



POLITICAL SCIENCE

An Introduction

FOURTEENTH EDITION

Roskin • Cord • Medeiros • Jones

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Brief Contents

PART I	The Bases of Politics	1	10	Parties	187
1	Politics and Political Science	2	11	Elections	207
2	Political Ideologies	28			
3	States	49	PART IV	Political Institutions	227
4	Constitutions and Rights	68	12	Legislatures	228
5	Regimes	86	13	Executives and Bureaucracies	248
			14	Judiciaries	269
PART II	Political Attitudes	108	PART V	What Political Systems Do	290
6	Political Culture	109	15	Political Economy	291
7	Public Opinion	127	16	Violence and Revolution	311
PART III	Political Interactions	147	17	International Relations	331
8	Political Communication	148			
9	Interest Groups	168			

Chapter 1

Politics and Political Science



Learning Objectives

- 1.1** Evaluate the several explanations of political power.
- 1.2** Justify the claim that political science may be considered a science.
- 1.3** Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of several theoretical approaches to political science.
- 1.4** Contrast normative theories of politics to political science.

When the Cold War ended, several thinkers held that democracy had won and would encompass the world. Soviet communism had collapsed and Chinese communism had reformed into state-managed capitalism. There were scarcely any other models for governance than **Western-style capitalist democracy**, argued some neo-conservatives. Even the Middle East, home to some of the worst dictators, would give way to democracy, argued Bush administration neo-cons as the United States invaded Iraq in 2003. The 2011 Arab Spring seemed to show the longing for democracy, aided by the new hand-held social media.

But we were too optimistic. **Not everyone craved democracy; many, in fact, either feared it or wanted to use it for misrule.** Russian democracy collapsed back into an autocracy that is now hostile to the United States. China's Communist chiefs oversaw dramatic economic growth but proclaimed that they would keep ruling. They jailed dissenters and also turned hostile to the United States. In the Middle East, elections produced **undemocratic regimes (exception: Tunisia)** and dangerous chaos. What had gone wrong? And what can political science tell us about why democracy did not spread as planned? Were these countries simply not ready for democracy, which seems to require a large, educated middle class and a tolerant, pluralist culture? Long-run, over several decades of economic and educational growth, is a march toward democracy likely to resume?

Questions like these make political science relevant and exciting. As its two-word name implies, **political science is both a topic of study and a method for studying its topic.** If we are studying politics, we need to start by thinking about what politics is. If we are studying it with science, we need to consider what makes the scientific method distinct from other ways to study politics.

What Is Politics?

1.1 Evaluate the several explanations of political power.

When you think of politics, you probably think of government and elections. Both are clearly political, but politics can happen in many more places. Politics happens in the workplace, in families, and even in the classroom. Consider the kid in class who asks too many questions and keeps the class late. What happens? Either the professor cuts the kid off, or his classmates express their disapproval to shape his behavior to achieve their goals. Either way, the kid's behavior is shaped by **the politics of the classroom.**

Politics is the ongoing competition between people, usually in groups, to shape policy in their favor. To do so, they may seek to guide policy indirectly by shaping the beliefs and values of members of their society. Notice this definition can encompass the politics of government, but it can also encompass the political dynamics in other contexts. While this text will largely focus on politics of governments, it is important to understand that politics is more fundamental than governments but occurs wherever human competitions play out.

Political Power

political power

Ability of one person to get another to do something.

As Renaissance Florentine philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) emphasized, ultimately politics is about power, specifically the power to shape others' behavior. Power in politics is getting people to do something they wouldn't otherwise do—and sometimes having them think it was their idea.

Some people dislike the concept of political power. It smacks of coercion, inequality, and occasionally brutality. Some speakers denounce “power politics,” suggesting governance without power, a happy band of brothers and sisters regulating themselves through love and sharing. Communities formed on such a basis do not last; or, if they do last, it is only by transforming themselves into conventional structures of leaders and followers, buttressed by obedience patterns that look suspiciously like power. Political power seems to be built into the human condition. But why do some people hold political power over others? There is no definitive explanation of political power. Biological, psychological, cultural, rational, and irrational explanations have been put forward.

BIOLOGICAL Aristotle said it first and perhaps best: “Man is by nature a political animal.” (Aristotle's words were *zoon politikon*, which can be translated as either “political animal” or “social animal.” The Greeks lived in city-states in which the polis was the same as society.) Aristotle meant that humans live naturally in herds, like elephants or bison. Biologically, they need each other for sustenance and survival. It is also natural that they array themselves into ranks of leaders and followers, like all herd animals. Taking a cue from Aristotle, modern biological explanations, some of them looking at primate behavior, say that forming a political system and obeying its leaders are innate, passed on with one's genes. Some thinkers argue that human politics shows the same “dominance hierarchies” that other mammals set up. Politicians tend to be “alpha males”—or think they are.

The advantage of the biological approach is its simplicity, but it raises a number of questions. If we grant that humans are naturally political, how do

Classic Works

Concepts and Percepts

The great Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote in the late eighteenth century, “Percepts without concepts are empty, and concepts without percepts are blind.” This notion helped establish modern philosophy and social science. A percept is what you perceive through your sensory organs: facts, images, numbers, examples, and so on. A concept is an idea in

your head: meanings, theories, hypotheses, beliefs, and so on. You can collect many percepts, but without a concept to structure them you have nothing; your percepts are empty of meaning. On the other hand, your concepts are “blind” if they cannot look at reality, which requires percepts. In other words, you need both theory and data.

we explain the instances when political groups fall apart and people disobey authority? Perhaps we should modify the theory: **Humans are imperfectly political (or social) animals.** Most of the time, people form groups and obey authority but sometimes, under certain circumstances, they do not. This begs the question of which circumstances promote or undermine the formation of political groups.

PSYCHOLOGICAL Psychological explanations of politics and obedience are closely allied with biological theories. Both posit needs derived from centuries of evolution in the formation of political groups. Psychologists have refined their views with empirical research. In the famous Milgram study, unwitting subjects were instructed by a professor to administer progressively larger electric shocks to a victim. The “victim,” strapped in a chair, was actually an actor who only pretended to suffer. Most of the subjects were willing to administer potentially lethal doses of electricity simply because the “professor”—an authority figure in a white lab smock—told them to. Most of the subjects disliked hurting the victim but rationalized that they were just following orders and that any harm done to the victim was really the professor’s responsibility. They surrendered their actions to an authority figure.

Psychological studies also show that most people are naturally conformist. Most members of a group see things the group’s way. Psychologist Irving Janis found many foreign policy mistakes were made in a climate of “groupthink,” in which a leadership team tells itself that all is well and that the present policy is working. Groups ignore doubters who tell them, for instance, that the Japanese will attack Pearl Harbor in 1941 or that the 1961 Bay of Pigs landing of Cuban exiles will fail. Obedience to authority and groupthink suggest that humans have deep-seated needs—possibly innate—to fit into groups and their norms. Perhaps this is what makes human society possible, but it also makes possible horrors such as the Nazi Holocaust and more recent massacres.

CULTURAL How much of human behavior is learned as opposed to biologically inherited? This is the very old “nurture versus nature” debate. For much of the twentieth century, the cultural theorists—those who believe behavior is learned—dominated. Anthropologists concluded that all differences in behavior were cultural. Cooperative and peaceful societies raise their children that way, they argued. Political communities are formed and held together on the basis of cultural values transmitted by parents, schools, churches, and the mass media. Political science developed an interesting subfield, *political culture*, whose researchers found that a country’s political culture was formed by many long-term factors: religion, child rearing, land tenure, and economic development.

Cultural theorists see trouble when the political system gets out of touch with the cultural system, as when the shah of Iran attempted to modernize an Islamic society that did not like Western values and lifestyles. The Iranians threw the shah out in 1979 and celebrated the return of a medieval-style religious leader, who voiced the values favored by traditional Iranians. Cultural theories can also be applied to U.S. politics. Republicans try to win elections by

culture

Human behavior that is learned as opposed to inherited.

articulating the values of religion, family, and self-reliance, which are deeply ingrained into American culture. Many thinkers believe economic and political development depend heavily on **culture**.

The cultural approach to political life holds some optimism. If all human behavior is learned, bad behavior can be unlearned and society improved. Educating young people to be tolerant, cooperative, and just will gradually change a society's culture for the better, according to this view. Changing culture, however, is slow and difficult, as the American occupiers of Iraq and Afghanistan discovered.

Culture contributes a lot to political behavior, but the theory has some difficulties. First, where does culture come from? History? Economics? Religion? Second, if all behavior is cultural, various political systems should be as different from each other as their cultures. But, especially in the realm of politics, we see similar political attitudes and patterns in lands with very different cultures. Politicians everywhere tend to become corrupt, regardless of culture.

rational

Based on the ability to reason.

RATIONAL Another school of thought approaches politics as a **rational** thing; that is, people know what they want most of the time, and they have good reasons for doing what they do. **Classic political theorists, such as Hobbes and Locke, held that humans form "civil society" because their powers of reason tell them that it is much better than anarchy.** To safeguard life and property, people form governments. If those governments become abusive, the people have the right to dissolve them and start anew. This Lockean notion greatly influenced the U.S. Founding Fathers.

The biological, psychological, and cultural schools downplay human reason, claiming that people are either born or conditioned to certain behavior and that individuals seldom think rationally. But what about cases in which people break away from group conformity and argue independently? How can we explain a change of mind? "I was for Jones until he came out with his terrible economic policy, so now I'm voting for Smith." People make rational judgments like that all the time. A political system based on the presumption of human reason stands a better chance of governing justly and humanely. If leaders believe that people obey out of biological inheritance or cultural conditioning, they will think they can get away with all manner of deception and misrule. If, on the other hand, rulers fear that people are rational, they will respect the public's ability to discern wrongdoing. Accordingly, even if people are not completely rational, it is probably for the best if rulers think they are.

irrational

Based on the power to use fear and myth to cloud reason.

IRRATIONAL Late in the nineteenth century, a group of thinkers expounded the view that people are basically **irrational**, especially when it comes to politics. They are emotional, dominated by myths and stereotypes, and politics is really the manipulation of symbols. A crowd is like a wild beast that can be whipped up by charismatic leaders to do their bidding. What people regard as rational is really myth; just keep feeding the people myths to control them. The first practitioner of this school was Mussolini, founder of fascism in Italy, followed by

Hitler in Germany. A soft-spoken Muslim fundamentalist, Osama bin Laden, got an irrational hold on thousands of fanatical followers by feeding them the myth that America was the enemy of Islam.

There may be a good deal of truth to the irrational view of human political behavior, but it has catastrophic consequences. Leaders who use irrationalist techniques start believing their own propaganda and lead their nations to war, economic ruin, or tyranny. Some detect irrationalism even in the most advanced societies, where much of politics consists of screaming crowds and leaders striking heroic poses.

Power as a Composite

There are elements of truth in all these explanations of political power. At different times in different situations, any one of them can explain power. Tom Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* rationally explained why America should separate from Britain. The drafters of both the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were imbued with the rationalism of their age. Following the philosophers then popular, they framed their arguments as if human political activity were as logical as Newtonian physics. Historian Henry Steele Commager referred to the Constitution as "the crown jewel of the Enlightenment," the culmination of an age of reason.

But how truly rational were they? By the late eighteenth century, the thirteen American colonies had grown culturally separate from Britain. People thought of themselves as Americans rather than as English colonists. They increasingly read American newspapers and communicated among themselves rather than with Britain. Perhaps the separation was more cultural than rational.

Nor can we forget the psychological and irrational factors. Samuel Adams was a gifted firebrand, Thomas Jefferson a powerful writer, and George Washington a charismatic general. The American break with Britain and the founding of a new order were complex mixtures of all these factors. Such complex mixtures of factors go into any political system you can mention. To be sure, at times one factor seems more important than others, but we cannot exactly determine the weight to give any one factor. And notice how the various factors blend into one another. The biological factors lead to the psychological, which in turn lead to the cultural, the rational, and the irrational, forming a seamless web.

One common mistake about political power is viewing it as a finite, measurable quantity. Power is a connection among people, the ability of one person to get others to do his or her bidding. Political power does not come in jars or megawatts. Revolutionaries in some lands speak of "seizing power," as if power was kept in the national treasury and they could sneak in and grab it at night. The Afghan Taliban "seized power" in 1995–1996, but they were a minority of the Afghan population. Many Afghans hated and fought them. Revolutionaries think they automatically gain **legitimacy** and authority when they "seize power"—they do not. Power is earned, not seized.

legitimacy

Mass feeling that the government's rule is rightful and should be obeyed.

Is power identical to politics? Some power-mad people (including more than a few politicians) see the two as the same, but this is an oversimplification. We might see politics as a combination of goals or policies plus the power necessary to achieve them. Power, in this view, is a prime *ingredient* of politics. It would be difficult to imagine a political system without political power. Even a religious figure who ruled on the basis of love would be exercising power over followers. It might be “nice power,” but it would still be power. Power, then, is a sort of *enabling device* to carry out or implement policies and decisions. You can have praiseworthy goals, but unless you have the power to implement them, they remain wishful thoughts.

Others see the essence of politics as a *struggle for power*, a sort of gigantic game in which power is the goal. What, for example, are elections all about? The getting of power. There is a danger here, however: If power becomes the goal of politics, devoid of other purposes, it becomes cynical, brutal, and self-destructive. The Hitler regime destroyed itself in the worship of power. Obsessed with retaining presidential power, President Nixon ruined his own administration. As nineteenth-century British historian and philosopher Lord Acton put it, “Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

What Is Political Science?

1.2 Justify the claim that political science may be considered a science.

The study of politics can take many forms. Political science is a method of how to study politics. Political science ain’t politics. It is not necessarily training to become a practicing politician. Political science is training in the calm, objective analysis of politics, which may or may not aid working politicians. Side by side, the two professions compare like this:

Politicians

love power
seek popularity
think practically
hold firm views
offer single causes
see short-term payoff
plan for next election
respond to groups
seek name recognition

Political Scientists

are skeptical of power
seek accuracy
think abstractly
reach tentative conclusions
offer many causes
see long-term consequences
plan for next publication
seek the good of the whole
seek professional prestige

Many find politics distasteful, and perhaps they are right. Politics may be inherently immoral or, at any rate, amoral. Misuse of power, influence peddling, and outright corruption is prominent in politics. But you need not like the thing

Classic Thought

“Never Get Angry at a Fact”

This basic point of all serious study sounds commonsensical but is often ignored, even in college courses. It traces back to the extremely complex thought of the German philosopher **Hegel** (1770–1831), who argued that things happen not by caprice or accident but for good and sufficient reasons: “Whatever is real is rational.” This means that nothing is completely accidental and that if we apply reason, we will understand why something happens. We study politics in a “naturalistic” mode, not getting angry at what we see but trying to understand how it came to be.

For example, we hear of a politician who took money from a favor-seeker. As political scientists, we push our anger to the side and ask questions like: Do

most politicians in that country take money? Is it an old tradition, and does the culture of this country accept it? Do the people even expect politicians to take money? How big are campaign expenses? Can the politician possibly run for office without taking money? In short, we see if extralegal exchanges of cash are part of the political system. If they are, it makes no sense to get angry at an individual politician. If we dislike it, we may then consider how the system might be reformed to discourage the taking of money on the side. And reforms may not work. Japan reformed its electoral laws in an attempt to stamp out its traditional “money politics,” but little changed. Like bacteria, some things in politics have lives of their own.

you study. Biologists may study a disease-causing bacterium under a microscope. They do not “like” the bacterium but are interested in how it grows, how it does its damage, and how it may be eradicated. Neither do they get angry at the bacterium and smash the glass. Biologists first understand the forces of nature and then work with them to improve humankind’s existence. Political scientists try to do the same with politics. The two professions of politician and political scientist bear approximately the same relation to each other as do bacteria and bacteriologists.

The Master Science

Aristotle, the founder of the discipline, called politics “the master science.” He meant that almost everything happens in a political context, that the decisions of the *polis* (the Greek city-state and root of our words *polite*, *police*, and *politics*) governed most other things. **Politics, in the words of Yale’s Harold Lasswell (1902–1978), is the study of “who gets what.”** But, some object, the economic system determines who gets what in countries with free markets. True, but should we have a totally free-market system with no government involved? A decision to bail out shaky banks sparks angry controversy over this point. Few love the bankers, but economists say it had to be done to save the economy from collapse. Politics is intimately connected to economics.

Suppose something utterly natural strikes, like a hurricane. It is the political system that decides whether and where to build dikes or deliver federal funds to rebuild in flood-prone seacoast areas. The disaster is natural, but its impact on society is controlled in large part by politics. How about science, our

discipline

A field of study, often represented by an academic department or major.

Methods

Learning a Chapter

Read each chapter *before* class. And do not simply read the chapter; learn it by writing down the following:

- A.** Find what strikes you as the *three main points*. Do not outline; construct three complete sentences, each with a subject and predicate. They may be long and complex sentences, but they must be complete declarative sentences. You may find two, four, or six main points, but by the time you split, combine, and discard what may or may not be the main points, you will know the chapter. Look for abstract generalizations; the specifics come under the point C below, examples or case studies. Do not simply copy three sentences from the chapter. Synthesize several sentences, always asking what three sentences distilled from this chapter will most help me on the exam? These might be three main points from Chapter 1:
 1. Study politics as a scientist studies nature, trying to understand reality without getting angry at it.
 2. Political science combines many disciplines but focuses on power: who holds it and how they use it.
 3. Politics can be studied objectively, provided claims are supported by empirical evidence and structured by theory.
- B.** List a *dozen vocabulary words*, and be able to define them. These are words new to you or words used in a specialized way. This text makes it easier with the boldfaced terms defined in the margins; for terms not in boldface, read with a dictionary handy.
- C.** Note specific *examples* or *case studies* that illustrate the main points or vocabulary words. Most will contain proper nouns (i.e., capitalized words). Examples are not main points or definitions; rather, they are empirical evidence that support a main point. The examples need not be complete sentences. These might be examples from Chapter 1:
 - Aristotle's "master science"
 - AIDS versus breast cancer research
 - West Germany's success story
 - Communist regimes in Eastern Europe
 - Afghanistan's chaos
 - Shah's regime in Iran erodes

bacteriologists squinting through microscopes? That is not political. But who funds the scientists' education and their research institutes? It could be private charity (the donors of which get tax breaks), but the government plays a major role. When the U.S. government decided that AIDS research deserved top priority, funding for other programs was cut. Bacteria and viruses may be natural, but studying them is often quite political. In this case, it pitted gays against women concerned with breast cancer. Who gets what: funding to find a cure for AIDS or for breast cancer? The choice is political.

Can Politics Be Studied as a Science?

Students new to science often assume it implies a certain subject for study. But science is a way to study nearly any subject. It is the method, not the subject. The original meaning of science, from the French, is simply "knowledge." Later, the natural sciences, which rely on measurement and calculation, took over the term. Now most people think of science as precise and factual,

supported by experiments and data. Some political scientists have attempted to become like natural scientists; they **quantify** data and manipulate them statistically to validate **hypotheses**. The quantifiers make some good contributions, but usually they focus on small questions of detail rather than on large questions of meaning. This is because they generally have to stick to areas that can be quantified: public opinion, election returns, and congressional voting.

But large areas of politics are not quantifiable. How and why do leaders make their decisions? Many decisions are made in secrecy, even in democracies. We do not know exactly how decisions are made in the White House in Washington, the Elysée in Paris, or the Zhongnanhai in Beijing. When members of Congress vote on an issue, can we be certain why they voted that way? Was it constituents' desires, the good of the nation, or the campaign contributions of interest groups? What did the Supreme Court have in mind when it ruled that laying off schoolteachers based on race is unconstitutional but hiring them based on race is not? Try quantifying that. Much of politics—especially dealing with how and why decisions are made—is just too complex and too secret to be quantified. Bismarck, who unified Germany in the nineteenth century, famously compared laws and sausages: It's better not to see how they are made.

Does that mean that politics can never be like a natural science? Political science is an **empirical** discipline that accumulates both quantified and qualitative data. With such data we can find persistent patterns, much like in biology. Gradually, we begin to generalize. When the generalizations become firmer, we call them theories. In a few cases, the theories become so firm that we may call them laws. In this way, the study of politics accumulates knowledge, the original meaning of science.

The Struggle to See Clearly

Political science also resembles a natural science when its researchers, if they are professional, study things as they are and not as they wish them to be. This is more difficult in the study of politics than in the study of stars and cells. Most political scientists have viewpoints on current issues, and it is easy to let these views contaminate their analyses of politics. Indeed, precisely because a given question interests us enough to study it indicates that we bring a certain passion with us. Can you imagine setting to work on a topic you cared nothing about? If you are interested enough to study a question, you probably start by being inclined to one side. Too much of this, however, renders the study biased; it becomes a partisan outcry rather than a scholarly search for the truth. How can you guard against this? The traditional hallmarks of **scholarship** give some guidance. A scholarly work should be *reasoned*, *balanced*, supported with *evidence*, and a bit *theoretical*.

REASONED You must spell out your reasoning, and it should make sense. If your perspective is colored by an underlying assumption, you should say so. You might say, "For the purpose of this study, we assume that bureaucrats are rational," or "This is a study of the psychology of voters in a small town." Your

quantify

To measure with numbers.

hypothesis

An initial theory a researcher starts with, to be proved by evidence.

empirical

Based on observable evidence.

scholarship

Intellectual arguments supported by reason and evidence.

basic assumptions influence what you study and how you study it, but you can minimize bias by honestly stating your assumptions. German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920), who contributed vastly to all the social sciences, held that any findings that support the researcher’s political views must be discarded as biased. Few attempt to be that pure, but Weber’s point is well taken: Beware of structuring the study so that it comes out to support a given view.

BALANCED You can also minimize bias by acknowledging other ways of looking at your topic. You should mention the various approaches to your topic and what other researchers have found. Instructors are impressed that you know the literature in a given area. They are even more impressed when you can then criticize the previous studies and explain why you think they are incomplete or faulty: “The Jones study of voters found them largely apathetic, but this was an off-year election in which turnout is always lower.” By comparing and criticizing several approaches and studies, you present a much more objective and convincing case. Do not commit yourself to a particular viewpoint or theory, but admit that your view is one among several.

SUPPORTED WITH EVIDENCE All scholarly studies require evidence, ranging from the quantified evidence of the natural sciences to the qualitative evidence of the humanities. Political science utilizes both. Ideally, any statement open to interpretation or controversy should be supported with evidence. Common knowledge does not have to be supported; you need not cite the U.S. Constitution to “prove” that presidents serve four-year terms.

But if you say presidents have gained power over the decades, you need evidence. At a minimum, you would cite a scholar who has amassed evidence to demonstrate this point. That is called a “secondary source,” evidence that has passed through the mind of someone else. Most student papers use only secondary sources, but instructors are impressed when you use a “primary source,” the original gathering of data, as in your own tabulation of what counties in your state showed the strongest Obama vote. Anyone reading a study must be able to review its evidence and judge if it is valid. You cannot keep your evidence or sources secret.

THEORETICAL Serious scholarship is always connected, at least a little, to a theoretical point. It need not be a sweeping new theory (that’s for geniuses), but it should advance the discipline’s knowledge a bit. At a minimum, it should confirm or refute an existing theory. Just describing something is not a theory, which is why Google or Wikipedia are seldom enough. You must relate the description to some factor or factors, supported, of course, with empirical evidence. The general pattern of this is: “Most of the time there is C there is also D, and here’s probably why.” Theory building also helps lift your study above polemics, an argument for or against something. Denouncing the Islamic State, which we all may do with gusto, is not scholarship. Determining why people join IS (studied by several scholars) would have important theoretical and practical impacts.

What Good Is Political Science?

Some students come to political science supposing it is just opinions; they write exams or papers that ignore all or some of the preceding points. Yes, we all have political views, but if we let them dominate our study we get invalid results, junk political science. Professional political scientists push their personal views well to one side while engaged in study and research. First-rate thinkers are able to come up with results that actually refute their previously held opinion. When that happens, we have real intellectual growth, an exciting experience that should be your aim.

Something else comes with such an experience: You start to conclude that you should not have been so partisan in the first place. You may back away from the strong views you held earlier. Accordingly, political science is not necessarily training to become a practicing politician. Political science is training in objective and often complex analysis, whereas the practice of politics requires fixed, popular, and simplified opinions.

Political science can contribute to good government, often by warning those in office that all is not well, “speaking Truth to Power,” as the Quakers say. Sometimes this advice is useful to working politicians. Public-opinion polls, for example, showed an erosion of trust in government in the United States starting in the mid-1960s. The causes were Vietnam, Watergate, and inflation. Candidates for political office, knowing public opinion, could tailor their campaigns and policies to try to counteract this decline. Ronald Reagan, with his sunny disposition and upbeat views, utilized the discontent to win two presidential terms.

Some political scientists warned for years of the weak basis of the shah’s regime in Iran. Unfortunately, such warnings were unheeded. Washington’s policy was to support the shah, and only two months before the end of his rule did the U.S. embassy in Tehran start reporting how unstable Iran had become. State Department officials had let politics contaminate their political analyses; they could not see clearly. Journalists were not much better; few covered Iran until violence broke out. Years in advance, American political scientists specializing in Iran saw trouble coming. More recently, political scientists warned that Iraq was unready for democracy and that a U.S. invasion would unleash chaos, but Washington decisers paid no attention. Political science can be useful.

The Subfields of Political Science

Most political science departments divide the discipline into several subfields. The bigger the department, the more subfields it likely has. We will get at least a brief introduction to all of them in this text.

U.S. Politics focuses on institutions and processes, mostly at the federal level but some at state and local levels. It includes parties, elections, public opinion, and executive and legislative behavior.

Comparative Politics examines politics within other nations, trying to establish generalizations about institutions and political culture and theories of

democracy, stability, and policy. It may be focused on various regions, as in “Latin American politics” or “East Asian politics.”

International Relations studies politics among nations, including conflict, diplomacy, international law and organizations, and international political economy. The study of U.S. foreign policy has one foot in U.S. politics and one in international relations.

Political Theory, both classic and modern, attempts to define the good polity, often focused on major thinkers.

Public Administration studies how bureaucracies work and how they can be improved.

Constitutional Law studies the applications and evolution of the Constitution within the legal system.

Public Policy studies the interface of politics and economics with an eye to developing effective programs.

Comparing Political Science to History and Journalism

Understanding how others study politics shows what makes political science distinct. History and journalism have different goals from political science, but they share common features. History studies the past, and not all history focuses on politics. Journalism covers the present, and only some news stories are on politics. What they share, however is a focus on unique events. When a historian studies the French Revolution, she wants to tell the story of the people, the places, and the events to better understand what happened and put forward a thesis about why it happened. She is not interested in comparing the French to the American Revolution, as those are distinct, unique events that deserve separate study.

Similarly, a journalist reporting on a war will describe the events as they unfold. He interviews people affected by the conflict and chronicles a battle to explain why it was a turning point.

Political science approaches these tasks differently. Instead of focusing on one revolution, a political scientist might compare several revolutions to discover what links them together. What factors cause revolutions? Why do they sometimes succeed and sometimes fail? What are the consequences of revolution?

Similarly, a political scientist would not necessarily be interested in writing about today’s battle or interviewing a war refugee. Instead, political scientists might be interested in what causes wars generally or why some small conflicts result in major wars and others do not. Under what circumstances do civil conflicts lead to genocide? What forms of aid are most successful when faced with large numbers of refugees?

generalize

Explaining the causes of consequences of a whole class of events.

Where historians or journalists often seek to explain the unique circumstances of a particular event, political scientists seek to **generalize**. What are

the necessary and sufficient conditions that will lead to revolution, to war, or to other political outcomes? If decapitating the aristocracy happened only in the French Revolution, then a political scientist would dismiss it as a factor that explains revolution, whereas a historian might be very interested in guillotines. If a refugee suffered from war, the journalist might tell her story. A political scientist would focus on how a new strategy for the international response to a refugee crises led to a 50 percent increase in the number of refugees helped compared to the old strategy.

Political science ignores things that might appear important in one context but are irrelevant beyond that context. Instead, it can focus on the few factors that exist across similar contexts. Did a politician win an election because he ran an ad about his opponent who voted for an unpopular bill or because he spent \$10 million to say so? Studying one campaign would not yield a definitive answer. Studying many campaigns could discover which was more important—negative advertising or campaign spending.

Theory in Political Science

1.3 Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of several theoretical approaches to political science.

Schools in the United States typically ask students to accumulate knowledge—to know more stuff. Critics point out that knowledge is more than just accumulating facts because the facts will not structure themselves into a coherent whole. Gathering facts without an organizing principle leads only to large collections of meaningless facts, a point made by Kant. In science, theories provide structure that give meaning to patterns of facts. To be sure, theories can grow too complex and abstract and depart from the real world, but without at least some theoretical perspective, we do not even know what questions to ask. Even if you say you have no theories, you probably have some unspoken ones. The kinds of questions you ask and which ones you ask first are the beginnings of theorizing.

Theories are not facts. They are suggestions as to how the facts should be organized. Some theories have more evidence to support them than others. All theories bump into facts that contradict their explanations. Even in the natural sciences, theories such as the so-called Big Bang explain only some observations. Theories often compete with other theories. How can you prove which model is more nearly correct? Political scientists—really all scientists—test theories with observations of the world and adjust theories to better reflect what they see. The accumulation of knowledge through science is nearly always a slow incremental process. The following sections outline several theoretical frameworks political scientists have used to understand the political world.

Behavioralism

institutions

The formal structures of government, such as the U.S. Congress.

positivism

Theory that society can be studied scientifically and incrementally improved with the knowledge gained.

behavioralism

The empirical study of actual human behavior rather than abstract or speculative theories.

From the late nineteenth century through the middle of the twentieth century, American thinkers focused on **institutions**, the formal structures of government. This showed the influence of law on the development of political science in the United States. Woodrow Wilson, for example, was a lawyer (albeit unsuccessful) before he became a political scientist; he concentrated on perfecting the institutions of government. Constitutions were a favorite subject for political scientists of this period, for they assumed that what was on paper was how the institutions worked in practice. The rise of the Soviet, Italian, and German dictatorships shook this belief. The constitution of Germany's Weimar Republic (1919–1933) looked fine on paper; experts had drafted it. Under stress it collapsed, for Germans of that time did not have the necessary experience with or commitment to democracy. Likewise, the Stalin constitution of 1936 made the Soviet Union look like a perfect democracy, but it functioned as a brutal dictatorship.

The Communist and Fascist dictatorships and World War II forced political scientists to reexamine their institutional focus, and many set out to discover how politics really worked, not how it was supposed to work. Postwar American political scientists here followed in the tradition of the early nineteenth-century French philosopher Auguste Comte, who developed the doctrine of **positivism**, the application of natural science methods to the study of society. Comtean positivism was an optimistic philosophy, holding that as we accumulate valid data by means of scientific observation—without speculation or intuition—we will perfect a science of society and with it improve society. Psychologists are perhaps the most deeply imbued with this approach. **Behavioralists**, as they are called, claim to concentrate on actual behavior as opposed to thoughts or feelings.

Beginning in the 1950s, behaviorally inclined political scientists accumulated statistics from elections, public-opinion surveys, votes in legislatures, and anything else they could hang a number on. Behavioralists made some remarkable contributions to political science, shooting down some long-held but unexamined assumptions and giving political theory an empirical basis. Behavioral studies were especially good in examining the “social bases” of politics, the attitudes and values of citizens, which go a long way toward making the system function the way it does. Their best work has been on voting patterns, for it is here they can get lots of valid data.

By the 1960s, the behavioral school established itself and won over much of the field. In the late 1960s, however, behavioralism came under heavy attack, and not just by rear-guard traditionalists. Many younger political scientists, some of them influenced by the radicalism of the 1960s, complained that the behavioral approach was static, conservative, loaded with its practitioners' values, and irrelevant to the urgent tasks at hand. Far from being “scientific” and “value-free,” behavioralists often defined the current situation in the United States as the norm and anything different as deviant. Gabriel Almond (1911–2002) and Sidney Verba (1932–) found that Americans embody all the

good, “participant” virtues of the “civic culture.” By examining only what exists at a given moment, behavioralists neglect the possibility of change; their studies may be time-bound. Behavioralists have an unstated preference for the status quo; they like to examine established democratic systems, for that is where their methodological tools work best. People in police states or civil conflicts know that honestly stating their opinions could get them jailed or killed, so they voice the “correct” views.

Perhaps the most damaging criticism, though, was that the behavioralists focused on relatively minor topics and steered clear of the big questions of politics. Behavioralists can tell us, for example, what percentage of Detroit blue-collar Catholics vote Democratic, but they tell us nothing about what this means for the quality of Detroit’s governance or the kinds of decisions elected officials will make. There is no necessary connection between how citizens vote and what comes out of government. Critics charged that behavioral studies were often irrelevant.

By 1969, many political scientists had to admit that there was something to the criticism of what had earlier been called the “behavioral revolution.” Some called the newer movement **postbehavioral**, a synthesis of traditional and behavioral approaches. Postbehavioralists recognize that facts and values are tied together. They are willing to use both the qualitative data of the traditionalists and the quantitative data of the behavioralists. They look at history and institutions as well as public opinion and rational-choice theory. They are not afraid of numbers and happily use correlations, graphs, and percentages to make their cases. If you look around your political science department, you are apt to find traditional, behavioral, and postbehavioral viewpoints among the professors—or even within the same professor.

postbehavioral

Synthesis of traditional, behavioral, and other techniques in the study of politics.

New Institutionalism

In the 1970s, political science partially pulled away from behavioralism and rediscovered institutions. In the 1980s, this was proclaimed as the “New Institutionalism.” Its crux is that government structures—legislatures, parties, bureaucracies, and so on—take on lives of their own and shape the behavior and attitudes of the people who live within and benefit from them. Institutions are not simply the reflections of social forces. Legislators, for example, behave as they do largely because of rules laid down long ago and reinforced over the decades. Once you know these complex rules, some unwritten, you can see how politicians logically try to maximize their advantage under them, much as you can often predict when a baseball batter will bunt. It is not a mystery but the logic of the game they are playing. The preservation and enhancement of the institution becomes one of politicians’ major goals. Thus, institutions, even if outmoded or ineffective, tend to rumble on. The Communist parties of the Soviet bloc were corrupt and ineffective, but they endured because they guaranteed the jobs and perquisites of their members.

Systems Theory

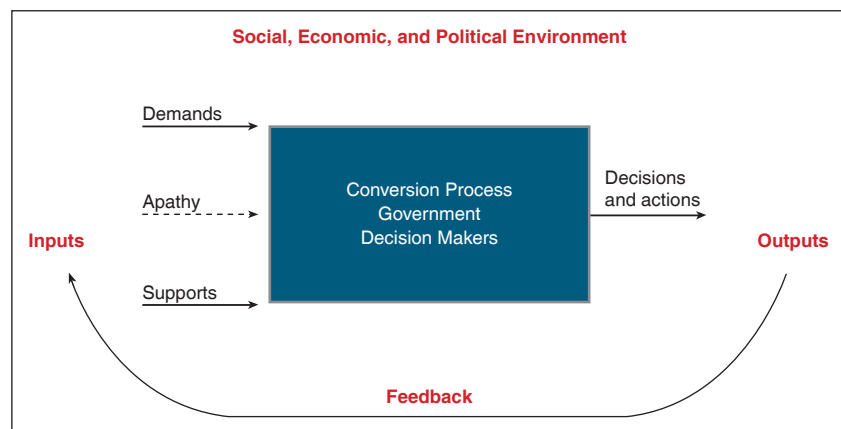
A major postwar invention was the “political systems” model devised by David Easton (1917–2014), which contributed to our understanding of politics by simplifying reality but in some cases departed from reality. The idea of looking at complex entities as systems originated in biology. Living organisms are complex and highly integrated. The heart, lungs, blood, digestive tract, and brain perform their functions in such a way as to keep the animal alive. Take away one organ and the animal dies. Damage one organ and the other components of the system alter their function to compensate and keep the animal alive. The crux of systems thinking is this: You cannot change just one component because that changes all of the others.

Political systems thinkers argued that the politics of a given country works as a feedback loop, a bit like a biological system. According to the Easton model (Figure 1.1), citizens’ demands, “inputs,” are recognized by the government decision makers, who process them into authoritative decisions and actions, “outputs.” These outputs have an impact on the social, economic, and political environment that the citizens may or may not like. The citizens express their demands anew—this is the crucial “feedback” link of the system—which may modify the earlier decision. Precisely what goes on in the “conversion process” was left opaque, a “black box.”

In some cases, the political systems approach fits reality. As the Vietnam War dragged on, feedback on the military draft turned negative. The Nixon administration defused youthful anger by ending the draft in 1973 and changing to an all-volunteer army. In the 1980s, the socialist economics of French President François Mitterrand produced inflation and unemployment. The French people, especially the business community, complained loudly, and Mitterrand altered

Figure 1.1 A model of the political system.

(Adapted from David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965, p. 32.)



his policy back to capitalism. In these cases, the feedback loop worked. Feedback can also be split. The Obama administration saw healthcare reform as important and necessary, but half the U.S. population opposed it—a point the Republicans used in subsequent elections.

But in other cases, the systems model falls flat. Would Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia really fit the systems model? How much attention do dictatorships pay to citizens' demands? To be sure, there is always some input and feedback. Hitler's generals tried to assassinate him—a type of feedback. Workers in Communist systems had an impact on government policy by not working much. They demanded more consumer goods and, by not exerting themselves, communicated this desire to the regime. Sooner or later the regime had to reform. All over the Soviet bloc, workers used to chuckle: "They pretend to pay us, and we pretend to work." In the USSR, (botched) reform came with the Gorbachev regime, and it led to system collapse.

How could the systems model explain the Vietnam War? Did Americans demand that the administration send half a million troops to fight there? No, nearly the opposite: Lyndon Johnson won overwhelmingly in 1964 on an anti-war platform. The systems model does show how discontent with the war ruined Johnson's popularity so that he did not seek reelection in 1968. The feedback loop did go into effect but only years after the decision for war had been made. Could the systems model explain the Watergate scandal? Did U.S. citizens demand that President Nixon have the Democratic headquarters bugged? No, but once details about the cover-up started leaking in 1973, the feedback loop went into effect, putting pressure on the House of Representatives to form an impeachment panel.

Plainly, there are some problems with the systems model, and they seem to be in the "black box" of the conversion process. Much happens in the mechanism of government that is not initiated by and has little to do with the wishes of citizens. The American people largely ignored the health effects of smoking.

Theories

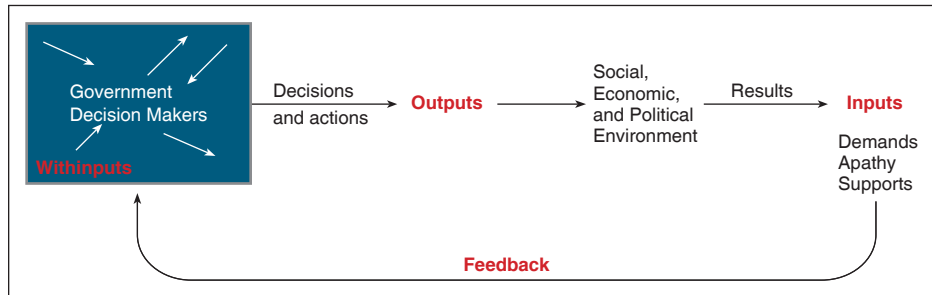
Models: Simplifying Reality

A model is a simplified picture of reality that social scientists develop to order data, to theorize, and to predict. A good model fits reality but simplifies it because a model as complex as the real world would be of no help. In simplifying reality, however, models risk oversimplifying. The problem is the finite capacity of the human mind. We cannot factor in all the information available at once; we must select which points are

important and ignore the rest. But when we do this, we may drain the blood out of the study of politics and overlook key points. Accordingly, as we encounter models of politics—and perhaps as we devise our own—pause a moment to ask if the model departs too much from reality. If it does, discard or alter the model. Do not disregard reality because it does not fit the model.

Figure 1.2 A modified model of the political system.

(Adapted from David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965, p. 32.)



Only the analyses of medical statisticians, which revealed a strong link between smoking and lung cancer, prodded Congress into requiring warning labels on cigarette packs and ending advertising of cigarettes. It was a handful of specialists in the federal bureaucracy who got the anticigarette campaign going, not the masses of citizens.

The systems model is essentially static, biased toward the status quo, and unable to handle upheaval. This is one reason political scientists were surprised at the collapse of the Soviet Union. “Systems” are not supposed to collapse; they are supposed to continually self-correct.

We can modify the systems model to better reflect reality. By diagramming it as in Figure 1.2, we logically change little. We have the same feedback loop: outputs turning into inputs. But by putting the “conversion process” of government first, we suggested that it—rather than the citizenry—originates most decisions. The public reacts only later. That would be the case with the Afghanistan War: strong support in 2001 but fed up ten years later.

Next, we add something that Easton himself later suggested. Inside the “black box,” a lot more happens than simply the processing of outside demands. Pressures from the various parts of government—government talking mostly to itself and short-circuiting the feedback loop—are what Easton called “withinputs.” These two alterations, of course, make our model more complicated, but this reflects the complicated nature of reality.

Rational-Choice Theory

In the 1970s, a new approach, invented by mathematicians during World War II, rapidly grew in political science—rational-choice theory. Rational-choice theorists argue that one can generally predict political behavior by knowing the interests of the actors involved because they rationally maximize their interests. As U.S. presidential candidates take positions on issues, they calculate what will give them the best payoff. They might think, “Many people oppose the war in Afghanistan, but many also demand strong leadership on defense. I’d better just criticize ‘mistakes’

in Afghanistan while at the same time demand strong ‘national security.’” The waffle is not indecision but calculation, argue rational-choice theorists.

Rational-choice theorists enrage some other political scientists. One study of Japanese bureaucrats claimed you need not study Japan’s language, culture, or history. All you needed to know was what the bureaucrats’ career advantages were to predict how they would decide issues. A noted U.S. specialist on Japan blew his stack at such glib, superficial shortcuts and denounced rational-choice theory. More modest rational-choice theorists immersed themselves in Hungary’s language and culture but still concluded that Hungarian political parties, in cobbling together an extremely complex voting system, were making rational choices to give themselves a presumed edge in parliamentary seats.

Many rational-choice theorists backed down from their know-it-all positions. Some now call themselves “neoinstitutionalists” (see above section) because all their rational choices are made within one or another institutional context—the U.S. Congress, for example. Rational-choice theory did not establish itself as the dominant **paradigm**—no theory has, and none is likely to—but it contributed a lot by reminding us that politicians are consummate opportunists, a point many other theories forget.

Some rational-choice theorists subscribed to a branch of mathematics called game theory, setting up political decisions as if they were table games. A Cuban missile crisis “game” might have several people play President Kennedy, who must weigh the probable payoffs of bombing or not bombing Cuba. Others might play Soviet chief Nikita Khrushchev, who has to weigh toughing it out or backing down. Seeing how the players interact gives us insights and warnings of what can go wrong in crisis decision making. If you “game out” the 1962 Cuban missile crisis and find that three games out of ten end in World War III, you have the makings of an article of great interest.

Game theorists argue that constructing the proper game explains why policy outcomes are often unforeseen but not accidental. Games can show how decision makers think. We learn how their choices are never easy or simple. Games can even be mathematized and fed into computers. The great weakness of game theory is that it depends on correctly estimating the “payoffs” that decision makers can expect, and these are only approximations arrived at by examining the historical record. We know how the Cuban missile crisis came out; therefore, we adjust our game so it comes out the same way. In effect, game theory is only another way to systematize and clarify history (not a bad thing).

All these theories and several others offer interesting insights. None, however, is likely to be the last model we shall see, for we will never have a paradigm that can consistently explain and predict political actions. Every couple of decades, political science comes up with a new paradigm—usually one borrowed from another discipline—that attracts much excitement and attention. Its proponents exaggerate its ability to explain or predict. Upon examination and criticism, the model usually fades and is replaced by another trend. Political science tends to get caught up in trends. After a few iterations of this cycle, we

paradigm

A model or way of doing research accepted by a discipline.

learn to expect no breakthrough theories. Politics is slippery and not easily confined to our mental constructs. By acknowledging this, we open our minds to the richness, complexity, and drama of political life.

“Political Theory” versus Theory in Political Science

1.4 Contrast normative theories of politics to political science.

Departments of Political Science often house both political scientists and political theorists. Because they have the same departmental “home,” the differences between how the two groups study politics is not obvious to most students. Where political scientists study politics by trying to understand how things *do* work, political theorists approach the study of politics from the perspective of how things *should* work.

The Normative Study of Politics

Some say Plato founded political science. But his *Republic* described an ideal *polis*, a normative approach rather than the objective approach of political science, which seeks to understand how things do work. Plato’s student, Aristotle, on the other hand, was the first *empirical* political scientist and sent out his students to gather data from the dozens of Greek city-states. With these data, he constructed his great work *Politics* which combined both **descriptive** and **normative** approaches. He used the facts he and his students had collected to prescribe the most desirable political institutions. Political science in its purest form describes and explains, but it is hard to resist applying what is learned to normative questions and prescribing changes. Both Plato and Aristotle saw Athens in decline; they attempted to understand why and to suggest how it could be avoided. They thus began a tradition that is still at the heart of political science: a search for the sources of the good, stable political system.

Most European medieval and Renaissance political thinkers took a religious approach to the study of government and politics. They were almost strictly normative, seeking to discover the “ought” or “should,” and were often rather casual about the “is,” the real-world situation. Informed by religious, legal, and philosophical values, they tried to ascertain which system of government would bring humankind closest to what God wished.

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) introduced what some believe to be the crux of modern political science: the focus on power. His great work *The Prince* was about the getting and using of political power. He was a **realist** who argued that to accomplish anything good—such as the unification of Italy and expulsion of the foreigners who ruined it—the Prince had to be rational and tough in the exercise of power.

descriptive

Explaining what is.

normative

Explaining what ought to be.

realism

Working with the world as it is and not as we wish it to be; usually focused on power.

Although long depreciated by American political thinkers, who sometimes shied away from “power” as inherently dirty, the approach took root in Europe and contributed to the elite analyses of Mosca, Pareto, and Michels. Americans became acquainted with the power approach through the writings of the refugee German scholar of international relations Hans J. Morgenthau, who emphasized that “all politics is a struggle for power.”

The Contractualists

Not long after Machiavelli, the “contractualists”—Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau—analyzed why political systems should exist at all. They differed in many points but agreed that humans, at least in principle, had joined in what Rousseau called a **social contract** that everyone now had to observe.

social contract

Theory that individuals join and stay in civil society as if they had signed a contract.

Classic Works

Not Just Europeans

China, India, and North Africa produced brilliant political thinkers centuries ago. Unknown in the West until relatively recently, they were unlikely to have influenced the development of Western political theory with their ideas. The existence of these culturally varied thinkers suggests that the political nature of humans is basically the same no matter what the cultural differences.

In China, Confucius, a sixth-century B.C. advisor to kings, propounded his vision of good, stable government based on two things: the family and correct, moral behavior instilled in rulers and ruled alike. At the apex, the emperor sets a moral example by purifying his spirit and perfecting his manners. He must think good thoughts in utter sincerity; if he does not, his empire crumbles. He is copied by his subjects, who are arrayed hierarchically below the emperor, down to the father of a family, who is like a miniature emperor to whom wives and children are subservient. The Confucian system bears some resemblance to Plato’s ideal Republic; the difference is that the Chinese actually practiced Confucianism, which lasted two and a half millennia and through a dozen dynasties.

Two millennia before Machiavelli and Hobbes, the Indian writer Kautilya in the fourth century B.C. arrived at the same conclusions. Kautilya, a prime minister and advisor to an Indian monarch, wrote in

Arthashastra (translated as *The Principles of Material Well-Being*) that prosperity comes from living in a well-run kingdom. Like Hobbes, Kautilya posited a state of nature that meant anarchy. Monarchs arose to protect the land and people against anarchy and ensure their prosperity. Like Machiavelli, Kautilya advised his prince to operate on the basis of pure expediency, doing whatever it takes to secure his kingdom domestically and against other kingdoms.

In fourteenth-century A.D. North Africa, Ibn Khaldun was a secretary, executive, and ambassador for several rulers. Sometimes out of favor and in jail, he reflected on what had gone wrong with the great Arab empires. He concluded, in his *Universal History*, that the character of the Arabs and their social cohesiveness were determined by climate and occupation. Ibn Khaldun was almost modern in his linking of underlying economic conditions to social and political change. Economic decline in North Africa, he found, had led to political instability and lawlessness. Anticipating Marx, Toynbee, and many other Western writers, Ibn Khaldun saw that civilizations pass through cycles of growth and decline.

Notice what all three of these thinkers had in common with Machiavelli: All were princely political advisors who turned their insights into general prescriptions for correct governance. Practice led to theory.

state of nature

Humans before civilization.

civil society

Humans after becoming civilized. Modern usage: associations between family and government.

general will

Rousseau's theory of what a whole community wants.

Zeitgeist

German for "spirit of the times"; Hegel's theory that each epoch has a distinctive spirit, which moves history along.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) imagined that life in "the **state of nature**," before **civil society** was founded, must have been terrible. Every man would have been the enemy of every other man, a "war of each against all." Humans would live in savage squalor with "no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." To get out of this horror, people would—out of their profound self-interest—rationally join together to form civil society. Society thus arises naturally out of fear. People would also gladly submit to a king, even a bad one, for a monarch prevents anarchy.

John Locke (1632–1704) came to less harsh conclusions. Locke theorized that the original state of nature was not so bad; people lived in equality and tolerance with one another. But they could not secure their property. There was no money, title deeds, or courts of law, so ownership was uncertain. To remedy this, they contractually formed civil society and thus secured "life, liberty, and property." Locke is to property rights as Hobbes is to fear of violent death. Some philosophers argue that Americans are the children of Locke. Notice the American emphasis on "the natural right to property."

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1788) laid the philosophical groundwork for the French Revolution. In contrast to Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau theorized that life in the state of nature was downright good; people lived as "noble savages" without artifice or jealousy. (All the contractualists were influenced by not-very-accurate descriptions of Native Americans.) What corrupted humans, said Rousseau, was society itself. The famous words at the beginning of his *Social Contract*: "Man is born free but everywhere is in chains."

But society can be drastically improved, argued Rousseau, leading to human freedom. A just society would be a voluntary community with a will of its own, the **general will**—what everyone wants over and above the selfish "particular wills" of individuals and interest groups. In such communities, humans gain dignity and freedom. If people are bad, it is because society made them that way (a view held by many today). A good society, on the other hand, can "force men to be free" if they misbehave. Many see the roots of totalitarianism in Rousseau: the imagined perfect society; the general will, which the dictator claims to know; and the breaking of those who do not cooperate.

Marxist Theories

Karl Marx (1818–1883) produced an exceedingly complex theory consisting of at least three interrelated elements: a theory of economics, a theory of social class, and a theory of history. Like Hegel (1770–1831), Marx argued that things do not happen by accident; everything has a cause. Hegel posited the underlying cause that moves history forward as spiritual, specifically the **Zeitgeist**, the spirit of the times. Marx found the great underlying cause in economics.

ECONOMICS Marx concentrated on the “surplus value”—what we call profit. Workers produce things but get paid only a fraction of the value of what they produce. The capitalist owners skim off the rest, the surplus value. The working class—what Marx called the **proletariat**—is paid too little to buy all the products the workers have made, resulting in repeated overproduction, which leads to depressions. Eventually, argued Marx, there will be a depression so big the capitalist system will collapse.

proletariat

Marx's name for the industrial working class.

SOCIAL CLASS Every society divides into two classes: a small class of those who own the means of production and a large class of those who work for the small class. Society is run according to the dictates of the upper class, which sets up the laws, arts, and styles needed to maintain itself in power. (Marx, in modern terms, was an *elite theorist*.) Most laws concern property rights, noted Marx, because the **bourgeoisie** (the capitalists) are obsessed with hanging on to their property, which, according to Marx, is nothing but skimmed-off surplus value anyway. If the country goes to war, said Marx, it is not because the common people wish it but because the ruling bourgeoisie needs a war for economic gain. The proletariat, in fact, has no country; proletarians are international, all suffering under the heel of the capitalists.

bourgeois

Adjective, originally French, for city dweller; later and current, middle class in general. Noun: *bourgeoisie*.

HISTORY Putting together his economic and social-class theories, Marx explained historical changes. When the underlying economic basis of society gets out of kilter with the structure that the dominant class has established (its laws, institutions, businesses, and so on), the system collapses, as in the French Revolution and ultimately, he predicted, capitalist systems. Marx was partly a theorist and partly an ideologist.

Marxism, as applied in the Soviet Union and other Communist countries, led to tyranny and failure, but, as a system of analysis, Marxism is still interesting and useful. For example, social class is important in structuring political views—but never uniformly. Economic interest groups still ride high and, by means of freely spending on election campaigns, often get their way in laws, policies, and tax breaks. They seldom get all they want, however, as they are opposed by other interest groups. Marx's enduring contributions are (1) his understanding that societies are never fully unified and peaceful but always riven with conflict and (2) that we must ask “Who benefits?” in any political controversy.

One of the enduring problems and weaknesses of Marx is that capitalism, contrary to his prediction, has not collapsed. Marx failed to understand the flexible, adaptive nature of capitalism. Old industries fade, and new ones rise. Imagine trying to explain Bill Gates and the computer software industry to people in the 1960s. Marx also missed that capitalism is not just one system—it is many. U.S., French, Singaporean, and Japanese capitalisms are distinct from each other. Marx's simplified notions of capitalism illustrate what happens when theory is placed in the service of ideology: Unquestioning followers believe it too literally.

Both political science and political theory have their place. As a citizen looking to improve the world, you are thinking like a political theorist—how things should be. You will need to decide what actions to take to achieve the political change you desire. To do so, you need to understand how things actually work and why. You need the skills of the political scientist to see the world as it is. If you only wish the world to be, you may be attempting impossible change. Thus, in navigating through political life, we merge the objective lens of political science with the normative lens of political theory.

Review Questions

1. What does it mean to “never get angry at a fact”?
2. Why did Aristotle call politics “the master science”?
3. Is politics largely biological, psychological, cultural, rational, or irrational?
4. How can something as messy as politics be a science?
5. What did Machiavelli, Confucius, Kautilya, and Ibn Khaldun have in common?
6. How did Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau differ?
7. What is the crux of Marx’s theory?
8. What is rational-choice theory?

Key Terms

behavioralism, p. 16
 bourgeois, p. 25
 civil society, p. 24
 culture, p. 6
 descriptive, p. 22
 discipline, p. 9
 empirical, p. 11
 generalize, p. 14
 general will, p. 24

hypothesis, p. 11
 institutions, p. 16
 irrational, p. 6
 legitimacy, p. 7
 normative, p. 22
 paradigm, p. 21
 political power, p. 4
 positivism, p. 16
 postbehavioral, p. 17

proletariat, p. 25
 quantify, p. 11
 rational, p. 6
 realism, p. 22
 scholarship, p. 11
 social contract, p. 23
 state of nature, p. 24
 Zeitgeist, p. 24

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