

Part One

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**Basic Concepts
in World Politics**

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Unit 1

POLITICS

"Politics itself has a clear theoretical core but an irretrievably opaque perimeter"

Gordon Marshall, Ian McLean

"Politics is not the art of the possible. It consists of choosing between the disastrous and the unpalatable"

J. K. Galbraith US diplomat, economist,
and writer *Ambassador's Journal*

Politics¹ in its broadest sense, is the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live. Politics is thus inextricably linked to the phenomena of conflict and cooperation. On the one hand, the existence of rival opinions, different wants, competing needs and opposing interests guarantees disagreement about the rules under which people live. On the other hand, people recognize that, in order to influence these rules or ensure that they are upheld, they must work together with others. However, politics in this broad sense is better thought of as a search for conflict resolution than as its achievement, as not all conflicts are, or can be, resolved. However, four quite different notions of politics can be identified:

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- First, it is associated specifically with the art of government and the activities of the state. This is perhaps the classical definition of politics developed from the original meaning of the term in Ancient Greece (politics is

1. It is extremely difficult to define precisely and accurately what exactly politics is. Politics can be looked at from *two perspectives*

Narrow: politics as the art of government and the actions of a state

Broad: politics as power. Here we take politics outside the area of state, government and public life to view the subject in all social activities and in every aspect of human life.

derived from polis, literally meaning city-state). In this view politics is an essentially state-bound activity, meaning that most people, most institutions and most social activities can be regarded as being "outside" politics; **18**

- Second, politics is viewed as a specifically "public activity" in that it is associated with the conduct and management of the community's affairs rather than with the "private" concerns of the individual. Such a view can be traced back to Aristotle's (384-22BC) belief that it is only within a political community that human beings can live "the good life"; **23**
- Third, politics is seen as a particular means of resolving conflict, that is, by compromise, conciliation and negotiation, rather than through force and naked power; and
- Fourth, politics is associated with the production, distribution and use of resources in the course of social existence. **28**

The traditional view that politics boils down to "what concerns the state" has been reflected in the tendency for academic study to focus upon the personnel and machinery of government. To study politics is in essence to study government. However, if the stuff of politics is power and the distribution of resources, politics is seen to take place in, for instance, the family, the workplace, and schools and universities, and the focus of political analysis shifts from the state to society. **35**

Definitions of politics that relate it to the art of government, public affairs or peaceful compromise are based upon an essentially consensus model of society, which portrays government as basically benign and emphasizes the common interests of the community. However, views of politics that emphasize the distribution of power and resources tend to be based upon conflict models of society that stress structural inequalities and injustices. Karl Marx (1818-83) thus referred to political power as "merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another". Finally, there is disagreement about the moral character of political activity and about whether it can, or should, be brought to an end. **45**

"Politics runs in our blood"

Edward Kennedy Jr.

Reading Task

Answer the following questions relating to the above text.

- a. Why are the notions of conflict and co-operation so significant in politics?
.....
.....
- b. Can the four different notions of politics be linked together, and if so, how?
.....
.....
- c. Why is the "stuff" of politics applicable to domains other than the state?
.....
.....
- d. Is there a deficit of trust in politics nowadays?
.....
.....

Collocations

a. Adjective + politics

politics – domestic, internal, national, global, international, world, democratic, electoral, multiparty, contemporary, modern, mainstream.

e.g. **Consensus politics** places a high value on existing political institutions.

b. Verb + politics

to enter into
to go into
to get involved in } **politics**
to dabble in, be active in
to get embroiled
interfere/intervene

Vocabulary Tasks

A. Locate key lexical collocations in the text. Then use two of them in an original sentence.

- i.
- ii.

B. Retrieve key words from the text to define *Politics*.

.....

C. In the boxes below, match the words in the column on the left with their meanings on the right.

1.	democracy	A a country in which every aspect of life is controlled by the government and in which opposition is not tolerated
2.	republic	B a country in which people can choose their government via freely contested elections
3.	theocracy	C a country ruled by one person who has complete power, usually with the support of the military
4.	one-party state	D a country in which an unelected king or queen is head of state
5.	dictatorship	E a country in which the people elect their head of state, who is usually referred to as a president
6.	totalitarian state	F a society ruled by religious scholars or priests
7.	monarchy	G a country in which only one political party is permitted

Give your answers below

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.

D. People and bodies involved in politics.

Match the terms under A, with their definitions under B

A	B
1. Ministry	a. someone for whom politics is a career
2. Embassy	b. the head of state in many modern states
3. Ambassador	c. hall used by a group of legislators, many countries have two chambers
4. Mayor	d. a committee of the most important ministers in the government
5. President and Vice President	e. a representative of the people in Parliament
6. Cabinet	f. a department of state headed by a minister
7. Chamber	g. top diplomat representing his/her country abroad
8. Prime Minister	h. head of a town or city council
9. Statesman/woman	i. the building where an ambassador and his/her staff are based
10. Politician	j. the head of government or leading minister in many countries
11. Member of Parliament (MP)	k. someone who uses an important political position wisely and well

Give your answers below

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.

E. In the box below there are 15 words connected with Politics.

- i. Use them to fill in the blanks – in some cases you will need to make them plural.
- ii. Underline or ring round the collocations.

a. recess	d. devolution	g. legislation	j. consensus	m. houses
b. spokesman	e. policy	h. leader	k. poll	n. abstentions
c. veto	f. leak	i. budget	l. membership	o. constitution

1. The government is running a tight monetary to try to control inflation and tax fraud.
2. The minister has put forward a aimed at slowing down the economy.
3. The motion was carried out by 200 votes to 150; there were 60
4. Austria's application for of the EU was successful.
5. The bill was passed by both and sent to the President for signature.
6. Many Welsh would like to see more of power from Westminster.
7. According to the last opinion the Prime Minister is more unpopular than ever.
8. The crisis happened during the summer and Parliament had to be recalled.
9. Germany has a federal
10. A government revealed that discussions had been concluded on the treaty.
11. The of the current opposition criticised the Prime Minister for his failure to act.
12. There is a between all the major parties about what we should do now.
13. Parliament has introduced to control the sale of drugs.
14. The President has the power of over bills passed by Congress.

15. The government is investigating the latest of documents relating to the spy trial.

Give your answers in the box below

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.

Further Reading

Networking:

Websites: www.parliament.uk/ & www.whitehouse.gov/
The British Monarchy www.royal.gov.uk

Books: Nelson Mandela by Jayne Woodhouse.

Films: Absolute Power, 1997, directed by Clint Eastwood

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