

The art of government

Some consider politics as the art of government. In other words, politics is regarded as the exercise of control within society through the making and enforcement of collective decisions. This is perhaps the classical definition of politics developed from the meaning of the term in ancient Greece. The word 'politics' is derived from polis, which means city-state. In this light, politics can be understood to refer to the affairs of polis; it literally means 'what concern the polis'. The modern equivalent of this definition is 'what concerns the state'. In this conception, politics is limited to the formal use of authority within the machinery of government. Thus, politics takes place in cabinet rooms, legislative chambers, government departments and the like. Meanwhile, a limited group of people (politicians, civil servants and lobbyists) are involved in policymaking. Most people, institutions and social organizations are regarded outside politics in this definition.

For some critics, however, politics doesn't only refer to the making of authoritative decisions by government, but also to the particular means by which these decisions are made. In this case, politics is portrayed as a means of resolving conflict by compromise, conciliation and negotiation. Such a definition of politics can be found in the common usage of the term. For instance, a 'political' solution to a problem implies negotiation and rational debate, in contrast to a 'military' solution) .

It's worth mentioning that the link between politics and the affairs of the state has, however, generated negative conceptions of what politics is about. For many, politics is quite simply a 'dirty' word. It implies deception, dishonesty and even corruption.