

## CHAPTER 1: POLITICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

### Learning Objectives

Students should be able to answer the following questions at the completion of this chapter:

- Why did politics fall out of favor? Is it back now?
- What does it mean to “never get angry at a fact”?
- Why did Aristotle call politics “the master science”?
- What did Machiavelli bring to the study of politics?
- How are legitimacy, sovereignty, and authority different but similar?
- Is the Iraqi government now legitimate? How can you tell?
- Is politics largely biological, psychological, cultural, rational, or irrational?
- How can something as messy as politics be a science?

### Chapter Outline

- I. Changing interest in politics
  - a. General trend toward a disinterest in politics
    - i. In the U.S. and abroad
  - b. Interest in U.S. politics recently revived amidst
    - i. Healthcare reform
    - ii. Bailouts
    - iii. Massive federal deficits
  - c. Why does interest or disinterest matter?
    - i. Those who don’t engage in politics have no control over their futures
      1. Wars
      2. Taxes
      3. Government programs
    - ii. The ignorant are manipulated
  - d. Politics might seem a bit distasteful but they are a part of life that must be understood
- II. The Master Science
  - a. Aristotle
  - b. Decisions of the *polis* have extensive effects on other aspects of society
  - c. Politics is the study of “who gets what” (Lasswell)
  - d. Almost everything is political
    - i. Even the type of economic system adopted is the result of a political decision
  - e. By applying reason we can understand why things happen
    - i. Study of politics in a rational, systematic way
  - f. Influential Disciplines and their Intersection with Political Science
    - i. History
      1. Chief data source for political scientists
      2. Historians and political scientists ask different questions and process information (data) differently
        - a. Historians seek to study one episode in depth

- b. Political scientists look for generalizations across multiple episodes
  - ii. Human Geography
    - 1. Less influential on political science as of late
    - 2. Territorial components of human behavior have political ramifications
      - a. Borders and regions
      - b. Ethnic areas
      - c. Trade flows
      - d. Centralization of power
      - e. Regional political variations
  - iii. Economics
    - 1. A matter of politics or are politics a matter of economics?
    - 2. Many political quarrels are economic
      - a. Distribution of resources
      - b. Basis of democracy
      - c. What promotes economic development?
      - d. Role of government in economy
  - iv. Sociology
    - 1. Overlaps with political science at times
    - 2. Sociology as an empirical basis to political-culture, political-opinion, and electoral studies
  - v. Anthropology
    - 1. Descriptive and interviewing techniques adopted by political scientists
    - 2. Political culture subfield
    - 3. Influence of tribes, clans, families, etc. on politics
  - vi. Psychology
    - 1. Helps political scientists understand
      - a. Which personalities are attracted to politics
      - b. Why and when people obey authority figures
      - c. How people form national, group and voting attachments
      - d. Why leaders make particular decisions
    - 2. Methodology
      - a. Control groups
      - b. Blind testing

### III. Political Power

- a. The focus on power distinguishes political science from other social sciences
- b. Power is the ability of A to get B to do something contrary to B's will
- c. Aristotle is founding father, but second founding father is Machiavelli who emphasized power in all of his works
- d. Foundations of power... some contending theories
  - i. Biological
  - ii. Psychological
  - iii. Cultural
  - iv. Rational

- v. Irrational
  - vi. Composite
    - 1. Truth in all preceding explanations of power
  - e. Power is not measurable
    - i. It is a connection among people that enables one person to get others to do his/her bidding
  - f. Not the same as politics
    - i. Politics is the combination of goals or policies *and* the power necessary to achieve them.
    - ii. Politics is not just a third for power
    - iii. The struggle for power only takes place so that individuals or groups can enact their preferred policies (at least in democracies)
- IV. Sovereignty, Legitimacy and Authority are all Basic to Political Science
- a. Sovereignty
    - i. National control over the country's territory
    - ii. Make decisions without outside interference
    - iii. Maintained by protecting the state
    - iv. Can sometime be a legal fiction
  - b. Legitimacy
    - i. Legal and psychological right to govern
      - 1. Public attitude toward the leadership
    - ii. Legitimacy and state capacity are closely related
    - iii. Legitimacy achieved by the government
      - 1. Ensuring security
      - 2. Ensuring rule of law
      - 3. Being viewed as legitimate over time... becomes more engrained
      - 4. Governing well
        - a. Provide for basic needs
      - 5. Have a structure that reflects popular influence and opinion
      - 6. Using national symbols
  - c. Authority
    - i. Psychological ability of leaders to get others to obey them
    - ii. Relies on a sense of obligation which is based on the legitimate power of office
    - iii. Authority both comes with the office and must be cultivated
- V. Political Science Subfields
- a. U.S. Politics
  - b. Comparative Politics
  - c. International Relations
  - d. Political Theory
  - e. Public Administration
  - f. Constitutional Law
  - g. Public Policy
- VI. Is Politics a Science?
- a. Original meaning of science: knowledge

- b. Attempt by some political scientists to study politics through the scientific method
- c. Some political science questions cannot be answered like those questions in the natural sciences
  - i. Political science is an empirical discipline that utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data
  - ii. Both allow observation of patterns
- d. An Unbiased Approach to Political Science
  - i. Reasoned approach
  - ii. Balanced approach
  - iii. Evidence to support findings
  - iv. Theoretical basis
- e. What good is political science?
  - i. More than training to become a politician
  - ii. Political Science is training in objective and complex analysis rather than what the practice of politics requires which is fixed, popular, and simplified opinions.
  - iii. Political science can contribute to good government

## Chapter Summary

Americans, and others around the world, have gradually become disinterested in politics. This disinterest has been curbed—at least temporarily—as a result of the recent economic crisis and the massive bailouts issued. Students are urged to continue this positive trend and remain engaged in politics, as politics impact nearly every aspect of their lives because, after all, politics is about “who gets what.” Given the complex relationships between politics and other aspects of everyday life, the study of political science was deemed by Aristotle as the “master science.” Political science is necessarily related to the following disciplines through topic, data, and/or methods of study: history, economics, sociology, psychology and social psychology, anthropology, and human geography.

Ultimately, political science is centered around the concept of power. Power is the ability of A to get B to do something that is contrary to B’s will. Although power is sometimes confused as the ultimate goal, political science treats power as the means to attain goals. In other words, politics is not about achieving power (something measurable and identifiable) but rather being in positions of power in order to accomplish a series of goals and/or policies. In this way, power has less of a negative connotation than commonly thought. The basis of power is complex. Power does not come from one source but rather derives from several including: biology, psychology, culture, rationality, and irrationality.

Related to power are the often-confused terms of sovereignty, legitimacy, and authority. *Sovereignty* simply refers to a government being able to maintain the territorial integrity of its country and rule over it without outside interference. *Legitimacy*, on the other hand, is derived from a psychological acceptance of institutions and those that occupy those institutions. Legitimacy is built first and foremost by ensuring citizens’ security, but it is also dependent upon rule of law, governing well, and having a governmental structure that reflects and responds to the popular will. Legitimacy becomes more engrained over time. Finally, *authority* is the psychological ability of leaders to get others to obey them. The populace must accept their right to rule and then willingly obey in order for them to have true authority. Obviously, these three concepts are highly related.

Finally, students should understand that the practice of politics and the study of political science are two very different things. The former relies on simplifications of reality in order to generate fixed, popular opinions while the latter is the objective and complex analysis of political phenomena. Political science takes an empirical approach (both quantitative and qualitative) to questions that treat political phenomena as the independent and dependent variable. Political scientists seek to understand the world around them, and while this knowledge can contribute to politics, this is not their ultimate goal.

### Lecture Starters

- What are politics? How are politics and political science different? Or are they different?
- Why should you be engaged in politics? How can you become involved in politics? How can you stay informed on politics?
- Why might people in some countries be more concerned with politics than people in others? For instance, Israel has voter turnout rates between 77% and 90%, while the U.S. voter turnout rates in federal elections range from 36% to 60%. What might contribute to this?
- Start with a discussion of the most important concept in this chapter: power. Ask students to write down a definition of power and then compare power to sovereignty, legitimacy, and authority. Have each student come to the board and write their definition of power. Use these definitions as points of comparison and discussion.
- Ask students that are interested in pursuing a political career to line up on one side of the room while those who would prefer to study political science to line up on the other side. Ask them to explain how the career path they plan on pursuing differs from the other. Allow them to engage in conversation and debate concerning the topic and then use points that come up in your discussion concerning these critical distinctions.

### Discussion Questions

- How are politics important for your everyday life?
- Why should you be informed and even involved in politics?
- What is political science?
- How is power related to political science?
- What are the bases of power?
- Why is political science described by Aristotle as the “master science”?
- What other disciplines is political science related to and how?
- How are the concepts of sovereignty, legitimacy, and authority different? How are they similar? How are they related to power?
- Why is the study of politics described as political *science*?
- What are the subfields of political science and how do they differ in their topics of study? Provide examples of each.
- How are politics and political science different?