

# Why and how have liberals supported the fragmentation

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



Why and how have liberals supported the fragmentation of political power?

(15) Why Liberals are concerned about power, most basically, because power constitutes a threat to liberty. Their concern about concentrations of power is rooted in their emphasis upon individualism and its implication that human beings are rationally self-interested creatures. Egoism determines that those who have the ability to influence behaviour of others are inevitably inclined to use that ability for their own benefit and therefore at the expense of others.

The greater the concentration of power, the greater will be the scope of rulers to pursue self-interest and, thus, the greater corruption. Lord Acton stated " Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men. " behind Acton's famous quote about power and corruption, he points out the liberal belief that, since human beings are individuals and therefore egoistical, they are bound to use power - the ability to influence the behaviour of others to benefit themselves and they will use, or abuse, others in the furtherance of that goal.

In essence, the greater the power the greater the scope for using and abusing others in the pursuit of self-seeking ends. Such thinking has shaped liberalism in a number of ways. In particular it has encouraged them to endorse the principle of limited government brought through constitutionalism and democracy. Liberals thus support, for example, codified constitutions, bills of rights, the separation of powers, federalism or devolution, as well as regular, free and fair elections, party competition and universal suffrage. Constitutionalism delivers limited government either by

legally ring-fencing government (e. . , codified constitutions and bills of rights or fragmenting government power so creating a network of checks and balances (e. g. , the separation of powers, bicameralism and federalism). Democracy delivers limited government because it bases government on a system of popular consent and accountability that also enables the public (through competitive elections) to rid themselves of unpopular or corrupt governments. The fragmentation of power brings many significant benefits. It creates a network of checks and a balance, ensuring that power is a check on power.

Different bodies and institutions will eventually act as a check on each other. Fragmented government therefore creates internal constraints that prevent government from becoming a tyranny against the individual. Furthermore, it ensures that those who exercise power have only a limited ability to influence other citizens, thus preventing absolute power. How Traditionally, liberals have always supported fragmented government, checks and balances. Power within liberal democracies is separated between the legislature, executive and judiciary which act as both independent and inter-dependent bodies.

The separation of powers emphasises it cuts on power into smaller pieces - thus preventing concentrations of power from developing - and that it creates internal tensions amongst institutions and power-holders which further diminishes the capacity of each to abuse or tyrannise the general public. Liberals support constitutionalism and consent because they fear that government may become a tyranny against the individual, based on the

assumption that power is inherently corrupting and concentrations of power will lead to absolute corruption.

This assumption is rooted in the liberal view of human nature: as individualism implies self-interest, those with power over others are apt to abuse it for their benefit and at the expense of others. Constitutionalism is the theory or practice of restricting government power through the establishment of a framework of constitutional regulations, usually involving the fragmentation of power to create a network of checks and balances. Liberal constitutionalism is expressed through support for various external and internal devices, such as codified constitutions, bills of rights, the separation of powers, federalism or devolution, and so on.

Liberal support for consent is evident in support for electoral democracy in general and, more specifically, sympathy for referendums and proportional representation. Consent is the principle that the right to govern derives from the willing agreement of the governed, who thus view the actions of government as rightful or legitimate. Consent is often in practice associated with the act of voting and therefore institutionalised through a system of electoral democracy. Liberals emphasise the importance of constitutionalism and consent because both are mechanisms for protecting or enlarging the sphere of individual liberty by restricting the capacity of government to encroach upon the individual. This commitment to limiting government reflects the underlying liberal fear that power is inherently corrupting, a consequence of egoism, meaning that government is always liable to become a tyranny against the individual. Constitutionalism achieved this aim

through formal, institutional and often legal restrictions upon government officials and bodies.

Consent achieves it by ensuring that politicians are publicly accountable and, ultimately, removable. Federalism, based on the principle of shared sovereignty, devolution, parliamentary government, cabinet government and so on. Power is devolved from the centre to regions and at local levels. In the UK: regional assemblies- welsh assembly; Scottish parliament Human rights act: giving people rights in law which means that they have a check to defend themselves from being discriminated against by those in authority.