

What is Political Science?

A man is a **social** animal and is **gregarious** in nature. As Aristotle remarks, “He who is unable to live in society or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or God”. Whereas man is social in nature, he is at the same time selfish and quarrelsome too. This aspect of the nature of man, and the instinct of living together and cooperating with one another require adjustment of behaviour according to some accepted rules. This requires that a society be properly organized. The society, thus, organized is called the state and the rules which determine social conduct are the laws of the state. All individuals are required to enforce the laws and see that they are equally observed by all others that constitute the government. The subject that deals with man in relation to the state and its government is called political science. Political science may be defined, in the simplest form, **as the study of man in the process of governing himself.**

One should bear in mind that political science is known by several names as politics (Aristotle), political science (William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft), science of state (R. G. Gettell) and science of politics (Sir Frederic Pollock). In effect, political science lacks a precise nomenclature. There are innumerable definitions of political science. Aristotle defined politics as the science of the state. He remarks, “it corresponds to that part of the affairs of the state which centers in government and that kind or part of government which speaks to law”.

In brief, political science as a relationship between man on the one hand and state and government on the other, studies the following themes:

1. Associations of human-beings
2. System of government
3. Analysis of political activities
4. Political thoughts and political behaviour
5. Practice of politics
6. Distribution of power and resources

The issues falling within the scope of political science

There is no general agreement on the nature and scope of political science, ‘the master science’ as Aristotle described it. This is because there is no universally accepted definition of political science that finds variation among the political scientists in meaning and content. However, following are the generally accepted themes that come within the field of political science.

1. Some writers restrict the scope of political science to the study of the state alone, for example, Bluntschli. All such writers exclude the study of government from the scope of political science, for the state for them obviously includes the study of government. A description of the state must include : (i) structure and functions of government; (ii) its

forms and institutions; (iii) modes of communication; (iv) interest groups; (v) mass media and communication; (vi) relationship involving rule, authority and power.

2. Few writers hold that political science deals only with government. As Karl W Deutsch remarks, "Because political science involves the making of decisions by public means, it is primarily concerned with government, that is, with the direction and self-direction of the study of large communities of the people".
3. Harold Laski takes a more realistic view and emphasizes that the scope of political science embraces the study of both the state and government, although he maintains that the state in reality means the government.
4. The study of types of state, i.e. unitary or federal also falls within the scope of political science.
5. Comparative politics falls within the ambit of political science. 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'.
6. International Relations also falls within the scope of political science. It studies politics among nations, including conflict, diplomacy, international law and organizations and international political economy.
7. Political theory, both classic and modern, attempts to define the good polity, often focused on major thinkers.
8. Public administration studies how bureaucracies work and how they can be improved.
9. Constitutional law studies the application and evolution of the constitutions within legal system.
10. Public policy studies the interface of politics and economics with an eye to developing effective programs.
11. The study of political institutions is another theme that falls within the scope of political science.
12. The study of political behaviour also falls within the scope of political science.

Methods of studying Political Science

Political science is an organized body of knowledge. It contains the facts which have been scientifically observed, collected and classified. There is no single method which can come to the rescue of a political scientist and help him to unfold the phenomenon of the state and government with some degree of precision. The generally accepted methods of political investigation are : (1) Historical method; (2) Observational method; (3) Experimental method; (4) Comparative method and (5) Philosophical method. To these methods may be added the method of analogy and the statistical or quantitative method. We shall deal with these methods in a manner as brief as possible.

- (1) **Historical method:** Machiavelli, Vico, Montesquieu, Savigny, Maine, Seeley and Freeman are the pioneers of historical method. The method lays on the use of historical evidence for a proper study of the political phenomena. It is useful because all political institutions

have a long record of their rise and growth and their present form may be well understood in the context of their past history. The advantage of historical method lies in the fact that it explains the past and enables us to draw dependable conclusions. The historical method gives a sense of history that warns us against repeating blunders of the past and instead correcting them for the future.

- (2) **Observational method:** James Bryce is the great advocate of observation method. This method lays stress on close observation of facts under study. James Bryce attached great importance to the study of the problems and institutions on the spot, to investigate their operations and form conclusions. He visited the USA, Canada, France, Switzerland, Australia and New Zealand, studied the people and their countries, closely observed the workings of their institutions and formed his own conclusions. The political investigator, said Bryce, must not confine his observation to one single country. The observational method is based on direct observation and reflection. It is practical and its utility is obvious. It helps in arriving at certain political principles in the light of the observations made and information obtained.
- (3) **Experimental method:** Experimental method is adopted in the field of natural sciences like physics and chemistry. It is said that it cannot be made use in a social science like political science. In a subject like political science, one deals with man's behaviour as a social and political creature. The method of experimentation cannot be used as behaviour differs from person to person on account of varying emotions, likes and dislikes. However, the experimental method can be used in the field of political science in its own way. The whole society is a laboratory in which political actions are put to test every day. If some policies succeed and some policies fail, its reasons should be traced in the fact of social experimentation which a social scientist must comprehend.
- (4) **Comparative method :** The comparative method of investigation is as old as Aristotle. He is said to have studied as many as 158 constitutions and after analyzing and comparing them, he arrived at certain definite conclusions. In modern times, the comparative method has been used by Montesquieu, De Tocqueville, Bryce and many others. Comparative method consists in drawing generalizations through comparisons. A student of political science may arrive at certain conclusions after establishing comparisons between different political systems, political institutions and political ideas. Its essence consists in noting similarities as well as differences in circumstances and conditions of the state under comparison. The comparison may be apparently between similar looking objects.
- (5) **Philosophical method:** The methods of investigation so far considered are inductive methods. These methods start with certain facts which are either historical in their character or are the result of experiment, comparison or observation and, then certain conclusions regarding the political phenomena are arrived at. The philosophical method,

on the other hand, is deductive or a priori and its prominent exponents are Plato, Rousseau, Hegel, Bradley, Immanuel Kant, Bosanquet and Sidgwick. The deductive method implies reasoning from or developing particular conclusions from a number of general principles or propositions which are admitted or assumed to be true. The philosophical or a priori method is thus reasoning from cause to effect, from a general principle to its consequences. In political science, this method starts from some abstract original idea about human nature and draws deduction from that idea as to the nature of the state, its aims, its functions and its future. It then attempts to harmonize its theories with the actual facts of history.

Utility of the study of Political Science

1. The study of political science is of great value and with its help people can know how and why the state was organized in the past and why its continuation is justified. Political science teaches about the functions of a state towards its citizens. Likewise, the citizens also learn about their duties towards the state.
2. As a result of political science, the citizens of a state come to know about the rights and privileges to which they are entitled. All such rights are mostly drawn from the UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights – 1948) and prescribed in the constitution of each state.
3. The people who are equipped with the knowledge of political science are an asset to the state. The knowledgeable people come to help the government in times of crisis and emergency situations.
4. Political science makes an effective electorate. If the electorate is intelligent and knowledgeable, then a good government can be set up to run the country's affairs. It should be borne in mind that government is the spokesman of the people.
5. Political science helps the administrators and statesmen to have knowledge about their institutions and the nature of work.
6. Political science acts as an important tool to better understand the world affairs. In other words, international relations can better be understood if one is backed by knowledge of political science.
7. A study of political science makes one aware of the different ideologies in the society.
8. Through learning political institutions, political systems, political culture etc., political science helps to bring societal change.
9. Political science helps in building leadership.
10. Political science teaches the lessons of cooperation, adjustment and tolerance.

In short, a modern man without knowledge of political science is imperfect. It is said that the people who neglect politics cannot be happy. Again, "whoever you are or want to be, you may not be interested in politics, but politics is interested in you". Hence, it is suggested that the study of political science should be made compulsory in all democratic countries.. Bernard Shaw remarked, "Political science is the science by which alone civilization can be saved".

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