

## Unit 18

# Sovereignty

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### Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you will be able to

- discuss the rise of sovereign states
- legal and political sovereignty
- explain the difference between internal and external sovereignty

## 18.1 Introduction

Sovereignty is an important element of the state which distinguishes the state from other political associations within a society and similar entities in the international society. The origin and history of the idea of sovereignty is intimately connected with the origin and development of the territorial states in modern times. It is for this reason that the meaning of sovereignty has undergone change across history. Despite the many meanings of the concept, sovereignty has a core meaning. Hinsley, an eminent Political Scientist, captures the core meaning of sovereignty when he says that it is "the idea that there is a final and absolute political authority in the political community...and that no final and absolute authority exists elsewhere".

Sovereignty, then, is an assumption about authority. We might say that sovereignty is the basic assumption about authority of modern political life, domestically and internationally. Authority is the right or title to rule. Sovereignty is the assumption that the government of a state is both supreme and independent. It is supreme over everybody who lives in its territorial jurisdiction and it is independent from other governing authorities.

The concept of sovereignty has been controversial in academic discourse. To a large measure this is because of the contrasting ways in which it is used-to refer to independence and to autonomy. The former is a notion of authority and right, but the second is a notion of power and capability. While historians, international lawyers and political theorists tend to operate with the first concept, political economists, and political sociologists tend to employ the later concept. These two categorically different approaches to sovereignty exist and must be borne in mind as we proceed to analyse the key concept in political thought.

From this starting point, this unit examines the rise of the modern territorial states with which the concept is associated with. Thereafter we will proceed to explain how the concept of sovereignty which was originally associated with the rulers came to be linked with the people or the ruled. We will also examine the two contrasting ways in which the concept has been used in Political Science and International Relations.

## 18.2 The Rise of Sovereign States

Sovereignty is a constitutional arrangement of political life. It is thus artificial and historical. There is nothing about sovereignty that is natural or inevitable or immutable. In fact, the notion of sovereignty was absent before the modern territorial states came into being in Europe between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The idea of sovereignty was not part of the ancient classical Greek world. There the city-states or polis did not differentiate between state and society-ruled as it was by citizen governors. The citizen was both a subject of state authority and also creator of public rules and regulations.

The Roman Empire that eclipsed the Greek city-states established a new type of rule, rule by a single central authority. What pleased the emperor had the force of law. While the idea of sovereignty as a distinct form of law making power was established, it did not outlive the Roman Empire.

The idea of sovereignty was progressively submerged by the rise of Christian faith when the Roman Empire was succeeded by a highly decentralised system of feudal order. During this period, Christianity gradually came to depend on two theocratic authorities, the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire. The source of authority and wisdom shifted from this worldly to the other worldly representatives. At the core of the Christian worldview was the belief that the good lay in submission to God's will. Law of nature or religious rules came to be regarded as superior to laws of the state. As Benn and Peters point out "in the feudal world the primary concept was not the state but law- a law not made by politicians but part of a universal and eternal order, to be discovered by a study of custom and precedent. Kings, councils and judges found and formulated it but could not make it; for to create new law would be to impose a new obligation by an act of will, and only God could do that."

### Box 18.1: The Modern Age

That medieval order was weakened by two important movements that marked the beginning of the modern age—the Renaissance and the Reformation. While the Renaissance led to the rediscovery of the humanism as well as the principles and precepts of Roman laws and thus led to new ways of thinking about political authority, the Reformation challenged the papal jurisdiction and authority across Europe. The weakening authority of the Church and the Holy Roman Empire was exploited by princes who asserted their authority over feudal lords and established centralised monarchies. In England this was achieved under Tudor dynasty, in France under the Bourbons, in Spain under the Habsburgs and so on. For the first time, secular rulers were able to claim to exercise supreme power, and this they did in a new language of sovereignty.

As the territorial state was occupying the European continent, piece by piece, eventually forming the system that came to occupy the globe, contemporary political philosophers embraced this form of polity and described what made it legitimate. In the early years of the formation of territorial

states in Europe, two contemporary philosophers, Niccolo Machiavelli and Martin Luther, provided legitimacy to the idea of sovereignty of the territorial state. They did not write explicitly or consciously about sovereignty, yet their ideas amounted in substance to important developments in the concept. Observing the politics of city-states in his Renaissance Italy, Machiavelli (1469-1527) described what a Prince had to do to promote a flourishing republic in terms that conferred on him supreme authority within his territory. The Prince, he advised, should not be bound by natural law, canon law, Gospel precepts, or any of the norms or authorities that obligated members of Christendom. The Prince instead should be prepared to 'not to do good' and perform evil, not because evil is no longer evil, but because it was sometimes necessary to further the cause of a strong and well-ordered state. The obligation of the Prince was *raison d'état*. The Prince was supreme within the states territory and responsible for the well being of this singular, unitary body.

Martin Luther argued for sovereignty from a different perspective. His theology of Reformation sought to strip the Catholic Church of its many powers, not only its ecclesiastical powers, but temporal powers as well. Luther held that under God's authority, there existed two orders with two forms of government. The realm of the spirit was the order in which Christ was related to the soul of the believer. The realm of the world was the order of the secular society where civil authorities ran governmental institutions through law and coercion. Both the realms furthered the good of the believers, though in different senses. Luther argued that these two realms need to be separately organised, with the leaders of the Church performing spiritual duties and the secular rulers, the princes, kings and magistrates would perform temporal ones. Thus, even without discussing the doctrine of sovereignty, Luther and his followers prescribed for princes all of its substance.

### 18.3 Conceptions of Sovereignty

The earliest scholar to espouse the doctrine of sovereignty explicitly is the French philosopher and thinker, Jean Bodin (1529-96). Writing at a time when France was rife with religious and civil conflicts, Bodin, like Machiavelli, asserted that such conflicts could be solved if it was possible to establish the existence of an unrestricted ruling power competent to overrule all religious and customary authority. He then went on to develop this notion into what is regarded as a classic statement of modern theory of sovereignty: that there must be within every political community or state a determinate sovereign authority whose powers are decisive and whose powers are recognised by the community as the rightful basis of authority. In the **Six Books of a Commonwealth** (1576), Bodin presented sovereignty as the untrammelled and undivided power to make laws. Law is accordingly 'nothing else than the command of the sovereign in the exercise of his sovereign power'. The sovereign power 'cannot be subject to the commands of another', for it is the sovereign that 'makes law for the subject'.

Bodin did not, however, advocate or justify despotic rule, but rather claimed that the sovereign monarch was constrained by the existence of a higher law, in the form of will of God or natural law. The sovereignty of temporal rulers was therefore underpinned by divine authority.

Bodin believed that a sovereign authority could only be properly established if, 'body politic was regarded as being composed of both ruler and ruled, integrated as previous beliefs and politics had failed to integrate them' (Hinsley, 86).

Bodin, preoccupied as he was with establishing the necessity of monarchical sovereignty, did not focus on the tensions inherent in idea of a sovereign power comprising both the ruler and the ruled. The three most important members of the social contract school, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau dwelt on this theme but they did not agree on the nature of sovereign power and the criteria of legitimacy of government and state. At the one extreme was Hobbes who provided a classic statement about state sovereignty and at the other end was Rousseau who developed the doctrine of popular sovereignty.

Writing at a time of political instability, the civil war in England, **Thomas Hobbes** (1588-1679), like Bodin, sought to establish the necessity of an all powerful sovereign capable of securing the conditions of 'peaceful and commodious living'. But he went on to establish a unique relation of authority—the relation of sovereign to the subject—and a unique political power by arguing that an all powerful sovereign could be established only when the individuals 'lay down their right to all things'. Hobbes based his sovereignty on a covenant of each member of a community with another member to surrender all their rights and powers into the hands of one person or body (the Leviathan, which represented the abstract notion of the state) who thereby becomes the sovereign. Since the sovereign is not himself a party to the contract it cannot be annulled by those who made it. Moreover, this sovereign had the monopoly and the right to use coercive power because 'men's ambitions, avarice, anger and other passions' are so strong that 'covenants without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all'. The authority of the sovereign is therefore permanent, undivided and ultimately unlimited. Hobbes conception of sovereignty thus provided a strong justification for state power.

If Hobbes had transferred sovereignty to the state and the rulers, **Jean Jacques Rousseau** (1712-78) insisted on retaining sovereignty for the people. In Rousseau's view, sovereignty originates in the people. Citizens can only be obligated to a system of laws and regulations they have prescribed for themselves with the general good in mind. The sovereign authority is the people making the rules by which they live. In this perspective, the ruled should be the rulers: the affairs of the state should be integrated into the affairs of ordinary citizens.

Rousseau did not posit any limits on the decisions of the democratic majority. As Berlin (1969) pointed out the community could easily destroy the liberty of the individuals. Thus, if Hobbes placed the state in an all powerful position with respect to the community, Rousseau placed the community (the majority) in a position to wholly dominate individual citizens.

**John Locke** (1672-1704) transcended the dualism between the ruler and the ruled, state and community by reaffirming the location of sovereignty in the body politic as a whole. In this conception of sovereignty, the community is the source of sovereignty and the state is the proper instrument for its exercise. In Locke's scheme, the formation of the state does not signal the transfer of all subjects rights the state. The subject transfers the law making and enforcement rights, but the whole process is conditional upon the state adhering to its essential purpose: the preservation of 'life, liberty and estate'. Thus supreme power remains ultimately with the people who retain the right to dispense with the rulers and even with the existing form of government.

### Reflection and Action 18.1

Comment upon the ideas of Rousseau and Locke with reference to sovereignty. Write down your commands in a notebook.

The ideas of Rousseau and Locke had a powerful role in replacing dynastic rule with representative governments in Europe and later in other parts of the world. Though the subsequent history of the concept of sovereignty has been marked dispute and complexity, there is a broad consensus that 'sovereignty is the supreme law making and decision making power of a community, that the ultimate source of sovereignty is the people, that sovereignty is necessarily delegated by the people to the state and exercised on their behalf through the government, and that constitutional arrangements are necessary to safeguard these political goods (Held 84, p).

From the description of conceptions of sovereignty it is clear that while there is a consensus on the need for a determinate authority, there are differences on the nature of the supreme authority, whether it refers to legal authority or unchallengeable political power. There are also differences on its location, whether it lies with the state or with the people. In the following sections, we will dwell on these aspects before proceeding to examine external sovereignty or the independent and autonomous status of the sovereign states in international relations.

## 18.4 Legal and Political Sovereignty

As we saw, Bodin argued for a sovereign who made laws but was not himself bound by those laws. Law, according to Bodin, amounted to little more than the command of the sovereign, and subjects were required simply to obey. Hobbes, on the other hand, described sovereignty in terms of power rather than authority. He defined sovereignty as a monopoly of coercive power and advocated that it be vested the hands of a single person or body of persons. This difference of emphasis on authority and power has led to the development of two distinct notions of sovereignty— legal sovereignty and political sovereignty.

Legal sovereignty is based upon the belief that that ultimate and final authority resides in the laws of the state. This is *de jure* sovereignty, supreme power defined in terms of legal authority. In other words, it is based upon the right to require somebody to comply, as defined by law. By contrast, political sovereignty is not in any way based upon a claim to legal authority but is concerned simply about the actual distribution of power, that is, *de facto* sovereignty. Political sovereignty therefore refers to the existence of a supreme political power, possessed of the ability to command obedience because it monopolises coercive force.

It should be noted that though one can analytically distinguish the two concepts, in practice they are closely related in practice. There are reasons to believe that on their own neither constitutes a viable form of sovereignty.

In a sense sovereignty always involves a claim to exercise legal authority, a claim to exercise power by right and not merely by virtue of force. All substantial claims to sovereignty therefore have a crucial legal dimension. Nevertheless, law on its own does not always secure compliance. There will be always some individuals and groups within a society who will disregard

the laws of the state and commit crime. The state, therefore, has to have the ability to secure compliance. Legal authority has to be underpinned by the exercise of power.

#### **Box 18.2: Political Conception of Sovereignty**

All states seek a monopoly of coercive power and prevent or at least limit their citizens' access to it. But very few rule through the use of force alone. Almost all states have sought to persuade citizens that they have the right to rule. Such efforts to acquire legal sovereignty have, in part, contributed to the establishment of constitutional and democratic governments. Some states, such as Nazi Germany and Pol Pot's Cambodia, came very close to establishing an exclusive political form of sovereignty. They ruled largely through their ability to repress, manipulate and coerce. But they did not endure for long. Moreover, even these states have sought to acquire the mantle of legal authority by building up vast ideological apparatus.

Thus sovereignty in practice has meant the presence of both legal and political authority.

#### **a) Characteristics of Sovereignty**

Before we proceed to examine the external aspect of sovereignty, it will be useful to list out the characteristics of sovereignty emerging from the conceptions of sovereignty. The key characteristics of sovereignty are explained below:

**Absoluteness:** The sovereign's authority is absolute and unlimited vis a vis other associations in a society. It is absolute in the sense of not being subject to any restraints, legal or otherwise. Laws and decrees passed by the sovereign are binding on all citizens. Social groups and associations such as the family, village councils, clubs, trade unions, businesses can establish rules which command authority, but only within the limits defined by law. If the sovereign is subject to either internal or external control of some other authority, that body ceases to be a sovereign.

**Exclusive:** The sovereign power of the state is exclusive, in the sense that no association is in a position to compete with it. There can be only one sovereign authority in a state which can legally command obedience of its inhabitants. Sovereignty does not accept any rival or parallel authority within the boundary of the state.

**Permanence:** Sovereignty is self-perpetuating. As long as the state exists, it is the supreme form of authority. Despite changes of governments, the sovereignty of the state endures. Once sovereignty is lost, the state ceases to exist.

**Universality:** The sovereign state exercises authority over all other individuals and groups of individuals within its jurisdiction. No group or person can claim immunity from its jurisdiction, as a matter of legal right.

**Inalienability:** The sovereignty of the state cannot be alienated. Since sovereignty forms the essential personality of the state, the very act of alienating it from the state would amount to the destruction of the state. As Leiber put it: 'Sovereignty can no more be alienated than a tree can alienate its right to sprout or a man can transfer his life or personality to any other without self-destruction'.

**Indivisible:** In a state there can be only one sovereign power. If sovereignty is divided, it implies that more than one state exists. Even if the exercise of sovereign power is shared among the branches of governmental machinery, the supreme authority is indivisible, in terms of its pervasive coercive command over other associations in the society. Agencies of government are mere functionaries of the sovereign.

As we noted at the beginning of the unit, the concept of sovereignty has been used in two contrasting ways. In the form of internal sovereignty, it refers to the distribution of authority within a state and leads to questions about the need for supreme power and its location within the political system. In the form of external sovereignty, it is related to the role of the state in the international order and to whether or not it is able to operate as an independent and autonomous actor on the world stage. It should be, however, noted that the two do not describe exclusive sorts of sovereignty, but different aspects of sovereignty that are coexistent and omnipresent. Sovereign authority is exercised within borders, but also, by definition, with respect to outsiders, who accept its independence.

## 18.5 Internal Sovereignty

The preceding discussion on the concept of sovereignty has been largely in terms of internal sovereignty. As we saw, much of modern political theory has been an attempt to decide precisely where sovereignty should be located. Early political thinkers such as Machiavelli, Bodin and Hobbes were inclined to the belief that sovereignty should be vested in the hands of a single person, a monarch. The overriding merit of vesting sovereignty in a single individual was that sovereignty would then be indivisible; it would be expressed in a single voice that could claim final authority. Locke, Rousseau and the subsequent thinkers departed from this absolutist notion of sovereignty. They rejected monarchical rule in favour of the notion of popular sovereignty, the belief that ultimate authority is vested in the people themselves. This doctrine of popular sovereignty is generally regarded as the basis of modern democratic theory.

While these thinkers disagreed about who or what the ultimate authority should be, they were united in their belief that sovereignty could be and should be located in a determinant body. This is the traditional doctrine of sovereignty which is also called as the monistic theory of sovereignty. Even Rousseau, who espoused popular sovereignty, acknowledged that the 'general will' was indivisible whole which could only be articulated by a single individual, who he called 'the legislator'.

This traditional doctrine of sovereignty has come under growing criticism in an age of pluralistic and democratic government. John Friggs, Harold J Laski and other pluralists have argued that the monistic theory is intrinsically linked to its absolutist past and so is frankly undesirable. They emphasise that political power in any given society does not rest only in the state apparatus, but is shared by a number of groups and institutions other than the state in that society. Moreover, they point out that it is no longer applicable to modern systems of government, which operate according to a network of checks and balances. For a pluralist, liberal-democratic principles are the very antithesis of sovereignty.

While the pluralists caution against the danger of 'elected' or 'majority' and call for restraining and influencing the exercise of the sovereign power of

the state, all the same they seem to miss the point that the monist position is that of legal theory of sovereignty. That is, state alone has compulsory and universal jurisdiction in its territory. It alone legally can use coercive power against those who break its law. This right of the state is recognised by all the citizens. Other associations may use power, but their right may not be accepted by all individuals. They may appeal against their actions to the higher authorities. And the state is the highest authority. There can be no appeal against the sovereign actions of state.

### b) Locating Sovereignty

After the English and the French Revolutions in 1688 and 1789 respectively, the representative and constitutional governments that were established initially in the West and later in other parts of the world assumed different forms. The task of locating sovereignty in representative governments is particularly difficult. The English jurist, John Austin, investigating who in the name of the people or of the state exercises sovereignty in Britain, came to the conclusion that it is neither vested in the Crown nor in the people but in the 'Monarch in Parliament'. This was the supreme organ that enacted laws binding on everybody else but that was not itself bound by the laws of and could change these laws at will. However, as we shall see later, this idea of legislative or parliamentary supremacy fitted only a particular system of government that prevailed in Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The idea of legislative supremacy does not fit well in federal states, such as the United States, Canada, Australia and India, where government is divided into two levels, each of which exercises a range of autonomous powers. Federalism is often said to involve a division of power between these two levels, between the centre and the states or constituent units. However, in developing the notion of a shared or divided sovereignty, federalism moves the concept away from the classical belief in a single and indivisible sovereign power. It may, furthermore, be suggested that neither level of government can finally be described as sovereign because sovereignty rests with the document which apportions power to each level: the constitution. But then, since the power to interpret the constitution lies with the Supreme Court one can argue that sovereignty resides with the Supreme Court. However, the Supreme Court cannot properly be portrayed as the supreme constitutional arbiter since its interpretation of the Constitution can be overturned by amendments to the original document. In this sense, sovereignty can be said to reside with the institution empowered to amend the Constitution: in the United States it is two-thirds majorities in both Houses of Congress and three-quarters of America's state legislatures, or in a convention specifically called for the purpose; in India, it is two-third majorities in both the Houses of Parliament and one half of the states. To complicate matters further, it can be argued that sovereignty in India ultimately is vested in the Indian people themselves. This is expressed in the Preamble to the Constitution which opens with the words 'We the people. . .' In view of these complexities, a polycentric concept of sovereignty has taken root in federal states.

It has long been argued that in Britain a single, unchallenge-able legal authority exists in the form of the Westminster Parliament. In the words of John Stuart Mill, 'Parliament can do anything except turn a man into a woman'. Being a unitary form of government, no rival legislatures exist to challenge the authority of Parliament; all legislation derives from a single source. However, it can be argued that in reality the British Parliament enjoys neither legal nor political sovereignty. Its legal sovereignty has been compromised by

membership of the European Union (EU). As an EU member, Britain is obliged to conform to European law and is thus subject to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in Luxemburg. In fact, the European Court in 1991 declared the Merchant Shipping Act of 1988 passed by the British Parliament to be unlawful because it contravened European laws guaranteeing a free movement of goods and persons within the European Community (as the EU was then). If Parliament can any longer be described as legally sovereign it is only by virtue of the fact that it retains the legal right to withdraw from the EU. In political terms also, the Parliament has never enjoyed sovereignty in the sense of acting as it pleases. Its behaviour has always been constrained by a wide range of institutions, including the electorate, organised interests, particularly those which possess financial or economic muscle, major trading partners, supranational organisations, international treaties and so forth.

### Reflection and Action 18.2

Does sovereignty lie in the state or the Political Community? Discuss with other students and friends.

To conclude, sovereignty resides in the state or political community as a whole. Given the complex checks and balances that operate in democratic states and the internal and external constraints that operate on these states, questions relating to the precise location of sovereignty appear to have become outdated. It is the issue of external sovereignty, that is, independence vis a vis other states in the international order that has become absolutely vital. Let us focus on this aspect of sovereignty.

## 18.6 External Sovereignty

Sovereignty, as seen from inside a state, is supreme authority and as seen from outside, is self-governing authority. In other words, external sovereignty refers to the state's place in the international order and therefore to its sovereign independence in relation to other states.

In international relations, sovereignty has become synonymous with state power. It is useful to conceive of external sovereignty as constitutional independence. The state possesses a constitution, written or unwritten, democratic or otherwise, which makes it independent from other states. State sovereignty, in the sense of constitutional independence, consists of being apart from other similar entities. The moment a state establishes a constitutional link with another state, it loses its sovereignty, for it is contained within a wider scheme. External sovereignty, in other words, implies that there is no higher political authority over the state. The sovereign state has the exclusive jurisdiction over its territory, its occupants, resources and events that take place there.

### Box 18.3: Westphalian International Society

Westphalian international society was based on two principles. The first principle was *rex est imperator in regno suo* (the king is emperor in his own realm). This norm specifies that sovereigns are not subjects to any higher political authority. Every king is independent and equal to every other king. The second principle was *cujus region, ejus religio* (the ruler determines the religion of his realm). This norm specifies that outsiders have no right to intervene in a sovereign jurisdiction on religious grounds.

The practice of sovereignty underlying the contemporary state system is generally traced to the Peace of Westphalia, the set of treaties that marked

the end of Thirty Years War in 1648. While this is a gross oversimplification of a complicated process that developed over centuries. However, by the 17<sup>th</sup> century some of the features of the state system had solidified. In two broad respects, the system of sovereign states triumphed at Westphalia. First, states emerged as virtually the sole form of constitutional authority in Europe. Secondly, it brought to an end intervention in matters of religion, up to then the most commonly practiced abridgement of sovereign prerogatives.

The principle of exclusive jurisdiction over people and resources within its territory has been codified by many agreements and treaties. The Charter of the United Nations, for instance, incorporated the principle of territorial integrity and political independence in Article 2 (4) thus: 'Member shall refrain in their international relations from the treat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.'

External sovereignty also establishes the basic condition of international relations- anarchy, meaning the absence of a higher authority over the states. There is no rule-making and rule-enforcing institution in international relations. Anarchy or the absence of higher political authority above the states does not necessarily imply chaos or absence of order. In fact, although there is no international government, there exists a rule governed social order in international relations. States, initially free of obligation to one another, have accepted a whole body of formal and informal rules (for instance, international law, rules governing diplomacy and recognition of spheres of influence, etc.

Many of the formal and rules accepted by the states restrict their freedom of action in certain activities and spheres. Moreover, because of the uneven distribution of power capabilities of states, the powerful states have greater freedom of action than the weaker states. Some scholars, therefore, talk of the erosion of state sovereignty or it being present only in great powers. But it should be noted sovereignty is not autonomy or freedom of action but constitutional independence. The distinction between autonomy and independence is the distinction between political and legal sovereignty. The states may be losing the ability to do what they want, but not their right to do so. If sovereignty is understood in political terms, one can argue that from the inception of the state system states had not much freedom of action. But if sovereignty is understood to mean the basic organising principles of international relations, that is, an order structured around sovereign states, then nothing much has changed. International commitments that place restrictions on states domestic policies are those that have been voluntarily accepted by states as sovereign entities. In contemporary international relations, the most basic norms, principles and practices continue to rest on state sovereignty.

While the principle of external sovereignty is widely recognised and enshrined as a basic principle of international law, it is not without its critics. There are those who draw our attention to the sinister implications of granting each state exclusive jurisdiction over its own territory, people and resources. Human rights advocacy groups, for instance, provide abundant evidence of state capacity to abuse, terrorise and even exterminate their own population and argue for intervention in states. They insist that states should conform to a higher set of moral principles, usually expressed in the doctrine of human rights. Attempts have been made to embody such principles in international law, notably in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948). (Eloberate?)

Then there are those critics who suggest that the classical argument for sovereignty should go beyond national sovereignty. Thinkers such as Bodin and Hobbes emphasised that sovereignty was the only alternative to disorder, chaos and anarchy. Yet this is precisely what a rigorous application of the principle of national sovereignty would turn international politics into. Just as the absence of an internal sovereign leads to brutality and injustice in interpersonal and intra-societal relations, so does the absence of a supreme international authority leads to illegal interventions by powerful states and disputes and armed conflicts (wars) between states. In this way, the classical doctrine of sovereignty can be turned into an argument for world government

## 18.7 Conclusion

Sovereignty is a contentious concept in domestic and international relations. As we saw, the concept developed as an instrument for the assertion of royal authority over feudal lords in the construction of modern territorial states. Political thinkers from Machiavelli to Rousseau believed that instabilities and disorder were obstacles to a stable society and could only be overcome by viable governments that could firmly establish sovereignty over territory and population. While political thinkers differed on the location of sovereignty and therefore the form of government, they were united in believing that only a determinate authority had the capacity to maintain order. The concept of sovereignty was then integrated into theories of international relations through a set of ideas that evolved over a period of time, but got established at Westphalia that ended the moral authority of the Church over secular rulers. Though external sovereignty has undergone major changes as a result of the international commitments made by sovereign states as well as because of growing interdependence of states, the basic international norms, principles and practices continue to rest on state sovereignty that is constitutional independence of states.

## 18.8 Further Reading

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