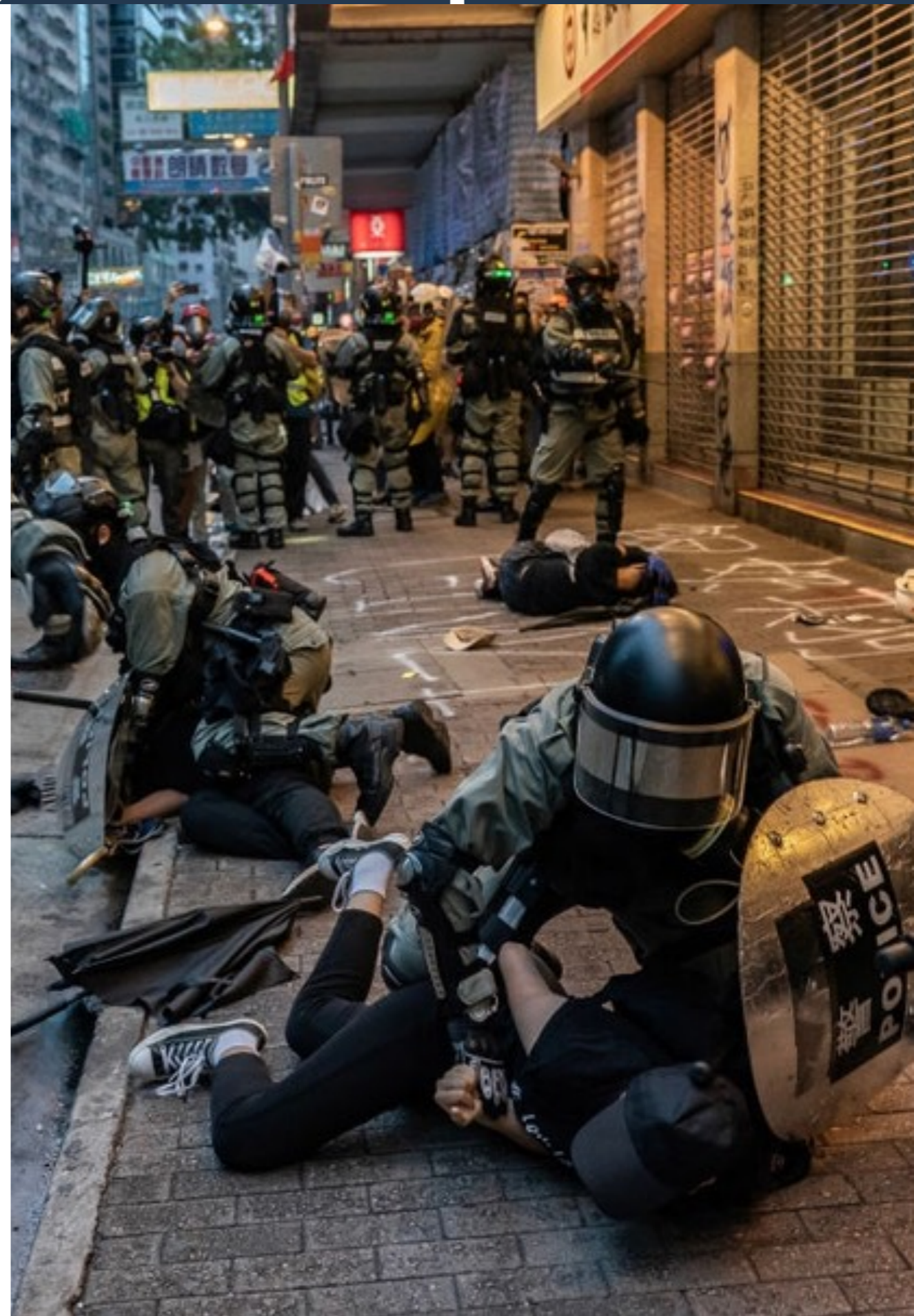


## State behavior



# Theories of State Power

# Theories of state power

1 Power elite

2 Dialectic

3 Pluralist

4 Poststructuralist

## Power elite theories

- ∴ Power in any society is concentrated among relatively few individuals
- ∴ The existence of the state creates positions of power that not everyone has access to
- ∴ Existing social hierarchies of power (economic, status, material, etc.) ensure that only elite have access to power of the state  
Empirically, most government positions of power belong to elite



# Theories of state power

1 Power elite

2 Dialectic

3 Pluralist

4 Poststructuralist



## Dialectic theories

- ∴ State power based on economic class division (Marx)
- ∴ State emerges as direct result of conflict between workers and capital
- ∴ Power not located in a particular position; instead based on relations between groups

# Theories of state power

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## Pluralist theories

- ∴ State is a neutral mediator of diverse groups' interests and conflicts
- ∴ State as an institution is disinterested  
Aided by restrictions like constitutions, separation of powers, ...
- ∴ **Stability maintained**  
Balance of group powers over time  
Intersecting membership in interest groups
- ∴ **Change happens because interests of different coalitions fight for dominance**  
In the long run, leads to responsive governance
- ∴ **Variant: *elite* pluralism**  
Admits some aspects of power elite theory  
The plurality of groups jockeying for power are inaccessible to most people



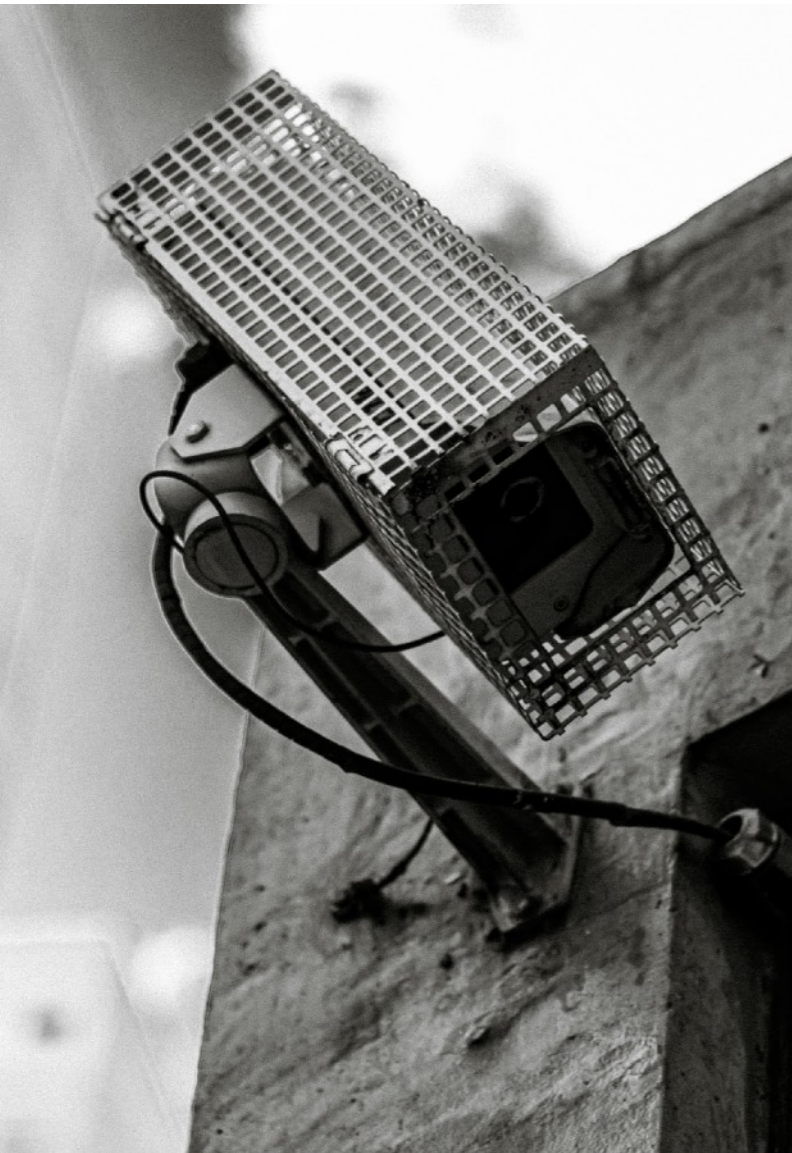
# Theories of state power

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## Poststructuralist theories

- ∴ Power in society is not linked to specific institutions like state, economy, etc.
- ∴ Instead, power is “dispersed” among the various institutions and relations of society
- ∴ Institutionalized knowledge and accepted beliefs are location of power  
E.g. norms of surveillance that cut across institutional settings, from government to prisons to schools
- ∴ Change is extremely difficult
- ∴ “... Nothing in society will be changed if the mechanisms of power that function outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses, on a much more minute and everyday level, are not also changed.”

Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Pantheon Books, 1980: 60

# Theories of state power

	<b>Power elite theory</b>	<b>Dialectic theory</b>	<b>Pluralist theory</b>	<b>Poststructuralist theory</b>
<b>Power is</b>	concentrated	concentrated but fluid	dispersed	diffused throughout social life
<b>Power defined by</b>	institutional position	relationship and process of institutionalized struggle	behavior	process of everyday interaction and knowledge production
<b>Elites are</b>	unified	usually competitive	competitive and divided	diffuse but powerful insofar as they may dominate knowledge production
<b>Nonelites are</b>	diverse and powerless	powerful, but only if organized	diverse and divided	powerless insofar as interests are managed by social body

Adapted from: Glasberg, Davita Silfen. Political Sociology: Oppression, Resistance, and the State. Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2011.

# Democracy & the will of the State



# Democratic will

## State Behavior

Much theory about state actions is based in *pluralist* conception of state power

- ∴ *Power elite and dialectic theories* are basis of stratification research
- ∴ *Poststructuralist theories* inform thought on interaction and class

State behavior takes the form of policy, police/military action, etc.

How do the actions of the state relate to the will of its citizens?

- ∴ Different approaches to translating diverse ideas of citizenry to policy and other government structure/behavior

**Democracy:** rule by public



# Democratic will

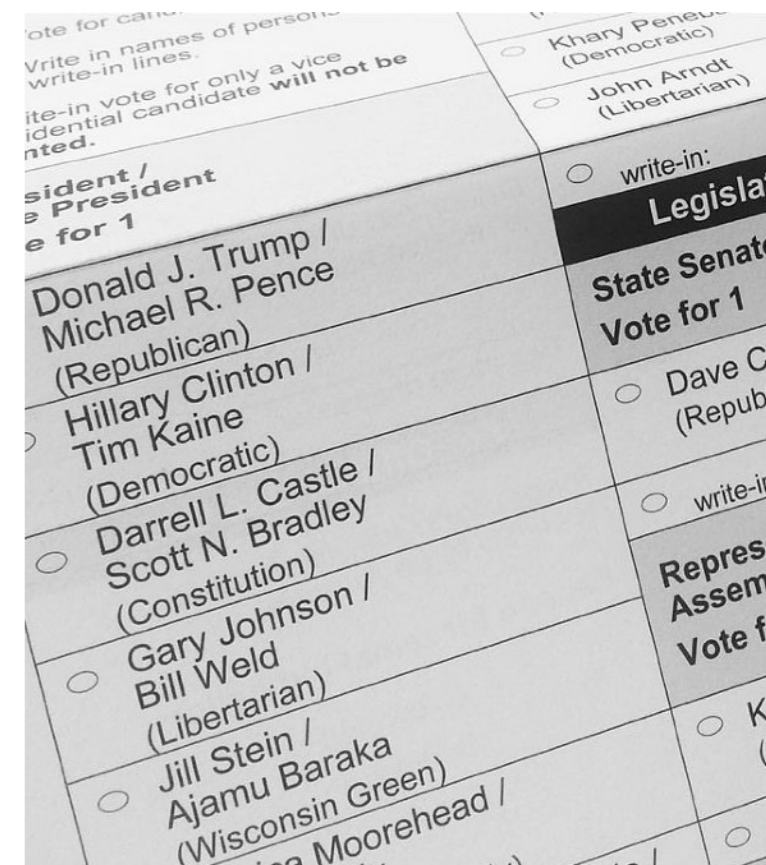


## Direct democracy

- ∴ People participate directly in all state decisions
  - ∴ Everyone has equal access to roles and processes of government
  - ∴ Logistically difficult, especially at large scale
- Though aspects of direct democracy exist in many non-direct settings (e.g. public referenda, town hall meetings)

## Representative democracy

- ∴ Virtually all existing democratic state governments are representative democracies
- ∴ State-sanctioned decision-makers elected by citizenry as representatives of their will
- ∴ Specific forms vary:  
*Parliamentary vs presidential*  
*Proportional vs first past the post*  
...



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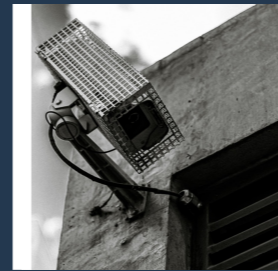


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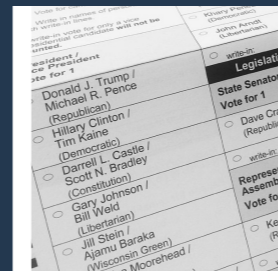


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