

KEY CONCEPTS IN POLITICS.
GLOSSARY OF POLITICAL CONCEPTS

Civil Society

Civil Society is a highly contested concept but always centres on the idea of freedom, freedom of thought, freedom of conscience, freedom of expression, freedom of movement, freedom to enjoy privacy and autonomy in the management of one's personal life. Freedom of private individuals to associate voluntarily and to form organisations for pursuing common purposes and freedom to participate politically in ways that do not infringe upon the similar rights of others.

The concept of *Civil Society* can easily be misinterpreted. In any civil society individuals should be allowed to exercise *Civil Liberties* that refer specifically to the protection of the individual rights to form and express his/her own preferences or convictions and to act freely upon them in the private sphere with no undue intrusive interference by the government. Therefor correlating to a goal of limited or no government.

Civil Rights on the other hand refer more to the individual rights as a citizen within a government to participate freely and equally in politics and public affairs in order to promote his/her preferred public policies through lobbying and policy making. Therefor correlating to a popular or democratic government.

Democracy

A system of government in which effectively political power is vested in the people. In ancient Rome the term *democracy* was reserved exclusively for governmental systems in which the populace exercised this power directly through general assemblies of referenda to decide the most important questions of law and policy. In more contemporary usage *democracy* refers to a system in which the power of people is exercised only indirectly through freely elected representatives who are suppose to make government decisions according to the popular will or at least according to the supposed values and interests of the population.

Democracy has always been and will always be a concept that centres on the idea of power in the majority. In a truly democratic state the majority decide what is best for the people. Disputes as to the meaning of *democracy* lie in its interpretation. Less than 200 years ago bribing someone to vote for a particular government rep. or political party was acknowledged and excepted internationally. Today such clean-cut bribery is far less common but still super powers such as the media play a large part in democratic societies.

The significance of *democracy* has never been so apparent. In liberal, western societies democracy remains the back bone to a form of government in which power

is vested in the people. As populations increase the need for fair democracy has never been stronger.

Ideology

A comprehensive and coherent set of basic beliefs about political, economical, social and cultural affairs that is held in common by a sizeable group of people within a particular society. Such Ideas and teachings seek to explain how political, social and economical institutions really do work and also how such institutions ought to operate. Radical and revolutionary ideologies set unconventional, higher, or even utopian standards of living in regards to what would constitute a legitimate social, economic, political system by demonstrating in detail that the existing order does not even come close to meeting these standards. The way things are or the way things ought to be.

Disputes as to the meaning of *ideology* arise when ideologies are mistaken for ideas. In order for an idea to be an ideology it must be held in common by a sizeable group of people. What this means is *ideologies* unlike ideas can not simply be disregarded. More often than none ideologies are very complex and can be the centre for fierce political and social disputes.

The significance of *ideology's* are apparent when they constitute "systems of thought" (a set of ideas which are interrelated and more or less coherent). The concept of *ideology* is far less significant when applied to ideas such as conservatism or fascism that simply hang together without a systematic or coherent shape.

Legitimacy

The principles that indicate the acceptance of decisions of government leaders and officials by the majority of the public on the grounds that these leaders have acquired these positions legitimately and in accordance with the societies generally accepted procedures and political or moral values. *Legitimacy* may be conferred upon power holders in a variety of ways in different societies, usually involving solemn formal rituals of religious or quasi-religious nature. Royal and coronations in monarchies, popular election and swearing-in in democracies.

An example of the significance of legitimacy or rather lack of legitimacy is apparent in most modern monarchies. In the UK for example if you are born or marry into the monarchy you have immediate rights and are placed in a position of authority. Years ago the acceptance of the decisions made by our monarchy and the people surrounding the monarchy were paramount. Today however there has been somewhat of a shift from monarchy to government but legitimacy still remains.

State

A specialised type of political organisation characterised by a full time, specialised, professional work force of tax collectors, soldiers, policemen or bureaucrats. And the like that exercises supreme political authority over defined territory with a permanent population. Independent from any enduring external political control and possessing a local predominance of coercive power great enough to maintain general obedience to its laws or commands within its territorial borders.

The importance and significance of the concept of state has been at the forefront of modern politics for years. Since the Second World War the idea of individual *states* has become increasingly less important. After WW2 the state of Germany only existed geographically. The politics that once governed Germany no longer existed. For the first time ever different countries through out Europe had to combine political ideas of law to prosecute the Nazis. Since WW2 the break down of borders and the unquestionable shift towards globalisation has never been so obvious. Soon the concept of individual *state* politics may well be replaced with a more international type of political ideology.

Class

Social division based upon economic or social factors such as wealth, income, status, living conditions and so on. A social class there for constitutes a group of people who share similar social and economic positions. Marxists use class-consciences to denote an awareness of class interests and a willingness to pursue them. The most common *class* structure is known as a tripartite structure of lower, middle and upper (based primarily on wealth). More recently however as *class* is becoming less apparent more complex structures of class have emerged taking factors such as education into account.

The Marxist idea of *class* splits people up into two distinct groups, the proletariat's (workers) and the bourgeoisie (owners) and states that one day the proletariat's will revolt and over throw the bourgeoisie. In Western Europe and the USA *class* has been apparent prominently since the industrial revolution. Before the revolution land was passed on from generation to generation. People either had money or did not and accepted the fact. Since the revolution however the distinction between upper (owners), lower/middle (workers) has lived on through to today.

Authority

Authority in its broader sense, is a form of power, sometimes thought of as 'legitimate power' whereas power is the ability to influence the behaviour of others. *Authority* is the right to do so. *Authority* is there for based on an acknowledged duty to obey rather than a form of coercion or manipulation. If too much *authority* is applied authoritarian ideas emerge. In a form of government in which a large amount of authority is invested in the state, at the expense of individual rights. Often power in authoritarian systems is centred on a small group of autocratic leaders usually used in a negative sense.

Authority and the significance of *authority* as an idea/concept changes due to many contributing factors such as government, or lack of and monarchies. Disputes as to the meaning of the concept *Authority* don't lie in its literal meaning i.e. "the right to influence the behaviour of others" but rather what gives someone the right to be in a position where *authority* can be applied. *Authority* is generally applied through democracy but democracy isn't perfect therefor *authority* can and has been placed in the wrong hands.

The significance of authority lies in the hands of those who apply it. Authority is essential in many circumstances such as the competent running of army's and police forces. The significance of authority in such institutes differs depending on the competency of he who remains in ultimate authority i.e. the Prime Minister, President or Monarch.

Power

The Capacity for a personal or impersonal instance to bring someone to do (or not to do) that which left to himself, he would not necessarily have done. It is immediately obvious that the greatest conceivable power lies in the possibility of performing someone in such a way that of his own accord, he does what one wants him to do, without any need for domination.

Power like most concepts can be interpreted differently depending on the context in which it's discussed. Power comes in all shapes and sizes and is very much dependant on the individual. What one person perceives, as powerful another may not i.e. parents. Much like authority there is little disputes as to the literal meaning of power. But rather disputes as to its allocation. History has been tarnished with people's disputes as to the allocation of power. Most recently the in Russia but most significantly during the French Revolution.

In democratic societies power is invested in the individual. In fascist dictatorships power can lie in the hands on individuals. Whichever the case may be power still remains extremely significant.

Sovereignty