



INTRODUCTION

What Is Politics and How Should We Analyze It?

The introductory chapter is concerned with the problems involved in defining the scope of politics. It can be narrowly defined as having an exclusive focus on the state, or it can be more broadly defined in a variety of ways to include the entire social sphere, the economy, even the environment taken as a whole. The chapter notes that too narrow a definition risks leaving out too much of the world it is attempting to examine, and too broad a definition threatens to dilute the discipline entirely. Harold Lasswell's formulation that politics seeks to determine "who gets what, when, how" allows for a suitably wide range of issue areas and events to be examined.

The chapter continues by introducing a number of themes that will be examined in more detail throughout the text. It is noted that, as a discipline, political science is generally divided into three sub-disciplines: political theory, institutions and processes within the state, and international relations. It is also noted that there are three interrelated types of political analysis that are commonly used: normative analysis asks value questions; empirical analysis focuses on observable phenomena; and, semantic analysis concentrates on meaning. The discipline also makes use of both deductive and inductive theories.

The chapter concludes with the observation that despite the traditional name "political science," the study of politics is not entirely amenable to the kind of value-free methodologies that are seen in the natural sciences.

Chapter Outline

- **Why is Politics So Hard to Define?**
- **Is Politics Unavoidable?**
- **Political Questions**
- **Boundaries of the Political: State, Society, and the International Community**

- **The Study of Politics**
- **The Rise and Fall of Normative Analysis**
- **Empirical and Semantic Analysis**
- **Deductive and Inductive Theories of Politics**
- **Can Politics Be a Science?**
- **Conclusion**

Key Terms

Authority
Civil society
Empirical analysis
Governance

Normative analysis
Political systems
Power
Rational choice theory

Realism
Semantic analysis
Sovereign

Discussion Questions

1. Politics is a difficult term to define, and there are many who disagree about what counts as political and what does not. How do you think about the political? Does your understanding of the term reach far enough? Does it reach too far? What do you think might be the hazards of reaching too far or not far enough?
2. What is the role of politics in our lives? Is it a positive or negative thing (or perhaps neither, or both)? What is the basis for your answer? Think of your first political memory? What is significant about it?
3. Using Aristotle's categories, how would you classify the Canadian government today? Why would you categorize it this way? Could it be classified any other way?
4. Much of politics is about normative judgements—about what counts as “the good life.” When faced with normative positions that are at odds with each other, how do you decide between them? On what basis do you make that decision?
5. Is political science best understood as a “science”? If so, how? If not, why not? What is gained by treating it as a science? What is lost? Is the move for science part of Behaviouralism?

Further Resources

- <http://www.aljazeera.com/>
Aljazeera English home page

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BBC News homepage
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The Guardian
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