

## Politics as power

This view sees politics at work in all social activities and in every corner of human existence. Here politics concerns the production, distribution and use of resources in the course of social existence. Politics is, in essence, power: the ability to achieve a desired outcome, through whatever means. Politics can therefore be seen as a struggle over scarce resources, and power can be seen as the means through which this struggle is conducted.

Advocates of this view of power include feminists and marxists. Modern feminists have shown particular interest in the idea of 'the political'. This arises from the fact that conventional definitions of politics effectively exclude women from political life. Women have traditionally been confined to a 'private' sphere of existence, centred on the family and domestic responsibilities. In contrast, men have always dominated conventional politics and other areas of 'public' life. Radical feminists have therefore attacked the 'public/private' divide, proclaiming instead that 'the personal is the political.'

Marxists have used the term 'politics' in two ~~terms~~ senses. On one

level, Marx used 'politics' in a conventional sense to refer to the apparatus of the state. For Marx, politics, together with law and culture, are part of a 'superstructure' that is distinct from the economic 'base' that is the real

foundation of social life. Marxists can be said to believe that 'the economic is political'.

Radical feminists hold that society is patriarchal, in that women are systematically subordinated and subjected to male power. Feminists look to an end of 'sexual politics' achieved through the construction of a nonsexist society, in which people will be valued according to personal worth rather than on the basis of gender.