Introduction to Politics

Political Science is an empirical science, a method and a topic

It is the study of politics and governments, and it is a social science which means it studies the human behaviour from different perspectives

* Political science study political behaviour, if you study PS you study behaviour in a lot of environments.

Definition: What is the politics about?

* Search of common good
* Fight for power
* Leaders
* Laws
* Elections
* Lobby
* Solutions to social problems (or of economic nature)
* Tricks
* Satisfaction of individual ambitions
* Power

Definition that is univocal l(various fields), unambiguous and without value connotation (science can be moral). E.g. Political Science study ideologies but it is not an ideology itself. There is no judgement here.

Definitions of Politics

* Aristotle (350 bC): Intrinsic dimension of the life of each citizen living in the community
* Thomas Aquinas (1250): Common good realization (but it is not univocal for the reason that common good changes easily)
* Machiavelli (1500): Technique or art in order to gain power (he is not interested on the ideal way to govern society, but in the techniques to gain power)
* Laswell H. (1936): Who gets what (power to do decision), where (arena of the politics), and how
* Max Weber (1900): Strive for participating to power […] either among States or within a State (power)
* David Easton (1950): Authoritative allocation of values for a society (through politics you allocate values for a society, and its allocation of value would be choosing the side for some decisions).
* Giovanni Sartori (1987): Sphere of public decisions – taken by people holding political positions – which are public, sovereign and which can be sanctioned in a coercive way. When a decision is taken by a political figure, and it can be sanctioned if you do not do what you are supposed to.

Politics: working definitions

* Politics: the human activity of making public authoritative decisions  
  in more details, politics is the activity of acquiring (and maintaining) the power of making decisions and exercising this power. It is the conflict or competition for power

Questions that politics seeks to answer:

Which decisions are made?

How decisions are made?  
Who makes or influence decisions?

Politics and Policy

* Politics: Human activity of making public authoritative decisions
* (Public) Policy: Anything a government chooses to do or not to do (maintaining the status quo)[Thomas Dye, 1972]  
  A set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them [William Jenkins, 1978]

Relations between Politics and Policy

Politics determines policies (false) vs Policies determines politics (true) [Lowi, 1972]

* Some decisions are so specific and difficult to be solved that the content of the policies determine politics

If one studies politics, they are interested in:

* Elections and electoral system
* Legislative voting
* Bureaucracy/ executives
* Political culture
* Political Participation

If one studies policies, they are interested in:

* How an issue becomes a public problem and enter in an institutional agenda
* Which actors decide on it and how
* Which outcomes emerge in relation to the original problem (has been the

Political System (D. Easton)

Easton’s aim was to build a general empirical theory including all actors and processes of political systems.

Political system is conceived as a set of structures (institutions and agencies) in order to reach the collective and authoritative allocation of values (output, i.e. public policies). It receives support as well as demands (inputs, requests of parties.. directly to the political systems) for the domestic as well as the international environment which it shapes through outputs in the feedback loop.

* Environment is what is outside the political system
* Decisions have an impact on the social life of the environment
* The environment evaluates the policies through feedback