CHAPTER 4

Democracy and Legitimacy

'Democracy is the worst form of government except all the other forms that have been tried from time to time.'

WINSTON CHURCHILL, Speech, UK House of Commons (11 November, 1947)

PREVIEW

Although states may enjoy a monopoly of coercive power, they seldom remain in existence through the exercise of force alone. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau put it, 'The strongest is never strong enough unless he turns might into right and obedience into duty'. This is why all systems of rule seek legitimacy or 'rightfulness', allowing them to demand compliance from their citizens or subjects. Legitimacy is thus the key to political stability; it is nothing less than the source of a regime's survival and success. In modern politics, debates about legitimacy are dominated by the issue of democracy, so much so that 'democratic legitimacy' is sometimes viewed as the only meaningful form of legitimacy. However, the link between legitimacy and democracy is both a relatively new idea and one that is culturally specific. Until well into the nineteenth century, the term 'democracy' continued to have pejorative implications, suggesting a form of 'mob rule'; and, in parts of the developing world, democracy promotion continues to be associated with 'westernization'. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which we are all now democrats. Liberals, conservatives, socialists, communists, anarchists and even fascists are eager to proclaim the virtues of democracy and to demonstrate their own democratic credentials. Indeed, as the major ideological systems have faltered or collapsed since the late twentieth century, the flame of democracy has appeared to burn yet more strongly. As the attractions of socialism have faded, and the merits of capitalism have been called into question, democracy has emerged as perhaps the only stable and enduring principle in the postmodern political landscape.

KEY ISSUES

- How do states maintain legitimacy?
- Are modern societies facing a crisis of legitimation?
- Why is political legitimacy so often linked to the claim to be democratic?
- What are the core features of democratic rule?
- What models of democratic rule have been advanced?
- How do democratic systems operate in practice?

CONCEPT

Legitimacy

Legitimacy (from the Latin *legitimare*, meaning 'to declare lawful') broadly means 'rightfulness'. Legitimacy therefore confers on an order or command an authoritative or binding character, thus transforming power (see p. 5) into authority (see p. 4). Political philosophers treat legitimacy as a moral or rational principle; that is, as the grounds on which governments may demand obedience from citizens. The *claim* to legitimacy is thus more important than the *fact* of obedience. Political scientists, however, usually see legitimacy in sociological terms; that is, as a willingness to comply with a system of rule regardless of how this is achieved.

LEGITIMACY AND POLITICAL STABILITY

The issue of legitimacy, the rightfulness of a regime or system of rule, is linked to the oldest and one of the most fundamental of political debates, the problem of political obligation. Why should citizens feel obliged to acknowledge the authority of government? Do they have a duty to respect the state and obey its laws? In modern political debate, however, legitimacy is usually understood less in terms of moral obligations, and more in terms of political behaviour and beliefs. In other words, it addresses not the question of why people *should* obey the state, in an abstract sense, but the question of why they *do* obey a particular state or system of rule. What are the conditions or processes that encourage them to see authority as rightful, and therefore underpin the stability of a regime? This reflects a shift from philosophy to sociology, but it also highlights the contested nature of the concept of legitimacy.

Legitimizing power

The classic contribution to the understanding of legitimacy as a sociological phenomenon was provided by Max Weber (see p. 82). Weber was concerned to categorize particular 'systems of domination', and to identify in each case the basis on which legitimacy was established. He did this by constructing three ideal types (see p. 20), or conceptual models, which he hoped would help to make sense of the highly complex nature of political rule. These ideal types amount to three kinds of authority:

- traditional authority
- charismatic authority
- legal–rational authority.

Each of these is characterized by a particular source of political legitimacy and, thus, different reasons that people may have for obeying a regime. In the process, Weber sought to understand the transformation of society itself, contrasting the systems of domination found in relatively simple traditional societies with those typically found in industrial and highly bureaucratic ones.

Weber's first type of political legitimacy is based on long-established customs and traditions (see p. 82). In effect, *traditional* authority is regarded as legitimate because it has 'always existed': it has been sanctified by history because earlier generations have accepted it. Typically, it operates according to a body of concrete rules: that is, fixed and unquestioned customs that do not need to be justified because they reflect the way things have always been. The most obvious examples of traditional authority are found amongst tribes or small groups in the form of patriarchalism (the domination of the father within the family, or the 'master' over his servants) and gerontocracy (the rule of the aged, normally reflected in the authority of village 'elders'). Traditional authority is closely linked to hereditary systems of power and privilege, as reflected, for example, in the survival of dynastic rule in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Morocco. Although it is of marginal significance in advanced industrial societies, the survival of monarchy (see p. 292), albeit in a constitutional form, in the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands

Max Weber (1864–1920)

German political economist and sociologist. Following a breakdown in 1898, Weber withdrew from academic teaching, but he continued to write and research until the end of his life. He was one of the founders of modern sociology, and he championed a scientific and value-free approach to scholarship. He also highlighted the importance to social action of meaning and consciousness. Weber's interests ranged from social stratification, law, power and organization to religion. He is best known for the thesis that the Protestant ethic encourages the development of capitalism, and for his analysis of bureaucracy. Weber's most influential works include *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1902), *The Sociology of Religion* (1920) and *Economy and Society* (1922).

CONCEPT

Tradition

Tradition may refer to anything that is handed down or transmitted from the past to the present (long-standing customs and practices, institutions, social or political systems, values and beliefs, and so on). Tradition thus denotes continuity with the past. This continuity is usually understood to link the generations, although the line between the traditional and the merely fashionable is often indistinct. 'Traditional' societies are often contrasted with 'modern' ones, the former being structured on the basis of status (see p. 152) and by supposedly organic hierarchies, and the latter on the basis of contractual agreement and by democratic processes.

and Spain, for example, helps to shape political culture by keeping alive values such as deference, respect and duty.

Weber's second form of legitimate domination is *charismatic* authority. This form of authority is based on the power of an individual's personality; that is, on his or her 'charisma' (see p. 83). Owing nothing to a person's status, social position or office, charismatic authority operates entirely through the capacity of a leader to make a direct and personal appeal to followers as a kind of hero or saint. Although modern political leaders such as de Gaulle, Kennedy and Thatcher undoubtedly extended their authority through their personal qualities and capacity to inspire loyalty, this did not amount to charismatic legitimacy, because their authority was essentially based on the formal powers of the offices they held. Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler (see p. 47), Ayatollah Khomeini (see p. 167), Fidel Castro and Colonel Gaddafi are more appropriate examples.

However, charismatic authority is not simply a gift or a natural propensity; systems of personal rule are invariably underpinned by 'cults of personality' (see p. 302), the undoubted purpose of which is to 'manufacture' charisma. Nevertheless, when legitimacy is constructed largely, or entirely, through the power of a leader's personality, there are usually two consequences. The first is that, as charismatic authority is not based on formal rules or procedures, it often has no limits. The leader is a Messiah, who is infallible and unquestionable; the masses become followers or disciples, who are required only to submit and obey. Second, so closely is authority linked to a specific individual, that it is difficult for a system of personal rule to outlive its founding figure. This certainly applied in the case of the regimes of Napoleon, Mussolini and Hitler.

Weber's third type of political legitimacy, *legal–rational* authority, links authority to a clearly and legally defined set of rules. In Weber's view, legal–rational authority is the typical form of authority operating in most modern states. The power of a president, prime minister or government official is determined in the final analysis by formal, constitutional rules, which constrain or limit what an office holder is able to do. The advantage of this form of authority over both traditional and charismatic authority is that, as it is attached to an office rather than a person, it is far less likely to be abused or to give rise to injustice. Legal–rational authority therefore maintains limited government and, in

CONCEPT

Charisma

Charisma was originally a theological term meaning the 'gift of grace'. This was supposedly the source of the power that Jesus exerted over his disciples. As a sociopolitical phenomenon, charisma refers to charm or personal power: the capacity to establish leadership (see p. 300) through psychological control over others. Charismatic authority therefore includes the ability to inspire loyalty, emotional dependence and even devotion. Although it is usually seen as a 'natural' capacity, all political leaders cultivate their charismatic qualities through propaganda, practised oratory and honed presentational skills.

addition, promotes efficiency through a rational division of labour. However, Weber also recognised a darker side to this type of political legitimacy. The price of greater efficiency would, he feared, be a more depersonalized and inhuman social environment typified by the relentless spread of bureaucratic (see p. 361) forms of organization.

Although Weber's classification of types of legitimacy is still seen as relevant, it also has its limitations. One of these is that, in focusing on the legitimacy of a political regime or system of rule, it tells us little about the circumstances in which political authority is challenged as a result of unpopular policies, or a discredited leader or government. More significantly, as Beetham (1991) pointed out, to see legitimacy, as Weber did, as nothing more than a 'belief in legitimacy' is to ignore how it is brought about. This may leave the determination of legitimacy largely in the hands of the powerful, who may be able to 'manufacture' rightfulness through public-relations campaigns and the like.

Beetham suggested that power can only be said to be legitimate if three conditions are fulfilled. First, power must be exercised according to established rules, whether these are embodied in formal legal codes or in informal conventions. Second, these rules must be justified in terms of the shared beliefs of the government and the governed. Third, legitimacy must be demonstrated by an expression of consent on the part of the governed. This highlights two key features of the legitimation process. The first is the existence of elections and party competition, a system through which popular consent can be exercised (as discussed below in connection with democratic legitimacy). The second is the existence of constitutional rules that broadly reflect how people feel they should be governed (which are examined in Chapter 15).

Legitimation crises and revolutions

An alternative to the Weberian approach to legitimacy has been developed by neo-Marxist (see p. 64) theorists. While orthodox Marxists were inclined to dismiss legitimacy as bogus, seeing it as nothing more than a bourgeois myth, modern Marxists, following Gramsci (see p. 175), have acknowledged that capitalism is in part upheld by its ability to secure political support. Neo-Marxists such as Jürgen Habermas (see p. 84) and Claus Offe (1984) have therefore focused attention not merely on the class system, but also on the machinery through which legitimacy is maintained (the democratic process, party competition, welfare and social reform, and so on). Nevertheless, they have also highlighted what they see as the inherent difficulty of legitimizing a political system that is based on unequal class power. In *Legitimation Crisis* (1973), Habermas identified a series of 'crisis tendencies' within capitalist societies that make it difficult for them to maintain political stability through consent alone. At the heart of this tension, he argued, lie contradictions and conflicts between the logic of capitalist accumulation, on the one hand, and the popular pressures that democratic politics unleashes, on the other.

From this perspective, capitalist economies are seen to be bent on remorseless expansion, dictated by the pursuit of profit. However, the extension of political and social rights in an attempt to build legitimacy within such systems has stimulated countervailing pressures. In particular, the democratic process has led to escalating demands for social welfare, as well as for increased popular

Jürgen Habermas (born 1929)

German philosopher and social theorist. After growing up during the Nazi period, Habermas was politicized by the Nuremburg trials and the growing awareness after the war of the concentration and death camps. Drawn to study with Adorno (1903–69) and Horkheimer (1895–1973), he became the leading exponent of the 'second generation' of the Frankfurt School of critical theory. Habermas work ranges over epistemology, the dynamics of advanced capitalism, the nature of rationality, and the relationship between social science and philosophy. During the 1970s, he developed critical theory into what became a theory of 'communicative action'. Habermas' main works include *Towards a Rational Society* (1970), *Theory and Practice* (1974) and *The Theory of Communicative Competence* (1984, 1988).

participation and social equality. The resulting expansion of the state's responsibilities into economic and social life, and the inexorable rise of taxation and public spending, nevertheless constrain capitalist accumulation by restricting profit levels and discouraging enterprise. In Habermas' view, capitalist democracies cannot permanently satisfy both popular demands for social security and welfare rights, and the requirements of a market economy based on private profit. Forced either to resist popular pressures or to risk economic collapse, such societies would find it increasingly difficult, and eventually impossible, to maintain legitimacy. (The implications for political stability of economic and financial crises are discussed in Chapter 6.)

A very similar problem has been identified since the 1970s in the form of what is called government 'overload'. Writers such as Anthony King (1975) and Richard Rose (1980) argued that governments were finding it increasingly difficult to govern because they were subject to over-demand. This had come about both because politicians and political parties were encouraged to outbid one another in the attempt to get into power, and because pressure groups were able to besiege government with unrelenting and incompatible demands. Government's capacity to deliver was further undermined by a general drift towards corporatism (see p. 251) that created growing interdependence between government agencies and organized groups. However, whereas neo-Marxists believed that the 'crisis tendencies' identified in the 1970s were beyond the capacity of capitalist democracies to control, overload theorists tended to call for a significant shift of political and ideological priorities in the form of the abandonment of a 'big' government approach.

In many ways, the rise of the New Right since the 1980s can be seen as a response to this legitimation, or overload, crisis. Influenced by concerns about a growing **fiscal crisis of the welfare state**, the New Right attempted to challenge and displace the theories and values that had previously legitimized the progressive expansion of the state's responsibilities. In this sense, the New Right amounted to a 'hegemonic project' that tried to establish a rival set of pro-individual and pro-market values and theories. This constituted a public philosophy that extolled rugged individualism, and denigrated the 'nanny state'. The success of this project is demonstrated by the fact that socialist parties in states as differ-

● **Fiscal crisis of the welfare state**: The crisis in state finances that occurs when expanding social expenditure coincides with recession and declining tax revenues.

Focus on . . .

Why do revolutions occur?

Why do regimes collapse? Should revolutions be understood primarily in political terms, or are they more a reflection of deeper economic or social developments? Contrasting theories of revolution have been advanced by Marxists and non-Marxists. In Marxist theory, revolution emerges out of contradictions that exist at a socio-economic level. Marx (see p. 41) believed that revolution marks the point at which the class struggle develops into open conflict, leading one class to overthrow and displace another. Just as the French Revolution was interpreted as a 'bourgeois' revolution, the Russian Revolution was later seen as a 'proletarian' revolution that set in motion a process that would culminate in the establishment of socialism and, eventually, full communism. However, revolutions have not come about as Marx forecast. Not only have they tended to occur in relatively backward societies, not (as he predicted) in the advanced capitalist countries, but Marxist revolutions were often *coup d'états* rather than popular revolutions.

A variety of non-Marxist theories of revolution have been advanced. Systems theorists have argued that revolution results from 'disequilibrium' in the political system, brought about by economic, social, cultural or international changes to which the system itself is incapable of responding – the 'outputs' of government become structurally out of line with the 'inputs'. The idea of a 'revolution of rising expectations' suggests that revolutions occur when a period of economic and social development is abruptly reversed, creating a widening gap between popular expectations and the capabilities of government. The classic statement of this theory is found in Ted Gurr's *Why Men Rebel* (1970), which links rebellion to 'relative deprivation'.

The social-structural theory of revolution implies that regimes usually succumb to revolution when, through international weakness and/or domestic ineffectiveness, they lose their ability, or the political will, to maintain control through the exercise of coercive power. Theda Skocpol (1979) explained the outbreak of the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions in these terms, but they could equally be applied to the swift and largely bloodless collapse of the Eastern European communist regimes in the autumn and winter of 1989 (see p. 44).

ent as the UK, France, Spain, Australia and New Zealand have accommodated themselves to broadly similar goals and values. As this happened, a political culture that once emphasized social justice, welfare rights and public responsibilities gave way to one in which choice, enterprise, competition and individual responsibility are given prominence.

However, legitimation crises may have more dramatic consequences. When faltering support for a regime can no longer be managed by adjustments in public policy or a change in leadership, legitimacy may collapse altogether, leading either to a resort to repression, or to **revolution**. While evolutionary change is usually thought of as **reform**, revolution involves root-and-branch change. Revolutions recast the political order entirely, typically bringing about an abrupt and often violent break with the past. Although there is considerable debate about the causes of revolution, there is little doubt that revolution has played a crucial role in shaping the modern world. The American Revolution (1776) led to the creation of a constitutional republic independent from Britain and gave practical expression to the principle of representation. The French Revolution (1789) set out to destroy the old order under the banner of 'liberty,

● **Revolution**: A popular uprising, involving extra-legal mass action, which brings about fundamental change (a change in the political system itself) as opposed to merely a change of policy or governing elite.

● **Reform**: Change brought about within a system, usually by peaceful and incremental measures; reform implies improvement.

equality and fraternity', advancing democratic ideals and sparking an 'age of revolution' in early nineteenth-century Europe. The Russian Revolution (1917), the first 'communist' revolution, provided a model for subsequent twentieth-century revolutions, including the Chinese Revolution (1949), the Cuban Revolution (1959), the Vietnamese Revolution (1975) and the Nicaraguan Revolution (1979). The Eastern European Revolutions (1989-91) and the rebellions of the Arab Spring (2011) (see p. 88) nevertheless re-established the link between revolution and the pursuit of political democracy.

Democratic legitimacy

Modern discussions about legitimacy are dominated by its relationship to democracy, so much so that democratic legitimacy is now widely accepted as the only meaningful form of legitimacy. The claim that a political organization is legitimate is therefore intrinsically linked to its claim to be democratic. The next main section examines competing models of democratic rule and debates how democracy operates in practice, but this section considers the nature of the link between democracy and legitimacy. Democracy can be seen to promote legitimacy in at least three ways. In the first place, it does so through **consent**. Although citizens do not explicitly give their consent to be governed, thereby investing political authority with a formal 'right to rule', they do so implicitly each time they participate in the political process. In this respect, democracy underpins legitimacy by expanding the opportunities for political participation, most importantly though the act of voting, but also through activities such as joining a political party or interest group or by engaging in protests or demonstrations. Political participation, in this sense, binds government and the people, encouraging the latter to view the rules of the political game as rightful and so to accept that they have an obligation to respect and obey those in authority.

Second, the essence of democratic governance is a process of compromise, conciliation and negotiation, through which rival interests and groups find a way of living together in relative peace, rather than resorting to force and the use of naked power. The mechanisms through which this non-violent conflict resolution takes place, notably elections, assembly debates, party competition and so forth, thus tend to enjoy broad popular support as they ensure that power is widely dispersed, each group having a political voice of some kind or other. Third, democracy operates as a feedback system that tends towards long-term political stability, as it brings the 'outputs' of government into line with the 'inputs' or pressures placed upon it. As democracy provides a mechanism through which governments can be removed and public policy changed, it tends to keep 'disequilibrium' in the political system to a minimum, enabling legitimation crises to be managed effectively and substantially undermining the potential for civil strife, rebellion or revolution.

Nevertheless, the notion of an intrinsic link between legitimacy and democracy has also been questioned. Some, for example, argue that the high levels of political stability and low incidence of civic strife and popular rebellion in democratic societies can be explained more persuasively by factors other than democracy. These include the fact that, having in the main advanced capitalist economies, democratic societies tend to enjoy widespread prosperity and are effective in 'delivering the goods'. Democratic legitimacy

● **Consent**: Assent or permission; in politics, usually an agreement to be governed or ruled.

CONCEPT

Trust

Trust means faith, a reliance on, or confidence in, the honesty, worth and reliability of another person. It is therefore based on expectations of others' future actions. Political trust consists in the level of confidence people have in one another in discharging their civic responsibilities and, crucially, the confidence citizens have that politicians generally, and leaders in particular, will keep their promises and carry out their public duties honestly and fairly. In liberal theory, trust arises through voluntary contracts that we uphold through mutual self-interest. In communitarian theory, trust is grounded in a sense of social duty and a common morality.

may therefore be less significant than 'capitalist legitimacy'. A further factor is that democratic societies tend to be liberal as well as democratic, liberal democracy (see p. 270) being the dominant form of democracy worldwide. Liberal societies offer wide opportunities for personal freedom, self-expression and social mobility, and these may be as important, or perhaps more important, in maintaining legitimacy than the opportunities that democracy offers for political participation.

Even if democracy is accepted as the principal mechanism through which legitimacy is promoted, there are reasons for thinking that its effectiveness in this respect may be faltering. In particular, mature democratic societies appear to be afflicted by growing political disenchantment or disaffection. This has been most evident in declining electoral turnouts and in the falling membership of mainstream political parties. For some, this 'democratic malaise' is a product of the tendency within democratic systems for politicians to seek power by promising more than they can deliver, thereby creating an expectations gap. As this gap widens, trust in politicians declines and healthy scepticism about the political process threatens to turn into corrosive cynicism. The issue of political disenchantment is examined in greater detail in Chapter 20.

Non-democratic legitimacy?

If democracy is taken to be the only genuine basis for legitimacy, this implies that non-democratic regimes are, by their nature, illegitimate. Nevertheless, some authoritarian regimes survive for many decades with relatively little evidence of mass political disaffection, still less concerted opposition. Clearly, this can very largely be explained through the use of coercion and repression, fear rather than consent being the principal means through which citizens are encouraged to obey the state. However, non-democratic regimes rarely seek to consolidate their hold on power through coercion alone. They typically adopt a two-pronged approach in which political control is exercised alongside claims to legitimacy. But, in the absence of democracy, what means of legitimation are available to such regimes?

Three key forms of non-democratic legitimation have been used. First, elections, albeit one-party, sometimes non-competitive or 'rigged' elections, have been used to give a regime a democratic façade, helping both to create the impression of popular support and to draw people into a ritualized acceptance of the regime. This legitimation device was used in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, and has also been used African one-party states and communist regimes. Second, non-democratic regimes have sought performance legitimation based on their ability to deliver, amongst other things, rising living standards, public order, improved education and health care, and so forth. Communist regimes thus emphasize the delivery of a package of socio-economic benefits to their citizens, a strategy that continues to be practised by China through its ability to generate high levels of economic growth.

Third, ideological legitimation has been used, either in an attempt to uphold the leader's, military's or party's right to rule, or to establish broader goals and principles that invest the larger regime with a sense of rightfulness. Examples of the former include Gamal Abdel Nasser's portrayal of the Egyptian military as the 'vanguard of the revolution' after its 1952 *coup*, and Colonel Gaddafi's proclama-

POLITICS IN ACTION . . .

The Arab Spring: democracy comes to the Arab world?

Events: The 'Arab Spring' (also known as the 'Arab revolutions' or the 'Arabic rebellions') was a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests that swept through North Africa and parts of the Middle East during 2011, toppling four dictators. The process was initiated by Tunisia's 'Jasmine' revolution, in which a growing wave of anti-government rallies in early January turned into a nationwide revolt due to incidents of police repression. On 14 January, President Ben Ali fled the country, bringing an end to his 23-year rule. Inspired by events in Tunisia, Egyptian demonstrators took to the streets on January 25, calling for the removal of President Hosni Mubarak; Tahrir Square, in Cairo, becoming the centre of protests. Under growing pressure from the Egyptian military and after 18 days of protests, Mubarak resigned on 11 February. In Libya, the 42-year rule of President Muammar Gaddafi was brought to an end by an eight-month civil war, in which rebel forces were supported by NATO aerial attacks, thanks to a no-fly zone imposed by the UN Security Council. Gaddafi's death on October 22 signalled the final collapse of his regime. Other significant popular uprisings in the Arab world occurred in Yemen (where President Saleh was forced from power in November 2011), in Syria (against President Assad) and in Bahrain.

Significance: There are significant debates about both the causes and consequences of the Arab Spring. Why did the uprisings occur? Clearly, as with the 1989 East European Revolutions, demonstrators were inspired, inflamed or emboldened by developments elsewhere, creating a chain reaction of protest, in this case often facilitated by the internet and social networking sites such as Facebook. The underlying factors were nevertheless common to much of the Arab world: poor living standards, widening inequality, rampant unemployment (particularly affecting the young), police violence and a lack of human rights. Ethnic and religious tensions were also significant in countries such as Syria, Libya and Bahrain. Nevertheless, such circumstances did not always translate into successful revolutions, or even, as in cases such as Sudan and Saudi Arabia, popular uprisings. Where these revolutions succeeded, three factors were significant. A broad section of the population, spanning ethnic and religious groups, and socio-economic classes, were mobilized; the loyalty of key elites, and especially in the military, started to fracture; and international powers either refused to defend embattled governments or gave moral and, in the case of Libya, military support to opponents of the regime.

What kind of political change will the Arab Spring bring about? Three possibilities offer themselves. The first is a transition to democratic rule, giving the lie to the view that, being mired in 'backward' cultural and religious beliefs, the Arab world is not ready for democracy. Certainly, the key demands of protestors were for the introduction of western-style democratic reforms, notably free and competitive elections, the rule of law and protections for civil liberties. Moreover, where regimes collapsed, this was invariably accompanied by the promise to hold free elections, as duly occurred during 2011 in Tunisia in October and in Egypt in November–December. The second possibility is that the hope for a smooth transition to stable democracy will be disappointed as some kind of recast authoritarianism emerges once the post-revolutionary honeymoon period ends. This scenario is supported by the crucial role still played by the military, especially in Egypt, and by the likelihood that, as divisions start to surface within the former-opposition, a perhaps lengthy period of political instability and policy reversals may develop. The third possibility is that, although the revolutions were strongest in the relatively secular Arab republics of North Africa, the long-term beneficiaries of the Arab Spring will be Islamist radicals, who initially appeared to play a marginal role. Not only are Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, generally better organized than their rivals, but post-revolutionary chaos and uncertainty offer fertile ground for advancing the politics of religious regeneration.

tion of a 'Green revolution' after seizing power in Libya in 1969. Examples of the latter include the emphasis on Marxism-Leninism in communist states and the use of Wahhabism to support monarchical rule in Saudi Arabia. However, when such strategies fail, all semblance of legitimation evaporates and non-democratic regimes are forced either to resort to progressively more draconian means of survival, or else they collapse in the face of popular uprisings. This can be seen in the case of the so-called 'Arab Spring' of 2011 (see p. 88).

DEMOCRACY

Understanding democracy

Debates about democracy extend well beyond its relationship to legitimacy. These stem, most basically, from confusion over the nature of democracy. The origins of the term 'democracy' can be traced back to Ancient Greece. Like other words ending in 'cracy' (for example, autocracy, aristocracy and bureaucracy), democracy is derived from the Greek word *kratos*, meaning power, or rule. Democracy thus means 'rule by the *demos*' (the *demos* referring to 'the people', although the Greeks originally used this to mean 'the poor' or 'the many'). However, the simple notion of 'rule by the people' does not get us very far. The problem with democracy has been its very popularity, a popularity that has threatened the term's undoing as a meaningful political concept. In being almost universally regarded as a 'good thing', democracy has come to be used as little more than a 'hurrah! word', implying approval of a particular set of ideas or system of rule. In Bernard Crick's (1993) words, 'democracy is perhaps the most promiscuous word in the world of public affairs'. A term that can mean anything to anyone is in danger of meaning nothing at all. Amongst the meanings that have been attached to the word 'democracy' are the following:

- a system of rule by the poor and disadvantaged
- a form of government in which the people rule themselves directly and continuously, without the need for professional politicians or public officials
- a society based on equal opportunity and individual merit, rather than hierarchy and privilege
- a system of welfare and redistribution aimed at narrowing social inequalities
- a system of decision-making based on the principle of majority rule
- a system of rule that secures the rights and interests of minorities by placing checks upon the power of the majority
- a means of filling public offices through a competitive struggle for the popular vote
- a system of government that serves the interests of the people regardless of their participation in political life.

Perhaps a more helpful starting point from which to consider the nature of democracy is Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address (1863). Lincoln extolled the virtues of what he called 'government of the people, by the people, and for

CONCEPT

Political equality

Political equality means, broadly, an equal distribution of political power and influence. Political equality can thus be thought of as the core principle of democracy, in that it ensures that, however 'the people' is defined, each individual member carries the same weight: all voices are equally loud. This can be understood in two ways. In liberal-democratic theory, political equality implies an equal distribution of political rights: the right to vote, the right to stand for election and so on. In contrast, socialists, amongst others, link political influence to factors such as the control of economic resources and access to the means of mass communication.

the people'. What this makes clear is that democracy links government to the people, but that this link can be forged in a number of ways: government *of*, *by* and *for* the people. This section explores the implications of these links by considering three questions. Who are the people? In what sense should the people rule? And how far should popular rule extend?

Who are the people?

One of the core features of democracy is the principle of political equality, the notion that political power should be distributed as widely and as evenly as possible. However, within what body or group should this power be distributed? In short, who constitutes 'the people'? On the face of it, the answer is simple: 'the *demos*', or 'the people', surely refers to *all* the people; that is, the entire population of the country. In practice, however, every democratic system has restricted political participation, sometimes severely.

As noted, early Greek writers usually used *demos* to refer to 'the many': that is, the disadvantaged and usually propertyless masses. Democracy therefore implied not political equality, but a bias towards the poor. In Greek city-states, political participation was restricted to a tiny proportion of the population, male citizens over the age of 20, thereby excluding all women, slaves and foreigners. Strict restrictions on voting also existed in most western states until well into the twentieth century, usually in the form of a property qualification or the exclusion of women. Universal suffrage was not established in the UK until 1928, when women gained full voting rights. In the USA, it was not achieved until the early 1960s, when African-American people in many Southern states were able to vote for the first time, and in Switzerland universal suffrage was established in 1971 when women were eventually enfranchised. Nevertheless, an important restriction continues to be practised in all democratic systems in the form of the exclusion of children from political participation, although the age of majority ranges from 21 down to as low as 15 (as in Iranian presidential elections up to 2007). Technical restrictions are also often placed on, for example, the certifiably insane and imprisoned criminals.

Although 'the people' is now accepted as meaning virtually all adult citizens, the term can be construed in a number of different ways. The people, for instance, can be viewed as a single, cohesive body, bound together by a common or collective interest: in this sense, the people are one and indivisible. Such a view tends to generate a model of democracy that, like Rousseau's (see p. 97) theory, examined in the next main section, focuses upon the 'general will' or collective will, rather than the 'private will' of each individual. Alternatively, as division and disagreement exist within all communities, 'the people' may in practice be taken to mean 'the majority'. In this case, democracy comes to mean the strict application of the principle of **majority rule**. This can, nevertheless, mean that democracy degenerates into the 'tyranny of the majority'. Finally, there is the issue of the body of people within which democratic politics should operate. Where should be the location or 'site' of democracy? Although, thanks to the potency of political nationalism, the definition 'the people' is usually understood in national terms, the ideas of local democracy and, in the light of globalization (see p. 142), **cosmopolitan democracy** (discussed in the final section of the chapter) have also been advanced.

● **Majority rule**: The rule that the will of the majority, or numerically strongest, overrides the will of the minority, implying that the latter should accept the views of the former.

● **Cosmopolitan democracy**: A form of democracy that operates at supranational levels of governance and is based on the idea of transnational or global citizenship.

How should the people rule?

Most conceptions of democracy are based on the principle of 'government *by* the people'. This implies that, in effect, people govern themselves – that they participate in making the crucial decisions that structure their lives and determine the fate of their society. This participation can take a number of forms, however. In the case of direct democracy, popular participation entails direct and continuous involvement in decision-making, through devices such as referendums (see p. 201), mass meetings, or even interactive television. The alternative and more common form of democratic participation is the act of voting, which is the central feature of what is usually called 'representative democracy'. When citizens vote, they do not so much make the decisions that structure their own lives as choose who will make those decisions on their behalf. What gives voting its democratic character, however, is that, provided that the election is competitive, it empowers the public to 'kick the rascals out', and it thus makes politicians publicly accountable.

There are also models of democracy that are built on the principle of 'government *for* the people', and that allow little scope for public participation of any kind, direct or indirect. The most grotesque example of this was found in the so-called '**totalitarian democracies**' that developed under fascist dictators such as Mussolini and Hitler. The democratic credentials of such regimes were based on the claim that the 'leader', and the leader alone, articulated the genuine interests of the people, thus implying that a 'true' democracy can be equated with an absolute dictatorship. In such cases, popular rule meant nothing more than ritualized submission to the will of an all-powerful leader, orchestrated through rallies, marches and demonstrations. This was sometimes portrayed as plebiscitary democracy. Although totalitarian democracies have proved to be a travesty of the conventional notion of democratic rule, they demonstrate the tension that can exist between 'government *by* the people' (or popular participation), and 'government *for* the people' (rule in the public interest). Advocates of representative democracy, for example, have wished to confine popular participation in politics to the act of voting, precisely because they fear that the general public lack the wisdom, education and experience to rule wisely on their own behalf.

How far should popular rule extend?

Now that we have decided who 'the people' are, and how they should rule, it is necessary to consider how far their rule should extend. What is the proper realm of democracy? What issues is it right for the people to decide, and what should be left to individual citizens? In many respects, such questions reopen the debate about the proper relationship between the public realm and the private realm that was discussed in Chapter 1. Models of democracy that have been constructed on the basis of liberal individualism have usually proposed that democracy be restricted to political life, with politics being narrowly defined. From this perspective, the purpose of democracy is to establish, through some process of popular participation, a framework of laws within which individuals can conduct their own affairs and pursue their private interests. Democratic solutions, then, are appropriate only for matters that specifically relate to the

● **Totalitarian democracy**: An absolute dictatorship that masquerades as a democracy, typically based on the leader's claim to a monopoly of ideological wisdom.

Focus on . . .

Direct democracy or representative democracy?

Direct democracy (sometimes 'classical', 'participatory', or 'radical' democracy) is based on the direct, unmediated and continuous participation of citizens in the tasks of government. Direct democracy thus obliterates the distinction between government and the governed, and between the state and civil society; it is a system of popular self-government. It was achieved in ancient Athens through a form of government by mass meeting; its most common modern manifestation is the use of the referendum (see p. 201). The merits of direct democracy include the following:

- It heightens the control that citizens can exercise over their own destinies, as it is the only pure form of democracy.
- It creates a better-informed and more politically sophisticated citizenry, and thus it has educational benefits.
- It enables the public to express their own views and interests without having to rely on self-serving politicians.
- It ensures that rule is legitimate, in the sense that people are more likely to accept decisions that they have made themselves.

Representative democracy is a limited and indirect form of democracy. It is limited in that popular participation in government is infrequent and brief, being restricted to the act of voting every few years. It is indirect in that the public do not exercise power themselves; they merely select those who will rule on their behalf. This form of rule is democratic only insofar as representation (see p. 197) establishes a reliable and effective link between the government and the governed. This is sometimes expressed in the notion of an electoral mandate (see p. 200). The strengths of representative democracy include the following:

- It offers a practicable form of democracy (direct popular participation is achievable only in small communities).
- It relieves ordinary citizens of the burden of decision-making, thus making possible a division of labour in politics.
- It allows government to be placed in the hands of those with better education, expert knowledge and greater experience.
- It maintains stability by distancing ordinary citizens from politics, thereby encouraging them to accept compromise.

community; used in other circumstances, democracy amounts to an infringement of liberty. Not uncommonly, this fear of democracy is most acute in the case of direct or participatory democracy.

However, an alternative view of democracy is often developed by, for example, socialists and radical democrats. In **radical democracy**, democracy is seen not as a means of laying down a framework within which individuals can go about their own business but, rather, as a general principle that is applicable to all areas of social existence. People are seen as having a basic right to participate in the making of *any* decisions that affect their lives, with democracy simply being the collective process through which this is done. This position is evident in socialist demands for the collectivization of wealth and the introduction of workers' self-management, both of which are seen as ways of democratizing economic life. Instead of endorsing mere political democracy, socialists have therefore called for 'social democracy' or '**economic democracy**'. Feminists, similarly, have demanded the democratization of family life, understood as the right of all to

● **Radical democracy**: A form of democracy that favours decentralization and participation, the widest possible dispersal of political power.

● **Economic democracy**: A broad term that covers attempts to apply democratic principles to the workplace, ranging from profit-sharing and the use of workers' councils to full workers' self-management.

CONCEPT

Plebiscitary democracy

Plebiscitary democracy is a form of democratic rule that operates through an unmediated link between the rulers and the ruled, established by plebiscites (or referendums). These allow the public to express their views on political issues directly. However, this type of democracy is often criticized because of the scope it offers for demagoguery (rule by political leaders who manipulate the masses through oratory, and appeal to their prejudices and passions). This type of democracy may amount to little more than a system of mass acclamation that gives dictatorship a populist (see p. 307) gloss.

participate in the making of decisions in the domestic or private sphere. From this perspective, democracy is regarded as a friend of liberty, not as its enemy. Only when such principles are ignored can oppression and exploitation flourish.

Models of democracy

All too frequently, democracy is treated as a single, unambiguous phenomenon. It is often assumed that what passes for democracy in most western societies (a system of regular and competitive elections based on a universal franchise) is the only, or the only legitimate, form of democracy. Sometimes this notion of democracy is qualified by the addition of the term 'liberal', turning it into liberal democracy. In reality, however, there are a number of rival theories or models of democracy, each offering its own version of popular rule. This highlights not merely the variety of democratic forms and mechanisms, but also, more fundamentally, the very different grounds on which democratic rule can be justified. Even liberal democracy is a misleading term, as competing liberal views of democratic organization can be identified. Four contrasting models of democracy can be identified as follows:

- classical democracy
- protective democracy
- developmental democracy
- people's democracy.

Classical democracy

The classical model of democracy is based on the *polis*, or city-state, of Ancient Greece, and particularly on the system of rule that developed in the largest and most powerful Greek city-state, Athens. The form of direct democracy that operated in Athens during the fourth and fifth centuries BCE is often portrayed as the only pure or ideal system of popular participation. Nevertheless, although the model had considerable impact on later thinkers such as Rousseau and Marx (see p. 41), Athenian democracy (see p. 95) developed a very particular kind of direct popular rule, one that has only a very limited application in the modern world. Athenian democracy amounted to a form of government by mass meeting.

What made Athenian democracy so remarkable was the level of political activity of its citizens. Not only did they participate in regular meetings of the Assembly, but they were also, in large numbers, prepared to shoulder the responsibility of public office and decision-making. The most influential contemporaneous critic of this form of democracy was the philosopher Plato (see p. 13). Plato attacked the principle of political equality on the grounds that the mass of the people possess neither the wisdom nor the experience to rule wisely on their own behalf. His solution, advanced in *The Republic*, was that government be placed in the hands of a class of philosopher kings, Guardians, whose rule would amount to a kind of enlightened dictatorship. On a practical level, however, the principal drawback of Athenian democracy was that it could operate only by excluding the mass of the population from political activity. Participation was restricted to Athenian-born males who were over 20 years of age. Slaves (the majority of the population), women and foreigners had no political rights

Debating . . .

Is democracy always the best form of government?

In modern politics, democracy has come to be so widely accepted that it appears to be almost politically incorrect to question it. The 'right' solution to a political problem is thus the democratic solution; that is, one made either by the people themselves or, more commonly, by politicians who are accountable to the people. But why is democracy so widely revered? And are there circumstances in which democratic rule is inappropriate or undesirable?

YES

The highest form of politics. The unique strength of democracy is that it is able to address the central challenge of politics – the existence of rival views and interests within the same society – while containing the tendency towards bloodshed and violence. In short, democratic societies are stable and peaceful. This occurs because democracy relies on open debate, persuasion and compromise. People with rival views or competing interests are encouraged to find a way of living together in relative harmony because each has a political voice. Democracy is therefore a kind of political safety valve, democratic participation preventing the build up of anger and frustration and, thereby, containing political extremism.

Democracy as a universal value. It is now widely argued that democracy is a human right: a fundamental and absolute right that belongs to all people, regardless of nationality, religion, gender and other differences. Rights of political participation and access to power, especially the right to vote, are universally applicable because they stem from the basic entitlement to shape the decisions that affect one's own life – the right to self-rule. Indeed, an equal access to power and the right to political participation could be viewed not simply as virtues in their own right, but as preconditions for the maintenance of all other rights and freedoms.

Keeping tyranny at bay. All systems of rule are apt to become tyrannies against the people, reflecting the fact that those in power (and, for that matter, all people) are inclined to place self-interest before the interests of others. Governments and leaders therefore need to be checked or constrained, and there is no more effective constraint on power than democracy. This is because democratic rule operates through a mechanism of accountability, which ultimately allows the public to 'kick the rascals out'. Democratic societies are therefore not only the most stable societies in the world, but also the societies in which citizens enjoy the widest realm of freedom.

NO

The disharmony of democracy. Far from being a guarantee of stability, democracy is biased in favour of conflict and disharmony. This is because democracy sets up an ongoing electoral battle between opponents who are encouraged to condemn one another, exaggerating their faults and denying their achievements. Democratic politics is often, as a result, noisy and unedifying. While the disharmony of democracy is unlikely to threaten structural breakdown in mature and relatively prosperous societies, democracy in the developing world may make things worse rather than better (Hawksley, 2009). 'Democratization' may therefore deepen tribal, regional or ethnic tensions, and strengthen the tendency towards charismatic leadership, thereby breeding authoritarianism.

Democracy as westernization. Rather than being universally applicable, democracy is based on values and assumptions that betray the cultural biases of its western heartland. Democracy is rooted in ideas such as individualism, notably through the principle of equal citizenship and 'one person, one vote', and notions of pluralism and competition that are intrinsically liberal in character. The dominant form of democracy is therefore western-style democracy, and its spread, sometimes imposed and always encouraged, to the non-western world can therefore be viewed as a form of cultural imperialism.

Good government not popular government. Democratic solutions to problems are often neither wise nor sensible. The problem with democracy is that the dictates of wisdom and experience tend to be ignored because the views of the well-educated minority are swamped by those of the less well-educated majority. Being committed to the principle of political equality, democracy cannot cope with the fact that the majority is not always right. This is a particular concern for economic policy, where options, such as raising taxes or cutting government spending, which may best promote long-term economic development, may be ruled out simply because they are unpopular.

CONCEPT

Athenian democracy

Athenian democracy is characterized by the high level of citizen involvement in the affairs of the city-state. Major decisions were made by the Assembly, or *Ecclesia*, to which all citizens belonged. When full-time public officials were needed, they were chosen on a basis of lot or rota to ensure that they constituted a microcosm of the larger citizenry. A Council, consisting of 500 citizens, acted as the executive or steering committee of the Assembly, and a 50-strong Committee, in turn, made proposals to the Council. The President of the Committee held office for only a single day, and no Athenian could hold this honour more than once in his lifetime.

whatsoever. Indeed, Athenian citizens were able to devote so much of their lives to politics only because slavery relieved them of the need to engage in arduous labour, and the confinement of women to the private realm freed men from domestic responsibilities. Nevertheless, the classical model of direct and continuous popular participation in political life has been kept alive in, for instance, the township meetings of New England in the USA, the communal assemblies that operate in the smaller Swiss cantons and in the wider use of referendums.

Protective democracy

When democratic ideas were revived in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they appeared in a form that was very different from the classical democracy of Ancient Greece. In particular, democracy was seen less as a mechanism through which the public could participate in political life, and more as a device through which citizens could protect themselves from the encroachments of government, hence 'protective democracy'. This view appealed particularly to early liberal thinkers whose concern was, above all, to create the widest realm of individual liberty. The desire to protect the individual from over-mighty government was expressed in perhaps the earliest of all democratic sentiments, Aristotle's response to Plato: 'who will guard the Guardians?'.

This same concern with unchecked power was taken up in the seventeenth century by John Locke (see p. 31), who argued that the right to vote was based on the existence of **natural rights** and, in particular, on the right to property. If government, through taxation, possessed the power to expropriate property, citizens were entitled to protect themselves by controlling the composition of the tax-setting body: the legislature. In other words, democracy came to mean a system of 'government by consent' operating through a representative assembly. However, Locke himself was not a democrat by modern standards, as he believed that only property owners should vote, on the basis that only they had natural rights that could be infringed by government. The more radical notion of universal suffrage was advanced from the late eighteenth century onwards by utilitarian theorists such as Jeremy Bentham and James Mill (1773–1836). The utilitarian (see p. 353) case for democracy is also based on the need to protect or advance individual interests. Bentham came to believe that, since all individuals seek pleasure and the avoidance of pain, a universal franchise (conceived in his day as manhood suffrage) was the only way of promoting 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number'.

However, to justify democracy on protective grounds is to provide only a qualified endorsement of democratic rule. In short, protective democracy is but a limited and indirect form of democracy. In practice, the consent of the governed is exercised through voting in regular and competitive elections. This thereby ensures the accountability of those who govern. Political equality is thus understood in strictly technical terms to mean equal voting rights. Moreover, this is, above all, a system of constitutional democracy that operates within a set of formal or informal rules that check the exercise of government power. If the right to vote is a means of defending individual liberty, liberty must also be guaranteed by a strictly enforced separation of powers via the creation of a separate executive, legislature and judiciary, and by the maintenance of basic rights and freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and freedom

● **Natural rights**: God-given rights that are fundamental to human beings and are therefore inalienable (they cannot be taken away).

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832)

UK philosopher, legal reformer and founder of utilitarianism. Bentham developed a moral and philosophical system that was based on the idea that human beings are rationally self-interested creatures or utility maximizers, which he believed provided a scientific basis for legal and political reforms. Using the 'greatest happiness' principle, his followers, the Philosophic Radicals, were responsible for many of the reforms in social administration, law, government and economics in the UK in the nineteenth century. A supporter of *laissez-faire* economics, in later life Bentham also became a firm advocate of political democracy. His utilitarian creed was developed in *Fragments on Government* ([1776] 1948), and more fully in *Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789).

from arbitrary arrest. Ultimately, protective democracy aims to give citizens the widest possible scope to live their lives as they choose. It is therefore compatible with *laissez-faire* capitalism (see p. 132) and the belief that individuals should be entirely responsible for their economic and social circumstances. Protective democracy has therefore particularly appealed to classical liberals and, in modern politics, to supporters of the New Right.

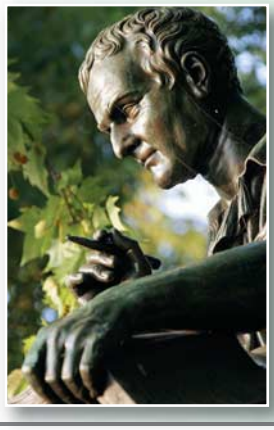
Developmental democracy

Although early democratic theory focused on the need to protect individual rights and interests, it soon developed an alternative focus: a concern with the development of the human individual and the community. This gave rise to quite new models of democratic rule that can broadly be referred to as systems of developmental democracy. The most novel, and radical, such model was developed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In many respects, Rousseau's ideas mark a departure from the dominant, liberal conception of democracy, and they came to have an impact on the Marxist and anarchist traditions as well as, later, on the New Left. For Rousseau, democracy was ultimately a means through which human beings could achieve freedom (see p. 339) or autonomy, in the sense of 'obedience to a law one prescribes to oneself'. In other words, citizens are 'free' only when they participate directly and continuously in shaping the life of their community. This is an idea that moves well beyond the conventional notion of electoral democracy and offers support for the more radical ideal of direct democracy. Indeed, Rousseau was a strenuous critic of the practice of elections used in England, arguing in *The Social Contract* ([1762] 1913) as follows:

> The English people believes itself to be free, it is gravely mistaken; it is only free when it elects its member of parliament; as soon as they are elected, the people are enslaved; it is nothing. In the brief moment of its freedom, the English people makes such use of its freedom that it deserves to lose it.

However, what gives Rousseau's model its novel character is his insistence that freedom ultimately means obedience to the **general will**. Rousseau believed the

● **General will**: The genuine interests of a collective body, equivalent to the common good; the will of all, provided each person acts selflessly.



Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78)

Geneva-born French moral and political philosopher, perhaps the principal intellectual influence upon the French Revolution. Rousseau was entirely self-taught. He moved to Paris in 1742, and became an intimate of leading members of the French Enlightenment, especially Diderot. His writings, ranging over education, the arts, science, literature and philosophy, reflect a deep belief in the goodness of 'natural man' and the corruption of 'social man'. Rousseau's political teaching, summarized in *Émile* (1762) and developed in *The Social Contract* ([1762] 1913), advocates a radical form of democracy that has influenced liberal, socialist, anarchist and, some would argue, fascist thought. His autobiography, *Confessions* (1770), examines his life with remarkable candour and demonstrates a willingness to expose weaknesses.

general will to be the 'true' will of each citizen, in contrast to his or her 'private' or selfish will. By obeying the general will, citizens are therefore doing nothing more than obeying their own 'true' natures, the general will being what individuals would will if they were to act selflessly. In Rousseau's view, such a system of radical developmental democracy required not merely political equality, but a relatively high level of economic equality. Although not a supporter of common ownership, Rousseau nevertheless proposed that 'no citizen shall be rich enough to buy another and none so poor as to be forced to sell himself' ([1762] 1913).

Rousseau's theories have helped to shape the modern idea of participatory democracy taken up by New Left thinkers in the 1960s and 1970s. This extols the virtues of a 'participatory society', a society in which each and every citizen is able to achieve self-development by participating in the decisions that shape his or her life. This goal can be achieved only through the promotion of openness, **accountability** and decentralization within all the key institutions of society: within the family, the workplace and the local community just as much as within 'political' institutions such as parties, interest groups and legislative bodies. At the heart of this model is the notion of 'grass-roots democracy'; that is, the belief that political power should be exercised at the lowest possible level. Nevertheless, Rousseau's own theories have been criticized for distinguishing between citizens' 'true' wills and their 'felt' or subjective wills. The danger of this is that, if the general will cannot be established by simply asking citizens what they want (because they may be blinded by selfishness), there is scope for the general will to be defined from above, perhaps by a dictator claiming to act in the 'true' interests of society. Rousseau is therefore sometimes seen as the architect of so-called 'totalitarian democracy' (Talmon, 1952).

However, a more modest form of developmental democracy has also been advanced that is compatible with the liberal model of representative government. This view of developmental democracy is rooted in the writings of John Stuart Mill (see p. 198). For Mill, the central virtue of democracy was that it promotes the 'highest and harmonious' development of individual capacities. By participating in political life, citizens enhance their understanding, strengthen their sensibilities and achieve a higher level of personal development. In short, democracy is essentially an educational experience. As a result, Mill proposed the

● **Accountability**: Answerability; a duty to explain one's conduct and be open to criticism by others.

CONCEPT

Parliamentary democracy

Parliamentary democracy is a form of democratic rule that operates through a popularly elected deliberative assembly, which mediates between government and the people. Democracy, in this sense, means responsible and representative government. Parliamentary democracy thus balances popular participation against elite rule: government is accountable not directly to the public but to the public's elected representatives. The alleged strength of such a system is that representatives are, by virtue of their education and experience, better able than citizens themselves to define their best interests.

broadening of popular participation, arguing that the franchise should be extended to all but those who are illiterate. In the process, he suggested (radically, for his time) that suffrage should also be extended to women. In addition, he advocated strong and independent local authorities in the belief that this would broaden the opportunities available for holding public office.

On the other hand, Mill, in common with all liberals, was also aware of the dangers of democracy. Indeed, Mill's views are out of step with mainstream liberal thought in that he rejected the idea of formal political equality. Following Plato, Mill did not believe that all political opinions are of equal value. Consequently, he proposed a system of plural voting: unskilled workers would have a single vote, skilled workers two votes, and graduates and members of the learned professions five or six votes. However, his principal reservation about democracy was derived from the more typical liberal fear of what Alexis de Tocqueville (see p. 245) famously described as 'the tyranny of the majority'. In other words, democracy always contains the threat that individual liberty and minority rights may be crushed in the name of the people. Mill's particular concern was that democracy would undermine debate, criticism and intellectual life in general by encouraging people to accept the will of the majority, thereby promoting uniformity and dull conformism. Quite simply, the majority is not always right; wisdom cannot be determined by the simple device of a show of hands. Mill's ideas therefore support the idea of **deliberative democracy** or parliamentary democracy.

People's democracy

The term 'people's democracy' is derived from the orthodox communist regimes that sprang up on the Soviet model in the aftermath of World War II. It is here used, however, to refer broadly to the various democratic models that the Marxist tradition has generated. Although they differ, these models offer a clear contrast to the more familiar liberal democratic ones. Marxists have tended to be dismissive of liberal or parliamentary democracy, seeing it as a form of 'bourgeois' or 'capitalist' democracy. Nevertheless, Marxists were drawn to the concept or ideal of democracy because of its clear egalitarian implications. The term was used, in particular, to designate the goal of social equality brought about through the common ownership of wealth ('social democracy' in its original sense), in contrast to 'political' democracy, which establishes only a facade of equality.

Marx believed that the overthrow of capitalism would be a trigger that would allow genuine democracy to flourish. In his view, a fully communist society would come into existence only after a transitionary period characterized by 'the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat'. In effect, a system of 'bourgeois' democracy would be replaced by a very different system of 'proletarian' democracy. Although Marx refused to describe in detail how this transitionary society would be organized, its broad shape can be discerned from his admiration for the Paris Commune of 1871, which was a short-lived experiment in what approximated to direct democracy.

The form of democracy that was developed in twentieth-century communist states, however, owed more to the ideas of V. I. Lenin (see p. 99) than it did to those of Marx. Although Lenin's 1917 slogan 'All power to the Soviets' (the workers' and soldiers' and sailors' councils) had kept alive the notion of

● **Deliberative democracy**: A form of democracy that emphasizes the need for discourse and debate to help to define the public interest.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924)

Russian Marxist theorist and active revolutionary. As leader of the Bolsheviks, Lenin masterminded the 1917 Russian Bolshevik Revolution, and became the first leader of the USSR. His contributions to Marxism were his theory of the revolutionary (or vanguard) party, outlined in *What is to be Done?* ([1902] 1968); his analysis of colonialism as an economic phenomenon, described in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* ([1916] 1970); and his firm commitment to the 'insurrectionary road to socialism', developed in *State and Revolution* (1917). Lenin's reputation is inevitably tied up with the subsequent course of Soviet history; he is seen by some as the father of Stalinist oppression, but by others as a critic of bureaucracy and a defender of debate and argument.

commune democracy, in reality power in Soviet Russia quickly fell into the hands of the Bolshevik party (soon renamed the 'Communist Party'). In Lenin's view, this party was nothing less than 'the vanguard of the working class'. Armed with Marxism, the party claimed that it was able to perceive the genuine interests of the proletariat and thus guide it to the realization of its revolutionary potential. This theory became the cornerstone of '**Leninist democracy**', and it was accepted by all other orthodox communist regimes as one of the core features of Marxism–Leninism. However, the weakness of this model is that Lenin failed to build into it any mechanism for checking the power of the Communist Party (and, particularly, its leaders), and for ensuring that it remained sensitive and accountable to the proletarian class. To rephrase Aristotle, 'who will guard the Communist Party?'

Democracy in practice: rival views

Although there continues to be controversy about which is the most desirable form of democracy, much of contemporary debate revolves around how democracy works in practice and what 'democratization' (see p. 272) implies. This reflects the fact that there is broad, even worldwide, acceptance of a particular model of democracy, generally termed liberal democracy. Despite the existence of competing tendencies within this broad category, certain central features are clear:

- Liberal democracy is an indirect and representative form of democracy, in that political office is gained through success in regular elections that are conducted on the basis of formal political equality.
- It is based on competition and electoral choice. These are achieved through political pluralism, tolerance of a wide range of contending beliefs, and the existence of conflicting social philosophies and rival political movements and parties.
- It is characterized by a clear distinction between the state and civil society. This is maintained through the existence of autonomous groups and interests, and the market or capitalist organization of economic life.

● **Leninist democracy**: A form of democracy in which the communist party, organized on the basis of 'democratic centralism', articulates the interest of the proletariat.

CONCEPT

Pluralism

In its broad sense, pluralism is a belief in, or a commitment to, diversity or multiplicity (the existence of many things). As a descriptive term, pluralism may be used to denote the existence of party competition (political pluralism), a multiplicity of moral values (ethical pluralism), or a variety of cultural norms (cultural pluralism). As a normative term, it suggests that diversity is healthy and desirable, usually because it safeguards individual liberty and promotes debate, argument and understanding. More narrowly, pluralism is a theory of the distribution of political power. It holds that power is widely and evenly dispersed in society.

- It provides protection for minorites and individuals, particularly through the allocation of basic rights that safeguard them from the will of the majority.

Nevertheless, there is a considerable amount of disagreement about the meaning and significance of liberal democracy. Does it, for instance, ensure a genuine and healthy dispersal of political power? Do democratic processes genuinely promote long-term benefits, or are they self-defeating? Can political equality coexist with economic inequality? In short, this form of democracy is interpreted in different ways by different theorists. The most important of these interpretations are advanced by:

- pluralism
- elitism
- corporatism
- the New Right
- Marxism.

Pluralist view

Pluralist ideas can be traced back to early liberal political philosophy, and notably to the ideas of Locke and Montesquieu (see p. 312). Their first systematic development, however, is found in the contributions of James Madison (see p. 319) to *The Federalist Papers* (Hamilton *et al.*, [1787–89] 1961). In considering the transformation of America from a loose confederation of states into the federal USA, Madison's particular fear was the 'problem of factions'. In common with most liberals, Madison argued that unchecked democratic rule might simply lead to majoritarianism, to the crushing of individual rights and to the expropriation of property in the name of the people. What made Madison's work notable, however, was his stress upon the multiplicity of interests and groups in society, and his insistence that, unless each such group possessed a political voice, stability and order would be impossible. He therefore proposed a system of divided government based on the separation of powers (see p. 313), bicameralism and federalism (see p. 382), that offered a variety of access points to competing groups and interests. The resulting system of rule by multiple minorities is often referred to as '**Madisonian democracy**'. Insofar as it recognizes both the existence of diversity or multiplicity in society, and the fact that such multiplicity is desirable, Madison's model is the first developed statement of pluralist principles.

The most influential modern exponent of pluralist theory is Robert Dahl (see p. 250). As described in *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (1961), Dahl carried out an empirical study of the distribution of power in New Haven, Connecticut, USA. He concluded that, although the politically privileged and economically powerful exerted greater power than ordinary citizens, no ruling or permanent elite was able to dominate the political process. His conclusion was that 'New Haven is an example of a democratic system, warts and all'. Dahl recognized that modern democratic systems differ markedly from the classical democracies of Ancient Greece. With Charles Lindblom, he coined the term 'polyarchy' (see p. 273) to mean rule by the many, as distinct from rule by all citizens. The key feature of such a system of pluralist democracy (see p. 101) is that

● **Madisonian democracy**: A form of democracy that incorporates constitutional protections for minorities that enable them to resist majority rule.

CONCEPT

Pluralist democracy

The term pluralist democracy is sometimes used interchangeably with liberal democracy. More specifically, it refers to a form of democracy that operates through the capacity of organized groups and interests to articulate popular demands and ensure responsive government. The conditions for a healthy pluralist democracy include: (1) a wide dispersal of political power amongst competing groups, specifically the absence of elite groups; (2) a high degree of internal responsiveness, group leaders being accountable to members; and (3) a neutral governmental machine that is sufficiently fragmented to offer groups a number of points of access.

competition between parties at election time, and the ability of interest or pressure groups to articulate their views freely, establishes a reliable link between the government and the governed, and creates a channel of communication between the two. While this may fall a long way short of the ideal of popular self-government, its supporters nevertheless argue that it ensures a sufficient level of accountability and popular responsiveness for it to be regarded as democratic.

However, the relationship between pluralism and democracy may not be a secure one. For instance, one of the purposes of the Madisonian system was, arguably, to constrain democracy in the hope of safeguarding property. In other words, the system of rule by multiple minorities may simply have been a device to prevent the majority (the propertyless masses) from exercising political power. A further problem is the danger of what has been called 'pluralist stagnation'. This occurs as organized groups and economic interests become so powerful that they create a log jam, resulting in the problem of government 'overload'. In such circumstances, a pluralist system may simply become ungovernable. Finally, there is the problem identified by Dahl in later works, such as *A Preface to Economic Democracy* (1985); notably, that the unequal ownership of economic resources tends to concentrate political power in the hands of the few, and deprive the many of it. This line of argument runs parallel to the conventional Marxist critique of pluralist democracy, and has given rise to neopluralism (see p. 63).

Elitist view

Elitism (see p. 102) developed as a critique of egalitarian ideas such as democracy and socialism. It draws attention to the fact of elite rule, either as an inevitable and desirable feature of social existence, or as a remediable and regrettable one. Classical elitists, such as Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), Gaetano Mosca (1857–1941) and Robert Michels (1876–1936), tended to take the former position. For them, democracy was no more than a foolish delusion, because political power is always exercised by a privileged minority: an elite. For example, in *The Ruling Class* ([1896] 1939), Mosca proclaimed that, in all societies, 'two classes of people appear – a class that rules and a class that is ruled'. In his view, the resources or attributes that are necessary for rule are always unequally distributed, and, further, a cohesive minority will always be able to manipulate and control the masses, even in a parliamentary democracy. Pareto suggested that the qualities needed to rule conforms to one of two psychological types: 'foxes' (who rule by cunning and are able to manipulate the consent of the masses), and 'lions' (whose domination is typically achieved through coercion and violence). Michels developed an alternative line of argument based on the tendency within all organizations, however democratic they might appear, for power to be concentrated in the hands of a small group of dominant figures who can organize and make decisions. He termed this 'the iron law of oligarchy' (see p. 232).

Whereas classical elitists strove to prove that democracy was always a myth, modern elitist theorists have tended to highlight how far particular political systems fall short of the democratic ideal. An example of this can be found in C. Wright Mills' influential account of the power structure in the USA. In contrast to the pluralist notion of a wide and broadly democratic dispersal of power, Mills, in *The Power Elite* (1956), offered a portrait of a USA dominated by a nexus of leading groups. In his view, this 'power elite' comprised a triumvirate of

CONCEPT

Elitism

Elite originally meant, and can still mean, 'the highest', 'the best', or 'the excellent'. Used in an empirical sense, it refers to a minority in whose hands power, wealth or privilege is concentrated. Elitism is a belief in, or practice of, rule by an elite or minority. *Normative* elitism suggests that political power should be vested in the hands of a wise or enlightened minority. *Classical* elitism claimed to be empirical (although normative beliefs often intruded), and saw elite rule as an unchangeable fact of social existence. *Modern* elitism is also empirical, but it is more critical and discriminating about the causes of elite rule.

big business (particularly defence-related industries), the US military and political cliques surrounding the President. Drawing on a combination of economic power, bureaucratic control and access to the highest levels of the executive branch of government, the power elite is able to shape key 'history-making' decisions, especially in the fields of defence and foreign policy, as well as strategic economic policy. The power-elite model suggests that liberal democracy in the USA is largely a sham. Elitists have, moreover, argued that empirical studies have supported pluralist conclusions only because Dahl and others have ignored the importance of non-decision-making as a manifestation of power (see p. 9).

Certain elite theorists have nevertheless argued that a measure of democratic accountability is consistent with elite rule. Whereas the power-elite model portrays the elite as a cohesive body, bound together by common or overlapping interests, competitive elitism (sometimes called 'democratic elitism') highlights the significance of elite rivalry (see Figure 4.1). In other words, the elite, consisting of the leading figures from a number of competing groups and interests, is fractured. This view is often associated with Joseph Schumpeter's (see p. 141) 'realistic' model of democracy outlined in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942):

> The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.

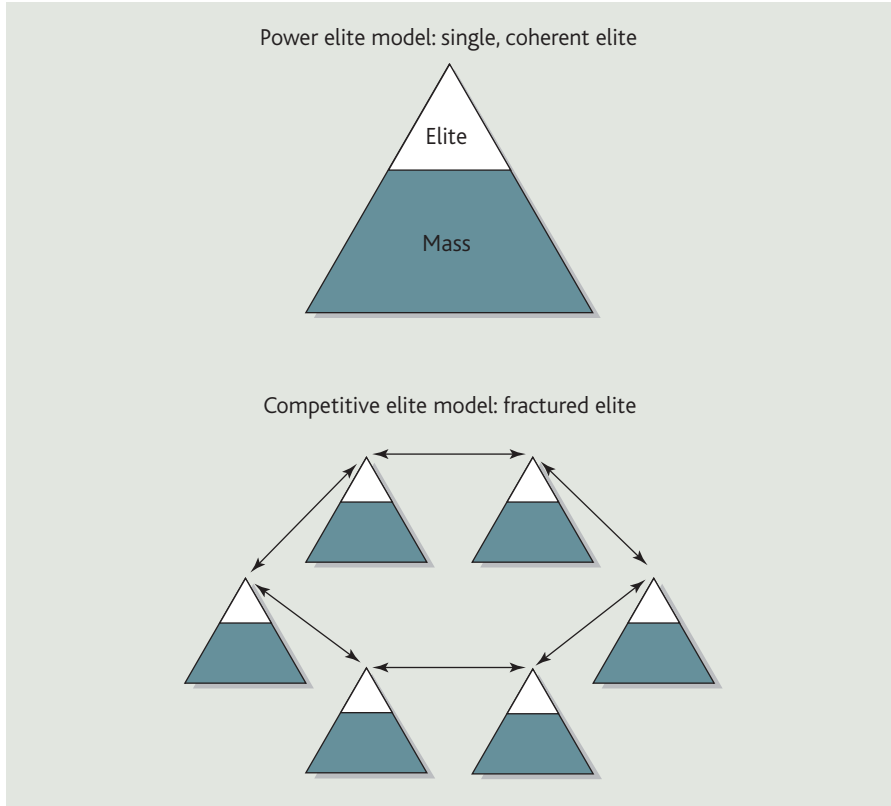


Figure 4.1 Elite models

The electorate can decide which elite rules, but cannot change the fact that power is always exercised by an elite. This model of competitive elitism was developed by Anthony Downs (1957) into the 'economic theory of democracy'. In effect, electoral competition creates a political market in which politicians act as entrepreneurs bent upon achieving government power, and individual voters behave like consumers, voting for the party with the policies that most closely reflect their own preferences. Downs argued that a system of open and competitive elections guarantees democratic rule because it places government in the hands of the party whose philosophy, values and policies correspond most closely to the preferences of the largest group of voters. As Schumpeter put it, 'democracy is the rule of the politician'. As a model of democratic politics, competitive elitism at least has the virtue that it corresponds closely to the workings of the liberal-democratic political system. Indeed, it emerged more as an attempt to *describe* how the democratic process works than through a desire to *prescribe* certain values and principles – political equality, popular participation, freedom or whatever.

Corporatist view

The origins of corporatism (see p. 251) date back to the attempt in Fascist Italy to construct a so-called 'corporate state' by integrating both managers and workers into the processes of government. Corporatist theorists, however, have drawn attention to parallel developments in the world's major industrialized states. In the form of **neocorporatism**, or liberal corporatism, this gave rise to the spectre of 'tripartite government', in which government is conducted through organizations that allow state officials, employers' groups and unions to deal directly with one another. To a large extent, this tendency to integrate economic interests into government (which was common in the post-1945 period, and particularly prominent in, for example, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Austria) was a consequence of the drift towards economic management and intervention. As government sought to manage economic life and deliver an increasingly broad range of public services, it recognized the need for institutional arrangements designed to secure the cooperation and support of major economic interests. Where attempts have been made to shift economic policy away from state intervention and towards the free market (as in the UK since 1979), the impact of corporatism has markedly diminished.

The significance of corporatism in terms of democratic processes is clearly considerable. There are those who, like the British guild socialists, argue that corporatism makes possible a form of functional representation, in that individuals' views and interests are articulated more by the groups to which they belong than through the mechanism of competitive elections. What is called 'corporate pluralism' thus portrays tripartism as a mechanism through which the major groups and interests in society compete to shape government policy. Some commentators, however, see corporatism as a threat to democracy. In the first place, corporatism only advantages groups that are accorded privileged access to government. 'Insider' groups therefore possess a political voice, while 'outsider' groups are denied one. Second, corporatism can work to the benefit of the state, rather than major economic interests, in that the **peak associations** that the government chooses to deal with can be used to exert discipline over their

● **Neocorporatism**: A tendency found in western polyarchies for organized interests to be granted privileged and institutionalized access to policy formulation.

● **Peak association**: A group recognized by government as representing the general or collective interests of businesses or workers.

members and to filter out radical demands. Finally, corporatism threatens to subvert the processes of electoral or parliamentary democracy. Policy is made through negotiations between government officials and leaders of powerful economic interests, rather than through the deliberations of a representative assembly. Interest-group leaders may thus exert considerable political power, even though they are in no way publicly accountable and their influence is not subject to public scrutiny.

New Right view

The emergence of the New Right from the 1970s onwards has generated a very particular critique of democratic politics. This has focused on the danger of what has been called 'democratic overload': the paralysis of a political system that is subject to unrestrained group and electoral pressures. One aspect of this critique has highlighted the unsavoury face of corporatism. New Right theorists are keen advocates of the free market, believing that economies work best when left alone by government. The danger of corporatism from this perspective is that it empowers sectional groups and economic interests, enabling them to make demands on government for increased pay, public investment, subsidies, state protection and so on. In effect, corporatism allows well-placed interest groups to dominate and dictate to government. The result of this, according to the New Right, is an irresistible drift towards state intervention and economic stagnation (Olson, 1982).

Government 'overload' can also be seen to be a consequence of the electoral process. This was what Brittan (1977) referred to as 'the economic consequences of democracy'. In this view, electoral politics amounts to a self-defeating process in which politicians are encouraged to compete for power by offering increasingly unrealistic promises to the electorate. Both voters and politicians are held to blame here. Voters are attracted by promises of higher public spending because they calculate that the cost (an increased tax burden) will be spread over the entire population. Politicians, consumed by the desire to win power, attempt to outbid one another by making ever more generous spending pledges to the electorate. According to Brittan, the economic consequences of unrestrained democracy are high levels of inflation fuelled by public borrowing, and a tax burden that destroys enterprise and undermines growth. As characterized by Marquand (1988), the New Right view is that 'democracy is to adults what chocolate is to children: endlessly tempting; harmless in small doses; sickening in excess'. New Right theorists therefore tend to see democracy in strictly protective terms, regarding it essentially as a defence against arbitrary government, rather than a means of bringing about social transformation.

Marxist view

As pointed out in relation to people's democracy, the Marxist view of democratic politics is rooted in class analysis. In this view, political power cannot be understood narrowly in terms of electoral rights, or in terms of the ability of groups to articulate their interests by lobbying and campaigning. Rather, at a deeper level, political power reflects the distribution of economic power and, in particular, the unequal ownership of productive wealth. The Marxist critique of liberal democ-

racy thus focuses upon the inherent tension between democracy and capitalism; that is, between the political equality that liberal democracy proclaims and the social inequality that a capitalist economy inevitably generates. Liberal democracies are thus seen as 'capitalist' or 'bourgeois' democracies that are manipulated and controlled by the entrenched power of a **ruling class**.

Marxism thus offers a distinctive critique of pluralist democracy. Power cannot be widely and evenly dispersed in society as long as class power is unequally distributed. Indeed, in many respects, the Marxist view parallels the elitist critique of pluralism. Both views suggest that power is ultimately concentrated in the hands of the few, the main difference being whether the few is conceived of as a 'power elite' or as a 'ruling class'. However, significant differences can also be identified. For instance, whereas elitists suggest that power derive from a variety of sources (education, social status, bureaucratic position, political connections, wealth and so on), Marxists emphasize the decisive importance of economic factors; notably, the ownership and control of the means of production. Modern Marxists, however, have been less willing to dismiss electoral democracy as nothing more than a sham. **Eurocommunists**, for example, abandoned the idea of revolution, embracing instead the notion of a peaceful, legal and democratic 'road to socialism'.

Towards cosmopolitan democracy?

The idea of cosmopolitan democracy has received growing attention due to the advance of globalization and the evident 'hollowing out' of domestic democratic processes focused on the nation-state. If global interconnectedness means that policy-making authority has shifted from national governments to international organizations, surely democracy should be recast in line with this? However, what would cosmopolitan democracy look like, and how would it operate? Two basic models have been advanced. The first would involve the construction of a world parliament, a body whose role would be to introduce greater scrutiny and openness to the process of global decision-making by calling to account established international organizations, such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and so forth. Very few advocates of such an idea contemplate the creation of a fully-fledged world government or global state; most, instead, favour a multilevel system of post-sovereign governance in which no body or level is able to exercise final authority. Held (1995) proposed a package of measures, including the establishment of a 'global parliament', reformed and more accountable international organizations, and the 'permanent shift of a growing proportion of a nation state's coercive capacity to regional and global institutions'. Monbiot (2004), for his part, backed the creation of a popularly elected world parliament, composed of 600 representatives, each with a constituency of about 10 million people, many of which would straddle national borders.

The alternative model of cosmopolitan democracy is less ambitious and formalized, relying less on the construction of new bodies and more on the reform of existing international organizations, often linked to the strengthening of global civil society (see p. 106). This model places its faith in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (see p. 248) to reconfigure global power by offering an alternative to top-down corporate globalization. This idea of 'globalization from

● **Ruling class**: A Marxist term, denoting a class that dominates other classes and society at large by virtue of its ownership of productive wealth.

● **Eurocommunism**: A form of deradicalized communism that attempted to blend Marxism with liberal-democratic principles.

CONCEPT

Global civil society

Global civil society refers to a realm in which transnational non-governmental groups and associations interact. These groups are typically voluntary and non-profitmaking, setting them apart from TNCs (see p. 149). However, the term 'global civil society' is complex and contested. In its 'activist' version, transnational social movements are the key agents of global civil society, giving it an 'outsider' orientation, and a strong focus on cosmopolitan ideals. In its 'policy' version, NGOs are the key agents of global civil society, giving it an 'insider' orientation and meaning that it overlaps with global governance (see p. 432).

below' amounts to a bottom-up democratic vision of a civilizing world order. Such an approach would be effective to the extent that NGOs and transnational social movements could introduce an element of public scrutiny and accountability to the working of international bodies, conferences, summits and the like, meaning that global civil society functions as a channel of communications between the individual and global institutions.

However, the prospects for cosmopolitan democracy are far from rosy. In the first place, states, and especially major states, are likely to block any trend towards global democracy, or ensure that any 'alternative' bodies that may be created will lack credibility and remain peripheral to global decision-making. In a wider sense, the egalitarian thrust implicit in the idea of cosmopolitan democracy is simply out of step with the deep economic, political and military disparities of the existing global system. Aside from the obstacles confronting the transition to cosmopolitan democracy, critics have argued that the project itself may be profoundly misconceived. In the first place, however structured and composed, any global institution that is tasked with ensuring public accountability is doomed to failure. The inevitable 'gap' between popularly-elected global political institutions and ordinary citizens around the world would mean that any claim that these institutions are democratic would be mere pretence. Democracy, in this light, is perhaps only meaningful if it is local or national, and all international organizations, whether these are regional or global, are destined to suffer from a debilitating 'democratic deficit'. Second, the democratic credentials of NGOs and, for that matter, social movements may be entirely bogus. Large memberships, committed activists and the ability to mobilize popular protests and demonstrations undoubtedly give social movements and NGOs political influence, but they do not invest them with democratic authority. Quite simply, there is no way of testing the weight of their views against those of the population at large.

SUMMARY

- Legitimacy maintains political stability because it establishes a regime's right to rule, and so underpins the regime's authority over its people. Legitimacy may be based on traditional, charismatic or legal–rational authority. Nevertheless, structural imbalances in modern society may make it increasingly difficult to maintain legitimacy. Legitimation crises may arise from the conflict between the pressure for social and economic interventionism generated by democracy on the one hand, and the pressure generated by market economy on the other.
- Democratic legitimacy is now widely accepted as the only meaningful form of legitimacy. However, it has been suggested that economic and other factors may be more effective than democracy in maintaining legitimacy, that evidence of growing political disengagement in mature democracies indicates that democracy's capacity to deliver legitimacy is declining, and that non-democratic regimes may enjoy at least a measure of legitimacy.
- There are a number of rival models of democracy, each offering its own version of popular rule. Classical democracy, which is based on the political system of Ancient Athens, is defended on the grounds that it alone guarantees government by the people. Protective democracy gives citizens the greatest scope to live their lives as they choose. Developmental democracy has the virtue that, in extending participation, it widens liberty and fosters personal growth. People's democracy aims to achieve economic emancipation, rather than merely the extension of political rights.
- There is considerable controversy about how liberal-democratic systems work in practice. Pluralists praise the system's capacity to guarantee popular responsiveness and public accountability. Elitists highlight the tendency for political power to be concentrated in the hands of a privileged minority. Corporatists draw attention to the incorporation of groups into government. The New Right focuses on the dangers of 'democratic overload'. And Marxists point to tensions between democracy and capitalism.
- Growing global interdependence has stimulated interest in whether democracy can, and should, operate at a global or cosmopolitan level, either through the construction of some kind of world parliament, or through a global civil society. However, major obstacles stand in the way of cosmopolitan democracy, with many rejecting the idea as unfeasible in principle.

Questions for discussion

- Why does power need legitimation?
- Are capitalist societies inevitably prone to legitimation crises?
- Is democratic legitimacy the only meaningful form of legitimacy?
- Is direct democracy in any way applicable to modern circumstances?
- Have the virtues of democracy been overstated?
- Which model of democracy is the most attractive, and why?
- Do modern forms of representative democracy deserve to be described as democratic?
- What are the major threats to democracy in modern society?
- Is cosmopolitan democracy possible, or desirable?

Further reading

Beetham, D., *The Legitimation of Power* (1991). A clear and authoritative introduction to the idea of legitimacy, which also considers the role of democracy and other factors in legitimizing power.

Dahl, R., *Democracy and its Critics* (1991). A wide-ranging and thorough discussion of the democratic ideal and democratic practices.

Gill, G., *The Dynamics of Democratization: Elite, Civil Society and the Transition Process* (2000). A clear and accessible overview of the scale, scope and character of democratization in the contemporary world.

Held, D., *Models of Democracy* (3rd edn) (2006). A rigorous and stimulating examination of rival models of democracy and the present state of democratic theory.

CHAPTER 5

Nations and Nationalism

'Nationalism is an infantile disease. It is the measles of mankind.'

ALBERT EINSTEIN, *Letter* (1921)

PREVIEW

For the last 200 years, the nation has been regarded as the most appropriate (and perhaps the only proper) unit of political rule. Indeed, international law is largely based on the assumption that nations, like individuals, have inviolable rights; notably, the right to political independence and self-determination. Nowhere, however, is the importance of the nation more dramatically demonstrated than in the potency of nationalism as a political creed. In many ways, nationalism has dwarfed the more precise and systematic political ideologies examined in Chapter 2. It has contributed to the outbreak of wars and revolutions. It has caused the birth of new states, the disintegration of empires and the redrawing of borders; and it has been used to reshape existing regimes, as well as to bolster them. However, nationalism is a complex and highly diverse political phenomenon. Not only are there distinctive political and cultural forms of nationalism, but the political implications of nationalism have been wide-ranging and sometimes contradictory. This has occurred because nationalism has been linked to very different ideological traditions, ranging from liberalism to fascism. It has therefore been associated, for instance, with both the quest for national independence and projects of imperial expansion. Nevertheless, there are reasons to believe that the age of the nation may be drawing to a close. The nation-state, the goal that generations of nationalists have strived to achieve, is increasingly beset by pressures, both internal and external.

KEY ISSUES

- What is a nation?
- How do cultural nationalism and political nationalism differ?
- How can the emergence and growth of nationalism be explained?
- What political forms has nationalism assumed? What causes has it articulated?
- What are the attractions or strengths of the nation-state?
- Does the nation-state have a future?

CONCEPT

Nation

Nations (from the Latin *nasci*, meaning 'to be born') are complex phenomena that are shaped by a collection of factors. *Culturally*, a nation is a group of people bound together by a common language, religion, history and traditions, although nations exhibit various levels of cultural heterogeneity. *Politically*, a nation is a group of people who regard themselves as a natural political community, classically expressed through the quest for sovereign statehood. *Psychologically*, a nation is a group of people distinguished by a shared loyalty or affection in the form of patriotism (see p. 118).

WHAT IS A NATION?

Many of the controversies surrounding the phenomenon of nationalism can be traced back to rival views about what constitutes a nation. So widely accepted is the idea of the nation that its distinctive features are seldom examined or questioned; the nation is simply taken for granted. Nevertheless, confusion abounds. The term 'nation' tends to be used with little precision, and is often used interchangeably with terms such as 'state', 'country', 'ethnic group' and 'race'. The United Nations, for instance, is clearly misnamed, as it is an organization of states, not one of national populations. What, then, are the characteristic features of the nation? What distinguishes a nation from any other social group, or other sources of collective identity?

The difficulty of defining the term 'nation' springs from the fact that all nations comprise a mixture of objective and subjective features, a blend of cultural and political characteristics. In objective terms, nations are cultural entities: groups of people who speak the same language, have the same religion, are bound by a shared past and so on. Such factors undoubtedly shape the politics of nationalism. The nationalism of the Québecois in Canada, for instance, is based largely on language differences between French-speaking Quebec and the predominantly English-speaking rest of Canada (see p. 114). Nationalist tensions in India invariably arise from religious divisions, examples being the struggle of Sikhs in Punjab for a separate homeland (Khalistan), and the campaign by Muslims in Kashmir for the incorporation of Kashmir into Pakistan. Nevertheless, it is impossible to define a nation using objective factors alone. All nations encompass a measure of cultural, ethnic and racial diversity. The Swiss nation has proved to be enduring and viable despite the use of three major languages (French, German and Italian), as well as a variety of local dialects. Divisions between Catholics and Protestants that have given rise to rival nationalisms in Northern Ireland have been largely irrelevant in mainland UK, and of only marginal significance in countries such as Germany.

This emphasizes the fact that, ultimately, nations can only be defined *subjectively* by their members. In the final analysis, the nation is a psycho-political construct. What sets a nation apart from any other group or collectivity is that its members regard themselves as a nation. What does this mean? A nation, in this sense, perceives itself to be a distinctive political community. This is what distinguishes a nation from an ethnic group. An **ethnic group** undoubtedly possesses a communal identity and a sense of cultural pride, but, unlike a nation, it lacks collective political aspirations. These aspirations have traditionally taken the form of the quest for, or the desire to maintain, political independence or statehood. On a more modest level, however, they may consist of a desire to achieve a measure of autonomy, perhaps as part of a federation or confederation of states.

The complexity does not end there, however. Nationalism is a difficult political phenomenon, partly because various nationalist traditions view the concept of a nation in different ways. Two contrasting concepts have been particularly influential. One portrays the nation as primarily a cultural community, and emphasizes the importance of ethnic ties and loyalties. The other sees it essentially as a political community, and highlights the significance of civil bonds and allegiances. These rival views not only offer alternative accounts of the origins of nations, but have also been linked to very different forms of nationalism.

● **Ethnic group**: A group of people who share a common cultural and historical identity, typically linked to a belief in common descent.

Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803)

German poet, critic and philosopher, often portrayed as the 'father' of cultural nationalism. A teacher and Lutheran clergyman, Herder travelled throughout Europe before settling in Weimar in 1776, as the clerical head of the Grand Duchy. Although influenced in his early life by thinkers such as Kant (see p. 410), Rousseau (see p. 97) and Montesquieu (see p. 312), he became a leading intellectual opponent of the Enlightenment and a crucial influence on the growth in Germany of the romantic movement. Herder's emphasis on the nation as an organic group characterized by a distinctive language, culture and 'spirit' helped both to found cultural history, and to give rise to a particular form of nationalism that emphasized the intrinsic value of national culture.

Nations as cultural communities

The idea that a nation is essentially an ethnic or cultural entity has been described as the 'primary' concept of the nation (Lafont, 1968). Its roots can be traced back to late eighteenth-century Germany and the writings of figures such as Herder and Fichte (1762–1814). For Herder, the innate character of each national group was ultimately determined by its natural environment, climate and physical geography, which shaped the lifestyle, working habits, attitudes and creative propensities of a people. Above all, he emphasized the importance of language, which he believed was the embodiment of a people's distinctive traditions and historical memories. In his view, each nation thus possesses a ***Volksgeist***, which reveals itself in songs, myths and legends, and provides a nation with its source of creativity. Herder's nationalism therefore amounts to a form of culturalism that emphasizes an awareness and appreciation of national traditions and collective memories instead of an overtly political quest for statehood. Such ideas had a profound impact on the awakening of national consciousness in nineteenth-century Germany, reflected in the rediscovery of ancient myths and legends in, for example, the folk tales of the brothers Grimm and the operas of Richard Wagner (1813–83).

The implication of Herder's **culturalism** is that nations are 'natural' or organic entities that can be traced back to ancient times and will, by the same token, continue to exist as long as human society survives. A similar view has been advanced by modern social psychologists, who point to the tendency of people to form groups in order to gain a sense of security, identity and belonging. From this perspective, the division of humankind into nations reflects nothing more than the natural human propensity to draw close to people who share a culture, background and lifestyle that is similar to their own. Such psychological insights, however, do not explain nationalism as a historical phenomenon; that is, as one that arose at a particular time and place, specifically in early nineteenth-century Europe.

In *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), Ernest Gellner emphasized the degree to which nationalism is linked to modernization and, in particular, to the process of industrialization. Gellner stressed that, while premodern or 'agroliterate' soci-

● ***Volksgeist***: (German) Literally, the spirit of the people; the organic identity of a people reflected in their culture and, particularly, their language.

● **Culturalism**: The belief that human beings are culturally-defined creatures, culture being the universal basis for personal and social identity.

CONCEPT

Cultural nationalism

Cultural nationalism is a form of nationalism that places primary emphasis on the regeneration of the nation as a distinctive civilization, rather than as a discrete political community. Whereas political nationalism is 'rational', and usually principled, cultural nationalism is 'mystical', in that it is based on a romantic belief in the nation as a unique, historical and organic whole, animated by its own 'spirit'. Typically, it is a 'bottom-up' form of nationalism that draws more on 'popular' rituals, traditions and legends than on elite, or 'higher', culture.

eties were structured by a network of feudal bonds and loyalties, emerging industrial societies promoted social mobility, self-striving and competition, and so required a new source of cultural cohesion. This was provided by nationalism. Nationalism therefore developed to meet the needs of particular social conditions and circumstances. On the other hand, Gellner's theory suggests that nationalism is now ineradicable, as a return to premodern loyalties and identities is unthinkable. However, in *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986) Anthony Smith challenged the idea of a link between nationalism and modernization by highlighting the continuity between modern nations and premodern ethnic communities, which he called 'ethnies'. In this view, nations are historically embedded: they are rooted in a common cultural heritage and language that may long predate the achievement of statehood, or even the quest for national independence. Smith nevertheless acknowledged that, although ethnicity is the precursor of nationalism, modern nations came into existence only when established ethnies were linked to the emerging doctrine of political sovereignty (see p. 58). This conjunction occurred in Europe in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, and in Asia and Africa in the twentieth century.

Regardless of the origins of nations, certain forms of nationalism have a distinctively cultural, rather than political, character. Cultural nationalism commonly takes the form of national self-affirmation; it is a means through which a people can acquire a clearer sense of its own identity through the heightening of national pride and self-respect. This is demonstrated by Welsh nationalism, which focuses much more on attempts to preserve the Welsh language and Welsh culture in general than on the search for political independence. Black nationalism in the USA, the West Indies and many parts of Europe also has a strong cultural character. Its emphasis is on the development of a distinctively black consciousness and sense of national pride, which, in the work of Marcus Garvey (see p. 162) and Malcolm X (1925–65), was linked to the rediscovery of Africa as a spiritual and cultural 'homeland'. A similar process can be seen at work in modern Australia and, to some extent, New Zealand. The republican movement in Australia, for example, reflects the desire to redefine the nation as a political and cultural unit separate from the UK. This is a process of self-affirmation that draws heavily on the Anzac myth, the relationship with indigenous peoples, and the rediscovery of a settler folk culture.

The German historian Friedrich Meinecke (1907) went one step further and distinguished between 'cultural nations' and 'political nations'. 'Cultural' nations are characterized by a high level of ethnic homogeneity; in effect, national and ethnic identities overlap. Meinecke identified the Greeks, the Germans, the Russians, the English and the Irish as examples of cultural nations, but the description could equally apply to ethnic groups such as the Kurds, the Tamils and the Chechens. Such nations can be regarded as 'organic', in that they have been fashioned by natural or historical forces, rather than by political ones. The strength of cultural nations is that, bound together by a powerful and historical sense of national unity, they tend to be stable and cohesive. On the other hand, cultural nations tend to view themselves as exclusive groups. Membership of the nation is seen to derive not from a political allegiance, voluntarily undertaken, but from an ethnic identity that has somehow been inherited. Cultural nations thus tend to view themselves as extended kinship groups distinguished by common descent. In this sense, it is not possible to 'become' a German, a Russian

CONCEPT

Race

Race refers to physical or genetic differences amongst humankind that supposedly distinguish one group of people from another on biological grounds such as skin and hair colour, physique, and facial features. A race is thus a group of people who share a common ancestry and 'one blood'. The term is, however, controversial, both scientifically and politically. Scientific evidence suggests that there is no such thing as 'race' in the sense of a species-type difference between peoples. Politically, racial categorization is commonly based on cultural stereotypes, and is simplistic at best and pernicious at worst.

or a Kurd simply by adopting the language and beliefs of the people. Such exclusivity has tended to breed insular and regressive forms of nationalism, and to weaken the distinction between nations and races.

Nations as political communities

The view that nations are essentially political entities emphasizes civic loyalties and political allegiances, rather than cultural identity. The nation is thus a group of people who are bound together primarily by shared citizenship, regardless of their cultural, ethnic and other loyalties. This view of the nation is often traced back to the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (see p. 97), sometimes seen as the 'father' of modern nationalism. Although Rousseau did not specifically address the nation question, or discuss the phenomenon of nationalism, his stress on popular sovereignty, expressed in the idea of the 'general will' (in effect, the common good of society), was the seed from which nationalist doctrines sprang during the French Revolution of 1789. In proclaiming that government should be based on the general will, Rousseau developed a powerful critique of monarchical power and aristocratic privilege. During the French Revolution, this principle of radical democracy was reflected in the assertion that the French people were 'citizens' possessed of inalienable rights and liberties, no longer merely 'subjects' of the crown. Sovereign power thus resided with the 'French nation'. The form of nationalism that emerged from the French Revolution therefore embodied a vision of a people or nation governing itself, and was inextricably linked to the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The idea that nations are political, not ethnic, communities has been supported by a number of theories of nationalism. Eric Hobsbawm (1983), for instance, highlighted the degree to which nations are 'invented traditions'. Rather than accepting that modern nations have developed out of long-established ethnic communities, Hobsbawm argued that a belief in historical continuity and cultural purity was invariably a myth, and, what is more, a myth created by nationalism itself. In this view, nationalism creates nations, not the other way round. A widespread consciousness of nationhood (sometimes called 'popular nationalism') did not, for example, develop until the late nineteenth century, perhaps fashioned by the invention of national anthems and national flags, and the extension of primary education. Certainly, the idea of a 'mother tongue' passed down from generation to generation and embodying a national culture is highly questionable. In reality, languages live and grow as each generation adapts the language to its own distinctive needs and circumstances. Moreover, it can be argued that the notion of a 'national' language is an absurdity, given the fact that, until the nineteenth century, the majority of people had no knowledge of the written form of their language and usually spoke a regional dialect that had little in common with the language of the educated elite.

Benedict Anderson (1983) also portrayed the modern nation as an artefact, in his case as an 'imagined community'. Anderson pointed out that nations exist more as mental images than as genuine communities that require a level of face-to-face interaction to sustain the notion of a common identity. Within nations, individuals only ever meet a tiny proportion of those with whom they supposedly share a national identity. If nations exist, they exist as imagined artifices, constructed for us through education, the mass media and a process

of political socialization (see p. 178). Whereas in Rousseau's view a nation is animated by ideas of democracy and political freedom, the notion that nations are 'invented' or 'imagined' communities has more in common with the Marxist belief that nationalism is a species of bourgeois ideology. From the perspective of orthodox Marxism, nationalism is a device through which the ruling class counters the threat of social revolution by ensuring that national loyalty is stronger than class solidarity, thus binding the working class to the existing power structure.

Whether nations spring out of a desire for liberty and democracy, or are merely cunning inventions of political elites or a ruling class, certain nations have an unmistakably political character. Following Meinecke, these nations can be classified as 'political nations'. A 'political' nation is one in which citizenship has greater political significance than ethnic identity; not uncommonly, political nations contain a number of ethnic groups, and so are marked by cultural heterogeneity. The UK, the USA and France have often been seen as classic examples of political nations. The UK is a union of what, in effect, are four 'cultural' nations: the English, the Scottish, the Welsh and the Northern Irish (although the latter may comprise two nations, the Protestant Unionists and the Catholic Republicans). Insofar as there is a distinctively British national identity, this is based on political factors such as a common allegiance to the Crown, respect for the Westminster Parliament, and a belief in the historic rights and liberties of the British people. As a 'land of immigrants', the USA has a distinctively multi-ethnic and multicultural character, which makes it impossible for it to construct a national identity on the basis of shared cultural and historical ties. Instead, a sense of American nationhood has been consciously developed through the educational system, and through the cultivation of respect for a set of common values, notably those outlined in the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. Similarly, French national identity is closely linked to the traditions and principles of the 1789 French Revolution.

What such nations have in common is that, in theory, they were founded on a voluntary acceptance of a common set of principles or goals, as opposed to an existing cultural identity. It is sometimes argued that the style of nationalism that develops in such societies is typically tolerant and democratic. If a nation is primarily a political entity, it is an inclusive group, in that membership is not restricted to those who fulfil particular language, religious, ethnic or suchlike criteria. Classic examples are the USA, with its image as a 'melting pot' nation, and the 'new' South Africa, seen as a 'rainbow society'. On the other hand, political nations may at times fail to experience the organic unity and sense of historical rootedness that is found in cultural nations. This may, for instance, account for the relative weakness of specifically British nationalism in the UK, by comparison with Scottish and Welsh nationalism and the insular form of English nationalism that is sometimes called 'little Englander' nationalism.

Developing-world states have encountered particular problems in their struggle to achieve a national identity. Such nations can be described as 'political' in two senses. First, in many cases, they have achieved statehood only after a struggle against colonial rule (see p. 122). In this case, the nation's national identity is deeply influenced by the unifying quest for national liberation and freedom. Developing-world nationalism therefore tends to have a strong anti-

POLITICS IN ACTION . . .

Canada: one nation or two?

Events: Canada is a federation comprising ten provinces and three territories, the former enjoying wider political autonomy than the latter. Almost 24 per cent of Canadians are francophones, who speak French as their first language and largely live (85 per cent) in the Atlantic province of Quebec. Since the 1970s, Canadian domestic politics has been dominated by the issue of Quebec's relationship to predominantly anglophone Canada. The paramilitary Quebec Liberation Front, was active during 1963–70; the separatist political party, *Parti Québécois* (PQ), won power in Quebec in 1976; since 1990, PQ has operated on a federal level through the *Bloc Québécois* (BQ). Referendums on independence for Quebec were held in 1980 and 1995, but both failed, the latter by a margin of 1 per cent. Attempts to address the challenge of Quebec nationalism through constitutional reform, notably through the Meech Lake Accord of 1987, also failed. However, the principles of multiculturalism and biculturalism have been enshrined in law through section 27 of the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the 1988 Canadian Multiculturalism Act. In 2006, the Canadian House of Commons passed a motion recognizing that the 'Québécois form a nation within a united Canada'.

Significance: The nationalism of the Québécois in Canada raises important questions about both the nature of nationalism and the circumstances in which it rises or falls. From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, Quebec nationalism was distinctively cultural in orientation, being shaped by conservative clerical allegiances, centred on the Catholic Church, and reflecting the rural and familial values of a historically agricultural territory. However, by the 1960s, this elite version of society was being unsettled by trends such as urbanization, secularization, Americanization, and the spread of liberal and progressive values. In this context, Québécois identity started to be re-articulated, becoming more self-confident and assertive, and expressing itself increasingly through political demands, especially for independence. Political factors also facilitated this process. The introduction, in the early 1960s, of the so-called 'Quiet Revolution' by the province's Liberal government promoted social and cultural modernization and, by increasing the power of the provincial government, sparked the growth of popular demands for secession. Similarly, under the premierships of Pierre Trudeau (1968–79, 1980–84), the Canadian government attempted to satisfy Quebec nationalism by making concessions in terms of language rights and by adjusting both Canada's and Quebec's constitutional status, which strengthened the tide of nationalism, rather than containing it.

However, despite the transition from cultural concerns to political demands, language remained central to Quebec nationalism, and, in some respects, became more important. This occurred both because of the perception that French was being threatened by the spread of English (and other languages) due to growing immigration (Canada has one of the highest per capita immigration rates in the world), and because language was increasingly equated with identity, and thus became part of a politics of politico-cultural self-assertion. Nevertheless, following the failure of the 1995 referendum, the tide started to turn against secessionist nationalism. In the 2007 provincial election, PQ was defeated by both the Liberals and the conservative *Action démocratique du Québec* (ADQ), marking the first time since 1973 that the party did not form either the government or the official opposition. The reasons for this include a growing recognition of the economic benefit of remaining within the Canadian federation, and the fact that progress in securing Quebec's cultural and language rights has, over time, weakened the sense of threat and injustice that had once helped to fuel secessionist politics. In many respects, multiculturalism (see p. 167), rather than nationalism, has proved to be the solution to the 'Quebec problem', especially as, since the 1990s, Canada has acknowledged the territorial and self-government rights of its so-called 'First Nations'.

colonial character. Second, these nations have often been shaped by territorial boundaries inherited from their former colonial rulers. This has particularly been the case in Africa. African 'nations' often encompass a wide range of ethnic, religious and regional groups that are bound together by little more than a shared colonial past. In contrast to the creation of classic European cultural nations, which sought statehood on the basis of a pre-existing national identity, an attempt has been made in Africa to 'build' nations on the foundations of existing states. However, the resulting mismatch of political and ethnic identities has bred recurrent tensions, as has been seen in Nigeria, Sudan, Rwanda and Burundi, for example. However, such conflicts are by no means simply manifestations of ancient '**tribalism**'. To a large extent, they are a consequence of the divide-and-rule policies used in the colonial past.

VARIETIES OF NATIONALISM

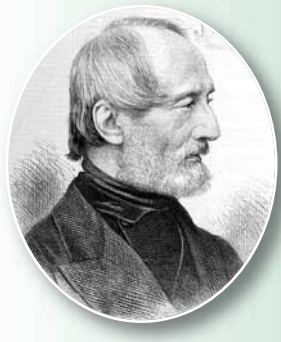
Immense controversy surrounds the political character of nationalism. On the one hand, nationalism can appear to be a progressive and liberating force, offering the prospect of national unity or independence. On the other, it can be an irrational and reactionary creed that allows political leaders to conduct policies of military expansion and war in the name of the nation. Indeed, nationalism shows every sign of suffering from the political equivalent of multiple-personality syndrome. At various times, nationalism has been progressive and reactionary, democratic and authoritarian, liberating and oppressive, and left-wing and right-wing. For this reason, it is perhaps better to view nationalism not as a single or coherent political phenomenon, but as a series of 'nationalisms'; that is, as a complex of traditions that share but one characteristic – each, in its own particular way, acknowledges the central political importance of the nation.

This confusion derives, in part, from the controversies examined above as to how the concept of a nation should be understood, and about whether cultural or political criteria are decisive in defining the nation. However, the character of nationalism is also moulded by the circumstances in which nationalist aspirations arise, and by the political causes to which it is attached. Thus, when nationalism is a reaction against the experience of foreign domination or colonial rule, it tends to be a liberating force linked to the goals of liberty, justice and democracy. When nationalism is a product of social dislocation and demographic change, it often has an insular and exclusive character, and can become a vehicle for racism (see p. 120) and **xenophobia**. Finally, nationalism is shaped by the political ideals of those who espouse it. In their different ways, liberals, conservatives, socialists, fascists and even communists have been attracted to nationalism (of the major ideologies, perhaps only anarchism is entirely at odds with nationalism). In this sense, nationalism is a cross-cutting ideology. The principal political manifestations of nationalism are:

- liberal nationalism
- conservative nationalism
- expansionist nationalism
- anticolonial nationalism.

● **Tribalism**: Group behaviour characterized by insularity and exclusivity, typically fuelled by hostility towards rival groups.

● **Xenophobia**: A fear or hatred of foreigners; pathological ethnocentrism.



Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–72)

Italian nationalist and apostle of liberal republicanism. Mazzini was born in Genoa, Italy, and was the son of a doctor. He came into contact with revolutionary politics as a member of the patriotic secret society, the Carbonari. This led to his arrest and exile to France and, after his expulsion from France, to Britain. He returned briefly to Italy during the 1848 Revolutions, helping to liberate Milan and becoming head of the short-lived Roman Republic. A committed republican, Mazzini's influence thereafter faded as other nationalist leaders, including Garibaldi (1807–82), looked to the House of Savoy to bring about Italian unification. Although he never officially returned to Italy, Mazzini's liberal nationalism had a profound influence throughout Europe, and on immigrant groups in the USA.

Liberal nationalism

Liberal nationalism can be seen as the classic form of European liberalism; it dates back to the French Revolution, and embodies many of its values. Indeed, in continental Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, to be a nationalist meant to be a liberal, and vice versa. The 1848 Revolutions, for example, fused the struggle for national independence and unification with the demand for limited and constitutional government. Nowhere was this more evident than in the '*Risorgimento*' (rebirth) nationalism of the Italian nationalist movement, especially as expressed by the 'prophet' of Italian unification, Guiseppe Mazzini. Similar principles were espoused by Simon Bolívar (1783–1830), who led the Latin-American independence movement in the early nineteenth century, and helped to expel the Spanish from Hispanic America. Perhaps the clearest expression of liberal nationalism is found in US President Woodrow Wilson's 'Fourteen Points'. Drawn up in 1918, these were proposed as the basis for the reconstruction of Europe after World War I, and provided a blueprint for the sweeping territorial changes that were implemented by the Treaty of Versailles (1919).

In common with all forms of nationalism, liberal nationalism is based on the fundamental assumption that humankind is naturally divided into a collection of nations, each possessed of a separate identity. Nations are therefore genuine or organic communities, not the artificial creation of political leaders or ruling classes. The characteristic theme of liberal nationalism, however, is that it links the idea of the nation with a belief in popular sovereignty, ultimately derived from Rousseau. This fusion was brought about because the multinational empires against which nineteenth-century European nationalists fought were also autocratic and oppressive. Mazzini, for example, wished not only to unite the Italian states, but also to throw off the influence of autocratic Austria. The central theme of this form of nationalism is therefore a commitment to the principle of **national self-determination**. Its goal is the construction of a nation-state (see p. 124); that is, a state within which the boundaries of government coincide as far as possible with those of nationality. In J. S. Mill's ([1861] 1951) words:

● **National self-determination**: The principle that the nation is a sovereign entity; self-determination implies both national independence and democratic rule.

> When the sentiment of nationality exists in any force, there is a prima facie case for uniting all members of the nationality under one government, and a government to themselves apart. This is merely saying that the question of government should be decided by the governed.

Liberal nationalism is, above all, a principled form of nationalism. It does not uphold the interests of one nation against other nations. Instead, it proclaims that each and every nation has a right to freedom and self-determination. In this sense, all nations are equal. The ultimate goal of liberal nationalism, then, is the construction of a world of sovereign nation-states. Mazzini thus formed the clandestine organization Young Italy to promote the idea of a united Italy, but he also founded Young Europe in the hope of spreading nationalist ideas throughout the continent. Similarly, at the Paris Peace Conference that drew up the Treaty of Versailles, Woodrow Wilson advanced the principle of self-determination not simply because the break-up of European empires served US national interests, but because he believed that the Poles, the Czechs, the Yugoslavs and the Hungarians all had the same right to political independence that the Americans already enjoyed.

From this perspective, nationalism is not only a means of enlarging political freedom, but also a mechanism for securing a peaceful and stable world order. Wilson, for instance, believed that World War I had been a consequence of an 'old order' that was dominated by autocratic and militaristic empires bent on expansionism and war. In his view, democratic nation-states, however, would be essentially peaceful, because, possessing both cultural and political unity, they lacked the incentive to wage war or subjugate other nations. In this light, nationalism is not seen as a source of distrust, suspicion and rivalry. Rather, it is a force capable of promoting unity within each nation and brotherhood amongst nations on the basis of mutual respect for national rights and characteristics.

There is a sense, nevertheless, in which liberalism looks beyond the nation. This occurs for two reasons. The first is that a commitment to individualism (see p. 158) implies that liberals believe that all human beings (regardless of factors such as race, creed, social background and nationality) are of equal moral worth. Liberalism therefore subscribes to **universalism**, in that it accepts that individuals everywhere have the same status and entitlements. This is commonly expressed nowadays in the notion of **human rights**. In setting the individual above the nation, liberals establish a basis for violating national sovereignty, most clearly through 'humanitarian intervention' (see p. 424) designed to protect the citizens of another country from their own government. The second reason is that liberals fear that a world of sovereign nation-states may degenerate into an international 'state of nature'. Just as unlimited freedom allows individuals to abuse and enslave one another, national sovereignty may be used as a cloak for expansionism and conquest. Freedom must always be subject to the law, and this applies equally to individuals and to nations. Liberals have, as a result, been in the forefront of campaigns to establish a system of international law supervised by supranational bodies such as the League of Nations, the United Nations and the European Union. In this view, nationalism and internationalism are not rival or mutually exclusive principles; rather, from a liberal perspective, the latter compliments the former.

CONCEPT

Internationalism

Internationalism is the theory or practice of politics based on transnational or global cooperation. It is rooted in universalist assumptions about human nature that put it at odds with political nationalism. The major internationalist traditions are drawn from liberalism and socialism. *Liberal* internationalism is based on individualism reflected in the assumption that human rights have a 'higher' status than claims based on national sovereignty. *Socialist* internationalism is grounded in a belief in international class solidarity (proletarian internationalism), underpinned by assumptions about a common humanity. Feminism and green politics have also advanced distinctively internationalist positions.

● **Universalism**: The theory that there is a common core to human identity shared by people everywhere.

● **Human rights**: Rights to which people are entitled by virtue of being human; universal and fundamental rights (see p. 342).

CONCEPT

Patriotism

Patriotism (from the Latin *patria*, meaning 'fatherland') is a sentiment, a psychological attachment to one's nation (a 'love of one's country'). The terms 'nationalism' and 'patriotism' are often confused. Nationalism has a doctrinal character and embodies the belief that the nation is in some way the central principle of political organization. Patriotism provides the affective basis for that belief. Patriotism thus underpins all forms of nationalism; it is difficult to conceive of a national group demanding, say, political independence without possessing at least a measure of patriotic loyalty.

Criticisms of liberal nationalism tend to fall into two categories. In the first category, liberal nationalists are accused of being naive and romantic. They see the progressive and liberating face of nationalism; theirs is a tolerant and rational nationalism. However, they perhaps ignore the darker face of nationalism; that is, the irrational bonds of tribalism that distinguish 'us' from a foreign and threatening 'them'. Liberals see nationalism as a universal principle, but they have less understanding of the emotional power of nationalism, which, in time of war, can persuade people to fight, kill and die for 'their' country, almost regardless of the justice of their nation's cause. Such a stance is expressed in the assertion: 'my country, right or wrong'.

Second, the goal of liberal nationalism (the construction of a world of nation-states) may be fundamentally misguided. The mistake of Wilsonian nationalism, on the basis of which large parts of the map of Europe were redrawn, was that it assumed that nations live in convenient and discrete geographical areas, and that states can be constructed to coincide with these areas. In practice, all so-called 'nation-states' comprise a number of linguistic, religious, ethnic and regional groups, some of which may consider themselves to be 'nations'. This has nowhere been more clearly demonstrated than in the former Yugoslavia, a country viewed by the peacemakers at Versailles as 'the land of the Slavs'. However, in fact, it consisted of a patchwork of ethnic communities, religions, languages and differing histories. Moreover, as the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s demonstrated, each of its constituent republics was itself an ethnic patchwork. Indeed, as the Nazis (and, later, the Bosnian Serbs) recognized, the only certain way of achieving a politically unified and culturally homogeneous nation-state is through a programme of **ethnic cleansing**.

Conservative nationalism

Historically, conservative nationalism developed rather later than liberal nationalism. Until the latter half of the nineteenth century, conservative politicians treated nationalism as a subversive, if not revolutionary, creed. As the century progressed, however, the link between conservatism and nationalism became increasingly apparent; for instance, in Disraeli's 'One Nation' ideal, in Bismarck's willingness to recruit German nationalism to the cause of Prussian aggrandisement, and in Tsar Alexander III's endorsement of pan-Slavic nationalism. In modern politics, nationalism has become an article of faith for most, if not all, conservatives. In the UK, this was demonstrated most graphically by Margaret Thatcher's triumphalist reaction to victory in the Falklands War of 1982, and it is evident in the engrained '**Euroscepticism**' of the Conservative right, particularly in relation to its recurrent bogey: a 'federal Europe'. A similar form of nationalism was rekindled in the USA through the adoption of a more assertive foreign policy; by Ronald Reagan in the invasion of Grenada (1983) and the bombing of Libya (1986), and by George W. Bush in the invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003).

Conservative nationalism is concerned less with the principled nationalism of universal self-determination, and more with the promise of social cohesion and public order embodied in the sentiment of national patriotism. Above all, conservatives see the nation as an organic entity emerging out of a basic desire

● **Ethnic cleansing**: The forcible expulsion or extermination of 'alien' peoples; often used as a euphemism for genocide.

● **Euroscepticism**: Opposition to further European integration, usually not extending to the drive to withdraw from the EU (anti-Europeanism).

of humans to gravitate towards those who have the same views, habits, lifestyles and appearance as themselves. In short, human beings seek security and identity through membership of a national community. From this perspective, patriotic loyalty and a consciousness of nationhood is rooted largely in the idea of a shared past, turning nationalism into a defence of values and institutions that have been endorsed by history. Nationalism thus becomes a form of traditionalism. This gives conservative nationalism a distinctively nostalgic and backward-looking character. In the USA, this is accomplished through an emphasis on the Pilgrim Fathers, the War of Independence, the Philadelphia Convention and so on. In the case of British nationalism (or, more accurately, English nationalism), national patriotism draws on symbols closely associated with the institution of monarchy. The UK national anthem is God Save the Queen, and the Royal Family play a prominent role in national celebrations, such as Armistice Day, and on state occasions, such as the opening of Parliament.

Conservative nationalism tends to develop in established nation-states rather than in those that are in the process of nation-building. It is typically inspired by the perception that the nation is somehow under threat, either from within or from without. The traditional 'enemy within' has been class antagonism and the ultimate danger of social revolution. In this respect, conservatives have seen nationalism as the antidote to socialism: when patriotic loyalties are stronger than class solidarity, the working class is, effectively, integrated into the nation. Calls for national unity and the belief that unabashed patriotism is a civic virtue are therefore recurrent themes in conservative thought.

The 'enemies without' that threaten national identity, from a conservative perspective, include immigration and supranationalism. In this view, immigration poses a threat because it tends to weaken an established national culture and ethnic identity, thereby provoking hostility and conflict. This fear was expressed in the UK in the 1960s by Enoch Powell, who warned that further Commonwealth immigration would lead to racial conflict and violence. A similar theme was taken up in 1979 by Margaret Thatcher in her reference to the danger of the UK being 'swamped' by immigrants. Anti-immigration campaigns waged by the British National Party, Le Pen's National Front in France, and far-right groups such as the Freedom Party in Austria and the Danish People's Party also draw their inspiration from conservative nationalism. National identity and, with it, our source of security and belonging, is threatened in the same way by the growth of supranational bodies and by the globalization of culture. Resistance in the UK and in other EU member states to a single European currency reflects not merely concern about the loss of economic sovereignty, but also a belief that a national currency is vital to the maintenance of a distinctive national identity.

Although conservative nationalism has been linked to military adventurism and expansion, its distinctive character is that it is inward-looking and insular. If conservative governments have used foreign policy as a device to stoke up public fervour, this is an act of political opportunism, rather than because conservative nationalism is relentlessly aggressive or inherently militaristic. This leads to the criticism that conservative nationalism is essentially a form of elite manipulation or ruling-class ideology. From this perspective, the 'nation' is invented, and certainly defined, by political leaders and ruling elites with a view to manufacturing consent or engineering political passivity. In crude terms, when in

CONCEPT

Racialism, racism

The terms racialism and racism tend to be used interchangeably. Racialism refers to any belief or doctrine that draws political or social conclusions from the idea that humankind is divided into biologically distinct races (a notion that has no, or little, scientific basis). Racialist theories are thus based on that assumption the cultural, intellectual and moral differences amongst humankind derive from supposedly more fundamental genetic differences. In political terms, racialism is manifest in calls for racial segregation (apartheid), and in doctrines of 'blood' superiority and inferiority (Aryanism and anti-Semitism).

trouble, all governments play the 'nationalism card'. A more serious criticism of conservative nationalism, however, is that it promotes intolerance and bigotry. Insular nationalism draws on a narrowly cultural concept of the nation; that is, the belief that a nation is an exclusive ethnic community, broadly similar to an extended family. A very clear line is therefore drawn between those who are members of the nation and those who are alien to it. By insisting on the maintenance of cultural purity and established traditions, conservatives may portray immigrants, or foreigners in general, as a threat, and so promote, or at least legitimize, racialism and xenophobia.

Expansionist nationalism

The third form of nationalism has an aggressive, militaristic and expansionist character. In many ways, this form of nationalism is the antithesis of the principled belief in equal rights and self-determination that is the core of liberal nationalism. The aggressive face of nationalism first appeared in the late nineteenth century as European powers indulged in 'the scramble for Africa' in the name of national glory and their 'place in the sun'. Nineteenth-century European imperialism (see p. 427) differed from the colonial expansion of earlier periods in that it was fuelled by a climate of popular nationalism in which national prestige was linked to the possession of an empire, and each colonial victory was greeted by demonstrations of popular enthusiasm, or **jingoism**. To a large extent, both world wars of the twentieth century resulted from this expansionist form of nationalism. When World War I broke out in August 1914, following a prolonged arms race and a succession of international crises, the prospect of conquest and military glory provoked spontaneous public rejoicing in all the major capitals of Europe. World War II was largely a result of the nationalist-inspired programmes of imperial expansion pursued by Japan, Italy and Germany. The most destructive modern example of this form of nationalism in Europe was the quest by the Bosnian Serbs to construct a 'Greater Serbia' in the aftermath of the break-up of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

In its extreme form, such nationalism arises from a sentiment of intense, even hysterical, nationalist enthusiasm, sometimes referred to as 'integral nationalism', a term coined by the French nationalist Charles Maurras (1868–1952), leader of the right-wing Action Française. The centrepiece of Maurras' politics was an assertion of the overriding importance of the nation: the nation is everything and the individual is nothing. The nation thus has an existence and meaning beyond the life of any single individual, and individual existence has meaning only when it is dedicated to the unity and survival of the nation. Such fanatical patriotism has a particularly strong appeal for the alienated, isolated and powerless, for whom nationalism becomes a vehicle through which pride and self-respect can be regained. However, integral nationalism breaks the link previously established between nationalism and democracy. An 'integral' nation is an exclusive ethnic community, bound together by primordial loyalties, rather than voluntary political allegiances. National unity does not demand free debate, and an open and competitive struggle for power; it requires discipline and obedience to a single, supreme leader. This led Maurras to portray democracy as a source of weakness and corruption, and to call instead for the re-establishment of monarchical absolutism.

● **Jingoism**: A mood of public enthusiasm and celebration provoked by military expansion or imperial conquest.

CONCEPT

Anti-Semitism

'Semites' are by tradition the descendants of Shem, son of Noah. They include most of the peoples of the Middle East. Anti-Semitism is prejudice or hatred specifically towards Jews. In its earliest form, *religious* anti-Semitism reflected the hostility of the Christians towards the Jews, based on their alleged complicity in the murder of Jesus and their refusal to acknowledge him as the son of God. *Economic* anti-Semitism developed from the Middle Ages onwards, and expressed distaste for Jews in their capacity as moneylenders and traders. R*acial* anti-Semitism developed from the late nineteeth century onwards, and condemned the Jewish peoples as fundamentally evil and destructive.

This militant and intense form of nationalism is invariably associated with chauvinistic beliefs and doctrines. Derived from the name of Nicolas Chauvin, a French soldier noted for his fanatical devotion to Napoleon and the cause of France, chauvinism is an irrational belief in the superiority or dominance of one's own group or people. National chauvinism therefore rejects the idea that all nations are equal in favour of the belief that nations have particular characteristics and qualities, and so have very different destinies. Some nations are suited to rule; others are suited to be ruled. Typically, this form of nationalism is articulated through doctrines of ethnic or racial superiority, thereby fusing nationalism and racialism. The chauvinist's own nation is seen to be unique and special, in some way a 'chosen people'. For early German nationalists such as Fichte and Jahn (1783–1830), only the Germans were a true *Volk* (an organic people). They alone had maintained blood purity and avoided the contamination of their language. For Maurras, France was an unequalled marvel, a repository of all Christian and classical virtues.

No less important in this type of nationalism, however, is the image of another nation or race as a threat or enemy. In the face of the enemy, the nation draws together and gains an intensified sense of its own identity and importance, achieving a kind of 'negative integration'. Chauvinistic nationalism therefore establishes a clear distinction between 'them' and 'us'. There has to be a 'them' to deride or hate in order for a sense of 'us' to be forged. The world is thus divided, usually by means of racial categories, into an 'in group' and an 'out group'. The 'out group' acts as a scapegoat for all the misfortunes and frustrations suffered by the 'in group'. This was most graphically demonstrated by the virulent anti-Semitism that was the basis of German Nazism. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* ([1925] 1969) portrayed history as a Manichean struggle between the Aryans and the Jews, respectively representing the forces of light and darkness, or good and evil.

A recurrent theme of expansionist nationalism is the idea of national rebirth or regeneration. This form of nationalism commonly draws on myths of past greatness or national glory. Mussolini and the Italian Fascists looked back to the days of Imperial Rome. In portraying their regime as the 'Third Reich', the German Nazis harked back both to Bismarck's 'Second Reich' and Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire, the 'First Reich'. Such myths plainly give expansionist nationalism a backward-looking character, but they also look to the future, in that they mark out the nation's destiny. If nationalism is a vehicle for re-establishing greatness and regaining national glory, it invariably has a militaristic and expansionist character. In short, war is the testing ground of the nation. At the heart of integral nationalism there often lies an imperial project: a quest for expansion or a search for colonies. This can be seen in forms of **pan-nationalism**. However, Nazi Germany is, again, the best-known example. Hitler's writings mapped out a three-stage programme of expansion. First, the Nazis sought to establish a 'Greater Germany' by bringing ethnic Germans in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland within an expanded Reich. Second, they intended to achieve *Lebensraum* (living space) by establishing a German-dominated empire stretching into Russia. Third, Hitler dreamed of ultimate Aryan world domination.

● **Pan-nationalism**: A style of nationalism dedicated to unifying a disparate people through either expansionism or political solidarity ('pan' means all or every).

CONCEPT

Colonialism

Colonialism is the theory or practice of establishing control over a foreign territory and turning it into a 'colony'. Colonialism is thus a particular form of imperialism (see p. 427). Colonialism is usually distinguished by settlement and by economic domination. As typically practised in Africa and Southeast Asia, colonial government was exercised by a settler community from a 'mother country'. In contrast, *neocolonialism* is essentially an economic phenomenon based on the export of capital from an advanced country to a less developed one (for example, so-called US 'dollar imperialism' in Latin America).

Anticolonial and postcolonial nationalism

The developing world has spawned various forms of nationalism, all of which have in some way drawn inspiration from the struggle against colonial rule. The irony of this form of nationalism is that it has turned doctrines and principles first developed through the process of 'nation-building' in Europe against the European powers themselves. Colonialism, in other words, succeeded in turning nationalism into a political creed of global significance. In Africa and Asia, it helped to forge a sense of nationhood shaped by the desire for 'national liberation'. Indeed, during the twentieth century, the political geography of much of the world was transformed by anticolonialism. Independence movements that sprang up in the interwar period gained new impetus after the conclusion of World War II. The overstretched empires of Britain, France, the Netherlands and Portugal crumbled in the face of rising nationalism.

India had been promised independence during World War II, which was eventually granted in 1947. China achieved genuine unity and independence only after the 1949 communist revolution, having fought an eight-year war against the occupying Japanese. A republic of Indonesia was proclaimed in 1949 after a three-year war against the Netherlands. A military uprising forced the French to withdraw from Vietnam in 1954, even though final liberation, with the unification of North and South Vietnam, was not achieved until 1975, after 14 further years of war against the USA. Nationalist struggles in Southeast Asia inspired similar movements in Africa, with liberation movements emerging under leaders such as Nkrumah in Ghana, Dr Azikiwe in Nigeria, Julius Nyerere in Tanganyika (later Tanzania), and Hastings Banda in Nyasaland (later Malawi). The pace of decolonization in Africa accelerated from the late 1950s onwards. Nigeria gained independence from the UK in 1960 and, after a prolonged war fought against the French, Algeria gained independence in 1962. Kenya became independent in 1963, as did Tanzania and Malawi the next year. Africa's last remaining colony, South-West Africa, finally became independent Namibia in 1990.

Early forms of anticolonialism drew heavily on 'classical' European nationalism and were inspired by the idea of national self-determination. However, emergent African and Asian nations were in a very different position from the newly-created European states of the nineteenth century. For African and Asian nations, the quest for political independence was inextricably linked to a desire for social development and for an end to their subordination to the industrialized states of Europe and the USA. The goal of 'national liberation' therefore had an economic as well as a political dimension. This helps to explain why anticolonial movements typically looked not to liberalism but to socialism, and particularly to Marxism–Leninism, as a vehicle for expressing their nationalist ambitions. On the surface, nationalism and socialism appear to be incompatible political creeds. Socialists have traditionally preached internationalism, since they regard humanity as a single entity, and argue that the division of humankind into separate nations breeds only suspicion and hostility. Marxists, in particular, have stressed that the bonds of class solidarity are stronger and more genuine than the ties of nationality, or, as Marx put it in the *Communist Manifesto* ([1848] 1967): 'Working men have no country'.

The appeal of socialism to the developing world was based on the fact that the values of community and cooperation that socialism embodies are deeply

established in the cultures of traditional, pre-industrial societies. In this sense, nationalism and socialism are linked, insofar as both emphasize social solidarity and collective action. By this standard, nationalism may simply be a weaker form of socialism, the former applying the 'social' principle to the nation, the latter extending it to cover the whole of humanity. More specifically, socialism, and especially Marxism, provide an analysis of inequality and exploitation through which the colonial experience could be understood and colonial rule challenged. In the same way as the oppressed and exploited proletariat saw that they could achieve liberation through the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, developing-world nationalists saw 'armed struggle' as a means of achieving both political and economic emancipation, thus fusing the goals of political independence and social revolution. In countries such as China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cambodia, anticolonial movements openly embraced Marxism–Leninism. On achieving power, they moved to seize foreign assets and nationalize economic resources, creating Soviet-style planned economies. African and Middle Eastern states developed a less ideological form of nationalistic socialism, which was practised, for example, in Algeria, Libya, Zambia, Iraq and South Yemen. The 'socialism' proclaimed in these countries usually took the form of an appeal to a unifying national cause or interest, typically championed by a powerful 'charismatic' leader.

However, nationalists in the developing world have not always been content to express their nationalism in a language of socialism or Marxism borrowed from the West. Especially since the 1970s, Marxism–Leninism has often been displaced by forms of religious fundamentalism (see p. 53) and, particularly, Islamic fundamentalism. This has given the developing world a specifically non-western – indeed an anti-western, voice. In theory at least, Islam attempts to foster a transnational political identity that unites all those who acknowledge the 'way of Islam' and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad within an 'Islamic nation'. However, the Iranian revolution of 1979, which brought Ayatollah Khomeini (1900–89) to power, demonstrated the potency of Islamic fundamentalism as a creed of national and spiritual renewal. The establishment of an 'Islamic republic' was designed to purge Iran of the corrupting influence of western materialism in general, and of the 'Great Satan' (the USA) in particular, through a return to the traditional values and principles embodied in the Shari'a, or divine Islamic law. By no means, however, does Islamic nationalism have a unified character. In Sudan and Pakistan, for example, Islamification has essentially been used as a tool of statecraft to consolidate the power of ruling elites.

A FUTURE FOR THE NATION-STATE?

Since the final decades of the twentieth century, it has become fashionable to declare that the age of nationalism is over. This has not been because nationalism had been superseded by 'higher' cosmopolitan allegiances, but because its task had been completed: the world had become a world of nation-states. In effect, the nation had been accepted as the sole legitimate unit of political rule. Certainly, since 1789, the world had been fundamentally remodelled on nationalist lines. In 1910, only 15 of the 193 states recognized in 2011 as full members

CONCEPT

Nation-state

The nation-state is a form of political organization and a political ideal. In the first case, it is an autonomous political community bound together by the overlapping bonds of citizenship and nationality. In the latter, it is a principle, or ideal type (see p. 20), reflected in Mazzini's goal: 'every nation a state, only one state for the entire nation'. As such, the nation-state principle embodies the belief that nations are 'natural' political communities. For liberals and most socialists, the nation-state is largely fashioned out of civic loyalties and allegiances. For conservatives and integral nationalists, it is based on ethnic or organic unity.

of the United Nations existed. Well into the twentieth century, most of the peoples of the world were still colonial subjects of one of the European empires. Only 3 of the current 72 states in the Middle East and Africa existed before 1910, and no fewer than 108 states have come into being since 1959. These changes have been fuelled largely by the quest for national independence, with these new states invariably assuming the mantle of the nation-state.

History undoubtedly seems to be on the side of the nation-state. The three major geopolitical upheavals of the twentieth century (World War I, World War II and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe) each gave considerable impetus to the concept of the nation as a principle of political organization. Since 1991, at least 22 new states have come into existence in Europe alone (15 of them as a result of the disintegration of the USSR), and all of them have claimed to be nation-states. The great strength of the nation-state is that it offers the prospect of both cultural cohesion and political unity. When a people who share a common cultural or ethnic identity gain the right to self-government, community and citizenship coincide. This is why nationalists believe that the forces that have created a world of independent nation-states are natural and irresistible, and that no other social group could constitute a meaningful political community. They believe that the nation-state is ultimately the only viable political unit. This view implies, for instance, that supranational bodies such as the European Union will never be able to rival the capacity of national governments to establish legitimacy and command popular allegiance. Clear limits should therefore be placed on the process of European integration because people with different languages, cultures and histories will never come to think of themselves as members of a united political community.

Nevertheless, just as the principle of the nation-state has achieved its widest support, other, very powerful forces have emerged that threaten to make the nation-state redundant. A combination of internal pressures and external threats has produced what is commonly referred to as a 'crisis of the nation-state'. Internally, nation-states have been subject to centrifugal pressures, generated by an upsurge in ethnic, regional and multicultural politics. This heightened concern with ethnicity and culture may, indeed, reflect the fact that, in a context of economic and cultural globalization (see p. 142), nations are no longer able to provide a meaningful collective identity or sense of social belonging. Given that all nation-states embody a measure of cultural diversity, the politics of ethnic assertiveness cannot but present a challenge to the principle of the nation, leading some to suggest that nationalism is in the process of being replaced by multiculturalism (see p. 167). Unlike nations, ethnic, regional or cultural groups are not viable political entities in their own right, and have thus sometimes looked to forms of federalism (see p. 382) and confederalism to provide an alternative to political nationalism. For example, within the framework provided by the European Union, the Belgian regions of Flanders and Wallonia have achieved such a degree of self-government that Belgium remains a nation-state only in a strictly formal sense. The nature of such centrifugal forces is discussed more fully in Chapter 17.

External threats to the nation-state have a variety of forms. First, advances in the technology of warfare, and especially the advent of the nuclear age, have brought about demands that world peace be policed by intergovernmental or supranational bodies. This led to the creation of the League of Nations and, later,

Debating . . .

Are nations 'natural' political communities?

Nationalism is based on two core assumptions: first, that humankind is naturally divided into distinct nations and, second, that the nation is the most appropriate, and perhaps only legitimate, unit of political rule. This is why nationalists have strived, wherever possible, to bring the borders of the state into line with the boundaries of the nation. But is humankind 'naturally' divided into distinct nations? And why should the national communities be accorded this special, indeed unique, political status?

YES

'Natural' communities: For primordialist scholars, national identity is historically embedded: nations are rooted in a common cultural heritage and language that may long predate statehood or the quest for independence (Smith, 1986). In this view, nations evolve organically out of more simple ethnic communities, reflecting the fact that people are inherently group-orientated, drawn naturally towards others who are similar to themselves because they share the same cultural characteristics. Above all, national identity is forged by a combination of a sense of territorial belonging and a shared way of life (usually facilitated by a common language), creating deep emotional attachments that resemble kinship ties.

Vehicle for democracy: The nation acquired a political character only when, thanks to the doctrine of nationalism, it was seen as the ideal unit of self-rule, a notion embodied in the principle of national self-determination. Nationalism and democracy therefore go hand-in-hand. Bound together by ties of national solidarity, people are encouraged to adopt shared civic allegiances and to participate fully in the life of their society. Moreover, democratic nations are inclusive and tolerant, capable of respecting the separate identities of minority groups. Nationality, thus, does not suppress other sources of personal identity, such as ethnicity and religion.

Benefits of national partiality: Nationalism inevitably implies partiality, the inclination to favour the needs and interests of one's 'own' people over those of other peoples. This, as communitarian theorists argue, reflects the fact that morality begins at home. From this perspective, morality only makes sense when it is locally-based, grounded in the communities to which we belong, and which have shaped our lives and values. National partiality is thus an extension of the near universal inclination to accord moral priority to those we know best, especially our families and close friends. There is no reason, moreover, why national partiality should preclude a moral concern for 'strangers'.

NO

'Invented' communities: Rather than being natural or organic entities, nations are, to a greater or lesser extent, political constructs. Nations are certainly 'imagined communities', in the sense that people only ever meet a tiny proportion of those with whom they supposedly share a national identity (Anderson, 1983). Marxists and others go further and argued that ruling or elite groups have 'invented' nationalism in order to bind the working class, and the disadvantaged generally, to the existing power structure (Hobsbawm, 1983). National anthems, national flags and national myths and legends are thus little more than a form of ideological manipulation.

'Hollowed-out' nations: The nation has had its day as a meaningful political unit and as a basis for democracy and citizenship. Nations were appropriate political communities during an industrial age that was shaped though the development of relatively discrete national economies. However, the growth of an interdependent world, and the transfer of decision-making authority from national governments to intergovernmental or supranational bodies, has seriously weakened the political significance of the nation. Not only have nations been 'hollowed-out' in terms of their political role, but the seemingly remorseless trends towards international migration and cultural diversity has fatally compromised the nation's organic unity (if it ever existed).

Miniaturizing humanity: National identity encourages people to identify with part of humanity, rather than with humanity as a whole. As such, it narrows our moral sensibilities and destroys our sense of a common humanity. Worse, nationalism breeds inevitable division and conflict. If one's own nation is unique or 'special', other nations are inevitably seen as inferior and possibly threatening. Nationalism therefore gives rise to, not a world of independent nation-states, but a world that is scared by militarism, aggression and conquest. For humankind to progress beyond struggle and war, nationalism must be abandoned and treated like the infantile disease it has always been.

the United Nations. Second, economic life has been progressively globalized. Markets are now world markets, businesses have increasingly become transnational corporations (see p. 149), and capital is moved around the globe in the blink of an eye. Is there a future for the nation-state in a world in which no national government can control its economic destiny? Third, the nation-state may be the enemy of the natural environment and a threat to the global ecological balance. Nations are concerned primarily with their own strategic and economic interests, and most pay little attention to the ecological consequences of their actions. The folly of this was demonstrated in the Ukraine in 1986 by the Chernobyl nuclear accident, which released a wave of nuclear radiation across Northern Europe that will cause an estimated 2000 cancer-related deaths over 50 years in Europe.

Finally, distinctive national cultures and traditions, the source of cohesion that distinguishes nation-states from other forms of political organization, have been weakened by the emergence of a transnational, and even global, culture. This has been facilitated by international tourism and the dramatic growth in communications technologies, from satellite television to the 'information superhighway'. When US films and television programmes are watched throughout the world, Indian and Chinese cuisine is as popular in Europe as native dishes, and people can communicate as easily with the other side of the world as with their neighbouring town, is the nation-state any longer a meaningful entity? These and related issues are discussed in greater depth in Chapter 8.

SUMMARY

- Nations are defined by a combination of cultural and political factors. Culturally, they are groups of people who are bound together by a common language, religion, history and traditions. Ultimately, however, nations define themselves through the existence of a shared civic consciousness, classically expressed as the desire to achieve or maintain statehood.
- Distinctive cultural and political forms of nationalism can be identified. Cultural nationalism emphasizes the regeneration of the nation as a distinctive civilization on the basis of a belief in the nation as a unique, historical and organic whole. Political nationalism, on the other hand, recognizes the nation as a discrete political community, and is thus linked with ideas such as sovereignty and self-determination.
- Some political thinkers portray nationalism as a modern phenomenon associated with industrialization and the rise of democracy, while others trace it back to premodern ethnic loyalties and identities. The character of nationalism has varied considerably, and has been influenced by both the historical circumstances in which it has arisen and the political causes to which it has been attached.
- There have been a number of contrasting manifestations of political nationalism. Liberal nationalism is based on a belief in a universal right to self-determination. Conservative nationalism values the capacity of national patriotism to deliver social cohesion and political unity. Expansionist nationalism is a vehicle for aggression and imperial conquest. Anticolonial nationalism is associated with the struggle for national liberation, often fused with the quest for social development.
- The most widely recognized form of political organization worldwide is the nation-state, which is often seen as the sole legitimate unit of political rule. Its strength is that it offers the prospect of both cultural cohesion and political unity, thus allowing those who share a common cultural or ethnic identity to exercise the right to independence and self-government.
- The nation-state now confronts a number of challenges. Nation-states have been subject to centrifugal pressures generated by the growth in ethnic politics. Externally, they have confronted challenges from the growing power of supranational bodies, the advance of economic and cultural globalization, and the need to find international solutions to the environmental crisis.

Questions for discussion

- Where do nations come from? Are they natural or artificial formations?
- Why have national pride and patriotic loyalty been valued?
- Does cultural nationalism merely imprison a nation in its past?
- Why has nationalism proved to be such a potent political force?
- Does nationalism inevitably breed insularity and conflict?
- Can nationalism be viewed as a form of elite manipulation?
- Are nationalism and internationalism compatible?
- Is the nation-state the sole legitimate unit of political rule?
- Is a postnationalist world possible?

Further reading

Brown, D., *Contemporary Nationalism: Civic, Ethnocultural and Multicultural Politics* (2000). A clear and illuminating framework for understanding nationalist politics.

Hearn, J., *Rethinking Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (2006). A comprehensive account of approaches to understanding nationalism that draws on sociology, politics, anthropology and history, and develops its own critique.

Hobsbawm, E., *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (2nd edn) (1993). An analysis of the phenomenon of nationalism from a modern Marxist perspective.

Spencer, P. and H. Wollman (eds), *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader* (2005). A wide-ranging and stimulating collection of mainstream and less mainstream writings on nationalism.