

Chapter 1

Studying Politics

Chapter Summary

This is a general introduction to the book. The chapter provides some overview of the study of politics, and the nature of politics in our lives. The relationship between politics and the social sciences and humanities is explained. Politics and society, decision making, and political institutions are presented as the basis for the study of politics. There is also a historical discussion of politics as it evolved from the Greeks to modern schools of political science.

Different approaches and methodologies are examined, relating these developments to major eras in the discipline. The “comparative approach” is introduced as the most significant viewpoint taken in the text book. (This approach is discussed in the context of international politics later in Chapter 9.) Here it is argued that knowing your own system is enriched by comparing it to others.

The chapter addresses the prevalence of apathy in modern politics, and suggests reasons why we ought to overcome our indifference. We are part of our politics, even if we try to avoid it! A theme that presents throughout the book is to develop a critical, but not cynical, view of politics. Politics, as the chapter states, is part of our everyday lives and is ultimately unavoidable in modern life.

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, students should be able to:

- distinguish the various approaches used in political studies;
- understand how politics affects our daily lives;
- consider the coexisting pressures of division and connection in a changing world;
- examine politics at the international and the domestic levels; and
- consider what it means to be a citizen in Canada.

Key Terms

Analytical approach: perspective that views politics as an empirical (that can be observed) discipline, rather than a science; argues that politics cannot be broken down into parts, but must be seen comprehensively

Authoritarianism: political system requiring absolute obedience to a constituted authority

Behaviouralism: perspective that concentrates on the “tangible” aspects of political life, rather than values; objective was to establish a discipline that was “scientific” and objective

Citizenship: status granted to people that comes with responsibilities and duties as well as rights

Comparative approach: method of political analysis that compares different systems of political authority, based on system type, time period, or form of leadership

Conflict: differences in preferred outcomes among social groups

Conflict resolution: process in domestic or international affairs that attempts to reconcile antagonism (either existing or potential) through the use of mediation and negotiation

Decision-making: mechanism or pattern of relations involving different levels of government in which determinations and judgements regarding the governance of the political system are made (sometimes referred to as the “black box”)

Empirical: analysis based not on concepts and theory, but on what can be observed or experimented upon

Ethnic and religious conflict: war or opposition among different racial, linguistic, or religious groups

Ethnocentrism: belief that one’s culture or group is superior to others or that other cultures or groups must be examined in relation to one’s own

Globalization: the intensification of economic, political, social, and cultural relations across borders

Government: the institutions and people responsible for carrying out the affairs and administration of a political system

Influence: the ability to change behaviour in others without exerting direct power over them

International politics: the study of foreign policy and relations among states and other actors at the international level; also called international relations

Levels of analysis: approach to political studies that suggests that accurate analysis must be inclusive of international, domestic, and individual arenas of interaction

Liberal democracy: political system based freedom and individual liberty, and on the principle that governance requires the assent of all citizens through participation in the electoral process, articulation of views, and direct or indirect representation in governing institutions

Most different systems: method of comparative analysis that examines political systems that share no (or few) common features yet have similar outcome or phenomena

Most similar systems: method of comparative analysis that examines political systems that have common features in an effort to identify different variables

Multiculturalism: peaceful coexistence of several racial, cultural, or ethnic identities in one nation

Multinational corporations (MNCs): corporate bodies that operate in more than one country

Non-governmental organization (NGO): non-profit group organized on a local, national, or international level

Political economy: approach that views political and economic spheres as harmonious and mutually dependent perceptions of the world; relationship between people, government, and the economy

Political studies: formal study of politics within and among nations

Post-behaviouralism: approach that attempted to reconcile the problems of behaviouralism by allowing for values and ideology in its analysis

Power: ability to achieve goals in a political system and to have others do as you wish them to

Protectionism: tendency of countries to safeguard their own economic sectors or industries through tariffs, quotas, or other forms of trade and investment legislation

Public goods: resources that are present in a political system whose use by one individual should not affect use by others

Social sciences: scientific study of human society and social relationships

Socialization: process whereby individuals act in a social manner; creation of social and political authority and rules to regulate behaviour and thus permit operation of social units

Structural-functionalism: approach that focuses on the role of political structures and their functions in society

Subjective reality: perspective of reality that is influenced by our personal experiences and bias

Systems theory: approach that views politics as a system of interaction, binding political structures, such as government to individual action; argues that politics is a dynamic process of information flows and responses that encompasses political institutions, groups, and individuals

Traditional approach: method in politics drawing heavily on fields of law, philosophy, and history and relying on subjective evaluation of the observer; also called the analytical approach

Discussion Questions

1. How does the enormous amount of political information made available to us daily make some people more cynical about politics? Can you think of ways that we could change this cynicism among Canadians?
2. In what ways is politics a distinct area of study? What other fields are most closely related to politics? Are there others that you feel have less in common with politics? Why?

3. The study of politics most often takes place in “political science” classes. How “scientific” is politics? Should other social science disciplines also make direct reference to science in their studies?
4. Differentiate the empirical and normative analysis in political studies? What are the ways to evaluate competing normative claims?
5. Do you believe that political power is controlled by a few in their own interests and government cannot be trusted for the public good or do you think that the system is transparent enough to respond to a diversity of interests?
6. The competition for scarce resources at home and globally means that some people benefit far more than others. Is this natural? Can you think of things we could do to balance benefits more equitably?

Statements for Debate

1. Be it resolved that: of all the social sciences, politics is the most important because it addresses the nature of power and freedom in society.
2. Be it resolved that: politics is a science.
3. Be it resolved that: the study of politics always have to include the state and its institutions.
4. Be it resolved that: all citizens have a responsibility to be politically informed and participate in politics.

Class Activities

1. **Let’s all take the citizenship quiz!**

Objective: To test your knowledge of all things Canadian.

Materials needed: Paper and pen

Description of activity: Give your answers for each question, and then compare with the correct answers. Anonymity is best to avoid embarrassment and alienation of students who are new to politics.

Citizenship Quiz:

1. When is Canada Day and what does it celebrate?
 - a) June 15th of each year to celebrate the anniversary of Confederation
 - b) August 8th of each year to celebrate the joining of British Columbia to Confederation
 - c) July 1st of each year to celebrate the anniversary of Confederation
 - d) May 21st of each year to remember Queen Victoria

2. When did the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms become part of the Canadian Constitution?
 - a) 1867
 - b) 1905
 - c) 1982
 - d) 1878

3. How can you show responsibility by participating in your community?
 - a) Mind your own business
 - b) Have a party
 - c) Keep your property tidy
 - d) Join a community group

4. What will you promise when you take the Oath of Citizenship?
 - a) Pledge allegiance to the Queen, observe the laws of Canada and fulfill the duties of a Canadian
 - b) Pledge to be faithful to the Queen
 - c) Promise to observe the laws of Canada
 - d) Fulfill duties as a Canadian citizen

5. What are the territories of Northern Canada and their capital cities?
 - a) Alaska (Juneau) and Yukon Territory (Whitehorse)
 - b) Northwest Territories (Yellowknife) and Alaska (Juneau)
 - c) Northwest Territories (Yellowknife) and Yukon Territory (Whitehorse)
 - d) Yukon Territory (Whitehorse), Northwest Territories (Yellowknife), and Nunavut (Iqaluit)

6. Which region covers more than one-third of Canada?
 - a) Central Canada
 - b) Prairies
 - c) Atlantic Canada
 - d) Northern Canada

7. One-third of all Canadians live in which province?
 - a) Quebec
 - b) Ontario
 - c) Northwest Territories
 - d) Manitoba

8. What is a major river in Quebec?
 - a) Fraser River
 - b) St Lawrence River
 - c) Niagara River
 - d) Hudson Bay

9. What are the three parts of Parliament?
 - a) The queen, governor general, and prime minister

- b) The House of Commons, the Legislative Assembly, and the Senate
- c) The queen, the Legislative Assembly, and the Senate
- d) The queen, the House of Commons, and the Senate

10. What are the three levels of government in Canada?
- a) Federal, provincial/territorial, municipal or local
 - b) Federal, provincial, and city
 - c) Federal, territorial, and provincial
 - d) Federal, state, and local

Citizenship Quiz Answers:

- | | | |
|------|------|-------|
| 1. C | 5. D | 9. D |
| 2. C | 6. D | 10. A |
| 3. D | 7. B | |
| 4. A | 8. B | |

2. Name that politician!

Objective: To see how many of your political representatives you can identify.

Materials needed: Paper and pen, access to the Internet.

Description of activity: Fill in as many blanks as you can. Then, compare your answers with what you find on the Internet. The Government of Canada webpage, as well as your provincial or territorial and municipal sites are the best bet for up-to-date information.

Political position	Name(s)
Governor General	
Prime Minister	
Your Member of Parliament	
Your Senator(s)	
Your provincial representative (MPP, MLA, MNA, etc.)	
Your mayor	
Your municipal representative (councillor, etc.)	

3. Quiz! True/False

Objective: To test your knowledge about the study and nature of politics.

Materials needed: Paper and pen

Description of activity: Circle your answers for each question, and then compare with the correct answers.

True/False Quiz:

1. The study of politics is an ancient part of human socialization and organization.
True/False
2. Politics is one of those areas in life that we cannot avoid.
True/False
3. In the analysis of politics, 'power' is the ability to affect the behavior of others.
True/False
4. Influence is the ability to use fear or threat of harm to achieve objectives.
True/False
5. People power refers to the ability of ordinary people to challenge the powerful through political protests, marches, and sit-ins.
True/False
6. Government is defined as coalitions built in order to increase the rank of an individual.
True/False
7. In every civilization (historical or present), political power has been used to gain control over wealth and resources.
True/False
8. Public goods are resources that are present in a political system exclusively for elite group of a society.
True/False
9. State is a recognized and sovereign political unit.
True/False
10. Liberal democracy is a political system requiring absolute obedience to a constituted authority.
True/False

True/False Answers:

1. True 2. True 3. True 4. False 5. True 6. False 7. True
8. False 9. True 10. False

4. **Fill in the blanks**

Objective: To test your knowledge about the approaches in political studies.

Materials needed: Paper and Pen

Description of activity: Fill in the blanks for each question, and then compare with the correct answers.

1. _____ seeks to understand peoples' political behavior by using quantitative methods. The goal is to develop a scientific and value-free approach.
2. Political analysis that based on what can observed or experimented upon in the definition of _____.
3. _____ is an approach that allows values and ideology in its analysis.
4. A perspective of reality that is influenced by our personal experiences and bias is defined as _____.
5. _____ is an approach that focuses on the role of political structures and their functions in society.
6. A methodological approach that uses empirical comparisons to understand countries and political phenomenon is called _____.
7. _____ is an approach that views relationship between people, government, and the economy as interrelated.
8. _____ is a belief that one's culture or group is superior to others.
9. An inclusive analysis of international, domestic, and individual arenas of interaction is called _____.
10. _____ is intensification of economic, political, social, and cultural relations across borders.

Fill in the blanks Answers:

1. Behaviouralism 2. Empirical Analysis 3. Post-behaviouralism

- 4. Subjective Reality 5. Structural-functionalism 6. Comparative Politics
- 7. Political Economy 8. Ethnocentrism 9. Levels of Analysis 10. Globalization

Teaching Aids

Films

- “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington” (1939). A classic film depicting the highs and lows of political life.
- “Milk” (2008). Depiction of the life of gay political activist Harvey Milk in the early 1970s.

Web Links

- Canadian Political Science Association (www.cpsa-acsp.ca): the website for the principal political science association in Canada. An excellent source of information for students and faculty on teaching, research, departments across Canada, and careers in political science.
- Careers for Political Scientists (<http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/careers.shtml>): a direct link to the careers section of the CPSA home page.
- Canadian Citizenship Test Homepage (www.cic.gc.ca/english/citizenship/cit-test.asp): source for more information about citizenship tests, as discussed in this chapter.

Further Readings

- Almond, Gabriel A. (1990). *A Discipline Divided: Schools and Sects in Political Studies*. Newbury Park: Sage Publishers.
- Aristotle (1986). *Politics*. T.A. Sinclair (Trans.). Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books.
- Easton, David (1981). *The Political System* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hobbes, Thomas (1962 [1651]). *Leviathan Or, the Matter Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*. Michael Oakeshott (Ed.). New York: Collier Books.
- Laozi (1976 [1963]). *Tao Te Ching*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.
- Lasswell, Harold (1958). *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How*. New York: Meridian Books.
- Seymour, Michel, ed. (2004). *The Fate of the Nation State*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press.