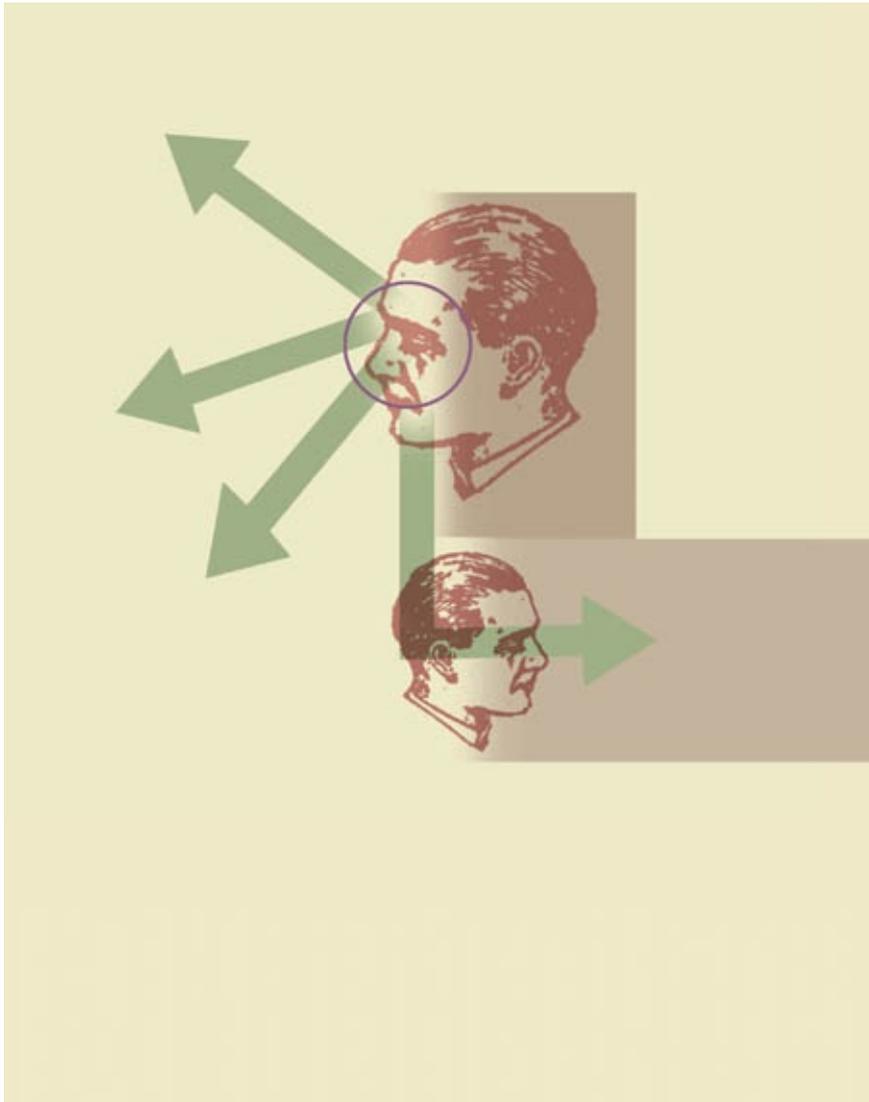


30-SECOND POLITICS

The 50 most thought-provoking theories in politics, each explained in half a minute



Editor
Steven L. Taylor



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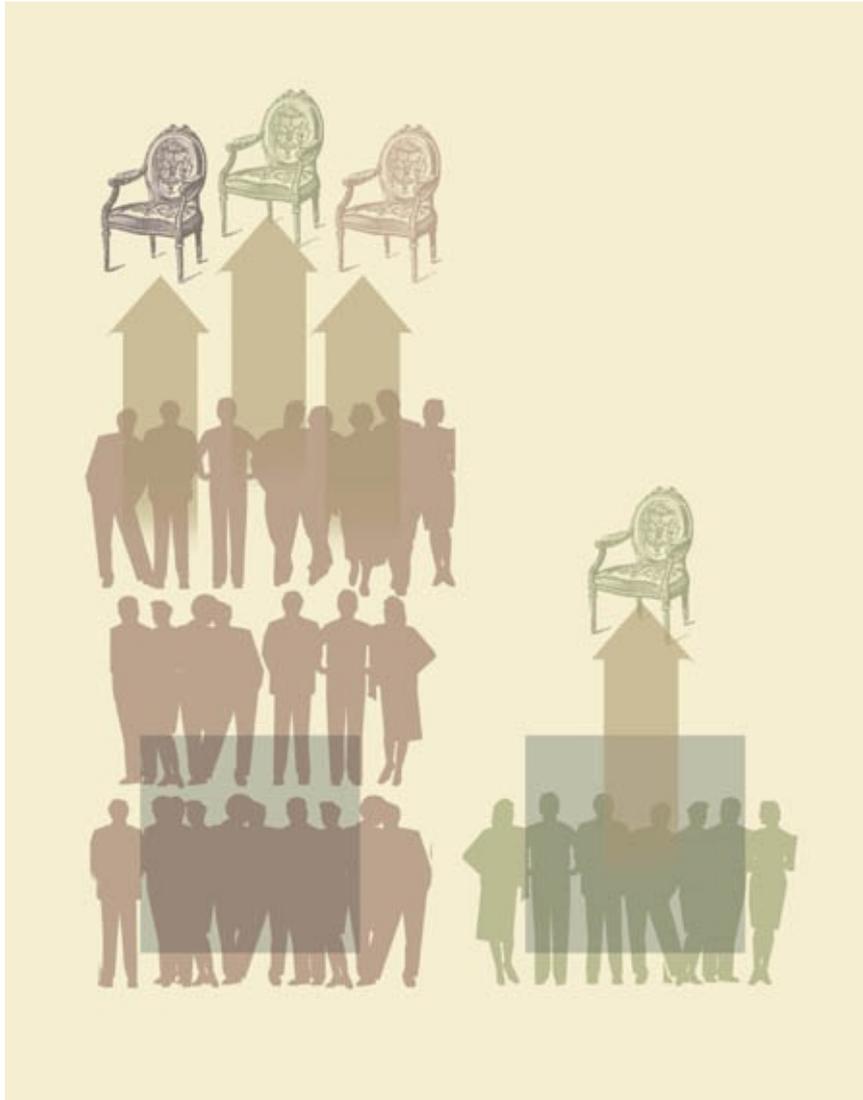
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INTRODUCTION

Steven L. Taylor

Much to the delight of political scientists everywhere, Aristotle once described the study of politics as the ‘master science’. Of course, he did not do so for the purpose of boosting the egos of a bunch of academics, rather he was expressing the notion that studying the interactions of human beings within the confines of political life encompassed the study of practically everything. While perhaps a grandiose formulation on the one hand, on the other consider the following set of issues that fall under the general rubric of politics: war and peace, criminal justice, taxation, safety regulations, civil rights and liberties, trade, abortion, marriage and rules governing scientific enquiry (to name but a few). Given the significance of these types of issues, the rules and structures governing their contents and application directly shape our lives. Put another way: one’s daily existence would be very different if one was born in North Korea versus in the South in terms both of material conditions as well as in the realm of rights and privileges. In short: politics matters. This book seeks to be an aid in sorting out the complexity of the political world and the language associated with it.

Aristotle provides a good place to start such a discussion, as he created a simple yet useful typology for classifying **regime types** by looking at the question of who governs: the one, the few or the many. This approach forms the foundation of the opening chapters of this book. The first chapter, Who Governs?, details what government by the one, few or many might look like in **basic terms**. The second, Rule by the Few, goes on to examine specifically regimes wherein the one or the few govern, or what we would call in modern parlance **authoritarian regimes**. From there we move to the question of Rule by the Many – in other words, democratic regimes. This third chapter details the basics of **democratic governance** while the fourth looks specifically at key **elements** of governance, especially of a democratic nature, through the prism of the work of Montesquieu, the French philosopher who heavily influenced the writers of the United States Constitution. Since democracy is the dominant form of government globally at the moment (even if imperfectly executed), more time is devoted to that general topic than any other.

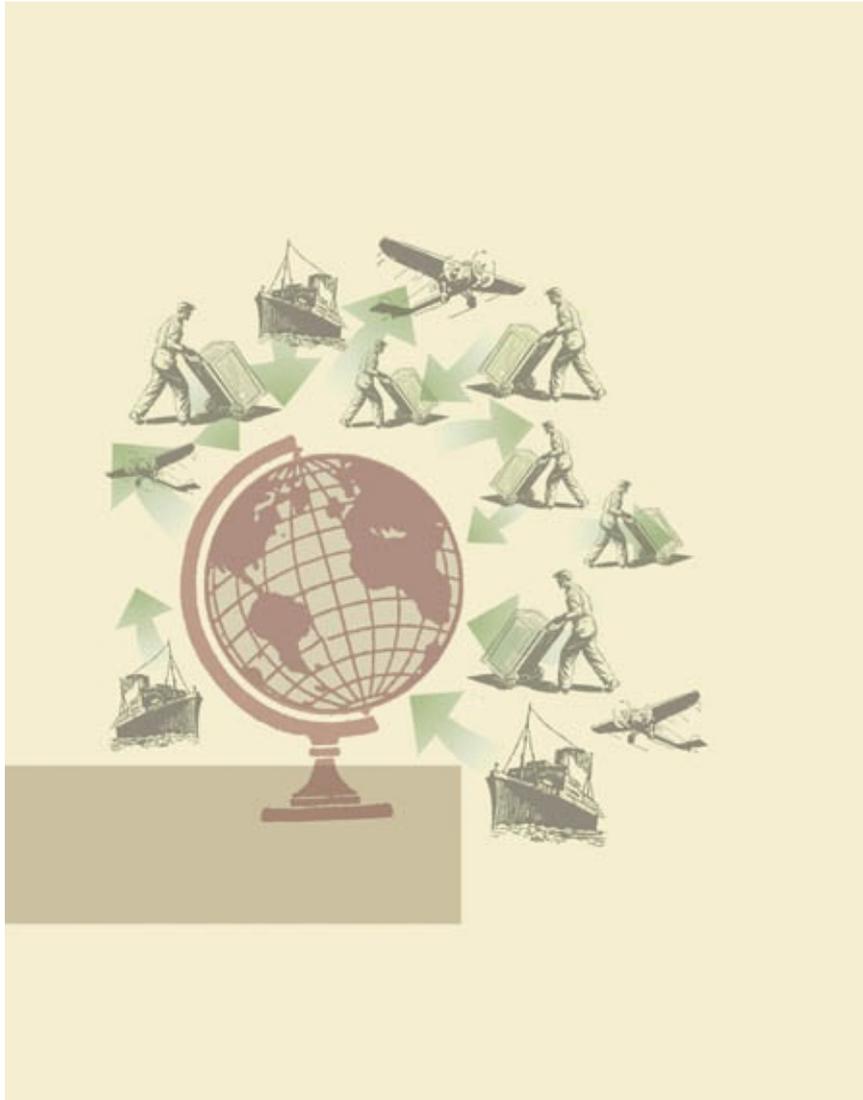


Proportional representation *How can we translate multiple interests in society into acceptable public policies? Democracy tries to do this, even if it does it imperfectly.*

The various **communist theories** are considered next. While it is true that, save for a few exceptions, communism is a dead regime type, the concepts are still relevant to political discourse as the terminology remains with us (not to mention that the current world order was shaped in large part, until only a few decades ago, by these ideas).

Beyond basic regime types and theoretical schools of thought, other elements bear consideration. One is the clear connection between politics and economics, and hence the penultimate chapter, Political Economy, deals with a number of interrelated issues. Another key focus for the study of politics is the question of why states go to war and why they make peace. As such, the final chapter details some key terms and concepts in the realm of **international relations**.

The book provides a lengthy menu of items to sample, yet it offers only a taste of each. Hopefully such samples will inspire further thought, reading and research.



Globalization *A key political challenge in the current era is that we are all becoming increasingly interconnected.*

THE BASICS: WHO GOVERNS?

THE BASICS: WHO GOVERNS?

GLOSSARY

absolute power Total authority over every aspect of a state or nation and its inhabitants. The term is usually used with reference to the power of an absolute monarch. Absolute monarchs ruled absolutely in part due to the concept of the divine right of kings, which affirmed that the king's right to rule was derived directly from God.

Arab socialism A political ideology that combines elements of socialism with a pan-Arabic agenda, which seeks to unify the various countries of the Arab world. Although Arab socialism follows many of the social and economic policies of European socialism, it differs by retaining a strong cultural and spiritual Arabic identity.

bourgeoisie A term most often associated with Marxism to describe the owners of the means of production, by which is meant the capitalist upper and middle classes.

city-state An independent state comprising a single city with sovereignty over the surrounding territory. The most famous city-states are those of ancient Greece, such as Sparta, Athens and Thebes. Although most city-states initially existed as monarchies, over time they developed alternative political systems including aristocracies, oligarchies and democracies.

constitutional monarchy A system of government in which the monarch, although head of state, performs only ceremonial and official duties. Most monarchies today exist within the framework of a constitutional parliamentary system in which legislation is enacted through a democratically elected parliament.

enlightened absolutism The absolute power of a monarch who ruled with a consideration to Enlightenment philosophy. Such rulers introduced reforms that encouraged freedom of expression, religious tolerance and the right to own property. Patronage of the arts and the founding of educational establishments were also indicative of enlightened absolutism.

hereditary monarchy A form of monarchy in which the title of king or queen is passed on to the eldest son or daughter, or next nearest blood relative, on the death of the incumbent monarch. Almost all monarchies were and still are based on the hereditary system, although historically male primogeniture, in which boys always inherited before girls, or in which girls were excluded altogether, was common.

Marxism-Leninism A variation of classic Marxist ideology developed by Vladimir Lenin. He identified imperialist trade as providing sufficient wealth via the bourgeoisie to the proletariat, preventing revolution. The proletariat would therefore need to be led to revolution by intellectual and dedicated revolutionaries. Lenin also identified the

developing world as the arena for revolutionary action against imperialism. Marxism-Leninism was adopted as the mainstream ideology by the Communist International in 1919.

meritocracy An ideological system of government in which individuals attain positions of responsibility and power by virtue of their ability alone. The idea of a meritocratic system is to prevent nepotism and cronyism, however detractors argue that it's difficult to quantify 'merit'.

mixed economy A term used to describe an economy in which there are both deregulated and regulated elements. Most developed countries, while aiming for a free market in terms of the free movement of goods, labour and so on, include some form of government intervention, whether through subsidies of rail or airlines, or through the provision of welfare.

proletariat A term used in Marxist theory to describe the working class; the proletariat do not own the means of production, and therefore have to sell their labour to survive.

tyrant A ruler with absolute power. Today the term is synonymous with despot, the inference being an authoritarian ruler who governs oppressively and brutally. The term, however, derives from ancient Greece, and simply described someone who seizes power rather than inheriting or constitutionally acceding to it – the tyrant may then have gone on to govern fairly.

MONARCHY

the 30-second politics

Hereditary monarchs have existed throughout recorded history and historically claimed that their power to rule comes from God or some other divine source, even in societies that were not organized as theocracies. In practical terms, some monarchs have been so feared (or loved) that they could rule with *absolute* power over their subjects, while others have only been figureheads with real power shared with dukes, earls and princes. During the Napoleonic Wars, the French Emperor Napoleon I even installed ‘kings’ to govern several of the puppet states he established. Monarchies in the modern world have developed in different directions; those in Europe (except the Vatican City) have become *constitutional* monarchies where the sovereign retains little day-to-day power; the king or queen’s actual power is limited by law and tradition, while real power lies in a prime minister chosen by an elected parliament. Others, such as Saudi Arabia and the member states of the United Arab Emirates, still have monarchs who rule their countries directly.

3-SECOND SOUNDBITE

A monarchy is a country, nation or empire that is ruled nominally or absolutely by an hereditary king, queen, sheikh or similar.

3-MINUTE MANIFESTO

While some hereditary monarchies have endured, others have perished – sometimes literally. In some countries, such as the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, the monarch has become an important symbol of national unity; in others, such as Greece and Italy in the 20th century, the monarch was a source of division, leading to their removal. Communism was no friend of monarchies. It resulted in the execution of the Russian royal family, while in other communist countries royals were forced into exile.

RELATED THEORIES

[DESPOTISM](#)

[ARISTOCRACY](#)

[THEOCRACY](#)

[IMPERIALISM](#)

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

[CHARLEMAGNE](#)

768–814

King of the Franks

LOUIS XIV

1643–1715

King of France at the height of its absolute monarchy

JUAN CARLOS I

1975–

Presided over the restoration of democracy after Franco

30-SECOND TEXT

Christopher N. Lawrence



'The king reigns, but does not govern.'
JAN ZAMOYSKI

DESPOTISM

the 30-second politics

Despotism (or tyranny) occurs when a nation or country is ruled by a *tyrant* – a ruler who governs with little regard to popular support or even the best interests of his or her people. Originally the word *turannos* in ancient Greek did not have a negative meaning attached to it – but, as in the case of the later German word *führer*, it only took one bad ruler to make a formerly neutral word *verboten*. At first the word *turannos* only meant that the individual had taken power without accordance to the law; only later did the title include the more modern sense of dictatorial rule as well. Even so the difference between a mere monarch and a tyrant or despot is often highly subjective. The Baron de Montesquieu, writing in *The Spirit of the Laws* in the 18th century, argued that the difference lay in the fact that while the actions of a king would be guided by law and tradition, the rule of a tyrant was arbitrary and capricious; however, more than a few monarchs (such as France’s Louis XIV and – in the eyes of the British Parliament at least – England’s Charles I) seem to have crossed that line.

3-SECOND SOUNDBITE

A political system in which an often harsh and oppressive ruler wields absolute power.

3-MINUTE MANIFESTO

In the modern world, tyrants are often called dictators or despots instead. They usually claim a legal or moral basis for their rule, most often – but not always – based on a totalitarian or authoritarian ideology, either imported or home-grown, such as Marxism-Leninism, Arab socialism or fascism. However, not every totalitarian or authoritarian state is despotic in nature; some, such as post-Mao China or the Soviet Union after Stalin, have had multiple leaders exercising their overlapping powers collectively as an oligarchy.

RELATED THEORIES

[MONARCHY](#)

[FASCISM](#)

[TOTALITARIANISM](#)

[PATRIMONIALISM](#)

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

PEISISTRATUS

546–527/8 BC

First tyrant of Athens

KIM IL-SUNG

1948–1994

Former president of North Korea, established a cult of personality

SADDAM HUSSEIN

1979–2003

Former president of Iraq

30-SECOND TEXT

Christopher N. Lawrence



'Wherever Law ends, Tyranny begins.'
JOHN LOCKE

ARISTOCRACY

the 30-second politics

Everyone has had a memorable moment while watching the evening television news when one wonders, ‘How did *that* clown get elected? I could do a better job than him!’ That judgment, whether we recognized it at the time or not, is essentially aristocratic in nature. Aristocracy is rule by the few, and its justification is that not everyone is equally equipped to rule and most people are altogether unfit for ruling. Governing is an exceedingly tricky business that shapes the quality of life of every citizen, and to do it well takes brains, considerable preparation, training or, ideally, all of the above. Aristocracy is therefore grounded in the idea of meritocracy – the idea that only the wisest and most virtuous persons should be allowed access to the reins of power. Virtually everyone acknowledges that some rulers are better than others, and some people are more fit than others to rule, so the popular resistance to embracing aristocracy more openly stems not so much from its idea as its practice. Almost from its inception in ancient Greece, aristocracy became intertwined with rule by leading wealthy families whose power and wealth were buttressed by laws that almost always led to opulence but only occasionally led to justice for the citizenry.

3-SECOND SOUNDBITE

Aristocracy means rule by ‘the few’, whether those few are the nation’s brightest and best, wealthy nobles, or a group of prominent (if rather frighteningly inbred) families.

3-MINUTE MANIFESTO

Rhetoric and reality do not always match up. Labelling a practice as aristocratic is almost always a criticism, yet some features of modern democracies such as elections of rulers (where campaigns promote the candidates’ superior qualities) and lifetime appointments of judges actually smuggle elements of aristocracy into the practice of democracy. The more democratic selection of rulers by lot – how jurors are selected in the United States and United Kingdom for example – is rarely employed at national level.

RELATED THEORIES

[MONARCHY](#)

[OLIGARCHY](#)

[PATRIMONIALISM](#)

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

[PLATO](#)

428–348 BC

Greek philosopher who advocated rule by the wise

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

1805–1859

French aristocrat who made keen observations on democracy

30-SECOND TEXT

Michael E. Bailey