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## Political Science Yesterday and Today

### WHAT IS POLITICAL SCIENCE?

Everyone is affected by politics. News reports bombard us daily with details of political developments and conflicts in our immediate environment and in the world. For the casual observer the amount of information is confusing and can be overwhelming. It is difficult to interpret political events and develop informed judgments about them; they are so numerous that they often appear as major headlines one day and vanish the next under a barrage of new crises, scandals, and revolutions.

Political scientists try to impose order on this inchoate material—to bring understanding out of the chaos and to improve ways of thinking about political problems. Thus, topics such as governments, elections, political parties, revolutions, and wars, which are subject to much casual observation and heated discussion, are also the focus of orderly research. Political science is primarily concerned with studying dispute and its collective resolution. In definitional form, political science is the study of how organized disputes are articulated and then resolved by public decisions made by governments.

Political scientists describe and analyze the institutions and behavior involved in the political governance of states. But there is also an ethical, normative aspect to political science. It involves the search for the proper relationship between institutional structures and desired ends such as equality, justice, and liberty. It is also important to note that political scientists do not aim merely to accumulate facts

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and data, but to explain why events happen as they do. If they cannot be used as a tool to further understanding, mere facts are not enlightening.

### Political Science in Perspective

Knowledge is generally categorized within the domain of the exact sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. These artificial divisions are convenient but cannot always be maintained in a neat fashion: The groupings are often overlapping and interdependent. The humanities include literature, language, sculpture, music, dance, and painting as well as philosophy and theology. Studies in this branch of knowledge tend to rely on human judgment more than on scientific methodology. The so-called exact sciences, on the other hand, including mathematics, physics, chemistry, earth science, and biology, require a more systematic approach to the acquisition and classification of knowledge. Studies in this area must meet the standard of scientific replicability, so that, if repeated, they will always reach the same conclusions or results.

Political science belongs to the social sciences. This branch of knowledge is generally divided into eight disciplines: geography, history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, communications, and political science. What these subjects have in common is the study of human behavior. Social scientists study the "social" aspects of individuals, as do the humanities, but many practitioners attempt to use scientific methodology and pattern their research on the so-called exact sciences. While all political scientists rely on logical reasoning, the latter aspire to rigorous methodology and objectivity, building evidence through experiments or observations. So far, the search by political scientists for universal and enduring laws like Newton's laws of physics have been frustrated because "human behavior is too sensitive to the fluctuations of culture and the circumstances of history to yield permanently enduring findings." There is today, therefore, no agreed-upon "essential scientific core" for the discipline as a whole—neither content nor method. According to a leading political scientist, division in the discipline exists for two basic reasons:

1. Some political scientists are convinced that true knowledge can be found only in the "rigorous search for invariances, for the regularities we expect to find in nature";
2. Others believe that "knowledge is the search for meaning, for understanding and interpretation, that is, for what is human in the blending of mind and spirit."

### Greek and Roman Political Thought /

Political science has developed by a series of "surges and sags" over the centuries. As a field of study it can be traced to early scholars of classical Greece such as Herodotus, Aristotle, and Plato. In fact, the word "politics" derives from the Greek word *polis*, which means city-state. Of course these early contributors did not think

or write in terms of modern political science, but rather of history and, more particularly, philosophy. However, they were concerned with the enduring questions about politics and government. They wrote both *empirical* (what is) and *normative* (what ought to be) works about politics. They addressed questions such as: "What form of government is best?" and "What is the good life?" They developed many of the ideas and classifications of political systems which we still use today.<sup>3</sup>

Herodotus, a Greek historian of the fifth century B.C., classified governments according to three types—monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy—depending on how many people wielded ultimate decision-making power; that is, rule by one, a few, or many. About a century later, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) revised this classification, adding a new criterion—whether the rulers ruled in their own interest or in the general interest.

This perceptive classification of rule by the one, the few, or the many on a spectrum running from tyrannical rule through to democracy has become part of Western thought. It helped to introduce a degree of order into the study of the immense variety of political ideas and systems and promoted the value of unbiased observation as an approach to studying political science. On the other hand, in his *Ethics*, Aristotle observed that which human behavior is involved, one cannot reach the same level of certainty as in the natural sciences.

Aristotle's *Politics* (eight books) had further profound effects on Western political thought. One of his most influential concepts was of the state as a social organism, in the biological sense of a living, changing unit. He believed that political systems evolve as natural social organisms from the desire to seek moral perfection. A healthy constitution, he maintained, was one to which all elements of society give assent and allegiance. And, the most stable Greek political system, he said, was one in which the middle class holds the balance of power—where they have numerical superiority and more power than the very rich and the very poor. They must, for example, hold more total wealth than the rich and physically outnumber the poor. Many of the ideas generated by Aristotle form the basis of comparative politics, an important branch of political science, which we examine closely in Chapter 4.

Plato (428–348 B.C.), another early Greek philosopher, who in fact taught Aristotle, was fascinated by the political question of what constitutes the ideal state or utopia. In his *Republic*, Plato was concerned particularly with the concept of justice, which he perceived resulted from adhering to relatively strict principles. He conceived of a "just" society as one in which every individual performs tasks for which he or she is best suited by inborn qualities and training. In return, that person receives his or her "just" due. In essence, Plato believed that justice would constitute ideal harmony for individuals and also the state.

Drawing on his knowledge of how Greek city-states functioned, Plato categorized political systems according to which level of society had most influence on the governance of a given state. The ideal state, he said, would be ruled by Philosopher Kings who were imbued with wisdom. Of course, Plato was not naive. He posited that an "ideal" state would persist only if the people believed in their leaders. He advocated the need for a "noble lie" or myth to keep people content with their status

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in life. Rulers would be those with gold in their composition, while soldiers would have silver, and ordinary craftsmen and farmers would possess only iron or brass.

Timocracies, in contrast, were ruled by property-owning, ambitious men in search of honor. And oligarchies were ruled by people who sought only wealth. If the rich became degenerate, the poor, Plato said, would take over and the state would soon reflect the tendency of base individuals who yield to the pleasures of the moment. Implicitly, Plato, too, viewed the state and society as an *organic whole* in which the component parts were specialized and, like the organs of the body, had roles which contribute to the well-being of the whole.

For centuries, Aristotle and Plato's concept of the organic nature of the state dominated how people thought about the state. The concept reflected, or was reflected by, the political institutions of the day. It was accepted for centuries after the fall of the Greek city-states, when the Roman Empire dominated the Western world and individuals such as Cicero (106-43 B.C.) contributed advances in law and public administration to the study of government. It continued even after the Roman Empire began to crumble, and through the so-called Dark Ages (A.D. 476-1000), when Christianity provided the main social and political coherence in Europe.

### Western European Political Thought

When the first European states began to emerge, they coexisted with the church. Kings used the influence of the church to strengthen their own positions with their subjects. Ultimately, they adopted the concept of divine rule, portraying themselves as vicars of Christ with absolute, divine authority. Church and state were fused.

With the invention of the printing press, political information became widely disseminated throughout Europe. From the late fifteenth century on, politics became a popular intellectual concern. The sixteenth century brought the years of the Reformation, when Martin Luther challenged the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and the supremacy of the pope. These and other attacks on the Church led to the rise of Lutheranism, Calvinism, and other Protestant denominations. Jean Bodin (1570-1596) also made his reputation during this period. Bodin is credited with inventing the term "political science," which he defined as the study of sovereignty, the functions of government, and the institutions that make law. Bodin, affected by the religious wars in Europe, wrote in his *Republique* that sovereignty was "indivisible," and advised that the monarchy and centralism were essential to a strong state.

By the late seventeenth century, access to written material had reached new heights, and intellectual debate about the exercise of state power flourished. This period of history, sometimes called the Age of Reason, produced several great political thinkers. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was an English philosopher and an ardent Royalist. He was an acquaintance of such thinkers as Galileo, Descartes, and Ben Jonson. Hobbes had a very pessimistic view of human nature and advocated absolute government based on a social contract which would bind all citizens under a sovereign who would protect them from their own selfishness.

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes wrote that individuals did not strive for moral perfection as Aristotle had posited, but for self-preservation. For Hobbes, life in the state of nature would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." A state would, therefore, be necessary in order to maintain order and stability. Government, he conjectured, should be developed to control personal appetites for liberty and power.

In direct contrast to Hobbes' prescription, another English philosopher, John Locke (1632-1704), advocated that governments should be limited and accountable so that people generally could be free to think and act as they wished. He conceived of humans as "free, equal and independent." Locke's optimistic views of human nature were widely popular and influential, most notably in framing the American Declaration of Independence. In France, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) indirectly supported Locke in his book *Social Contract* when he developed the idea that in the state of nature "Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains." In other words, he believed that man was born innocent but was corrupted by society. We shall have more to say about Locke and Rousseau in Chapter 6.

Yet another significant contribution during this period was made by the French scholar Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755), who, after incorrectly examining the British political system, advised a "separation of powers" as a check on absolute authority. Montesquieu's views, expressed in *L'Esprit des Lois*, did not have a large following in his native France but later greatly influenced the framers of the United States Constitution.

The Enlightenment also saw the development of the application of scientific principles to politics. Modern political science is indebted to the British Utilitarians of the nineteenth century, including Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), James Mill (1773-1836), and John Stuart Mill (1805-1873), who advanced the scientific principle of utility—the greatest good for the greatest number. The Utilitarians wanted a scientific approach to politics so that it could be exercised for the good of the whole rather than for any particular group or elite in society.

The ultimate challenge to the organic view of the state came with the industrial revolution in Britain in the nineteenth century. The idea of the organic state and society as continuous and changeless was definitively broken at that time. People no longer believed that the relations among the three social classes—the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, and the proletariat—were ordained by God. The repercussions of the industrial revolution were extensive. It inspired new machines and also new movements. Aristocracies fell, as did forms of government. A mechanistic view of the state and society took hold. If the state was not a fixed, organic whole, it could be regulated, changed, and adapted, and the best way to do that was through constitutions, and finding methods of improving constitutions.

Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) and Karl Marx (1818-1883) used science in quite a different way. They developed a "scientific" philosophy of history and economics. In Marx's terms, this science could explain the historical development of mankind from feudalism, to capitalism, to socialism, and eventually to a perfect condition where the state would wither away entirely. This philosophy, the basis of Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, profoundly affected the political world and helped set

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the stage for the application of scientific principles of economics to politics. We will return to these and later ideas of Marxism in Chapter 6.

Some early writers, however, focused on quite different aspects of politics. Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), one of the best-known political thinkers of the Renaissance (from the mid-fourteenth century to the end of the sixteenth century), emphasized pragmatism and political power. During the Renaissance, as medieval feudal societies gave way to the modern world with its growing national consciousness, political centralization, and commercial economies, a great many small, unstable, new states existed. Machiavelli searched for the rules of political stability, concentrating particularly on developing practical rules to guide politicians in obtaining and holding power. He found that power tends to be more important than ethics and morality. From his publication *The Prince*, Machiavelli's name became synonymous with these rules for princes, the best known of which today may be "It is better to be loved, but if not loved then feared." Machiavelli did not produce these rules in order to compare or analyze states but rather to instruct politicians on how to obtain or maintain power or control over the behavior of others.

Most early Greek, Roman, and European philosophers, however, were social ethicists or social critics, not "scientists." A brief list of these philosophers would have to include St. Augustine (354–430); Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274); and Marsiglio of Padua (1275–1343), who combined their political advice with their theological teachings. To these few might be added the names of later philosophers of eighteenth-century Europe, including Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), and Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) in the United States. These philosophers of the Enlightenment were all concerned with freedom, and their ideas permeated thought during the American Revolution (1776) and the French Revolution (1789).

Early contributions to the study of politics and government came, then, largely from philosophers, but also from the fields of history and law. For many years, the subject was commonly taught in history departments. Political scientists were, in fact, often considered to be "historians of the present," and early studies of political institutions and international relations emphasized historical methodology.<sup>4</sup> Since it was particularly concerned with government organization and law-making, the field of law, too, was important in the evolution of modern political science.

## CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES AND METHODS

Political science did not appear as a separate discipline until the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when departmental chairs were established in universities. The first department of political science was created in the United States at Columbia University in 1880. Even after it was officially recognized as a distinct field, however, political science continued to be taught for many years in history departments and in economics departments as "political economy." Political sci-

## BOX 2.1 Politics and the novel.

Even literature can be related to the study of politics. Novelists can be particularly adept at capturing the political culture of a country. In the United States, Henry Adams began the tradition of the Washington novel with *Democracy: An American Novel*. Some classic political novels that entertain and also engage the mind about political and cultural issues would include the following—the reader undoubtedly has favorites to add to this short list:

Feodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*  
 Allen Drury, *Advise and Consent*  
 Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*  
 Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*  
 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*  
 Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*  
 V. S. Naipaul, *Guerillas*  
 George Orwell, *Animal Farm; Nineteen Eighty-Four*  
 Alan Paton, *Cry, the Beloved Country*  
 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Dirty Hands*  
 B. F. Skinner, *Walden Two*  
 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*  
 Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men*

ence thus developed as a truly interdisciplinary study. This trend continued into the twentieth century as developments in sociology, anthropology, psychology, biology, physics, and economics impacted on the thinking of political scientists.

Many first-generation American political scientists, such as Harold Lasswell and Charles E. Merriam, favored the application of scientific methods to the study of politics. At the same time, a European tradition was sustained in America by European-educated immigrants such as Carl Friedrich and many others who had been trained in the European tradition of philosophical inquiry with its traditional historical methods.<sup>9</sup> These two approaches to the study of politics combined to form the basis of modern political science as it persists today.

In the 1930s, and even moreso in the 1940s and 1950s, the discipline of political science was reoriented as political scientists increasingly studied observable human political behavior in the light of theories borrowed from other social sciences. Because the social sciences had developed from biological models, the concept of the political system as a political organism became popular once again, particularly in the study of subjects such as systems analysis, as we shall see below.

More recently, after World War II, political scientists relied increasingly on the fields of mathematics and statistics to help analyze political data, making political science even more interdisciplinary. But the study of philosophy was not forgotten. There is, as Lucien Pye notes, a sense that as a discipline, modern political science wants to have its cake and eat it too—to be simultaneously humanistic and scientific.<sup>10</sup>

## Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Politics

In order to escape from randomly collecting facts or relying on only one theory when none has met the complete test for scientific validity, political scientists have developed several approaches. An approach to a discipline is the particular orientation that one adopts when addressing the subject. It is a predisposition to adopt a particular conceptual framework and to explore certain hypotheses in order to generate theory. An approach may be implicit or explicit, but it must be identifiable because it determines the questions, perspectives, and procedures or methods that a researcher will use in his or her study.

Scholars have tended to bring approaches and methods of study from other fields to their research in political science. It is multidisciplinary. As well, different generations of scholars have developed approaches based on their unique interests, values, and methodologies. Approaches to the study of politics have therefore changed over time, with notions about which ones were best shifting according to what was needed, or sometimes fashionable, to study specific topics or problems.

Underlying all approaches to the study of politics, however, is the principle that political scientists should be analytical and comparative and should avoid basing generalizations on casual observation. Whether the research is based on experiments, statistics, or configurative case studies, it ought to be ordered by the desire to be explicit about the rules employed to describe and analyze politics.

*The Traditional/Historical Approach.* We have seen that the traditional/historical approach was predominant in the early years of modern political science, when studies of politics concentrated on an essentially legal/formal description of governments. Most political scientists make some use of history, but traditionalists concentrate almost exclusively in this area, emphasizing chronology and the historical development of government structures and institutions.

By the late 1950s, the traditional approach was under severe attack. The basic criticism alleged that its practitioners were essentially *parochial* (biased toward Western thought and ideas), *formal-legal* (interested mainly in constitutions and the operations of institutions such as executives, legislatures, courts, and bureaucracies), *noncomparative* (based essentially on the configurative study of single countries), and *unscientific* (concepts, models, and theories were rudimentary, if not nonexistent). Furthermore, the approach was said to exclude informal politics and therefore ignores a large and important source of relevant information. While many of these charges were exaggerated, they did point to the simple fact that the formal-legal approach is particularly limiting in comparative studies because the role of formal governmental institutions varies greatly from country to country. In some societies, legislatures may be much less important than other institutions or processes. For example, in some countries the military assumes the functions of both the government and the legislature. In others, the legislature may consist of nothing more than the extended family of the monarch.



**The Scientific/Behavioralist Approach.** (The behaviorist approach came to the forefront of the discipline in the 1960s.<sup>8</sup> It aimed to correct perceived shortcomings in the traditional approach to the study of politics. Concentrating on the informal aspects of politics, behavioralists seek to understand how individuals behave within political institutions, and how informal behavior contributes to policy-making. They are concerned mostly with empirical theory (which deals with the observable world) rather than normative theory (which involves value judgments) used by political philosophers or traditional political theorists.)

The scientific approach of behavioralists brought a new, technical vocabulary to the study of politics, a vocabulary which must be learned in order to understand much of contemporary political science. Behavioralists made explicit many of the rules or methodology (the manner of gathering, measuring, and explaining political information) of the discipline that had been implicit in more traditional approaches. As in the physical sciences, these researchers begin with curiosity about some "variable" or "variables"; that is, some changeable phenomena which they are trying to understand. A variable is a feature of a social situation or institution that may appear in different degrees or forms in other situations and institutions. Disciplines within the social sciences stress different variables for examination. Psychologists concentrate primarily on individual behavior; economists on scarcity. For political scientists the subject of inquiry is generally governmental power and authority—how it is obtained and used. Students might be particularly interested in variables such as how difficult university courses are in particular subjects or how rigorously essays are graded.

Political science today is a science, then, in that it aims to provide plausible explanations for phenomena. Political scientists develop "hypotheses" which offer explanations of political phenomena and then test them against empirical evidence. A hypothesis is a statement or generalization presented in tentative and conjectural terms. It is used to speculate about causes or effects by linking one or several variables to others.<sup>9</sup> One might, for example, hypothesize that levels of political stability increase or decrease depending on the possible threat of external attack on a state; and then conduct a study to see if this explanation is valid over time and in various settings. University students might hypothesize that younger professors give relatively more difficult courses, or that teaching assistants give higher grades than professors. If these concepts can be operationalized and measured properly, relationships (or correlations) may be found which confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis.

Often political scientists combine several hypotheses into a theory. The concept of theory derives from the Greek word *theoria* meaning contemplation. Theories are human inventions, bold conjectures, about operations in the real world. They are intellectual "nets" used to catch or explain the real world. In scientific/behavioral terms they are defined as a series of interconnected hypotheses which describes what we think we know about interrelationships among a series of variables.<sup>10</sup> A theory involves three elements: generalizations; new observations, and testability.<sup>11</sup> Albert Einstein put it like this: Theories involve posing problems, applying a tentative theory, eliminating error, and proceeding on to a new problem.

Behavioralists strive to use scientific methods to explain or predict political phenomena by discovering "uniformities in political behavior."<sup>12</sup> They make hypotheses about politics, which they verify or disprove with empirical data. The tools of their craft include statistics and computers. The most successful studies of this type have been in the area of voting behavior, party organization, and studies of beliefs and attitudes.

In summary, the scientific enterprise encompasses:

1. Identifying a significant *issue* or *problem*.
2. Devising a plausible *hypothesis* to explore the phenomena.
3. Finding *reliable evidence* with which to test the hypothesis.
4. Exploring the *findings*.
5. Exploring how the results may be combined with other scientific explanations to form a *theory*.

The main criticism of the behavioralist approach is that it ignores values. And by concentrating on methods and statistics, it is sometimes said to end up with very precise answers to trivial questions. Furthermore, since political science studies human beings rather than inanimate objects, it is rarely able to achieve replicable rules of political behavior that are equivalent to those in the exact sciences. In general, political science cannot predict future events based on past behavior; and given the immense number of variables that have to be considered, it is doubtful that this will ever be achieved to the degree possible in the exact sciences. As David Easton noted, natural sciences have the advantage of dealing with inanimate matter. "Atoms . . . do not have feeling or intentions that, by their very nature are unpredictable or inaccessible to observation or prediction."<sup>13</sup> However, even in the exact sciences there is an extraordinary and unavoidable unpredictability. In fact, modern physicists refer to "chaos theory" as a way of studying how incredibly minute uncertainties in the initial state of a system can lead to total uncertainty in even the best conceivable predictions of the futures of those systems.

Many political scientists now rely on a combination of methods of inquiry derived from both the traditional and behavioral schools. By their very nature, different topics of inquiry require different approaches, and both schools have made important contributions to the study of politics. Efforts are often made to combine aspects of both approaches and reconcile them, retaining a concern for values, and using whatever techniques seem best suited for answering particular questions. This approach is sometimes labeled post-behavioralism.

*The General Theory Approach.* Many modern approaches to the study of political science are based on a belief that studies of politics must employ a general theory of the polity; that is, they must identify all the critical structures and processes of society, explain their interrelationships with politics, and predict a wide array of governmental outcomes. Such a theory, it is argued, would allow scholars to obtain scientific-law-like generalizations about politics.

Two analogies summarize the core of this debate on the status of general theory in political science.<sup>14</sup> One is that politics is like the shifting formlessness of

clouds; the other is that it is based on precise, mechanical causation like a watch. Almond and Genco conclude that "the current quandary in political science can, to a large extent, be explained by the fact that, by themselves, clock-model assumptions are inappropriate for dealing with the substance of political phenomena."<sup>15</sup> This conclusion comes from the belief that all theories about politics must necessarily include transient and fleeting phenomena. Almond and Genco maintain that politics is not totally predictable because, since human behavior is involved, there can be no direct cause-and-effect relationship among all the variables. They contend that political reality "has distinctive properties which make it unamenable to the forms of explanation used in the natural sciences."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the science of politics should not be seen as a set of methods with a predetermined theory, but rather, as Almond and Genco noted, as a "commitment to explore and attempt to understand a given segment of empirical reality."<sup>17</sup>

*The Systems Approach.* Yet another approach to the study of politics is the systems approach. This approach is based on a general theory that provides political scientists with a limited, but useful, framework for analysis. It was particularly popular in the 1960s and 1970s, and remains an implicit approach in many other ways of explaining politics. The essence of systems theory is that the politics of a country can be depicted by the interaction between the societal environment and an abstract political system which processes or converts demands and supports into outputs, producing an overall stability or homeostasis. David Easton outlined the first comprehensive systems theory for political science.<sup>18</sup> The study of systems entails the search for cyclical processes that govern political structures.

According to Easton, it is useful to view politics as a system of processes and relationships between the conversion processes and the environment in which they function. Political life is seen as human behavior that operates within and responds to the environment, and thereby enables one to study political structures and functions in relation to social, economic, and cultural conditions in the environment.

The basic argument of systems analysis is that governments are the center of political systems in which three stages of action are involved (see Figure 2.1). First, the environment affects the political system by making multiple demands on it, as well as by providing fundamental support. These might include demands for better housing or health care or lower taxes. The supports would include intangibles such as "love of country" or patriotism. In Easton's concept, these are the "inputs." In the second stage, political parties or other institutions aggregate (or try to aggregate) the inputs into wider programs. Finally, the political system (including politicians, bureaucrats, executives, legislatures, courts, etc.) makes authoritative responses. These authoritative responses are in the form of decisions, laws, or other actions as "outputs" which return to the environment as "feedback." The parts of the system interact then like, say, the boundaries of a body's circulatory system. The system is more than the sum of its parts; it is like a living organism.

Systems analysis is frequently criticized. It is argued that the model on which it is based does not assist in discerning which parts of a political system are essential or influential. Some argue that more is learned about the various aspects of pol-

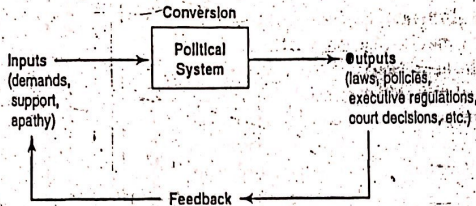


FIGURE 2.1 Model of a political system.

itics by studying specific components of a political system. Others say it is impossible to predict how, or even whether, a change in one part of the system will affect another part. Furthermore, political systems are not as closely interrelated as the model would make it appear. Nor are they as static as the model implies.<sup>19</sup> Easton's framework focused on the persistence of the system to the extent that the desire or compulsion to survive is considered a feature of all political systems. Some authors have interpreted this as a conservative bias built into the approach.<sup>20</sup>

*The Structural-Functionalism Approach.* Another related approach, structural-functionalism—often associated with the name of Gabriel Almond—was developed to make systems theory more open to the possibility of fundamental or developmental change.<sup>21</sup> In essence, structural-functionalism specifies the activities of a viable political system and explains how these functions must be performed to maintain the stability of the political system. If the polity cannot perform these functions, it ceases to exist. Almond and others used this approach to study the change in level of political development, from traditional to modern systems.<sup>22</sup>

The normally specified functions of political systems include input activities such as interest articulation, aggregation, socialization, and communication, and the output functions of rule-making, rule application, and rule adjudication. According to structural-functionalists the role of the scholar is to research what "structures" various states use to perform these "functions." In some societies rule-making, rule application, and rule adjudication, for example, are all performed by the same structure. In Inuit bands, the headman performs all these output functions. In more complex systems, like the United States as a whole, these functions are performed respectively by the legislative, executive, and judicial structures.

One weakness of the structural-functional approach is that it does not accommodate well to the state as a dynamic entity. It assigns the state the mechanical role of performing functions, but the individuals who carry them out may have their own interests and priorities. Thus, some critics argue that the structural-functional approach places far too much trust in technology and "rational" procedures, and that the relation between the structures and functions is obscure.<sup>23</sup> Almond's "levels of development" concept left him open to charges of bias in that he con-

sidered democracy, especially Western liberal democracy, to be integral to the responsiveness of the political system and thus to political stability. He seems to be contending that all systems must evolve in the same manner and direction as did the Anglo-American democracies if they wish to "develop" to higher political stages.

**The Political Economy Approach.** Finally, it is important to mention the political economy approach which gained popularity among political scientists in the late 1980s. Political economy studies are concerned with the relationship between government and economics. Politics and economics are never entirely separate phenomena: The way people earn a living as professionals, business people, laborers, or unemployed always influences politics. Economics involves conflict over scarce resources, while politics generally involves decisions about who will pay and who will benefit from the production and distribution of items ranging from highways to health care to armaments. Governments can affect the amount of resources in the hands of the poorest and richest segments of society. And, there is a close interaction between the economy and government in many important issues such as tax policy, welfare policy, and so on. Governments carry out policies to protect, promote, and regulate the economy, but are themselves driven by that same economy.

The political economy approach has gained particular importance in the study of public policy, that is, studies of what governments do. Different ideologies and political beliefs conflict over what the role of government and politics should be. Underlying the dispute is the question: "What is the role of government concerning regulation, support or intervention in economic and social affairs?" Those who accept values such as private enterprise, freedom, and individualism may answer the question one way; those who believe that social and political relations are largely determined or constrained by the economic basis of society may answer it quite differently.

Two opposing views, therefore, are reflected in studies of political economy: a relatively new public choice school, which is sometimes referred to as "liberal political economy" because it tends to follow the logic of classical economic reasoning; and neo-Marxism, which is based on Karl Marx's thinking concerning the relationship between economic, social, and political structures. The details of Marxist philosophy are discussed in Chapter 8, but essentially, he argued that the primary function of the state in capitalist society is to serve the interests of capitalism. It creates and maintains conditions favorable to profitable capital accumulation by concentrating wealth in a few hands. But, in the long run, he argued, capitalism cannot resist the attack of workers who will eventually become the masters of the means of production and exchange in a collectivist society. One must accept many of the Marxist premises to agree with the conclusions derived from neo-Marxist analysis. Both public choice and neo-Marxist approaches are relatively underdeveloped; much more work, both theoretical and empirical, needs to be done for a comprehensive theory of politics to emerge from either of them.

The essential problem with systems analysis, functionalism, and the political

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economy arguments is that they are at such a high level of abstraction that they are remote from much empirical research. That is, they are aimed at general theories, not "observation and experiment." They describe the polity in such broad terms that they neither generate testable propositions nor aid greatly in understanding concrete political problems. Besides this, the theories have also failed so far in their fundamental task of identifying all the theoretical structures and processes of the political system and explaining the relations among them—that is, they cannot be accepted as having contributed a comprehensive and predictive theory of the polity, and thus they remain only approaches to the discipline. A student must be aware of these various approaches in order to understand their advantages and disadvantages in the study of politics.

## FIELDS OF MODERN POLITICAL SCIENCE

Today there are many fields or branches within the study of modern political science. The most important are political theory and political philosophy; federal, provincial, and local governments; public administration and public policy; methodology; international relations; and comparative government and politics.

Political theory and political philosophy are terms which are often used interchangeably. Scholars in this field are concerned with questions about value judgments and the history and development of the ideas of great political thinkers. Political philosophy is sometimes called value or normative theory (as distinguished from empirical/scientific theory) because it is concerned primarily with values, norms, and morality. It attempts to examine the connections among facts, values, and judgments. Theory is an important part of all political science fields because it is used in the explanation and prediction of political phenomena. Political philosophers may also be concerned with epistemology—the origin, nature, and limits of knowledge.

Governments themselves make up an entire branch of political science. Scholars examine the structure and functions of federal, provincial or State, and local governments, usually within the context of a single country. As well as studying the institutions such as the presidency, they also analyze the political behavior of the wide range of participants in the political process.

Public administration and public policy both concern the study of the administrative aspects of government. Public policy analyzes and evaluates policies in areas such as defense, health, education, and resource development. Public administration studies are concerned more with how these policies are formulated and implemented within the large bureaucratic infrastructure of government.

Methodology in political science is particularly concerned with empirical or scientific theory. Methodologists develop approaches and techniques to be used in

all aspects of the discipline. They are especially interested in making the study of politics as rigorous as the exact sciences. Methodologists tend to work in the realm of statistical analysis, polling techniques, and computer science, or study epistemology (how we know what we know) and the philosophy of science (the assumptions and general principles of science).

International relations focuses on the foreign policies of countries, international organizations, and international law in order to learn more about the interactions among states. Scholars in this field are particularly concerned with such issues as conflict management among countries. The importance of economics is stressed in the international political economy school within this sub-discipline.

Comparative government and politics is a very wide field with many subdivisions. To a large extent it is the study of the macro-politics of states. It is primarily concerned with comparing the politics and government of different states. In this field there are many area specialists who focus on regions such as the Middle East, the former Soviet Union, Asia, developing countries, and so on, as well as specialists who place their studies in the perspective of all the world's diverse political structures and practices. The argument for comparison is extremely important—only by comparing can one understand and evaluate the merits or problems of a particular political system. And furthermore, comparison is an integral part of all scientific enquiry. This book is based on the comparative tradition, and Chapter 4 discusses fully the rationale and methods of comparison in political science.

The focus of political science, then, has broadened considerably since it was formally recognized as a discipline at the turn of the twentieth century. Much research today is designed to be relevant to current domestic and international problems. This trend is particularly evidenced in the relatively young field of public policy, which concentrates on explaining domestic and international government action.

As with the general division of knowledge into the three groups of science, social science, and humanities, it is obvious that these fields within political science are artificial categories. There is considerable overlap of interests among them. Topics such as behavior, parties, or violence and revolutions, for example, are studied by specialists in many of these different fields, each contributing expertise from a different perspective, as well as posing unique hypotheses and using different approaches.

### POLITICAL SCIENCE IN THE LATE 1990s

It is evident from this brief survey of the development of political science that there have been a great many changes over the years in the favored approaches and methods about how best to understand the political world. A survey of today's aca-

democratic journals reveals studies based on rigorous application of scientific methodology alongside basic descriptive studies that document change in institutions or processes. This combination has led some commentators to call this the post-behavioral period of political science. They contend that political science can and should encompass a scientific approach to the discipline as well as a concern for the principles of ethics, wisdom, and judgment.

Many political scientists today could be classified as "soft" scientists. They would agree that the approach a political scientist takes to issues structures the questions that will be asked and what methods will be used in the study. Soft political scientists recognize that basic descriptive work has to be done to document changes in societies and political institutions, and that intuitive accounts are needed to supplement empirical studies in order to provide the "big picture" of society as a whole. At the same time, however, the soft approach "is based on a core adherence to the central precepts of science."<sup>24</sup> Modern political science seeks to discover generalizations or regularities of behavior that govern the political process. It is a difficult exercise because human behavior is involved and there is a multiplicity of factors in each situation. Political scientists have to work with the variation which occurs naturally in the real world. They cannot create and control experimental conditions.

Haphazard, casual observations are not part of political science; analysis must follow scientific conventions. For example, political science studies must amass evidence to support claims, clearly stating methods, results, and conclusions, and following scientific principles so that the study can come as close as possible to the goal of replication. As members of a scientific community, political scientists adopt a *critical* perspective about the causes and effects of political phenomena, constantly doubting and treating claims skeptically. As philosopher of science Karl Popper argued—the advance of science is "—towards an infinite yet attainable aim: that of discovering new, deeper, and more general problems, and of subjecting our ever tentative answers to ever renewed and even more rigorous test."<sup>25</sup> The paradigm, or world-view which legitimates the academic consensus about what constitutes exemplary research, is constantly shifting—almost like the subject of politics itself.<sup>26</sup>

It is important for students to be aware of the different approaches and methods used by political scientists and of the advantages and problems related to each. Today, there is a great diversity of fields and approaches in the discipline of political science: a kind of benevolent pluralism flourishes. There remains, however, a fundamental gulf in the discipline between the "scientific" and "humanistic" tendencies; the former may be said to concentrate on explaining scientific variances, the latter on humanistic interpretations. In this text we try to take a neutral position concerning the value of the major approaches, drawing on the contributions of each where possible. However the book is firmly in the comparative tradition. Comparison highlights variations and allows us to identify and often measure phenomena, providing a perspective that is invaluable to political scientists. Chapter 4



very much essential to understand the dynamics of the world. Since we are living in a world where globalization brought into the fore several issues that were beyond the purview of the traditional boundaries of the discipline of political science.

21. The ancient Greek city-states were popularly known as 'polis' where the discipline of political science emerged. Political science is also known as the art of governance or as politics.
22. In the post-behavioural era, political science earned the epithet as policy-science. This is because the government lays down those policies that will help in the proper allocation of goods and services.
23. The knowledge of political science enables us to lead a happy life in the modern times. It is essential to understand the constitution, form of government, citizenship laws and also the role of political parties and public opinion. Some observe the voting behaviour and the distribution of political power can be analysed in the modern times during elections. The knowledge of political science is essential to understand the rights and duties of citizens as well as subjects. Rights help in the enjoyment of political freedom, while duties are to be performed for the benefits received from the state.

## QUESTIONS

1. Define political science and explain its meaning.
2. Discuss the scope of political science.
3. Discuss whether political science is an art or science.
4. What is the difference between theoretical and applied politics?