



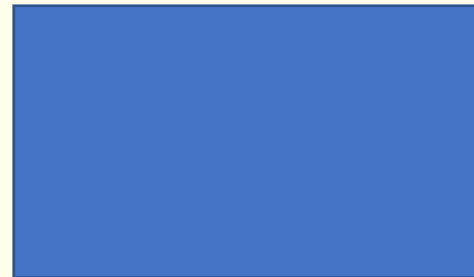
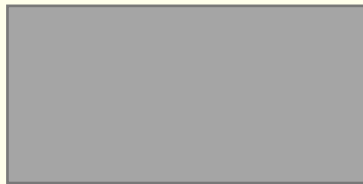
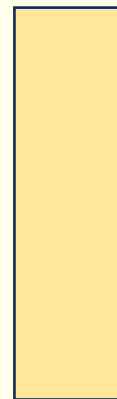
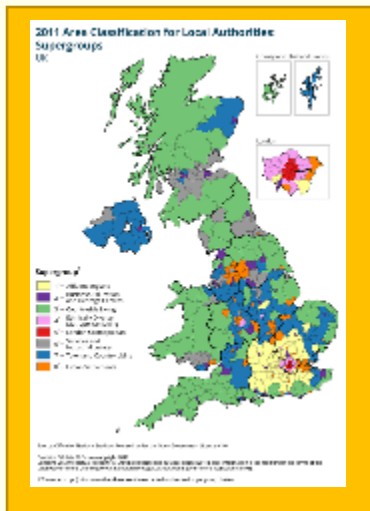
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ECED7007: Political Influences in Inequality & Diversity

Theme 2: Political Discourse – Language, Inequality & Diversity (Part 1)

What is Politics?

- ‘A modern mainstream view might be: ‘politics applies only to human beings, or at least to those beings which can communicate symbolically and thus make statements, invoke principles, argue, and disagree’ (Brown *et al*, 2018)
- ‘Politics occurs where people disagree about the distribution of goods, benefits, or statuses **and have at least some procedures for the resolution of such disagreements**’. (Brown *et al*, 2018)
- These **procedures** can be seen to include **political discourse** which Apter (2001, no page) argues is ‘the narrative construction of reality,[which] relies heavily on events as signifiers, particularly as metaphors.....’.

Political Metaphors

- The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (2007a, p. 1765) defines a metaphor as ‘ a figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from that to which it is literally applicable’
- In political discourse the language used in metaphors is often emotive
- Political metaphors can be both positive or negative but in either case they are used in order to persuade the public

Negative Political Metaphors

- An example of a negative political metaphor is Donald Trumps promise that he wants to “drain the swamp”

Have you heard this phrase used?

In what context?

How would you interpret this metaphor?



Negative Political Metaphors

- Donald Trump first used this phrase in his 2016 Presidential campaign in the context of a ‘package of ethics reforms he said would "drain the swamp" of Washington, D.C., including strict limitations on lobbying and a constitutional amendment imposing term limits on Congress’ (Hughes, 2016).
- The implication for public consumption, was that the Federal bureaucracy was corrupt
- However, researchers such as Zhang (2023, no page) have argued that it is an example of the intention ‘to circumvent or undermine democratic institutions controlled by the establishment elite in order to develop a direct and unmediated relationship with the “people” they [populist politicians] claim to represent’.

Positive Political Metaphors

- In his first speech, as Prime Minister, to the Labour Party Conference in 2024, Keir Starmer claimed,
- ‘So, brick by brick, we can build a new home. A better home. Built to last. Built with pride. But above all built together’ (Starmer, 2024).

How would you interpret this metaphor?



Positive Political Metaphors

- In this example, Starmer is using the metaphor of building a home to talk about improving the country
- This can be seen as an example of what Charteris-Black (2011, p28) sees as the metaphor 'used for ideological purposes because it activates unconscious emotional associations and thereby contributes to myth creation: politicians use metaphor to tell the right story'

Making the Abstract Concrete

- Such metaphors are effective because as Lakoff & Johnson (1980, *cited in* Brugman *et al*, 2019, no page) have argued;
- ‘individuals think about abstract concepts (e.g., ideas) in terms of other, often more concrete, concepts (e.g., food) to fully understand these abstract concepts’.
- In many ways the metaphor is used to simplify complex issues
- In Trump’s example the abstract concept (reforming the Federal bureaucracy) is made more concrete (draining the swamp)
- In the case of Starmer, the abstract concept (creating a better Britain) is made more concrete (building a home together).

Political Metaphors and Social Norms

- It can be argued that one of the reasons that political metaphors work is because they ‘tap into’ commonly held attitudes and **social norms**
- *For example, what words, thoughts and feelings are elicited for you by the use of the word **swamp** by Donald Trump?*
- *And what words, thoughts and feelings are elicited for you by Starmer’s metaphor of **building a home**?*

We will now look at our own responses to these two metaphors.

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*What words, thoughts and feelings are elicited for you by the use of the word **swamp** by Donald Trump?*





*What words, thoughts and feelings are elicited for you by the use of the word **swamp** by Donald Trump?*

RESULTS SLIDE





*What words, thoughts and feelings are elicited for you by Starmer's metaphor of **building a home**?*





*What words, thoughts and feelings are elicited for you by Starmers metaphor of **building a home**?*

RESULTS SLIDE



Political Discourse & Normative Concepts

- In this Theme we will explore a number of words and **concepts** that are central to the political debate
- In doing so we will explore the '**normative**' elements of these concepts
- That is to say, the way in which each concept is, by its nature, value laden due to the fact that each one is a social construct based on social norms (you will be asked to consider the values behind these concepts)
- Some concepts, we will return to in later Themes but for the moment we will take a moment to explore the idea of 'norms' from a sociological and social psychology perspective

Sociological Norms

- ‘In sociology a norm is a shared expectation of behaviour that is considered culturally desirable and/or appropriate’ (Scott, 2014)
- ‘There has been a recognition that [...] norms [...] should not be seen as fixed or rigid. Interactionist sociology (with its focus on the negotiation of meanings), ethnomethodology, and postmodernist theory, all tend to emphasize the complexity and diversity of meanings’ (Scott, 2014)
- Functionalist theorists such as Talcott Parsons see norms as socially agreed ways of thinking and behaving which individuals learn through the process of socialisation (Zalta, E.N. & Nodelman, U. (eds), 2023)

Social Norms & Misperception

- Social Norms Theory developed in social psychologists, such as Berkowitz, in the 1980s explores the differences between ‘perceived norms’ and ‘actual’ norms
- Perceived norms refer to what an individual **thinks** is standard way to think and act (Berkowitz, 2005)
- Actual norms are the beliefs and **actions** that we can observe in society (Berkowitz, 2005)
- The difference between these two is known as ‘misperception’ (Berkowitz, 2005)
- Thus ‘normative’ relates to assumptions of meaning based on accepted but changeable and often misperceived norms Enfield, N.J. & Sidnell, J. (2019)
- The use of metaphors and other emotive language can significantly change the actual norms as we shall see...

Social Norms & Misperception: Some Examples

Perceived Norm	Actual Norm
Because of the Equality Act we live in an equal society.	In many households, women still do more domestic work even when both partners work full-time. (Wang & Cheng, 2024)
It is good manners to queue in an orderly manner.	Many people are willing to 'jump the queue'
You should follow the rules even if they are inconvenient.	The 20 mph speed limit had been broken 112,699 times between Sept 2024 and March 2024 (GoSafe, 2026)

Social Learning Theory

- Albert Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory emphasizes that people learn behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions through observing others.
- Whilst initially focused on children's development he expanded his theory to explain how an individual's beliefs and behaviours are influenced by others (Bandura 1986) arguing that;
- People can learn new behaviours by watching others (models), without direct experience or reinforcement.
- Individuals are more likely to imitate behaviours if they see others being rewarded for them or if they value the opinion of the other person
- Media and social environments are powerful sources of observational learning
- Behaviour, personal factors (like cognition), and environment all influence each other in a dynamic, reciprocal way.
- Bandura's Theory helps us to understand how people's beliefs and behaviours can be influenced by the use of specific language and normative concepts

Normative Concepts we will explore

- Left wing
- Right wing
- Authoritarianism
- Libertarianism
- Justice
- Rights
- Liberty
- Individual
Autonomy
- Equality/Equity
- Democracy
- Populism/Demagoguery
- Property
- The Common Good
- State Sovereignty

Left wing / Right Wing

Where does this concept come from?

- This way of describing political positioning dates back to the Constituent Assembly at the start of the French Revolution (1789).
- In the chamber the radical Jacobins radicals sat on the left side of the King's seat; moderates sat in the centre; and royalists and clerical members sat on the right.
- The terms passed into general use to refer to the opposition between the egalitarian, democratic, and anticlerical views of many reformers and **radicals**, and the defence of aristocratic and clerical privileges by conservatives and **reactionaries**

(Calhoun, 2002)

Left wing / Right Wing: Changing Meaning Over Time

- The meaning of the terms have changed somewhat over time and are changing still.
- For example, economic liberalization and free trade—was once a radical proposition in many contexts, it has migrated to the right as part of the neo-liberal agenda.
- Left-wing agendas have been generally much more tied to forms of state regulation and intervention in economic life—reflecting the modern pursuit of egalitarian goals with the tools of the welfare state
- The 20th century model of UK politics saw the Conservative Party on the right, the Liberal Democrats in the centre and the Labour party on the left but this has changed again in the 21st century
- We will now briefly look at each in turn

(Calhoun, 2002)

Moderate or Centre Left Views

- These are typically associated with **social democracy** or **progressive liberalism**;
- Support for regulated capitalism with strong social safety nets.
- Emphasis on incremental reform through democratic institutions.
- Advocacy for universal healthcare, public education, workers' rights, and environmental protection.
- Belief in equality of opportunity, not necessarily full economic equality.
- Willingness to work within existing political and economic systems.

Based on (Calhoun, 2002)

Extreme or Radical Left Views

- These are often associated with **communism**, or **anarchism**;
- Desire to abolish capitalism entirely, viewing it as inherently exploitative.
- Support for radical redistribution of wealth and power.
- May advocate for collective ownership of the means of production (e.g., factories, land).
- Scepticism or rejection of existing political institutions, sometimes favouring revolutionary change.
- Emphasis on equality of outcome, not just opportunity.

Based on (Calhoun, 2002)

Moderate or Extreme: A Matter of Perception

- We have already seen that the perceptions of people are 'normative' (i.e. they are based on beliefs and assumptions),
- And that these beliefs and assumptions can be influenced through social learning (Bandura 1986)
- We will now look at this in action
- Before we look at two video clips, please share your thoughts on the following question:

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Question slide

What words would you use to describe Barack Obama?



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Results slide

What words would you use to describe Barack Obama?

RESULTS SLIDE



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Moderate or Extreme: A Matter of Perception

- Now we will take a look at two videos answering the same question;

Do the views in the videos differ from those we have discussed?

If so, why?



Alan Keyes, 2009
0:00 to 1:00



David Packman Show, 2013
0:27 to 1:36

Moderate Right wing views

- Also known as **center-right**, this group typically supports:
- Free market capitalism with some regulation
- Limited government but with essential public services
- Traditional values but with tolerance for diversity
- Rule of law and democratic institutions
- Incremental change rather than radical reform
- International cooperation (e.g., NATO, trade agreements)

Based on (Calhoun, 2002)

Extreme Right wing views

- Also referred to as the **far-right**, this group often includes:
- Ultranationalism or ethnonationalism
- Anti-immigration and sometimes xenophobic rhetoric
- Authoritarian tendencies or rejection of liberal democracy
- Conspiracy theories and distrust of mainstream media
- Populism and anti-elite sentiment
- Rejection of pluralism, sometimes promoting racial or cultural supremacy

Based on (Calhoun, 2002)

We will look at many of the concepts used in the previous slides throughout this theme.

Firstly, we will look at two other terms that can be seen to be in opposition to each other.

Authoritarian and Libertarian

Authoritarianism

- A style of government in which the rulers demand unquestioning obedience from the ruled.
- Traditionally, 'authoritarians' have argued for a high degree of determination by governments of belief and behaviour and a correspondingly smaller significance for individual choice but did leave some room for private choice
- This has been enhanced by the concept of totalitarianism (mostly closely associated with fascism and state communism) in which even personal freedom is restricted
- However, even democratically elected governments can drastically restrict personal freedoms

Can you think of examples from recent history?



(Brown *et al*, 2018)

Authoritarianism

Features of authoritarianism include;

1. Centralized Power

- Power is concentrated in the hands of a single leader or a small elite group.
- There are few or no checks and balances on the authority of the ruling power.

2. Limited Political Pluralism

- Opposition parties are often banned, restricted, or heavily controlled.
- Elections, if held, are usually not free or fair.

3. Lack of Civil Liberties

- Freedom of speech, press, assembly, and religion are often restricted.
- Media is usually state-controlled or censored.

Based on (Brown *et al*, 2018)

Authoritarianism

Features of authoritarianism include;

4. Rule by Law (Not Rule of Law)

- Laws are used as tools to maintain control rather than to ensure justice.
- The judiciary is often not independent and serves the interests of the regime.

5. Use of Force and Surveillance

- Security forces and intelligence agencies are used to monitor, intimidate, or eliminate dissent.
- Citizens may be subject to arbitrary arrest, detention, or torture.

Based on (Brown *et al*, 2018)

Authoritarianism

Features of authoritarianism include;

6. Increased Propaganda and Control of Information

- The government uses propaganda to shape public opinion and legitimize its rule.
- Access to independent or foreign media is often restricted.

7. Limited Individual Rights

- Citizens have few protections against government actions.
- Rights are often granted or revoked at the discretion of the regime.

Based on (Brown *et al*, 2018)

Libertarianism

- Refers primarily to a range of theories and attitudes whose common characteristic is that they seek to reverse the progress of collectivism and authoritarianism and to 'roll back the frontiers of the state'.
- Traditionally, 'libertarian' denoted a believer in free will, as opposed to determinism;
- A further meaning referred to a kind of principled libertine, a person in favour of breaking down whatever inhibited and constrained natural or instinctive behaviour, whether it was religious belief, family ties, or the enforcement of laws by the state. But these meanings are now antiquated (or are they).

(Brown *et al*, 2018)

Libertarianism

- The most precise form of modern libertarianism rests on a belief in the essential separateness of individual persons who possess, quite irrespective of whether or not they are part of a society or subject to the laws of a state, a set of inalienable rights, which necessarily include rights to acquire and retain property’.
- Libertarians would argue that the denial of these rights by states can never be defensible, and people should only consider themselves subject to states in so far as those states enhance their rights or rest on voluntary procedures. Based on (Brown et al, 2018)

Is there anything we need to explore further?



A recent example of this debate



Libertarianism

Features of libertarianism include;

1. Individual Liberty

Primary Value: The belief that individuals have the right to live their lives as they choose, as long as they do not infringe on the rights of others.

Personal Autonomy: Strong support for civil liberties, including freedom of speech, religion, and lifestyle choices.

2. Limited Government

Minimal State: Government should exist only to protect individual rights—primarily through police, courts, and national defence.

Scepticism of Authority: Distrust of centralized power and bureaucratic overreach.

Any thoughts on these?



Based on (Brown *et al*, 2018)

Libertarianism

Features of libertarianism include;

3. Free Markets

Economic Freedom: Strong support for capitalism, voluntary exchange, and minimal regulation.

Private Property: Emphasis on the sanctity of private ownership and contracts.

4. Non-Aggression Principle (NAP)

Moral Foundation: The belief that aggression (initiating force or coercion) against others is inherently wrong.

Peaceful Interaction: All human interactions should be voluntary and consensual.

Any thoughts on these?



Based on (Brown *et al*, 2018)

Libertarianism

Features of libertarianism include;

5. Personal Responsibility

Self-Reliance: Individuals are responsible for their own actions and well-being.

Opposition to the Welfare State: Preference for private charity and community support over government welfare programs.

6. Decentralization

Local Governance: Preference for decisions to be made at the most local level possible.

Voluntary Associations: Support for communities and organizations formed by mutual consent.

Any thoughts on these?



Based on (Brown *et al*, 2018)

Our Own Political Positioning

- The concepts of **right** / **left** and **authoritarian** / **libertarian** can allow us to create a schematic representation of where different politicians, parties and people sit in relation to each other
- Political stances are often a complex combination of these four concepts and, as we have seen, they are a result of our norms and values
- This idea has been used by a website called 'The Political Compass'
- Although not a formal research tool it does allow us to evaluate and reflect on our own political positioning

In preparation for future discussions please follow the link below and 'Take the Test'.



Guided Study: Reflecting on our own political positioning



Further Reading

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