

Unit 1: Foundational Concepts of Politics

1a: Situate the academic discipline of political science within the broader field of social science.

- 1a.1. Political science is one of several interrelated academic disciplinary fields that explores and attempts to explain various aspects of human behavior and human relations.
- A. The social sciences include political science, anthropology, sociology, economics, history, psychology, cognitive science, behavioral science, and organizational behavior.
 - B. Each of the social sciences connects with other disciplines within the social sciences.
 - C. Give an example of how politics, economics, and social issues interplayed and influenced the US presidential election campaigns of the leading candidates in 2016.
 - D. Refer back to Saylor Academy's ["Introduction to Political Science"](#) to refresh your understanding of how closely related and overlapping yet distinct the various disciplinary fields of the social sciences actually are. Why is it important to study political science even if one is not necessarily interested in becoming a politician or government official?

Political science is often thought of as the science explaining who gets what, where, when, and how. In other words, it is the study of power among individuals in communities and the world. Because power also can be exercised in the economic sphere, between persons, and even within an individual, a complete study of power must refer not only to political science's principles and understandings but also to several other social science fields such as economics, history, sociology, and psychology. Could a political candidate seeking office, for example, run an effective campaign without considering how individual voters develop political preferences and make decisions? It would be difficult to understand how political actors gain their positions of prominence without paying attention to the other social science fields.

- 1a.2. The field of political science itself includes several subfields, each dealing with a different aspect of political decision-making and public life.
- A. The main subfields of political science in the United States are comparative politics, international politics, American politics, political theory, political behavior, public administration, and public policy.
 - B. Each country or geographical region of the world has its own distinct subfield focusing on the politics of its own country or region. For example, Latin American politics includes the study of political power and political decision-making in the countries of Central and South America as well as the overlapping study of politics among Hispanic Americans and immigrants from Central and South America who migrated to the US for work, as refugees, as students, or as family members of persons already in the US.
 - C. Why might Canadian political scientists study both Canadian and American politics?

Consider what the academic world would be like if no one studied political science. Could the other social sciences adequately explain power relations and the acquisition, distribution, and wielding of power if we had no field called "political science"? Do we really need to study power and politics in an academic setting, or is it enough to use other

fields such as history and economics to explain power relations between individuals and communities?

1b: Define politics, power, authority, and legitimacy.

1b.1. Politics and power are integrally related, yet each represents a distinct concept.

A. Politics is the study of who gets or exercises power and how they do this.

B. Politics takes place at many levels, from very local levels such as in a family or a neighborhood all the way up to the global level, as with international politics – the political interactions of countries, geographical regions, and international actors such as global alliances.

C. Give an example of how politics may explain interactions and power dynamics in a family.

D. How politics is involved in trade relations and alliances between countries?

The concept of political power involves two basic contrasting forms of power: that coming from groups of people acting collectively to exert influence and that coming from an individual, group, or governmental organization or body attempting to force the people under its influence or in other parts of the world to accept its authority or follow its directions. In what ways does this double meaning of power shape the ways people feel about politics and government?

1b.2. Authority and legitimacy are mutually connected yet different concepts. Both relate to considerations of power and the use of power to achieve goals in organized societies.

A. When an individual or group accepts that another individual or group has power over them, the party exercising the power is said to have authority.

B. Legitimacy signifies that the person or body holding power over others is doing so in a way that is fitting and appropriate.

C. Can you think of an example of a political leader who has authority over his or her community members but not legitimacy? How can a political leader lack legitimacy while still wielding authority? What leads to the sense that a politician is illegitimately exercising power?

To better understand the nuances of authority and legitimacy, re-read William Little's comments on these two concepts in *Introduction to Sociology*: [“Chapter 17: Government and Politics.”](#)

1c: Analyze the debate over political science as a “scientific” discipline.

1c.1. The principles of scientific research require that hypotheses are developed and tested and that a logically connected set or series of hypotheses are used to construct a scientific theory to explain phenomena in the world.

A. When political scientists develop theories of power relations and the wielding of power among individuals, groups, nations, and international actors, they make testable hypotheses against which they compare relevant evidence collected objectively or

logically determined, depending on whether they examine real-world events or explore concepts more philosophically.

B. When is it appropriate to question the scientific validity of a political theory or hypothesis? Why might the public not trust theories developed from public opinion polls on the one hand or from logically developed, philosophical thinking on the other? Is it possible for political science to be truly scientific and rigorous? Does the fluidity of social relationships and human relations make it difficult or impossible to test political theories adequately?

C. Consider again the views of the authors of the University of North Carolina's Chapel Hill Writing Center's [handout on political science](#). Are the authors convincing in their argument that political scientists can develop theories as rigorously testable as the theories of "hard scientists" (biologists, chemists, physicists), often based on the observable behavior of physical objects and objectively measurable phenomena?

1c.2. To test political hypotheses and develop political theories, "operationalizing variables" is necessary – that is, defining changeable elements in measurable ways, where operations can be conducted (like varying the amount of one element expected to affect another phenomenon).

A. If a variable cannot be operationalized, it is not possible to test it in a hypothesis.

B. Both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used to test hypotheses in political science.

C. When is it appropriate to use qualitative means to test political science hypotheses rather than quantitative methods based on hard data? Is it equally scientific to use qualitative methods of research to investigate power relations and political phenomena, or is qualitative research never as conclusive or rigorous as quantitative research based on measurable data and statistics?

D. Why is statistical analysis important in verifying hypotheses in political science about election behavior and voting? What are the limitations of using only quantitative research methods in developing theories of voting behavior? Re-read Matt Woods's article, "[An Insider View on the Relevance of Political Scientists to Government](#)," as you develop your answers.

Many contend that public policy must be based on well-tested scientific hypotheses and theories with sufficient evidence before laws are enacted and public programs funded with tax-payers' dollars are implemented. Others say that because political science is less rigorous than physical sciences like biology and chemistry, political theories that are less easily tested also can provide the grounds for making political decisions and developing public policies. Should public policy only be based on objective testable hypotheses, or can more general collectively approved goals (such as equity, fairness, income equality, or liberty) shape decisions and action by politicians?

1d: Explain the concepts of constitutionalism and political representation.

1d.1. Constitutionalism is the belief that a formal written or unwritten constitution should serve as the framework of government for those living under a political authority.

- A. A constitution is a basic framework of organizing principles for government and outlines power relationships between governing authorities and the people to be governed.
- B. In a constitutional form of government, the constitution may be one document or a set of documents or oral agreements made over a period of time.
- C. The laws of a country must be developed in accordance with the country's constitution in order to be accorded legitimacy by the people of that country. When a country has a constitution, all laws and legal decisions (judgments on the application and enforceability of laws) should align with the constitution. If a law is enacted that conflicts with the constitution, the constitution should take priority and the law must be annulled.
- D. Many political scientists contend that a constitutional form of government provides greater stability for political decision-making and transitions of power than governments either lacking or only loosely following a formal constitution. Countries undergoing radical political change in short periods of time may have constitutions that are not very long lasting or influential on political leaders. The US has one of the longest-standing constitutions in the world as the US Constitution was developed and approved at the end of the 18th century and is still in force today.
- E. Re-read the Wikipedia article on [Constitutionalism](#) to see if you think it is beneficial for the US to be guided strictly by a constitution in developing laws, even at the state level, or whether it is acceptable to follow the constitution less strictly, with interpretations based more on current social, economic, and political conditions than on strict constitutional provisions and principles.

1d.2. Political representation, in contrast to constitutionalism, maintains that following public opinion and the voice of large groups of citizens expressing their political opinions is more useful and appropriate than following constitutional provisions.

- A. Political representation can be achieved by selecting legislative representatives at the local, state, and national levels of government through regular elections.
- B. Political representation also can be more informally expressed through large groups of citizens and residents in a political community participating in protests, marches, demonstrations; contacting governmental officials via social media, email, mail, or phone; and writing articles, blogs, and editorials in news media.
- C. Give an example of how social media influenced the US presidential campaign of 2016.

To develop your view on whether political representation is more advantageous in building a vibrant democracy than strictly following a written constitution, read both articles presented as part of subunit 1.4 on political theory ("[Constitutionalism](#)" and "[Representation \(politics\)](#)"). Does the situation in question (e.g. supporting or disapproving abortion rights, allowing or prohibiting homosexual marriage, or allowing or barring immigrants from entering a country) have more to do with strictly following constitutional guidelines or with taking public opinion into account in determining which political course of action to take?

1e: Illustrate the rational-legal, charismatic, and traditional forms of legitimacy.

1e.1. According to Max Weber, the German sociologist who developed an influential theory of political power in the early 1900s, the rational-legal form of legitimacy builds government legitimacy through a bureaucracy efficiently performing various functions of government through an interconnected series of legally based decisions and laws.

A. The rational-legal system of government requires members of a political community to agree to abide by a constitutional framework and laws in accordance with the constitution.

B. In a rational-legal system, the governmental office carries the weight of authority, not the individual person who occupies an official position.

C. Review *Introduction to Sociology*: [“Chapter 17: Government and Politics”](#) to refresh your understanding of how the rational-legal approach to government contrasts with the charismatic and traditional forms of legitimacy. Is Weber’s picture of the sources of legitimacy of governing authority convincing? Can governmental leaders gain legitimacy in any other way?

Can you think of a country with a rational-legal system of government, where a carefully constructed hierarchical network of bureaucratic officials fulfills government functions in efficient business-like ways? Cite a president who deferred in decision-making to a government bureaucracy. Does the rational-legal system of government make top political leaders weak?

1e.2. Charismatic legitimacy stems from leaders’ gaining power and legitimacy by specific personality traits and the ability to charm and convince people to follow them – i.e., charisma.

A. Charismatic leaders rule by their own unique perspective and not necessarily by strictly interpreting laws or constitutions.

B. Following a charismatic leader may be dangerous, as such a leader usually assumes an out-of-proportion significance and sway over the populace and may be less easily deposed.

Identify some of the risks and benefits for citizens in a country where a charismatic leader assumes political control. Consider such cases as Nazi Germany under Hitler, Uganda under Idi Amin, and Syria under Bashar al-Assad on the one hand and the United States under John F. Kennedy, South Africa under Nelson Mandela, and Burma under Aung San Suu Kyi on the other as you reflect on the possible disadvantages and advantages of charismatic leadership.

1e.3. In some societies, the assumptions, customs, and practices surrounding political leadership are followed as a matter of tradition. The people follow them almost unquestioningly because “this is what always has been done.” Legitimacy is granted to persons who assume authority in government according to the “old way of doing things.”

A. In a traditional society, religious and community leaders who inherit their positions are the ones most likely to assume political control. Such societies are typically hierarchically organized, with political power and authority distributed from the top down.

B. A traditionally governed society is generally slow to change, and political decisions, while not necessarily made democratically, are often adhered to because those governed are used to following the traditional leaders and have accepted this form of rule for generations.

C. Why might a traditionally governed society suddenly change and shift to a new form of governmental legitimacy when subjected to outside influences such as exposure to global media or international trade or included in international political alliances?

Consider Weber's three-category depiction of political legitimacy. Was he accurate in describing conditions in the 19th century but perhaps not today? Does Weber's framework of legitimacy require adjustments to adequately explain political phenomena and authority today?

1f: Compare and contrast smart power, soft power, and hard power.

1f.1. Hard power is the type of power achieved and enforced through the use of force, primarily military force or police force.

A. Through most of history, hard power was used as the primary means of persuasion to get adversaries of a government to toe the line or to submit to governmental control.

B. Diplomacy and persuasion – softer power – also was used over the centuries to convince adversaries within or outside of a political constituency to follow the political leaders' direction.

C. During the Cold War, hard power based on military might was predominant in both the United States and the Soviet Union. As conditions changed in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc crumbled in the late 1980s and early 1990s, soft power became more significant in political decision-making internationally.

1f.2. Soft power is power stemming from persuasive attraction, not military measures, to accomplish one's goals. Soft power comes from the influence of culture and ethical beliefs and values – in other words, “co-option” – rather than coercive force or direct payments aimed at influencing an adversary. (See Hallams's [“From Crusader to Exemplar: Bush, Obama and the Reinvigoration of America's Soft Power.”](#))

A. The concept of soft power was developed by Joseph Nye, an American political scientist, near the end of the Cold War period, after the potential use of nuclear technology had made military action directly between the United States and the Soviet Union less desirable but proxy wars in third-world countries were still creating significant losses of life and property.

B. Military officials and police forces typically rely on the threat or actual use of physical force to get their adversaries to behave in ways they want, although many military and police officials would say this is a last-resort method after trying softer means of persuasion.

C. Under what circumstances, if any, is it appropriate for military or security forces to use force to stop a crowd of angry protestors? What other means could be used to shape the behavior of large groups of people unhappy with government decisions or political leadership?

When is it appropriate to use military force to threaten a belligerent opponent and when is soft power (diplomacy, persuasion, and promises of cultural benefits – the proverbial carrot, not the stick) more appropriate? Cite specific recent situations where political leaders have used either hard power or soft power to shape the behavior of other nations.

1f.3. Smart power refers to the power to achieve desired outcomes from the behavior of another country, region, or adversary by diplomatic or persuasive measures combined with force, such as sanctions, threats, or the actual use of military force or police force, depending on circumstances.

A. Not having experienced either the pluses or minuses of relying on soft power versus hard power, it may be hard for a people to recognize the benefits of blending these two principal forms (soft and hard power) to create a system of government where smart power is the norm.

B. Is it possible to run a country without using a combination of hard power and soft power?

See Section IV, “Barack Obama and the Revitalization of America’s Soft Power,” of Ellen Hallam’s [“From Crusader to Exemplar”](#) to discover why President Obama believed smart power was preferable to a strict use of either hard power or soft power.

Considering that many peace activists believe no use of coercive force is appropriate, how should terrorists be dealt with? Is it ever possible to completely outlaw and prevent the use of coercive physical force or punishment in a society?

Unit 1 Vocabulary List

Political science
Social science
Economics
History
Sociology
Scientific knowledge
Hypothesis
Power
Legitimacy
Authority
Coercion
Diplomacy
Soft power
Hard power
Smart power
Rational-legal legitimacy
Charismatic leadership
Traditional legitimacy
Constitution
Constitutionalism

Representation
Republic
Democracy