

# OCHLOCRACY

# Ochlocracy

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.  
(Redirected from Mob rule)

**Ochlocracy** (Greek: *οχλοκρατία*; Latin: *ochlocratia*) is government by mob or a disorganized mass of people. Ochlocracy is also a pejorative term for democracy and more specifically, majoritarianism. Additionally, it is a term in civics that implies that there is no formal authority whatsoever, not even a commonly-accepted view of anarchism, and so disputes are raised, contended and closed by brute force - *might makes right*, but only in a very local and temporary way, as another mob or another mood might just as easily sway a decision.

The term appears to have been coined by Polybius in his *Histories* (6.4.6) [1] (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text.jsp?doc=Plb.+6.4&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0234>). He uses it to name the 'pathological' version of popular rule in opposition to the 'good' version, which he refers to as democracy.

An **ochlocrat** is one who is an advocate or partisan of ochlocracy. It can also be used as an adjective **ochlocratic** or **ochlocratical**.

Of course, whether or not the decisions enforced by a mob are *good* is another matter entirely. Different mobs have supported a wide variety of viewpoints throughout history, and most people would agree with at least some of them.

The threat of **mob rule** (not unlike the term *tyranny of the majority*) is often used as a rhetorical device by those who wish to see more power assigned to a certain ruling minority.

## Contents

- 1 Mobs in history
- 2 Mobs used to affect policy
- 3 Limitations of mob rule
- 4 Other mobs
- 5 See also
- 6 References

## Mobs in history

Historians often comment on mob rule as a factor in the rise of Rome, and its maintenance, as the city of Rome itself was huge (reaching a million people in ancient times), and the aristocracy and even military was very small by comparison to the citizenry. With weapons also being crude, the military force did not exist that could have dealt with a revolt from the larger populace. There was a constant need to keep people fed, distracted, and in awe of the power of the state. Those who could do this, ruled not only Rome, but the whole of the Roman Empire.

Lapses in this control often led to loss of power, or even the loss of heads, of officials - most notably in the reign of Commodus when Cleander unwisely used the Praetorian Guard against a mob which had come to call for his head. As Edward Gibbon relates it,

*"The people... demanded with angry clamors the head of the public enemy. Cleander, who commanded the Praetorian Guards, ordered a body of cavalry to sally forth and disperse the seditious multitude. The multitude fled with precipitation towards the city; several were slain, and many more were trampled to death; but when the cavalry entered the streets their pursuit was checked by a shower of stones and darts from the roofs and windows of the houses. The foot*

*guards, who had long been jealous of the prerogatives and insolence of the Praetorian cavalry, embraced the party of the people. The tumult became a regular engagement and threatened a general massacre. The Praetorians at length gave way, oppressed with numbers; and the tide of popular fury returned with redoubled violence against the gates of the palace, where Commodus lay dissolved in luxury and alone unconscious of the civil war... Commodus started from his dream of pleasure and commanded that the head of Cleander should be thrown out to the people. The desired spectacle instantly appeased the tumult..."*

This followed a previous incident in which the legions of Britain had demanded and received the death of Perennis, the prior administrator. The mob thus realized that it had every chance of success.

## Mobs used to affect policy

During the French Revolution, the mobs in Paris played a similar function, but were more carefully manipulated by political leaders who sensed that they had the power to dispose of monarchy entirely, as they did, eventually setting up a representative democracy (which in turn fell to Napoleon's model of semi-constitutional monarchy).

The modern theories of civil disobedience and satyagraha bear some resemblance to mob rule and its mechanics. Certainly it is quite frightening for large numbers of people, especially peaceful ones, to be marching and shouting common demands, if one is charged with the uncomfortable task of refusing them. If Roman guards, facing crucifixion for disobedience, could be swayed by mobs, it is obviously possible also to sway modern police even in a police state. The Velvet Revolution in former Czechoslovakia, and the resistance to the military coup in the Soviet Union in 1991 that led to the collapse of that state, are situations where it is possible that it was the "mob" which won the day due to defections by authority.

Whether by intent or by circumstance, non-violent well-organized assemblies often degrade into unruly mobs. Provocation from within and from external forces is often a factor, but crowd dynamics often spontaneously emerge to confront the peaceful intentions of those who rallied a crowd. Published treatises on civil disobedience theory almost always encourage practitioners to establish order within their ranks, but civil disobedience groups often face difficulty in controlling those they recruit. Dr. Martin Luther King, a renowned advocate of orderly demonstrations of group power, died after he returned to Memphis to restore order to demonstrations he had inspired but which had turned violent on his previous visit.

## Limitations of mob rule

A scenario where mob pressure did *not* win can be seen in the reporting of Tiananmen Square in 1989. While initially Beijing-based units of the People's Liberation Army refused to charge on the students occupying the square, it was reported that new units from the countryside were brought in who tended to perceive the students not as citizens like themselves but as people deluded by a privileged position in Chinese society.

Many of the more prominent student leaders who had attempted to establish a provisional civil order during their million-strong occupation of the capitol city's main square reportedly fled Beijing before the rural troops arrived, leaving Beijing residents to make their own decisions without the advice of student leaders. Others fled the square after a face to face confrontation with soldiers, indicating remaining student leaders had not spread out among the mob in an attempt bring an orderly conclusion to their demonstration.

Some students of a more radical mindset joined outlying barricades that were defended with provisional weapons, and seized a key bridge leading into Beijing. As soldiers fought their way through barricades and through a downtown area occupied by a now-leaderless throng, combat injuries and injuries from indirect gunfire in an urban setting resulted in deaths. The dead and injured included Beijing residents, PLA soldiers and students who had left the square to enforce barricades around the city.

As this example shows, relying on sheer mob strength and disruption is chancey in any political movement, and is not to be relied upon for any extended period. Anarchism is a theory of civics that relies on mobs and passive resistance more than most, but all branches of it stress the need for ethical relationships and voluntary association. This is not an adequate description of a "mob", which generally lacks anything that one might actually describe as real "integrity" or an explicit "ethical code". Encounters with mob rule usually hinge on threats of bodily harm - do what the mob wants, and you won't get hurt, resist, and you almost certainly will - the sheer size and psychological makeup of the mob making it difficult or impossible to assign blame to any one person. The morality of the mob and its actions can be said to depend on what its demands are, what it's being influenced by, and what it's fighting against. While most people would find it objectionable for a mob to cause harm to ordinary citizens, the same cannot be said about a mob rising up to depose a tyrant.

## Other mobs

The term "mob" is also sometimes used to describe organized crime. Since it is relatively simple for the criminal element to exploit public strife, e.g., by looting, or grabbing power by means of fraud in the confused circumstances, there is some resonance in the idea of "mob rule" meaning, ultimately, rule by these people who exploit or create mobs by leading them into violence.

In certain places with a dubious record of representative democracy, physical control of Polling Stations is a form of mob rule that determines who wins: whoever can bring out more supporters (typically with clubs and farm implements, although now usually knives and guns) to keep the opposing political party out, wins. Political privacy is very often nonexistent in this kind of condition, so retribution against defectors is easy. Some critics view the anti-globalization movement's protest against G8 and World Trade Organization and IMF meetings as an attempt to impose mob rule. This may be valid, as such groups have actually managed to change at least part of the agenda, and timing, of such meetings, and forced leaders to address their concerns, out of proportion, some say, to the degree to which they are shared in the populace.

## See also

- Flash mob
- Group behaviour
- Lynching
- Mobocracy
- Smart mob
- Tribalism
- Crowd
- Crowd psychology
- Group (sociology)



Wikiquote has a collection of quotations related to:  
***Ochlocracy***

## References

- Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn (under pseudonym Francis Stuart Campbell), *The Menace of the Herd*, The Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1943. (Note where the term "ochlocracy" is used throughout the book.)

Retrieved from "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ochlocracy>"

Categories: Classical studies | Forms of government | Politics

- This page was last modified 14:17, 16 January 2006.
- All text is available under the terms of the GNU Free