Political science

Political science is a social science concerned with the theory and practice of politics and the analysis of political systems and political behavior. Political scientists "see themselves engaged in revealing the relationships underlying political events and conditions. And from these revelations they attempt to construct general principles about the way the world of politics work."[1] Political science intersects with other fields; including public policy, national politics, economics, international relations, comparative politics, psychology, sociology, history, law, and political theory.

Political science is commonly divided into three distinct sub-disciplines which together constitute the field: Political Philosophy, Comparative Politics and International Relations. Political Philosophy is the reasoning for an absolute normative government, laws and similar questions and their distinctive characteristics. Comparative Politics is the science of comparison and teaching of different types of constitutions, political actors, legislature and associated fields, all of them from an intrastate perspective. International Relations deals with the interaction between nationstates as well as intergovernmental and transnational organizations.

Political science is methodologically diverse and appropriates many methods originating in social research. Approaches include positivism, interpretivism, rational choice theory, behavioral, structuralism, post-structuralism, realism, institutionalism, and pluralism. Political science, as one of the social sciences, uses methods and techniques that relate to the kinds of inquiries sought: primary sources such as historical documents and official records, secondary sources such as scholarly journal articles, survey research, statistical analysis, case studies, and model building.

"As a discipline" political science, possibly like the social sciences as a whole, "lives on the fault line between the 'two cultures' in the academy, the sciences and the humanities."[2] Thus, in some American colleges where there is no separate School or College of Arts and Sciences per se, political science may be a separate department housed as part of a division or school of Humanities or Liberal Arts.[3] Whereas classical political philosophy is primarily defined by a concern for Hellenic and Enlightenment thought, political scientists are broadly marked by a greater concern for "modernity" and the contemporary nation state, and as such share a greater deal of terminology with sociologists (e.g. structure and agency).

Overview

Political scientists study matters concerning the allocation and transfer of power in decision making, the roles and systems of governance including governments and international organizations, political behavior and public policies. They measure the success of governance and specific policies by examining many factors, including stability, justice, material wealth, and peace. Some political scientists seek to advance positive (attempt to describe how things are, as opposed to how they should be) theses by analyzing politics. Others advance normative theses, by making specific policy recommendations.

Political scientists provide the frameworks from which journalists, special interest groups, politicians, and the electorate analyze issues. According to Chaturvedy, "...Political scientists may serve as advisers to specific politicians, or even run for office as politicians themselves. Political scientists can be found working in governments, in political parties or as civil servants. They may be involved with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or political movements. In a variety of capacities, people educated and trained in political science can add value and expertise to corporations.[4] Private enterprises such as think tanks, research institutes, polling and public relations firms often employ political scientists."[5] In the United States, political scientists known as "Americanists" look at a variety of data including elections, public opinion and public policy such as Social Security reform,..... foreign policy, US Congressional committees, and the US Supreme Court — to name only a few issues.

Most United States colleges and universities offer B.A. programs in political science. M.A. or M.A.T. and Ph.D or Ed.D. programs are common at larger universities. The term *political science* is more popular in North America than
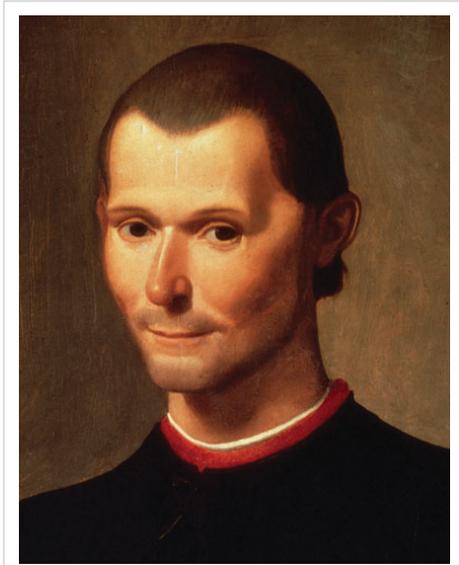
elsewhere; other institutions, especially those outside the United States, see political science as part of a broader discipline of *political studies, politics,* or *government.* While *political science* implies use of the scientific method, *political studies* implies a broader approach, although the naming of degree courses does not necessarily reflect their content.[6] Separate degree granting programs in international relations and public policy are not uncommon at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Master's level programs in political science are common while political scientists engage in public administration.[7]

The national honour society for college and university students of government and politics in the United States is Pi Sigma Alpha.

History

Political science is a relatively late arrival in terms of social sciences. However, the discipline has a clear set of antecedents such as moral philosophy, political philosophy, political economy, political theology, history, and other fields concerned with normative determinations of what ought to be and with deducing the characteristics and functions of the ideal state. In each historic period and in almost every geographic area, we can find someone studying politics and increasing political understanding.

Niccolò Machiavelli, one of many influential political theorists

The antecedents of Western politics can trace their roots back to Plato (427–347 BC) and Aristotle [(The Father of Political Science)] (384–322 BC), particularly in the works of Homer, Hesiod, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Euripides. Later, Plato analyzed political systems, abstracted their analysis from more literary- and history-oriented studies and applied an approach we would understand as closer to philosophy. Similarly, Aristotle built upon Plato's analysis to include historical empirical evidence in his analysis. Plato wrote *The Republic* and Aristotle wrote the *Politics*.

The rise and fall of the Roman Empire

During the height of the Roman Empire, famous historians such as Polybius, Livy and Plutarch documented the rise of the Roman Republic, and the organization and histories of other nations, while statesmen like Julius Caesar, Cicero and others provided us with examples of the politics of the republic and Rome's empire and wars. The study of politics during this age was oriented toward understanding history, understanding methods of governing, and describing the operation of governments. Nearly a thousand years elapsed, from the foundation of the city of Rome in 753 BC to the fall of the Roman Empire or the beginning of the Middle Ages. In the interim, there is a manifest translation of Hellenic culture into the Roman sphere. The Greek gods become Romans and Greek philosophy in one way or another turns into Roman law e.g. Stoicism. The Stoic was committed to preserving proper hierarchical roles and duties in the state so that the state as a whole would remain stable. Among the best known Roman Stoics were philosopher Seneca and the emperor Marcus Aurelius. Seneca, a wealthy Roman patrician, is often criticized by some modern commentators for failing to adequately live by his own precepts. The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius, on the other hand, can be best thought of as the philosophical reflections of an emperor divided between his philosophical aspirations and the duty he felt to defend the Roman Empire from its external enemies through his various military campaigns. According to Polybius, Roman institutions were the backbone of the empire but Roman law is the medulla.[8]

The Middle Ages

With the fall of the Western Roman Empire, there arose a more diffuse arena for political studies. The rise of monotheism and, particularly for the Western tradition, Christianity, brought to light a new space for politics and political action. Works such as Augustine of Hippo's *The City of God* synthesized current philosophies and political traditions with those of Christianity, redefining the borders between what was religious and what was political. During the Middle Ages, the study of politics was widespread in the churches and courts. Most of the political questions surrounding the relationship between church and state were clarified and contested in this period. The Arabs lost sight of Aristotle's political science but continued to study Plato's *Republic* which became the basic text of Judeo-Islamic political philosophy as in the works of Alfarabi and Averroes; this did not happen in the Christian world, where Aristotle's *Politics* was translated in the 13th century and became the basic text as in the works of Saint Thomas Aquinas.[9]

Indian Sub-Continent

In ancient India, the antecedents of politics can be traced back to the *Rig-Veda*, *Samhitas*, *Brahmanas*, the Mahabharata and Buddhist *Pali Canon*. Chanakya (c. 350–275 BC) was a political thinker in Takshashila. Chanakya wrote the *Arthashastra*, a treatise on political thought, economics and social order, which can be considered a precursor to Machiavelli's *The Prince*. It discusses monetary and fiscal policies, welfare, international relations, and war strategies in detail, among other topics. The Manusmriti, dated to about two centuries after the time of Chanakya is another important political treatise of ancient India.

East Asia

Ancient China was home to several competing schools of political thought, most of which arose in the Spring and Autumn Period. These included Mohism (a utilitarian philosophy), Taoism, Legalism (a school of thought based on the supremacy of the state), and Confucianism. Eventually, a modified form of Confucianism (heavily infused with elements of Legalism) became the dominant political philosophy in China during the Imperial Period. This form of Confucianism also deeply influenced and were expounded upon by scholars in Korea and Japan.

West Asia

In Persia, works such as the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam and Epic of Kings by Ferdowsi provided evidence of political analysis, while the Middle Eastern Aristotelians such as Avicenna and later Maimonides and Averroes, continued Aristotle's tradition of analysis and empiricism, writing commentaries on Aristotle's works. Averroe did not have at hand a text of Aristotle's *Politics*, so he wrote a commentary on Plato's *Republic* instead.

The Renaissance

During the Italian Renaissance, Niccolò Machiavelli established the emphasis of modern political science on direct empirical observation of political institutions and actors. For Machiavelli, nothing seems to be too good nor too evil if it helps to attain and preserve political power. Machiavelli shatters political illusions, reveals the harsh reality of politics and could be considered the father of the politics model.[10] Later, the expansion of the scientific paradigm during the Enlightenment further pushed the study of politics beyond normative determinations.

Like Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, well-known for his theory of the social contract, believed that a strong central power, such as a monarchy, was necessary to rule the innate selfishness of the individual but neither of them believed in the divine right of kings. John Locke, on the other hand, who gave us Two Treatises of Government and who did not believe in the divine right of kings either, sided with Aquinas and stood against both Machiavelli and Hobbes by accepting Aristotle's dictum that man seeks to be happy in a state of social harmony as a social animal. Unlike Aquinas' preponderant view on the salvation of the soul from original sin, Locke believed man comes into this world with a mind that is basically tabula rasa. According to Locke, an absolute ruler as proposed by Hobbes is unnecessary, for natural law is based on reason and equality, seeking peace and survival for man.

The Enlightenment

Religion would no longer play a dominant role in politics. There would be separation of church and state. Principles similar to those that dominated the material sciences could be applied to society as a whole, originating the social sciences. Politics could be studied in a laboratory as it were, the social milieu. In 1787, Alexander Hamilton wrote: "...The science of politics like most other sciences has received great improvement." (*The Federalist Papers* Number 9 and 51). Both the marquis d'Argenson and the abbé de Saint-Pierre described politics as a science; d'Argenson was a philosopher and de Saint-Pierre an allied reformer of the enlightenment.[11]

Other important figures in American politics who participated in the Enlightenment were Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.

Modern political science

Because Political Science is essentially a study of human behavior, in all aspects of politics, observations in controlled environments are often challenging to reproduce or duplicate, though experimental methods are increasingly common.[12] Citing this difficulty, former American Political Science Association President Lawrence Lowell once said "We are limited by the impossibility of experiment. Politics is an observational, not an experimental science."[13] Because of this, political scientists have historically observed political elites, institutions, and individual or group behavior in order to identify patterns, draw generalizations, and build theories of politics.

Like all social sciences, political sciences faces the difficulty of observing human actors that can only be partially observed and who have the capacity for making conscious choices unlike other subjects such as non-human organisms in biology or inanimate objects as in physics. Despite the complexities, contemporary political science has progressed by adopting a variety of methods and theoretical approaches to understanding politics and methodological pluralism is a defining feature of contemporary political science.

The advent of political science as a university discipline was marked by the creation of university departments and chairs with the title of political science arising in the late 19th century. In fact, the designation "political scientist" is typically reserved for those with a doctorate in the field. Integrating political studies of the past into a unified discipline is ongoing, and the history of political science has provided a rich field for the growth of both normative and positive political science, with each part of the discipline sharing some historical predecessors. The American Political Science Association was founded in 1903 and the American Political Science Review was founded in 1906 in an effort to distinguish the study of politics from economics and other social phenomena.

Behavioral Revolution and New Institutionalism

In the 1950s and the 1960s, a behavioral revolution stressing the systematic and rigorously scientific study of individual and group behavior swept the discipline. A focus on studying political behavior, rather than institutions or interpretation of legal texts, characterized early behavioral political science, including work by Robert Dahl, Philip Converse, and in the collaboration between sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld and public opinion scholar Bernard Berelson.

The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed a take off in the use of deductive, game theoretic formal modeling techniques aimed at generating a more analytical corpus of knowledge in the discipline. This period saw a surge of research that borrowed theory and methods from economics to study political institutions, such as the United States Congress, as well as political behavior, such as voting. William H. Riker and his colleagues and students at the University of Rochester were the main proponents of this shift. Criticisms of the use of this rational choice theorizing has been widespread, even among political scientists who adopt quantitative methods.[14]

This trend toward formalization has continued and accelerated, even as the behavioralist revolution has subsided. At the same time, because of the interdependence of all social life, political science also moved towards a closer working relationship with other disciplines, especially sociology, economics, history, anthropology, psychology, public administration, law, and statistics without losing its own identity.[15]

Increasingly, political scientists have used the scientific method to create an intellectual discipline involving quantitative research methods, as well as the generation of formal economics-style models of politics to derive testable hypotheses followed by empirical verification. Over the past generations, the discipline placed an increasing emphasis on relevance and the use of new approaches to increase scientific knowledge in the field and provide explanations for empirical outcomes.

Kenneth R. Mladenka, a political scientist at Texas A&M University, was among the academics who proceeded to bring acceptance of the newer urban studies component of the discipline. In the 1970s and 1980s, he found that urban scholars were not as prominent on the editorial boards of the major political science journals, and that traditional scholars, called empiricists, regard most urban research, dependent on case studies, paradigms, qualitative analysis, and theoretical perspectives, as less reliable than the traditional emphasis of the discipline. The urban scholars such as Mladenka stress "local settings where global, national, and voting behavior outcomes happen at street level and where day-to-day lives are affected."[16] [17]

Recent Developments

In 2000, the so-called Perestroika Movement in political science was introduced as a reaction against what supporters of the movement called the mathematicization of political science. Those who identified with the movement argued for a plurality of methodologies and approaches in political science and for more relevance of the discipline to those outside of it. [18]

Subfields

In the United States, most political scientists work broadly in one or more of the following five areas:

- Comparative Politics, including Area Studies
- International Relations
- Political Philosophy
- Methodology
- American Politics, generally limited to scholars and departments in the United States

In contrast to this traditional distinction, some academic departments organize scholarship into thematic categories, including political philosophy, Political behavior (including public opinion, collective action, and identity), and political institutions (including legislatures and International organizations. Political science conferences and journals often emphasize scholarship in more specific categories. The America Political Science Association, for example, has 42 organized sections that address various methods and topics of political inquiry.[19]

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[3] See, e.g., the department of Political Science (http://www.marist.edu/liberalarts/polsci/) at Marist College, part of a Division of Humanities before that division became the School of Liberal Arts (c. 2000).

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[6] *Politics* is the term used to describe this field by Brandeis University; Cornell College; University of California, Santa Cruz; Hendrix College; Lake Forest College; Monash University; Mount Holyoke College; New York University; Occidental College; Princeton University; Ursinus College; and Washington and Lee University. *Government* is the term used to describe this field by Bowdoin College; Colby College; Cornell University; Dartmouth College; Georgetown University; Harvard University; Smith College; Wesleyan University; the College of William

and Mary; the University of Sydney; the University of Texas at Austin; the University of Ulster; the University of Essex; Victoria University of Wellington, which has both a "School of Government" and a separate "Political Science and International Relations Programme"; and the London School of Economics and Political Science. *Politics and government* is the term used by the University of Puget Sound. *Government and politics* is used by the University of Maryland, College Park.

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- *Oxford Handbooks of Political Science*

External links

- International Political Science Association (http://www.ipsa.org/)
- IPSAPortal : Top 300 websites for Political Science (http://ipsaportal.unina.it/)
- International Association for Political Science Students (http://www.iapss.org/)
- American Political Science Association (http://www.apsanet.org/)
- European Consortium for Political Research (http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/)
- Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. " Political Science Department which offers MA and PhD programmes (http://www.graduateinstitute.ch/political-science)"
- Political Studies Association of the UK (http://www.psa.ac.uk/)
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