

Politics a: analysing theories of the state and individual evaluation of pluralis...



Pluralism is a term used to describe a form of government, the type of government that can be seen in the UK and USA and is often referred to as Liberal or Representative Democracy.

Technically the pluralistic political model is one that consists of multiple centres of power and authority, as opposed to one where the state controls people's actions. A truly pluralistic model would be Medieval Europe where the Monarchy and Church were co-equal rulers in their different spheres, and where craft corporations and feudal landlords also had claim to the obedience of its citizens.

Nowadays the doctrine has changed slightly and become more complicated in its nature. Modern states will not accept formally that there are rival but equal sources of power and foci for legitimacy. Societies like the USA and those found in Western Europe are considered pluralistic. Here Trade Unions and Industrial Associations considered secondary associations that along with Political Parties and subsequent administrative bureaucracy share power with Government and the Legislature. The collective but distinct power of these associations and groups representing different interests provide a counter to the tyranny of the state and that of the majority.

Within a pluralistic regime there are sub-categories a multiparty system where there is no one majority but a coalition of several parties looking out for their own interests, generally considered unstable. Two-party system where one party holds power and there is little confrontation, generally considered stable. There are different types of pluralistic regime adopting these subcategories. Presidential regime like the USA where there is a

pseudo two-party system and freedom of vote, or Latin America where it has a multiparty system. The UK has a Parliamentary regime with a two party system, where as Continental Europe has parliamentary regime with a multi party system.

In a pluralistic democracy, political struggle and opposition takes place openly and freely, often within the public domain of the media. Pluralistic society is a liberal society where personal freedom exists, people are able to express and voice their opinions. Be it orally in writing or through the membership of organizations and participation in demonstrations.

Traditionally this kind of action would be considered conspiracy against the state. The principle in pluralism is that if you organize individuals with a more or less like mind you can increase the political influence and power of those concerned. Over the years these groups become more accessible and organized, and develop into lobbyists, pressure groups and even political parties, Informal groups exist as well e. g. family, peer groups and work colleagues. All of these segments of society are capable of influencing government policy, with great effect if they are formally organized.

Government policy is the result of bargaining and compromise between these groups.

Political scientist Arthur Bentley [1870-1957] originated pluralism from his group theory. He argued that all political systems really consist of, is a number of separate groups competing with one another to influence policy. The role of the government was that of a political broker, responding to demands and influence of different groups and distributing policies in response.

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In the pluralistic model the role of government is to act as umpire to be "an honest broker in the middle of the game". It has to see that participants observe the rules and play their part in the pluralistic model. From this a stable and democratic policy making process develops, this is necessary to ensure fairness, act as forum for different interest groups and the plurality of secondary associations enabling them to consider arguments and counter arguments.

The state mediates between different groups ensuring that all of them have some influence on government policy; despite this none of them should have the power to enable them to have everything their own way. Different groups will be in vogue depending on the views of the government and of the people at different times. It would be impossible for the state to satisfy all of the people all of the time.

The role of individual is central to the pluralistic model, which probably explains why most developed countries have some form of pluralistic democracy. The job of the individual is to participate, Classical pluralists believe as many people as possible should be actively involved.

Alexis de Tocqueville [1805-1859] was a French political writer who saw that mass participation beyond voting rights was impossible, hence the necessity of organized groups such as the lobby groups and pressure groups and the ability to join political parties.

This mass involvement is an integral element, these secondary associations and parties link individuals and groups to the formal power structures and the diversity of groups ensures all individuals have a place to express their

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views. Modern pluralists recognise that not every elector can or wants to be a member of a political party or secondary association and would rather adopt a more passive role. Pluralist and political theorist Robert Dahl [1915-] argued that mass participation was not required and only legitimised the authority of the decision makers, he did not see his theory of polyarchy a government for the people by the people, instead he saw no government by the people but government approved by the people.

Individual participation and the formation of political parties, interest groups and other secondary associations are vital in a pluralistic democracy. The parties have the people power to educate and spread a message through manifestos, broadcasts and canvassing this informs public opinion and presents a choice. It is the role of these parties to shape, educate and clarify public opinion and choice.

With pluralism as in all political systems regardless of the model there exist elites, who can be governing or none governing, but who ultimately hold power both overt and covert over the decision and policy making process. In Britain studies have explored the Establishment that is people who have attended the same schools, universities and the effects this has on the political process. G. L Guttsman calculated that the people who controlled the UK system of government numbered just over 11 000 this consisted of Members of Parliament, civil leaders, industrial leaders etc.

Pluralism is used as an explanation of how democracy works in the complex liberal democracies of the developed world we know today. The fundamental ideas are about democracy as a representative form of government. It

recognizes that direct access to political power does not exist, but people's needs are met due to representation provided by other centres of power. With this there is an understanding that there is a form of social contract between government and the people they represent.

For some political philosophers like John Stuart Mill [1806-1873] there was the question of how political society should be organized in order to protect and ensure the rights of the individual, the government was expected to enforce contracts which protect individual rights to own, protect and use property and go about their business in peace and without state interference.

Alexis de Tocqueville also believed that public opinion tended towards tyranny and that majority rule could be as oppressive as that of a despot. Tyranny could be avoided by encouraging a system of strong decentralized local government with citizens participating in voluntary organisations. Which would enable a system of checks and balances, and a separation of power between the executive, legislature and judiciary, compromise would be necessary as there would be no one centre of power.

But there was a fear in a pluralistic democracy of the tyranny of the majority a fear of how popular pressure may threaten individual freedom. The aim of pluralism is to set limits on the power of the rulers over the community. This is achieved by agreeing certain rights and liberties which the rulers cannot infringe, if they do it is reasonable cause to have a genuine and popular rebellion.

Constitutional checks and balances are also put in place to allow consistency and continuity in the social contract between state and individual. Despite this is vital to protect against the "will of the people" and how that will can infringe upon individual rights, freedom of expression, choice and self determination. Even though democratic regimes have a mandate to govern, when it makes wrong mandates instead of right or if it interferes in issues that it should not then it is guilty of social tyranny, which goes against the ideas of a pluralistic democracy.

At an ideological level, liberals and social democrats in particular agree that pluralism is the only practical form of democracy in the modern world of highly populated nation states, with complex and industrialized social structures. Robert Dahl saw that pluralism responded to a high degree of industrialization. Therefore it could be considered impossible to bring a pluralistic democracy to developing nations, where people are undernourished, uneducated and illiterate and as a result unable to participate.

This idea that people participate and have the power to influence is key to modern pluralism, ensuring this is not a problem only in the developing world. Do we all really have the power to participate are the unemployed, poor, uneducated and minority ethnic groups represented, and if they have interest groups do those groups have the recognition and power to influence policy.

Often are representatives are unrepresentative, with the electoral system in the UK not all voters are represented by their member of parliament, only

those voters who voted for the winner are. Marxists claim that the fundamental structures do not change and so power is not redistributed, the means of production and financial power lies with the elite meaning that certain sections are ignored and left to feel like they have no power or influence.

For many Pluralism is the end result of the ideology of liberalism what Karl Marx called the dominant ideology. A pluralistic democracy is one in which the power of the state is limited; not everything is politicized and fundamental freedoms such as free speech, a free media, open and fair elections, an independent judiciary, religious toleration and genuine trade unions are guaranteed.