

Politics, Power and Political Science

Outline

- Politics?
- Why matter for us?
- Politician vs Political Science.
- Definition of Politics, and Political Power.
- Evaluate various explanations of (holding) Political Power.

What is 'Politics?'

- **'Politics'** is the ongoing competition between people, usually in groups, to shape policy in their favor. To do so, they may seek to guide policy indirectly by shaping the beliefs and values of members of their society (Roskin, 2016, p.3).
- **'Politics'** on the hand is the banding together of the people in likeminded group to press a particular agenda.
- **'Politics'** is the process of collective choice resolving disagreement and reaching decision through persuasion, bargaining, discussion and compromise.

Politics Matters

“”Man is by nature a political animal and he who by nature and not by mere accident is without state is either above humanity or below it ””

---- Aristotle

He who is unable to live in society or who has no need because he is sufficient to for himself, must be either a beast or God

Politics Matters

If you do not take an interest and participate, **others will**, and **they will influence the decisions that govern your life.**

- ‡ Will they take us to war in a foreign land? Who might have to fight in that war?
- ‡ Will they alter the tax code to favor certain citizens and corporations? Who will have to pay in taxes what others avoid paying?
- ‡ Will they set up government programs whose costs escalate far beyond what anyone had foreseen? Who then will have to pay these costs?

A man may take more or less participation but it is certain that the destiny of man is linked with the State and government.

Politics

- Politics also involves decision making over the world's resources.
- Politics is about deciding who does and does not get access to what the world has to offer (Harold Laswell).
- Politics involves “change.

(Grigsby, 2014:05)

Conception of Politics Influenced by Many Factors:

- View of life
- Attitudes towards politics
- Nationality
- Age
- Economic status
- Place where you have grown
- Life experience

Politician vs. Political Science

- ❑ **Political Science** is not necessarily training to become a practicing politician. **Political science** is training in the calm, objective analysis of politics, which may or may not aid working politicians.

Politicians	Political Scientists
love power	are skeptical of power
seek popularity	seek accuracy
think practically	think abstractly
hold firm view	reach tentative conclusions
offer single causes	offer many causes
see short-term payoff	see long-term consequences
plan for next election	plan for next publication
respond to groups	seek the good of the whole
seek name recognition	see professional prestige

Again, What is 'Politics?' (Recap)

- Politics is the ongoing competition between people, usually in groups, to shape policy in their favor. To do so, they may seek to guide policy indirectly by shaping the beliefs and values of members of their society.
- Politics on the hand is the banding together of the people in likeminded group to press a particular agenda.
- Politics is the process of collective choice resolving disagreement and reaching decision through persuasion, bargaining, discussion and compromise.

Political Science vs. Politics

- **‘Political science’** is a social science concerned with the theory and practice of politics and the description and analysis of political systems and political behaviour. It comprises of several subfields, including: political theory, public policy, national politics, international relations, and comparative politics.
- **‘Politics’** is something that happens in the real world. Politics is the process by which people try to influence their government and the process by which the government decides which policies will be enacted.

Politician vs. Political Science

"Who Reads Political Science, Rarely Enter Into Politics
Who Are In Politics, They Rarely Read Political Science"

Political Power

“Political power is simply the ability of one person to get another to do something”

(ex: A gets B to do what A wants)

Contesting Views - Political Power

- i. Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) - “politics is about power, specifically the power to shape others behavior. Power in politics is getting people to do something they wouldn’t otherwise do—and sometimes having them think it was their idea”.
- ii. Some people dislike the concept of **political power** - It smacks of coercion, inequality, and occasionally of brutality. They denounce ‘power politics’ and suggest a governance without power like a happy band of brothers and sisters regulating themselves through love and sharing.

It is said, Communities formed on such a basis do not last; or, if they do last, it is only by transforming themselves into conventional structures of leaders and followers, buttressed by obedience patterns that look suspiciously like power. (Roskin, 2016, p. 4)

Political Power

- Political power seems to be built into the human condition.

Why do some people hold political power over others?

There is no definitive explanation of political power.

- Biological
- Psychological
- Cultural
- Rational,
- Irrational explanations

(Roskin, 2016, pp 4-8)

Political Power: 1] Biological Explanation

- Aristotle said it first : “**Man is by nature a political animal.**” Aristotle meant that humans live naturally in herds, like **elephants** or deer. **Biologically**, they need each other for sustenance and survival. It is also natural that they array themselves into ranks of leaders and followers, like all herd animals.
- Taking a cue from Aristotle, a modern biological explanation would say that forming a political system and obeying its leaders is **innate human behavior, passed on to future generations with one’s genes.**
- Some thinkers argue that human politics shows the same “dominance hierarchies” that other mammals set up. Politicians tend to be “alpha males” — or think they are.

Political Power: Biological Explanation

The advantage of the biological approach is its simplicity, but it raises a number of questions-

If we grant that humans are naturally political, how do we explain the instances when political groups fall apart and people disobey authority?

Perhaps we should modify the theory: **Humans are imperfectly political (or social) animals.** Most of the time people form groups and obey authority, but sometimes, under certain circumstances, they do not.

Political Power:

2] Psychological Explanation

- Psychological explanations of politics and obedience are closely allied with biological theories. Both posit needs derived from centuries of evolution in the formation of political groups.
- The psychologists have refined their views with empirical research.
- Psychological studies also show that **most people are naturally conformist**.
(Example – Milgram Study - <https://www.simplypsychology.org/milgram.html>)
- Most members of a group see things the group's way.

Political Power: Psychological Explanation (Cont.)

- Psychologist Irving Janis found many foreign policy mistakes were made in a climate of “groupthink,” in which a **leadership team** tells itself that all is well and that the present policy is working.

For example: Groups ignore doubters who tell them that the Japanese will attack Pearl Harbor in 1941 or that the 1961 Bay of Pigs landing of Cuban exiles will fail.

- Obedience to authority and groupthink suggest that **humans have deep-seated needs—possibly innate—to fit into groups and their norms**. Perhaps this is what makes human society possible, but it also makes possible horrors such as the Nazi Holocaust and more recent massacres.

Political Power:

3] Cultural Explanation (learned, not inherited)

- Political science developed an interesting subfield, *political culture*, whose researchers found that a country's political culture was formed by many long-term factors: religion, child rearing, land tenure, and economic development.
- For much of the twentieth century, the cultural theorists—**those who believe behavior is learned**—dominated. The cultural approach to political life holds some optimism. If all human behavior is learned, bad behavior can be unlearned and society improved.
- Educating young people to be tolerant, cooperative, and just will gradually change a society's culture for the better, according to this view.

Political Power: Cultural Explanation (cont.)

- Changing culture, however, is slow and difficult, as the American occupiers of Iraq discovered.
- Culture contributes a lot to political behavior, but the theory has some difficulties:
 - **First**, where does culture come from? History? Economics? Religion?
 - **Second**, if all behavior is cultural, various political systems should be as different from each other as their cultures. But, especially in the realm of politics, we see similar political attitudes and patterns in lands with very different cultures.
 - Politicians everywhere tend to become corrupt, regardless of culture.

Political Power: 4]Rational Explanation

(based on the ability to reason)

- The biological, psychological, and cultural schools downplay human reason, claiming that people are either born or conditioned to certain behavior, and individuals seldom think rationally
- Another school of thought approaches politics as a **rational** thing; that is, people know what they want most of the time, and they have good reasons for doing what they do.
- Classic political theorists, such as Hobbes and Locke, held that humans form “**civil society**” because their **powers of reason tell** them that it is much better than **anarchy**.
- To safeguard life and property, people form governments. If those governments become abusive, the people have the right to dissolve them and start anew.

Political Power: Rational Explanation

- A political system based on the presumption of human reason stands a better chance of governing justly and humanely.
- If leaders believe that people obey out of biological inheritance or cultural conditioning, they will think they can get away with all manner of corruption and misrule.
- If, on the other hand, rulers fear that people are rational, they will respect the public's ability to discern wrongdoing.
- Accordingly, even if people are not completely rational, it is probably for the best if rulers think they are.

Political Power: 5] Irrational Explanation

(based on the power to use fear and myth to cloud reason)

- Late in the nineteenth century, a group of thinkers expounded the view that people are basically **irrational** , especially when it comes to political power.
- People are emotional, dominated by myths and stereotypes, and politics is really the manipulation of symbols.
- A crowd is like a wild beast that can be whipped up by charismatic leaders to do their bidding. What people regard as rational is really myth; just keep feeding the people myths to control them.
- The first practitioner of this school was Mussolini, founder of fascism in Italy, followed by Hitler in Germany. A soft-spoken Muslim fundamentalist, Osama bin Laden, got an irrational hold on thousands of fanatical followers. Believing the myth that America was the enemy of Islam, some willingly ended their lives in terrorist acts.

Political Power: Irrational Explanation (Cont.)

- There may be a good deal of truth to the irrational view of human political behavior, but it has catastrophic consequences. Leaders who use irrationalist techniques start believing their own propaganda and lead their nations to war, economic ruin, or tyranny.
- Some detect irrationalism even in the most advanced societies, where much of politics consists of screaming crowds and leaders striking heroic poses.

Power as a Composite

- There are elements of truth in all these explanations of political power. At different times in different situations, any one of them can explain power.

For Example: American Separation from Britain.

- **Rational?** –
- Tom Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* rationally explained why America should separate from Britain. The drafters of both the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were imbued with the rationalism of their age.
- **Cultural?** –
- By the late eighteenth century, the thirteen American colonies had grown culturally separate from Britain. People thought of themselves as Americans rather than as English colonists.
- They increasingly read American newspapers and communicated among themselves rather than with Britain. **Perhaps the separation was more cultural than rational**

Power as a Composite

or Psychological and irrational I? –

- Samuel Adams was a gifted firebrand, Thomas Jefferson a powerful writer, and George Washington a charismatic general.

Rather it is Composite.....

- The American break with Britain and the founding of a new order were complex mixtures of all these factors. Such complex mixtures of factors go into any political system you can mention.
- To be sure, at times one factor seems more important than others, but we cannot exactly determine the weight to give any one factor.
- And notice how the various factors blend into one another. The biological factors lead to the psychological, which in turn lead to the cultural, the rational, and the irrational, forming a seamless web.

Reference

Roskin, M. G., Cord, R. L., Medeiros, J. A., & Jones, W. S. (2016). **Political Science: An Introduction** (14th Edition). Upper Saddle River: Pearson. (**Chapter 1**).

Grigsby, E. (2014). *Cengage Advantage Books: Analyzing Politics*. Nelson Education. (**Chapter 1**)