Political ordering

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The Open University

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Head of Intellectual Property, The Open University

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Introduction

This course discusses ways in which our lives are ordered by the state. The focus is largely on the question 'How is society made and repaired?' But you will also be looking at questions of differences and inequalities. You may find you need to work harder to see the significance of this second key question, but the effort will be worthwhile.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course DD102 *Introducing the social sciences*.

Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand key social issues and debates in contemporary UK society, such as: how social and material lives are related; how our identities are made; and how societies are ordered and governed
- understand inequalities, difference and diversity in contemporary societies
- construct a simple social science argument using appropriate concepts; theories and evidence
- interpret and criticise different forms of evidence, both quantitative and qualitative
- read and understand information from tables, graphs, charts and diagrams.

1 'Political ordering' (Georgina Blakeley and Michael Saward)

This section includes an extended case study of mural paintings in Northern Ireland. Case studies are often used in social science to illustrate and explore theoretical issues – in this instance, the case study is examining the changing links between state, territory and people. Try not to get too bogged down in the detail of dates, names, and so on, and remember why the case study is being used. While the case study is very much about how society is made and repaired, cutting across this is the theme of difference and inequality. You might find it helpful to divide your notes into two parts, one for the unionist/ loyalist tradition and one for the nationalist/republican one. This should help you to see clearly the different and changing relationship of each to the state as the peace process has progressed.

1.1 Overview

In this course we explore the significance of the state as a governing authority. Encounters with the state explores the significance of political order in everyday life, while Making and remaking the state considers the processes through which states are made and remade. Legitimising the state focuses on one critical issue in the making of political order: the question of legitimacy. Repairing the state examines how one particular state and its authority have been repaired – using the example of Northern Ireland to examine contested views of the state and its legitimacy.

2 Encounters with the state

2.1 Political order in everyday life

Box 1 Jill's story

Jill lay awake in bed waiting for the alarm to ring, worrying about the day ahead. She already had a mental list of things to be done: renew the car's MOT; make an appointment with the health visitor for her toddler's two-year check-up. And there was the inspection they were facing at the school where Jill worked as a receptionist.

The sound of the alarm forced her out of bed and into the shower. Jill managed to leave the house on time, bundling her toddler into the car seat to take her to nursery. Just as she was leaving, the post arrived. Jill ignored the pile of envelopes; probably just more bills and tax demands. She drove the short distance to the nursery, taking care to avoid the potholes and the speed cameras, and left her toddler in the care of her favourite nursery nurse, Vicky.

On her journey to the school, a police car and two ambulances rushed past with their sirens blasting. The noise momentarily drowned out the politician on the radio who was droning on about the next local election. Waving at the lollipop lady, Joan, as she drove through the school gates, Jill braced herself for work. Mercifully, the busy morning passed quickly.

Jill gulped down a quick lunch at her desk while scanning the headlines of the newspaper that one of the inspectors had left behind. One headline declaring the arrival of the 'Big Brother state' turned out, rather disappointingly, to be about the possible introduction of identity cards rather than the reality TV show. Another headline, 'Nanny state bans your chip butty', reminded Jill too late that she had meant to choose the healthy option from the canteen rather than the bacon butty she had plumped for. One headline, however, held her attention: 'More state help for parents: how to save money on childcare'. That's something I really could do with, she thought.

Jill left her desk to dash to the local shops. She needed stamps from the post office; she wanted to join the new DVD rental club (she had remembered to bring proof of identity) and she had to buy a card and present for one of the teachers who was retiring after over thirty years at the school. They were all going to the local pub after work to celebrate. Roll on half-past three, Jill thought, as she headed out into the rain, cursing the weather forecast for being wrong yet again.

Jill's story is in many ways a typical one. You might have had similar mornings yourself or, at the very least, you may recognise some of Jill's experiences as familiar. What any of this has to do with 'political ordering' or 'the state' is perhaps less obvious. After all, this is just a simple account of someone's (hectic) morning. And yet, during this account our protagonist encounters and experiences the state in numerous ways. Moreover, her experience is not unusual. As individuals, most of us will bump up against the state on a daily basis in many areas of our lives, although we might not always notice that we do so. This is because state actors, institutions, practices and discourses order (or try to order) our lives in various ways. The state is not the only mechanism that contributes to social order. Social order is produced and reinforced in various ways, but the state does provide

an institutional **political order** that is one important part of the social order it (ideally) produces. In fact, we could argue that there are two types of political order:

1. the avoidance of chaos or disorder generally in society
2. institutions that regulate our lives in many small and large ways.

The two are closely linked. The state is, among other things, an institutional order that aims to prevent social chaos and make social order. But where is the state in Jill's everyday story?

First, there are the people who are employed by the state to carry out certain functions, such as the health visitor, the lollipop lady, the school inspectors and the teachers. The nursery nurse may be a state employee or she may be employed by a private nursery. Even if she is employed by a private nursery, however, she will still be providing childcare, an activity that is regulated by the state. Though they are not mentioned directly, there are state agents – people employed by a state institution, or in the public sector – behind some of the material objects mentioned, such as the speed camera, the police car and the ambulances. There are also state agents behind some of the practices referred to, such as the arrival of the post.

Some of the state's institutions are also visible, or at least hinted at, in this narrative. By 'institution' we mean organisations (the post office, a government department or ministry, a school or a hospital), but also sometimes regular or patterned 'ways of doing things'. The most visible examples are the school where Jill works and the post office where she buys her stamps. The nursery might well be a state institution. It is also possible to imagine the state institutions behind the police car, the health visitor and the ambulances. Listening to the politician on the radio might conjure up images of the House of Commons, just as listening to the weather forecast might conjure up an image of the Met. Office – although many people may be surprised to know that this is a state institution which operates under the Ministry of Defence.

The state also appears in this narrative through the bureaucratic procedures – that is, established procedures through which state institutions and their employees regulate and order many everyday activities. Jill's office timetable, the length of her working day and the time allocated for her lunch break are regulated by state health and safety procedures. Even the very time that appears on Jill's alarm clock is regulated by the state – an Act of Parliament in 1916 established that people in Britain would get up an hour earlier in summer (from the last Sunday in March to the last Sunday in October to be precise). The requirement to use a car seat, for the car to have its MOT certificate, for Jill to have a valid driving licence in order to be able to drive, all point to the existence of the state through its laws and regulations and the people who work in the state institutions and agencies that make and implement them.

What Joe Painter, the political geographer, calls 'the everyday discourses of state actors' (2006, p. 761) also feature in Jill's story. Most obviously there is the politician talking on the radio, but there is also the labelling that probably appears on Jill's sandwich telling her what ingredients it contains, the road signs on Jill's way to school, the tax demands which may have come in the post and even the fine she might have incurred driving past the speed camera. The state also presents itself to individuals, not just through official correspondence in the form of tax demands or speeding fines, but through the mass media. Newspaper headlines referring to the 'Big Brother state' or to the 'nanny state' do so because these terms have meaning – they reflect ideas about the state that circulate in society. These particular headlines imply a state that is overbearing and intrusive in everyday life, and they are used precisely because this is one image of the state that has

resonance for many people. There is, however, a headline that talks about state help, and this suggests another idea of the state that supports its citizens with childcare or retirement; in other words, what is generally defined as the welfare state. We can see here an interesting tension between state provision of security and protection on the one hand, and unfair state intrusion into people's lives on the other. Many political debates focus on disagreements about how to define the point at which protection and support turn into intrusion or interference.

2.2 So, what is the state?

The kind of everyday practices and representations of the state in Jill's story shape, for the anthropologists Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (2006), the ways in which people experience and learn about the state. But what is the state, exactly, and where is it? From Jill's story, it seems that the state is everywhere, enmeshed in our daily lives through a complex assemblage of institutions, practices, people and discourses.

- It is worth saying that we could have given more examples of state presence drawing on Jill's story; you might want to have a go at listing more examples yourself.

So, there are many and varied practices through which the state orders – or attempts to order – our lives. Or, to put it another way, there is a lot of political ordering going on in ordinary, everyday life. This fact tells us something about what the state is – it is the thing that does all this complex ordering. But the state remains a rather elusive thing. One might say that it lacks 'thingness'. For example, I can visit a government department, see my NHS doctor, phone the police, write an email to my local council representative and correspond with the tax office. But **the state** is always more than each of these things – perhaps it is not so much a thing as a rather abstract idea which, in a sense, 'sits behind' all of these organisations. The state as such does not appear – it seems to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time. This is one reason why the emphasis on practices is important. But there is a sense in which the state is less abstract, or more concrete. We could say that the state is all the organisations and agents through which and by which these practices are made and remade. So, in that sense, the state is also a set of organisations.

Taking the state as a set of organisations, we can see that the state today is a much larger, more complex, and more numerous set of organisations and practices than it was two hundred, one hundred or even fifty years ago. The English historian A.J.P. Taylor argued that, until August 1914, the state left the adult citizen alone and 'a sensible, law-abiding Englishman could pass through life and hardly notice the existence of the state, beyond the post office and the policeman' (1975, p. 25) (Taylor was writing specifically about England, but what he says applies more generally across the UK). This is certainly no longer the case today. For Taylor, it was the First World War, and then the Second World War, that increased the reach of the state into the daily lives of both men and women, as all aspects of the economy and society were drawn into the war effort on an unprecedented scale:

> The mass of the people became, for the first time, active citizens. Their lives were shaped by orders from above; they were required to serve the state instead of pursuing exclusively their own affairs. Five million men entered the armed forces, many of them (though a minority) under compulsion. The Englishman's food was limited, and its quality changed, by government order.

> His freedom of movement was restricted; his conditions of work prescribed. Some industries were reduced or closed, others artificially fostered. The publication of news was fettered. Street lights were dimmed. The sacred freedom of drinking was tampered with: licensed hours were cut down, and the beer watered by order. The very time on the clocks was changed. From 1916 onwards, every Englishman got up an hour earlier in summer than he would otherwise have done, thanks to an act of parliament. The state established a hold over its citizens which, though relaxed in peacetime, was never to be removed and which the Second World War was again to increase.
>
> (Taylor, 1975, p. 26)

States today do more, and they need more people and more organisations (departments, agencies, advisory and regulatory bodies) to do so. States are now so large and complex in terms of both their structures and their functions that Christopher Hood (1982), a political scientist, has argued that the bodies that now make up the state are 'a formless mass'. One hundred years ago, even basic ideas of the welfare state, with its structures and operations around health, education and social services, barely existed. Today, along with defence, these are the largest areas of state policy and provision, even after privatisations (the transfer of state bodies and functions to the private sector) and the rise of the market principle from the mid 1980s across Western and a number of other democracies. The economic and social role of the state increased again as a consequence of the financial crisis and downturn beginning in 2008. The large array of things that the state now does requires not only more state employees and agencies, but also more complex patterns of interaction and interdependence between different state bodies, as well as between state bodies and non-state bodies. In short, contemporary states not only consist of enormous numbers of agencies, but they perform an enormous variety of functions.

The size of the state, its organisational complexity and its variety of functions all combine to make the state a difficult thing to grasp (we noted above how it seems to have this 'abstract' quality). Have you ever tried to grasp 'a formless mass'? But there is another reason why the state is difficult to define. In some ways, it appears to be something more than its personnel, its institutions, its practices and its discourses. What is this 'more' that we are talking about here? To try to understand this we will use The Open University as an example. To start with, The Open University consists of all the people who work there in various capacities and of all the people who study with the University. It is also made up of material things, such as its buildings, its computers and all of the course materials generated there, and it is made up of countless practices and daily activities, such as carrying out research, producing courses and marking exam papers. The Open University also presents itself to its employees, its students and the wider society through its official brand, which appears on internal and external communications, and through its advertising in various media. But The Open University also gives the impression that it is more than the sum of all these parts. It appears to have an existence independent of the people, institutions and practices that compose it, akin perhaps to the fictional Unseen University in Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* novels. The Unseen University, which some believe is inspired by The Open University, has an official motto 'Nunc Id Vides, Nunc Ne Vides', loosely translated as 'Now you see it, now you don't'.

We can see this same effect when we try to pinpoint what it is we are talking about when it comes to the state. It is reflected in the distinction that some political scientists make between governments and the state. Government is generally understood as the group of ministers (about 100 people in the UK, led by the Prime Minister) who are collectively

responsible to Parliament for making and implementing policy on national issues. While particular governments come and go, mostly as a result of victories and defeats in national elections, the state is 'a continuing, even permanent, entity' (Heywood, 1994, p. 38). More accurately, there is a continuous attempt to create an impression that the state is a permanent thing, even if, in reality, some states also come and go (think of Yugoslavia, for example, a state that no longer exists, having been broken up in recent years into a number of new states – Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, Montenegro, FYR Macedonia and Kosovo). But, how is this quality of permanence and continuity created? Sharma and Gupta (2006) argue that the everyday bureaucratic practices and the representations of the state (of the kind encountered in Jill's morning) contribute to building up an image of the state that is coherent, unified and dominant across time and space. As a result of the seemingly endless repetition of everyday practices and the images the state presents to us, perhaps (for example) through the uniforms state agents wear, the buildings they work in or discourses in the media, the state comes to assume a dominant and permanent position in our lives as something with a ring of solidity to it. This is reflected in Benjamin Franklin's famous adage that 'In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes'. This idea of permanence and solidity is what the political scientist Timothy Mitchell (1999) terms 'the state effect'. For Mitchell (1999, p. 180), the mundane activities and state discourses that we talked about in Jill's story all help to give the impression that the state is more than just the sum of its parts.

Figure 1 The Unseen University coat of arms invented by the novelist Terry Pratchett

From the above, you might have the impression that the state is overpowering and all-pervasive. Certainly this is one image of the state that many have held, past and present. As Figure 2 shows, the frontispiece of one of the most famous books on the state, *Leviathan*, written by the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes in 1651, a time of widespread and dangerous religious strife, certainly appears at first glance to offer us this image.

Hobbes's leviathan state, portrayed by the giant body of the king or ruler, towers over the people and territory it rules. And yet, on closer inspection, we can see that Hobbes's leviathan state is composed of countless individuals. The state appears to dominate those individuals (and in Hobbes's account, the state is certainly there to keep its citizens in awe), but the state also depends on those same citizens for its very existence. Today, we can see that the mundane, repetitive practices that build up an image of the state as coherent and unified depend precisely on the activity of citizens, whether or not they work for the state.

For example, the census illustrates one way in which individuals experience the state. Through the census, the state literally comes through a person's front door in an official

envelope, and individuals are asked to fill in the form following the categories the state has chosen to employ. And yet, a significant proportion of the British population chose to subvert the process by ignoring the classifications delineated by the state and identifying their religion as Jedi. Others may well have subverted the process by refusing to fill in the census or by filling it in incorrectly. Thus, there is 'nothing straightforward or obvious about the production and reproduction of the state effect' (Sharma and Gupta, 2006, pp. 17–18).

Figure 2 The frontispiece of one of the most famous books on the state, Leviathan, by Thomas Hobbes

Summary

- Creating and maintaining political order is largely the job of the state, which we can define as a set of practices, a set of institutions and as a rather abstract idea.
- The state is visible in everyday life through a complex assemblage of institutions, practices, people and discourses which provide social order.
- Most states today are large and complex, and they require more people and more organisations to carry out their functions.
- The repetition of everyday practices and discourses creates the impression of states as permanent and continuous institutions.

3 Making and remaking the state

All individuals, to a lesser or greater extent, are involved in making and remaking the state, as the example of the census in the previous section suggests. This happens in numerous and complex ways. To return to her story for a moment, Jill may well have contributed to making and remaking the state by paying her taxes, by not speeding, by renewing her MOT and by taking her toddler to the health visitor for a check-up. On the other hand, she may well have contributed to 'unmaking' the state by doing none of these things or by doing them in ways that go against established processes and procedures.

Activity 1

Figure 3 is a picture of a citizenship ceremony, which is an interesting example of one of the ways in which individuals might be called upon to accept or to reinforce the state. Have a look at the image and jot down a few notes on what the symbols in the picture suggest to you about the state.

Since 1 January 2004, under the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, all successful adult applicants for British citizenship have been required to attend a citizenship ceremony. While they are quite a recent innovation in the UK, citizenship ceremonies have a longer history in other countries, such as Australia. These ceremonies are an example of a performance carried out by individual citizens that contributes to producing and reproducing the state and to creating a particular idea of the state. A key element of this idea is the link between the state and a nation defined by its territory and people. One of the most famous definitions of the state, which is regularly used in political argument today, depends on this symmetrical relationship between a state, its territory and its people. The German sociologist Max Weber, in a lecture given in 1918, defined **the state** as 'a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory' (Weber, 1991 [1921], p. 78). While other elements are key to Weber's definition, and we shall explore some of these below, territory is clearly central to it – the state claims to be dominant (it claims to say what goes) within a defined territory, or within a country's borders.

Figure 3 A citizenship ceremony for immigrants who become British citizens

And yet, the relationship between state and nation, or nations, is not a given – it is constructed rather than natural. The suggestion of a citizenship ceremony for all school leavers in the UK sparked off intense debate because it raises key questions about the relationship between the state, its territory and its people. In part, this is because the borders of a state do not necessarily coincide with the borders of a nation, as in the case

of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the official title of the country since 1927) where one state houses three nations – England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland is an interesting example, and one to which we will return below. For now we can say that it is part of the state of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but only some would consider it a nation or would describe their nationality as Northern Irish. Some refer to it as a state-within-a-state, others as the Province, others as the Six Counties, others as Ulster.

Activity 2

In 2008, a report, authored by government minister Lord Goldsmith, and commissioned by Prime Minister Gordon Brown, suggested that all school leavers should be encouraged to take part in a citizenship ceremony, which could contain an oath of allegiance to the Queen. Below is a selection of personal pledges that members of the public invented in response to this suggestion. Read the pledges and try to draw out what they say about the relationship between the people who wrote these pledges and the state they are pledging allegiance to.

> I make a personal pledge to respect my fellow citizens, regardless of race, gender, or religion, and to uphold the laws of Great Britain. In so doing, I acknowledge my personal responsibility to contribute to the country I have chosen to call my own.
>
> Lynne Killeen, from Brentwood, Tennessee, USA

> I pledge my oath of allegiance to my Queen and my country. I promise to watch all reality TV and to emulate those that are put before us as examples of fine citizens. I will honour all sporting figures and raise them upon pedestals until such times as they make an error where upon I will pillory them and mock them to the ends of the earth. As an upstanding member of British society I vow to claim as much social benefit as possible to ensure that my binge drinking does not sink to sub standard levels. But most importantly, and over everything else, I swear that I will not take myself, or my country, too seriously because I am proud to be British and that is how we do it.
>
> Kiltie Jackson, Staffs, UK

> I swear to be true to the Queen (or King) of England (even though I'm Welsh) and to never watch her speech on Christmas Day because there's always a good film on the other channel. I promise to moan constantly about the weather, the price of fuel, Americans and how much better things were 10/20/30 years ago. I will not leave my bag unattended on a railway station. I pledge allegiance to the flag of Ikea and can't wait for the next series of Dr Who which is very British and also made in Wales. I will not accept foreign currencies nor will I weigh items in grams when pounds are perfectly adequate.
>
> Wags, Tywyn Gwynedd

I swear allegiance to humanity, to the values expressed by the UN Charter and vow to uphold the Human Rights of all people in accordance with its precepts.

Lorna McAllister, Cumbernauld, North Lanarkshire

(BBC News, 2008)

These pledges of allegiance point to a number of interesting questions about the relationship between state, nation and territoriality, and about issues of identity and belonging.

The pledges suggest that there is a relationship between a state and a territory but that this relationship is not a neat one. The idea of 'my country' is expressed frequently but exactly what this means varies between the pledges: we have references to Great Britain, England and Wales. The last pledge also refers to a wider 'humanity' beyond the confines of nation states or countries. Although none of the pledges cited here refer to the European Union, they could have done so given that all UK citizens now also have European citizenship.

The pledges also hint at a set of common ideas, values and cultural references, often expressed here in terms of humorous stereotypes, which give people a sense of belonging and a sense of identification with a particular state and its territory, even though these ideas and values might not be uniformly or universally shared.

Finally, there is a sense that being a citizen of a state carries with it certain responsibilities, even if these are often expressed ironically, such as promising to moan constantly about the weather. The first pledge, in particular, stresses the responsibility that arises because this person has chosen to be a citizen of a particular state whereas the other pledges assume, to some degree, a pre-given relationship between a person and the nation state in which they happen to be born.

From the above, we can see how the relationship between people, territory and the state is not pre-given but is made and remade through the practices of citizens and the practices and discourses of the state's agents and institutions. In this sense, the state cannot just assume its territoriality, but must constantly lay claim to it.

Summary

- All individuals are involved in making and remaking the state through everyday activities, such as paying tax, or through special events, such as citizenship ceremonies.
- There is a relationship between the state, its territory and its people. This relationship is not pre-given or natural but rather is a product of constant claims.

4 Legitimising the state

We used the example of citizenship ceremonies to open up the issue of the links between state, nation and people. Citizenship ceremonies are just one way in which citizens are requested by the state to legitimise their relationship with the state. 'Legitimacy' refers to a belief in the state's 'rightness', its right to rule, or the idea that its authority is proper. A state that is (believed to be or accepted as) legitimate is more likely to succeed in its constant tasks of political ordering than a state that is perceived as illegitimate. The majority of citizens in the UK, however, are unlikely to be called upon to participate in one of these ceremonies. So, in what other ways does the state seek to claim legitimacy from its citizens? We have already seen from Jill's story that many of the everyday practices and discourses of the state, its symbols and the ways in which state actors and institutions represent themselves to the people, are involved in this process of legitimation; that is to say, the state's claiming of legitimacy from its citizens.

In addition to these everyday practices and discourses, one of the main ways in which individuals express their acceptance or rejection of the state is through the ballot box. By and large, of course, elections do not tend to question the state's overall legitimacy: they provide a means for people to question and reflect on this or that government policy, the adequacy of this or that government agency, or the talents and policies (or lack of them) of this or that party, candidate or official. Nevertheless, in the contemporary world, legitimacy – the sense that the state is in some way rightful – is closely associated with democratic principles. One prominent democratic theorist, David Beetham (1992), suggests that **political legitimacy** can arise from:

1. legal validity (the government is formed, and state agencies operate, according to the rules of the constitution)
2. the justifiability of those rules in terms of local values (the constitutional rules are themselves acceptable to the people who are ruled by them)
3. evidence of express consent (the people have regular opportunities to give or withhold their agreement with government and policies, especially, though not solely, through democratic voting).

Today, we would see free and fair democratic elections as the main, if not the only, reasonable indicator of whether people have given 'express consent' to those who hold state-derived power over them.

This is a key point. 'Democracy' is the word that, in the early twenty-first century, names the form of political order that few dare to oppose. To oppose democracy is to put oneself beyond the pale in most political discourse in most countries and cultures today. As the Nobel Prizewinning economist and philosopher Amartya Sen has written:

> In any age and social climate, there are some sweeping beliefs that seem to command respect as a kind of general rule – like a 'default' setting on a computer program; they are considered right unless their claim is somehow precisely negated. While democracy is not yet universally practised, nor indeed uniformly accepted, in the general climate of world opinion, democratic governance has now achieved the status of being taken to be generally right. The ball is very much in the court of those who want to rubbish democracy to provide justification for that rejection.
>
> (Sen, 1999, p. 5)

Democracy, it seems, is virtually the only game in town. Beyond groups of ideological and religious extremists, plus the rulers and defenders of isolated regimes such as that of North Korea, few would explicitly oppose democracy, even if (as we shall see) they disagree on what democracy is. 'Democracy' is the word that describes the early twenty-first century's political good thing, its must-have political system. There is irony in democracy's popularity. Only just over 200 years ago, to be a 'democrat' was to be on the political fringe, perhaps a dangerous radical. At the time of the American and French revolutions – often taken to be the twin birthplaces of modern democracy – 'democracy' still largely meant what we would call 'direct democracy'. Direct democracy is a system in which citizens make community decisions in face-to-face assemblies, as in the famous ancient Athenian democracy, or, in the more modern version, a system in which key (or even all) community decisions are made by direct votes of the people (in referendums).

Arguably, and to tell a complex story in simple terms, what those two great revolutions of the late 1700s invented was not 'democracy', but rather *representative* government. Over time, that system of representation based on elections, establishing a system of indirect rather than direct rule by the people, came to be known as 'representative democracy', and then simply as 'democracy'. The foundations of what we call democracy today were laid by constitutional designers such as James Madison, one of the founding fathers of the US Constitution, who sought to restrain rather than to unleash the forces of democracy. The historical advance to today's democratic systems was halting, dangerous and often bloody. Working-class men, then women, had to struggle to get the vote. Extensions of democracy were opposed strongly by conservative factions and parties at almost every step, in most European countries at least.

Figure 4 The Athenian Agora, where citizens used to meet in the open air to discuss political issues

Setting the history largely to one side, the pressing question remains – how can we define democracy? If it is so crucial to state legitimation, just what is it? The first point to make is that democracy is not so much a 'thing' as a project; not so much something that is already built as something that is always still under construction. Arguably, there is no non-democracy that cannot be a democracy, and no democracy that cannot be more democratic. And democracy will always be built and run differently in different places, depending on local histories and cultures; Senegalese democracy is real, but it does not operate just like Indian or American democracy. A big part of what democracy is, is the continuing debate about what democracy is.

We can take each of those points on board and still be a little more precise, however. Many commentators refer to 'minimalist' and 'maximalist' approaches to **democracy**. Minimalists define democracy as competition in elections for the right to govern. Maximalists accept this as a minimal core, but go further – democracy also requires local and direct participation, or special forums for deliberation, or elements of direct democracy such as policy referendums, and so on. The democratic theorist Giovanni Sartori (1987) has argued that there are two key questions we need to ask: (1) Is this a democracy? (2) How democratic is it? In other words, there is a threshold and a continuum – the threshold specifies the minimum requirements of a democracy, and the continuum a range of further democratising institutions and practices on top of those requirements. That is one route to compromise between minimalists and maximalists. But

throughout the twentieth century and up to today, there has been lively debate between the two camps as to who knows best the soul of democracy. Minimalists have claimed variously that they are realists, that they base their views on what works in the real world, and that they do empirical research (e.g. on elections and electoral systems) that backs up their views. Maximalists – variously known as 'participative democrats' or 'direct democrats', or more recently 'deliberative democrats' – claim that minimalists do not take seriously the genuinely radical call, as well as the real practical potential, of democracy as 'rule by the people'. Nevertheless, the grounds for a compromise built on Sartori's notions are strong. There is little point trying to extend democracy in terms, say, of citizens' juries and policy referendums if a system of free and fair elections for parliamentary representatives is not in place. And there is equally little point in establishing free and fair elections and then saying to citizens 'that's it, just turn up to vote every four or five years and there's nothing more you can or should do'.

There are other ways to look at democracy too. Of course, people's lived *experience* of democracy will vary a great deal, within one place or country and between countries. Men and women, younger people and older people, members of different ethnic groups, rich and poor, working-class and middle-class people will experience democracy in divergent ways. Ideals associated with democracy, such as freedom and equality, are just abstract principles; how and to what extent people can understand them and act upon them puts flesh on the bones of these abstractions, and produces complex and mixed stories. There are different cultures of democracy. Further, critics have argued that there is a lot of window dressing involved in the popularity of 'democracy'; political leaders and others may construct images of themselves as good democrats, but how far in specific cases does the image match people's lived realities? In short, for all its rhetorical popularity today, democracy remains a set of practices and ideas that is subject to complexity and controversy.

Summary

- In the contemporary world, state legitimacy is closely associated with democracy.
- Democracy has developed from a direct form of rule in which the people took the decisions themselves to an indirect form of rule in which people elect representatives to take decisions on behalf of the people.
- Minimalist approaches to democracy define democracy as competition in elections for the right to govern. Maximalist approaches go further in requiring forms of citizen participation beyond voting.

5 Repairing the state

We have seen that democracy is one of the foremost mechanisms through which states today claim their legitimacy to rule over a certain territory and its people. We have not yet asked, however, why states constantly seek to legitimise their rule. As political theorist Rodney Barker (2001, p. 2) has put it, what characterises government generally 'is not the possession of a quality defined as legitimacy, but the claiming, the activity of legitimation'. The contemporary state is in a continuous process of legitimation – a claim that is never fully fulfilled and never uncontested. Again, this is where seeing the state in terms of its constant, everyday practices is important. There is a close overlapping relationship between these practices, political ordering and seeking legitimation.

A number of factors can help to explain this constant search for legitimacy. First, states are human constructions and not pre-given entities. They are artificially created and need to be reinforced in numerous, regular ways. This can be seen by examining historical maps which show how nation states have evolved. The idea of the United Kingdom would have been unintelligible from examining, for example, a map of Europe around 1000 CE (see Figure 5).

This is because the United Kingdom is an artificial political unit that houses competing allegiances and identities. As suggested above, it is possible that few citizens are aware that the official title of the country in which they live is, and has been since 1927, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and few are likely to use this rather unwieldy title in response to the question of where they are from. Wales, Scotland and Ireland all had their own independent parliaments in the fourteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, respectively, before they were gradually brought under the political control of the parliament in Westminster in a process that was often violently resisted by those territories forced to give up their independent institutions.

Second, this ongoing process of creation and re-creation denotes that states are only ever partially and temporarily successful in promoting social order (and maintaining an institutional order), despite the impression of solidity and permanence that they carefully cultivate. All states succeed and fail to some extent. The artificial and temporary nature of social order means that states constantly seek legitimacy from their citizens through regular elections, for example, or through new innovations such as citizenship ceremonies. As a result, change is a constant factor in the life of states, even in those that appear to be more-or-less stable. The UK is generally seen as an example of a political system in which change has been gradual and evolutionary and it has retained pretty much the same institutional political order over time. But, in fact, even in the UK, the state has tended to be much more fluid and changeable than might appear at first glance. New institutions have been created, and existing ones revised. Malfunctioning institutions are repaired or replaced. The process of devolution in the contemporary UK in 1998, which resulted in a Scottish Parliament, a National Assembly for Wales and an Assembly in Northern Ireland, can be seen as part of this process of state renewal and repair.

Figure 5 Europe around 1000 CE

Finally, it is curious that, in an important sense, states base their claim to rule on something they can never have. We can see this paradox clearly if we return to Weber's definition of the state. We have seen how territory is crucial to Weber's definition, but there is also another key element. Weber argued that there was no point defining states by what they do – they do lots of different things. Better, he said, to define it by its means – to ask 'how does it do things?' Weber knew that states did things in various ways, but there was one way, one key characteristic of the state, that was unique: *force*. Institutions of coercion are crucial, as Weber suggests, and closely related to the defining idea of the state being the authoritative rule maker in the territory and among the people over which it rules. The idea here is that, in the end, it is only the state that can make and enforce laws legitimately; corporations, trade unions, universities and private citizens, for example, do not have that authority. It is important to note that Weber says that the state *claims* a monopoly of force – he does not say that a state automatically *has* this monopoly. But here is the paradox: as political theorist John Hoffman (2007, p. 45) argues, 'The state is an institution which claims something that it cannot possibly have.' For Hoffman:

> A state claims a monopoly of legitimate force, but ironically it is only because 'competitors' (that is, criminals, terrorists, etc.) contest the state's claim to have a monopoly of legitimate force that the state exists at all. A state that really did have a monopoly of legitimate force would have no reason to exist. Think of a state in which everyone acted peacefully and regarded all laws as legitimate. It would be wholly redundant!
>
> (Hoffman, 2007, p. 45)

We are now going to look at one historical case to help illustrate the range of issues discussed so far. Focusing on Northern Ireland helps to bring alive a series of linked issues – contested claims to legitimacy, disputes about competing modes of political ordering, and the contingent and always unfinished nature of state claims. And by looking more specifically at political murals in Northern Ireland, we can also focus on the important visual and symbolic elements of such issues. As with all the visual evidence you have come across so far in this course, it is important to remember that the murals in Northern Ireland can be interpreted in numerous ways, depending on their intended and unintended audience, and that they are selective in what they represent and what they omit.

5.1 State renewal and repair in Northern Ireland

The creation of Northern Ireland in 1921 demonstrates that the link between a state, its territory and the people within these territorial boundaries is not pre-given. Following the

War of Independence with Britain from 1919 to 1921, the partition of Ireland in 1921, as a result of the Government of Ireland Act in 1920, led to the creation of an independent Irish Republic in the south and a British-controlled Northern Ireland (see Figure 6). Northern Ireland's territorial boundaries were drawn by the British Government in order to incorporate as much as possible of the large Protestant population of Ulster who had opposed Home Rule in the wake of partition in favour of union with Britain.

At the heart of the politics of Northern Ireland is a divided population that experiences the state in quite different ways. In simplified terms, a majority in Northern Ireland, although they represent only a minority in Ireland as a whole, regard themselves as British and want Northern Ireland to remain a part of the United Kingdom. This majority of Unionists, and their radical form, the Loyalists, are also predominantly Protestant. A sizeable minority within Northern Ireland, 44 per cent according to the 2001 Census, define themselves as Irish and Catholic, although an increasing number of people do not see themselves as belonging to either category. The Catholic Nationalists, and their radical form, the Republicans, would prefer to be ruled by a single, Irish authority. For the Catholic minority within Northern Ireland, the creation of Northern Ireland in 1921 established 'an artificial state, devoid of geographical, historical or political logic' (Tonge, 2001, p. 634). Both the Protestant majority and the Catholic minority, however, are not static. The size of the majority and minority fluctuates over time. Moreover, both within and outside this majority and minority, other majorities and minorities based on gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, 'race' and ethnicity, for example, coexist.

The tradition of mural painting in Northern Ireland provides an insight into the political dynamics of these changing communities. When and where murals appear, what they express and what they don't express, how they are renewed and repaired or how they are forgotten and left to fade provide insights into the political process and the ways in which power is expressed and contested in Northern Ireland. As you read this section, think about the ideas of zero-sum and positive-sum power and try to decide how they apply to the changing community relationships in Northern Ireland.

Figure 6 Map of Ireland depicting the partition of Ireland in 1921 between an independent Republic in the south and a British-controlled Northern Ireland

For cultural historian and museum exhibition designer Judy Vannais (2001), there are two separate traditions of mural painting in Northern Ireland which are indicative of two different relationships to the state. On the one hand, the Unionist/Loyalist tradition of mural painting has been going on for more than a century. This long tradition denoted a community at ease and confident in its relationship with the state. Mural painting was an expression of this confidence and it literally represented a claiming of public space and territory, and an assertion of identity and belonging, that was evidence of the Protestant domination of politics and society in Northern Ireland. Prior to the 1970s, the majority of

Unionist/Loyalist murals were linked to the annual commemoration of the Battle of the Boyne on 12 July 1690, when Protestant Prince William of Orange defeated Catholic King James II in the struggle for the English throne. The dominant image in these murals was of 'King Billy' astride his white horse crossing the River Boyne (see Figure 7).

Figure 7 Protestant Prince William of Orange – King Billy – crossing the River Boyne

The Nationalist/Republican tradition of mural paintings, on the other hand, dates only from the beginning of the 1980s, though attempts to claim territory through painting slogans, for example, pre-dated mural paintings. The late development of mural painting as an expression of the Nationalist/Republican community, in comparison with the early development of Unionist/Loyalist painting, is indicative of a very different relationship to the state. Nationalists and Republicans in Northern Ireland generally rejected the idea of Northern Ireland as a separate state and did not feel that the state belonged to them. The state's laws and daily practices were a constant reminder that the Nationalist/Republican community was a minority in a state that belonged to the majority Unionist/Loyalist community. Nowhere was this exclusion felt more strongly than in the policing of Northern Ireland. Jon Tonge notes that the Special Powers Act of 1922 gave the predominantly Protestant security forces in Northern Ireland vast and arbitrary powers. The Royal Ulster Constabulary averaged only 10 per cent Catholic membership while the auxiliary police force, the B Specials, was exclusively Protestant (Tonge, 2001, p. 634). For Catholics, there was nothing legitimate about the state's claim to a monopoly of force in Northern Ireland.

The late development of Nationalist/Republican mural painting, therefore, denoted a community which felt excluded from the state and feared showing its identity in public. Events in the 1970s, however, forced a change in the politics of Northern Ireland and in community relations, and these changes were reflected in changes in the two communities' mural painting traditions. Influenced by similar movements in the USA, in the 1960s the Nationalist/Republican communities began a series of civil rights marches demanding an end to discrimination against Catholics in the political, economic and social spheres. Specifically, Catholics demanded police reform and a fairer voting system to end Unionist domination of the political system in Northern Ireland, where Unionist Party control of the parliament at Stormont from 1922 to 1972 was matched by Unionist control of 85 per cent of local councils (Tonge, 2001, p. 634). Political discrimination was reinforced by discrimination in education, housing provision and employment.

The increasingly harsh response by the police, and ultimately the British military forces, to the civil rights movement led to a spiral of violence that marked the beginning of the 'Troubles'. The last big civil rights march, on 30 January 1972, became known as Bloody Sunday following the killing of fourteen civilians by British soldiers. Later in 1972, the Northern Ireland parliament was dissolved and direct rule was imposed from Westminster. The state's claim to its monopoly of legitimate force was challenged directly, on the one hand by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), a left-wing paramilitary organisation that sought to bring about a united Ireland, and on the other hand by various Loyalist paramilitary groupings, such as the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Ulster Defence

Association and the Ulster Protestant Volunteers, which fought to maintain Northern Ireland's status within the UK.

Although the onset of the 'Troubles' curtailed the civil rights movement's reclaiming of public space through protest marches, the Nationalist/Republican community began to assert its control of public space visually through an explosion of mural painting. The main catalyst for change was the hunger strike of 1981 by Republican prisoners demanding the reinstatement of their prisoner-of-war status which had been revoked by the British authorities in 1976. From this moment onwards, the Nationalist/Republican community began to use mural painting in much the same way that it had long been used by Unionists and Loyalists, namely, to demarcate territory and affirm their identity. Murals were a means of communication which aimed to get across a message that was often suppressed and denied in the media. Murals honouring the hunger strikers, especially Bobby Sands (Figure 8), proliferated.

Figure 8 Mural of Bobby Sands, one of the hunger strikers

At the same time, political scientist Jean Abshire (2003, p. 152) argues that these early Nationalist/Republican murals also reflected the changing strategy of the Republican political party Sinn Féin, whose new slogan 'Not everyone can plant a bomb, but everyone can plant a vote' aimed to combine the armed struggle of the IRA with increased political engagement, particularly following the election of Bobby Sands to the House of Commons while on hunger strike.

5.1.1 The long peace

For Vannais (2001, p. 138), the 1994 ceasefires by both Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groupings not only represented a new beginning, which would eventually culminate in the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, they also marked a new phase in mural painting. She argues that most Nationalist/Republican mural paintings seemed to anticipate the ceasefire signed by Republican paramilitaries on 31 August 1994, while most Unionist/Loyalist paintings seemed to struggle to acknowledge the ceasefire had taken place long after it had been signed on the 13 October 1994.

By 1994, British troops had been in Northern Ireland for twenty-five years. This anniversary was signalled by the appearance in Nationalist/Republican murals of a circular stencilled emblem which read 'Time for Peace – Time to Go' with the number 25 painted in the centre. Vannais (2001, p. 139) argues that this emblem, which became ubiquitous in Republican areas in the months leading up to the 1994 ceasefire, was a message directed not only at British troops but also at fellow Republicans. Vannais describes one Republican mural painted by Danny Devenny several months before the

IRA ceasefire that appeared on gable walls throughout Belfast. The image is of a line of British soldiers marching down a road signposted to England. A banner above the soldiers, decorated with green, white and orange balloons, wishes the troops *Slán Abhaile* ('safe home' in Irish) and below this is the message: 'Time for Peace, Time to Go' (see Figure 9). Vannais (2001, p. 140) argues that what is remarkable about this image is how magnanimous the message is, given the levels of hostility against the British Army at that time.

According to Vannais (2001, p. 142), the optimism and magnanimity that characterised the Republican/Nationalist murals in the period leading up to the 1994 ceasefire were not present in the Unionist/Loyalist paintings. As Nationalists and Republicans became increasingly assertive and confident in their public identity, Unionists and Loyalists were beset by uncertainty and a lack of confidence. Loyalist murals reflected this changing political landscape as the King Billy theme, which had predominated until the 1970s, began to be replaced by paramilitary themes (see Figure 10).

Figure 9 Republican mural marking the 25th year of the presence of British troops in Northern Ireland

This uncertainty continued up until and after the 1994 ceasefires, when the message in loyalist murals became more militaristic and demonstrated none of the sense of impending change that could be found in the Nationalist/Republican paintings. It could be argued that this represents an example of zero-sum power, where gains by one side are perceived as losses by the other.

From the 1970s onwards, therefore, mural painting developed in each community in diametrically opposed ways. This trajectory continued through the ceasefires of 1994, into the political negotiations that followed and beyond the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which was the culmination of this process. Following the 1998 Agreement, Nationalist/ Republican murals engaged with the process. Some were genuinely supportive of the new political structures put in place by the Good Friday Agreement, while others were critical of the way in which some aspects of the agreement were implemented (see Figure 11).

Figure 10 Loyalist paramilitary murals

Figure 11 Nationalist/Republican murals engaging with the Good Friday Agreement of 1998

Loyalist paintings, on the other hand, were much more hesitant in engaging with the political process. This reflected the difficulties that the peace process posed for Unionists and Loyalists. Given that this community desired continued union with the UK, it is perhaps not surprising that the murals did not depict the same sense of change that the Nationalist/Republican murals did. On the contrary, they continued to depict Loyalist paramilitary gunmen, often with the slogan 'No Surrender'. These militant murals served as a warning message both to Nationalists/Republicans and to their own politicians who were engaged in the negotiations. This is indicative of the ambivalence felt by many in the Unionist/Loyalist communities towards the peace process as well as the tensions between various paramilitary factions within the community.

Figure 12 Post-1998 Unionist/Loyalist murals

These different developments in the murals of each community demonstrate the changing relationship of each to the state. They also express changes in the balance of power as murals are created or removed in attempts to demonstrate control over space and place. This case study of mural painting clearly reveals a distinctive and localised way in which disputes over ordering and legitimation claims manifest themselves and change over time, and the important role that symbols and images can play in such processes. As Republicans and Nationalists became more confident and secure in their relationship with the state, the murals began to demonstrate a more commemorative attitude, in much the same way that the early Unionist/Loyalist murals demonstrated their confidence through murals commemorating 12 July. Conversely, new murals by Loyalists and Unionists (see Figure 12) seek to move beyond paramilitary themes to depict new and broader cultural and historical themes, often borrowing icons used by Nationalist/Republican murals in much the same way that Nationalist/Republican murals sought legitimacy for their struggle when they began painting murals in the 1980s (Vannais, 2001, p. 156).

Figure 13 Painting from the Same Palette was unveiled at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in the USA

It is still too early to say how politics will develop in Northern Ireland as the power-sharing arrangements established by the Good Friday Agreement continue to evolve. Similarly, it is still too early to say what the fate of Northern Ireland's murals will be, but there are indications that the tradition may evolve rather than disappear, not the least because they are an increasingly popular tourist attraction. In 2008, ten years after the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and only one year after the historic power sharing in government that began in May 2007, a mural *Painting from the Same Palette* was unveiled at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in the USA (Figure 13).

What was unusual about this mural was that it was painted by Danny Devenny, a former IRA prisoner and famous Republican muralist, and Mark Ervine, a famous Loyalist muralist. According to Danny Devenny: 'During the war, the murals told the story of injustices we experienced. Now they show hope for the future' (quoted in UMassAmherst College of Social and Behavioural Sciences, 2008). Mark Ervine commented that while previous murals reflected the communities' concerns about the conflict: 'Now hopefully this is the beginning of ones that will reflect the peace' (quoted in UMassAmherst College of Social and Behavioural Sciences, 2008). The two artists have continued to work together, most recently on a series of murals depicting the Beatles to celebrate Liverpool's term as Capital of Culture in 2008.

Summary

- There are two traditions of mural painting in Northern Ireland, which are indicative of two different relationships to the state.
- Mural painting is a visible way of claiming territory and affirming identity and a sense of belonging.
- Changes in mural paintings have denoted changes in each community's relationship to the state as the peace process has progressed.

> ## How do we know?
>
> ### Looking for legitimacy
>
> You have looked at a range of agents, institutions, practices and procedures through which states attempt to order aspects of our social lives. And you have seen that the idea of the state involves a constant work of claiming and receiving legitimacy. That is to say, you have been studying the state through its effects on our daily lives and through the routine, often taken-for-granted, ways in which it seeks to shape and regulate society.
>
> You have also seen that the degree to which people acknowledge that state as legitimate is varied. In the examples of the citizenship ceremony and the ways in which different groups in Northern Ireland have sought to mark and claim public space, to represent their political identities in visual form, you have seen that the legitimacy of the state is contested, sometimes violently.
>
> Here you have been 'reading' evidence about the legitimacy of the state through a study of its agents, institutions and practices as well as though the ways in which its subjects or citizens represent their vision of the state and their political identities. In particular, the murals of Northern Ireland can be seen as expressing ideas, views or orientations – and need to be 'read' as a source of evidence.

5.1.2 Summary

We have seen how the legitimacy of the state was deeply contested in Northern Ireland, primarily by those in the Nationalist/Republican community but also by those in the Unionist/Loyalist community. Moreover, throughout Northern Ireland there are some who were, and still are, critical about the way in which the new power-sharing political structures and institutions of Northern Ireland are developing. It would be a mistake, however, to fall into the trap of seeing Northern Ireland as an exceptional case. Instead it may be located at one point on a continuum that embraces numerous degrees of acceptance felt by individuals and groups towards the state in which they live.

Returning to Jill for a last time, is it possible to argue that her everyday story is a narrative that would be the same whoever she was and wherever she was within the UK? On a general level, the answer is affirmative. It is the case that much of the story would be similar for anyone anywhere in the UK but, on a more detailed level, there would be differences depending on who Jill was and where she lived. This is because individuals, and the communities they live in and belong to, experience the state differently depending on a range of variables, which could include not only territorial location but also nationality, age, gender, class, race, disability, religion and sexual orientation. You might want to think about what kind of narrative you would write about yourself and what kind of experiences of the state would feature in your own story.

Although Wales and Scotland have not, in recent times at least, sought to defend their national identities with force as in Northern Ireland, they have maintained distinct national identities despite being ruled from Westminster on losing their independent parliaments. Most recently, these national identities have gained expression through a Parliament in Scotland and a National Assembly in Wales. It is not just national groups, however, that may feel ambivalence towards the state which governs them. Black people may feel separated from a state that is still run predominantly by white people. Women may question the authority claims of a state still run predominantly by men. Working-class

people may at times feel alienated from a state run predominantly by individuals from the middle and upper classes.

Different people might feel different degrees of acceptance in their relationship to the state. Shared experiences of ambivalence or alienation that are articulated and expressed sometimes lead to more-or-less enduring critical perspectives on the state. A number of critical perspectives have grown and declined over the years and decades. Many of these are reformist – advocating relatively minor changes to state structures or practices – and others are radical demands for fundamental change.

Activity 3

Read the extract below. What sort of person do you think it was written by? When do you think it was written? Is it a view of the state that has resonance for you?

> To be GOVERNED is to be kept in sight, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right, nor the wisdom, nor the virtue to do so … To be GOVERNED is to be at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered, enrolled, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under the pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, trained, ransomed, exploited, monopolized, extorted, squeezed, mystified, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, despised, harassed, tracked, abused, clubbed, disarmed, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and, to crown all, mocked, ridiculed, outraged, dishonored. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality.

Now, returning to the thread which opened this course, Jill apparently did not take a radically critical view like this (as opposed to being moderately irritated perhaps). But we could just about imagine how the ubiquitous presence of the state in Jill's life might lead to more radical views. The uncompromising words above were written by the classical anarchist writer and political activist J.-P. Proudhon in 1851 in the epilogue to a book entitled *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* (Proudhon, 1923 [1851], pp. 293–4). Anarchists are opposed to the state as a matter of principle. The state, for them, is purely an oppressive, exploitative entity. Today, the term 'anarchy' is almost always used as a synonym for something like 'chaos'. The critical perspective Proudhon articulates is associated with the view that individuals can, more-or-less spontaneously, regulate their own behaviour, and that collective rules can arise from the people themselves rather than being devised or imposed by a single sovereign entity, or state. Anarchists argue, therefore, that we can have political order in the sense of avoiding basic social chaos if we do not have institutional political order like the state. Some other form of institutional political order might be fine – a more spontaneously generated, bottom-up, fluid and decentralised set of institutions and practices perhaps. According to this view, Jill, you, me, our friends, family and compatriots could together find ways to organise rules and institutions for ourselves, beyond the state, and doing so would make us freer.

As citizens we experience annoyance with, express support for and criticise aspects of the state's activities and structures in our daily lives. Often we are simply unaware of the many and detailed ways in which the state *orders* our daily routines. Some widely shared critical perspectives on the state, including anarchism, have endured, even as they change over time. Many of these critiques have, to some extent, been taken on by state actors and institutions, for instance in policies on equal pay for women and environmental protection.

We have seen that the work of political ordering is continuous, and that as part of this states are engaged in a constant process of claiming and repairing a sense of their legitimacy. A good deal of this activity involves everyday processes, which order (and in many ways regulate) people's daily lives. In this sense, political order is linked intimately to social order. In this course we have explored key ways in which the state acts out its claim to be the ultimate source of legitimate authority over the population and land in a particular territory (or country). Citizens are positioned very differently in terms of race, gender, class, religion and region; individual and group experiences of political ordering, or encounters with the state, will be detailed and varied. There are recognisable ways in which states and their attempts at legitimation are disputed. The specific dynamics of ordering can be highly distinctive in different (often contested) societies, as we saw in the case of Northern Ireland. The state remains a diverse, enigmatic and complex force in all our lives. To sum up, in this course you have considered:

- the degree to which states' claims to legitimacy are recognised and acknowledged by individuals and groups varies in time and space
- how a shared experience of ambivalence to or alienation from the state may produce critical political perspectives on the state, both reformist and radical
- how one critical tradition, the tradition of political anarchism, contends that it is possible and desirable to have an ordered society without the institutions of the state.

Conclusion

This free course provided an introduction to studying social sciences. It took you through a series of exercises designed to develop your approach to study and learning at a distance and helped to improve your confidence as an independent learner.

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Glossary

Democracy

Democracy can be defined minimally, in terms of procedures such as competitive elections, and maximally, in terms of ideas of participation, deliberation and the direct involvement of citizens in government.

Political legitimacy

Political legitimacy arises in political orders that are rule governed, where the basic constitutional rules accord with the values of those who are governed and where the governed have opportunities to express their consent as to how they are governed.

Political order

Both a condition in which there is an absence of conflict and disorder, especially an absence of violent disorder, and a set of organisations that seek to shape or regulate social life.

The state

The state is: an idea based on shared expectations about the ordering of social life; a set of organisations; and a set of practices.

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