refers to the geographical area within which it exercises authority.

Question 2

One essential characteristic of a State is _____, which implies supreme authority within its borders and independence from external control.

Question 3

Government refers to the _____ through which the will of the State is formulated and implemented.

2.3.1 Functions of the State

Now that you understand the definition and characteristics of the State, let us take the next step by exploring the State's functions and how they shape citizens' lives.

The state evolves for the sake of life and continues “for the sake of life” (Aristotle). The end of the state is therefore ethical. As Newman puts it: “the state exists (according to Aristotle) for the sake of that kind of life which is the end of man. When the state, by its education and laws, written and unwritten, succeeds in evoking and maintaining in vigorous activity a life rich in noble aims and deeds, then and not till then has it fully attained the end for which it exists”.

The ethical end of the state is subordinated to convenience in Locke’s view. His concern is not with the ‘good’ but with the ‘convenient’. This is the preservation of the people’s property, which is Locke’s general name for ‘lives, liberties and estates’.

The manner in which these natural rights are preserved is therefore the purpose of political society; and the exercise of power by government is conditioned by that purpose (Appadorai, 2004). Adam Smith (1723-90),

in his *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), laid down the following as the three duties the sovereign must attend to:

1. The duty of protecting society from violence and the invasion of other independent societies
2. The duty of establishing an exact administration of justice
3. The duty of erecting and maintaining certain public works and certain public institutions for the society

In contemporary language, these three functions are the maintenance of internal law and order, the defence of a state's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, the efficient administration of justice, and the provision of public goods and infrastructural facilities. Writing on the purpose of the state, Laski says that the state is an organisation that enables the mass of men to realise social good on the largest possible scale.

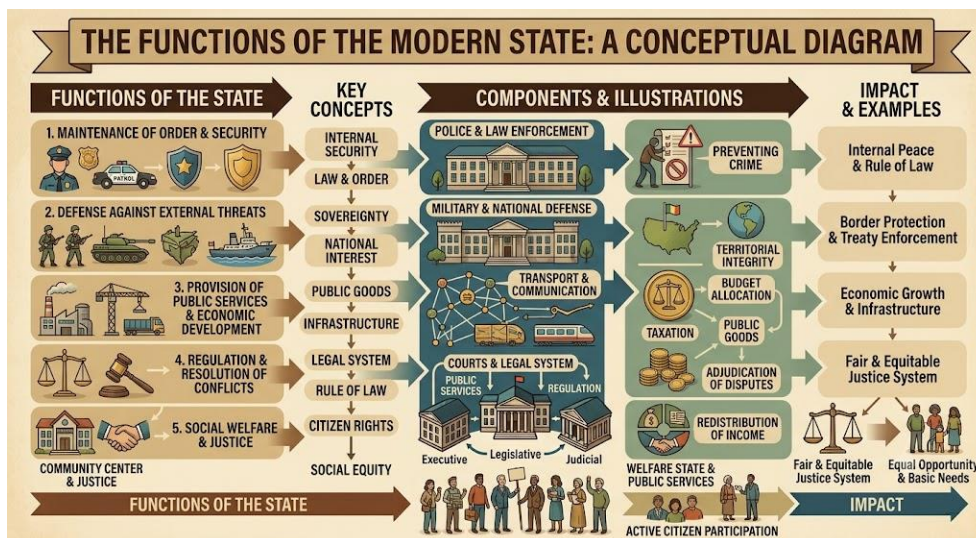


Fig. 3.1 The Function of the Modern State

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Identify and discuss the purpose of the State

Question 1

The primary purpose of the State is to ensure _____ within society.

- A. peace, order, and security
- B. entertainment and recreation
- C. scientific experimentation
- D. religious conversion

Question 2

Which of the following best reflects the welfare function of the State?

- A. Providing public goods and services for citizens
- B. Promoting only private business interests

- C. Limiting citizen participation in governance
- D. Enforcing only traditional customs

Question 3

A key purpose of the State is the protection of _____ of its citizens.

- A. fundamental rights
- B. private opinions only
- C. cultural festivals only
- D. individual hobbies

2.3.2 The Class Character of the State

Now that you understand the functions of the State, let us go a step further and examine how social and economic classes can influence the nature and activities of the State.

The assumption of statehood by most nations obscures the urgent fact that the state is only one, however important, of the various groups into which society is divided. In the opinion of Harold Laski (1982:235), the state is, in its daily administration, the government. The government may lie at the disposal of a special interest, and it must consult with the various groups if the will realised is to represent a just compromise between competing wills.

In other words, Harold Laski was indirectly affirming Marx's notion of the state, which states that a state expresses a will to maintain a given system of class relations.

Indeed, the territorial character of the sovereign nation-state enables a small fraction of its members to appropriate its power for their own ends, even against the interests of their fellow citizens.

It does so by the use of its supreme coercive power to that end. In a feudal state, law is made to serve the interests of the owners of land; the reason it embodies is their reason; the general end of society it seeks to fulfil is its conception of what that general end should be.

Similarly, in a capitalist society, the owners of capital will predominantly determine the substance of the law. However, it also reflects the interest of the society as a whole. Therefore, the idea of equality before the law within a state is meaningless unless such a society is a classless one. The question arises as to whether citizens always obey the state. What are the reasons for peoples' obedience? Is it out of fear, habit, consent or utility? No doubt, to some degree it is all of these.

In a feudal state, the serf had no option but to live as the feudal lord decreed because it was upon such obedience that his livelihood and existence were guaranteed.

In a capitalist system, the coercive power of the state is always at the disposal of the ruling class to compel obedience, thereby enforcing their will. The difference between a feudal and a capitalist society is that while Obedience was usually secured in the most crude, even cruel ways in the former. In the latter, the pretence to democracy makes obedience to the state voluntary and freely given since it is assumed that the state authority is exercised in the interest of the generality of the people.

The veneer of participation of all citizens is thus reinforced by the freewheeling principle of the capitalist system, which in reality is a contraption to promote the interests of a few.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Differentiate between the feudal and capitalist societies in terms of obedience to the state.

2.3.3 The Concept of Nation

Now that you have explored the class character of the State, let us broaden our understanding by examining the concept of a nation and how shared identity, culture, and history bring people together.

The term nation is often used as a synonym for state or country. This is not technically correct. Indeed, the concept of a nation is not political, but sociological.

A nation can exist even though it is not contained within a particular state or served by a given government. A nation exists where there is a union of people based on similarities in linguistic patterns, ethnic relationships, or cultural heritage.

Although the German people make up the bulk of Germany's population, the Austrians and Dutch are also Germanic. For thousands of years, until the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the Jews maintained a national identity without a state of their own. In addition, between 1797 and 1919, the Polish state ceased to exist as a political entity, but the Polish nation survived.

It is common to talk of one's nationality or one's state of origin as if the two are interchangeable or synonymous. One can belong to a state without belonging to the nation or one of its constituent nations.

Conversely, one can belong to a nation and not the state in which it is located. For example, it is possible to find members of the Yoruba nation outside the nationality's traditional home states (Southwest Nigeria). It is also possible for a nation to span multiple states (e.g., the Igbomins in Nigeria's Kwara and Osun States). It can also be transnational, as with the Hausas and Yorubas in some West African countries.

Similarly, a Nigerian living in London can be a British citizen without being an Irish, English, Scot or Welsh. In effect, while the state is a political entity with sovereignty, a nation is a group of people bound together by the sentiment of nationality - race, culture, religion, language, and history. However, the state has a monopoly on coercive force, but a nation lacks such a powerful element.

Only states, not nations, are recognised and represented in international organisations such as the United Nations, the African Union, the International Monetary Fund, and the Arab League. Nigeria is a nation of about 250 ethnic groups.

nationalities that make up the 36 states of the federation. Similarly, the United States of America became a nation comprising 52 states after the War of Independence with Great Britain.



Fig. 3.1 The Concept of Nation

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 4

Differentiate between the concept of a state and a nation

Question 1

A state is best defined as _____, while a nation refers to a group of people with shared identity and culture.

- A. a political organisation with defined territory, population, government, and sovereignty
- B. a religious organisation
- C. an economic association
- D. a cultural festival

Question 2

Which of the following best distinguishes a nation from a state?

- A. A nation is based on shared identity, while a state is based on political organisation
- B. A nation has no population
- C. A state is based only on culture
- D. Both are the same.

Question 3

A key feature of a state that a nation may not necessarily possess is _____.

- A. sovereignty
- B. common language
- C. shared history
- D. cultural unity

2.3.4 The Nation-State

Now that you understand the concept of a nation, let us take the next step by exploring the nation-state and how a shared national identity can exist within a defined territory and political system.

The nation-state has become the principal form of political organisation among modern people. In the past, Tribes, City-states, and Feudal baronies were known. Indeed, in political terms, part of the definition of a modern society is that it is organised into a nation-state.

The term nation symbolised the unity of a people around which they unite and through which they identify themselves and assess political events. So strong is the people's identification with the nation-state that political leaders often need to claim that a particular act is in the national interest to satisfy many citizens that the policy is justified.

Many scholars have listed specific preconditions, such as a common language, religion, and ethnic heritage, that must be met before a nation-state can emerge. This is not strictly valid. Switzerland, for example, with four official languages, and Belgium, with two, are good examples of nation-states.

The United States is ethnically diverse, yet it remains a model nation-state. Obviously, common language, religion, and ethnic origin will help create a nation-state, but they are not mandatory, as the U.S. experience has shown.

However, what is essential is that people feel they share a deeply significant element of a common heritage and a common destiny for the future. Accidents of geography, military conquest, and local and external political rivalries have brought together groups of people who are completely different from one another.

However, they can see themselves as one, or as members of a nation-state, to the extent that they co-operate in a common enterprise such as self-defence against external enemies, accept similar concepts of political authority and legitimacy, see their future as bound up with each other, and are willing to accept this prospect.

Self-Assessment Exercise 5

Describe what qualifies a state or nation to become a nation-state.

Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

Question 1 A nation-state is formed when a political entity possesses both a defined _____ and a strong sense of shared national identity among its people.

Question 2 One key requirement of a nation-state is _____, which implies supreme authority within its borders and independence from external control.

Question 3 For a state to qualify as a nation-state, its population must share common elements such as culture, language, or _____.



2.4 Summary

In this unit, we have examined the concept of the state in practical terms by defining it and outlining its features, characteristics, and functions. We attempted to highlight the differences between a state and a nation-state. We also explained that a state is a political concept. At the same time, a nation is a sociological concept, and a state does not automatically transform into a nation-state unless certain integrative or adhesive conditions are met.



2.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources

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2.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

Possible Answers to SAE 1

- 1 Answer: territory
- 2 Answer: sovereignty
- 3 Answer: machinery

Possible Answers to SAE 2

- 1 Answer: A
- 2 Answer: A
- 3 Answer: A

Possible Answer to SAE 3

The difference between feudal and capitalist societies in terms of obedience to the state lies in the basis and structure of authority.

In a feudal society, obedience is personal and hierarchical. Individuals, especially peasants or vassals, owe loyalty directly to a lord or monarch, often based on tradition, custom, and land relationships. Authority is decentralised, and obedience is tied to personal allegiance and obligation rather than to an abstract state. The state, as a unified authority, is weak or fragmented.

In contrast, in a capitalist society, obedience is impersonal and institutional. Citizens obey the state as a legal and political entity, rather than individual rulers. Authority is centralised and formalised, operating through laws, constitutions, and institutions. Obedience is based on legal-rational authority, where individuals comply with established rules rather than personal ties.

Thus, while feudal obedience is personal, traditional, and localised, capitalist obedience is legal, institutional, and state-centred.

Possible Answers to SAE 4

- 1 Answer: A
- 2 Answer: A
- 3 Answer: A

Possible Answers to SAE 5

- 1 Answer: territory
- 2 Answer: sovereignty
- 3 Answer: history

Unit 3 The Doctrine of Sovereignty and its Limitations

Unit Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Learning Outcome
- 3.3 Definition of the concept of sovereignty
 - 3.3.1 Types of sovereignty
 - 3.3.2 Legal sovereignty
 - 3.3.3 Political/Popular sovereignty
 - 3.3.4 External Sovereignty
 - 3.3.5 Criticisms and Limitations of Sovereignty
- 3.4 Summary
- 3.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources
- 3.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise



3.1 Introduction

Sovereignty is a very important concept in political science and the foundation of a state's survival and existence in both its domestic and external affairs.

This unit begins with a working definition of sovereignty; it discusses its relevance and the different types of sovereignty. The Unit also presents criticisms of sovereignty from both theoretical and practical perspectives, as well as its limitations as a philosophical and political concept.



3.2 Learning Outcome

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- define the concept of sovereignty, its different types and relevance as a political concept;
- explain relevant criticisms of sovereignty with a view to bringing to light that it can only be applied in a modified form; and
- discuss the recent developments on the international scene in relation to the concept of sovereignty.



3.3 Definition of the concept of sovereignty

Have you ever wondered who has the highest authority to make and enforce decisions within a state? Let us explore the concept of sovereignty and understand what confers a state's ultimate authority.

Sovereignty may be defined as the power of a state to make laws and enforce the laws with all the coercive power it can employ without any external interference.

It is that characteristic of the state by virtue of which it cannot be legally bound except by its own will or limited by any power other than itself. The modern states claim to be sovereign and to be subject to no higher human authority.

It issues orders to all and receives orders from none, and its will is not subject to any legal limitation of any kind. The French writer Jean Bodin (1530-96) introduced the theory of sovereignty into political science.

It was he who postulates that, “If the state is to live, there must be in every organised community some definite authority not only itself obeyed, but also itself beyond the reach of authority.”

Harold Laski corroborates Bodin’s definition when he concludes that when we discover the authority which gives commands habitually obeyed but itself does not receive them, we have the sovereign power in the state. By these characterisations, in an independent political community, sovereignty is determinate, absolute, and illimitable.

Sovereignty is a supreme power of the state over its citizens and subjects, itself not bound by the laws. Scholars who have helped to develop the theory of sovereignty include Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, J. J. Rousseau, and Jeremy Bentham.

According to Hobbes, sovereignty is absolute and vested in the ruler, with the social contract as his premise. Locke did not use the term sovereignty at all; insofar as there was a supreme power in his state, it lay with the people, though it was normally latent.

Rousseau maintained that sovereignty belonged to the people; it could be exercised only in an assembly of the whole people. Government was but the executive agent of the general will: it had no manner of sovereignty. The sovereignty of the people of Rousseau was as morally unlimited as it was unlimited.

The possibility of resistance limits it, and there are conditions under which resistance is morally justifiable. Bentham urged the necessity for the sovereign to justify his power by useful legislation to promote “the greatest happiness of the greatest number.”

Within the domestic environment, the sovereignty of the state is located in, or exercised by, persons or institutions. In a monarchical system, sovereignty resides in the king, except where that king is a constitutional monarch, as in Britain, where the law obliges a division of sovereignty among several institutions of the state, with parliament in clear supremacy. In a republican democracy like the United States, several institutions also share sovereignty, where the President occupies a primacy. In most modern democracies, one of the principal institutions involved in the exercise of the state's sovereign power is the Legislature or Parliament, which has the power to make laws that are binding on all, including the lawmakers.

Others are the Executive, which has constitutional responsibility for enforcing or executing the laws, while the Judiciary, which has the power to interpret and adjudicate disputes arising from the constitution and the law. There has been a great deal of academic debate on whether sovereignty is determinate or illimitable. It is not worthwhile to reopen such a debate here, but the important thing is to know what sovereignty denotes and connotes. First, in every state, there must be a sovereign; his sovereignty must be clearly located; his commands are laws, and within the sphere of law, as Hobbes said, there is no such thing as an unjust command. Second, such laws or commands may oblige subjects to do or refrain from doing certain things, and failure to comply attracts a penalty. Therefore, sovereignty lies with the individual, group, or association that is obeyed without question by the rest of the people in a state.

Scan the QR code or click the link below to watch a short video on the Concept of Sovereignty.

As you watch, pay attention to what sovereignty means and how it relates to the authority, independence and power of the State.

https://youtu.be/N7QG1TT_BjU?si=BF3Lc-bIhrPt2G7R



Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Describe the defining characteristics of the theory of sovereignty.

3.3.1 Types of sovereignty

Let us take a closer look at the types of sovereignty and see how authority can be exercised within and beyond a state.

The most common distinction is that which is made between legal and political sovereignty, on one hand, and internal and external sovereignty on the other. Legal and political sovereignty can be subsumed within internal sovereignty, while external sovereignty is relevant to and applicable in the conduct of international relations.

However, in the present interdependent world, when bridges of cooperation among states are rapidly replacing barriers and divisions, the distinction is no longer strictly relevant but serves only academic or analytical purposes.

3.3.2 Legal sovereignty

Let us begin with Legal Sovereignty, where the key question is: who has the final legal authority to make and enforce laws in a state?

John Austin is the foremost exponent of legal sovereignty. For him, the state is a legal order in which the sovereign is determinate and exercises ultimate power. He admits that a sovereign may act unwisely or dishonestly, but for legal theory, the character of its actions is not important.

This view is similar to the popular saying in Britain that “the King or Queen can do no wrong.” But since a constitutional Monarch, as it obtains in Britain, operates within a legal or unwritten conventional milieu, legal sovereignty connotes also the power of the legislature to make laws, or that of constitutive and regulative laws of the state, as symbolised or permitted by the constitution, which is the supreme law.

It is also plausible to argue that legal sovereignty resides in the constitution. Although the legislature can review, amend or even mutilate the constitution, it can only do so in accordance with the same constitution. This makes the idea of legislative sovereignty to be limited or suspect. In any case, the legality or otherwise of legislation can be challenged in a court of law, whereas the constitution cannot. All that can be done to the constitution in the court of law is to interpret it in a way to make its provisions less ambiguous and more precise. In this sense, we can only talk of legal sovereignty, which means the supremacy of the constitution.

3.3.3 Political/Popular sovereignty

It is also possible to speak of political or popular sovereignty, which, in fact, refers to the ultimate power of the people. It is often argued that the people make up the polity and all constitutions are, or ought to be, reflections of their preferences, culture and institutions. By popular/majority will, they can also enthrone and displace or remove governments. Consequently, in discussions of sovereignty, it is tempting to suggest or conclude that the people are sovereign. Nevertheless, in practice, the impact of the people involved in the lawmaking process or in the drafting of constitutions is minimal, if not nil. Most legislators hardly consult their constituents before making vital decisions; the recall procedure is cumbersome to apply as a check on recalcitrant legislators; and the electoral process, particularly in Third World nations, hardly reflects popular will. For these reasons, we must be cautious about placing too much hope in the strings the political sovereign can pull. This is why Laski dismisses attempts to equate popular sovereignty with public opinion as an abstraction, especially when we do not “know when public opinion is public and when it is opinion.”

In the modern state, it is therefore an illusion to suggest that the people are sovereign. Only the very active, powerful, aggressive, or interested actually get to exert any influence on the constitutions, institutions of state, or the workings of government. The mass of the people cannot govern only in the sense of acting continually as a unit; more importantly, the business of the modern state is far too complex to be conducted by perpetual referenda. John Chipman Grey confirmed elitist rule by declaring that the real rulers of society are undiscoverable. For the most part, constitutions and regulative rules emerge from the manipulation, compromises and conflicts of powerful minorities. The majority often concedes its right to influence public policy through apathy, indifference, or ignorance. Thus, while in theory the people are sovereign, in practice it is the constitution and the operators who exercise this sovereignty.

However, people can mobilise to assert themselves and influence the legal sovereign (the constitution and parliament) in ways that suit their interests or desires. Such occasions, however, are rare. They occur only in moments of crisis when radical change is needed. In short, sovereignty is meaningless in the absence of power; that is, power to enforce laws. However, as others have argued, power is neither necessary nor sufficient for the exercise of sovereignty. What is central and necessary is to earn the obedience of the people, which ultimately enhances the possession and exercise of authority.

3.3.4 External Sovereignty

How can a state remain truly independent if another country can control its decisions? Let us explore External Sovereignty and understand how it protects a state's independence from outside interference.

Sovereignty is the central organising principle of the international system. It means the supremacy and separateness of states as legal or political entities, with the power to control others and to regulate not only their internal affairs but also their external or foreign relations.

The state is sovereign within a defined territory and enjoys equal status with others which have the same attribute. The importance of Hugo Grotius in the development of the theory of sovereignty lies in his emphasis on external sovereignty, i.e., the independence of states from foreign control. Sovereignty is therefore used in reference to states, which are autonomous of any other entity. Although membership of international organisations is voluntary, States willingly join because they consider such participation to be in their enlightened national interests. States can also decline jurisdiction or refuse to abide by the judgment of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), as the United States has done with its optional clause, or that of the International Criminal Court (ICC) by refusing to ratify its Statute. This is still within the exercise of a state's external sovereignty.

The idea of the sovereign state in diplomatic history had its roots in the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. After the Thirty Years' War, the sovereign state emerged from the bloody clash to vindicate the supremacy of the secular order against religious claims. Moreover, since then, states have been guarding their sovereignty, equality and territorial integrity. From the 1815 Congress of Vienna, through the 1919 Versailles Peace Treaty, the San Francisco Conference of 1945, which gave birth to the Charter of the United Nations, the 1961 Vienna Conference on Diplomatic Immunity, to the 2000 Rome Treaty of the International Criminal Court, the notion of state sovereignty has been preserved.

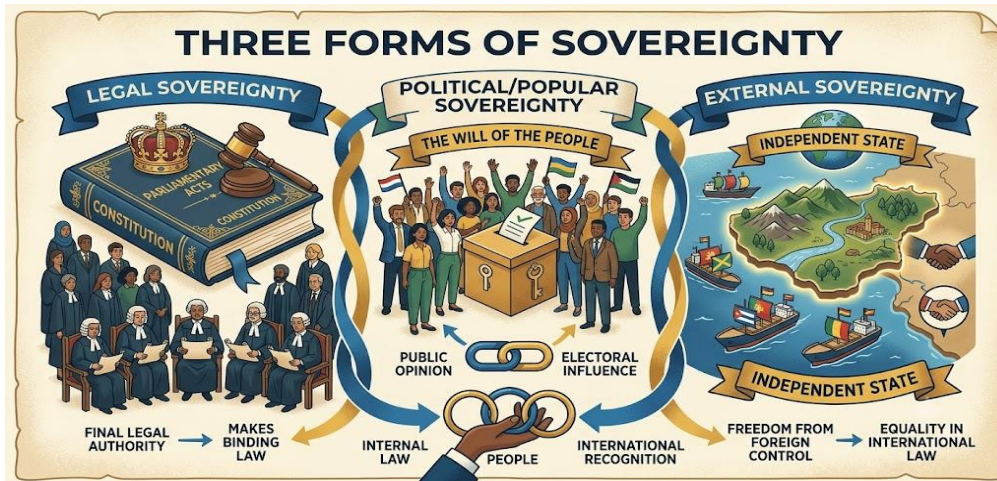


Fig 3.1 The Three Forms Of Sovereignty

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Discuss ways in which legal sovereignty differs from political sovereignty.

Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

Question 1 _____ sovereignty refers to the authority recognized by law as the ultimate power in the state, while political sovereignty resides with the people.

Question 2 Political sovereignty is exercised through public opinion and _____, whereas legal sovereignty is exercised through formal institutions.

Question 3 While legal sovereignty is _____ in nature, political sovereignty is more informal and based on influence and public support.

3.3.5 Criticisms and Limitations of Sovereignty

Sovereignty gives a state authority and independence, but is it really unlimited? Let us examine the criticisms and limitations of sovereignty and see why a state's power may have boundaries.

There are several criticisms of the theory of sovereignty. First, in the view of Sir Henry Maine, sovereignty does not apply to undeveloped communities, among whom custom is the king of men (Appadorai, 2004). Second, sovereignty assumes that the state is the only association.

This is not true, according to the pluralists, who recognise the existence of other non-political associations, such as trade unions, that grow naturally, have a will of their own, and possess a personality distinct from that of the state. They also have members who find fulfilment within such bodies.

Third, in a federal state, it may not be easy to determine or locate sovereignty in a single source, given the origins, cooperative and dual character of most federations, which often compel the distribution of powers among levels of government. However, a caveat to this criticism is that even within federations, efforts are underway to build an overarching national consensus.

As Laski puts it, “The will of the state must be all or nothing. If it can be challenged, the prospect of anarchy is obvious.” It was this realisation that made Abraham Lincoln in the United States between 1861 and 1865, and Yakubu Gowon of Nigeria from 1967 to 1970, use federal might to suppress rebellions by secessionist states to keep the federation intact.

Fourth, the sovereign must habitually observe certain principles or maxims. For example, it is unthinkable that the Queen in Parliament will ignore established age-old conventions that hold British society together. Fifth, in a democracy, it is almost a truism that the legal sovereign should bow to the political sovereign.

The question then is: if sovereignty is determinate, how can the people or the electorate, where popular sovereignty rests, satisfy this requirement? Sixth, while it is conceded that the law of the sovereign is a command, the state cannot enact laws that offend the historical and sociological milieu of a society; the sovereign risks resistance or even rebellion. Seventh, to say that there is no law beyond the reach of the sovereign is to strain the definition to its limit, as the sovereign cannot tax private property without the consent of the owner.

As Laski warned, “Men will sooner part with their souls than with their possessions.”

The concept of absolute, unlimited sovereignty did not last long after its adoption, either domestically or internationally. The growth of democracy imposed important limitations upon the power of the sovereign and of the ruling classes.

The increase in the interdependence of states restricted the principle that might is right in international affairs. Citizens and policymakers generally recognise that there can be no peace without law, and that there can be no law without some limitations on sovereignty.

They therefore began to pool their sovereignties to the extent needed to maintain peace and prosperity. For example, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, United Nations, European Union, African Union and ECOWAS Charters, which modern states are signatories to and respect, serve as limitations on their sovereignty.

Despite these criticisms, sovereignty remains a valid legal and political theory. In those levels of society in which the bulk of society habitually renders obedience to an authority or superior who is independent of any other superior, the obedience is so rendered because this authority or superior is regarded as expressing or embodying what may properly be called the general will.

This sovereign does not exercise an unlimited power of compulsion since his power is dependent upon his conforming to certain convictions that the subjects consider to be in line with the general interests.

The sovereign can exercise the ultimate power of getting habitual obedience from the people because of what the people stand to gain for so doing. The consent is not reducible to the fear of the sovereign; rather, it is a common desire to achieve a certain purpose towards which obedience to law contributes.

The Austinian conception of sovereignty, which emphasises a determinate person or body of persons with sovereign power, is therefore not without qualifications. It only suggests common interest, a common sympathy, and a desire for a common object, which we call the general will, and which the people believe is embodied in the sovereign.

The foregoing is what Harold Laski (1982:62) had in mind when he wrote of a modified view of sovereignty. In his characteristic inimitable way, he wrote: "If the state is to be a moral entity, it must be built upon the organised acquiescence of its members.

However, this demands from them the scrutiny of government orders; and that, in its turn, implies a right to disobedience." Therefore, will, not force, is the basis of the state.

Regarding the limitations of the concept of sovereignty, there has been considerable debate about its relevance in international relations. Scholars like John Herz, J. Rosenau, R. Cooper and Karl Deutsch have argued at one time or another that sovereignty has become obsolete. Herz's position is that nuclear weapons have undermined the isolation and separateness of states, making them vulnerable to decisions outside their control.

Rosenau's concept of cascade interdependence argues that other states, forces, or agencies intrude on another state's decision-making process, thereby undermining its sovereignty and autonomy. Karl Deutsch premised his argument on the rise of hegemonic powers, which have the capacity to impose their will on others and to exercise that power without authorisation, often with impunity.

This was the case when the United States in 2003 invaded Iraq, toppled Saddam Hussein's government and forcefully imposed its coercive will on the country, an action that amounted to the virtual extinguishing of Iraq's sovereignty.

This reality has reduced the sovereignty of smaller states, making them live at the mercy of powerful ones, as it happened when Kuwait was overrun by neighbouring Iraq in August 1990, until its sovereignty was restored in January 1991 after the intervention of the United Nations-backed, US-led Allied Forces.

For similar hegemonic, imperialist or economic reasons, countries such as Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, Afghanistan, and Georgia, at one time or another, were at the receiving end of the ambitions and manipulations of superpowers like the USA and the former Soviet Union, now Russia. Joseph Nye Jnr. (2000:177) also wrote extensively on the economic interdependence among states and how it seriously undermines their capacity for independent action.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

State the major criticisms and limitations of the theory of sovereignty.

Question 1 A major criticism of the theory of sovereignty is that it assumes _____, which is often unrealistic in modern pluralist societies.

- A. absolute and unlimited authority of the state
- B. equal distribution of power among citizens
- C. total absence of government
- D. complete economic independence

Question 2: Which of the following best reflects a limitation of sovereignty in the contemporary world?

- A. The influence of international organisations and global interdependence
- B. The absence of legal systems in states
- C. The elimination of political institutions
- D. The dominance of traditional rulers only

Question 3 The pluralist critique argues that sovereignty is unrealistic because power is _____ in society.

- A. centralised in one authority
- B. concentrated in monarchs only
- C. distributed among various groups and institutions
- D. absent in modern states



3.4 Summary

This unit examines the concept of sovereignty and stresses its importance as an organising principle of the state in both its domestic and external relations.

The point was made that sovereignty belonged to the state, not the government, the latter being a mere agency of the former. We also emphasised that, despite the views of the classical theorists, a modified theory of sovereignty is the one that is realistic in the modern state, in which its ultimate purpose is better served only if the interests of its citizens are maximized political institutions or the constitution. Although extraneous forces may influence a state's ability to govern, it is uncommon to find any state that is not governed largely by its constitution. Therefore, from the issues raised in this unit and recent developments in the world of sovereign states, though we may concede that sovereignty is no longer absolute, they have by no means eliminated the formal independence of states, their separateness and the ability of governments in those states to exercise sovereignty on behalf of their people.



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3.6 Possible Answers to SAEs

Possible Answers to SAE 1

The theory of sovereignty is defined by several core characteristics that establish it as the supreme authority within a political system.

First, sovereignty is supreme, meaning it is the highest power within a state and is not subject to any other internal authority. Second, it is absolute, implying that the sovereign has ultimate decision-making power, though in modern states this may be constitutionally limited. Third, sovereignty is permanent, enduring regardless of changes in government or leadership.

Another key feature is that sovereignty is indivisible, traditionally viewed as a single, unified authority, although federal systems may distribute powers while maintaining overall sovereignty. It is also inalienable, meaning it cannot be transferred or surrendered permanently. Additionally, sovereignty is universal within the state's territory, extending to all persons and institutions within its boundaries.

Finally, sovereignty includes both internal and external dimensions: internally, it denotes authority over citizens and institutions; externally, it signifies independence and equality among states in the international system.

Thus, sovereignty remains the central organising principle of the state, defining its authority, independence, and legitimacy.

Possible Answers to SAE 2

- 1 Answer: Legal
- 2 Answer: elections
- 3 Answer: formal

Possible Answers to SAE 3

- 1 Answer: A
- 2 Answer: A
- 3 Answer: C

Unit 4 Citizenship Rights, Limitations and Protections

Unit Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Learning outcome
- 4.3 Citizenship Rights, Limitations and Protections
 - 4.3.1 Limitations to Human Rights
 - 4.3.2 Liberty and Equality
 - 4.3.2.1 Types of Liberty
 - 4.3.2.2 Types of Equality
 - 4.3.3 The State and protection of liberties
 - 4.3.4 Importance of Human Rights to Citizenship
 - 4.3.5 Citizenship, Duties and Obligations
 - 4.3.5.1 Definition of citizenship
 - 4.3.5.2 Duties of a citizen
 - 4.3.5.3 Obligations of a citizen
- 4.4 Summary
- 4.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources
- 4.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise



4.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. In the previous unit, you examined the major theories that explain how the state originated, providing a strong foundation for understanding one of the central ideas in political science. Building on that knowledge, we will now move from theoretical discussions to a closer examination of the state in practice. Together, we will explore its key features and characteristics, consider the roles it performs, and examine how it differs from government, a nation, and a nation-state. As you work through this unit, try to relate these ideas to the political systems and institutions you encounter in everyday life. This approach will help you prepare for the learning activities ahead and deepen your understanding of the nature and significance of the state.



4.2 Learning Outcome

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the origins, meaning, categories and limitations of fundamental human rights;
- discuss ways in which rights can be fully enjoyed and protected; and
- enumerate the importance of these rights as reciprocal to the performance of the duties of the citizens to the state.



4.3 Definition and Limitations of Human Rights

Human rights belong to every person, but does that mean they are without limits? Let us explore their meaning and limitations and understand when and why certain rights may be restricted.

Human rights are the privileges enjoyed by the citizens of a given state. The privileges are usually defined and enjoyed within the bounds of the law, i.e. the law of the country.

In written constitutions, these rights, their limits, and the protection accorded to them by the government are specified. In other words, human rights are spelt out in the written constitutions of modern democracies and protected by the government, as set out in the United Nations Charter.

The protection of these rights calls for two forms of government action. The government is forbidden from doing a series of things to the individual to preserve their rights, and the government is obliged to fulfil certain obligations to the individual, specifically to preserve their liberties, against which the citizen can enforce their rights through the judicial process.

Historically, the origins of human rights can be traced to the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, which proclaimed the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; the French Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1789; the European Convention of Human Rights; and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Rights. Many political scientists have written and said a great deal about fundamental human rights.

Its most influential exponent, perhaps, was the English political philosopher John Locke, who wrote that the obedience to the commands of a given government is for only one reason, and that is to secure the personal rights to life, liberty, and property that naturally belong to all men equally, simply because they are all human beings.

In Nigerian constitutions since the 1963 Republican Constitution, there has been a Chapter devoted exclusively to Fundamental Human Rights. Chapter IV of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 guarantees the citizens' Fundamental Human Rights in the following section of the document, thus:

- Sec. 33: Right to life
- Sec. 34: Right to the dignity of a human person
- Sec. 35: Right to personal liberty
- Sec. 36: Right to fair hearing
- Sec. 37: Right to private and family life

- Sec. 38: Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion
Sec. 39: Right to freedom of expression and the press
Sec. 40: Right to peaceful assembly and association
Sec. 41: Right to freedom of movement
Sec. 42: Right to freedom from discrimination
Sec. 43: Right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria

The First Amendment to the American Constitution also lawfully secures freedom of speech and of peaceful assembly. The Fourth secures the citizen that his house shall not be searched except upon a warrant, while the Eighth legally secures citizens against excessive bail (Laski, 1982:103). In the unwritten British Constitution, however, there has been no general proclamation of rights. Still, each of a series of important rights has been achieved through particular historical struggles, and their maintenance today depends on the workings of the law.

In short, whether a country operates under a written or unwritten constitution, Fundamental Human Rights are guaranteed to individual citizens and protected by law. These Rights include the right to life, freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom from slavery, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom from unlawful imprisonment, and the right to private life and property. Right to life, for instance, is the foundation on which other rights are based. This is why murder and suicide are punishable under the law by capital punishment, even when sanctioned by the state, for many reasons, including the sanctity of human life, which remains a controversial subject. However, when we say human rights are inalienable, it does not imply that they are unqualified. This means, in effect, that there are rules guiding these various rights or liberties.

Scan the QR code or click the link below to watch this short video on What Are Human Rights?.

Be sure to watch the video before proceeding to the next section, as it will help you build a clear understanding of the topic.

<https://youtu.be/djRmsmn6Fc8?si=rplMEUbKVC8pvnQb>



4.3.1 Limitations to Human Rights

Fundamental Human Rights are not without limitations, since an absolute right is as good as no right at all. A Citizen should know that their rights end where that of others begins. For example, you have the right to stress your hands the way you like, but you should not box or hit anybody with your hands in the process, otherwise you may be charged in court with assault and battery by the aggrieved person. The law of libel is a limitation on the freedom of speech and writing if it defames or impugns the integrity of another person.

The freedom of assembly could be lawfully curtailed to prevent a breakdown of law and order. The state could restrict freedom of movement during an emergency, and people may be asked to stay indoors from dusk until dawn to observe a curfew.

A citizen who is mentally challenged could be ‘arrested’ and ‘detained’ in a psychiatric hospital for treatment, against their will, or roam the street. Citizens could also be conscripted into the Army and sent to the front lines to defend the state, which may limit their freedom to life (Sec. 33).

Restrictions on, and derogations from, fundamental rights are contained in **Secs. 45(1)(a)(b)(2)&(3)** of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Human rights are said to be inalienable, yet without detracting from this view, it is still a fact that the only part of the conduct of anyone, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others.

4.3.2 Liberty and Equality

Liberty does not mean freedom to do one’s will. This is a negative conception that suggests an absence of restraint, which the rich prefer. The presence of government will make this definition of liberty impossible. Liberty means maintaining equal opportunities for all citizens. Liberty, therefore, is a positive thing.

It does not merely mean absence of restraint. Regulation is required since citizens cannot live together without common rules. For example, a citizen’s liberty is not endangered if he is refused permission to commit murder. So also is observing traffic regulations. To compel obedience to them is not to make a man unfree.

Where restraint becomes an invasion of liberty is where the given prohibition acts to destroy productive endeavours (Laski, 1982).

Liberty, therefore, is never real unless the government can be called to account, especially when it invades rights. In his Essay on Liberty, John Stuart Mill wrote: “That government is best which governs least.” There are three aspects of liberty.

3.3.2.1 Types of Liberty

Personal	Political	Economic	Domestic	National	International
Freedom of choice on strictly private	Right to take part in state affairs	Right to gainful employment	Responsible and respectable position of the family	Freedom from colonial subjugation (independence)	Renunciation of war
Health security, personal honour	Right to exercise franchise	Freedom from want	Freedom to enter into marriage alliance	Exercise of loyalty and patriotism	Abandonment of the use of force
Freedom of thought, expression, movement, movement and faith	Right to free supply of news and information dissemination	Right to produce, distribute and consume goods	Responsibility of parents for the development of family members		Pacific settlement of disputes among nations
Freedom to us and enjoy private property	Right to fight for free and fair elections	Workers' right to participate in the management of industry			Limitation on the production of armaments
	Right to send petition to the government	Establishment of industrial democracy			
	Right to support or oppose government policies and actions				

The first is private liberty. This means the opportunity to exercise freedom of choice in personal life, like in religious beliefs. The second is political liberty. This is the citizen's right to participate in the political activities of his country- right to vote and to stand for elections and to criticise the government-

A citizen must find no barriers that are not general barriers in the way of access to a position of authority. The educational system must not be structured such that children of rich or well-born men are trained to imbibe the habit of authority, while the children of the poor are trained to habits of deference. The third is economic liberty. This means security and the opportunity to find a reasonable means of livelihood. As Laski (1982) argues, where there are the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated, we always find masters and servants. Therefore, liberty cannot exist without equality.

Economic liberty also means democracy in industry, or what is called equal economic opportunities. Freedom can therefore not exist in the presence of special privilege, since there is no liberty where the rights of some depend upon the pleasure of others.

Equality does not mean identity of treatment. There can be no ultimate identity of treatment so long as men are different in want, capacity and need.

It fundamentally implies a levelling process and the provision of equal opportunities for all, which also depends on the training we offer to citizens. For the power that ultimately counts in society is the power to utilise knowledge, and disparities in the ability to use that power. In the final analysis, political equality is never real unless it is accompanied by economic equality since political power is the handmaid of economic power.

4.3.2.2 Types of Equality

Natural	Social	Political	Economic	Legal	International
All are born free, no discrimination on the grounds of sex, religion, race, language,	Equality of rights and opportunities on the subject grounds of discrimination	Equality of participation in the political process	Equality in the resource allocation/distribution	Equality before the law	Equality of states. No discrimination based on demography, geography, economic or military potential

		Universal adult suffrage	Provision of protection for the minority groups' interests	Equal protection of the law for all	Eradication of social evils such as slavery, child abuse/trafficking, drug trafficking, etc
		Open leadership recruitment through credible, periodic elections	Control of the private sector through social policies	Equality of access to justice through a low-cost and without unnecessary delay	
		Free press and mass information media			

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

List and explain the different types of liberty and equality you know
 Question 1 Which type of liberty emphasises freedom from external restraints or interference by others?

- A. Negative liberty
- B. Political liberty
- C. Economic liberty
- D. Moral liberty

Question 2: Which form of equality refers to equal access to opportunities such as education and employment?

- A. Equality of opportunity
- B. Legal equality
- C. Political equality
- D. Social equality

Question 3 Which type of liberty involves the right of citizens to participate in the political process, including voting and contesting elections?

- A. Political liberty
- B. Economic liberty
- C. Civil liberty
- D. Natural liberty

4.3.3 The State and protection of liberties

How does the state protect our freedom while also maintaining law, order and security? Let us explore the relationship between the state and the protection of liberties.

Every state is measured by the number of liberties and rights it obligates its citizens to. The state is not simply a sovereign organisation with the power to get its will obeyed; it must safeguard rights by preventing unlawful invasion of rights and ensuring that a citizen's right stops where another's begins. Harold Laski (1982:131) made this delicate balance clear:

“It is a state, for instance, which can prevent the Roman Catholic Church from putting a man to death for heresy; but it cannot force the Roman Catholic Church to surrender the dogma of Papal infallibility.” Also, a state cannot demand allegiance from its subjects, except in terms of what that allegiance is to serve. Indeed, the state character will be apparent from the rights that, at any given period, secure recognition. Any given state is therefore torn between rights that have been recognised and rights that demand recognition. Rights, in fact, are those conditions of social life without which no man can seek, in general, to fulfil himself. Since the state exists to make that achievement possible, it is by maintaining rights that its purpose may be served.

For example, rights such as the freedoms of speech, association, assembly, and religion are either equally applicable to all citizens without distinction or not applicable at all. Freedom of speech is limited only by the law of libel or slander, which constrains the freedom of the press. Opinion, in the view of Harold Laski (1982:119), may be penalised if it is held to involve disorder. However, to ensure that state authorities respect rights, it is imperative to establish, in the constitution, the principle of separation of powers and the system of checks and balances. In the opinion of Harold Laski (1982:104), the more independent a judiciary, the more adequate are the safeguards of rights. However, he added a caveat: since the executive ultimately appoints the judiciary, the judiciary's independence is rarely final. Indeed, separation of powers merely acts as checks upon the expansion of each authority's allotted sphere into another; it does not determine the quality and the extent of the power that is allotted (Nurudeen, 2009, p. 300).

It is therefore not enough for a state to make verbal commitments to respect human rights; statutory and institutional frameworks are required to back or safeguard them. In the United Kingdom, for example, there is a special precaution against unlawful imprisonment. A citizen unlawfully imprisoned can seek relief from his captors through the writ of *habeas corpus*.

This is an order from a judge of a Law Court requiring that anyone detained be produced before the court on a specified date. The effect is that any person unlawfully detained can obtain his release or trial at the earliest possible time.

In Nigeria, if a citizen is unlawfully arrested, he is entitled to receive compensation. If lawfully arrested, he enjoys the right to defend himself accordingly (Ojo, 1973, p. 47). Similarly, a citizen can bring a writ of *Mandamus* from a Law Court to compel any level of government to perform its constitutional responsibility. A citizen can also protect their liberties by seeking either *an interlocutory or a perpetual remedy injunctions* from a Law Court, to compel a stay of action that may violate his/her rights.

The essence of safeguards for human rights is to prevent governments from infringing on citizens' rights or citizens from engaging in lawlessness, which can plunge the state into chaos. It also ensures that individuals can perform their lawful duties without fear of oppression or victimisation. A government which deprives its citizens of these fundamental rights would have lost its legitimacy to remain in office. Hence, John Locke's remark that:

The great and chief end... of men uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property (i.e. their natural right). When a government fails to preserve these rights and thereby ceases to serve the end for which it was created, the citizens have the right – indeed, the duty- to overthrow it.

Law is therefore an important condition of rights. However, laws can either help or destroy liberty because they can provide equal opportunities or curtail freedom. A. V. Dicey once argued that the more there is one (law), the less there is the other (rights). The independence of the judiciary is achieved by providing for the appointment or removal of judicial officers through due process to ensure job security, and for the payment of their salaries/allowances from the Consolidated Revenue Fund. Other measures to protect Human Rights from encroachments are:

- i) A written constitution in which the rights and obligations of citizens are set out in a lucid and unambiguous language. Citizens are aware of these liberties and the measures to defend them if they are violated.
- ii) Existence of *Ombudsman* - a Public Complaints Commission, through which any aggrieved citizen can seek redress against the state or any of its agencies.
- iii) A free press that will report and disseminate information, as well as educate the citizenry about government policies and their implications on their rights and liberties.

A democratic government also helps safeguard human rights because democratic institutions such as the Senate, the House of Representatives, and State Assemblies are composed of elected representatives who represent different constituencies in the federation. They protect their constituents through public hearings, motions, and bills to protect citizens' rights.

- iv) Quick dispensation of justice is another element in protecting the rights and liberties of citizens. As the saying goes, "justice delayed is justice denied." The judicial process should not only be fast but also accessible to people with low incomes at a reasonable cost of litigation.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Enumerate ways of protecting your liberties in your country.

Question 1 One effective way of protecting individual liberties in a state is through _____.

- A. an independent judiciary that upholds the rule of law
- B. concentration of power in one authority
- C. elimination of constitutional provisions
- D. restriction of citizens' rights

Question 2 Which of the following mechanisms best ensures the protection of citizens' liberties in a democratic system?

- A. Separation of powers among branches of government
- B. Absolute rule by a single leader
- C. Absence of legal frameworks
- D. Suppression of public opinion

Question 3 The protection of civil liberties is strengthened when citizens have access to _____.

- A. fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution
- B. arbitrary government decisions
- C. limited political participation
- D. restricted legal processes.

4.3.4 Importance of Human Rights to Citizenship

Imagine waking up one day and discovering that your freedom to speak, learn, work or participate in society is no longer protected. What would citizenship mean without these rights? Let us explore why human rights are essential to meaningful citizenship.

In any given state, citizens are endowed with rights because, without them, they may not be able to function optimally or fulfil their civic obligations to the state. Put differently, rights are corollaries to duties. For

example, a man has not only the right to work; he has the right also to be paid adequate wages for his labour.

To live a citizen without access to the means of existence is to deprive him of that which makes him perform his basic civic obligations, or function in the interest of the larger society. As Laski put it, “there must be sufficiency for all before there is superfluity for some”. The state also provides for the right to property if what a citizen owns is commensurate with his efforts, or can be shown to be related to the common welfare.

However, a citizen cannot justifiably own directly because of the efforts of others, or if the effect of such ownership is a power over the life of another. Indeed, there is an income below which no man can be allowed to fall if he is to be himself as a decent citizen.

The civilised modern state accords the right to education top priority, since a citizen who lacks it is bound to be a slave to others. He will not only live a stunted being, but also fail to rise to the full heights of his personality. If citizenship means that one's contribution is informed judgment for the public good, a citizen without a basic education will not be able to make informed choices.

Related to this is the right to political power. Every adult citizen has the right to indicate the person he desires should be elected. If the body of voters is limited, the welfare realised usually excludes that of those excluded. However, just as those who choose cannot be drawn from any special class in a state, so also, those who are chosen cannot be members of a limited section only.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Outline the benefits that citizens can derive from respect for human rights in a country.

Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

Question 1 Respect for human rights promotes _____ and stability within a country by reducing conflicts and injustice.

Question 2 When human rights are protected, citizens enjoy _____ before the law, ensuring fairness and justice in society.

Question 3 The protection of human rights enhances citizens' _____, allowing them to express opinions and participate in governance without fear.

4.3.5 Citizenship, Duties and Obligations

Just as every citizen has rights which are entrenched in the constitution and are to be protected by the state, so also the constitution requires of All citizens have certain duties and obligations. This implies that for every privilege there is a corresponding responsibility.

4.3.5.1 Definition of citizenship

Citizenship means membership in a given state. A citizen is a person who is a freeborn of a state. Put briefly, a citizen is an individual who has full political and legal rights in a state.

Under international law, every nation has the right to determine how a person can acquire its citizenship. Chapter III of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 stipulates the ways by which a person may acquire Nigerian citizenship.

Aristotle defines citizenship as the right to rule and be ruled. Ways of acquiring Citizenship may be by birth, place of birth, blood/descent, by marriage, registration, naturalisation, or by conquest.

4.3.5.2 Duties of a citizen

Duties are the responsibilities that citizens owe not only to the state but also to themselves, for the effective functioning of the state and the harmonious relationships between individuals and social groups within it. If it is the state's responsibility to protect the rights of individual citizens, citizens also have duties in return. The organic theory of the state holds that without individuals performing their functions (duties), the state cannot function.

The duties that citizens owe to the state include, but are not limited to: Obedience and unalloyed loyalty to the state - this encompasses respect to the national flag and national anthem; Payment of tax as and when due; Obedience to traffic laws and highway codes; Serving in the military if required during an emergency period; Non-interference with other citizens' rights.

4.3.5.3 Obligations of a citizen

These are civic responsibilities that directly or indirectly contribute to an effective government and to avoiding acts that may infringe on others' rights. Good citizens, for example, are expected to exercise their voting rights in elections, and those who decide not to vote on election day are effectively contributing to the election of an unpopular government.

Therefore, it is politically obligatory for every citizen with the right to vote to exercise their voting right during elections, and it is equally necessary to resist the rule of an unpopular government by constitutional means, i.e., by removing such a government through the exercise of their voting right.

Every citizen owes it an obligation to obey the government, provided the government is good, and not to deprive others of their rights. It is also obligatory for a citizen to assist law enforcement agencies in detecting and preventing crime.

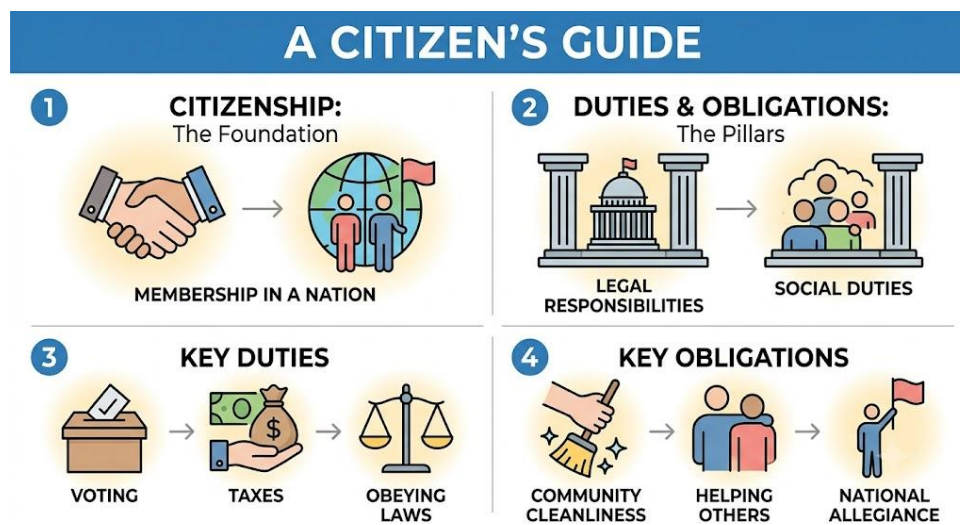


Fig. 4.3 A Citizenship Guide

Self-Assessment Exercise 4

Explain the relationship between citizenship, rights, duties and obligations.



4.4 Summary

In this unit, we have defined and examined various categories of human rights. We also observed that, despite their inalienable character, these rights are not without qualifications or limitations. We also stated that a citizen could only fully enjoy his rights on the condition that he knows his limits under the law and performs his duties. Where this is the case, the state, acting through the government, is to ensure that a citizen's rights are fully guaranteed, protected, and safeguarded.



4.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources

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4.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

Possible Answer to SAE 1

- 1 Answer: A
- 2 Answer: A
- 3 Answer: A

Possible Answer to SAE 2

- 1 Answer: A
- 2 Answer: A
- 3 Answer: A

Possible Answer to SAE 3

- 1 Answer: peace
- 2 Answer: equality
- 3 Answer: freedom

Possible Answer to SAE 4

Explain the relationship between citizenship, rights, duties and obligations.

Citizenship, rights, duties, and obligations are interdependent and mutually reinforcing within a political system.

Citizenship defines the legal and political membership of an individual in a state. By virtue of this membership, a citizen is entitled to certain rights, such as civil, political, and socio-economic rights. These rights guarantee freedom, protection, and participation in governance.

However, rights are not absolute; duties and obligations balance them. Duties refer to responsibilities expected of citizens, such as obeying laws, paying taxes, voting, and defending the state. Obligations are broader commitments that ensure respect for others' rights and support for societal order.

The relationship is therefore reciprocal: citizens enjoy rights because they fulfil duties, and the state protects rights while expecting compliance with laws and civic responsibilities. Without duties, rights may be abused; without rights, duties may become oppressive.

Thus, a stable political system depends on a balance between citizenship rights and civic responsibilities, ensuring both individual freedom and collective order.

Unit 5 Power, Authority and Legitimacy

Unit Structure

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Learning outcome
- 5.3 The meaning of the concept of Power
 - 5.3.1 Political power
 - 5.3.2 Attributes and Elements of State Power
 - 5.3.2.1 Attributes of Power
 - 5.3.2.2 Power is dynamic
 - 5.3.2.3 Objectivity and Subjectivity of Power
 - 5.3.2.4 Power is relative
 - 5.3.3 Elements of national power
 - 5.3.3.1 Tangible Elements
 - 5.3.3.2 Intangible elements
 - 5.3.4 Differences in the concepts of Power/Influence and Authority/Legitimacy
 - 5.3.4.1 The Concept of Authority
 - 5.3.4.2 The concept of Legitimacy
 - 5.3.5 Influence
 - 5.3.5.1 Forms of Influence
 - 5.3.5.2 Means of Achieving Relationship of Influence
 - 5.3.5.3 Trained Control
 - 5.3.5.4 Rational/Manipulative Persuasion
 - 5.3.5.5 Inducement
- 5.4 Summar
- 5.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources
- 5.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise



5.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. In the previous unit, you examined the concept of the state, its features, functions, and how it differs from government, a nation, and a nation-state. Building on that foundation, we will now turn our attention to another central idea in political science, one that shapes political interactions and decision-making at every level.

As you progress through this unit, you will explore the nature of power, its key characteristics and elements, and its significance in political relationships. You will also consider how it differs from other closely related ideas.

As you study, think about how power operates in your community, organisations, and national politics. This reflection will help you engage more meaningfully with the learning activities that follow and strengthen your understanding of political processes.



5.2 Learning Outcome

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning and nature of power in the political context;
- describe the major attributes and elements of state and national power;
- differentiate between power, influence, authority and legitimacy in political relationships; and
- analyse the forms and means through which influence is exercised in political and social relationships.



5.3 The meaning of power

When you hear the word “power”, what comes to mind? Is it authority, influence, control, leadership, or something else? Take a moment to reflect before we explore its meaning in Political Science.

The concept of power features regularly in political discourse. For this reason, it is often said that power is to politics what energy is to physics. Power is also often used interchangeably with power and influence. However, despite their apparent relations, the three concepts have different meanings. We will, however, focus on power in this unit and defer discussion of the others until section 4.3 below. Power, when used in a socio-political context, the ability of Mr A is the ability to get Mr B or other people to do what they would ordinarily not have done. This ability may be a derivative of possession of either: a gift, trust/goodwill, supernatural power, public office or any other coercive superiority over others.

However, the more precise meaning of power necessarily involves the concept of coercion. Power is the ability or capacity to get other people to do one's wishes, with or without their consent; that is, whether they like it or not. This may result from social, biological, or economic relationships, e.g., between father/children, sponsor/beneficiary, or political godfather/godson.

Similarly, possession of a monopoly of weapons or agents of death, e.g. armed robber/victim, armed security official/unarmed civilian. It can also be a group of armed military officers forcing their way into power. Power is invariably tied up with superior quality or capability. This is where power is different from influence.

We must make this distinction at this stage to avoid mistaking power for influence. Our concern here is primarily power, even if we recognise that other forms of power, economic in particular, may have an almost decisive impact on political power.

5.3.1 Political power

Max Weber defines power as the “probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance.” The corollary of this is that a power relationship is said to exist when A makes B act in a manner he wants him to act, regardless of B’s wish.

Inherent in the power relationship, therefore, is the element of sanction, coercion and the use of physical force. While sanction is the drive of fear of punishment by A and B, coercion refers to compulsion by A of B to carry out his wish, and the use of physical force involves the threat by A to harm B.

It should, however, be noted that the power relationship does not necessarily involve physical force, although elements of sanction and coercion may operate in the background, thereby enhancing its credibility. Political power is the capacity to affect another’s behaviour by the threat of some forms of sanction. The greater the sanctions, or the more numerous the sanctions, the greater the political power. The sanctions may be negative, positive, or a carrot-and-stick approach.

Thus, a political leader may acquire compliance with his wishes by promising those who support him with wealth or honours, or he may threaten to deny such rewards to those who support him with both. The penalties for opposing those in political power may be severe, including imprisonment or even death.

These latter penalties are usually reserved.

For the state, and those who control the state’s apparatus often wield the strongest political power.

However, it is the fear of these coercive penalties that provokes obedience, not the coercion itself; indeed, too frequent use of these penalties may indicate the weakening of that political power. Nonetheless, if those who claim authority lack the power to enforce their will, they cannot rightly claim authority. Political power is important not because it is an end in itself but because it is a means to an end. Power can serve as an instrument both for empowerment and for domination. For this reason, scholars have warned against the possibility of misuse or abuse of power, since according to Lord Acton, “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely”

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Attempt a good and concise definition of power.

5.3.2 Attributes and Elements of State Power

Power in politics can be understood as the total of a nation's capabilities, including its tangible and intangible resources. Power is also a political resource encompassing the attributes of a state that enable it to achieve its goals. The characteristics or attributes of power include the following:

5.3.2.1 Attributes of Power

Before we examine the attributes of power, let us pause to consider how power operates around us. Why do some individuals or groups influence decisions while others have little influence? In this topic, you will explore the key features of power and how they shape relationships, decisions and political actions.

5.3.2.2 Power is dynamic

Power exercised by a state changes over time and is never static; it is dynamic. Before 1991, the Soviet Union was a Superpower, but it no longer exists today. Indeed, its successor state, Russia, is far from assuming a status in the world today.

Until the turn of the 19th Century, Britain was the most powerful country in the world, with colonial possessions across the globe. Today, Pax Britannica is history, leaving the United States as the most powerful country in the world in all dimensions of power.

5.3.2.3 Objectivity and Subjectivity of Power

Objective power consists of assets that a state actually possesses and that it has both the capacity and the will to use. On the other hand, subjective power depends on perception, and in some cases, appearance may be more important than reality. It is easier to assess the contribution of the tangible than the intangible elements of power to a nation's power matrix. Tangible elements are easily more measurable and thus objective than intangible power, which is less precise and thus subjective.

5.3.2.4 Power is relative

Power is best perceived in relative rather than absolute terms. Power, therefore, becomes meaningful when you compare the power a nation wields in a particular period with another, or when actor A is compared to actor B. For example, we cannot say Nigeria is powerful in absolute

terms unless we specify in comparison to whom, or compare a country's power across periods.

ATTRIBUTE OF POWER: POWER IS DYNAMIC



ATTRIBUTE OF POWER: OBJECTIVITY & SUBJECTIVITY OF POWER

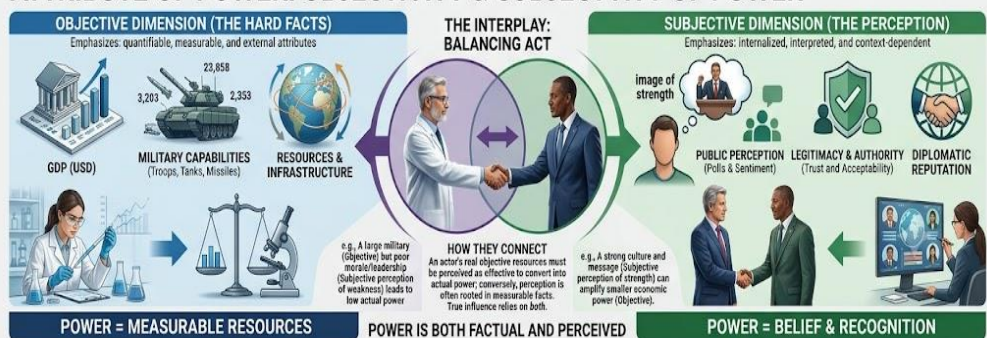


Fig. 5.1 State Power Attribute

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

5.3.3 Elements of national power

Building on what we have just learnt about the attributes of power, let us now take the idea a step further. Can a country be powerful simply because it has a large population or a strong military? Not necessarily.

A nation's power comes from several elements working together. In this topic, you will explore these elements and see how they contribute to a country's ability to influence events and protect its national interests.

5.3.3.1 Tangible Elements

The tangible elements of national power include military capabilities, economic strength, natural resources, population, and strategic location. These elements, however, are interrelated and need some qualifications. Military capability comprises both conventional and nuclear power, and without it, a state may be unable to defend its territorial integrity, a vital attribute of statehood. Similarly, a country with a weak economic base may be unable to acquire military equipment or maintain political stability.

The size and quality of a country's population may be either an asset or a liability, with serious implications for national power. For instance,

Nigeria is respected in the international community, among others, because of its large population, which has psychological effects on the global system.

It is also not enough for a country to have huge natural endowments; its power will remain limited if it has to rely on other nations for technology to explore or exploit those resources. A country strategically located along a coastline will command more respect or wield more power in international politics than a landlocked country. A landlocked country with no territorial waters has to depend on foreign countries' international trade by sea. This will make such a country vulnerable to external control.

5.3.3.2 Intangible elements

The intangible (or soft power) elements of national power include culture, attraction of ideas, ideology and institutions. This form of power does not require any form of coercion.

The power a state like the Vatican wields today in the world, especially among Catholics, is principally because of religion. Beyond its tangible oil wealth, Saudi Arabia occupies a prime position in the Muslim world because of the religious significance of the city of Mecca, located within the country.

There is no doubt that the widespread acceptance of Western values, including the Western idea of liberal democracy, and even the near acceptance of the capitalist ideology as the orthodox route to development, is a huge accretion to the power Western nations, especially the United States, exercise in the world today.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Explain the elements of a state's power that you consider most important

Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

Question 1 The _____ of a state, including its size, location, and natural resources, is a key element that determines its power.

Question 2 A large and well-educated _____ contributes significantly to a state's power by providing human resources for development and defense.

Question 3 The _____ strength of a state enables it to defend its sovereignty and exert influence over other states.

5.3.4 Differences in the concepts of Power/Influence and Authority/Legitimacy

Having examined the elements of national power, let us now go a step further. A country may possess resources and capabilities, but how does it actually use them to shape the behaviour of others? To answer this, we need to distinguish between power, influence, authority and legitimacy.

Understanding these differences will help you see how political actors gain compliance, exercise control and secure acceptance.

Scan the QR code or click the link below to watch the video. Be sure to watch it before proceeding, as it will provide a useful foundation for the topic.

<https://youtu.be/34XmBXPC5kA?si=BsMU2347LejQcGXB>



5.3.4.1 The Concept of Authority

Authority has a relationship with power, but it is distinct from it in one important respect. It is based on rules. It is common to define authority as legitimate power, but this may be misleading, as it can give the impression that coercive power is necessarily illegitimate.

When coercive power is used or exercised by the state, it is legitimate. While a definition of authority need not exclude the concept of power, the two concepts are not synonymous. Authority is the consequence of the acknowledgement of power.

This may also be misconstrued because it is possible to accept or acknowledge other people's power as "a fait accompli," but this would not necessarily confer legitimacy on such force. For example, if one surrenders a property to an armed robber, it is an acknowledgement of power, but it does not confer authority or legitimacy on that power.

A more acceptable definition will see authority as legitimate power, that is, power derived from accepted rules and exercised with the consent of the people. Thus, authority, rather than brute force, is better understood when power is seen as a right to issue commands and have them obeyed willingly.

We can therefore regard authority as a form of power. It is different from the form of power exercised by A over B to get B to do what he could never have wished to do. Rather, it is a form of power derived from approved procedures of political culture, which enable the office holder to act in certain ways to predictably and in anticipation affect the behaviour of others.

In a democracy, for example, there is compliance with the executive directives of a country's president, not because of the person, but because the officeholder has been freely given a mandate to rule through procedures acceptable to them.

Compliance, therefore, is voluntary and in support of a system that the people hold in high esteem. In the same token, when a legal system is established, it is recognised and obeyed by the people voluntarily, regardless of whether a particular law is wrong or right. Thus, authority has been described as legitimate power because it commands voluntary obedience. This is in sharp contrast to the power structure of a superior-subordinate relationship, in which the superior's command usually takes precedence.

Herbert Simon (cited in Bello- (Imam, 2008) described the circumstances surrounding the exercise of power as Sanctions of Authority” The sanctions are not in the sense of punishment, but as a means of explaining why subordinates carry out commands from their superiors. It is said that in a republic, it is not power that creates obedience, but authority.

5.3.4.2 The concept of Legitimacy

Max Weber identifies three major sources of authority. These are not three different kinds of authority but only different sources of authority.

These are the traditional, legal-rational, and charismatic. Traditional authority derives from long-standing traditions and the common acceptance of their sanctity and usage.

This takes the form of respect for the monarchy, chief, or Oba/Emir, respect born out of the inheritance of one's parents' status and the exercise of authority conferred on that status. The supremacy of the law legitimates legal rational authority.

The exercise of such power is accepted as legitimate because it derives from institutionalised rules, which confer and circumscribe the right to give command and have them obeyed. In the legal-rational situation, such a right derives from rules (e.g., constitutional status), whereas in a traditional situation, the right derives from customs, usages, and acceptance of common antecedents.

Charismatic authority derives from persons of exceptional qualities who are accepted and obeyed as leaders. Such qualities include heroism, oratorical power, intelligence, and healing or prophetic power. Charismatic authority often derives from a common acceptance or voluntary submission to a leader's perceived competence, superiority, or simply charisma.

Leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi of India, John Kennedy of the United States, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Sir Ahmadu Bello, and Murtala Muhammad of Nigeria are examples of leaders who, during their lifetimes, possessed charismatic qualities that endeared them to their countries' people.

5.3.5 Influence

Now that we have distinguished power from related concepts, let us focus on influence. Think about a situation where someone changes your opinion or decision without ordering, threatening or forcing you. That is influence at work.

Influence is the ability to shape other people's decision-making. It largely involves the capacity to make one's presence felt in other people's minds. Influence can be exercised without power, although it can be conferred by power. Also important is that influence can acquire the intensity of power. This happens when Somebody's influence is so overbearing that others have no choice but to take cognisance of the person in their decision-making. The distinction between power and influence can only be made in terms of the form of the relationship between actor A and B. At the same time, it is correct to say that power relationships also connote influence, since both concepts express the relationship between A and B. Power and influence are inseparable.

5.3.5.1 Forms of Influence

Influence has been identified in several forms, which can be classified into two categories: manifest and implicit. Manifest influence is said to exist where B can anticipate A's wants, for example, if A wants outcome X, and if, as a result of A's action, B attempts to bring about X, then A exercises manifest influence.

On the other hand, if A wants outcome X, then although A does not act with the intent of causing B to bring about X, if A's desire for X causes B to attempt to bring about X, then A exercises implicit influence over B (Dahl, 1984, pp. 42-5).

5.3.5.2 Means of Achieving Relationship of Influence

The relationship of influence could be achieved through several means or a combination of them. The means, according to Robert A. Dahl (1984), include trained control and persuasion, which could be rational, manipulative, or inducive.

5.3.5.3 Trained Control

Influence through trained control takes the form of prior persuasions and inducements aimed at manipulating actors' behaviour in the required direction in compliance with appropriate cues and signals.

5.3.5.4 Rational/Manipulative Persuasion

Rational persuasion is influence based on truthful information and rational communication. The relationship of influence derives from an appeal to the emotion of conscience of **B** concerning the genuineness of the subject over which he is being influenced. On the other hand, manipulative persuasion is achieved through half-truths and falsehoods presented to **B** by **A**.

5.3.5.5 Inducement

This is an influence relationship in which a reward is offered to prevent anticipated action. Examples include an offer of a wage rise.

and the threat of strike action or improved students' amenities, and students' boycott of lectures.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Identify the differences between authority and influence.

Question 1 Authority differs from influence in that authority is _____, while influence is informal and not necessarily backed by law.

- A. legally recognised and legitimate power
- B. based only on personal opinion
- C. dependent on physical strength
- D. unrelated to governance

Question 2: Which of the following best describes influence as distinct from authority?

- A. It operates through persuasion and personal appeal
- B. It is always enforced through legal sanctions
- C. It exists only in formal institutions
- D. It is derived solely from constitutional provisions

Question 3 A key feature that distinguishes authority from influence is that authority is _____, whereas influence may not be.

A. institutionalised and backed by law
 B. temporary and unstable
 C. based on emotions only
 D. unrelated to leadership



5.4 Summary

In this unit, we have defined power, its features and indices as well as significance in a political system. We also differentiated between power, authority and influence. We underscored that while power involves coercion, authority connotes voluntary acceptance and submission to control. We, however, conceded that it is not unlikely to see people use the two concepts interchangeably in ordinary discussion, leaving the strict distinction between the two to academic discourse.



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5.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

Possible Answer to SAE 1

Power in political science refers to the capacity or ability of an individual or group to influence, control, or direct the behaviour and actions of others, even in the face of resistance. It is a central concept in politics

because it determines who makes decisions, how resources are distributed, and how authority is exercised within a society.

Possible Answer to SAE 2

- 1 Answer: geography
- 2 Answer: population
- 3 Answer: military

Possible Answer to SAE 3

- 1 Answer: A
- 2 Answer: A
- 3 Answer: A

Unit 6 Types of Political Systems

Unit Structure

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Learning Outcomes
- 6.3 Monarchy
 - 6.3.1 Constitutional Monarchy
 - 6.3.2 Aristocracy
 - 6.3.3 Theocracy
- 6.4 Totalitarianism/Dictatorship
- 6.5 Summary
- 6.6 References/Further Reading/Web Resources
- 6.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise



6.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. In the previous unit, you explored the concept of power and its role in shaping political relationships. Building on that understanding, we will now examine the different forms of government that have evolved throughout history and consider how they influence political life and citizens' experiences.

As you study this unit, you will explore the major forms of government, reflect on their strengths and limitations, and trace how systems of government have changed over time, leading to the widespread acceptance of democracy in many parts of the world today.

As you work through the learning activities, think about the form of government practised in your own country and how it shapes political participation, rights, and responsibilities. This reflection will enrich your learning and prepare you for the discussions ahead.



6.2 Learning Outcome

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- analyse the characteristics of various forms of governments;
- discuss how political organisations have evolved from one form of government to another; and
- explain which of the systems of government is for the safety of the rights of the citizens.



6.3 Monarchy

Are you aware that the earliest form of government is a monarchy? Simply, it is a form of government headed by an individual who is not subject to legal limitations and does everything according to his own will. Monarchy is a type of government headed by a Queen, a King, or an Emperor. Examples are the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

A constitutional monarchy is subject to legal limitations, as in the United Kingdom, in contrast to the absolute monarchy of Saudi Arabia. However, it should be noted that hereditary monarchy is the norm, though elective forms also exist. Therefore, the essence of monarchy is the personification of the state's majesty and sovereignty in an individual. Monarchy can bring about a stable political system; it is also a natural institution in which obedience to the king is seen as obedience to God.

Britain offers the most contemporary example of a country operating a monarchy. Indeed, the British monarchy had evolved from the absolute monarchy of the Tudors to the constitutional monarchy of Queen Elizabeth. This transition was a consequence of the Puritan revolt that erupted between the King and the Parliament. It was later resolved bloodily after what came to be known as the Glorious Revolution in 1688. The characteristics of monarchy include the following: monarchy is an age-old form of government; the country's government is in the hands of a king, emperor, or queen; it is a hereditary form of government. In some forms of monarchy, e.g. absolute monarchy, the ruler has no constitutional limitation. In some monarchies, e.g., constitutional monarchies, the ruler is subject to constitutional checks.

A monarchical form of government has some advantages: a monarchy can bring about a stable political system; it is a natural institution in which obedience to the king is seen as obedience to God, thereby promoting total loyalty to the state.

A stable political system can be best secured only where supreme authority is vested in a single ruler. A monarchy could be adopted to address emergencies when the state requires the undivided loyalty of the people to the government of the day. In a monarchical system, decision-making is faster since the monarch does not need to consult anybody before making necessary and urgent decisions.

Monarchy helps to harmonise different interests and prevent social strife. In some circumstances, the king may serve as the protector of the people at large from the tyranny of the few. Where a hereditary kingship has existed for a considerable time, as in Britain, it may be unwise and unnecessary to abolish it.

Democratic principles can be grafted into, as was done in Britain, with admirable success. The disadvantages of monarchy include the following: Good intentions, ability, and industry are not hereditary. Therefore, a monarch could be a bad leader. A monarch could also be despotic, keeping the people weak so they would be unable to resist him.

Forms of Monarchy-Broadly, there are two types of monarchy: Hereditary and Elective.

Absolute monarchy: This occurs when there is no established constitutional authority to check the king's power. The king rules as the head of government and head of state. Examples include Frederick the Great of Prussia, the Queen of England, and Louis XIV of France before the French Revolution. Hereditary monarchy can be found in countries such as Britain, the old Oyo Empire, and the Hausa-Fulani Empire, where the Alaafin of Oyo and the Sultan of Sokoto were regarded as the personification of the state.

Despite the imposition of foreign rule and the displacement of traditional rulers under the post-colonial dispensation in many African states, the monarchy has survived, albeit with diminished power and authority.

The phrase “the king reigns but does not rule” aptly captures the present position of monarchs, in contrast to the days of unlimited absolutism.



Fig. 6.1 Monarchy in Nigeria

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

6.3.1 Constitutional Monarchy

Building on the idea of monarchy, let us consider a system in which the monarch's powers are limited by a constitution and established laws.

The constitution regulates the power of a constitutional monarch. The monarch can promulgate only those laws that are agreed upon by the resolution of the elected parliament, as in Britain. Also, they are bound to

respect not only the spirits of the constitution but also the laws of the state. He assents only to laws passed by the elected parliament. Britain is a good example of a constitutional monarchy.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Describe the differences between an absolute and a constitutional monarchy.

Question 1 An absolute monarchy differs from a constitutional monarchy in that the monarch in an absolute system _____.

- A. exercises unlimited political power
- B. is strictly controlled by a constitution
- C. shares power equally with parliament
- D. has no political authority

Question 2: **Which of the following best characterises a constitutional monarchy?**

- A. The monarch's powers are limited by law and a constitution
- B. The monarch rules without any legal restrictions
- C. The monarch controls all branches of government
- D. The monarch derives power solely from divine authority

Question 3 A key distinction between absolute and constitutional monarchy is that in a constitutional monarchy, governance is primarily carried out by _____.

- A. elected representatives and institutions
- B. the monarch alone
- C. religious leaders
- D. military authorities

6.3.2 Aristocracy

Moving from a constitutional monarchy, let us now examine aristocracy, a system in which political power is concentrated in the hands of a privileged social class, often made up of nobles or members of influential families.

Aristocracy is a government that the best citizens lead; the quality which marks out the aristocrat from others is virtue: moral and intellectual superiority. Because the aristocrat possesses these qualities in abundance, he only assumes leadership; he does not need to explain or justify his claims to superiority or leadership positions.

In short, his deeds, not his words, attest to his preeminence. In the view of Appaduria (2004), any time an aristocrat is compelled to justify his power, "it will be proof that his position is crumbling."

The distinctive qualities which characterise an aristocracy include noble birth (aristocracy of family), culture and education (aristocracy of priests or of scholars), age (aristocracy of elders), military distinction (aristocracy of knights), or property (aristocracy of landowners). Several Scholars have tried to justify aristocracy as a form of government.

Carlyle said, “It is the everlasting privilege of the foolish to be governed by the wise’ Rousseau also contended that it is the best and most natural arrangement that the wisest should govern the many. Montesquieu equally noted that aristocrats usually possess the great virtue of moderation. This quality also makes them cautious in their leadership role, so as not to ignite resistance from the masses, who have the advantage of numbers.

Plato indeed likened democracy to mob rule and argued that a few people of high quality, if allowed to rule, could do better for society. Although Aristotle was less cynical about democracy than Plato, he preferred aristocracy to democracy.

He even contended that, under certain conditions, the judgment of a few could be equal to or wiser than that of the will of many. According to Aristotle, the upper class contained people of the greater refinement or quality, and as such, they were best equipped to provide better government for the society as a whole {Baradat 2000:67}

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Analyse the differences between monarchy and aristocracy.

Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

Question 1 In a monarchy, political power is vested in a single ruler, while in an aristocracy it is exercised by a _____ group of elites.

Question 2 Monarchy is typically based on _____ succession, whereas aristocracy is based on rule by a privileged class.

Question 3 In an aristocracy, authority is held by individuals considered _____ due to wealth, status, or noble birth.

6.3.3 Theocracy

Having explored aristocracy, in which power is concentrated among a privileged class, let us now turn to theocracy, in which political authority is closely connected to religious beliefs and leadership. As we move from one system to another, consider how the source and exercise of political power change.

Theocracy is a government guided by divine authority or by officials regarded as divinely guided. Theocracy means literally 'the rule of God', and the term was invented by Josephus (AD 38-c. 100) to describe the ancient Hebrew constitution and the role of Mosaic Law.

Theocracy can also be defined as a government by a priesthood or religious leader. It is divine, and the laws made are of divine inspiration. In many theocracies, government leaders are members of the clergy, such as Islamic clerics, and the state's legal system is based on religious laws.

Theocratic rule was typical of early civilisations. However, the Enlightenment era marked the end of theocracy. The Vatican City in Rome, for example, is a theocratic state headed by the Pope. Other contemporary examples of countries practising theocracy include Saudi Arabia and Iran. A more secular definition of theocracy is priestly rule.

In theocracies, the religiously revealed laws or policies are unchallengeable, even by a popular majority or by an inherited monarch. It should, however, be noted that even such regimes which claim that their laws are divinely ordained and thus immutable do not make this claim in respect of all laws.

Theocracy is a form of government in which a god or deity is recognised as the state's supreme civil ruler, or, in a higher sense, a form of government in which a state is governed by immediate divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided.

For believers, theocracy is a form of government in which divine power governs an earthly human state, either through a personal incarnation or, more often, through religious institutional representatives such as the church, thereby replacing or dominating civil government.

Theocracy should be distinguished from other secular forms of government that have a state religion, or are merely influenced by theological or moral concepts, and monarchies, which are based on the divine rights of the king.

A theocracy may be monist in form, where the administrative hierarchy of the government is identical with the administrative hierarchy of the religion, or it may be dualist, having two arms, in which the state's administrative hierarchy is subordinate to the religious hierarchy. Theocracy is also a form of government in which people do not govern; God governs through the priests. By not separating religion from the state, Islam also sanctions theocracy.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Differentiate a theocratic government from a secular government.

Question 1 A theocratic government differs from a secular government in that it _____.

- A. bases its authority on religious principles and leadership
- B. separates religion from politics
- C. relies only on economic policies
- D. is controlled by elected representatives only

Question 2: Which of the following best describes a secular government?

- A. A system where religion and state affairs are separate
- B. A system ruled entirely by religious leaders
- C. A government based solely on divine authority
- D. A political system without laws

Question 3 A key distinction between theocratic and secular systems is that laws in a theocratic government are derived from _____, while secular laws are based on human-made principles.

- A. religious doctrines
- B. economic policies
- C. cultural traditions only
- D. military authority

6.4 Totalitarianism/Dictatorship

In Country A, one leader takes control of the government, suppresses opposition and makes most political decisions without meaningful checks on their power. This is a dictatorship.

In Country B, the government goes further by seeking to control not only politics but also the media, education, the economy, culture, and even citizens' beliefs and private lives. This reflects totalitarianism.

As you explore this topic, ask yourself: where does ordinary dictatorship end, and where does totalitarian control begin?

Since the 1950s, some scholars have argued that the extreme type of authoritarianism is best described as "totalitarianism." Robert C. Fried (1966:3) noted that totalitarian and dictatorial institutions are related, but they differ in one respect. The characteristics of the former include complete control over government, complete autonomy from outside and total control of social life.

The latter shares the first two characteristics of the former but lacks control over social life. The nature of government is important, since it determines the burden the political leadership shoulders. If a government is dictatorial, the burden is heavy. This is unlike a democracy, where the burden does not disappear, but the people share it.

In addition to the characteristics already cited above, “totalitarianism” implies “an official ideology which members of the society must adhere to and which covers all aspects of life in the society”; “a system of terroristic police control which supports, and supervises on behalf of the leader, and which is directed against the ‘enemies’ of the State”; and “central control and direction of the entire economy.”

Other characteristics of totalitarianism include the subordination of all to the interest of the political elites and to the specification of the ideology designed and adopted by them. In a totalitarian state, all groups of the youth, labour unions, cultural associations and other intermediate social structures, including the educational system, are organised to serve the interests of the state and its rulers.

Indeed, there is no distinction between the state and society. While the ruler controls a sophisticated state apparatus of propaganda to communicate and impose the will of the political leadership on the citizens, there are no institutional channels to ensure feedback communication from the population to the elites.

In short, authoritarian governments are content to control citizens' overt behaviour and eliminate any sign of organised opposition. Totalitarian governments attempt to control not only their citizens' behaviour but their thoughts as well. So instead of the dictators giving the people cutlery to make them survive, they throw cutlery at them to make them fight the war to defend their rulers.

However, ironically, history is replete with major achievements recorded by some dictatorial leaders: Despite the notorious Nazi concentration camps Hitler rebuilt a shattered German economy and conceptualized a Volkswagen, a “people’s car”; while Stalin’s desperate struggle to even out with the United States at the onset of the cold war did not stop him from transforming the Soviet Union from a backward agrarian to a military superpower. Chairman Mao also put China out of a primitive state and transformed it into an atomic power (Anyanwu 2002, p. 209).



Fig. 6.2. Totalitarianism/Dictatorship

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 4

Explain the distinguishing features of a democracy and totalitarianism
Question 1 A democracy differs from a totalitarian system in that democracy is based on _____.

- A. popular participation and free elections
- B. absolute control by one leader
- C. suppression of opposition
- D. strict state control of all aspects of life

Question 2: **Which of the following best characterises** totalitarianism as opposed to democracy?

- A. Complete control of political, social, and economic life by the state
- B. Protection of civil liberties and rights
- C. Competitive political parties
- D. Freedom of expression

Question 3 A key distinguishing feature of democracy is the existence of _____, which is absent in totalitarian systems.

- A. Rule of law and protection of fundamental rights
- B. centralized authority
- C. censorship of the media
- D. one-party dominance



6.5 Summary

In this unit, we have examined different forms of government. We first discussed the monarchy as a hereditary institution headed by a person who rules either as an absolute ruler or, in other circumstances, as a constitutional monarch. We also examined aristocracy, a form of government led by men of rare virtue, distinction, and valour.

We also treated theocracy as a form of government in which the state makes no distinction between the divine/spiritual and the temporal/secular. We finally discussed a totalitarian government as one in which the fundamental human rights of citizens are suppressed and in which no distinction is made between the state and society.



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6.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

Possible Answer to SAE 1

- 1 Answer: exercises unlimited political power
- 2 Answer: The monarch's powers are limited by law and a constitution
- 3 Answer: elected representatives and institutions

Possible Answer to SAE 2

- 1 Answer: small
- 2 Answer: hereditary
- 3 Answer: superior

Possible Answer to SAE 3

- 1 Answer: A
- 2 Answer: A
- 3 Answer: A

Possible Answer to SAE 4

- 1 Answer: A
- 2 Answer: A
- 3 Answer: A

Unit 7 Democracy as a form of Government

Unit Structure

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Learning Outcome
- 7.3 The Meaning and Features of Democracy
 - 7.3.1 The Process of Democracy
 - 7.3.2 The Criticisms and Limitations of Democracy
- 7.4 Summary
- 7.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources
- 7.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise



7.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. As you continue your journey through Political Science, we now turn our attention to democracy and the ideas that have shaped its development across societies.

Beginning with its roots in the Greek city-states, democracy has evolved, taking different forms as societies have adapted it to their political circumstances.

In this unit, we will explore the key ideas and principles that shape democratic government and examine the processes through which democratic systems operate, with particular attention to Western liberal democracy.

As you work through the unit, think about how democratic principles are reflected in the political systems around you, and consider how citizens participate in shaping government. Engage actively with each learning activity, reflect on the issues raised, and prepare yourself for the next stage of the module.



7.2 Learning Outcome

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain in detail the features of democracy as a system of government;
- discuss how a state can realise the goals of a democratic government; and
- analyse why democracy is not a perfect form of government from its theoretical and practical perspectives.



7.3 The Meaning and Features of Democracy

What would happen if people had the power to choose their leaders, express their views and influence how they are governed? Let us explore the meaning and key features of democracy and discover what makes a government truly democratic.

The term democracy comes from the Greek word for “rule of the people.” The Greeks’ idea of democracy was based on the full participation of all people in every aspect of government.

The Greek system of democratic government is the model of “pure” or consensus.

democracy, though in Greece pure democracy did not last long. However, the idea of government by the people survived the decline of the Greek city-state to become one of the basic ideals of political thought. There are two broad categories of scholars on the concept of democracy: the process and principle democrats.

Process scholars see democracy as a method of decision-making, but principal democrats argue that it has a very important theoretical basis (Baradat, 2000).

The principal democrats state that, although the procedure of democracy is important, it is secondary to the basic intents and objectives of democracy as expressed in democratic theory. For this reason, we will focus on the principle or theory of democracy in this unit.

The principal democrats contend that the basic principles of modern liberal democracy include that the individual is of major importance in society, that each individual is essentially equal to all others, and that each has certain inalienable rights.

Central to democracy is also the assumption of the individual's freedom of choice, free from fear or coercion and any other disabilities. Central to democracy is the liberty to make choices and the equality of choice.

Democracy, according to John Dewey, is much more than a form of government or a set of legal arrangements; it should be seen as a way of life that requires faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action when proper conditions are provided.

He further argues that democracy requires faith in the possibility of resolving disputes through uncoerced deliberation. Democracy, according

to Dewey, should not be viewed as “something institutional and external” but should be seen as “a way of personal life.”

Democracy not only requires institutional guarantees of rights but also faith in the possibility of resolving disputes through uncoerced deliberation. In other words, unhindered communication should be put in place in a democratic setting in which there is a “cooperative undertaking”, instead of having one group suppress the other through either subtle or overt violence or through intimidation.

Democracy does not impose authority from above but instead relies on dialogue as the source of authority and the means of choosing among competing alternatives. A democratic system flourishes in a setting where all citizens participate freely and rationally in public debate.

For Emile Durkheim, the basic hallmark of democracy is the citizens’ capacity to participate in the state’s judgment. To him, the state’s legitimacy springs from its collective conscience. In other words, citizens should be able to contribute to the society’s natural reasoning and deliberations. In Durkheim’s view, if we want to have a viable democracy, then we must have a vibrant public sphere where issues of common concern could be debated rationally. Similarly, intolerance, abuse, calling of names because of differences of opinion about religion or politics including differences of race, colour or wealth are treason to the democratic way of life.

Despite this seeming agreement among most scholars on its principle, democracy, especially its process, which we shall discuss in the next unit, is essentially a largely contested concept. Robert Dahl (1984) sees it as a concept that defies definition, in that any definition would betray one’s beliefs, personal outlook, political experience, and ideological preferences.

There are differences for example between the United States’ and the Soviet Union’s conception of democracy. A major difference between the USA and the former Soviet Union is that the USA emphasises political freedom as basic to democracy, while the USSR focuses on economic rights, and its leaders are even prepared to suppress or deny individual rights for the sake of the survival of the system.

On the other hand, democracy in the USA does not place a high premium on economic needs, despite President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal program. In retrospect, one can argue that one of the reasons the Soviet Union collapsed is that the system could no longer meet the basic economic needs of its people, despite the lid it placed on human (political) rights.

This is why Baradat (2000:66) argued that the Soviet Union and the United States differed as to which procedures best define democracy.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Define the concept of Democracy and outline its main features

Question 1 Democracy is best defined as a system of government in which _____.

- A. Power ultimately resides with the people
- B. Authority is vested in a monarch
- C. a military council makes decisions
- D. laws are based solely on religious doctrine

Question 2: Which of the following is a fundamental feature of democracy?

- A. Free and fair elections
- B. Absolute rule by a single leader
- C. Suppression of opposition parties
- D. Centralised control of all media

Question 3: A key characteristic of democracy is the protection of _____, which ensures that citizens can express their opinions and participate in governance.

- A. fundamental rights and freedoms
- B. traditional authority only
- C. military control
- D. economic monopoly

7.3.1 The process of democracy

The popular definition of democracy offered by Abraham Lincoln gives the impression that all citizens have the opportunity to participate in government. However, this is no longer possible in the modern world because of the size of sovereign states today.

Since the world has advanced beyond the Greek city-states, participatory democracy is no longer practicable, hence the necessity for indirect or representative democracy.

Through this process, given that all necessary conditions are in place, it is quite possible to achieve the ideals of democracy. Political power comes from the people, and a government is only legally constituted and run when the people give their consent.

The democratic process is therefore the institutional arrangements for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire and retain the power to rule by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote. The success of any democratic political system is largely determined by the willingness of political actors to comply with the rules of the game.

A democratic political system will therefore be stable if the process of leadership recruitment is legitimate and the majority of the citizens accept the electoral system as fair and just.

Presently, the United States and most European countries have met most of the conditions for sustaining democracy, while most third-world countries are still struggling to lay the foundations or rudiments for beginning the democratic journey.

Democracy goes beyond merely establishing political structures and institutions; it also involves the meaningful participation of the people in the affairs of the state. The keywords, therefore, are participation, transparency, and accountability.

As aptly argued by Samuel P. Huntington (Huntington, 1991), democracy has advanced in waves since the early nineteenth Century, with each wave giving way to partial reversals followed by new gains. The current wave, which he calls the third, commenced in the mid-seventies. Thus, contemporary views on democracy see it as the exercise of state power with the consent of the people, either directly or indirectly, through their elected representatives.

Within democratic governance, there is provision for state institutions to express the will of the state and, ultimately, for the supremacy of that expression in all basic questions of socioeconomic direction and policy. Under democratic governance, factors such as economic equality, fraternal feeling, and political liberty within a defined territory are indispensable prerequisites.

The institutional expression within democratic governance in contemporary times is equal rights for all normal adults to vote and to stand as candidates for election; periodic elections; equal eligibility for executive and judicial offices (provided the essential qualifications for the performance of the assigned duties are satisfied), and freedom of speech, publication and association (Appadoria, 2004, p. 137).

These rights, in themselves, provide opportunities for the entire citizenry to participate in choosing their rulers and in deciding the general lines of their policy through political manifestos presented before elections. However, a number of factors, most significant of which are the social

environment, the economic resources of citizens, and their natural endowments, determine the extent to which these essential democratic *sine qua non* rights can be met.

Nonetheless, in most democratic states, despite their imperfections, even the poor are afforded at least minimal equality in voting, since votes are counted, not weighed, regardless of voters' social or economic status. Among the rights that can promote the cause of democracy are the freedoms of speech, press, and association.

These rights are integral to democratic governance because they make possible free discussion and the continuous participation of the citizenry in government, over time and not only during general elections. Free discussion is necessary because democratic governance is based on the belief in the value of individual personality.

This implies an obligation to respect the other man, to listen to his views, and to take his argument into account. In addition, the process of law-making should allow full scope for the consideration of different and opposing viewpoints. Those who are inevitably affected by a law must be content that their case has been properly heard in a properly constituted court of law in the land (Egbewole, 2008: 214-5).

This makes the 'Rule of Law' a cardinal element of democracy (Dicey, 1963). Equality before the law, impartiality in the dispensation of justice, and periodic elections are also important in promoting a hitch-free democratic process. There is also the possibility of an alternative government in democratic governance.

This is in sharp contrast to a situation in which power is conferred permanently, or in which people do not feel free or safe to discuss or vote according to their conscience. Where this is the case, democracy cannot be said to exist, even if the people continue to enjoy the other political rights enumerated above.

Finally, democratic governance requires proper organisation and dynamic leadership. Political parties organise within democratic governance. Despite their limitations, political parties are indispensable to the successful operation of a democratic society (Bello-imam, 2002:14-16).

Little wonder political parties are regarded as the fulcrum of democracy. Lastly, we must point out that it is not possible to isolate the principle of democracy from its process, because one needs to reconcile the two so that a state uses the right method or process to achieve the objectives of democracy.

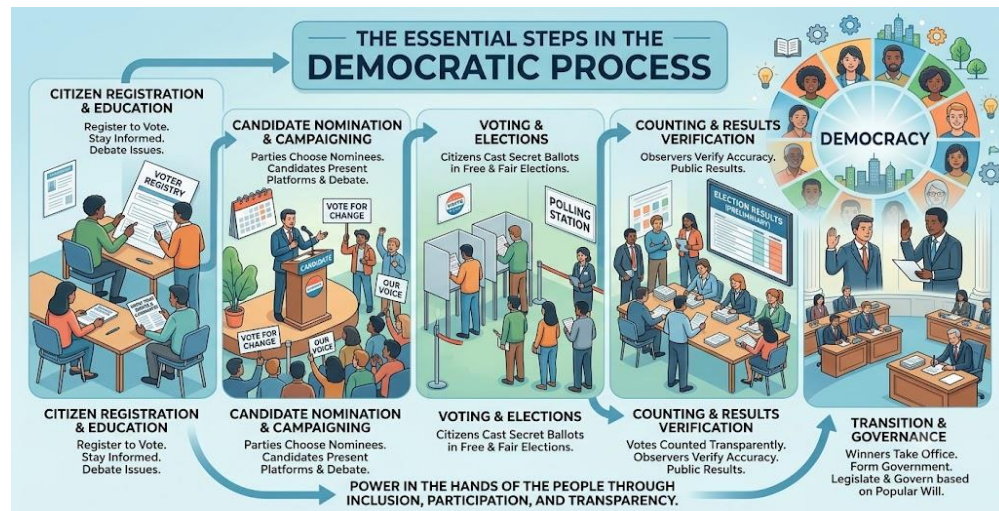


Fig. 7 .1 Democratic Process

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Explain how the process of democracy helps to realise its underlying principles.

Question 1: **Regular elections in a democratic system help realise the principle of _____.**

- A. popular sovereignty and accountability
- B. absolute authority of rulers
- C. suppression of dissent
- D. concentration of power

Question 2: Which democratic process ensures that government actions are subject to scrutiny and legal limits?

- A. Rule of law and judicial review
- B. Military intervention
- C. One-party dominance
- D. Censorship of opposition

Question 3 Freedom of expression and association in a democracy helps to promote _____.

- A. citizen participation and pluralism
- B. authoritarian control
- C. elimination of opposition
- D. centralisation of power

7.3.2 Criticisms and Limitations of Democracy

Democracy, as a philosophical and political process, has been subjected to several criticisms. Joseph Schumpeter, for example, argued that liberty and equality are not part of democracy and that, in all democratic systems,

there are necessarily limitations on voters' qualifications and circumstances. The franchise is often qualified, and the qualifications exclude a significant section of the population from the voting process. As for equality, the scholar argued that the relationship between the voter and the candidate is that people who are slightly affluent in society are more able to make claims or enjoy democratic dividends. Besides, disparities in educational, economic, or other social conditions limit voters' real opportunities to exercise their franchise despite apparent equality.

Another criticism of democracy derives from elite theories best associated with Mosca and Pareto. According to these theorists, in most societies, past and present, there is a distinction between the ruler and the ruled.

Indeed, the Platonic idea of the philosopher-king is often regarded as a tacit legitimisation of elitist rule. The processes and conditions of governance also have their own internal dynamics and logic, which gradually create a distinction in outlook and opportunities between those who govern and those who are governed.

Both Michel-Aaron J. J. Rousseau and J. J. Rousseau had argued that democracy necessarily involves representation, in which some interests may not receive adequate attention from elected representatives. Harold Laski (1982:319) shares this sentiment when he advised that an elected representative is “not entitled to get elected as a free trader and to vote (in Parliament) for a protective tariff”.

By virtue of their positions, the representatives possess greater political power than the average citizen does. This is because they meet regularly and operate, and are better informed about the technicalities of the law and socio-political relations than the larger society they represent.

Although the majority has the power of ejection and rejection, it is exercised irregularly, i.e., at long intervals during elections. Consequently, Michel Aaron argued that government by the people is an illusion since the great majority of people are uneducated or uninformed and therefore cannot participate effectively, or at all, in the process of government.

Democracy is also attacked as slow and inefficient. The decision-making mechanism is long and torturous, unable to make a speedy decision in an emergency. While democracy might have been possible in the past, technology has complicated society to such an extent that popular government is no longer possible.

In developing societies, according to Lucien Pye, democracy has also been criticised for being inefficient: “To a disturbing degree the strange idea has been spread within many transitional societies that democracy is linked with inefficiency, muddled actions and corrupt practices while authoritarian ways are identified with clear thinking, purposeful action and firm dedication.”

This essentially constituted the rationale put forward by African leaders in the first decade of independence for their preference for one-party democracy, which in reality was a euphemism.

for dictatorship. Finally, democracy is also fraught with illogicality because it tends to promote mediocrity at the expense of merit. In political contests, winners are not always the best candidates in terms of intellect, education, or competence. Rather, the criteria for determining electoral victory are popularity, financial wherewithal and other factors.

Nevertheless, democracy is still the most popular and rational form of government. According to Obafemi Awolowo (1981), “There is indeed no substitute for democracy as a form of government. It is most certainly the best form of government, which humanity in its long, painful and heroic search, has evolved.”

Democracy is so popular that most countries, even those that are clearly undemocratic, such as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, China, or the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), prefer to prefix their names with "democratic" or to pretend to practice democracy.

However, in reality, these are states that operate under an authoritarian form of government and are one-party-based, a factor that explains the potential for authoritarianism in such states.

In the Western liberal tradition of Europe and North America, and in areas of the world that emulate it, the tendency is towards multi-party democracy. The preference for the multi-party system is that it allows for competition between parties, sometimes of different ideological persuasions, with an inherent likelihood of the transfer of power from one party to another, in accordance with the wishes of the electoral majority, if the ruling party is defeated. For the less developed countries, a lot still needs to be done to institute democratic practices. As the Jacobins of France once said, “The transition of an oppressed people to democracy is like the effort by which nature arose from nothingness to existence”

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Discuss the major criticisms and limitations of democracy.



7.4 Summary

In this unit, we have discussed the origins, meaning, and features of democracy. We observed that democracy, in its classical conception, has intrinsic value. Yet, we recognised that in the modern world of large nation-states, it is no longer practicable to enjoy the benefits of direct democracy. The idea of representative government has therefore become the only way by which political leadership can be recruited regularly, and they will retain their positions as long as they continue to enjoy the support of the people. However, we also noted that the process

of enthroning a democratic government may not be perfect. Consequently, the reality today is that democracy, as a form of government, has been subjected to many abuses, the principal of which is the substitution of elite or minority rule for majority rule in many countries.



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7.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

Possible Answer to SAE 1

- 1 Answer: power ultimately resides with the people
- 2 Answer: freedom and fair elections
- 3 Answer: fundamental rights and freedoms

Possible Answer to SAE 2

- 1 Answer: popular sovereignty and accountability
- 2 Answer: Rule of law and judicial review
- 3 Answer: citizen participation and pluralism

Possible Answer to SAE 3

Democracy, while widely regarded as the most desirable system of government, is not without criticisms and limitations.

One major criticism is that democracy can lead to inefficiency and slow decision-making, as extensive consultations, debates, and procedures often delay urgent actions. It may also promote majority rule at the expense of minority rights, where the interests of smaller groups are overlooked.

Another limitation is uninformed or irrational voting, in which citizens may lack adequate political knowledge, leading to poor electoral choices. This can result in the election of incompetent leaders driven by populism rather than merit.

Democracy is also criticised for high costs, especially in organising elections, maintaining institutions, and running campaigns. Additionally, it can encourage corruption and political manipulation, as politicians may use money, propaganda, or ethnic and religious sentiments to influence voters.

Furthermore, democracy can sometimes produce political instability, particularly in societies with deep divisions, where frequent leadership changes disrupt policy continuity.

Thus, while democracy promotes participation, accountability, and freedom, its effectiveness depends largely on educated citizens, strong institutions, and adherence to democratic principles.

MODULE 3 POLITICAL/PARTY SYSTEMS AND ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

Unit 1	Major Components of a Political System
Unit 2	The meaning and nature of Political Parties
Unit 3	Pressure and Interest Groups
Unit 4	The British Political System
Unit 5	American Political System
Unit 6	Electoral System and Process
Unit 7	Electoral Reforms and Democratic Sustainance

Unit 1 Major Components of a Political System

Unit Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Learning outcomes
- 1.3 Political institutions
 - 1.3.1 Political Elites
 - 1.3.2 Elite theory
 - 1.3.3 The Masses
 - 1.3.4 Political Culture
 - 1.3.5 Political Linkage
- 1.4 Summary
- 1.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources
- 1.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises



1.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. In the previous unit, you examined political parties, their organisation, and the important roles they play in representative government. Building on that knowledge, we now broaden our focus to the political system as a whole and explore how its major components work together to support effective governance.

As you study this unit, you will examine the different parts of a political system and consider how their interactions influence stability, continuity, and overall performance.

Your understanding of political institutions and processes from earlier units will help you appreciate these relationships and see how each component contributes to the system's functioning. Begin with the first section, where you will explore the key components of a political system and how they are connected.



1.2 Learner's Outcome

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the roles of political institutions, elites and the masses in the political process;
- describe the major assumptions of elite theory and the influence of elites on political decision-making;
- analyse how political culture and political socialisation influence political participation and stability; and
- evaluate the role of political linkage mechanisms in connecting citizens, elites and government in the political process.



1.3 Political Institutions

Welcome! You are making good progress. Let us begin by exploring Political Institutions and discovering how they shape how a society is governed and how political decisions are made.

The most important and visible foundations of the political system or process are the formal institutions of government, such as the Constitution, Parliament, Courts, Bureaucracies, and the Executive structure.

These political institutions serve as the focal points for deciding, “Who gets what, when and how.” They also serve as arenas for the political process; the structure of a nation’s political system undoubtedly shapes its policymaking.

The question could be asked: to what extent can the political stability in the USA and Britain be attributed to the specific structures of their political institutions? Could the political instability that besets third-world countries be remedied by changing their political system to make them more like that of the Americans or the English? Providing answers to these questions was a major challenge and preoccupation of Political Scientists until the advent of the Behavioural Revolution.

One of the most significant contributions of the Behavioural Revolution to the development of political science is the emphasis on the importance of the human element over institutions, systems, and structures, and the realisation that they cannot be understood in isolation.

They can only be meaningful and better appreciated within the context of the operators, and they cannot work if the human behavioural element is not conducive to the systemic or institutional requirements.

In other words, no political structure can endure in the absence of corresponding values.

The character of Nigerian politics in the First Republic, when the parliamentary system was used, and the second, when the presidential model was adopted as a better alternative holds that explanations for the success and failure of political systems lie beyond a system's structure.

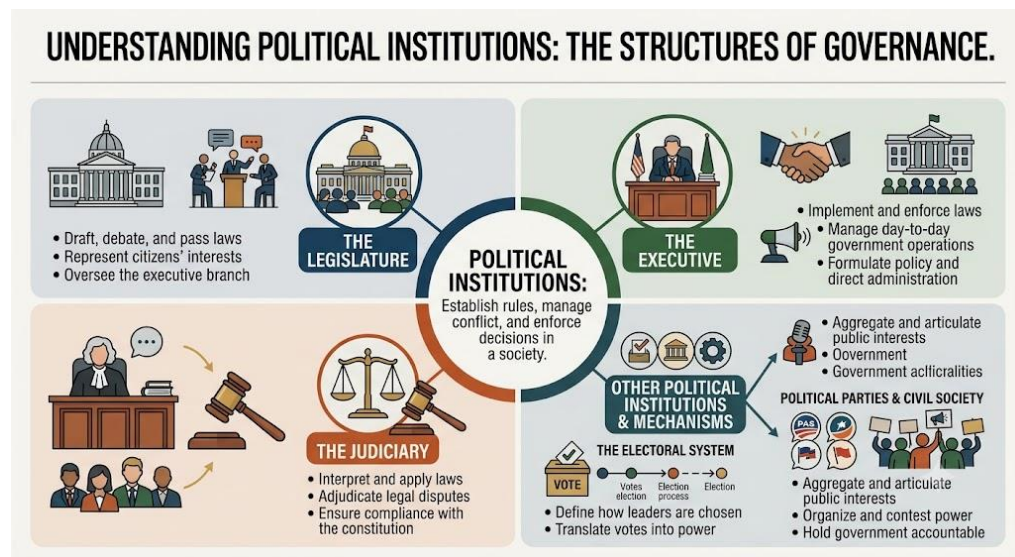


Fig: Political institution

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Assess the importance of political institutions in a political system.

1.3.1 Political Elites

The formal structures of the government are central in explaining the three basic questions posed by Harold Lasswell: “who gets what, when and how? However, understanding the primacy of elites is more important for analysing relationships among the other components, especially the masses.

Elites dominate formal institutions of government; they get most of what is available to be shared or allocated authoritatively. Indeed, a significant school of political scientists suggests that elites, defined as decision-makers, are perhaps the single most important element in the political

process. In their view, the American and British political systems are stable because of a high level of consensus among elites regarding the rules of the game.

The dominant elites always stick together; they are conscious of their enlightened self-interest and know how to use their privileged positions, as well as the dominated or weakened status of the masses, to advance these interests. On the other hand, the chaos and mounting violence in the politics of third-world countries can also be attributed to a lack of consensus among competing political elites.

1.3.2 Elite theory

Geraint Parry, in his *Political Elites*, stresses that elites are the “decision makers of the society whose power is not subject to control by any other body in the society”. He then defined Elite as the small minority who appear to play an exceptionally influential role in the political and social affairs of that group and to wield control over crucial policies.

In political science, elite theory is a class approach to understanding the political process. The elite can be divided into the governed and the non-governed. The assumptions underlying the elite theory are:

- That in every society, there is always a minority of the population that makes major decisions. Such decisions are usually referred to as political decisions
- That elites include those who occupy political power or seek to influence government decisions
- That there is a circulation of elites

That there are no changes in society in the composition or structure of the elites, Robert Michels, in 1942, formulated the famous “Iron Law of Oligarchy”: “He who says organisation says Oligarchy”. According to the elite theorists, “government by the people for the people” is a farce. On their part, the ruling elites always argue self-righteously that they are not anti-masses, but that, as leaders of their various factions, they have the right to determine the policy orientation to be pursued by the government in power.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Analyse the relevance of elite theory to mass participation in politics.

1.3.3 The Masses

The Microsoft Encarta dictionary 2008 defines the word “*masses*” (the plural of “*mass*”) as a body of matter that forms a whole but has no definable shape. Therefore, the downtrodden, ordinary citizens (the average person) who are susceptible to manipulation by elites in society could be defined as the masses.

Unlike that of formal institutions or elites, the influence of the masses on policy is usually indirect and difficult to measure. Rather than the movers and shakers of society, the masses tend to be the moved and the shaken. The masses do influence policy because the elites must control them to remain in power, and the masses must be mobilised for the elites to achieve their goals.

As an illustration, although elites make the formal decision to declare war, it is the masses who fight wars. The motivation and skill of the masses do make a difference in the outcome of war. Indeed, the profound willingness of the masses in advanced countries to play by the rules and support their respective systems offers at least a partial explanation for the stability of those systems. The reverse is also true for African states.

How readily the masses can be mobilised to support elite goals, then, depends largely on their perception and evaluation of the political system. The more that the masses are deeply committed to the political system, the more stable a regime is likely to be.

The less committed the masses, the less stable the political system is likely to be. The overall assessment of how the masses perceive and evaluate the political system is often referred to as political culture.

The process by which individuals learn or otherwise acquire their political culture is often referred to as political socialisation.



Fig. 4.3 The Masses in Nigerian Politics

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Explain why the impact of the masses in the political process is disproportionate to their number.

1.3.4 Political Culture

A political culture, according to Allan Ball (1979:56), is composed of the attitudes, beliefs, emotions and values of society that relate to the political system and to political issues. In short, it is the study of a people's orientation to politics or what people think about it, as distinct from the actual political behaviour.

Two components are critical to understanding political culture: attitudes toward the state's political institutions and the extent to which citizens feel they can influence and participate in the decision-making process. The latter is otherwise called the degree or level of political efficacy.

In liberal democracies, political culture is transmitted from one generation to another through established societal institutions. This is achieved through political socialisation.

What is relevant to a democratic system is what has been called “the civic culture”, which is most likely to ensure political stability. In a parochial political culture, citizens are dimly aware of the central government's existence.

In a subject political culture, citizens see themselves as subjects of government rather than participants. In contrast, in a participatory political culture, citizens are keenly involved in political activities, contribute to it, and are affected by it.

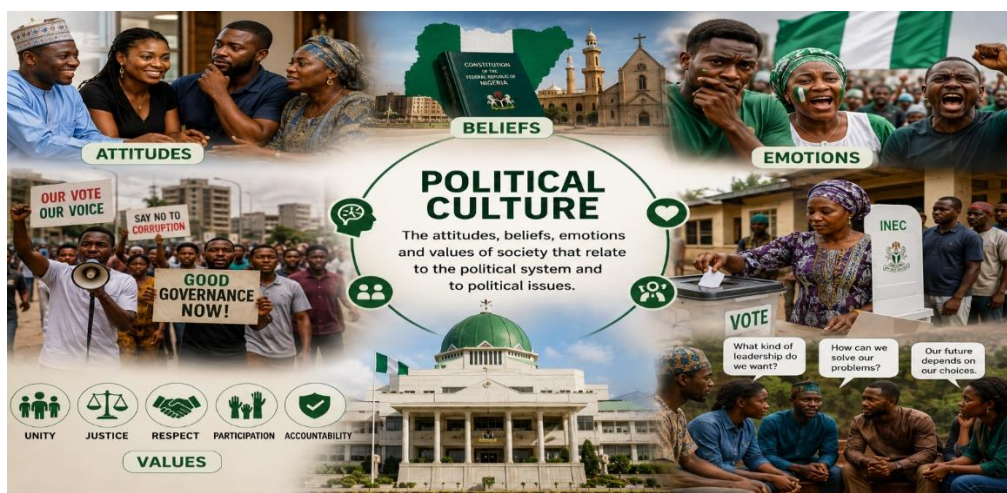


Fig 4.3 Political Culture

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 4

Discuss the relevance of political culture to the problem of political instability.

1.3.5 Political Linkage

The ability of the elites to control and mobilise the masses, including their ability to socialise them into believing in the political system, depends largely on the elites who dominate those institutions. The more the political system penetrates the masses, the more readily the elite can communicate its wishes and coordinate the mobilisation of the masses to fulfil them.

The more that the political system can penetrate the masses, the more readily the elite can assess mass demand and either take steps to meet it, thereby building support for the system, or take defensive action. The more that the political system penetrates the masses, the more it is difficult for opposition to the system to develop unnoticed by the dominant elite.

The mechanisms linking the masses and elites include political parties and pressure groups such as labour unions and professional organisations. In less developed societies, the linkage process often relies on kinship and religious networks.

Through public opinion, the citizens of a country can also influence the conduct of government officials. It is a popular axiom that the glory of the king or government must find its expression in the welfare of the people.

Self-Assessment Exercise 5

Explain how developed the linkage mechanisms or devices in your country are.

**1.5 Summary**

In this unit, we have examined the major components of a political system. We identified the elites, who, despite their limited number, occupy a dominant position in any political system.

We also explained that, on the other hand, the masses do not enjoy a decisive influence commensurate with their numerical strength.

We further noted that for a political system to remain stable and endure, the mechanisms that bind the masses to the system must be strong enough to enable it to fulfil its goals, as determined by the elites, without resistance from the masses.



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1.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Political institutions are the established structures and rules through which political authority is exercised in a political system. Examples include the executive, legislature, judiciary, electoral bodies, political parties, and public service institutions. Their importance in a political system can be assessed as follows: Political institutions provide order and stability by regulating how power is acquired, distributed, and exercised. Without them, political life would be chaotic and unpredictable.

They ensure law and governance, as the legislature makes laws, the executive implements them, and the judiciary interprets and enforces them. This separation of functions promotes efficiency and accountability. Political institutions also support political participation and representation by creating platforms such as elections and political parties through which citizens express their preferences and choose leaders.

They help with conflict management by providing constitutional and legal procedures to resolve disputes peacefully rather than through violence. Moreover, they also promote continuity and

stability of government, ensuring that governance continues even when leaders change, especially through democratic processes.

2. Elite theory is based on the idea that political power is concentrated in the hands of a small group of people (the elite). At the same time, the majority (the masses) have limited real influence over key political decisions. Scholars such as Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Robert Michels argue that even in democratic systems, elites tend to dominate governance due to their access to resources, education, organisation, and influence.

In relation to mass participation in politics, elite theory is relevant in several ways:

It suggests that mass participation is often indirect rather than direct. Although citizens vote and participate in elections, real policy decisions are largely shaped by political, economic, and bureaucratic elites.

It also explains the limitations of democracy, showing that political equality is more theoretical than practical because elites control political parties, the media, and state institutions, thereby influencing public opinion and election outcomes.

However, elite theory does not completely dismiss mass participation. Instead, it shows that mass participation is often controlled, guided, or filtered by elites who determine the options available to citizens, such as candidates and policy agendas.

At the same time, mass participation still plays a role by providing legitimacy to elite rule. Elections and civic engagement give elites the authority to govern, even if the masses have limited direct control.

Elite theory is relevant because it highlights that, while mass participation exists in modern politics, actual political power is largely concentrated in the hands of a small ruling elite that shapes and directs political outcomes.

3. The impact of the masses in the political process is disproportionate to their number because political power is not evenly distributed in society. Although the masses make up the majority, real political influence is often held by a small group of elites who dominate decision-making, resources, and institutions. Many citizens also have limited access to political information and resources, which reduces their ability to influence policy

effectively. In addition, political participation is often indirect, as people mainly vote for representatives rather than making decisions themselves. Political parties, media, and interest groups further shape and filter public opinion, meaning the preferences of the masses are often influenced or directed by elites.

4. Political culture refers to the attitudes, beliefs, values, and orientations that people have toward the political system. It is relevant to political instability because it shapes how citizens relate to government and political authority. Where political culture is weak or fragmented, citizens may lack trust in government, leading to protests, violence, and reduced cooperation with state institutions. This can weaken political stability. Also, a political culture that encourages intolerance, corruption, or ethnic loyalty over national unity can increase conflict and division, thereby destabilising the political system. On the other hand, a strong political culture that supports democracy, participation, and respect for the rule of law promotes stability by encouraging the peaceful resolution of disputes and the acceptance of government authority. In general, political culture influences political stability by shaping how people behave politically and respond to governance and authority.
5. Linkage mechanisms are the channels through which citizens communicate their needs and demands to the government. They include political parties, elections, interest groups, pressure groups, and the mass media. In Nigeria, these linkage mechanisms are moderately developed. Political parties and regular elections provide opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process. At the same time, the media and civil society groups help to express public opinion and influence government decisions. However, these mechanisms are not fully effective due to problems such as corruption, electoral malpractice, weak political parties, poor political education, and limited responsiveness among government officials. Nigeria's linkage mechanisms exist and function to some extent, but they remain underdeveloped because political and institutional challenges undermine their effectiveness.

Unit 2 The Meaning and Nature of Political Parties

Unit Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Learning Outcomes
- 2.3 Definition of Political Parties
 - 2.3.1 Organisation and Structure of Party Systems
 - 2.3.2 Types of Party System
 - 2.3.2.1 Single or one-party system
 - 2.3.2.2 Two-party systems
 - 2.3.2.3 Multi-party system
 - 2.3.2.4 Zero-Party option
 - 2.3.3 Functions of Political Parties
 - 2.3.3.1 Popular Participation
 - 2.3.3.2 Representation
 - 2.3.3.3 Elite Formation and Leadership Recruitment
 - 2.3.3.4 Interest Articulation and Aggregation
 - 2.3.3.5 Socialisation and Mobilisation
 - 2.3.3.6 Organisation of Government
 - 2.3.3.7 Avenue for Criticisms of Government Policies
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources
- 2.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise



2.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. In the previous unit, you explored the nature and components of political systems and examined how they interact to promote stability and effective governance. Building on that foundation, we now focus on political parties, which are central to political participation and representative government.

As you work through this unit, you will examine different scholarly perspectives on political parties, explore how they are classified by various criteria, and compare the structures and organisations of party systems in developed and developing countries.

You will also consider the important functions political parties perform in supporting representative government and the political process. Your understanding of political systems will provide a useful foundation for these discussions. Begin with the first section, where you will explore the concept and classification of political parties.



2.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning, origins and distinguishing features of political parties;
- describe the organisation and structure of political parties and party systems;
- compare the major types of party systems and their advantages and limitations;
- analyse the roles and functions of political parties in promoting participation, representation and effective governance.



2.3 Definition and origins of political parties

What comes to your mind when you hear the word politics? Have you ever wondered where it began, how it developed, and why it matters in our everyday lives? Get ready to explore these questions and discover the fascinating world of politics.

Scholars and political philosophers have defined political parties in several ways. Edmund Burke defined a political party as “a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some political principle in which they are agreed.” In Joseph Schesinger’s conceptualisation, parties are political organisations, which actively and effectively compete for elective office. According to Joseph LaPalombara (1974:323), a political party is “a formal organisation whose self-conscious, primary purpose is to place and maintain in public office persons who will control alone or in coalition, the machinery of government”.

In the view of Joseph Schumpeter (1943:279), “The first and foremost aim of each political party is to prevail over the others to get into power or to stay in it” Thus, Political parties, like interest groups, are organisations seeking influence over government; they can be distinguished from interest groups based on their primary political orientation.

Political parties developed along with the expansion of suffrage, the right to vote, and can be understood only in the context of elections. In Nigeria, for example, the first political party in the country was the National Democratic Party (NNDP), formed by Herbert Macaulay in 1922 to contest the Lagos Town Council election created when the elective principle was introduced under the Clifford Constitution.

A party seeks to control the entire government by electing its members to office, thereby controlling the government personnel. Interest groups, through campaign contributions and other forms of electoral assistance, are also interested in getting politicians, especially those who are inclined in their policy direction, elected. But interest groups are not interested in directly sponsoring candidates for elections, and in between elections, they usually accept the government and its personnel as given and try to influence government policies through them. While interest groups are benefit seekers, political parties are office-seekers.

In an elaborate and expansive definition, Leslie Lipson (1964:120) defines a political party thus:

Whenever sufficient diversity of interests occurs among those who compose a society and the political system gives these interests an opportunity to combine, men will cluster into groupings, which may be more or less formal, and closely or loosely organized. They do this in order better to protect what they may possess and extend their influence to wider spheres.

In simple language, a political party is a group of persons bonded in policy and opinion in support of a general political cause, which essentially is the pursuit, and retention for as long as democratically feasible, of government and its offices.

In other words, a political party is a group that seeks to elect candidates to public offices by supplying them with a label - a party identification - by which they are known to the electorate. Therefore, a political party is composed of a group of people like any other groups or organizations, except that it is distinguished by its unique objective, which, in a democratic setting, is seeking control of government through nominating its candidates and presenting programs for endorsement via the electoral process in competition with other parties.

Click the link or scan the QR code below to watch a short clip on The Origins of Political Parties. Be sure to watch the video before proceeding to deepen your understanding of how political parties emerged and developed.

<https://youtu.be/lrYSjUp2jyg?si=FX354UuaqkSRLlhT>



Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Describe in your own words a political party.

2.3.1 Organization and Structure of Party Systems

Party organization is the internal arrangement by which parties are structured in such a way that it is better able to fulfill its mission. It is possible that we may have one or few parties that know their limitations, and may not pretend to cover the whole country; but most parties prefer to have presence in every part of a country.

The advantage of this is that the more widespread the party support base is, the better the prospects of it winning an election, if the right conditions are in place.

Indeed, in Nigeria since 1979, until the liberalization of conditions for the operations of political parties under the Obasanjo's civilian administration, political parties were required to have membership and offices in at least two thirds of the states in the federation, before they could qualify for registration.

In most countries, parties are organized in such a way that they have branches at every tier or level of government: National, State and Local levels. In addition, taken a cue from the United States, Nigeria since the Babangida's transition program, has promoted the grassroots politics by making the ward level the centrepiece of political activities through to the national level of party organization.

The ward level is so important today that a presidential aspirant may have his national ambition truncated, no matter how popular he may be elsewhere, if he is unable to be selected as a delegate from his own ward. This is why most aspirants for political offices are always interested in having their men constituting the majority in the party executives at all levels.

Beyond the party's official executive organs, there are other levels of party organization. These include the Central Working Committee (CWC), Board of Trustees (BOT), the Elders' Council, the Parliamentary or Legislative Caucus, the Party's Governors' Forum, the Women and Youth Wing. Experience has shown that in most states, including advanced democracies, only aspirants who can get the nod from these unofficial levels can hope to become a party's candidate or flag-bearers during general elections.

In Nigeria, for example, given the electoral dominance that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has enjoyed in the last ten years, the competition within the party has always been the keenest in the country. This is because of the plausible assumption by most aspirants that whoever becomes the party's candidate is almost certain of winning the elections in most states, including the presidency.

In recent times, the Governors Forum, or more appropriately, PDP Governors' Forum has proved to be the most decisive platform of taking crucial decisions, for the party, and indeed, for the nation as shown in the elevation of Jonathan Goodluck as Nigeria's Acting President.

The implication of the new found powers of these unofficial organs of political parties is that party's primaries and conventions have been turned into a mere ritual only to decorate those that have been anointed by the dominant groups within the party.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Compare a party's structure and organization in a developed with that of a developing country.

2.3.2 Types of Party System

If you belong to a political party, which one do you belong to, and what attracted you to it? Your answer may bring you closer to understanding the different types of party systems and how political parties compete for power.

A party system is a network of relationships through which parties interact and influence the political process. The most popular way of distinguishing between different types of party system is the reference to the number of parties competing for power. The French political scientist, Maurice Duverger, in his popular work *Political Parties*, classified parties into three types: The single or one-party system, the two-party system and the multiple-party system.

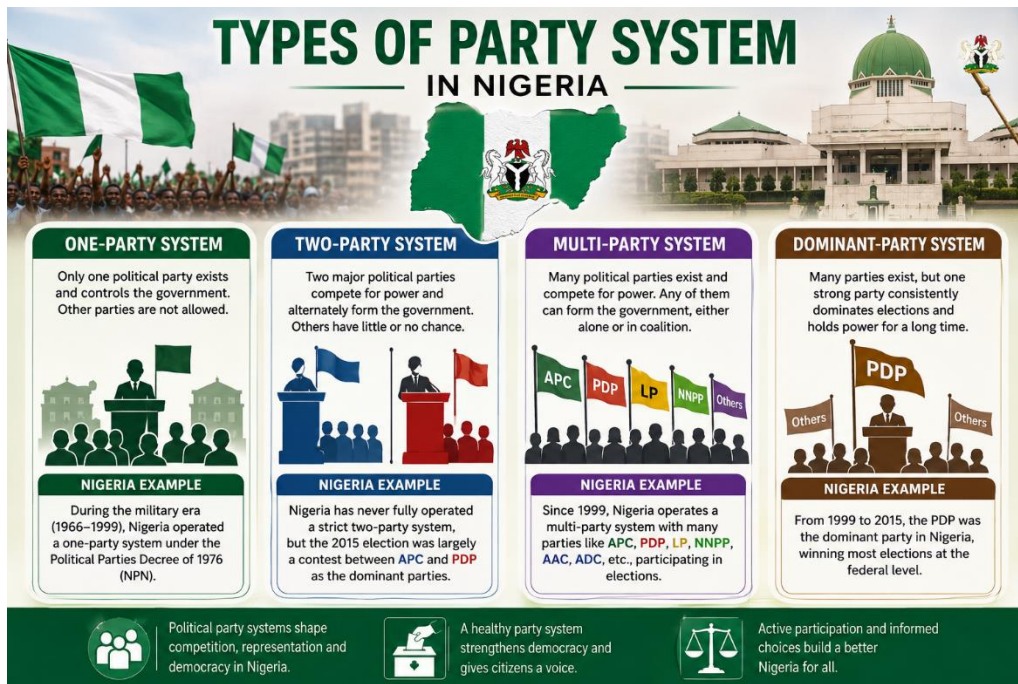


Fig: 2.1 Party Systems in Nigeria

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

2.3.2.1 Single or one-party system

A one party is a system in which only one party is legal recognized in the country. Therefore, it is illegal for any organization to operate as a political party in such country. It is a common feature of communist and socialist countries like North Korea, Cuba etc.

In the immediate post-independence period, one party was a feature of scores of African countries, such as Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah, where the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) held sway and Tanzania under Julius Nyerere, where the Tanzanian African National Union (TANU) was the only officially recognised party.

The position of the PDP as the party controlling the federal government in Nigeria does not make the country a one-party state; it only represents a case of a one-party dominant regime.

You should note the following as important characteristics of a one-party state: no opposition party is legally recognised, there is usually only one ideology for the whole country, and it is the ideology of the party in government.

There is either no private control of mass media or very stringent requirements that must be met before private individuals are allowed to own or publish a newspaper or magazine, in addition to close censorship of their activities. Those who promote a one-party system advance the

following advantages:

- One party prevents economic waste in the sense that elections are not held among numerous parties, most of which are not viable or strong enough to win a single seat. The resources for providing logistics and security during elections are diverted to other uses.
- One party also promotes unity since the only recognised party must necessarily cut across ethnic or religious divides in a country; it therefore has the advantage of promoting national unity.
- It ensures stability in the sense that no opposition party may overheat the polity through acrimonious competition for power during elections. Unhealthy rivalry for political power may evoke unpatriotic sentiments in bad losers.
- In a one-party system, the decision-making process is prompt since the dilatory tactics of the opposition parties in government or the filibustering of opposition members in parliament are avoided.
- There is also an absence of political vendetta against political opponents. Good as the one-party system appears to be, one of its greatest drawbacks is that it may develop into a dictatorship.

Other disadvantages to note include: Individual rights are usually trampled upon. This is common in most one-party systems, whether in developed or developing societies.

The human rights abuses under Joseph Stalin's era in the former Soviet Union, the 1989 massacre at Tiananmen Square in China and the Kwame Nkrumah's Preventive Detention Act are vivid examples.

The implication is that the principle of the rule of law and the provisions of the constitution on fundamental human rights may not be upheld or guaranteed.

The constitution may be silent on the need for periodic elections, and where such provisions are made, elections are only held to confirm the same party in power, or are a mere public-relations exercise.

2.3.2.2 Two-party systems

A two-party system operates in a country where only two parties have a reasonable chance of winning elections and forming or controlling the government.

government. This does not, however, suggest that only two parties exist in a country. However, among the multitude of parties that participate in the electoral process, only two are strong enough to win elections.

In the United States and Great Britain, where two-party systems operate, the two parties, the Democratic and Republican Parties in the former, and the Conservative and Labour Parties in the latter, are products of historical evolution.

The Nigerian example, in which President Babangida decreed the existence of the Social Democratic Party and the Republican Convention during Nigeria's ill-fated Third Republic, was a clear aberration.

In the U.S.A. and Britain, the two parties have been alternating, sometimes in succession, in forming their governments. In Britain, for example, during World War II, the Conservative Party was the ruling party. Still, Winston Churchill's gallantry as a wartime political leader did not stop British voters from electing Clement Attlee in 1945. This led to the saying "The electors cheered Churchill but voted against him."

However, in the United States, the American people rewarded the Commander of the Allied Forces during the same war, Dwight D. Eisenhower of the Republican Party, with victory, even though Franklin Delano Roosevelt had taken the United States into the war. Harry Truman, also of the Democratic Party, won the war, which stamped American leadership of the world.

The greatest advantage of two-party systems is that they promote political stability by allowing for alternative governments. There is also room and opportunity for choice of candidates and parties' manifestos. It is democratic because it upholds democratic principles and allows the rule of law to operate.

Regular alternation or change of government is possible because there is a provision for periodic elections. This gives the electorate the power to change a government that is unresponsive or unaccountable.

Two-party systems also provide for stronger opposition, which makes for a better government, since the ruling party is always cautious about the policies it pursues.

The opposition is therefore seen as a corrective party in government, since it monitors and criticises the ruling party. This promotes stability, unlike in a multi-party system, where the proliferation of sometimes conflicting ideas encourages the formation of coalition governments. From the experience of both mature and developing societies, such coalition arrangements, usually alliances of strange bedfellows, more often than not produce weak and unstable governments.

The following are the disadvantages of a two-party system. There is the danger that the two-party system may divide the country into two opposing factions. This can polarise a country along religious and ethnic divides, and may thereby negatively affect or endanger national unity. It may also lead to a one-party state if one of the two parties retains power for an excessively long period; this may tempt the other party to dissolve into the ruling party.

2.3.2.3 Multi-party system

A multi-party system exists in a country with several parties, each having a reasonable chance of winning seats in the legislature. This model is suitable in a country with a multiplicity of sometimes minority interests, in which case each of these parties will represent such interests.

Germany offers a good example of a multi-party system in which the parties represent diverse interests, such as religious, gender, and environmental interests. Nigeria is also a good example of a multi-party system with parties such as the Action Congress (AC), All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), and Labour Party (LP), etc., struggling to wrestle power at the centre from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) that has been in power at the federal level since 1999.

A multi-party system is one in which more than two political parties contest for political power in a country. All the parties are duly registered and recognised by law.

Nigeria in the Second Republic, with six political parties: NPN, UPN, NPP, GNPP, PRP, and NAP, Babarinsa (2003), and Fourth Republic, with about fifty parties, is a multi-party state.

Other countries in the same group include France, Italy and Germany. In a multi-party system, a coalition government may be formed among political parties with a reasonable number of seats in parliament.

The greatest advantage of multi-party systems is that individuals can easily make a free choice of parties and programs. There is also a lack of dictatorship, due to the multiplicity of parties that are always ready to keep the ruling party's leadership on its toes. Fundamental human rights of citizens are better guaranteed and protected by the government, which also leads to wider representation of people with different interests and opinions in the decision-making process. A multi-party system also presents its own drawbacks.

They include the following: Too many political programmes are offered to voters, which may confuse them and make electoral choice difficult; it

is also very expensive to manage because of the high costs involved in party organisation, voter mobilisation, campaigns, and election administration.

It is also possible that if these parties are formed along ethnic and sectional lines, they will operate in ways that jeopardise the national interest.

A multi-party system may also make forming a new government very difficult.

This is because a coalition government that assumes office after a multi-party electoral contest lacks a common policy or platform before coming to power.

It therefore forces many unhealthy compromises, horse-trading, and concessions on the parties in a coalition arrangement, during which vital principles are abandoned and ideological positions discarded for the sake of political patronage, in a situation where the system suffers from the sacrifice of merits on the altar of partisan gains.

It may encourage bribery and corruption within the legislative arm because many members from different parties must be lobbied before government programs and important legislation are passed in parliament. The net effect of these combinations is to lower the quality of public policies and the standard of public life. Most coalition governments arising from multi-party systems are weak and unstable.

2.3.2.4 Zero-Party option

On very rare occasions, there are talks about a zero or non-party system. This is one of the options that Gen. Muritala Muhammed (1939-1976) gave to the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) in Nigeria in 1975 when he charged the 50 'wise men' not to hesitate, during the course of their deliberation, they found the means by which government can be formed without political parties, to recommend that alternative.

The CDC members, however, did not find the Zero party option attractive as it dismissed it, in the following words, among others: "To accept a no-party system and yet accept some form of representative government would amount to accepting a *syndicalist* or *corporativist* political system. Were this even practicable, under modern conditions, it would not unlikely lead ultimately to a fascist system of government" (Graf, 1979:52).

Notwithstanding, in 1987, former President Babangida found it expedient to adopt the novel idea in the local government elections held that year.

However, it was not long before he discarded the idea and embraced party politics, despite its imperfections. One needs to point out that it is the problems associated with party politics that have led political leaders and politicians, at one time or another, to toy with the novel idea of a zero-party system.

Beyond this, we do not consider a zero-party system a conventional model in an ideal democratic system. In some mature democracies, such as the United States, the idea of independent candidates is acceptable. This idea also found favour with the Muhammed Uwais panel on electoral reforms in Nigeria.

The difference between the Zero party option and Independent candidacy is more of semantics than of substance.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Which party system is considered the most suitable for the sustenance of democracy?

- A. One-party system
- B. Two-party system
- C. Military system
- D. Absolute monarchy

2.3.3 Functions of Political Parties

Political parties worldwide are widely accepted as indispensable in a democratic political system. It is therefore important that we discuss their functions:

2.3.3.1 Popular Participation

Political parties promote popular political participation, make effective political choices in elections possible and facilitate the flow of public business in the legislature. Parties always state their positions on issues, thereby arousing public sentiments and involvement. They also make candidates standing for election on their tickets identify with their platforms and, as a result, hold them accountable for their actions and inactions in government. (Baradat, 2000:133)

2.3.3.2 Representation

Political parties provide opportunities for representation. This refers to the capacity of parties to respond to and articulate the views of both members and the voters. In the language of systems theory, political parties are major “inputting” devices that ensure that government policies reflect the wishes of broader society.

Since every society is composed of individuals and groups, not all of whom can participate directly in politics, political parties therefore provide these people, in varying combinations, an avenue to participate indirectly in government.

As the Italian Political Scientist, Giovanni Sartori has stated, parties are the central intermediate and intermediary structures between society and government”

2.3.3.3 Elite Formation and Leadership Recruitment

Parties of all kinds are responsible for providing democratic states with their political leaders. In most cases, parties provide a training ground for politicians, equipping them with skills, knowledge and experience that may be useful in governance and goal formulation.

Parties have traditionally been one of the means through which societies set collective goals. They play this role because, in the process of seeking power, they help in formulating government policies and programs through their election manifestoes, campaigns, public debates, conferences, and conventions, with a view to attracting.

popular support. The goal of a political party is to gain control of the government so it can implement its electoral promises.

In a democracy, political parties seek to gain and maintain control of the government through the electoral process. It is, therefore, a misuse of the term to say political parties seek to capture power. That terminology crept into the Nigerian political lexicon due to the many years of military rule that have foisted a siege mentality on the psyche of Nigerian citizens.

2.3.3.4 Interest Articulation and Aggregation

In the process of developing collective goals, parties also help to articulate (express) and aggregate (combine) the various interests found in society. Parties, indeed, often develop as vehicles through which business, labour, religious, ethnic, or other groups advance or defend their various interests. The fact that national parties invariably articulate the demands of a

multitude of group forces them to aggregate these interests by drawing them together into a coherent whole, thereby balancing competing interests against each other.

2.3.3.5 Socialisation and Mobilisation

Through internal debates and discussions, as well as electoral campaigns and competitions, parties engage in political education and socialisation. The issues they raise and articulate, as well as the attitudes generated around them, become part of a country's larger political culture.

2.3.3.6 Organisation of Government

It is often argued that complex modern societies would be ungovernable without political parties.

Parties help form the government. This is why we refer to the parliamentary system in Britain as party government: the policies and programs of the British government at any given time are entirely based on the manifesto of the party in power.

Parties provide the government with a degree of stability and coherence, especially when the government is drawn from a single party. Parties also facilitate cooperation between the two major branches of government, the legislature and the executive.

2.3.3.7 Avenue for Criticisms of Government Policies

In the competitive environment of politics, political parties also serve as vital sources of opposition and criticism, both inside and outside government. By broadening the space for political debates, they help in educating the electorate and ensuring that government policies are more thoroughly scrutinised.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Political parties in a democracy help to _____, _____, and _____ government policies while representing the interests of the people.



2.4 Summary

In this unit, we have defined political parties, their structure and organisation, their classification or types, and the functions they perform. We also noted that political parties are indispensable in a democracy because, without them, meaningful representation is not possible.

We also observed that, due to over two centuries of uninterrupted democratic order in developed countries such as Britain and the United States, party systems and politics have become institutionalised there, compared to Third World countries like Nigeria and Egypt, where party systems are personalised, inchoate, and largely reflect the primordial cleavages in these societies.



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2.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

1. A political party is an organised group of people who share similar political ideas and work together to gain political power through elections, so they can form a government and implement their policies for the benefit of society.

2. In developed countries, political parties usually have strong structures, clear organisation, internal democracy, and stable funding. In developing countries, party structures are often weak, less organised, personality-driven, and hampered by inadequate funding and ethnic or regional interests.
3. B
4. Political parties in a democracy help to form, influence, and monitor government policies while representing the interests of the people.

Unit 3 Pressure and Interest Groups

Unit Structure

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 - 3.3.1 Definitions and functions
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 - 3.3.5 Pressure Groups vs Political Parties
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3.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. In the previous unit, you explored political parties, their organisation, classifications, and their roles in representative government.

Building on that knowledge, we now turn to pressure groups and other non-governmental, non-partisan organisations that also influence political processes, although in different ways.

As you progress through this unit, you will examine the various types of pressure groups, explore how they are classified, and consider the different roles they play in shaping public policy and influencing government decisions.

You will also compare pressure groups with political parties to better appreciate their distinct purposes and methods of operation.

Your understanding of political parties will provide a valuable foundation for these discussions. Begin with the first section, where you will explore the nature and classification of pressure groups.



3.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning, characteristics and functions of pressure groups in a political system;
- classify pressure groups according to their objectives, membership and organisational characteristics;
- analyse the techniques and approaches used by pressure groups to influence government decisions and public policy; and
- evaluate the contribution of pressure groups to the policy-making process and distinguish their roles from those of political parties.



3.3 Definition and Functions of Pressure Groups

Imagine a group of farmers approaching the government to demand better agricultural policies, while a group of workers campaigns for improved wages and working conditions.

Neither group wants to form the government, but both want to influence government decisions. This is where pressure groups come in.



Fig. 3.1 Pressure Groups

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

3.3.1 Definitions and functions

Pressure Groups are organised bodies that seek to influence the context of government decisions. As an interest group, they seek to prevent the government from initiating policies and programs they may consider unfavourable to their members' well-being, or to influence the government to fashion its policies in the best interests of their members. It is within the context of this particularistic approach to interest articulation that some scholars have perceived pressure groups as “narrowly self-interested, out for themselves, (groups) without regard for the public good (Ojo, 1973).

James Madison in the *FEDERALIST* likened pressure or interest groups to factions “who are united and actuated by common impulse or passion, adverse to the rights of other citizens.” In one breath, Madison suggested they should be outlawed, but in another breath, he conceded that “pressure groups are inevitable in a free society”; to try to eliminate them would require tyranny, a remedy worse than the disease” (Greenberg and page 1993:215).

We need to stress that interest groups and pressure groups are often used interchangeably, but they virtually convey the same meaning. While the former emphasises why a set of individuals aggregates in pursuit of a common goal, the latter emphasises the method they employ to pursue their interests, usually by exerting pressure on government agencies (Olaniyi, 1998:91).

The semantic similarities between pressure groups and interest groups were also affirmed by Greenberg (1993:215),” because decision makers often perceive efforts by the interest groups as constituting pressures on them, so interest groups are often called pressure groups”.

A pressure group in a democracy is any group of persons that tries to get the government or other bodies to take notice of certain issues or take action by bringing pressure to bear on such government or body. Thus, any organised group in a democratic system that seeks to exert influence or lobby for the benefit of its members is a pressure group. Here, the group is not presenting itself as a potential replacement for the existing government. Rather, it usually seeks only to pressure the government into taking a desired course of action.

It is possible, however, in certain cases, for a frustrated but powerful pressure group to openly support an opposition party in an effort to replace the party in power with one more sympathetic to its cause.

A related concept is that of an interest group organised around a particular interest to influence public policy regarding that interest. When local cement manufacturers in Nigeria once came together to convince the government to ban the importation of cement into the country, they became an interest group seeking to influence public policy on international trade.

The difference between a pressure group and an interest group may be little more than semantic, since pressure groups form around one interest or another. In contrast, interest groups often need to exert pressure to influence government policy in the direction they desire.

We can identify four factors that help explain the vibrancy, or otherwise, of pressure groups in a democracy. These include changes in a nation's socio-economic and political structure and in the international environment, which can create new interests or redefine or strengthen existing government policy.

The presence of the required leadership outside government, willing and able to use democratic means to organise a group to influence government decisions and policy directions. In this way, the more active a government is, the greater the probability that more pressure groups will form around such activities.

3.3.1.1 Functions of Pressure Groups

Pressure groups are a vital part of a healthy democracy. Indeed, the sustained and rapid expansion of pressure group activity and involvement in the political process is often seen as a sign of growing political involvement among the populace. Pressure groups perform the following functions:

- (a) Pressure groups promote discussion and debate, and mobilise public opinion on key issues. They also educate the public on specific issues. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), and the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) have played prominent roles in this regard.
- (b) Pressure groups can also enhance democratic participation. They do this by articulating issues that political parties may not want to touch or dabble in.
- (c) They also provide an important access point for those who may want redress of their grievances. This may include providing a platform for minorities marginalised from the mainstream of national politics, who lack the means to represent themselves directly.

- (d) The Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) has done this several times during the long agitations by minorities in Nigeria's Niger Delta for compensation for environmental pollution. In fiscal federalism, pressure groups can also serve as an important and valuable source of specialised information/expertise for the legislature and the bureaucracy, which may be overburdened by routine activities and may not have the time or even the expertise to handle certain issues.

For example, the Chambers of Commerce can provide valuable input to the executive during budget preparations and assist the legislators during public hearings, and both arms in carrying out policy enrichments in their respective post-budget analyses.

- (e) Pressure groups also play an important role in pushing for policy changes or reversals, as well as forcing the government's hand in making changes in the implementation of public policies.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Explain the roles of pressure groups in a political system.

3.3.1.2 Pressure Groups by classification and types

Pressure groups can be classified in two broad ways: either by the professions or careers of their members, or by the types of activities they engage in, or by their nature, character, or lifespan.

Depending on the objectives they seek to pursue, protect, promote or advance, pressure groups can be broadly categorised into three:-

Economic and Business pressure groups, such as the Nigerian Chamber of Commerce, Nigerian Employers Consultative Association (NECA), and Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA). The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) can conveniently be grouped under this category because, as a trade union, it is concerned with economic or labour-related matters such as wages, workers' working conditions, and industrial disputes.

These groups apply pressure on the government to adopt favourable policies on taxation, tariff structure, interest rates, and expatriate quotas. The second category comprises various professional groups, such as the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), and the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT).

The third category comprises religious pressure groups such as the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA) and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). The second mode of broad classification

comprises four types: communal groups, institutional groups, associational groups, and anomie groups.

- (a) **Communal groups:** These are socio-cultural associations whose membership is based on birth, rather than recruitment. They are part of the social institutions in a community, castes and ethnic groups such as the Arewa People's Congress (APC), the Odua People's Congress and the Ohaneze Indigbo all fall under this category.
- (b) **Institutional groups:** These are part of the machinery of government, and they attempt to exert influence from within their organisations, using the government machinery. They differ from interest groups in that they have no measure of autonomy or independence. Examples include civil servants, military officers, and the association of local government workers.
- (c) **Associational groups:** This group are formed by people who wish to pursue shared, but limited goals. Groups, as associations, are characterised by voluntary participation and shared interests, aspirations, or attitudes. The most obvious examples of associational groups are what are commonly called interest groups.
- (d) **Anomic groups:** These are groups that often emerge spontaneously in response to an issue and usually disperse after the objective has been achieved or when the contentious issues have been resolved. Examples of this type of group include the Campaign for Democracy and the National Democratic Coalition, which stood against the annulment of the June 12, 1993, election under the Babangida and Abacha military regimes in Nigeria.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Which of the following represents the major categories of pressure groups that operate in a country?

- A. Economic groups, professional groups, religious groups, and ethnic groups
- B. Legislative groups, executive groups, and judicial groups
- C. Local governments, ministries, and parastatals
- D. Military groups, police groups, and courts

3.3.2 Techniques and Approaches by Pressure Groups

Several techniques are open to pressure groups to influence the public policy-making process. Lobbying of policymakers is the most popular and effective of these methods. This can be done in many ways. For

instance, when a bill relevant to a pressure group comes before the legislature, the leadership of that pressure group may go directly to lawmakers to solicit their support for or against a bill before it becomes law.

The Nigerian Labour Congress has, in several instances, adopted this method. In advanced countries, pressure groups may employ professional lobbyists to fully realise the potential benefits of this method. Mobilising members to support or reject a particular government's policy is another method available to pressure groups.

This is usually achieved by educating members about their policy preferences or by using publicity and propaganda in the mass media. By doing so, they would have succeeded in shaping public opinion in their favour, thereby influencing policymakers' decisions.

Pressure groups may also attempt to influence elections by appearing before party committees at party conventions, by making monetary contributions to candidates, or by offering propaganda services to candidates on the ticket of a party sympathetic to its interests. The idea behind this is that if such a party were to come to power, it would adopt policies favourable to the pressure or interest group.

To be effective in influencing government policy, a pressure group may adopt any of these methods or a combination of them. However, pressure groups are conscious of when to apply these methods to achieve the desired effect.

But the effectiveness of any of these methods will depend on the type of issues involved, the organisational strength or otherwise of the groups involved, the resources, human and material, at their disposal and their positions within the political, socio-economic structure of the country (Ajibola, 1978, p. 133)

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Which of the following is the most effective technique used by pressure groups to influence government policies?

- A. Lobbying and public campaigns
- B. Military intervention
- C. Judicial punishment
- D. Suspension of elections

3.3.3 Pressure Groups and Policy-Making Process

Public policy-making is central to the activities of any government, especially a democratic government that is always conscious of the need to justify the mandate reposed in it by the electorate.

If public policy is premised on goal attainment, or, as Chandler and Plane define it, “the strategic use of resources to alleviate national problems,” then the process of making such policies is critical to the success or failure of any government. However, the resources at the government's disposal, given the multiple and often conflicting ends or interests to be satisfied, are limited.

Based on Harold Lasswell's (1936) conception of politics as “who gets what, when and how and given the inadequacy of resources, government is thereby constrained to rank or prioritise these interests, to determine which one to address first.

Therefore, a policy decision to solve an environmental or political problem may come at the expense of an economic or educational policy option.

Under these circumstances, pressure groups set in their own perception of socioeconomic problems and attempt to influence the government about their own ideas of what constitutes rational solutions, or options in the context of rational decision-making. Adebayo (1982:89-90), identifies the following stages in decision making during which pressure groups can engage the government: when a given problem or demand is identified; when the nature of problem is determined by clarifying goals, value and objectives; the point at which the available possible choices of action are outlined; that stage when the probable cost and benefits of the alternatives course of actions are examined and considered; and the final point when policy makers select the option, which in their opinion, is most appropriate to maximize set goals.

A proactive pressure group strategically positions itself and knows when and how best to influence policy-making at any or all of these stages.

The environments in which policymakers operate also shape the extent of influence pressure groups can exert on policymaking. In a military setting where personal freedoms and liberties are curtailed, it may be difficult for pressure groups and other civil society organisations to operate smoothly.

Similarly, in advanced societies, where political campaigns are issue-oriented, policymakers are often favourably disposed to considering the competing views canvassed by interest groups. This is in contrast with developing societies like in Nigeria, where primordial factors, such as ethnicity and religion, or partisan considerations, are salient.

Also, because pressure groups are usually urban-based and, given the nature of the policy issues that interest them, they are more likely to be concerned with issues of “first-order magnitude” that are either federal or state in nature, rather than local or residual.

In most developing countries, such as Nigeria, policymakers' preoccupation has been with economic development, political stability, and social cohesion. Using Nigeria as a case study since its attainment of independence in 1960, we can identify key areas of public policymaking in which different pressure groups have engaged with the Federal Government.

3.3.3.1 The Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact

The decision by the Balewa government in 1962 to abrogate the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact, following demonstrations spearheaded by students at the University of Ibadan, was a response to a pressure group's demand. Many Nigerian's felt the pact was an affront to Nigerian sovereignty. On the other hand, the insistence by the same government to go ahead with the Commonwealth Heads of State Conference in Nigeria despite the political disorder in the Western Region in January 1996 represents another extreme of the government's indifference or insensitivity to pressures from articulate and organised groups.

3.3.3.2 The Deregulation Policy of the Downstream Sector

During his first term in office, Obasanjo's government decided to introduce what it called “appropriate pricing” for petroleum products to curb smuggling to neighbouring countries and maintain price stability. The decision saw the price of petrol (PMS) jumping from N18:00 (the price the Obasanjo's administration inherited from its predecessor) to N70:00 within eight years, before President Yar'Adua reduced it to N 65:00. More than three times during President Obasanjo's administration, the Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) went on strikes because it was not convinced about the government's stated rationale for the repeated increases. The Yar'Adua administration also engaged the organised labour for dialogue aimed at convincing the body of its intention to completely remove the subsidies on petroleum products, in the name of total deregulation of the downstream sector.

3.3.3.3 ASUU and the case of ‘Unilorin 34’

Since entering into an agreement with the federal government in June 2001, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has repeatedly called on its members to strike to compel the government to implement the terms of the pact.

The agreement concerns university funding, unpaid salaries, and the dismissal of 34 lecturers from the University of Ilorin. For about five months, almost all public universities in the country were shut down in 2009, which completely disrupted the 2008/2009 academic session.

The universities were reopened only after the government agreed to implement its agreement with ASUU substantially. The Supreme Court, in a landmark judgment in December 2009, also reinstated the sacked Unilorin lecturers.

3.3.6 The Derivation Policy

The age-long agitations by the oil-producing states paid off when the Obasanjo administration decided to set aside 13 per cent to compensate the states for ecological degradation and oil spillage arising from the oil companies' exploratory activities.

However, this policy, in turn, created another problem: how to share the revenue among the littoral states, which degenerated into a dilemma popularly known as the on-shore, off-shore dichotomy.

The search for a solution to this problem led the oil-bearing states to form pressure groups, and they finally filed a lawsuit seeking a judicial interpretation of the contentious law. The dispute was not resolved until the Supreme Court, in its interpretation of the seaward boundaries of a littoral state, abolished the so-called on-shore, off-shore dichotomy. This forced the federal government to find a political solution to resolve the impasse.

Self-Assessment Exercise 4

Mention some significant contributions of Pressure groups to public policy inputs in your country.

3.3.7 Pressure Groups vs Political Parties

Although pressure groups have much in common with political parties, the major difference is that they are not in the contest for political power. However, because they fall within the general context of David Truman's definition of "political interest groups," pressure groups may, in pursuing their objectives, be involved in the electoral process by endorsing candidates or shaping parties' platforms.

They, however, do not exceed, according to Truman, making certain claims upon other groups in the societies, by acting through or upon any of the institutions of governments," cited in (Ojo, 1973, p. 52).

We can summarise the differences between pressure groups and political parties as follows: While political parties seek to create change by being elected to public office, pressure groups attempt to influence public policy, often through political parties or other linkage devices to get their views across to the government.

Pressure groups are better able to focus on specialised issues, whereas political parties tend to address a wide range of issues.



Fig. 3 .2 Pressure Groups vs Political Parties

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 5

Analyse the major distinctions between pressure groups and political parties.



3.4 Summary

In this unit, we have discussed pressure groups and the role they play in influencing government policies in ways that favour them. We also examined different categories of pressure groups and the techniques available to enable them to play their interface and linkage roles within a political system. Lastly, using relevant examples, we analysed how pressure groups in Nigeria have engaged with past governments.



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3.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Pressure groups play important roles in a political system by influencing government policies, protecting the interests of their members, and creating political awareness. They also serve as a link between the government and the people by presenting demands and encouraging the government to respond to public needs.
2. A
3. A
Pressure groups contribute to public policy by influencing government decisions, representing the interests of specific groups, creating public awareness, and advising the government on important social and economic issues.
4. Pressure groups aim to influence government policies without seeking political power, while political parties aim to win elections and form government. Also, pressure groups focus on specific interests, whereas political parties pursue broader national interests.

Unit 4 The British Political System

Unit Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Learning outcomes
- 4.3 The British constitution
 - 4.3.1 Unwritten and Flexible
 - 4.3.2 Constitutional Conventions
 - 4.3.3 Unitary System of Government
- 4.4 Formation and Workings of Government
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 - 4.4.4 Prime Minister and Parliament
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 - 4.4.6 The Prime Minister and the Monarch
- 4.5 The Cabinet
 - 4.5.1 Functions of Cabinet
 - 4.5.2 Composition of Cabinet
 - 4.5.3 Party system in Britain
- 4.6 The British Monarchy
- 4.7 Summary
- 4.8 References/Further Reading/Web Resources
- 4.9 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercises



4.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. Having explored democracy and its development in the previous unit, we now move from the broader principles of democratic government to examine how they operate within a specific political system.

In this unit, you will explore the British system of government and follow its remarkable development from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. We will examine the distinctive features of its constitutional arrangements and consider how the monarch, Parliament, Cabinet and Prime Minister function within the system.

You will also explore the role of long-established conventions and the principles that have contributed to the continuity and stability of British government.

As you work through the unit, pay attention to how these institutions interact and how their relationships shape the exercise of political power. Engage with the learning activities and reflect on what this system reveals about democratic government in practice.



4.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the key features and principles of the British Constitution, including its unwritten, flexible and unitary nature;
- describe the roles and powers of the Prime Minister, Cabinet and political parties in the British system of government;
- differentiate between constitutional laws and conventions and explain their importance to the operation and stability of the British political system; and
- analyse the constitutional role of the British Monarchy and its relationship with Parliament and democratic government.



4.3 The British Constitution

Welcome! Have you ever seen the British Constitution? Have you compared it with the Nigerian Constitution? What differences do you notice between the two? Think about what you already know, then get ready to explore what makes the British Constitution different from the Nigerian Constitution.

Click the link or scan the QR code below to watch a short clip on The British Constitution. Be sure to watch the video before proceeding, as it will help you understand its key features, structure and development.

<https://youtu.be/-6dsNOndUso?si=aCnTh1QfjV2UeBiG>



4.3.1 Unwritten and Flexible

The British constitution is often described as unwritten. This is not to suggest that no part of the Constitution is written down. On the contrary, some aspects of the British constitution, such as the Magna Carta of 1215, the Petition of Rights of 1628, the Bill of Rights of 1689, and other such enactments, are written down.

The Bill of Rights limited the powers of the English Monarch. More significantly, the unwritten character of the British constitution implies that at no time in the country's history did the English people, as the Americans did in Philadelphia, assemble to draft a constitution for their country.

In addition, it implies that the British constitution is not codified in a single document, since some aspects of it, as we noted above, are written. In contrast, others, such as established conventions, cannot be found in any known document. Other sources of the British constitution include statutes, judicial decisions and usages.

The British constitution is also usually described as flexible due to the simple, uncomplicated process for amending it. Unlike the American constitution, which is rigid because of its stringent amendment procedure, the process of amending a constitution in Britain is like the simple process of making or annulling an ordinary law or statute.

4.3.2 Constitutional Conventions

It is, however, important to distinguish between laws and conventions. While laws, by their statutory nature, are enforceable in courts of law, this is not the case with conventions.

However, given the manner in which conventions have evolved in Britain and their historical role as a stabilising mechanism for conservative British society, it is rarely in the character of the British to violate these conventions. Let us examine some of these well-known conventions to demonstrate their enduring utility in the British system's notable success.

They include the understanding that the first among equals in the cabinet is the Prime Minister, who is the leader of the party having a majority in the House of Commons. Members of the cabinet are appointed and dismissed by the Parliament; Ministers with cabinet rank are selected from the majority party; cabinet policies are consistent with the party's program and the mandate from the electorate; and there must be support in the House of Commons for **t h e** government policies, including the norm that cabinet members must sit in either the House of Commons or the House of Lords.

Other conventions include the requirement that peerage may be created from outsiders to enable them to participate in cabinet deliberations. However, such a step can only be taken if the post does not excite controversy:

- A government defeated on a major issue must resign
- A government resigns if defeated at a general election

- Parliament stands dissolved on the request of the Prime Minister. Should a government be defeated at the polls, the Prime Minister tenders his resignation on behalf of the government without meeting the new Parliament, in which, lacking a majority, he would face an immediate defeat.
- The Prime Minister and their cabinet ministers should resign if a vote of no confidence is passed on the government.
- The principle of collective responsibility presumes that both the Prime Minister and their cabinet ministers are collectively responsible to the Parliament.



Fig. 4 .1. Law vs Convention

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

4.3.3 Unitary System of Government

Britain operates a unitary system of government. Under this arrangement, all governmental powers are concentrated at the central level. Any local level of government that exists is created and allocated powers by the central government. This is unlike the United States, where the states, as federating units, derive their powers from the constituents and are equal, exercising co-ordinate authority with the federal government over those powers allotted to them.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Explain the importance of conventions to the enduring stability of the British government.

4.4 Formation and Workings of Government

Now that you understand how pressure groups seek to influence government decisions, let us turn our attention to how government itself is formed and how it functions. Who gets to form a government, how are leaders chosen, and how do they turn political decisions into action? In this topic, you will explore the processes through which governments are established, organised and operated.

4.4.1 The Role of the Prime Minister

The British Prime Minister is the head of government and the country's political leader. His functions can be seen in his role in the formation of the government, in giving direction to the cabinet, in sustaining a majority in the parliament, and as the Monarch's principal adviser. The Prime Minister is at the centre of these bodies and personalities, and he must work in cooperation with them to ensure the state's success.

You must know his major functions, which include the following:

4.4.2 Prime Minister and Power of Appointments

The Prime Minister has wide powers of patronage, including the appointment and dismissal of Ministers. For example, in 1962, Harold Macmillan, the Conservative Prime Minister, dismissed a third of his cabinet overnight. In this age, when "professional" politicians predominate, the Prime Minister's ability to directly affect the careers of ambitious members of Parliament, for better or worse, is crucial. He appoints all Ministers and promotes, demotes, or dismisses them.

He also assigns a portfolio or responsibilities to each of them, thereby deciding who does what in the cabinet. The Prime Minister also appoints Chairmen of Cabinet committees, which have now become increasingly important in the operations of the British government.

4.4.3 Prime Minister and Direction of the Cabinet

Chooses the Cabinet and determines its size. He convenes meetings, sets the agenda, summarises the "mood" of meetings, approves the minutes, and speaks to the cabinet spokesperson to the outside world.

4.4.4 Prime Minister and Parliament

He is the leader of parliament since his party commands a majority in the House of Commons, and one of his functions is to constrain the activities of the opposition, coordinate parliamentary party caucuses to enable his party to retain its majority, and manage Question Time in such a way that the government is not embarrassed.

4.4.5 Prime Minister and Party

He is the leader of the party that forms the government and exercises a major influence on government policies

4.4.6 The Prime Minister and the Monarch

He advises the sovereign on the appointment of important officials and on the granting of honours. The Prime Minister personally advises the monarch on the date of Parliament's dissolution, and this matter is not discussed in the Cabinet.

4.5 The Cabinet

Writing in 1867, Walter Bagehot, in *The English Constitution*, declared that the two characteristic features of Cabinet Government in Britain were, firstly, that the cabinet is a collective executive body, and secondly, that it is drawn from Parliament and answerable to Parliament.

(rather than directly to the electorate) for its authority and very existence. This, argued Bagehot, is in direct contrast with the presidential system in the United States of America, where the executive is a single figure, the President, who is elected directly by the people and thus not responsible to the legislature.

The traditional description of the Prime Minister's role in the cabinet is that of "*primus inter pares*." However, it is widely claimed today that the power of the Prime Minister within the cabinet is so decisive and significant that he is more than 'first among equals'.

4.5.3 Functions of Cabinet

The role of the cabinet is that of a central directing force within the machinery of government, making important policy decisions, supervising the execution of that policy, and coordinating the work of the whole executive machine. We can summarise the functions of the cabinet as follows:

1. It draws up policy, fills in the details of policy,
2. Takes a decision when the various items shall be submitted to Parliament,
3. Determines policies to be followed in response to the pulse of the nation or current challenges,
4. Co-ordinates policies, supervises the work of the executive and draws up plans for the future.

4.5.4 Composition of Cabinet

In essence, the Cabinet has always been a collection of departmental heads. This has the advantage that members can bring administrative expertise to policy decisions.

The two, it is argued, are inseparable. With this in mind, the Prime Minister has to consider and balance several factors when forming his Cabinet.

If too many ministers are included in the cabinet, it becomes unwieldy. It conflicts with the general principle that decision-making is most effective when performed by a small body.

If too few ministers are included, it becomes difficult for the cabinet to keep in touch with the other members of the government, back-benchers and the party outside Parliament.

Some departmental posts, such as the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, would be included in any conventional Cabinet.

Posts such as Lord Privy Seal, Lord President of the Council, and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster can be included in the Cabinet so that their holders may perform non-departmental functions and therefore undertake policy coordination, long-term planning, and general administrative tasks. Personality factors inevitably play a role a vital part in cabinet making. The Prime Minister has to include among his ministers individuals of standing within the party, regardless of their potential ministerial ability.

This is particularly important when one considers that several diverse elements exist within the British parties.

The Prime Minister also has to decide whether a particular party extremist would be the biggest threat to party unity, in or out of the Cabinet, since it is sometimes possible to “buy” silence and conformity from a potential rebel by giving him the responsibility of a ministerial office.

This is what Clement Attlee did when he included Aneurin Bevan in his cabinet, and what Wilson did when he included Cousin.

4.5.3 Party system in Britain

According to Maurice Duverger (1964), the party system is at the centre of the British parliamentary government: “The party holds in its own hands the essential prerogatives of the Legislature and the Executive. Government posts are in the hands of its leaders who apply its doctrine

and its program as expressed in its electoral “platform...” In Britain, the Party with a majority in parliament wields considerable power; it is entitled to form a government, while the other party forms the opposition, or the shadow cabinet.

The Labour Party, under the leadership of Gordon Brown, presently forms the government in Britain, while the Conservatives are in opposition. These two parties have been alternating in government for close to a century and have, between them, produced world-class Tory Prime Ministers such as Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher, as well as Labour Premiers like Harold Wilson and Tony Blair.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Describe the role of the Prime Minister in both the cabinet and the parliament.

4.6 The British Monarchy

The monarchy in Britain is a hereditary institution which parliament regulates by the rules of succession. The Act of Settlement of 1701 and the Statute of Westminster of 1931 are major laws in Britain governing the appointments and powers of the King/Queen of England.

The monarchy is the symbol of the continuity of the British government. It is an integral part of the Parliament, the sovereign that makes the monarch not answerable to any court in Britain and thereby not liable to arrest.

The powers of the monarch include giving assent to bills before they become law and enforcing national laws. The normal recital of Acts of Parliament: “Be it enacted by the Queen’s most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons...” confirms the powers of the monarch in every legislation in parliament.

The monarch also appoints Prime Ministers, summons, prorogues or dissolves parliament, and reads the address from the throne at the opening of parliament. However, in exercising these powers, the monarch, by convention, relies on the advice of Parliament, since the King or Queen cannot do, nor be permitted to do, any wrong.

The monarch or the sovereign as Walter Bagehot puts it, has three rights—the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, the right to warn”; and he concluded: “A King of great sense and sagacity would want no others” With this type of arrangement, the sanctity of the monarchy is preserved by ensuring that for every act of the monarch there is someone responsible to the parliament.

The monarchy is a highly respected institution in Britain because it provides continuity for the British government. According to Peel, “a King after a reign of ten years ought to know much more of the machine of government than any other man in the country.” Despite the powers ascribed to the King in Britain, the tradition is that the King does not govern, but reigns.

For this reason, the monarchy in Britain does not constitute an encumbrance to democracy or the popular will. The evolution of the constitutional monarchy in Britain was meant to prevent the institution from obstructing the wheel of democracy.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Explain the meaning of the phrase “The King reigns but does not rule”



4.7 Summary

In this unit, we discussed the British system of government, especially how it evolved from an absolute, unlimited monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. We noted that Britain operates an unwritten, flexible and unitary constitutional structure.

We also identified the cabinet as a committee of a supreme parliament, both headed by a Prime Minister who exercises real executive powers, alongside a titular monarch whose power is more symbolic and ceremonial than substantive.

However, this delicate arrangement of grafting monarchy with democracy has endured for so long due to the unique British tradition of respect for age-old conventions and an almost infinite capacity for adaptation to modern changes.



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4.9 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Conventions help the British government remain stable by providing unwritten rules and accepted practices that guide the behaviour of political leaders and institutions, ensuring smooth governance and preventing constitutional conflicts.
2. The Prime Minister is the head of the cabinet, coordinates government policies, and leads ministers. In parliament, the Prime Minister is the leader of the majority party and directs government business.
3. The phrase, "The King reigns but does not rule," means that the monarch is the ceremonial head of state, while the elected government, led by the Prime Minister, exercises the real political power

Unit 5 American Political System

Unit Structure

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Learning outcome
- 5.3 Historical Background
 - 5.3.1 American Confederal Constitutional Structure
 - 5.3.2 Adoption of a Federal Constitution by the US
 - 5.3.3 Major features of the U.S. Constitution
 - 5.3.3.1 A strong Executive President
 - 5.3.3.2 Division of Powers
 - 5.3.3.3 Separation of Powers:
 - 5.3.3.4 Checks and Balances
 - 5.3.3.5 Bicameral National Legislature
 - 5.3.3.6 Judicial Review
 - 5.3.3.7 Two-Party System
 - 5.3.3.8 Amendment Procedure
- 5.4 Presidential System of Government
- 5.5 Summary
- 5.6 References/Further Reading/Web Resources
- 5.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise



5.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. Having explored the British system of government in the previous unit, we now cross the Atlantic to examine another influential democratic system, the United States political system.

This unit provides an opportunity to explore how political institutions can be organised differently while pursuing democratic government. As you work through the unit, we will examine the distinctive features of the American system, including its two-party structure, presidential system, Congress and the constitutional arrangement of powers among its institutions.

You will also consider how the relationship between the President and Congress shapes the exercise of political authority. As you engage with the learning activities, pay attention to the similarities and differences between the British and American systems, and reflect on how different institutional arrangements influence how government operates.

This comparison will help prepare you for the next stage of the Unit.



5.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the historical development of the United States constitutional system from the colonial period to the adoption of the Federal Constitution;
- differentiate between the American confederal and federal constitutional arrangements and explain the factors that led to the adoption of federalism;
- analyse the major features of the United States Constitution, including separation of powers, checks and balances, judicial review, bicameralism and the two-party system; and
- compare the American presidential system with the British parliamentary system, focusing on the organisation and distribution of political authority.



5.3 Historical background

The United States of America is a former colony of Great Britain. In 1776, Americans fought the American Revolutionary War. A committee appointed by the Second Continental Congress, headed by Thomas Jefferson, drafted the American Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration was an extraordinary document in both philosophical and political terms. Philosophically, it proclaimed all men were created equal and asserts that certain rights- including life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are inalienable, and could not be abridged by government. At a time when most Kings in Europe were claiming divine right to rule, this was a remarkable statement.

Politically, despite the differences dividing Northern merchants and Southern planters, the declaration focused on problems, grievances, aspirations, and principles that seemed to unify them.

According to John Adams, who wrote of the American Revolution: “The men who made it wanted not just independence, but a change that would transform their own societies, and set a new example for humanity.

Though the United States faced its first challenge to its unity under President Abraham Lincoln, it was settled that the state would continue to play a central role in the American Revolution of ideas, and that the republican experiment would be conducted within the state arena. In line

with the inscription under the statue of liberty: “liberty lighting the World,” Americans are said to prefer freedom to equality, and proudly refer to their country as the “Promised Land”.

The United States is a melting pot of several nationalities that migrated across the Atlantic due to, among other reasons, religious persecution.

In the early days of the American nation, the country engaged in unbridled expansionism. From 1776 to 1976, for instance, the US expanded from an enclave of thirteen states on the Atlantic Seaboard to a continental power extending into the Pacific (King, 1977, p. 154).

From 1776 to 1939, when World War II broke out, the area under US domination increased from 400,000 square miles to 3,738,393 square miles. In 77 years alone (1776-1853), the US expanded across the continent, with an area of 300 miles from East to West and more than 1,500 miles from North to South.

This accretion in US territory from Louisiana, which increased American territory by about 50 per cent, to Florida, which was ceded from Spain, in pursuit of President Andrew Jackson’s doctrine of “manifest destiny,” was achieved by a combination of military expedition, diplomatic manoeuvres, and, in some cases, outright purchase.



Fig. 5.1 Historical Background of the United States

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise

Explain why the United States is described as a melting pot.

5.3.1 American Confederal Constitutional Structure

The United States of America declared its independence in 1776 after the American Revolutionary War, led by George Washington, who later became the first President of the country. The former thirteen colonies eventually became the pioneer confederal states that formed the United States of America.

The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union were adopted in November 1777 and remained in effect until March 1789. As provided for under Article II, “each state retains its sovereignty and independence, and every power, jurisdiction and right, which is not by this confederation expressly delegated to the United States, in Congress assembled.”

From this provision, it is obvious that the Articles of Confederation were concerned primarily with limiting the powers of the central government, and this it did in the following ways:

- a. The central government was based entirely on the Congress
- b. There was no Executive branch of government
- c. Execution of laws passed by Congress was left to the discretion of individual states
- d. Members of the Congress were no more than delegates, or messengers from the states, and the states could recall them at will
- e. Congress also lacked the power to levy taxes
- f. Although Congress had the power to declare war, there was no central army; the central government could only rely on state militia.

Due to these limiting provisions, the confederal arrangement was unable to hold the nation together. As a voluntary compact of sovereign states in which the central government lacked legal authority to enforce compliance with the laws, the arrangement was doomed to fail.

Added to these constitutional inadequacies was the lack of trust among the states. The Annapolis Convention, which was held because of an invitation from the Virginia legislature, was the first major attempt to revise the Articles of Confederation. However, it was not very successful as only delegates from five states attended the convention.

It took the bloody Shay’s Rebellion for the Founding Fathers to commit themselves to a major review of the Articles of Confederation.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Examine the factors that led to the collapse of the United States' confederation.

5.3.2 Adoption of a Federal Constitution by the US

To escape the strain under which the United States operated, the American founding fathers convened a Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, attended by delegates from the states.

A heated debate dominated the conference before it settled on a federal constitution as the most suitable for the country. The major debate centred on how to reconcile the divergent Virginia and New Jersey Plans. The Virginia Plan provided for a system of representation in the national legislature based on each state's population, the proportion of each state's revenue contribution, or both.

The New Jersey Plan, on the other hand, concentrated on specific weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation, in the spirit of revision, rather than a complete replacement of the document. In the end, an agreement, popularly called the “Connecticut Compromise”, was reached.

In the Great Compromise, the Constitutional Conference of 1787 gave each state an equal number of senators regardless of its population, but allocated representation in the lower house based on population. Apart from promoting unity in diversity, one reason the United States opted for a federal system is to strengthen the nation's capacity to declare war and protect the states against foreign intrusion.

From the Federalist Papers co-authored by John Jay, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton, as well as the foundation laid by the Founding Fathers like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, one is left in doubt about the character of the American nation and the direction it would take.

The American Constitution is often seen as an inspired, if not divine, work, expressing timeless principles of democratic government. The American system of government, which draws its strength from its federal constitutional arrangement, has been so successful that many countries in the world have either grafted portions of the American system into their own political structures or transplanted the US model wholesale, thereby conferring on it a constitutional orthodoxy.

Countries such as Australia, Canada, Germany, Switzerland and Nigeria borrowed the major planks of their constitutions from the American experience, a country widely recognised as having the patent or franchise for federalism.

Federalism was adopted in the United States as a step towards greater centralisation of powers. The delegates agreed that they needed to place more powers at the national level, but not completely.

undermining the state governments. Thus, a system of dual sovereigns was devised- the state and the nation, with the hope that competition between the two would be an effective limitation on the power of both.

The United States is also a federal republic, and, according to James Madison, a republic is a government of elected representatives of the people, with no room for a king.

Although slightly democratic and highly republican, US citizens have little formal control over their political system; given its diversity, pluralism rather than pure democracy is a more suitable term to describe the American system.

Madison held that a country as geographically large and as economically, socially, politically, and culturally diverse as the United States cannot easily attain a single majority on most issues.

Because the American people have been called a nation of joiners, individuals must join with others to achieve their political goals.

The US federal constitution today remains arguably the most enduring political document in the world; it is often described as a masterpiece, the product of ingenious constitutional engineering.

At the beginning, the constitution concerned itself with the structure and powers of government. The next stage was the passage of the Bill of Rights on the insistence of George Mason, Thomas Jefferson and Samuel Adams. Later, franchise or voting rights were extended to almost every adult male under Andrew Jackson.

The Abraham Lincoln era liberated the enslaved people and promulgated the Homestead Act, which made free land available to poor farmers. The Progressive Era saw constitutional amendments that granted women the right to vote. The New Deal under Franklin Delano Roosevelt brought Social Security, collective bargaining, and social welfare. At the same time, the era of the Great Society under John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson launched a war on poverty and racism (Baradat, 2000).

Let us now take a closer look at the major features of the US Constitution.

5.3.3 Major features of the U.S. Constitution

How excited are you about everything you have learnt so far? You have explored constitutions, sovereignty, human rights, democracy and political parties. Now, take a moment to reflect: which of these topics has surprised you the most, and why?

Great! Let us keep the momentum going as we explore the major features of the U.S. Constitution and discover what makes the American constitutional system unique.

5.4.3.1A strong Executive President

The United States Constitution, under Article II, established the office of a strong president. As Alexander Hamilton, a popular delegate to the 1787 Constitutional Convention, pointed out, Article II was aimed at “energy in the Executive.”

It did so in an effort to overcome the natural stalemate built into the bicameral legislature and the separation of powers among the three organs of government.

The President of the United States exercises Executive powers as the Head of state and the head of government.

and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. As Sir Henry Maine aptly puts it: “The King of England reigns but does not govern; the French President neither reigns nor governs; the American President governs, though (not being a king) he does not govern” (Appadorai, 2004).

The powers and authority of an American president remain single and undivided. Stephen Skowronek (2002: xiv) wrote of the Oval Office in America thus: “The Presidency has been a singularly persistent source of change, a transformative element ingrained in the constitution itself.

In the presidency, change is generated by incumbents trying to legitimate themselves.” His ministers (known as secretaries), who are largely chosen by him, are therefore not his colleagues, but their advice does not bind mere advisers, nor him.

Unlike in Britain, the concept of collective responsibility does not apply to the American system. What keeps the system going is the combined application of the principle of separation of powers and the doctrine of checks and balances.

5.3.3.2 Division of Powers

Cooperative and political interdependence among states in the US prohibits the centre from certain things, e.g., prohibiting states' religions, and it cannot suspend the right of habeas corpus. The constitution prohibits the state from entering into a treaty, confederation, or community.

Residual powers – powers not delegated to the federal government nor prohibited to the states are reserved to the states respectively or to the people.

The constitution recognises a second-tier system of fifty state governments, with a strong constitutional base and significant formal power in revenue and taxation, interstate commerce, health, education, etc, but with a history of uneven utilisation of these powers.

All these are made to work by an American citizenry- richly diverse in ethnic, racial, class and regional terms that historically have distrusted government, but show patriotism to their country.

5.3.3.3 Separation of Powers:

The United States' constitution also incorporates the principle of separation of powers and checks and balances among the three organs of government.

In a brilliant formulation, Richard Neustadt (1960:13) described separation of Powers as a system not of separated powers but of “separated institutions sharing power.”

S. E. Finer (1949) also stated that the American Constitution was consciously and elaborately made an essay in the separation of powers and is today “the most important polity in the world which operates upon the principle.

By dividing the Congress into two bodies, the Senate is elected for a six-year term with partial renewal after two years, and the House biennially, and by vesting.

By separating legislative, executive, and judicial functions into distinct organs, the American Constitution aimed to reduce the risk of power being misused.

5.3.3.4 Checks and Balances

This is a mechanism by which each branch of government in the USA can participate in and influence the activities of the other branches.

Its major examples include the power of the President to veto Congressional legislation, the Senate's power to confirm presidential appointments and the power of the Judiciary to review laws enacted by Congress.

According to Ray (2006: 145), the primary objective of the Federalist Papers for instituting the doctrine of checks and balances was "to provide for an equilibrated system of interaction among the three principal institutions of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary".

Indeed, the doctrine of checks and balances is a recognition of the reality of the process of government: To run a government, powers must not only coordinate but also overlap.

5.3.3.5 Bicameral National Legislature

The Senate has 100 members elected on a per-state basis. In comparison, 436 members of the House of Representatives are elected based on population, with a single-member constituency of about 30,000 voters sending a representative to the lower chamber. The two independent national legislative chambers have different constituencies and are frequently bipartisan, reflecting divergent views on federal-state-local relations. Equal representation in the Senate seeks to balance bigness and smallness, majority rule and minority rule, and centralising and decentralising tendencies.

5.3.3.6 Judicial Review

This is the Power of the court to render legislative and executive acts null and void if they violate the Constitution. The Supremacy Clause governs the judicial role in resolving intergovernmental disputes arising from inconsistent state legislation. Where such arise, the Supreme Court has the power to declare a state's legislation that is inconsistent with federal laws null and void, while that of the federal government remains valid.

5.3.3.7 Two-Party System

The government of the United States operates under a two-party system: the Democratic and Republican Parties. This does not suggest that there are only two political parties in the country.

Rather, only two parties are strong enough to alternate in government. It is believed that party competition contributes to the health of the American democratic process, especially the bipartisan consensus that often shapes the country's electoral process.

Thus, it is not unusual for one party to control the Presidency, while the other party dominates the Congress, or an arm of it. In the early years of the Republic, the idea of party competition was not particularly well received.

In 1798, the Federalist Party, which controlled the national government, sought to outlaw the Democratic-Republican opponents through the Alien and Sedition Acts. However, the attempts failed.

Also, in the 19th Century, American politics was dominated by powerful party machines. However, this has given way in modern times to candidate-centred electoral politics in which individual candidates have taken over campaign organisation and voter mobilisation.

5.3.3.8 Amendment Procedure

The American Constitution is often described as a rigid constitution to indicate the difficult and cumbersome procedure it entails. In defence of this, James Madison argued that the method was to guard “equally against the extreme facility which would render the constitution too mutable and that extreme difficulty which might perpetuate discovered faults”.

Despite this complicated procedure, in over two hundred years of its operations, the U.S. Constitution has been amended about twenty-five times.

The First Amendment legally secure freedom of speech and of peaceful assembly; the Fourth Amendment forbids a search without a warrant, the Fifth Amendment replaced the word right to pursue happiness with the property right; the Eighth Amendment legally secures the citizen against excessive bail, while the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits discrimination against any citizen of the United States based on colour (Laski 19 103).

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Explain why a federal constitution is most suitable for the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

5.5 Presidential System of Government

Though a former colony of Britain, the U.S.A. turned its back on the monarchical system for which Britain is renowned and embraced a republican presidential democracy.

For over two hundred years now, the United States has made a success of its presidential system of government, anchored on a two-party system and strengthened by a bipartisan consensus. This arrangement has not only promoted political stability in the country, but has also assured Americans an unprecedented level of economic prosperity.

Under the Presidential system of government, the President, who has the whole country as his constituency, is elected separately for a fixed term of four years, and separately from the Congress.

The President is the head of state, head of government and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. However, in some respects, despite having the whole country as his constituency, the President, in exercising his major functions of legislation, appointments, treaty-making, and declaration of war, shares his power with the Congress.

This is why Baradat (2000) described the US government as “a Presidential-Congressional system”, which he labelled “a divided government”.

The import of the so-called “divided government” came into light when, in 1919, the President and the Senate disagreed and went their separate ways over the Versailles Peace Treaty. This row prevented the United States from joining the League of Nations.

Self-Assessment Exercise 4

Explain the major features of the presidential system of government.



5.5 Summary

In this unit, we have discussed the origins of the American presidential System of government. We outlined the reasons for the failure of the confederal constitution after it was in effect for about a decade and two years.

We also stated the reasons why the Founding Fathers opted for a federal constitution in 1787. The Unit also discussed the positive contributions of the two-party system to the success of the American political model, as well as the combined roles of the principles of Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances in curbing executive lawlessness and ensuring good governance under a presidential system.



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5.7 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Why is the United States described as a “melting pot”
The United States is called a melting pot because it brings together people from diverse ethnic, cultural, and racial backgrounds who gradually integrate into a common national identity.
2. Factors that led to the collapse of the Confederation in the United States could be traced to: Weak central government with limited powers, lack of power to tax and regulate trade, financial and economic instability, Absence of a strong executive and judiciary, Poor coordination among the states.

3. Reasons why Nigeria adopts federalism are: It accommodates ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, promotes unity while allowing regional autonomy, ensures balanced distribution of power and resources, and it also reduces domination by any single group
4. The major features of the presidential system of government include separation of powers among executive, legislature, and judiciary, the president is both Head of State and Government, Fixed tenure of office, there are checks and balances among arms of government and Executive independence from the legislature

Unit 6 Electoral System and Process

Unit Structure

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Learning outcome
- 6.3 Definition and Types of an Electoral System
 - 6.3.1 Majority rule system
 - 6.3.2 Proportional Representation
 - 6.3.3 History of the electoral process in Nigeria
- 6.4 Summary
- 6.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources
- 6.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise



6.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. Having explored the British and American political systems, we now turn our attention to the electoral system and its place in democratic government.

Elections provide an important link between citizens and those who seek to represent them, making the study of electoral processes essential to understanding democracy in practice. In this unit, you will explore the different electoral systems and consider the conditions necessary for elections to be free and fair.

We will then turn our focus to Nigeria, tracing the development of its electoral process from the colonial period to the present. As you work through the unit, reflect on how electoral arrangements influence political participation and representation.

Engage actively with the learning activities and consider how the electoral process you encounter in everyday life connects with the issues explored in this unit.



6.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning, purpose and major types of electoral systems in democratic government;
- differentiate between majority rule and proportional representation systems, including their advantages and limitations;

- analyse the conditions and institutional requirements necessary for a credible, free and fair electoral process; and
- evaluate the development of Nigeria's electoral system and its implications for democratic stability from the colonial period to the Fourth Republic.



6.3 Definition and types of an electoral system

Have you ever wondered how your vote is turned into a winner in an election? Is it simply the candidate with the most votes, or are there different ways of deciding who wins? Let us explore the definition and types of electoral systems and discover how different voting methods shape political representation.

All modern democratic nations have developed systems through which their citizens participate in electing their leaders. It is through elections that people express their views on issues and accord legitimacy to, or withdraw it from, political leadership. J. J. Rousseau, who popularised the doctrine of the “general will”, preferred direct.

From democracy to representative government, according to him, “individuals will not be able to be transferred because it is inalienable, and that no one can adequately represent another individual (Baradat, 2000, p. 82).

However, today, direct democracy is no longer feasible because the world has moved beyond the Greek city-states. Therefore, what is now popularly referred to as liberal democracy rests on the pillars of representative government, universal suffrage and unrestricted franchise or voters' eligibility.

The electoral system is the process or machinery by which citizens in a democratic state elect their representatives through competitive elections held at periodic intervals.

While casting a vote is the highest point of an electoral process, other activities are involved before the process can be considered complete. An essential task of an electoral system is to provide an opportunity for a broad spectrum of citizens to participate in the political process.

This is very significant in any government, unitary or federal, but more so in the latter, because a good electoral system helps to foster national integration. Broadly, an electoral system may be based on either majority rule or proportional representation.

Click the link or scan the QR code below to watch a short video, Voting Systems: Best in the World | Explained by Think Novus.

Be sure to watch the video before proceeding, as it will help you understand how different voting systems work and how they shape the electoral process.

https://youtu.be/W4sVjfUyVgU?si=8_wx5Ez06amdXuXo



6.3.1 Majority rule system

In the majority-rule system practised in Nigeria at present, the party or candidate with the most votes cast in an election is declared the winner. However, a major disadvantage of the majority-rule system is that a party may win a minority of votes and still command a majority of seats in parliament, thereby forming a government.

Another party may win fewer than half the seats but with a disproportionately large share of the vote. This oddity of the majority-rule variant of an electoral system may be tolerated where it occurs occasionally. However, where it occurs more frequently, it certainly poses a grave danger to the polity. Also, in a majority-rule system, minority parties that are constantly defeated in elections may either lose interest in politics or develop radical or subversive ideas. It may also encourage the fragmentation of Political parties along regional or ethnic lines.

This scenario is true of Nigerian politics in the defunct First Republic (Sklar, 1963). In a single-member constituency, as long as there is more than one candidate for a single seat in an election, seats will always be distributed among political parties in a way that is disproportionate to the votes cast. Two illustrative cases are relevant here.

In the 1992 general election in Britain, the Conservative Party, led by John Major, secured a majority of seats in Parliament. However, it failed to win a majority of the popular vote (Baradat, 2000, p. 132). Also, if we use a simulative scenario of an election involving three parties, and in which the distribution of votes is as follows: Party A, 41%; Party B, 39% and Party C, 29%, it is obvious

That Party A, with 41 per cent, has won. However, the majority of voters (59 per cent) voted against party A, and therefore, that large percentage

of voters is unrepresented. In quantitative terms, 41 per cent of voters won 100 per cent of the representation.

The implication, therefore, is that all those who voted for party B or C might as well have stayed away from the election, since their votes do not count. This is why the majority-rule system is generally criticised for promoting the winner-takes-all, or zero-sum, syndrome.

6.3.2 Proportional Representation

Under the system of proportional representation, however, elections are not decided at the constituency level. The country as a whole is considered a single constituency: parties present candidates to the entire electorate on lists, and voters are expected to choose from those lists.

A party will therefore be allotted in parliament as many seats as correspond to the percentage of votes scored in the entire country. The parliament is, therefore, a reflection of the strength of each party based on the number of votes. Under this variant, the government is usually, if not always, formed by a coalition of several parties.

Its major advantage is that it is evidently more just than a majority system, because it allows more parties to participate in government and thus precludes the possibility of instability arising from the injustice of consistently excluding minority parties. Its major defect is that it encourages the proliferation of small parties that may eventually win a not-so-significant number of seats in parliament, making it difficult to form a stable government.

A case in point is the German (1919) constitution, in which not fewer than 42 parties contested the elections, and in the election, not more than 14 of those parties managed to win seats in parliament (Kriele, 1979, p. 357).

Also, the Salvador Allende government of 1970 was a coalition of Chile's major political parties. However, when the controversies over the redistribution of farmland and its nationalisation reached an irreconcilable level among the coalition partners, the various parties withdrew their support.

To avert a deadlock, Allende abandoned all democratic pretences and became dictatorial; the army intervened, and he was subsequently murdered in 1973 (Baradat, 2000, p. 1350). It is the realisation that neither of these two variants is perfect that has led some scholars to suggest modifying the two to achieve what has been called a "mixed-system," such as the triple mandate system or the minority-quorum system (Kriele, 1979, p. 359).

Whether in a majority-rule or proportional system, representation is another complex subject in democratic government. The complication arose from what should be the criterion or basis of representation, an issue on which opinion is divided among scholars. Population, territorial, and functional criteria are used either selectively or in combination.

In Nigeria and the USA, both population and territorial criteria are employed in the elections to the two chambers of the National Assembly and the Congress, respectively.

In the former Soviet Union, the functional criterion was added to the election to the 2,250-strong Congress of the People's Deputies. On whether public officials should represent national or constituent interests, there is also no unanimity among scholars on whether they should represent the people's will or their interests, a distinction known as the mandate or independent theory of representation.

While Thomas Hobbes and Alexander Hamilton preferred the reactionary theory, John Locke and Thomas Jefferson favoured the Liberal theory, and J. J. Rousseau endorsed the radical theory of representation (Baradat, 2000, p. 139).

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Outline the differences between majority-rule and proportional-representation systems.

1.1 Pre-requisites for a good electoral system

The electoral system differs from one country to another. However, some features are common to all types of democratic systems regardless of their level of political development. Scholars have given conditions that can make an electoral system or election a worthy exercise.

In Robert Dahl's opinion, three conditions are essential to achieve a credible election. These are meaningful and extensive competitions among individuals and organised groups for public positions; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular, free and fair elections, such that no significant group of adults is excluded; civil and political liberties sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation.

In S. P. Huntington's view, an electoral system is democratic "to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for roles and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote." To meet

the conditions stipulated by these two scholars, most democratic states have implemented electoral requirements.

These include dividing a country into electoral districts, known as constituencies. Population is the most common criterion used for the delimitation of the country into electoral units of roughly equal size, with each constituency being entitled to one representative in a single member constituency, or more than one representative in a multi-member constituency.

Another is the registration of voters and their periodic revision, especially before a major election. The exercise will ensure that every citizen who is eligible to vote on account of age, residential qualification, property, educational qualifications, or any other eligibility criteria is registered by the electoral body and issued with a valid voter's card, without which they cannot exercise their franchise.

The third essential element of an electoral system is the nomination of candidates for the election. In a democratic setting, candidates contest elections on their party's platforms. Members of a party who wish to contest usually go through either a convention or a primary election, where party members serve as delegates or are handpicked by a select committee. There are, however, rare cases when elections are conducted on a zero-party basis.

Political neutrality by the authorities responsible for conducting elections is another prerequisite for a sustainable democracy. The electoral umpire must be neutral and financially independent of other organs of government; otherwise, electoral officials will always be suspected of manipulating the electoral process in favour of the incumbents.

There must be a level playing ground for all the contestants; the electoral boundaries should be delimited in such a way that no particular candidate or party should be favoured; electoral materials should be evenly distributed across all the polling units, and the voters' list should be compiled and reviewed periodically to accommodate every citizen of voting age.

Another requirement is that an electoral system should ensure that parties and their candidates have sufficient opportunities to articulate their positions on various issues during the election campaign. This can also be done through mass media when all parties/candidates are expected to be given equal prime airtime, especially in government-owned media houses.

The most important aspect of an election is voting itself. This is where voters express preference for parties or candidates of their choice. One man, one vote, and secret balloting are universally accepted standards to ensure that voters cast their ballots without fear of intimidation.

It is also important that the counting, collation, and declaration of election results be conducted in the full glare of public scrutiny and in the presence of accredited agents of the parties or candidates.

Avenue for legal redress for a defective candidate should also be provided in an electoral law. Where a loser in an election has reasonable grounds to challenge a declared result, the instrumentality of an election tribunal is usually provided to enable him to bring legal action to overturn results that, in his opinion, do not reflect the popular voters' will.

It is also very important to dispose of election petitions within a reasonable time in order not to confer undue legitimacy to a winner, who may have manipulated the electoral process to his own advantage.

Power of recall is another feature of an electoral system in some countries, and it is applied sparingly, only in a few cases when voters are convinced that it will be dangerous for the polity to retain, until the next election, the services of a representative who is unworthy of the people's mandate. There are stringent requirements that must be met before a constituency can invoke the power of recall.

However, it was successfully applied in the U.S.A.'s electoral history, whereas in Nigeria, all past attempts to apply it were stalled. However, Harold Laski (1982:320) has warned of the danger of converting the power of recall to a weapon of "easy use" to prevent representatives living under the shadow of "a particularly ugly Sword of Damocles".

In summary, the electoral system has many implications for the political culture in any given country. Indeed, political culture is, to a large extent, a function of the electoral system.

Therefore, a political system will remain stable only when it has the broadest possible and legitimate basis for recruiting and rejecting leaders, and when the majority of citizens accept the electoral machinery as fair and just.

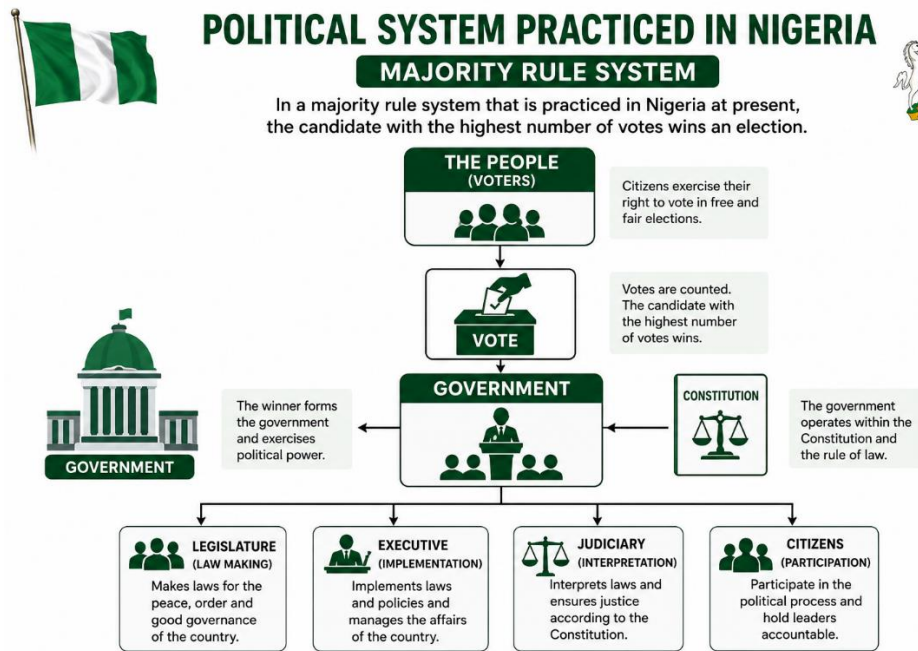


Fig. 6 .1 Political system in Nigeria

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Explain how the power of recall can become a ‘Sword of Damocles in the hands of a political godfather.

6.3.3 History of the Election in Nigeria

The history of elections in Nigeria began in 1923, following the promulgation of Clifford’s constitution of 1922; an electoral system was introduced to regulate elections for three legislative seats in Lagos and one in Calabar. It was based on a restricted franchise of 100 pounds per annum.

In 1946, no major changes were made to the electoral requirements, except for reducing the income requirement to 50 pounds. The major landmark in the history of electioneering in Nigeria was the introduction of party politics by the Macpherson Constitution of 1951, which led to the emergence of political parties contesting elections to the regional Assemblies.

The parties were: The Action Group (AG), led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and was in control of the Western Region; The Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC), led by Sir Ahmadu Bello and was in control of the Northern Region; and the National Convention of Nigerians and Cameroons (later National Convention of Nigerian Citizens) (NCNC), which controlled the Eastern Region.

During the 1954 and 1959 regional elections in the East and West, universal adult suffrage was used. However, it was modified during the 1959 Federal elections, when the East and West adopted universal adult suffrage while only the North used male adult suffrage.

The above shows that the history of the electoral process and institutions, as well as their administration in Nigeria, dates back to the colonial era. The first electoral institution established to manage the administration and conduct of elections in Nigeria was the Electoral Commission of Nigeria. The ECN administered and managed the conduct of the 1959 pre-independence general elections that heralded Nigeria's first republic.

In the First Republic, the body was renamed the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) by the administration of late Sir Abubakar Tafawa-Balewa. The Commission conducted the controversial General Elections of 1964 and the West Regional election of 1965.

The manner in which the two elections were conducted and the crises they triggered combined to cause the collapse of the First Republic. In preparation for the 1979 elections, General Olusegun Obasanjo's regime established the Federal Election Commission (FEDECO).

The commission established in 1978 was disbanded in 1983 by the military because of its glaring partiality and culpability in the massively rigged 1983 elections, which returned then incumbent President Shehu Shagari to power in what was then described as "a landslide victory".

This shoddy performance occurred despite the administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari establishing the Justice Ovie Whiskey Panel to probe allegations of electoral fraud in the 1979 elections and recommend measures to guard against it in future elections.

The consequence of the 1983 electoral debacle was that the military terminated the second-term administration of Alhaji Shagari on December 31st 1983.

Given its interpretation of the state of the nation and its leaders' disdain for politicians, Muhammadu Buhari's administration did not bother itself with a political transition program. However, upon assuming office on 27th August 1985, General Babangida committed his administration to a program of transition to civil rule.

In 1987, following the Political Bureau's report, he established the Electoral Commission (NEC), initially headed by Professor Eme Awa and later by Professor Humphrey Nwosu.

The commission was charged with managing the electoral process during General Babangida's staggered and flamboyant transition.

Though NEC managed to conduct local, state and national assembly elections, the annulment of the presidential election in June 1993 called into question the integrity of the whole transition program. Though Chief Abiola was denied his victory, Professor Nwosu, in a book published in 2008, fifteen years after the 1993 presidential election, confirmed that Chief Abiola actually won the election, information known, though unofficially, to most Nigerians.

In November 1993, the regime of General Sani Abacha succeeded the lame-duck Interim National Government led by Chief Ernest Shonekan and established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON). Abacha also preoccupied himself with an unpopular self- succession program, which alienated the vast majority of Nigerians, transformed the country into a pariah state and alienated it from the mainstream of the civilised world community.

After the demise of General Sani Abacha, his successor, General Abdusalami Abubakar, overhauled the electoral commission and renamed it the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The commission was established by Decree No. 17 of 1998 (now an Act of Parliament).

INEC's responsibility, as contained in the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is the conduct and management of the electoral process in the country.

INEC successfully conducted a series of elections that ushered in the nation's Fourth Republic in 1999. The commission also conducted the second general elections of 2003, which were not without criticism. Predictably, in the conduct of the 2007 General Elections, INEC seemed to have perfected the art and science of rigging. In 2003, what mattered was the election officials' disposition toward the candidate.

Indeed, in 2003, the cliché "those who vote decide nothing, but those who count decide everything" became a popular way of describing the farce in the electoral process. In 2007, the incumbent president described the election as a "do or die affair," and it is little wonder that the opposition parties were almost wiped off the political scene when the results were announced.

Almost three years after the 2007 General Elections were won and lost, the litigations arising therefrom have not been fully disposed of by the election tribunals. This is not good enough for the survival of democracy.

What is obvious from the history of elections in Nigeria from the First Republic to date is that Nigerian politicians have not imbibed the appropriate political culture to ensure a dispute- and rancour-free electoral process and, in turn, to ensure the stability of the polity.

Both the government and opposition parties are guilty of electoral malfeasance. Incumbency is indeed potent everywhere, including in established Western democracies. However, in Nigeria, the incumbency factor has been extended to include public funds to finance the ruling party, to the detriment of opposition parties.

Opposition parties are also denied equal access to government-owned media outlets. In some cases, security agencies are used to intimidate opposition groups.

You need to note that a typical Nigerian politician has not imbibed the culture of accepting the result of an election, even when he has been squarely defeated in a free contest. This is unlike the practice in advanced democracies, where losers willingly accept defeat and immediately plan for the next election.

In Nigeria, a clear loser not only engages himself in needless litigations but may also engage in subversive activities or openly call for a military coup. The reason is obvious.

It is not in the character of a Nigerian politician to contemplate life outside government because of the power of patronage that political power confers. Little wonder, he is always ready to put the rule of the game in abeyance, in pursuit of power at all costs.

Until recently in Nigeria, people seemed to look forward to a military intervention - an illegal and illegitimate government - as the only available option because people had lost faith in the ballot box as the only peaceful means of changing a bad government.

Thus, this lends credence to the axiom: “those who make peaceful change impossible makes violent change inevitable. The consequence, as a retired Supreme Court in Nigeria, Justice Kayode Eso puts it is that, “military dictatorship rather than being a temporary expedient became the rule, civil rule, the exception, serving only as an interregnum to the military regnum”(Eso, 2000, p. 258).

Experience has, however, shown worldwide that a military regime is never an alternative to a democratic government. Writing on the Oliver Cromwellian regime, Henry Hallam (cited in Williams, 1982:xviii) also wrote: “It is not in general difficult for an armed force to destroy a

government, but something other than the sword is required to create one.

Therefore, only when an appropriate electoral system is in place can the goal of enduring political stability be realised in any democratic system.

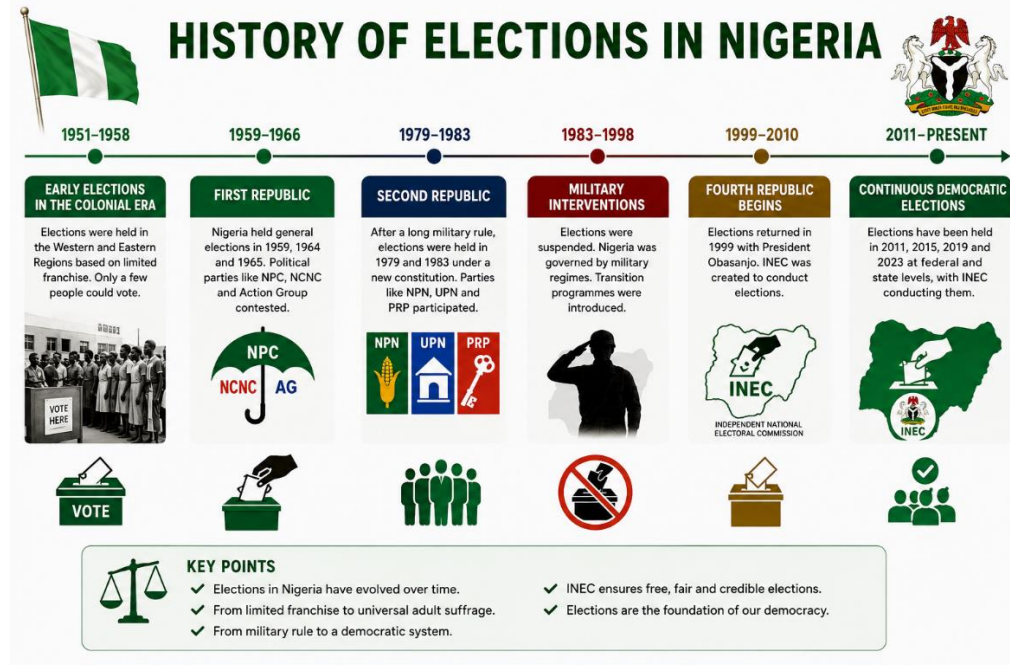


Fig. 6 .2. History of Election In Nigeria

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

List the reasons for electoral malpractices in Nigerian politics.



6.4 Summary

In this unit, we have discussed the importance of the electoral system as a major requirement for a free and fair election. We also identified two types of electoral systems: the majority-rule and proportional-representation models, and explained that each has its own merits and disadvantages.

The unit also elaborated on the conditions that can ensure the conduct of a credible election in any democratic society. We finally took a look at the history of election conduct in the country and submitted that the record, so far, has been abysmally poor.



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6.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Majority rule is an electoral system where the candidate with the highest number of votes in a constituency wins, leading to a winner-takes-all outcome. Proportional representation, on the other hand, allocates seats to political parties based on the proportion of votes they receive, ensuring broader and more equitable representation of voters' preferences.
2. Recall is meant to make elected representatives accountable to voters. However, it can be abused by powerful political patrons ("godfathers") who sponsor candidates. Such individuals may threaten to initiate a recall if the office holder refuses to obey their directives. This turns recall into a tool of intimidation and control, forcing representatives to serve private interests rather than the electorate, thus hanging like a constant threat ("Sword of Damocles") over the officeholder.
3. The following are reasons for electoral malpractices in Nigerian politics
 - a. Desperation for political power and access to state resources
 - b. Weak electoral institutions and poor enforcement of laws
 - c. Poverty and illiteracy make voters vulnerable to manipulation
 - d. Political godfatherism and patron-client networks
 - e. Lack of internal party democracy
 - f. Inadequate security and monitoring during elections
 - g. Corruption among electoral officials and politicians

These factors undermine free and fair elections and weaken democratic consolidation and participation.

Unit 7 Electoral Reforms and Democratic Sustainance

Unit Structure

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Learning outcomes
- 7.3 The Imperatives of Electoral Reforms in Nigeria
 - 7.3.1 Uwais Electoral Reforms Committee's Recommendations
 - 7.3.1.1 A genuinely Independent INEC
 - 7.3.1.2 Unbundling of INEC
 - 7.3.1.3 Scrapping of State INEC
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 - 7.3.1.5 Party Agents
 - 7.3.1.6 Independent Candidacy
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 - 7.3.1.9 Disposal of Electoral Petitions before Swearing-in
 - 7.3.1.10 Rejection of zero-sum politics
 - 7.3.2 The Importance of Electoral Reforms
- 7.4 Summary
- 7.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources
- 7.6 Possible Answers to SAE's



7.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. Having explored the electoral system and the development of elections in Nigeria, we now take a closer look at the challenges that have shaped the country's electoral experience and the efforts made to address them. In this unit, you will examine the recurring need to improve the electoral process and consider why reform has remained an important part of Nigeria's democratic journey.

We will explore some of the major challenges facing elections in Nigeria and examine proposals to strengthen the process, with particular attention to the Muhammed Uwais Electoral Reform Panel and its recommendations.

As you work through the unit, reflect on how electoral challenges can affect democratic participation, representation and public confidence. Actively engage in learning activities and consider the conditions necessary for a credible and sustainable democratic process in Nigeria.



7.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the major challenges that necessitate electoral reforms in Nigeria;
- identify the key recommendations of the Uwais Electoral Reform Committee for improving Nigeria's electoral system;
- analyse how proposed electoral reforms can address institutional, procedural and systemic weaknesses in the electoral process; and
- evaluate the importance of electoral reforms in promoting credible elections, political participation and sustainable democracy in Nigeria.



7.3 The Imperatives of Electoral Reforms in Nigeria

The problems confronting elections and the electoral process in the nation's democratic history can be linked to behavioural and attitudinal dispositions of the political elite (Almond, 2005). Part of the blame can also be placed at the doorstep of institutions saddled with the responsibility for conducting the elections.

Experiences have shown that rather than being independent of the executive and non-partisan, electoral commissions for the greater part of Nigeria's political history have been tied to the apron string of the incumbent executives.

They not only lack independence and transparency in their dealings with politicians and in the discharge of their functions, but they are also far from being accountable and responsive to other stakeholders involved in the electoral process.

The history of elections in Nigeria's efforts at democratisation has not been an impressive one since independence. This is because fraudulent practices, corruption and violence have marred electoral conduct in the nation's political history.

It is therefore of little surprise that past efforts at democratisation have collapsed at the altar of perverted elections and electoral processes. So bad was the situation that the election period came to be associated with violence and politically motivated crises.

That politics has been converted into a money-making venture has reinforced the notion of election as a contest meant to be won at whatever cost (Gboyega, 1977). This has turned electoral conduct in Nigeria into a war-like situation. From the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECRT) of the First Republic to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of today, electoral commissions in Nigeria have not demonstrated the detachment and competence required to discharge their functions.

Their inability to effectively manage the conduct and administration of elections and the electoral process has consistently frustrated the nation's efforts to institute a credible and virile democratic system.

It is significant that on assumption of office, President Musa Yar'Adua recognised the flawed nature of the election that brought him into office. He therefore promised to establish a panel to review the country's electoral laws.

On August 28, 2007, President Umar Musa Yar'Adua announced the establishment of an electoral reform panel headed by the former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Muhammed Uwais.

The Uwais' committee made far-reaching recommendations that bordered on constitutional amendments, institutional strengthening and value reorientation, including the granting of more autonomy to the Independent National Electoral Commission (TELL, January, 26 2009: 19-23).

The President later inaugurated a three-person panel headed by the Justice Minister, Chief Aondoaka. The Aondoaka's panel tampered heavily with the recommendations of the Electoral Reform Committee (ERC). For example, it submitted that the appointment of the Chairman of the National Electoral Commission (INEC) should not be made by the President (Vanguard, December 12, 2008: 19). The government, in its white paper, which was in line with Aondoaka's review, seriously tinkered with the Uwais' report, and came out with positions that were at variance with the aspirations of most Nigerians.

The government argues that the National Judicial Commission's involvement in the appointment of the INEC chairperson would violate the principle of Separation of Powers.

The National Assembly, however, rejected a bill proposed by the Presidency that sought to establish another commission to handle party registration.

In the wise opinion of the lawmakers, that proposal was considered an unnecessary duplication of INEC's functions and an unjustified waste of government resources.

Accomplishing far-reaching electoral reforms in Nigeria is no doubt a major challenge confronting the present administration.

Obviously, in the 1999 General Elections, there were allegations of electoral manipulations. However, the scale was neither as massive as in 2003 nor as sweeping as in 2007.

Worse still, the manner in which the re-run Governorship election in Ekiti state was conducted in April 2009 by INEC under Yar'Adua's watch shows that the politicians learned no lessons, or remorse shown by the electoral umpire that had been severally indicted by the electoral tribunals, including the Supreme Court (Nurudeen, 2009, p. 301).

The continuous nullifications of election results in many states of the federation confirm that what passed for elections in 2007 and the re-runs since 2008 were, at best, selections, or at worst, charades, despite INEC's verdicts. Only the recently conducted Governorship election in Anambra state on February 6th 2010, gives a ray of hope about future elections in Nigeria.

There is no doubt that the choice of Ghana as the first African country to be visited in July 2009 by the United States' President, Barack Obama, was a subtle indictment of Nigeria's electoral process.

According to the United States, "Ghana has now undergone a couple of successive elections in which power was transferred peacefully, even in a very close election...President Mills has shown commitment to the rule of law' (Guardian, July 7, 2009: back page).



Fig. 7.1 Electoral Reforms in Nigeria

Source: ChatGPT AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Classify the problem of electoral malpractices as attitudinal or systemic challenges.

7.3.1 Uwais Electoral Reforms Committee's Recommendations

In view of the far-reaching recommendations of the Uwais committee on electoral reforms, we must examine in greater detail the committee's understanding of Nigeria's electoral problems and how it proposes to address them.

In carrying out its assignment, the committee reviewed the country's electoral history. It established that "the lack of independence by the electoral commissions at both federal and state levels is a key deficiency of Nigeria's electoral process."

In the committee's review of the 85-year history of elections in Nigeria since 1922, it observed a "progressive degeneration' of outcomes, with the 2007 election believed to be the worst.

The panel, in its report, further affirms that the major problem with the nation's electoral system is the lack of credible elections.

The committee noted that people's perceptions of elections are critical determinants of the success of electoral practices and regretted that "the election mindset of Nigerians is not only largely negative, but they are also largely irrational".

The committee's recommendations are therefore aimed at fostering a positive mindset in the electorate to minimise violence and rigging in elections, including by building lasting democratic institutions and cultures. Mohammad Uwais, a former Chief Justice of Nigeria, who headed the 22- member committee, noted:

The committee is firmly convinced that the acceptance and implementation of the recommendations contained in this report will significantly restore confidence in the electoral process and usher in an era of free, fair and credible elections in the country.

(Vanguard, Friday, December 12, 2008) Some of the committee's recommendations require changes to existing electoral procedures, the reallocation of electoral functions, or the creation of new institutions. Some of them require new legislation, while others require amendments to existing laws.

Leaving nothing to chance to quicken the implementation process, the committee prepared a draft of three bills: the Act to Amend the 1999 Constitution; the Act to Amend the 2006 Electoral Act; and the Act to Establish the Electoral Offences Commission.

7.3.1.1 A genuinely Independent INEC

The committee recommends that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) be thoroughly reorganised and repositioned to ensure its independence and professionalism.

It therefore recommends that the 1999 constitution be amended to ensure that INEC becomes truly independent, nonpartisan, impartial, professional, transparent, and reliable, both as an institution and in the performance of its constitutional functions.

For INEC to be truly independent, it is recommended that Section 84 of the 1999 Constitution be amended by adding subsection (8) to read: "The election expenditure of the independent electoral commissioners' offices (addition to salaries and allowances of the chairman and members) shall be first charge on the Consolidated Revenue Fund of the Federation" (TELL, January 26, 2009).

The committee also recommends that INEC be split into two bodies: a board that formulates broad electoral policy and direction, and a professional/technical election management agency to handle the actual conduct of the elections.

The INEC board shall be composed of 13 members as follows: a Chairman and a deputy chairman who must not be of the same gender; six persons representing the six geo-political zones of the country, two of whom must be female; and five nominees representing the civil service organisations, labour organisations, the Nigerian Bar Association, NBA, women organisations, and the media.

Once appointed, a nominee cannot be recalled by any organisation. The chairman and the deputy shall be persons of integrity and nonpartisanship, with extensive professional/administrative/academic experience, and must be at least 50 years old. The other 11 members shall also have the same qualifications and must be at least 40 years of age.

The nomination process, as suggested, is to be no less rigorous. For the positions of chairman and the six geopolitical zones, the National Justice Council (NJC) shall advertise all positions; receive applications/nominations from the general public; and shortlist three persons for each position.

These shall be forwarded to the National Council of State to select one and forward to the Senate for confirmation. For the other five members, each professional body shall forward three nominees to the NJC for screening, after which the NJC shall make appropriate recommendations to the National Council of State, which shall, after further screening, recommend one each to the Senate for confirmation. The tenure of office of the members shall be five years, subject to renewal for another five years.

7.3.1.2 Unbundling of INEC

One of the most radical, though contentious, reforms suggested is the unbundling of INEC. The committee stated that for INEC to function efficiently, some of the functions it presently performs should be assigned to other agencies. Consequently, it recommended creating three new agencies.

These are: Political Parties Registration Council, PPRC; the Electoral Offences Commission; and the Constituency Delimitation Commissions. The PPRC would, among other things, register political parties in accordance with the 2006 Electoral Act and monitor their organisation and operations, including their finances.

It shall be composed of a chairman and a deputy, who must be of different genders, and six national commissioners representing the six geo-political zones, two of whom must be women.

The appointment and tenure procedures are the same as those for the INEC board and the technical management team. The President can remove members on the NJC's recommendation (TELL. January 26, 2009).

A new autonomous and constitutionally recognised body called the Electoral Offences Commission has been recommended to be established through a bill of the National Assembly and empowered to perform functions, which include: investigation of all electoral frauds and offences; co-ordination, enforcement and prosecution of offences and the enforcement of the Electoral Act 2006, the constitutions of registered political parties and any other Acts or enactments.

It shall be the chief executive officer; a deputy Chairman; six representatives of the six geopolitical zones; the Attorney- General of the Federation or his nominee, not below the rank of an assistant Inspector-General; and a Secretary who shall be the head of administration.

The Chairman and members shall be nonpartisan and appointed by the President, subject to confirmation by the Senate.

The third agency is the Constituency Delimitation Commission. This would be established with institutional representation from INEC, the National Population Commission, the National Boundary Commission, the Office of the Surveyor-General of the Federation, the National Bureau of Statistics, and the National Identity Management Commission.

A fourth body, Centre for Democratic Studies, CDS, is recommended to be established to undertake broad civic education for legislators, political office holders, security agencies, politicians, political parties and the general public.

7.3.1.3 Scrapping of State INEC

The committee recommends that the State Independent Electoral Commissions, SIECs, should be reorganised and structured into INEC to form a single election management body for the country.

At the state level, INEC will have 37 directors, one for each of the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), appointed by INEC and trained and posted to states other than their own.

At the local government level, INEC shall employ 774 full-time electoral officers through public advertisement and post them outside their local government areas. At least one-third of the numbers shall be women. Similarly, 8814 full-time career assistant electoral officers should be employed by INEC by the same process and posted within their wards.

To give this legal backing, Section 153 of the 1999 Constitution, which lists INEC as a Federal Executive Body, would be amended by deleting Sub-Section 1(f). Consequently, the term "INEC" should be deleted wherever it appears in Sections 153 to 158.

7.3.1.4 Voting Process

Regarding the voting process and procedure, the committee recommends the gradual introduction of electronic machines in future elections, following a period of limited testing and experimentation.

In future elections, accreditation and voting are to take place within a defined period. Agents of political parties are to be given copies of the results, and they have the right to demand a recount on the spot, should the need arise.

All election results duly signed and copies given to the party agents, the Police and the State Security Service should be announced at the polling stations by the presiding officer.

INEC is expected “swiftly and publicly” to display detailed results of the elections, including all polling station results and collated information on the number of voters, votes cast, invalid votes and others.

Emphasis is on the transparency of the result process to assure all stakeholders that the election is free, fair and credible. To enhance this, the results broken down by polling station should be provided at each higher level, and the results should be more detailed.

For the presidential election, INEC is to publish the results at the lowest level before declaring a winner, to demonstrate that the results are accurate and within expectations.

The committee says that this is very important because, without vote analysis, at least at the state level, it would be impossible to determine if all constitutional requirements for the election have been met.

7.3.1.5 Party Agents

Unlike the present practice, where party agents are accredited on election day, the committee recommends that accreditation be completed 14 days before the election.

However, fears have been expressed about this recommendation that such a long space may make it easier for a switch of the accredited agents, reveal the identities of the non-aligned ones and expose them to danger or business deals to rig the elections (TELL. January 26, 2009)

7.3.1.6 Independent Candidacy

A novel introduction is the recommendation for independent candidates. If accepted, some credible persons would be allowed to contest elections, provided they meet two conditions, in addition to the provisions of the 2006 Electoral Law.

It shall be a constituency-backed nomination, supported by verifiable signatures from 10 registered voters in each ward of the constituency, and subject to a refundable financial deposit if the candidate scores up to 10 per cent of the valid votes cast in the constituency.

7.3.1.7 Funding of Political Parties

The committee recommends that the government continue to fund political parties either directly or through INEC. This will, however, be based on the parties' performance in any election.

Parties are also encouraged to raise funds through other means, such as the sale of forms to candidates, fundraising, individual and corporate donations and through commercial activities.

However, there are ceilings on how much an individual can donate to a political party as follows: President, N20 million; Governor, N15 million; Senate, N10 million; House of Representatives, N5 million; Chairman of local government, N3 million; and councillor, N500,000. This is to check the influence of godfathers who buy off candidates with large donations, only to demand even larger returns later.

7.3.1.8 A Mixed-Electoral System

The committee recommends a mixed electoral system that combines majority-rule (first-past-the-post) and modified proportional representation for legislative elections at the federal, state, and local levels, except for the Senate.

For the House of Representatives, the existing 360 constituencies would be filled by the first-past-the-post system. At the same time, for the Senate, the committee recommends a mixed electoral system for the 108 seats. This will be replicated at the state and local government levels.

7.3.1.9 Disposal of Electoral Petitions before Swearing-in

Another recommendation is to resolve election disputes before elected officials are sworn in. Unlike now, when election disputes can last as long as the judges please, a six-month time limit has been set for resolving all

election disputes. In this regard, a maximum of four months would be spent at the tribunal stage, while the appeals resulting from the tribunal stage should take a maximum of two months. The election will, therefore, be conducted six months ahead of handing over (TELL, January 26, 2009)

7.3.1.10 Rejection of zero-sum politics

Furthermore, the committee rejects what it calls the zero-sum approach to politics, more popularly known as winner-takes-all.

Henceforth, political parties that win at least 2.5 per cent of the National Assembly seats shall be qualified for cabinet appointments.

It is the committee's considered view that this would reduce tension in the polity and give all stakeholders a voice in the country's governance.

This will also discourage smaller parties and less electorally influential politicians from adopting the 'Any Government In Power' (AGIP) attitude.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Explain the most important recommendations of the Muhammed Uwais Panel on electoral reforms.

7.3.2 The Importance of Electoral Reforms

The importance of an efficient electoral system cannot be overemphasised in any democratic political system. A good electoral system delicately balances the politics of participation with the politics of representation and ultimately contributes to the building of a viable and sustainable political culture.

Participation in the electoral process in a country not only lends legitimacy to decision-makers but also makes voters aware that they are active and effective participants, though indirectly, in their country's decision-making.

In a country where a good electoral system is in place, voting becomes much more than a ritual or a mechanical function, but an important instrument of citizen participation in the selection of their leaders.

After almost five decades of political independence and the fourth attempt at democratic government, Nigeria cannot yet be described as a stable political system. No country, including the advanced democracies, has yet devised a perfect process of electoral administration.

However, the difference between those countries and most developing states, including Nigeria, is that they have maintained uninterrupted electoral procedures. Over the years, their electoral systems have not only matured but also endured.

It is for this reason that an electoral reform becomes the most significant step towards realizing the goal of free and fair elections and sustainable democracy in the country. A closer look at the Uwais Panel's report will reveal that it is a summary of the major problems confronting electoral administration in Nigeria which, include lack of capacity and shoddy preparation by the electoral commission, inadequate logistics and irregular electoral outcomes that the courts have severally confirmed.

While most of the election results have been upheld on the grounds of substantial compliance, this has not removed the odious stigma or the lack of credibility or legitimacy attached to the beneficiaries of such controversial judicial decisions.

Using the language of system analysts, these election-related problems in Nigeria can be broadly categorised as system, process and policy inadequacies. They will continue to haunt the conduct of elections in the country unless they are addressed at their roots.

However, unfortunately, the attitude of the National Assembly towards electoral reforms in Nigeria conveys the impression that the laws makers are not enthusiastic about the reforms since according to Ume Ezeoke, the All Nigerian People's Party's (ANPP) National Chairman, the present political leadership in the country is loath, and apprehensive of any constitutional review, or electoral reform because as the major beneficiaries of the present unfair system, they are deliberately thwarting any move that may likely endanger their vested interests (Guardian, July 1, 2009:8). The legislators' attitude is a desire for self-preservation, and to expect them to proceed in the urgent manner that most Nigerians desire is to make them embark on an exercise in self-destruction or immolation. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the ruling party in the country, and with a comfortable majority in the two Houses of the National Assembly and its control of more than two-thirds of the states in the federation, has been identified as the biggest culprit in the conspiracy to frustrate the implementation of the recommendations of the Uwais Panel's report.

One would also expect President Yar'Adua, with his well-publicised Seven-point Agenda, if he is willing, to use his clout as the leader of the ruling party, to push his party members, to act swiftly, without further delays in (re)commencing the process of amending the relevant sections of the constitution and the electoral laws.

Apart from the Uwais report, there are many sources from which the government can get input on the right course of action.

Only recently, on February, 23, 2010, the former U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria, Mr Walter Carrington, delivered a lecture titled “Electoral Reform, Good Governance and Democracy: Lessons for Nigeria” where he stated that “the enormous powers wielded by the Independent National Electoral Commission were responsible for the flawed electoral process in Nigeria since the return to democracy in 1999”.

He suggested that INEC should be a “mostly administrative body” to stem the controversy over elections in Nigeria (The Guardian, February, 24, 2010). With all these interventions, the federal government cannot claim it lacks sufficient impetus to take the much-needed, urgent step of reforming the country's electoral system.

Any further delay, about a year before the next General Elections in 2011, may cast doubts on the prospects of conducting free and fair elections in the country in future.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Give reasons for the delay by the National Assembly in considering the report of the Uwais’ panel on electoral reforms.



7.4 Summary

We have established a case for electoral reforms in Nigeria, examining the problems that have confronted elections in this unit and the previous one.

We highlighted the major recommendations of the Muhammed Uwais panel on electoral reforms. We stressed the importance of the present administration addressing the issues raised in the report with dispatch.

This is the only way the government can convince Nigerians that it intends to conduct credible elections in the country in 2011 and thereafter.



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7.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Electoral malpractice can be classified as both attitudinal and systemic challenges, because it is caused by individual behaviour as well as weaknesses in political institutions.
- A. Attitudinal challenges refer to problems caused by the behaviour, values, and political culture of individuals.

Electoral malpractice falls under this category because some actors engage in unethical practices such as:

- Vote buying and selling
- Electoral violence
- Ballot box stuffing
- Bribery and intimidation

These actions reflect poor political culture, greed, lack of civic responsibility, and weak democratic values among citizens and political actors.

- B. Systemic challenges refer to problems within the structure and institutions of the political system.

Electoral malpractice is also systemic because it is encouraged by:

- Weak electoral institutions
- Poor enforcement of electoral laws
- Lack of transparency in vote counting
- Ineffective security during elections
- Weak punishment for offenders

These institutional weaknesses create opportunities for malpractice to occur and persist. Electoral malpractice is therefore both attitudinal and systemic, but systemic weaknesses often make attitudinal problems easier to express. Effective solutions require a political reorientation of citizens and strong institutional reforms.

2. Key recommendations of the Uwais Panel on Electoral Reforms included:

Full independence of the electoral body (INEC), including an independent funding mechanism

Transparent appointment process for the INEC Chairman, involving broader institutions rather than the executive alone

Establishment of an Electoral Offences Commission to prosecute electoral crimes

Creation of an independent body for election dispute resolution to speed up justice

Adoption of credible and transparent electoral processes, including improved voter registration and voting procedures

1. The delay by the National Assembly in considering the Uwais Panel report on electoral reforms was due to:

The political self-interest of legislators who benefited from the existing electoral system

Fear of losing control over electoral outcomes if reforms were fully implemented

Lack of political will to carry out far-reaching institutional changes
Controversial recommendations (e.g., independence of the electoral body)

Bureaucratic and legislative delays within the law-making process

MODULE 4 THEORIES OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE

- Unit 1 Spectrum of Political Attitudes
- Unit 2 Major Political Ideologies
- Unit 3 Revolution and Social Change

Unit 1 Spectrum of Political Attitudes

Unit Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
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 - 1.3.1.2 Liberal
 - 1.3.1.3 Moderate
 - 1.3.1.4 Conservative
 - 1.3.1.5 Reactionary
 - 1.3.2 Analysis of attitude towards certain political concepts
 - 1.3.2.1 Human and Economic Rights
 - 1.3.2.2 Rationalism
 - 1.3.2.3 Nationalism
 - 1.3.2.4 Equality
- 1.4 Summary
- 1.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources
- 1.6 Possible Answer to Self-Assessment Exercises



1.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. As you continue your study of Political Science, we now turn our attention to the different attitudes that political actors may hold towards change.

In this unit, you will explore the political spectrum and consider how actors positioned at different points may respond to attempts to change existing political arrangements.

We will move from the extreme left through the centre to the extreme right, examining the preferences and responses associated with each position. You will also consider the factors that can shape these attitudes and influence whether political actors support, resist, or seek to modify political change.

As you work through the unit, think about political events around you and how different groups respond to calls for change. Engage actively in the learning activities and use the provided examples to deepen your understanding of political attitudes and behaviour.



1.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the concept of political change and identify the key factors that shape citizens' attitudes towards it;
- differentiate between the major positions on the political spectrum: radical, liberal, moderate, conservative and reactionary.
- compare left-wing and right-wing attitudes towards human rights, rationalism, nationalism and equality; and
- analyse how factors such as age, education, economic interests and gender can influence citizens' support for or resistance to political change.



1.3 Political Change and Citizens' Attitudes

How do people react when political change comes to their society? Do they welcome it, resist it, or remain somewhere in between? Let us explore Political Change and Citizens' Attitudes and discover what shapes people's responses to change.

Any coherent explanation of political change is incomplete without knowing its direction and the values inherent in it. The conventional approach is to arrange the terms radical, liberal, moderate, conservative, and reactionary along a continuum to gain perspective on each.

Citizens who occupy each point on the political spectrum have an attitude about whether a change is necessary or not in the existing state of affairs (the status quo), and if not, why, and if yes, how? It is their attitude toward political change that will determine the policies they support or oppose, as well as the course of action they opt for.

Political change is not only a complex subject but is also fundamental to any society. Four things are relevant to the understanding of political change.

The first is the direction in which the proposed change will carry society. When progress is demanded, it could be a change that will endorse an existing policy or one that has not existed before.

Is it progressive or retrogressive? Will it carry society forward or backwards? The second is to determine the depth of a proposed change. Would the desired change amount to a major or minor adjustment in society? Would it modify or replace an institution that is fundamental to society as it now exists? The third aspect is the speed at which people want change. Here, the more dissatisfied people are with the status quo, the more impatient they are likely to be, and therefore the more rapidly they want to change. The last factor is the method by which it occurs. Is it peacefully or violently, legally or illegally? Political change can be achieved illegally, as it was in Russia in 1917 and in China in 1949.

The movement along a political spectrum should be devoid of emotional or moral values. New changes may be positive or negative. Let us now consider these four items, or criteria, and their relation to attitudes toward political change as represented at different points on the political spectrum.



Fig. 1.1 Political Change and Citizens' Attitudes

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Which of the following are criteria that can influence and be used to analyse the concept of political change?

- A. Political participation, leadership pattern, institutional reforms, and ideology
- B. Climate conditions, language diversity, rainfall patterns, and vegetation
- C. Population growth, trade balance, transportation, and tourism
- D. Religious beliefs, family size, occupation, and age

1.3.1 Major points on the Political Spectrum

Since we have explored Political Change and Citizens' Attitudes, let us take the next step by examining the Political Spectrum. This will help us understand where different political groups and individuals stand, from those who favour major, rapid change to those who prefer gradual reform or the maintenance of the existing order.

1.3.1.1 Radical

A radical is on the extreme left of the spectrum of political attitude, and can therefore be impatient with less than extreme proposals for changing it. Hence, all radicals favour an immediate and fundamental change in society. In other words, all radicals favour revolutionary change. Although all radicals want immediate change at society's foundation, a few of them (pacifists) completely reject violence as a means to achieve justice. Excellent examples of pacifists include Mahatma Gandhi (2008), the famed father of Indian independence, who successfully employed a nonviolent approach during India's struggle for freedom from British colonial rule. Another is Mr Martin Luther King Jnr., the late civil rights leader in America who followed in Gandhi's footsteps and was famous for his "I have a dream" speech. Ironically, both of them died violently in the hands of radical assassins, who preferred the extreme method to dialogue.

1.3.1.2 Liberal

Liberals are close to the status quo point on the continuum, which makes them significantly less dissatisfied with the existing state of affairs than radicals. Indeed, the liberals support the basic features of society but are quick to recognise its weaknesses and are therefore anxious to reform the system. One of the most fundamental differences between a radical and a liberal is their attitude toward the law. Radicals oppose the political system that governs them, so they often see the law as one way those who dominate society maintain their control. Liberals, on the other hand, generally respect the concept of law.

Although they may want to change certain specifics, they usually will not violate it; instead, they try to change the law through legal procedures. John Locke and Jeremy Bentham fall under this category.

1.3.1.3 Moderate

Moderates are fundamentally satisfied with society, although they agree there is room for improvement and recognise several specific areas that need to be modified.

However, they insist that changes in the system should be made gradually and that no change should be so extreme as to disrupt society. Unlike the other positions on the political spectrum, the moderates' category lacks a philosophical foundation.

Aristotle's advice about seeking the "Golden mean" is often cited by moderates to justify their stance.

Being moderate or taking a mild position about issues such as legalizing abortion or death penalty, it is difficult to take a moderate position. An example of a moderate position in Nigeria is the idea of "a little to the left and a little to the right" which military President, Ibrahim Babangida promoted as the manifestoes of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC), when the two parties were registered by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) for participation in the politics of the aborted Third Republic in the country.

1.3.1.4 Conservative

Conservatives are the most supportive of the status quo and, therefore, are reluctant to see it changed. Conservatives support the status quo not so much because they like it as because they believe it is the best that can be achieved now. Lacking confidence in society's ability to achieve improvements through bold policy initiatives, most conservatives support only very slow and superficial alterations of the system. The most cautious of them often resist and are even afraid of seemingly minor change. They tend to see intrinsic value in existing institutions and are unwilling to tamper with them, claiming that doing so might seriously damage what tradition has perfected.

As Edmund Burke, a leading Conservative, argues, the well-governed society is one in which people know their place. As he put it: "The rich, the able and the wellborn govern, while the people of lower social rank recognise their betters and willingly submit to their rule." Burke also believes that no single generation can create abrupt changes that will improve society. In his view, tinkering with institutions that have endured over the years will only destroy them. He also perceived civilisation as a fragile entity that could ruin society if not protected against human folly (Baradat, 2000).

1.3.1.5 Reactionary

Of all the political attitudes, only the reactionaries propose retrogressive changes; that is, a policy that would return society to a previous condition or even a former value system. For example, when the Shah of Iran was overthrown in 1979, the new government, headed by Ayatollah

Khomeini, returned the country to the pre-Shah era. By definition, reactionaries reject the notion of social progress as defined by people to their left, look back with pleasant nostalgia to the past and to previously held norms or values that kept such a society going.

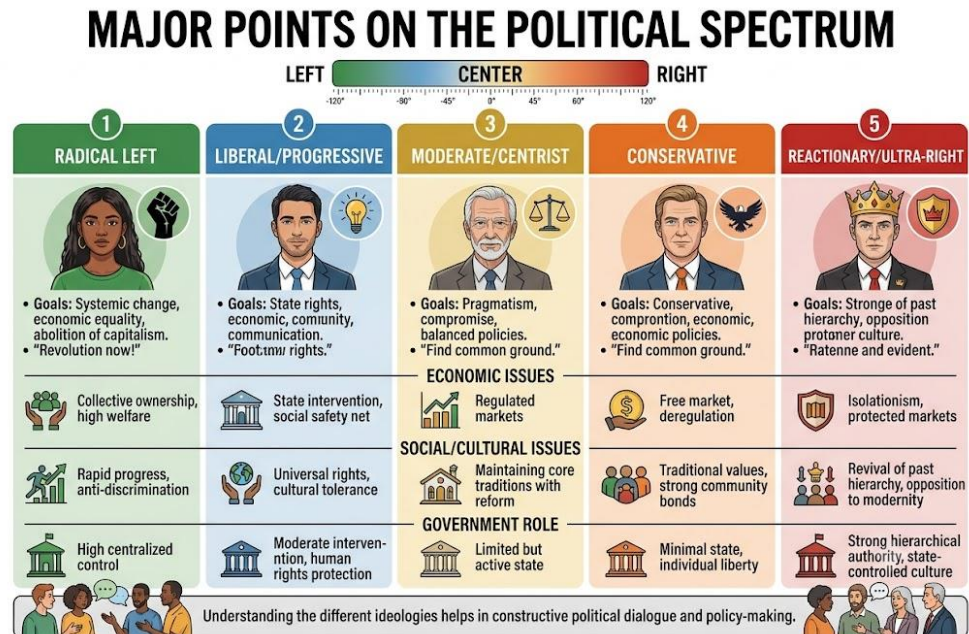


Fig. 1 .2 Major points on the Political Spectrum

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Compare the attitudes of a Radical and a Conservative toward political change.

1.3.2 Analysis of attitude towards certain political concepts

Each of the individuals we have identified above responds differently to some specific issues of concern to human societies. These include, among others, issues like human rights and equality.

1.3.2.1 Human and Economic Rights

The left is inclined towards personal liberty, especially as conceived in human rights. In other words, those whose political acts may be regarded as leftist placed emphasis on the extension of human rights. Right-minded political attitudes emphasise economic or property rights. Indeed, right-wing political attitudes regard property rights as inalienable. Political rights, they believe, can be used to equalise property ownership; so claimed the rightists.

1.3.2.2 Rationalism

Right-wing political attitudes tend toward irrationalism. For example, conservatives believed in the known, tried-and-tested methods and institutions of society. They do not usually accept that human beings can improve upon existing conditions. The left, on the other hand, believes in human rationality and contends that Marxism is, after all, anchored in the scientific method, including the recognition of man's capacity to change his conditions for the better. Since leftist political attitudes rely on human reason and intellect, we can say they are more consistent with man's quest for progress.

1.3.2.3 Nationalism

Rightists believed in Nationalism and metaphysical thinking. Leftists believed in internationalism, insisting that national frontiers are artificial and meant to promote exploitation in the name of national sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. The boundary leftists recognise is human, not geographical.

1.3.2.4 Equality

The left is egalitarian-minded, whilst the right is elitist. Leftists emphasise the basic equality of humanity. The left-wing politician will argue that the conditions for decent, equal living should be available to everyone. The rightist will argue that society is stratified and that human beings are unevenly endowed.

This thinking epitomises elitism. The rightists will say that some people are innately superior to others, while the leftists will say that men have equal talent or latent ability; what those talents are, they do not know unless they are developed.

They further argued that once all talents have been developed, each must be given equal opportunities to contribute to social development. According to the leftist, if an individual's talent is not developed, it is not the individual who suffers from it but society as a whole.

Many people suspect that economic pressures are the primary factors determining the particular political position a citizen takes. Other factors include age, which makes youth more liberal than older adults, educational status, psychological disposition, sex, etc.

Older adults, unlike youths, have very limited time to live, which makes them less likely to bother with change, the impact of which they may not live long enough to enjoy. However, the youth are rightly described as the leaders of tomorrow, and for that reason, they usually view change as something that concerns their future.

This makes the age structure of a country's population an important factor in political change, with youth as the fuel and raw materials for change and older people as the major force resisting it.

Similarly, educational status is another factor that can influence whether a citizen supports or opposes political change. Those who are educated can properly evaluate the content of the proposed change, gauge the possible impact of the method being planned to effect the change, and assess the impact of such a change on the fabric of society.

In most societies, since the bulk of the property class is educated, their attitude to change will certainly be influenced by the desire to preserve such interests.

The uneducated do not have the advantage of thoroughly weighing the merits and demerits of change, which makes it more likely they will plunge society into change. Similarly, males are more likely to seek change than females.

The factors of physiology and maternity have combined to make women both physically and emotionally less prepared for the struggle that normally precedes and accompanies change. At the same time, men, on the other hand, are better endowed with those qualities of vigour and sacrifice which political change requires.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

- A. Education reduces political awareness, while age prevents political participation
- B. Education increases political awareness, while age influences political participation and acceptance of change
- C. Education promotes dictatorship, while age discourages political opinions
- D. Education and age do not influence political change



1.4 Summary

In summary, our discussion in this unit centred on the major points on the political spectrum and their different attitudes toward change. For instance, while conservatives are averse to change, they support property rights, or private property. Liberals admit of non-harmful change and support human rights. Also, while the radicals favour egalitarianism, the conservatives oppose change and are inclined towards elitism. Conservatives are usually capitalist-biased since the system tends to be.



1.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources

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1.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

1. A
2. A Radical supports rapid and fundamental political change, often seeking to replace existing political structures completely. A Conservative, on the other hand, prefers gradual or limited change, aiming to preserve traditional institutions and maintain political stability.
3. B.

Unit 2 Major Political Ideologies

Unit Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Learning outcomes
- 2.3 Definition of ideologies
 - 2.3.1 Capitalism
 - 2.3.2 Communism
 - 2.3.3 An Appraisal of Different Ideologies
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 References/Further Reading/Web Resources
- 2.6 Possible Answers to SAQs



2.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. Having explored different political attitudes and responses to change, we now move into the ideas and beliefs that have shaped political thought and action across societies.

In this unit, you will encounter some of the major political ideologies that have influenced political systems, movements and debates over time.

We will follow important developments in the history of these ideas, including the contributions of Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, while considering how their arguments have influenced political and economic thinking.

As you work through the unit, you will also examine these ideas in the light of historical and contemporary events, allowing you to consider how far their claims have been supported or challenged by real-world developments.

Engage critically with the issues raised, reflect on different viewpoints, and use the learning activities to develop your own informed understanding.



2.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning, features and relevance of political ideology to political systems;
- compare the major characteristics of capitalism, socialism and communism;

- analyse the strengths, limitations and practical implications of different political ideologies; and
- evaluate the suitability of political ideologies for promoting socio-economic development and political stability in Nigeria.



2.3 Meaning and Definition of an Ideology

Ideologies were made necessary by the challenges of the Age of Enlightenment, when people believed they could improve their conditions by taking positive action rather than passively accepting life as it came.

Before the modern era, people were discouraged from seeking solutions to their problems. Politics had not yet become democratised. Ordinary people were not allowed to participate in the political system. Politics was reserved for the kings heading a small ruling class.

However, this view changed with the democratisation of politics and the social and economic upheavals that accompanied the Industrial Revolution (Baradat, 2000).

Political scientists do not agree on the exact definition of the term ideology. Frederick Watkins suggests that ideology comes almost entirely from the political extremes. Ideologies, he argues, are always opposed to the status quo.

They propose an abrupt change in the existing order; thus, they are usually militant, revolutionary and violent. In his view, most ideologies are stated in simplistic terms, are utopian in their objectives, and usually display great faith in man's potential to achieve success and happiness.

For example, the American Declaration of Independence, a political statement authored by Thomas Jefferson, and the Communist Manifesto, an economic doctrine written by Marx and Engels, fall within this definition.

David Ingersoll suggests that each ideology includes assessments of the status quo and a view of the future.

Karl Marx argues that ideology is nothing more than a fabrication used by the ruling class to justify its rule over the masses. Therefore, the dominant political ideas, or ideology of any society, would always reflect the interests of the ruling classes, which, according to him, were based on an incorrect interpretation of the nature of politics.

L.T Sarget argues that ideologies are based on the value systems of various societies, and provide the believer with the picture of the world both as it is and as it should be.

Although these definitions differ in their emphases, they share enough in common to allow for a broader understanding of ideology. Ideology is primarily a political term, though it can be applied to other contexts. Second, ideology consists of a view of the present and a vision of the future.

The preferred future is presented as a materialistic improvement over the present. This desirable future is often attainable, according to the ideology, within a single lifetime. As a result, one of the outstanding features of an ideology is its offer of hope. Third, ideology is action-oriented. It not only describes reality and offers a better future, but, most importantly, it gives specific directions on the steps that must be taken to achieve this goal. Fourth, ideology is directed at the masses (Baradat, 2000).

For example, Karl Marx, Benito Mussolini, Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong and Adolf Hitler directed their ideologies to the masses in their countries. To appeal to the masses, ideologies are usually couched in motivational terms.

In a simple language, ideologies are the set of ideas from which the individual perceives himself; a set of ideas that lay down rules of correct behavior and provides a justification for the behaviour of the citizens; the purpose and ideals of society, the direction in which the nation is going and the norms and values to be upheld in changing circumstances within the life of the nations would be embraced in the national ideology. Having defined ideology through the eyes of different scholars, we must discuss some of the world's influential ideologies.

Click the link or scan the QR code below to watch a short video on Ideology: Definition and Meaning.

Be sure to watch the video before proceeding, as it will help you develop a clearer understanding of what ideology means and its significance in political thought.

<https://youtu.be/bAY5eS50pHY?si=PESFCs4dma58iV-G>



Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Explain the relevance of an ideology to a political system.

2.3.1 Capitalism

The rudiments of capitalism were developed from Adam Smith's notion of the "invisible hand" in his book, *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith (1776) advocated the principle of Laissez-Faire, which held that government should remain aloof from economic matters and instead allow the forces of demand and supply to direct the economy, thereby encouraging competition. Therefore, competition is regarded as the engine of the capitalist system because it rests on the assumption that "the good of the whole is best served when each person pursues his or her own self-interest" (Baradat, 2000, p. 86).

Capitalism can therefore be defined as an economic system under which the ownership of the means of production is concentrated in the hands of a minor section of society. According to Awolowo (1978:57-61), capitalism has four basic concepts: private property, choice, equality and egoistic altruism.

Only the fourth component requires elaboration, since the other three are self-explanatory. Egoistic-altruism, or what Smith called the 'invisible hands', suggests that while pursuing his economic interest, every individual unconsciously promotes at the same time the economic interest of others.

Historically, capitalism developed after the collapse of the feudal system. Its springboard was the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century.

England, during which mechanisation replaced human labour, leading to the mass production of goods and services.

Capitalism is also related to democracy since both emphasise freedom of choice and individualism, otherwise referred to as the survival of the fittest. Though capitalism originated in Europe, today the United States is regarded as the bastion of capitalism in the world.

American capitalism reserves many of its greatest advantages for those with enough wealth to buy into the system. The adage "it takes money to make more money", and indeed to acquire political power, including the presidency, in the US, is true of American capitalist society.

However, the problem with capitalism is that it is exploitative and corruptive. Capitalism punishes abundance and rewards scarcity; labour is not rewarded in value commensurate with its input; the poor and the rich are left at the mercy of the few who are rich.

By means of monopolies or oligopolies, the capitalists can subvert the economy of any state to promote their self-interest and injure the interests of the masses. Because the capitalist system eschews central planning, it is always subject to intermittent crises, alternating between prosperity and recession.

Capitalism also promotes fierce division between the upper and lower classes, thereby encouraging the law of the jungle among men.

However, since the introduction of the welfare system in Europe and the New Deal under President F. D. Roosevelt in the US, attempts have been made to mitigate the evils of capitalism. Nevertheless, since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the discredit suffered by the socialist alternative and the apparent triumph of capitalism have led Francis Fukuyama to proclaim “the end of history perhaps prematurely.”

He described the event as “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalisation of western liberal democracy” (Huntington, 1996, p. 31).

Since then, other countries such as Russia and China in Asia, and Tanzania and Nigeria in Africa, have either joined the capitalist bandwagon or grafted free-market principles into their systems, thereby swelling the ranks of the capitalist bloc, led by the United States, Japan, Germany, and Britain.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Which of the following represents the major characteristics of a capitalist system?

- A. Military control, price regulation, and government monopoly
 - B. State ownership, central planning, and equal distribution of resources
 - C. Collective farming, one-party rule, and public ownership
 - D. Private ownership, profit motive, competition, and free market economy
- Socialism

According to Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, Socialism is an intermediate stage between capitalism and communism. Socialism is not only an economic system, but a movement and a complex ideology embracing social, political, and moral philosophy. Socialism has three basic features: public ownership of the means of production, distribution, and finance; the establishment of a welfare state; and a socialist intent.

Socialism seeks to extend its activities to all undertakings to promote equality and social welfare. It desires the expansion of state activities not for personal gain but to ensure freedom and justice for the individual.

To achieve this lofty goal, planning is central to socialism. The traditional way to socialise an economy is through nationalisation. Nevertheless, because of the problems associated with nationalisation, socialists are wary of adopting it.

Another problem with nationalism is that some industries are best run and most productive when left to the private sector.

Apart from production, another equally important issue for a socialist society is the distribution of goods and services.

The introduction of the New Deal in the 1930s by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt of the USA, despite the USA being a capitalist state, was a major attempt to even out the distribution of wealth in favour of people experiencing poverty. However, unlike communism, socialism is not completely egalitarian; it merely attempts to narrow the gap between the haves and have-nots.

While it recognises individual differences, which account for differences in status, Socialism seeks to eliminate poverty and to assure a reasonable and comfortable life for the citizens. The motto of socialism is “from each according to his ability and to each according to his deed.”

The principle of socialist intent set the goal of freeing citizens from material dependence. Since the condition of scarcity under capitalism makes people compete acutely, under socialism, cooperation is expected to replace competition.

The replacement of competition with co-operation in the machine age after the Industrial Revolution, the theory posits, will lead to greater productivity, the disappearance of class differences, and the elimination of tensions within society.

In some respects, one can say that socialism is also compatible with democracy, since it is to the individual economically what democracy is to the individual politically. Socialism is therefore the economic equivalent of democracy.

According to Harold Laski, “Socialism is the logical conclusion of democracy” (cited in Baradat, 2000:191). It is well known that money is a major source of political power. Thus, J. J Rousseau argued that an economic system that distributes wealth more evenly would enhance the practice of democracy.

The major problem with socialism is that it has many variants. There is scientific socialism, which strictly followed the doctrinaire exposition of Marx and Engels.

The differences in interpretation and the alleged shift from the original socialist dogma in the practice of the ideology in the former Soviet Union and China were among the reasons for the historic Sino-Soviet rift in the 1950s.

The Utopian socialism of Saint Simon and Robert Owen also differs from the Marxian approach because it sought to achieve socialist ends through peaceful means. In the early days of African independence, some African leaders, notably President Nyerere of Tanzania and President Kaunda of Zambia, toyed with the idea of African socialism, which they called Ujamaa and Humanism, respectively.

In Nigeria, Chief Awolowo equally advocated Democratic Socialism. Because of this lack of unanimity of view about socialism as an ideology, it is not unusual to hear people say: Not all socialists are Marxists, but all Marxists are socialists. Before 1991, socialist countries included many, such as East Germany, Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland, largely in Eastern Europe.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Identify the differences between a capitalist and a socialist system

2.3.2 Communism

Communism is a social and political system based on the doctrine developed by Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels in their book *The Communist Manifesto*, written in 1848. Communism interprets history as a relentless war between the wealthy and those who have to work to earn a living. It teaches that the economy is the foundation of societies, while other spheres, such as politics and religion, which they call the superstructure, are determined by economic factors.

The deep-seated conflict of interests between these two groups, they theorised, will lead to a class war between the oppressor and the oppressed. In the end, the proletariat (the lower class) will emerge victorious, establish its hegemony and create a true socialist commonwealth.

The communist reason is that, since history has shown that those who control power use it to perpetuate their dynasty, the democratic Utopia envisaged can only be attained through revolutionary or violent means (Azikwe, 1979, p. 26).

As a first step, a dictatorship of the proletariat will be established to eliminate all differences before the state apparatus disappears.

Under capitalism, the state is an instrument of arbitrary coercion and oppression and its executive “is but a committee for managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie”- in their ruthless exploitation of the working class. As the dictatorship directs society towards building an egalitarian society, there will be a greater willingness among every man to work to his own capacity, since the fruits of labour will be shared more equitably.

As the state apparatus withers, the communist slogan becomes “from each according to his ability and to each according to his need”. However, contrary to the Marxian prediction, the Soviet Union, a non-capitalist country, experienced a socialist revolution in 1917.

Moreover, for more than seven decades, until 1991, the Soviet Union remained a socialist state. However, it could be argued that the Soviet experience did not approximate genuine communism, since the state structure did not “wither away” or disappear as predicted by Marx.

The reason is that the Soviet Union never attained communism, the final stage of societal development. This was confirmed in 1961, when the Russian Communist Party declared that only socialism had been achieved, and, in line with the view of the communist historian Isaac Deutscher, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 was the beginning of the journey to communism (Watson, 1993, p. 184).

Under communism, the nation-state system is distrusted because it developed alongside capitalism. Marx argued that capitalists organised nation-states to create artificial separation from people who have a great deal in common, since, according to him, “working men have no country.” The Socialist Internationalists predicted that as various countries adopt socialism or communism, the need to break the artificial barriers among states would be realised.

A major feature of communism is the dominance of a one-party organisation. The communist party in the Soviet Union before 1991, for example, had a long tradition of obedience to decisions once made by the party’s hierarchy; while arguments could only be made about the interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, not about alternatives to it.

This arrangement complements the centrality of economic planning by ensuring that nothing important is left to private enterprise. Communism also demands a strong bureaucracy and a considerable curtailment of freedom until the emergence of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, who introduced the ideas of “*Glasnost*” and “*Perestroika*” to reform the practice of communism in the old Soviet Union, which ultimately led to the collapse of the Soviet-communist state and the abandonment of the ideology.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there have been attempts to discredit socialism and communism as alternative ideologies to capitalism. Though it is true that since the end of the Cold War, the socialist bloc has been in disarray, it is not clear that socialism has lost all its attractions or is dead, theoretically or politically.

Presently, Cuba, a Latin American country, still believes in the superiority of the socialist alternative, despite the determination of successive U.S. administrations since 1959 to undermine the Fidel (now Raúl) Castro-led government.

Self-Assessment Exercise 4

Differentiate between Socialism and Communism

2.3.4 An Appraisal of Different Ideologies

Having explained the meanings and features of the three main ideologies, we must appraise them to determine which is most appropriate for adoption today, either globally or in your country.

First, an ideology suitable for a country is one whose prescriptions are relevant to the people's political, economic, legal, and educational systems, as well as their social relations.

For a post-colonial state like Nigeria, an ideology that will shake off the imperial vestiges inherent in the country's educational system, so that its colonial orientation gives way to a development-focused system.

An ideology that will wean the nation's legal system from its colonial orientation, in such a way that it is no longer a rehash of English Common Law, but a body of laws reformed in consonance with national values and mores, including the substitution of the archaic notion of capital punishment, with a more equitable, just and fair system which is aimed at correcting rather than punishing offenders.

An ideology that will create an economic climate conducive to increasing capacity utilisation and human resources development, as well as bridge the gap between the very many, who are poor, and the very few, who are rich.

The experience of the former Soviet Union and the persistence of contradictions within its socialist system are pointers to the fact that a wholesale technical embrace of an ideology alone is insufficient as a national panacea. We now know that contrary to Karl Marx's theoretical predictions, socialism did not lead to the withering away of the State.

Mikhail Gorbachev's resort to "*Perestroika*" and "*Glasnost*" was not only an act of desperation but also an open admission that the Soviet system was overdue for reforms. However, the reforms, novel as they were for an already atrophied system, could not stop communism from being taken for a capitalist shock therapy until the Soviets abandoned it.

Like socialism or communism, capitalism, despite its outward veneer of resilience, has also failed to overcome its inherent contradictions. What has kept it afloat and safeguarded it from collapse is the adoption by most capitalist countries of what Karl Popper, in his book *The Poverty of Historicism*, has termed "reformist measures."

This package is embodied in what is popularly known as welfare policies, such as unemployment benefits, old-age pensions, and state-sponsored Medicare is prevalent in capitalist Western European Countries. It also predates what Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe (1979), in his book *Ideology for Nigeria*, christened Neo-Welfarism (Azikiwe, 1977).

If we contrast Azikiwe's "Neo-Welfarism" to Awolowo's preference for "Democratic Socialism", or Nkrumah's "Scientific Socialism" or Nyerere's "Ujamaa", it will, therefore, become clear that any discourse on ideology is a pure academic or polemical exercise in dialectical dissent.

We are not saying that ideology is irrelevant simply because it is loaded with doctrinaire complications; rather, a more reasonable attitude is to embrace it with caution. Even before Karl Marx, the utopian socialists, such as Robert Owen and Saint-Simon, were divided.

Joseph Proudhon, for instance, wrote *Philosophy of Poverty*, but Marx, in a bitter satiric reply, wrote his famous *Poverty of Philosophy*. However, both espoused socialist thought. Karl Popper's *The Open Society and the Closed Society* and *The Poverty of Historicism* are, to date, perhaps the most devastating assaults on Marxism and the theory of dialectics.

While the facts of a given event can be objectively determined and agreed upon by all reasonable people, their interpretation is influenced by subjective factors, personal beliefs, and value judgments.

If this is the case, the search for an appropriate ideology for any country should go beyond adopting or rejecting a particular ideology. A suitable ideology, therefore, must be deliberately conceived, and the citizens must be psychologically nurtured to accept and embrace it.

In a multi-national country like Nigeria, reconciling the primordial goals of the disparate groups that make up the country, within the context of an overarching national framework, must be the focus of an ideology.

The need for this harmonisation of goals and interests becomes more imperative if we realise that the former imperial powers that brought these groups together, motivated by the expediency of colonial interests, adopted the policy of “Divide and Rule”, which tore these groups apart rather than uniting them.

Azikiwe (1979:111-9) provided insight into how the integration of these ideologies can be achieved through what he called an eclectic philosophy and a pragmatic approach.

This is the only way visionary leadership, supported by an articulate citizenry, can enable a country to attain the goals of socio-economic development and political stability, rather than a straitjacketed adoption of a national ideology.

Self-Assessment Exercise 5

Estimate the justifications for the most suitable ideology for your country.



2.4 Summary

In this Unit, we have examined the origins and meaning of ideology as a political and philosophical concept. We also discussed the major ideologies and how the world has evolved from one ideology to another. We noted that Karl Marx employed the principles of dialectics and economic determination, or the materialist conception of history, to explain the inexorable forces and the motive that have been bringing about these changes.

We, however, observed that the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 did not technically follow Marx’s prediction, since Russia was not yet a capitalist state, and the event did not lead to the withering away of the state.

We ended the discussion by appraising the age-long debates between the supporters of the “status quo” and advocates of a utopian world.



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2.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Possible answer: An ideology gives direction and purpose to a political system by providing the beliefs, values, and principles that guide government policies and political actions. It helps to shape the structure of government and influences how political power is used in society.
2. D
3. A capitalist system is based on private ownership, profit motive, and free market competition, with limited government control. In contrast, a socialist system is based on public ownership, equal distribution of resources, and government control of major economic activities to promote social welfare.
4. Socialism is an economic and political system in which the government controls major means of production and distribution

to ensure fair distribution of wealth, but private ownership may still exist to some extent. At the same time, Communism is a more extreme form of socialism in which all means of production are collectively owned, private property is abolished, and the aim is to create a classless society in which resources are shared equally among all citizens.

5. The most suitable ideology for my country is democratic socialism because it combines political freedom with government responsibility for social welfare. It promotes economic equality, social justice, and public provision of basic services such as education, healthcare, and employment, while still allowing democratic participation and limited private ownership. This ideology is suitable because it can reduce poverty, promote development, and ensure fairness in the distribution of national resources.

Unit 3 Revolution and Social Change

Unit Structure

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3.1 Introduction

Welcome to this unit. As you continue your study of political ideas and their influence on society, we now turn our attention to revolution and social change. In this unit, you will explore major revolutionary movements and examine how significant political and social transformations have unfolded in different parts of the world.

We will consider the methods used by revolutionary movements to pursue their objectives and trace important historical examples, including the Puritan revolt in Britain, the American War of Independence and the French Revolution.

We will also examine how these developments provide a foundation for understanding the Marxist view of revolution and its wider influence on political thought.

As you work through the unit, reflect on what drives societies to challenge existing political arrangements and how different forms of change can shape the course of history. Engage actively with the learning activities and develop your own critical perspective.



3.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the meaning, origins and causes of revolutionary movements.
- Analyse Lenin's and Mao's revolutionary ideas and methods.
- Examine major revolutionary movements and their outcomes.
- Evaluate the role of revolutionary and liberation movements in political and social change.



3.3 Definition and Origins of Revolutionary Movements

A revolution is a sudden or abrupt change in a society's social structure. The concept of a revolution is distinct from evolution. While evolution is a gradual stage-by-stage progression, transition or development from one level to another, revolution is an unusual and often an unorthodox means of effecting change.

In the liberal social science disciplines, there is a preference for the non-violent method of change, which led Claude Ake(1988) to describe "Social Science as imperialism".

What Karl Marx and other succeeding generations of radical scholars, such as Claude Ake, Ola Oni, Bade Onimode, Edwin Madunagu and Okwudiba Nnoli, did was to transform the foot-dragging of bourgeois scholarship into an open resistance of the critical school.

They all conceive a revolution as political in character: it is concerned with the calculated overthrow of an existing political order, using as much force and terror as are deemed necessary to effect radical changes in men's moral, economic, social and intellectual lives (Nisbet, 1973, p. 207).

However, for a revolution to succeed, it also requires two other prerequisites: religious zeal or mentality and military tactics. Indeed, without the religious, almost messianic preoccupation, the Jacobins would not have succeeded in carrying out the French Revolution. Similarly, V. I. was clear about "What Is to Be Done?" In his "*The State and Revolution*", before he led the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917.

Indeed, the resemblance between the words "militant" and "military" as weapons of revolution is more than verbal. However, a revolution never occurs unless the objective conditions are ripe, which makes violent change inevitable. These conditions include poverty, political deprivation or exclusion and social injustice.

Lack of access to basic human needs is a prime cause of revolutions, especially when poor people see others living much better. Most revolutionary movements, therefore, espouse egalitarian ideas, advocating a more equitable distribution of wealth and power to appeal to and awaken the masses' consciousness.

Former President John Kennedy once explained one condition that contributes to a revolution, when he said: "Those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable".

Contrary to popular impression, a revolution is not necessarily spontaneous; it has to be planned and led to be meaningful and enduring. As Nisbet explained:

...The heart of every revolution, successful or unsuccessful, lies in small minorities-elites as they are known in modern social theory-composed of dedicated, often professionally trained individuals, conscious of themselves as communities, and working with technical knowledge as well as moral zeal toward the overthrow of a political order by whatever means are necessary.

Based on the criteria identified above, it is not easy to precisely place or date the beginning of the revolutionary tradition in history. Some believed that the American War of Independence in 1776 marked the onset of revolutionary movement or struggle. Others, however, argue that, in the strict sense of the word, it was not a revolution but a war of liberation from the mother country, since the objective was limited and did not involve a total reconstruction of the fabric of society.

Others are also willing to look back to the Puritan revolt of 1688, in which Cromwell, a soldier, played a vital role, and to the civil war, in which Parliament triumphed in a decisive victory over a now-weakened monarchy.

However, unlike in the French Revolution, where the unifying myth was earthly or worldly, the underlying pull and push in the Puritan revolt was an eternal Christian conviction, championed by the Jesuit order, led by Ignatius Loyola, himself a retired soldier.

This makes the 1789 French Revolution, which marked the end of the period of Royal absolutism under Louis XV, the first ideal revolution in modern history because it fully satisfied these criteria. Despite these

different views, it is beyond debate that each of these struggles represents a rejection or repudiation of the past and a fervent, determined desire for a new order.

What is striking in 1776, and perhaps similar to other revolts in their sentiments, is that the Americans not only wanted freedom from British rule but also embraced, as it was then, a novel and unprecedented republican democracy. In 1789, the French proclaimed freedom, equality and fraternity-a three-word slogan- employed by the coalition of the common people (The Third Estate) and the nobles (The Second Estate) to embark on the siege of the Bastille, where the king (First Estate) held sway.

A similar victory was achieved in 1688 in what later became known as the Glorious Revolution, when the English rose against the Catholic tyranny, and James II fled to France. Another common theme in these three incidents is that those who desired change were already dissatisfied with peaceful or conventional methods; rather, they were prepared to use unorthodox means and, in all the cases, actually used violence or force to achieve their objectives. Indeed, by opting for violence, they clearly anticipated Karl Marx, who, in 1848, along with his lifelong collaborator, Fredrick Engels, later developed a more profound, brilliantly articulated, and scientifically based violent method for reconstructing a new social order.

Examples of revolution in other countries of the world include: Russia 1917, China 1949, Cuba 1959, Algeria 1962, South Vietnam 1975, Cambodia 1975, Angola 1975, Iran 1979, Nicaragua 1979, Afghanistan 1992 and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004. However, we will discuss a few of them, citing two examples in Europe, one each in Asia and Latin America, and including some African countries where popular uprisings or revolts, commonly referred to as revolutions, have occurred.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Account for the criteria that will qualify a popular revolt as a revolutionary movement

3.3.1 The 1917 Russian Revolution

Vladimir I. Lenin was in exile in Siberia in 1898, where he encountered and studied Karl Marx's work. He was released in 1900 and went to Switzerland, where he turned into an apostle of Marxism. He later became a leader of the Russian Marxist movement.

This movement split into two due to irreconcilable ideological differences over the interpretation and practical application of Marxism. The first group, the Mensheviks, was led by the father of Russian Marxism, Georgi Plekhanov; they were the orthodox Marxists.

They insisted that the dialectics had to run their full course before the proletarian revolution. As far as they were concerned, Russia was not ripe for a revolution because it was still a feudal society in the pre-1917 years. They believed that without attaining the capitalist stage, a revolution in the Marxian sense was not possible.

On the other hand, the Bolsheviks, led by V. I. Lenin, rejected the Menshevik theory as too dogmatic. They argued that under certain circumstances, the proletariat and the peasantry could join forces and take control of the state.

Unlike Marx, who spent much of his time analysing capitalism and paid little attention to socialist/communist utopianism, Lenin was more pragmatic. Consequently, Lenin devoted himself to developing revolutionary doctrine and applying Marxism to concrete situations.

Lenin therefore restored violence to the doctrine, amended the theory to apply it to underdeveloped states, and filled the gap left by Marx regarding post-revolutionary proletarian society.



Fig. 3.1 The 1917 Russian Revolution

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

3.3.1.1 Ways by which V.I. Lenin modified the Marxist theory

1. Violence is the only action that would bring about meaningful change.
2. V. I. Lenin believed that the proletariat would not develop class consciousness without the intervention of a revolutionary group. Someone must ignite the revolution; Lenin recommended not even the labour unions, because they could be bought off.

3. Lenin believed that socialism could be imposed by a minority - a revolutionary vanguard - a small, disciplined, totally dedicated group which must include total commitment.
4. The vanguard of the proletariat in Russia was the Bolshevik party. It was renamed the Communist Party in 1918. The party would carry out the revolt or revolution, then impose a dictatorship on society as a whole. As Lenin saw it, it was not to be a dictatorship of the Bolsheviks over the proletariat.
5. Lenin also created a structure for the vanguard of the proletariat and the international movement. He called it the International Communist Movement (the Committers). Its duty was to encourage the socialist revolution to last or endure if other European nations embraced the socialist option.
6. Lenin succeeded in October 1917 when the Bolshevik Party carried out the socialist revolution in Russia. The revolution eventually led to the formation of the USSR, initially led by Lenin himself, who died in 1924.

Having laid the foundation for the socialist revolution in the USSR, he passed the mantle to his successor, Joseph Stalin, who also died in 1956. From 1956, Nikita Khrushchev ruled for eight years before being dismissed in 1964. Leon Brezhnev took over and ruled until he died in 1982. A succession of ageing leaders from Andropov to Chernenko ruled until 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev, a relatively young leader, emerged.

He reasoned that the 1917 revolution had not really achieved its objectives, given the stagnation and atrophy of the Soviet economy. Gorbachev therefore introduced far-reaching reforms that altered the course of the socialist revolution in the Soviet Union and ultimately led to the disintegration of the Soviet Empire.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Explain the methods used by V. I. Lenin to actualise Karl Marx's revolutionary doctrine in Russia in 1917.

3.3.2 The 1949 Chinese Revolution

The Communist Party of China was founded in 1921. Mao Tse-tung, the leader of the revolution, was born in 1893 and later became the leader of the Chinese Communist Party.

The Soviet Union was interested in China, and therefore, V. I. Lenin used the Comintern to coordinate the efforts of the Communists in China. Mao wrote a book titled *Report on the Human Peasant Movement*, which called upon the Communists to abandon the cities for the countryside

because the peasants, not the proletariat, were China's true revolutionaries.

With this document, Mao led the formation of what became 'Maoist thought'. However, it was not easy for Mao to translate his ideas into reality.

The Nationalists led the government of China. There was a rivalry between the Nationalists and the Communists because the Nationalists were already in control in China, and they saw Mao's idea as a threat to their positions. The nationalists, therefore, decided to silence the communists. To avoid destruction or annihilation, the communists embarked on a Long March. It lasted a few years.

About 100,000 people embarked on that journey, which covers 6,000 miles; only 35,000 survived (Baradat, 2000). A new base was established in Shensi province where the March ended. In 1949, Mao led the peasants to overthrow the Nationalists' government in a revolution successfully.



Fig. 3.2 The 1949 Chinese Revolution

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

3.3.2.1 Principles of Maoism

First, when the Communist Party in China took control of the government, it introduced the five-year plan, which attacked absentee landlords, sought to socialise the economy, and made it collectively owned. Second, Mao allowed the people to criticise his government, unlike the Soviet system, which suppressed dissent and imposed conformity or uniformity.

To achieve this, Mao used the phrase: "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools contend." Third, Mao believed in permanent revolution because it is the only means by which people can achieve their goals. Mao

did not believe in institutionalisation or bureaucratisation but in mass movement.

Fourth, Mao rejected Lenin's elitist reliance on the party to lead the revolution. Mao therefore invoked the slogan "red over expert" and called for the mobilisation of the masses, whom he described as the last line of defence of the revolution.

Fifth, Mao believed in guerrilla warfare, unlike Marx, who believed that revolution would happen by itself, or Lenin, who spoke of a vanguard party to lead a revolution.

Mao believed that revolution would happen over a long period. Sixth, Mao identified two objectives of a revolution: military and political, the two being inseparable, since, as he puts it, "political power also flows from the barrel of the gun".

According to him, the first military goal of a guerrilla war is to preserve oneself and destroy the enemy. Moreover, this can be done by destroying the opponent's fighting capabilities. The only thing essential to the guerrilla is the safe zone.

Politically, war is not won until you have convinced your opponent of the rightness of your course. As Mao put it, "surround the cities with the countryside"

Mao said in 1949, when he led the revolution: "From today on, the Chinese people have stood up. Never again will foreigners be able to tramp us."

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Identify the major idea behind Mao's type of revolution.
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3.3.3 The 1959 Cuban Revolution

Fidel Castro was born in 1927. His country, Cuba, was under the rule of a dictator named Fulgencio Batista. In 1953, Castro tried to seize a military installation but failed. He was arrested and imprisoned but was later released in 1955.

Castro went into exile in Mexico and returned to Cuba in 1956. He built a large following among the peasantry, to whom he promised land reforms and redistribution. Just like Mao, he embarked on guerrilla warfare, which eventually toppled Batista's government in December 1959.

Since the assumption of office in 1959, the communist inspired government of Fidel Castro faced consistent United States' hostility, which reached its peak in 1961 when the John Kennedy administration sponsored the Bay of Pigs insurrection against Castro's government.

However, with the support of the Soviet Union, Castro was able to ward off this rebellion, despite the international outrage and anxiety generated by the Cuban Missile Crisis. This dispute pitched Washington against Moscow. American consistent grouse against Cuba included Castro's anti-imperialist postures, the description of the U.S. as the colossus of the North, and his determination to export or ignite revolution in other Latin American countries, including African states, notably Angola.

Despite the U.S.'s opposition, Cuba has remained a communist state in the Americas like an oasis in a desert, and Castro retained his position first as Prime Minister, until 1976 when he took the title of President. Due to ill health, he resigned from office in 2008. Though still a third-world country, Cuba has recorded modest achievements since the 1959 revolution in the fields of education, public health, and racial equality, including substantial investment in agriculture, especially sugar cane production, its major foreign-exchange earner.



Fig. 3.3 The 1959 Cuban Revolution

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

Self-Assessment Exercise 4

Assess Fidel Castro's government in line with the objectives of the 1959 revolution in Cuba.

- A. It failed to achieve its objectives, as inequality and foreign domination increased.
- B. It fully achieved all its objectives, including total democracy and economic prosperity.
- C. It had no clear objectives and therefore cannot be assessed.
- D. It partially achieved its objectives by improving social services, but restricted political freedoms.

3.3.4 Revolution in Third World/African countries

Most third-world and African countries have had revolutionary movements at some point before and since their independence. During the Cold War years, the typical Third World revolutionary movement was a communist insurgency based in the countryside.

Those who view their leaders as promoting what they call US imperialism, which they consider to be against their national interest, organise such revolutions. Consequently, the domestic politics of third-world countries were coloured by the great-power politics of the East-West contest.

In reality, many of these governments and revolutions had little to do with global communism, capitalism or imperialism. They were indeed a local power struggle, largely between rural ethnic groups, into which great powers, for selfish reasons, were drawn.

The end of the Cold War in 1989 removed superpower support from both sides of domestic politics, and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the adoption of capitalist-oriented economic reforms in many countries, including Russia and China, reduced the appeal of communist-directed revolution.

Although Third World revolutions usually advocate for the poor rather than the rich and for nationalism rather than imperialism, the specific character of these movements varies across regions.

In the Arab world, for instance, some of the most potent revolutionary movements are motivated by extreme, or in the Western usage, fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic doctrine, as it was successfully launched in Iran in 1979 and Afghanistan in 1982.

Islamic political activities in the Middle East derive their main base of strength from championing the cause of the Palestinians against Israel (Zionism), or against the idea of an exclusive nuclear club or selective proliferation, or the poor masses against the rich elites. Thus, radical groups like Hezbollah run schools, hospitals, and control 12 seats in Lebanon's parliament as of 2001 (Goldstein). Through such activities, they gain legitimacy in the eyes of their people, rather than being perceived as terrorist organisations.

In Africa, also, where colonialism led to the creation of artificial boundaries that were at variance with ethnic divisions, many revolutionary claims or movements have continued to have a strong tribal appeal or primordial base, as it was successfully demonstrated in the

secession of Eritrea from Ethiopia and is ongoing in countries such as Sudan and Côte d'Ivoire.

In his book, *Revolutionary Pressures in Africa*, Claude Ake (1977:9) wrote of contradictions that arose between proletarian and bourgeois countries, which have created a class struggle between the two, “brought about revolutionary pressures in Africa” and intensified what he called “mutual alienation.” He identified neo-colonial dependency as the most salient feature of a post-colonial African state, a condition that is rooted in and perpetuated by global class struggle. He concluded that the class war can only be brought to an end through “socialist revolution”.

This, however, did not occur, especially with the collapse of the Soviet Union, a country that was passionate about spearheading the global overthrow of the capitalist system. However, there are about half a dozen countries in the continent where revolutionary activities, even if they do not approximate to Claude Ake’s prediction, have succeeded. They include, among others, Egypt, Algeria, Ghana, Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa. Let us briefly examine some of them.

3.3.5 Egyptian Revolution

The Egyptian Revolution was launched in 1952 by Gamal Abdel Nasser, who led the army in overthrowing King Farouk. The revolution began under a petty-bourgeois leadership that opposed the old regime's incapacity and corruption.

It proposed to modernise the country by striking at the old conservative order and ushering in a new era of economic progress that would end imperialist domination of Egypt. One of the objectives of the revolution was to considerably expand the state sector, which led to the nationalisation of heavy industries and major banks, including the Suez Canal, in 1956.

Nasser’s administration also granted the workers and peasants a formal majority of seats in the Egyptian National Assembly. These reforms were meant to realise the goals of Arab socialism, which was also anti-capitalist.

Despite these reforms, we must note that, for several reasons, Nasser was unable to establish a workers’ state. The revolution could not stop the bourgeoisie from freely buying and selling land up to a certain ceiling. Similarly, the state structure inherited from the former regime remained largely intact. There were also no organs of workers’ power, or independent trade unions, or an independent workers’ party, and no socialist consciousness among the broad masses. All of these have kept

the private sector very strong, if not dominant. Indeed, apart from the symbolic changes made under Abdul Nasser, the few gains of the revolution were not sustainable, as Nasser successors-Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, have returned Egypt to the pre-1952 era, especially with their enthusiastic embrace of Western powers, particularly the United States.



Fig. 3 .4 Egyptian Revolution

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

3.3.6 Ghanaian Revolution

The Ghanaian revolution can be seen in two phases. The first phase was noticed during the struggle for independence by Kwame Nkrumah, who advocated for independence for “Self-governance-Now” as opposed to Dr Joseph Danquah, his counterpart of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), whose slogan was ‘Self-Government within the shortest possible time’.

What actually made the struggle for independence in Ghana to be regarded as a revolution was that the militancy employed by Nkrumah in his slogans (we prefer self- government in danger to servitude in tranquility) and his eloquent (seek ye first the political freedom and every other thing shall be added unto it), though earned him detention where he won a colonial supervised election, but eventually succeeded in making Ghana the first black African country to gain independence in 1957.

The other phase of the Ghanaian Revolution was the cleansing of Ghana's socio-political and economic Augean Stable, especially through the execution of three former heads of state, Acheampong, Afrifa, and Akuffo, when Jerry John Rawlings came to power in 1981.

He transformed Ghanaian society by exposing the corrupt structures and people in the system. Afterwards, he transformed from a military ruler to a democratic leader, organised a successful transition, and laid the foundation in Ghana of what can now be referred to as an oasis of true democracy in the West African desert of guided or flawed democratic practice.



Fig. 3 .4 Ghanaian Revolution

Source: Gemini AI 07/08/2025, Adopted by E.Y. David

3.3.7 Ethiopian Revolution

In early 1974, Ethiopia entered a period of profound political, economic, and social change, frequently accompanied by violence. One major reason for the Ethiopian revolution was the need for modern forces to confront the traditional status quo to effect meaningful changes in the political, economic, and social nature of the Ethiopian state. This is because the government fails to effect significant change in the country's economic and political systems, leading to a falling standard of living, rising inflation, corruption, and famine, which affected several provinces.

It is important to note that the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution was initiated by the military, acting essentially in its own immediate interests. However, this later spread to the civilian population amid a general outburst of dissatisfaction.

Specifically, Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam led the revolution that ousted Emperor Haile Salassie from his authoritarian grip on power and his exploitative feudal regime. To some extent, the rule of Mengistu Haile

Mariam in Ethiopia is an exception to the general stereotype of military rule in Africa as an aberration, because his revolution liberated the long-oppressed and exploited working class. It created the necessary conditions for the subsequent rise of the Ethiopian Workers Party (EWP) and the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.



Fig. 3 .5 Ethiopian Revolution

(PDRE), with its own new system of provincial divisions and administration for a socialist government in Ethiopia.

3.3.9 Algeria, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa

The revolutions in these African countries were struggles to liberate these former colonial territories from oppressive, exploitative colonial regimes. This mostly took the form of guerrilla warfare aimed at independence. In Algeria the FLNA led by Ahmed Bembella provided the military vanguard while Frantz Fanon supplied the intellectual sinew; in Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo of the Patriot Front(an amalgam of ZANU and ZAPU) led the struggle; in Mozambique it was Samoral Machel who piloted the struggle; in Namibia Sam Njuoma was the hero of struggle while, in South Africa, the African National Congress, after it was unbanned and its leader, Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990, succeeded in achieving majority rule for the country in 1994.

It is important to note that not all liberation struggles in Africa entailed large-scale violence; there were countries such as Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Gambia where independence was negotiated.

Equally important is the case of Zimbabwe, where Robert Mugabe, after more than three decades in office, has succumbed to counter-revolutionary forces: manipulation of elections and annihilation of opposition forces to remain in power, economic mismanagement, corruption and gross human rights violations.

The only pretences to revolution his regime now show include indiscriminate seizure of white-owned farmlands, ostensibly to redress alleged past wrongs, and vitriolic verbal attacks on Western imperialists for interfering in Zimbabwe's internal affairs.

Apart from guerrilla wars for independence, African revolutions also took internal forms, such as revolts against despotic and authoritarian leaders. One could cite the example of the overthrow of Mobutu Sese Seko, the sit-tight ruler of former Zaire (now DRC), by Laurent Kabila as another variant of a revolution, since in this case, a corrupt and unpopular leader was replaced in a popular revolt and a new government was formed.

Self-Assessment Exercise 5

Examine the character of revolutionary movements in Africa.

- A. They are mainly characterised by violence, mass mobilisation, anti-colonial struggle, and demands for social and political change.
- B. They are always peaceful and strictly constitutional in nature.
- C. They are purely economic movements with no political objectives.
- D. They are led only by external foreign powers without local participation.



3.4 Summary

In this unit, we have discussed the concepts of revolution and social change. We identified the conditions that create a revolutionary situation. Moreover, submitted that a revolution is usually of a political character. We also cited examples of revolutionary movements from different countries around the world to illustrate the point that, though the emphasis may differ from one country to another, the objective of every revolution is to bring about radical change and institute a new social order.



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3.6 Possible Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

1. A popular revolt qualifies as a revolutionary movement when it leads to a fundamental and widespread change in the political, social, or economic structure of a society. It must involve mass participation, aim at overthrowing the existing system, and result in the replacement of old institutions or leadership with a new order. The movement must go beyond protest and bring about lasting transformation in the state.
2. Karl Marx's revolutionary doctrine was based on the overthrow of the capitalist system by the proletariat and the establishment of a classless society. However, Russia in 1917 did not fully fit Marx's expectation of an advanced capitalist society. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin adapted Marxist ideas to Russian conditions and successfully led the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Lenin actualised Marx's doctrine through several key methods:

- a. Adaptation of Marxism: He modified Marx's ideas to suit Russia's largely agrarian society by promoting a worker–peasant alliance.
 - b. Vanguard Party: He created a disciplined Bolshevik party to lead and direct the revolution.
 - c. Propaganda and Mobilisation: He used simple slogans like “Peace, Land and Bread” to gain mass support.
 - d. Exploitation of Crisis: He took advantage of political instability and the weakness of the Provisional Government. Use of Force (Revolution): He organised the October 1917 armed uprising to seize power.
 - e. Establishment of Proletarian Rule: He set up a government claiming to represent workers and began socialist reforms.
3. The major idea behind Mao Zedong's type of revolution was a peasant-based revolution, where rural masses (not just industrial workers) led the struggle. It emphasised protracted guerrilla warfare, mass mobilisation, and the gradual overthrow of existing authority to establish a socialist state.
4. D
- A. They are mainly characterised by violence, mass mobilisation, anti-colonial struggle, and demands for social and political change