

1. Political Science

I INTRODUCTION

Political Science, the systematic study of and reflection upon politics. Politics usually describes the processes by which people and institutions exercise and resist power. Political processes are used to formulate policies, influence individuals and institutions, and organize societies.

Many political scientists study how governments use politics. But political scientists also study politics in other contexts, such as how politics affects the economy, how ordinary people think and act in relation to politics, and how politics influences organizations outside of government. The emphasis upon government and power distinguishes political science from other social sciences, although political scientists share an interest with economists in studying relations between the government and economy, and with sociologists in considering relations between social structures in general and political structures in particular. Political scientists attempt to explain and understand recurrent patterns in politics rather than specific political events.

II THE IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Political science is important because politics is important. During the 20th century, tens of millions of people were murdered by regimes devoted to particular political ideologies. All peoples' lives are affected in many ways by what governments do or choose not to do, and by the power structures that exist in society.

The specific ideas of political scientists are only occasionally implemented by policy makers. Political scientists usually influence the world in more indirect ways: by educating citizens and political leaders, by contributing to debates on political issues, and by encouraging different ways of looking at the world. The study of political science is motivated by the need to understand the sources and consequences of political stability and revolution, of repression and liberty, of equality and inequality, of war and peace, of democracy and dictatorship. The study of political science suggests that the world of politics is complex and

cannot be reorganized by simple ideological schemes without unintended consequences.

III WHAT POLITICAL SCIENTISTS DO

Most professional political scientists work in colleges and universities where they teach, conduct research, and write articles and books related to their specific research interests. Political scientists also work in policy-related think tanks, privately funded organizations that conduct and publicize research on public policy issues. Examples of such organizations include The Brookings Institution and the American Enterprise Institute. Political parties and survey-research organizations frequently employ political scientists to design and interpret opinion surveys. Businesses employ political scientists to provide information on the political contexts in which corporations operate. Governments employ political scientists as assistants to legislators, as staff members of administrative departments such as the United States Department of State, and in international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU). Some political scientists become politicians or journalists. One political scientist, Woodrow Wilson, became president of the United States.

IV FIELDS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

Political science is organized into several fields, each representing a major subject area of teaching and research in colleges and universities. These fields include comparative politics, American politics, international relations, political theory, public administration, public policy, and political behavior.

A Comparative Politics

Comparative politics involves study of the politics of different countries. Some political scientists, known as area specialists, study a single country or a culturally similar group of nations, such as the countries of Southeast Asia. Area specialists tend to be versed in the language, history, and culture of the country or group of countries they study. Other political scientists compare culturally

dissimilar nations, and investigate the similarities and differences in the politics of these nations. Political scientists who undertake these comparisons are often motivated by the need to develop and test theories—for example, theories of why revolutions happen. This may lead them to discover commonalities between countries that are widely separated and appear very different. For example, political scientists have found many similarities between the transitions from authoritarian rule to democracy in Latin America and Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s.

B American Politics

Research institutions in most of the world classify American politics as a subfield of comparative politics. However, political scientists usually organize the study of their own country into a separate field, so within the United States, American politics is recognized as its own specialty. Given the size of the United States and the number of students who study U.S. politics in colleges and universities, the American politics subfield is very large. Political scientists interested in American politics often study the Congress of the United States, judicial politics, constitutional law, the presidency, state and local politics, voting and elections, and American political history.

C International Relations

International relations is the study of the international system, which involves interactions between nations, international organizations, and multinational corporations. The two traditional approaches used by political scientists in the study of international relations are realism and liberalism (which is not the same as liberalism as a political ideology). Realism emphasizes the danger of the international system, where war is always a possibility and the only source of order is the balance of power. Liberalism is more idealistic and hopeful, emphasizing the problem-solving abilities of international institutions such as the United Nations and World Trade Organization. In 1991, after the Soviet Union dissolved and the Cold War ended, the balance of opinion briefly shifted in favor of liberalism, but realists were quick to point to the potential for future international conflicts.

Beginning in the 1980s *constructivist* political scientists asserted that the interests of nations and the character of their interactions are not fixed, but can be determined by policy makers. For example, for the past 50 years, U.S. policy makers have constructed the identity of Canada and Cuba in quite different ways. In spite of the fact that Canada and the United States were rivals in the early part of their history, during the 20th century the U.S. has established military and economic alliances with Canada and regards it as a close ally. In contrast, since Cuba's 1959 revolution and subsequent adoption of Communist principles, the United States has treated Cuba as a potential threat to American national security. Many European nations and allies of the United States believe this fear is unwarranted. According to constructivist political scientists, the identities that U.S. policy makers have constructed for countries like Canada and Cuba help to determine whether the fears of realists or the hopes of liberals are more likely to be realized.

D Political Theory

Political theory involves the study of philosophical thought about politics from ancient Greece to the present; the interpretation and development of concepts such as freedom, democracy, human rights, justice, and power; the development of models for government, such as participatory democracy or constitutional systems; and the logic that political scientists use in their inquiries. Political theory overlaps law, philosophy, and the other fields of political science. In 1971 John Rawls, a professor of philosophy at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, published *A Theory of Justice*, which revitalized political theory. Rawls's book showed that it was still possible to generate sophisticated and challenging philosophical arguments about the way that political systems should be organized, and that political scientists should not just look to the ideas of the great philosophers of the past.

E Public Administration

Political scientists interested in public administration study government organizations and their relation to other parts of government. Political scientists investigate how these organizations work, and try to devise methods of improving them. For example, David Osborne and Ted Gaebler's book

Reinventing Government (1992) inspired many national, state, and local governments to adopt more-competitive and less bureaucratic ways of delivering services to the public.

F Public Policy

The field of public policy involves the study of specific policy problems and governmental responses to them. Political scientists involved in the study of public policy attempt to devise solutions for problems of public concern. They study issues such as health care, pollution, and the economy. Public policy overlaps comparative politics in the study of comparative public policy; with international relations in the study of foreign policy and national security policy; and with political theory in considering ethics in policy making.

G Political Behavior

Political behavior involves the study of how people involve themselves in political processes and respond to political activity. The field emphasizes the study of voting behavior, which can be affected by social pressures; the effects of individual psychology, such as emotional attachments to parties or leaders; and the rational self-interests of voters. The results of these studies are applied during the planning of political campaigns, and influence the design of advertisements and party platforms.

V RESEARCH METHODS

Political scientists are divided on the extent to which their discipline should follow methods used by traditional sciences. Some argue that political science should follow the research model of natural sciences such as physics and chemistry, which use quantitative analysis and repeated observation to establish scientific laws. These political scientists aim to discover general laws of politics, although few such laws have been discovered. One such law is Duverger's law, which asserts that countries that conduct elections through proportional representation (such as Germany and the Netherlands) will have many political parties, while countries that decide elections on the basis of a

simple plurality of votes (such as Britain and the United States) will have only two primary parties. But Duverger's law is itself faced with a need to explain many contradictory real-world cases—for example, why India does not have a two-party system.

Political scientists who attempt to develop scientific laws favor quantitative methods or explanations of politics that are derived from deductions based upon simple assumptions about human behavior. All else is regarded as transient, unfounded, and unreliable.

Political scientists who oppose this scientific emphasis argue that politics is highly complex and variable, continually changing as new events unfold, and driven by unpredictable human actions. They argue that any rigidly scientific approach can only yield trivial results. They point out that their more scientific colleagues have not had much success in developing general laws of political science, let alone making predictions based on such laws. For example, not one political scientist predicted the breakup of the Soviet bloc in 1989 and end of the Soviet Union. Political scientists who favor less scientific approaches tend to pursue single-case studies—for example, a study of the presidency of Ronald W. Reagan—or examine specific social problems.

A Quantitative Analysis

Political scientists who favor quantitative research most often use statistical methods such as opinion surveys and aggregate-level analysis. Opinion surveys ask a representative sample of individuals a series of questions about their behavior, their attitudes about politics, their social status, and other individual characteristics. Political scientists also commonly employ aggregate-level statistical analysis, in which administrative entities such as electoral districts, states, or countries compose the units of analysis. Such analysis can be used to test very broad theories—for example, the relationship between a country's level of prosperity and how democratic its government is. In addition, time series analysis can be used to track political relationships involving time, for example, the voting strength of socialist parties and the amount of government spending on social programs over time.

B Case Studies

Some political scientists believe that case study research has little or no explicit methodology or theory, and argue that it is impossible to extrapolate its findings to other situations. Comparative case study analysis overcomes these criticisms. In this method of study, researchers choose cases that are alike in some important respects and different in others, and then try to explain the reasons for the similarities and differences. For example, theories about the causes of revolution can be developed and tested by comparing the details of a few important revolutions.

C Other Methods

Political scientists often adopt methods of study and analysis used by other disciplines. These methods include computer simulations of political processes, experimentation with human subjects playing political roles, in-depth interviewing, and textual analysis and criticism. Some political scientists conduct policy experiments, which compare what happens when a policy is implemented in one place but not another. Others use *Q methodology*, which involves profiling subjects in terms of their reactions to a set of statements, then comparing these profiles using statistical techniques.

VI HISTORY OF THE DISCIPLINE

A Origins and Development

The systematic study of politics dates to ancient times. The oldest legal and administrative code that survives in its entirety is the Code of Hammurabi, inscribed on a pillar of black basalt. Hammurabi, a Babylonian king who ruled from 1792 to 1750 BC, described the laws in his code as enabling “stable government and good rule.” Hammurabi’s justification indicates that the reasoning behind the code was political as well as legal.

The first political scientist known to analyze information systematically was the Greek philosopher Aristotle. He compared the constitutions of Greek city-states during the 4th century BC and generalized about the political consequences of

the different constitutional systems. The study of political science flourished in ancient Greece during the 5th and 4th centuries BC, in the Roman republic from 509 to 31 BC, in the republics of Italy during the 15th and 16th centuries, amid the political turmoil of 17th century Britain, and during the French and American revolutions toward the end of the 18th century. While the specific methods employed by political scientists throughout the centuries varied tremendously, their common concerns have been to provide useful advice to rulers and to organize governments more effectively.

Political science as it is practiced today was developed more recently. In 19th-century Germany, academics developed a systematic science called *Staatlehre* to provide useful information to governments. *Staatlehre* was geared to the needs of Germany's centralized government, which sought to consolidate power and administer society more effectively.

B Political Science in America

The first professor of political science in the United States was German emigré Francis Lieber, who was appointed chair of political science at Columbia College (now Columbia University) in New York City in 1857. Lieber and his successor, John W. Burgess, aspired to build a strong American national government following Germany's example, and wanted Columbia to be appointed a national university and lead this movement. However, the U.S. government was not especially receptive to this view. Thus, the next generation of political scientists sought to establish the discipline's identity and influence in the emerging American university system, rather than through the American government. This academic context encouraged many political scientists to emphasize the scientific aspects of their discipline.

The American model of political science has often been self-consciously scientific, and successive waves of reformers have criticized their predecessors for not being truly scientific. During the 1920s and 1930s Charles E. Merriam and his colleagues at the University of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois, formed the so-called Chicago School. Merriam's many interests included the history of political thought and civic education. But he is best known for promoting the scientific and statistical study of politics. His associates and students in the

Chicago School, most notably Harold Gosnell and Harold Lasswell, conducted research that focused on voting, mass political participation, the psychology of political behavior and leadership, and wartime propaganda. Merriam, a politician himself, wanted to improve politics by applying the results of this kind of research.

C The Behavioral Revolution

The Chicago School was the precursor of what became known as the behavioral revolution of the 1950s that influenced political science for the remainder of the 20th century. The behaviorists believed they would revolutionize the field by applying methods of analysis used in the natural sciences. Many of the behavioral revolutionaries served the U.S. government during World War II (1939-1945), and conducted economic and social analysis as part of the war effort. The behaviorists' modernization theory influenced academics abroad. Modernization theory explored the conditions for economic and political development from a "traditional" to a "modern" society. The theory was premised on the belief that other countries could and should develop a political system similar to that of the United States. By the 1960s the behaviorists controlled the discipline.

The behaviorists' triumph was short-lived. During the late 1960s, the violence and civil unrest associated with the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War (1959-1975) gave rise to calls for political science to become more diverse in its topics of study, theories, and methods. Critics also charged that the American political science establishment presumed the U.S. system of government was superior to other political systems. But the behaviorists had firmly established the place of quantitative research and broad theories in the study of political science.

The American Political Science Association, founded in 1903 and now composed of more than 13,000 members, helps to set professional standards and organizes the discipline. A rigorous and lengthy doctoral degree program is the only route of entry to the profession in the United States, and professional success is measured by publication in highly competitive journals.

VII RECENT TRENDS

During the late 20th century the American practice of the discipline has become dominant worldwide. The analytical methods favored by the behaviorists continue to influence political scientists, who have developed *rational choice theory* to predict and explain the behavior of people when they interact in a political context. Political scientists have also reconsidered some of the most basic building blocks of society, such as the state and the institutions it comprises.

A Rational Choice Theory

The latest initiative to make political science more self-consciously scientific involves the use of rational choice theory, which attempts to deduce what will happen when individuals are faced with a political situation. The theory borrows from economics the assumption that all individuals are *rational egoists*. People are assumed to be rational in their capacity to devise, choose, and put into practice effective means to clear ends; they are egoists because the ends in question generally refer to the self-interest of that individual. Rational choice theory can be applied to everything from decisions made by small committees to complex negotiations between governments.

Rational choice theory has proven limited in its ability to predict real-world behavior. For example, rational choice theory cannot explain why intelligent people vote in elections when the chances of their vote being decisive in determining the winner of the election are near zero. Some observers believe that the results of rational choice theory are best thought of as a set of warnings about what would happen if people behaved as rational egoists, rather than an explanation of how the world actually works.

B New Institutionalism

New institutionalists have reinvigorated the study of institutions. In political science, institutions can be defined as systems of formal rules or informal understandings that coordinate the actions of individuals. Examples of

institutions include the U.S. Congress and global agreements that seek to limit damage to the earth's ozone layer. New institutionalists claim that the behavioral revolution of the 1950s led political scientists to overemphasize the behavior of individuals, to the neglect of the institutional contexts in which these individuals operate. New institutionalists claim to have more-sophisticated theories about how institutions work than did the "old" institutionalists of the early 20th century.

C Return of the State

From the 19th century to the 1940s many political scientists regarded the state as a unified, organic entity that integrated government, society, and political organizations. During the behavioral revolution, this concept of a unified, goal-directed state was discredited, in favor of a looser and more open concept of the political system. Behaviorists contended that the idea of the state was unscientific and mocked it as mystical. They claimed that political systems, in contrast, are real and observable, composed of various inputs and outputs. According to the behaviorists, the inputs in a political system include influences such as lobbying by interest groups and bargaining between the executive and legislative branches, and the outputs are public policies.

The concept of the state, now more precisely defined as the set of officials legally authorized to make binding decisions for a society, made a comeback in the 1980s. States are viewed as having certain functions or imperatives that they must perform—for example, maintaining the confidence of financial markets—regardless of the desires of their political leaders, the wishes of voters, pressure from interest groups, or bargaining within government.

D Democracy and Democratization

During the 1980s and 1990s increasing numbers of political scientists studied democracy and its development in societies that had formerly been ruled by authoritarian governments. The wave of democratization that followed the end of the Cold War inspired political theorists to develop new models of democracy, and political scientists to study the role of citizenship and citizen education in democratic governments.

E Challenges to the Discipline

Marxists challenged conventional political science through most of the 20th century, charging that the discipline overlooked oppressive political relationships in the capitalist economy. According to Marxists, formal democracy is a sham because the dominant economic class in society always controls the government.

Since 1970 feminism has influenced most fields of political science. Feminist critics contend that both governments and political science have been organized along male-dominated lines and have ignored and repressed the perspective of women. Political scientists' responses to feminism have ranged from attempts to study the political behavior of women more closely to the development of comprehensive feminist political philosophies.

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