

## Chapter 1 - Basic Concepts

The word "polity" is derived from the ancient Greek word **polîtês**, meaning citizen or **polis** meaning city-state or city. Polity may refer to a group of people organised for governance. It also refers to the organized structure of political institutions that govern a country. Polity as a discipline helps us understand how governments function, the roles they play, and the rights and responsibilities of state, people and institutions in society.

This chapter is an introduction to polity. It explores fundamental political concepts, terminologies and provides a deeper understanding of the governance structure. By delving into these concepts, you can thoroughly understand and appreciate the ongoing discussions and challenges in the life of a nation. Now, think about this: are you familiar with the concept of a nation? And how does it differ from the idea of a state?

### Nation, State, and Related Concepts

A **Nation** is a large group of people who share a strong sense of unity and a collective identity. This identity is usually shaped by common elements like a shared common past, culture, religion, language, or ethnicity.. However, the idea of a nation is not the same as that of a **State**. A State, on the other hand is a legal-political entity characterized by four elements- [PYQ 2021] - population, territory, government and sovereignty.

Unlike a nation, a **state is a community of persons permanently occupying a definite territory independent of external control and possessing an organized government** (PYQ 2021). Its law-making power comes from **sovereignty**, which is the most defining feature of a state. It is important to note that a state can include one or more nations, like the Roman Empire did. Similarly, a nation may exist across one or more (often neighbouring) states, as seen in the early modern principalities of Germany.

### Concepts related to State and Nation

Exploring the ideas of State and Nation also leads us to related terms such as Nation-State, State-Nation, and Stateless Nation. These highlight different forms of political organization:

1. **Nation-State** – A Nation-State is a state largely made up of a single nation, where cultural boundaries overlap with territorial boundaries. In simple terms, the nation and the state are almost the same. For example, modern France is considered a Nation-State.
2. **State-Nation** – A State-Nation allows different “imagined communities” (nations) to coexist under one democratic system. It accepts that people can have multiple identities—ethnic, linguistic, cultural—without weakening a broader sense of national unity. India is a classic example of a State-Nation, where immense diversity thrives within one state.
3. **Stateless Nation** – A Stateless Nation is a cultural community that has not been able to create its own nation-state. A well-known example is the Kurds, who live across Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey, but do not have an internationally recognized state of their own.

We should not confuse **Nation** or **State** with the idea of a **Country**. A Country is a specific geographical and political entity with defined borders and its own government. It may be fully independent or part of a larger sovereign state. For example, Japan is an independent country, while Wales is a country within the United Kingdom—a multi-part sovereign state. In short, a **Country** is the place, a **State** is the authority that governs it, and a **Nation** is a community of people connected by shared culture and history.

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The idea of **Nationalism** comes from the concept of a Nation. **Nationalism** is a strong sense of identity and loyalty towards one's nation, often linked with national pride. It is usually rooted in shared ethnicity, language, religion, culture, or social values. However, Nationalism should not be confused with **Patriotism**. While Patriotism means love and pride for one's country with a commitment to its values, it also respects other nations as equals and supports peaceful coexistence. While Nationalism is a political concept, patriotism is an emotional one - and Nationalism often exhorts patriotism to meet its agenda.

Another related term is **Nationality**. It is an ethnic and racial concept that shows an individual's belonging to a nation. Usually, a person's nationality is decided by their place of birth or origin, and it is not easy to change. In fact, **Nationality** is often the starting point or a prerequisite for getting **Citizenship** in a country.

### Citizenship & Citizen

**Citizenship** is the bond between an individual and a state, where the individual owes **allegiance** (loyalty) to the state. Under the Indian Constitution, citizens have **single citizenship**, which means they cannot hold separate citizenship of their states or provinces, unlike in the United States.

A **Citizen** is a member of a political community who enjoys civil and political rights. Citizens enjoy protection and rights from the state while also fulfilling their duties towards it. Citizens exist in a democratic nation. On the other hand the term subject is used to denote residents governed under a monarchy. Subjects only have duties to the crown or the ruler, and may not enjoy rights.

**Suffrage** is the **right to vote**, usually given to citizens, to elect representatives or directly take part in decision-making. It is a core element of democracy and also includes broader rights like the right to contest elections.

### Types of States

Understanding the different types of states provides valuable insights into the diverse ways in which societies are governed. Each type offers unique structures, principles, and dynamics, shaping the political landscapes of nations across the globe.

1. **Authoritarian State** – An authoritarian state is marked by strict submission to **authority**. It claims to work for the welfare of its citizens but restricts political freedoms and civil liberties. Such states are marked by high handed treatment towards its citizens. Criticism of the government is not tolerated.. Loyalty to the government is rewarded and dissent is punished. *Example: North Korea, ruled by the Kim family with a highly centralized and repressive system. Some people argue that Russia is an authoritarian state.*
2. **Totalitarian State** – Based on the idea of **Totalitarianism** (from the Latin *totalis* meaning “whole”), this state seeks total control over every aspect of people's lives. It demands complete loyalty and even attempts at controlling the way people think. A totalitarian state is always authoritarian in an extreme way. There is not only submission to the state, but this submission is total. *Example: Stalin's Soviet Union, famously described in George Orwell's novel 1984 ("Big Brother is watching you").*
3. **Fascist State** – Based on **Fascism**(from Italian word *fascio* meaning bundle or group), signifying power and unity, and was adopted by Mussolini to describe his authoritarian and nationalist political movement in early 20th-century Italy. The state instills fear, and encourages a sense of superiority among citizens, making them believe that national interests are above individual welfare thus requiring individual sacrifice. In such states,

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fringe groups suppress citizens and impose state ideology by force, and receive state support as the state condones such actions of these fringe groups. *Example: Mussolini's Italy.*

**Nazism** is an extreme form of fascism that was implemented by the Nazi Party ( National Socialist Party ) under Adolf Hitler in Germany. It added racial superiority and promoted “ethnic cleansing” for “racial purity.” State actions that resemble the steps that were once taken by Adolf Hitler are criticised to be Nazi. The word is often used as an adjective. *Example: Nazi Germany under Hitler, which promoted the Aryan race as the “master race.”, and promoted ethnic cleaning of Jews.*

4. **Dictatorship & Autocracy** – In a **Dictatorship**, one person or a small group holds absolute power without constitutional limits, often ruling by force and repression. A ruler is said to be a dictator when he shows no accountability to those governed and has no regard for their opinion. *Example: Gaddafi's rule in Libya (1969–2011).* An **Autocratic State** is similar but emphasizes rule by a single authority with no regard for citizens' fundamental rights and civic liberties. The word comes from Greek: *autos* = self, *kratos* = rule, meaning “self-rule.”
5. **Oligarchic State** – Power rests in the hands of a small, privileged group, often defined by wealth, social status, or influence. *Example: In ancient Greece, especially Athens, political power was concentrated among wealthy landowners.*
6. **Theocratic State** – In a **Theocracy**, religious leaders govern in the name of God or gods. Religion and state are not separate, and often only one religion is allowed openly. *Examples: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Vatican City.* A secular state is the opposite of a theocratic state.
7. **Majoritarian State** – In a majoritarian state, the majority population has dominant control over public decisions. While democratic in appearance, it often leads to “tyranny of the majority,” minority groups are ignored or oppressed. It is difficult to call a state a Majoritarian state in pure terms, though certain state actions can be termed as majoritarian. An example of a majoritarian state action could be Sri Lanka's adoption of majoritarian policies, such as recognising Sinhala as the sole official language in 1956, and marginalisation of Tamils. Some people fear that an imposition of a Uniform Civil Code on all communities in India may lead to the imposition of cultural practices of the majority religion ( Hindus ) on religious minorities. Thus they allege that UCC smacks of majoritarianism.

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**Does the imposition of UCC amount to majoritarianism?** Contrary to what many people think, some advocacy groups argue that the imposition of UCC is not about the imposition of religious and cultural practices of one majority group over another. In fact UCC deals with personnel laws that concern five aspects of social life - marriage, divorce, inheritance, succession and adoption. A close scrutiny will tell you that religious and cultural norms concerning these are often to the disadvantage of women across all religions. A secular, uniform civil code may help emancipate women from conservative and backwards religious & cultural practices and provide them equal rights as other women enjoy under a common Constitution.

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8. **Populist State** – A populist state is one which pursues policies that claim to serve the general population, often for short-term political gains rather than long-term welfare. Thus it may take steps which may appease the masses, but may yield no real long term benefits. *Some people may consider farm loan waivers, free bus rises for women, free electricity for the poor etc. as populist policies.*

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9. **Anarchy** – Anarchy means the complete absence of a central government and authority. Anarchists reject the idea of the state itself. They see the state as harmful and unnecessary, favoring self-governed societies, individual liberty, equality, and non-coercive decision-making.

**Was Gandhi an anarchist?** Gandhi called the modern state a “soulless machine” and believed it often crushes individual freedom. For him, true Swaraj meant self-governance at the individual and village level, not a big centralized state. His vision of India was a federation of self-sufficient villages (Gram Swaraj), very close to anarchist ideals of local self-rule. After independence, he felt that there was no need for a centralized state and even advocated that Congress should dissolve as a political party as its main objective ( of independence ) had been achieved. It should transform into a social organisation. However, unlike violent anarchists (like Bakunin), Gandhi’s anarchism was non-violent and based on moral persuasion. Some scholars call Gandhi a “philosophical anarchist” or “ethical anarchist.” He did not reject all authority – he believed in a minimal state for protection of the weak and for coordination. He accepted that some governance was necessary, as long as it was based on consent and moral responsibility.

### Imperialism & Colonialism

With the evolution of the economic system and its impact on indigenous people, post industrial revolution, it is necessary to get a brief understanding of Imperialism and Colonialism. While they are used interchangeably, they differ in several aspects.

	Imperialism	Colonialism
<b>Definition</b>	An ideology of extending a nation’s power and influence over other regions, either directly or indirectly.	The practice of acquiring and maintaining direct control over a foreign territory by settling and governing it.
<b>Objective</b>	To establish political, economic or cultural dominance over weaker nations or regions.	To exploit the resources, land, and people of the colony for the benefit of the colonizing power.
<b>Measures</b>	Can involve political pressure, economic domination, military force, or cultural influence without always requiring settlement.	Involves direct territorial occupation, administration, and settlement by the colonizing country.
<b>Example</b>	British economic and political dominance in China through the Opium wars; US influence in Latin America and the Middle East.	British colonization of India, French colonization of Algeria

In simple words, colonialism can be thought to be a practice and imperialism as the idea driving the practice. While the history of colonialism dates back to the 15th century, Imperialism has its origins dating back to the Roman Empire.

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Those countries that were earlier part of the British Empire but had their own governments i.e., self-governing nations of the British Empire are referred to as **Dominions**. The term 'dominion' means "that which is mastered or ruled". For instance, India remained a dominion from August 15, 1947, to January 26, 1950, when it became a Republic.

### Neo-Colonialism

Neo-colonialism refers to a form of indirect control or influence that powerful countries or multinational corporations exert over less powerful nations, often after formal colonialism has ended. Unlike traditional colonialism, which involved direct political and administrative control, neo-colonialism operates through economic, political, and cultural means, maintaining dominance without apparent occupation or formal governance. It may be characterized by:

1. **Economic dependence:** Developing countries often face economic control through debt dependency, where they are burdened with large debts to multilateral institutions like the IMF or World Bank;
2. **Corporate Influence:** Multinational corporations can exert significant control over local economies and resources. For instance, exploitation of cobalt in Congo without sufficient environmental safeguards or equitable compensation for local communities.
3. **Cultural Domination:** The imposition of foreign cultural values and practices can also be a form of neo-colonialism. For example, **McDonaldization** can erode local traditions and cultural practices, and
4. **Political Influence:** Powerful nations may exert influence over the political decisions of weaker states through diplomacy, economic aid, or strategic alliances, undermining their sovereignty.

Some people believe that the influence of the United States of America through its multi national corporations such as Coca - Cola, McDonalds, Google, Meta etc has a colonising influence on developing and underdeveloped nations. In the 21st century it is also believed that global dependence on American Technology and their companies ( such as GPS technology or Google Maps etc. ) amounts to digital colonialism and digital dictatorship.

### Capitalism, Communism and Socialism

**Capitalism** is an economic system in which private individuals and enterprises own the means of production with the aim of maximizing profit. The principle of *Laissezfaire* or free-markets where fair competition prevails is dominant in such polities. The role of the government is kept to a minimum, as a '**night watchman**.' In capitalism, making a profit involves efficiently and dynamically allocating resources, leading to improved productivity and the growth of the nation. However, it might also lead to the creation of class distinction, in terms of socio-economic inequalities, measured by the material wealth - '**Haves**' and '**Have nots**' (labour class). This class distinction is reflected in the exploitation of labour.

**Socialism** is an economic and political system where the means of production are owned and regulated by the community/state for the common good. Its aim is to reduce inequality and ensure fair distribution of wealth. It allows some private property and can exist within democracy. Nordic countries are examples of welfare socialism.

**Communism** is a more extreme form of socialism where all property is collectively owned — no private property at all. Its aim is to build a classless, stateless society where wealth is shared equally. The state, in theory, eventually "withers away" once true equality is achieved. Our modern understanding of Communism is based on Karl Marx's idea of a final stage after socialism. According to Marx, socialism was an intermediate stage in the establishment of an ideal Communist society. Marx's Communism is incompatible with democracy. Stalin's USSR, Mao's China, Cuba under Castro are some

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examples of Communist state - though true communism has never been achieved. In 1957, Kerala became the first place in the world where a communist government came to power through democratic elections - given that communist governments have generally come to power through revolutions, often with bloodshed.

**Why the lengthiest constitution in the world?** The Indian Constitution is the lengthiest in the world because it incorporates the accumulated experience of several constitutions like those of the USA, France, and South Africa, with features intelligently adapted to the Indian context. It is drafted in great detail to minimize ambiguity and litigation, containing not just fundamental principles but also rules of governance and administration. Unlike the USA, which has separate constitutions for each state, India follows a single Constitution for the whole country. The diversity of India is reflected through special provisions for different regions (e.g., Article 371). Moreover, nearly three-fourths of its framework was borrowed from the voluminous Government of India Act, 1935, further adding to its bulk.

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