

Nigel A. Jackson
and Stephen D. Tansey

Politics

the basics

Fifth Edition

POLITICS
THE BASICS
5TH EDITION

Nigel A. Jackson and Stephen D. Tansey



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POLITICS

THE BASICS

Now in its fifth edition, *Politics: The Basics* explores the systems, movements and issues at the cutting edge of modern politics. A highly successful introduction to the world of politics, it offers clear and concise coverage of a range of issues and addresses fundamental questions such as:

- Why does politics matter?
- Why obey the state?
- What are the key approaches to power?
- How are political decisions made?
- What are the current issues affecting governments worldwide?

Accessible in style and topical in content, the fifth edition has been fully restructured to reflect core issues, systems and movements that are at the centre of modern politics and international relations. Assuming no prior knowledge in politics, it is ideal reading for anyone approaching the study of politics for the first time.

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THE BASICS

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PETER N. STEARNS

To the next generation – especially Eliot, Toby, Jon,
Sam, Mike, Emma, Freya and Jake.

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PREFACE

WHO THE BOOK IS FOR – AND WHAT IT IS ABOUT

This book is designed as a basic introduction to twenty-first-century politics. We do not claim to be able to predict with certainty the political shape of the new century. However, it is already clear that many of the old perspectives of superpower rivalry and ideological warfare which dominated the Cold War seem to be of reduced relevance. Issues such as ecology, new technology, Islam, terrorism and the role of the what used to be described as the Third World (referred to as 'the South' in this book) are likely to move to centre stage. An introduction to politics that takes a parochial single-country approach no longer seems sensible in an era of increased international interdependence.

The readers we have in mind are without a systematic knowledge of, or rigid attitudes towards, politics. This book is intended to both enable such readers to make up their minds about politics and understand more about the academic discipline of political science. In particular, pre-university students, whether or not they have studied politics at school, have found this book a useful indication of the ground covered by university courses. The book has also been found useful for undergraduates beginning courses in politics. It has also formed the basis of short subsidiary courses in politics at

undergraduate, postgraduate and extra-mural level. However, we hope that open-minded and intelligent older and younger readers will also find much of interest in this approach. Nor would we have any objection to the occasional practising politician quarrying something useful from the work!

We have not taken the view that a 'social scientific' approach requires the assumption of an attitude of detachment from the politics of the day. But neither have we tried to sell a short-term political programme. The approach here is to search for long-term principles that can help guide political actions. 'Politics' has been taken to mean the essential human activity of deciding how to live together in communities. This activity has been put in a long-term and wide geographical context. The focus is on the relatively prosperous industrialised countries of the 'West', but this cannot be detached from those of the rest of the world. Previous editions of the book have sold all over the world and been published in Polish, Arabic and Chinese. We hope that this edition too will be of interest to readers worldwide. In considering such an ambitious agenda we have drawn extensively on the work of many academics, whose ideas have in many cases already been borrowed (often in caricatured form) by politicians.

In a book designed to help readers make up their own minds about politics, no attempt has been made to hide the authors' liberal and socially progressive point of view. This has inevitably been reflected in such matters as the choice of topics for discussion. But it is hoped that it gives a fair representation of all other major points of view and an indication of where the reader can find accessible versions of alternative perspectives at first hand.

HOW THE BOOK IS ORGANISED

The book begins with a discussion of the nature of politics and the variety of academic approaches to its understanding. The next two chapters illustrate how and why politics is exercised; the following two chapters then survey competing ideas about the aims of that political activity.

The next four chapters consider in more detail what and how political decisions are reached. Chapter 5 reviews the variety of different states and Chapter 6 views politics beyond domestic

confines and considers international politics. Chapter 7 considers the detail of how decisions are made, with Chapter 8 addressing more specifically some particular areas of public policy making, the limitations of public policy-making processes and the role of individuals in politics. The last chapter looks ahead to the key issues and problems which liberal democracies face.

To assist users of the previous editions of the book, it may be helpful to point out the major innovations in the fifth edition:

- We have restructured the chapters so that there are now nine instead of eight. Power, global perspectives and challenges to democracy each have a whole chapter.
- Each chapter now begins with clear learning outcomes and hopefully explains why the chapter is important. We have updated the material in the further reading section at the end of each chapter.
- There is more explicit consideration of whether politics matters, and the idea of anti-politics is assessed in Chapter 1.
- Chapter 1 also introduces the debates within American political science concerning the so-called 'perestroika' movement.
- A new chapter, 2, addresses what power is and how it is exercised and changes over time.
- In Chapter 3 we have sought to compare in more depth the similarities and differences between different political systems.
- Chapter 3 also introduces the concept of deterritorialisation and the idea of politics beyond territory.
- Chapter 4 has updated the literature and examples relating to many of the ideologies. In addition we have addressed the Tea Party movement in the US, which has arisen since our last edition.
- In Chapter 5 we provide more recent research on the trend towards democracy and how the idea of totalitarianism is evolving.
- Throughout, we have sought to offer more international examples reflecting the greater influence of international relations within the study of politics. In addition, we have a chapter, Global, designed to solely address relations beyond states.
- In Chapter 6 we look at specific international organisations in more depth. We have also considered the creation or otherwise of a non-Western study of politics.

- We have introduced a whole new chapter, Mechanisms, to consider how government is operated. As a result we have more on pressure groups, political parties and the media. Moreover, since our last edition technology has played a greater role in politics, so there is more on online politics.
- In Chapter 8 we have added more on the policy-making process, such as the application of policy communities and networks. We have also added a section on non-Western policy making.
- Our new last chapter, Challenges, seeks to look at the problems which liberal democracies currently face.
- In Chapter 9 we consider the implications on democracy of new technologies.

This new edition, in addition to obvious changes following such developments as the first coalition government in the UK for over 70 years and the two-time election of Barack Obama in the US, has been further amended to strengthen its international references both for the benefit of its many international readers (including readers of editions in Polish and Chinese) and to counter the parochialism of many introductory courses and books in Britain.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

There are many ways to attempt to introduce students to a discipline, and in this book we have chosen to concentrate on introducing some of the major arguments within politics and the concepts associated with them. Logically we have begun with the methodology and boundaries of the discipline. Complete novices to the subject may find this introductory chapter of limited interest at first and can be forgiven for skipping through the second half of the chapter at first reading.

Students already started on a politics course should find that this broader perspective on their studies stimulates more thought than many more detailed and limited textbooks. It should prove useful especially at the beginning of such courses and by way of revision at the end. It is also intended to help those contemplating such courses to decide whether or not politics is the appropriate subject for them. By encouraging an evaluation of the reader's own political

position and analysing many basic political concepts as part of a sustained argument, we hope to encourage a critical and individual approach which is more valuable than a more 'factual' approach both in the examination room and in practice.

A feature of the book which readers should find particularly useful is the definition of key concepts found in boxes at intervals in the text. Students will quickly find that any work they submit which does not clearly define its terms will obtain an unfriendly reception, and, conversely, such definitions contribute greatly to clear analysis and communication.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Finally, a word of thanks to students on various politics and public sector management and public relations courses at Plymouth and Bournemouth universities – with especial mention of Rory Shand for his thoughts on power – and the WEA and U3A, for their comments and suggestions on this material.

In addition to the help from colleagues and friends acknowledged in earlier editions, this latest edition has also benefited from useful comments and suggestions by a number of readers and the work of our editor at Routledge, Siobhán Poole, and her colleagues has been much appreciated. The amendments to the fifth edition are primarily the work of Nigel Jackson. The blame for infelicities and errors remains, of course, with us.

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POLITICS

THIS CHAPTER ...

discusses what politics is and the ways in which scholars have attempted to understand it. The first serious professional teachers (Greeks such as Plato (427–347 BC) and Aristotle (384–322 BC)) made politics the centre of the curriculum. In the twenty-first century, academics are still seeking to explain politics ‘scientifically’. This chapter discusses the meaning, importance and problems of such an enterprise.

Much of our understanding of politics is what we may refer to as formal politics, such as debates, meetings and elections, which are indeed part of politics. However, this chapter, in seeking to provide a clearer understanding of what is politics, addresses both its formal and informal components. The concept, and practical application, of politics also includes a host of constraints and opportunities which shape our everyday lives, even if we are not overtly aware of them. Politics is ubiquitous.

By the end of the chapter students will be able to:

- understand why politics is important at both a systemic and individual level;
- assess the meaning of politics;