Chapter 1 introduced the key concepts and arguments which give shape to the politics of private security. This chapter will address the theoretical assumptions on which these concepts and arguments ultimately rest. As they stand, these concepts and arguments take for granted a number of basic assumptions. These include: i) that there are state-centric political norms about how security ought to be delivered which serve to structure the actions of state and private security actors; ii) that there are a series of economic forces centred around shifts in supply and demand within the security sector which serve to structure the actions of state and private security actors; iii) that state actors have a significant degree of political agency in their interactions with the private security industry; and iv) that private security actors have a significant degree of political agency in their negotiations with the state. Each one of these assumptions feeds directly into the complex political processes which are examined in this book. With this in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to put together a theoretical framework which elaborates upon these assumptions, thereby situating the politics of private security on solid theoretical terrain. However, it should be emphasised that these assumptions cannot be given an absolute, objective grounding, for they are – like all theoretical assumptions – value-laden and subjective. But they can be better understood, and it is the process of better understanding these assumptions through the lens of a purpose-built theoretical framework which serves to steer the politics of private security towards stable theoretical territory. In constructing this framework, the chapter follows a two-part logic. To begin with, the three most prominent models for understanding the dynamics of the domestic security sector – the monopoly, nodal governance and anchored pluralism models – will be critically reviewed so as to capitalise upon the
important theoretical research which has already been conducted in this field. The chapter will then integrate the most valuable elements of this research into a new model – the ‘political economy of private security’ – which has been specifically designed for studying the politics of private security.¹

Monopoly

Different theoretical frameworks for understanding the composition of the security sector provide different insights into the nature of the four assumptions set out above. These insights are usually reflective of the historical context and ideological spirit in which the framework has been constructed (see Cox 1986; Kuhn 1996). This is certainly the case with the monopoly model, which emerged at a time when many European states were steadily monopolising their national law and order institutions and were generally supported in this project by the social and political thought of the Enlightenment. As such, this model depicts a domestic security sector in which the prevailing political norms and economic forces are aligned in a manner which serves to simultaneously privilege state agency and marginalise private security agency, in the process conceptualising something like a state monopoly over security provision. It is immediately obvious, then, that this model is outdated, for it more accurately reflects that period of history which preceded the rise of private security, when the state was usually able to meet the rising demands for domestic security with commensurate increases in the supply of security provision, and private security was accordingly relegated to the backwaters of the security sector. As a consequence, the model is of limited value to the present task. Nevertheless, it is important to critically examine the monopoly model for two reasons. First, a crucial reading of this model does help us to better understand the nature of the state-centric political norms which structure the actions of state and private security actors today. Second, it is also the theoretical framework against which more recent models of the security sector are almost always defined and thus serves as a kind of stepping stone to the other models examined in this chapter.

Finding a clear starting point for mapping out the core propositions of the monopoly model is not as straightforward a task as one might imagine. This is because the model has so dominated the analysis of security provision in the modern era that it can be found in countless scholarly publications which span a period of more than 300 years. In approaching this difficult task, this section will follow in the