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People's capacity to give meaning and direction to social life is an essential dimension of political freedom. Yet many citizens of Western democracies believe that this freedom has become quite restricted. They feel they are at the mercy of anonymous structures and processes over which they have little control, structures and processes that present them with options and realities they might not have chosen if they had any real choice. As a result, political interest declines and political cynicism flourishes.

The underlying cause of the powerlessness pervading the current political system could be modernization. Taking the work of Max Weber, Karl Mannheim, and Joseph Schumpeter as a point of departure, Hans Blokland here examines this process. The topics covered are, among others, the meaning of modernization, the forces that drive it, and, especially, the consequences of modernization for the political freedom of citizens to influence the course of their society via democratic politics.

Hans Blokland is an independent scholar in the Netherlands. His previous books include Freedom and Culture in Western Society