

# NATIONALISM

Nationalism is political ideology based wholly, or predominantly, on the interests of a nation, and the belief that these interests surpass those of the individual or other groups. Nationalism is particularly associated with the belief that a nation is intrinsically superior to other nations with its interests often conceived at the expense of other nations. The root of the word nationalism, *natio*, means people who by birth or place of birth, are related to each other. Once expanded, the nation, in nationalism, refers to people with a shared heritage and traditions which produce a common identity, who may live within the same geographical boundaries of a country or exist as smaller distinguishable units within the boundaries of a country, or indeed live across boundaries.

## Origins

There is an assumption that nations have long existed since humans began to interact with each other with nation becoming a byword for tribe, ethnic or kinship affiliation. This is a primordialist contention and it is not just employed by nationalists. Some hold that instead of being primordial, nationalism is pre-modern, while some historians believe that it is quite modern in comparison, an early nineteenth century invention. The use of nationalism as a term decoupled from ethnicity, Hobsbawm for instance, claims is a recent phenomenon.

## Regulative Themes of Nationalist Ideology

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century when nationalism entered the European political lexicon, there has been little consensus on what exactly nationalism entails or should entail. This is not uncommon for political ideologies, but nationalism as a concept is comparatively exceptionally 'thin.' Nationalism has since inception parasitically attached to other thicker ideologies such as conservatism, liberalism, socialism, and fascism to have an impact, sometimes catastrophic. By itself, nationalism has not had any solutions to pressing political problems. While the host ideology of nationalism allows us to see somewhat of the substance of nationalism, by itself, there are some identifying themes.

## National Awareness or Consciousness

Humans are considered to be splintered into different clusters, each of which have a common historical progression, language, and practices. Usually, ethnicity is invoked at this juncture to situate a national group. Culture is also often used in correlation to ethnicity. Cultural or ethnic uniformity is upheld, given value, and seen as remarkable. Language and religion are also seen as two determining factors for national awareness.

## **National Identity**

Distinct, uniform, and valorised groups connect constituent individuals with a robust sense of identity. As such, one's identity as human is interlinked with that of the nation. National identity is a way of identifying an individual and connected to the concept of national citizenship.

## **Geographical Identification**

The nation is usually associated with a particular geographical territory, or homeland, with distinct borders.

## **Sovereignty**

The nation is usually considered to be sovereign over other groups. Its legitimacy and claims to loyalty derive from this sovereignty, which is seen by many nationalists as fundamental.

## **Identification with National Culture**

For a life with purpose, individuals must actively identify with their national culture. Various national symbols and mythologies intermingle to mould a national culture in which one becomes ensconced in turn determining how insiders and outsiders are treated. Values such as liberty, independence, or rights matter only insofar as they operate within a national cultural framework. Values do not exist independent of a national context; they are not abstract or universal.

## **Exclusivity and Self-Determination**

The membership of a nation is selective and a nation has the ability to self-determine regardless of what other outside entities might suggest. This self-determining feature came to the fore post-WWII in international law and with decolonisation. Many consider these themes regulative, formal, and quite vacuous. All of these themes need a host ideology to be construed in any meaningful political sense.

Liberalism and conservatism have both provided a refuge for nationalism at various points in modernity. Liberal nationalists see individualism and liberal principles circumscribed within a national collective. These national collectives are held together by norms and principles and not by racial or ethnic affiliations. The aforementioned normative principles are liberal and democratic and as such, national identity is transcribed as liberal identity.

Tenets of fascist nationalism were that humans are the supreme beings of robust national communities that are exclusive to a particular *race*. Real identity is to be situated in the national collective in which the individual and rights all subordinate to the nation. As a matter of fact, the individual is considered to be a liberal fabrication. It must be noted that fascist nationalism

was set up as a counterweight to Marxist class strife and liberal civil society. Rather than engage in material concerns or parliamentary debate, which fascists considered unfruitful, with nationalism they readied the nation for heroic pursuits which were always military.

Adapted from Andrew Vincent, 'Nationalism' in Michael Freeden, Lyman Tower Sargeant and Marc Stears (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (OUP 2013)