

THE COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO POLITICAL SCIENCE

Fields, Theories, Methods, and Real-World Applications

A systematic map of the discipline from power and institutions to behavior, policy, international order, and political change

THE COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO POLITICAL SCIENCE

FIELDS, THEORIES, METHODS, AND REAL-WORLD APPLICATIONS

I. WHAT IS POLITICAL SCIENCE?

Definition
Political science is the systematic study of power, authority, governance, and collective decision-making in human societies, at the domestic and international levels.

Etymology
From Greek: *polis* (city-state, community) + *-logia* (pertaining to) = *-logy* (study). Literally, "the study of the city" or "public affairs."

Principal Objects of Study
The state, government, power, authority, legitimacy, institutions, law, policy, political behavior, processes, groups, classes, elites, and the international order.

Academic Purposes
To explain political phenomena, understand human cooperation and conflict, evaluate normative ideals of justice and the good society, and inform public policy and citizen engagement.

HOW POLITICAL SCIENCE EXAMINES CORE POLITICAL PHENOMENA

- State & Government:** Studies the origin, structure, and functions of the state and governments, and the distribution of authority.
- Power:** Examines who gets what, when, and how. Includes coercion, persuasion, agenda setting, and structural power.
- Authority & Legitimacy:** Investigates the rightful exercise of power and the factors that make authority acceptable.
- Institutions:** Analyzes formal and informal rules, organizations, and norms that structure political life.
- Law:** Explores the creation, interpretation, and enforcement of laws and their relationship to justice and power.
- Policy:** Studies how governments and other actors define problems, formulate policies, and evaluate outcomes.
- Political Behavior:** Examines how individuals and groups think, decide, participate, and influence politics.
- Political Processes:** Investigates elections, representation, interest articulation, policymaking, conflict, and cooperation.
- Groups, Classes & Elites:** Studies organized interests, social stratification, leadership, and ruling groups.
- International Order:** Analyzes states and non-state actors, diplomacy, conflict, cooperation, and global governance.

THE SCOPE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

44 Politics is the authoritative allocation of values in a society.*
— David Easton

II. MAJOR FIELDS OF MODERN POLITICAL SCIENCE

#	FIELD	DEFINITION	CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS (EXAMPLES)	KEY CONCEPTS & THEORIES	REPRESENTATIVE SCHOLARS & CLASSIC WORKS	CONTEMPORARY DEBATES
1	Political Theory & Philosophy	Normative study of justice, legitimacy, rights, and the good society	What is justice? What makes authority legitimate? What are rights and the common good?	Justice, rights, liberty, equality, legitimacy, contract, virtue, citizenship	Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, John Rawls, A. Theory of Justice (1971)	Liberalism vs. Communitarianism; Global justice; Multiculturalism; Postcolonial critiques...
2	Comparative Politics	Comparative study of political systems, regimes, and institutions	Why do political systems differ? What causes regime change and stability?	Regime, state, democratization, change, institutions	Arnold Toynbee, Comparative Politics (1971); Samuel Huntington, The Third Wave (1991)	Democratic backsliding; Institutional quality; Democracy vs. authoritarianism
3	International Relations & International Politics	Study of interactions among states and non-state actors across borders	Why do states cooperate or conflict? How is order maintained across borders?	Sovereignty, power, anarchy, balance of power, interests, international law	Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations (1948); Kenneth Waltz, Theory of International Politics (1979)	Rise of China; Multipolarity; Global governance; Realism vs. Liberalism; Constructivism
4	American Politics & Politics of Countries	Study of U.S. politics and individual countries	How do national institutions shape politics? How do political culture and history matter?	Federalism, separation of powers, political culture, parties	Robert Dahl, Democracy in America (1957); James E. Anderson	Polarization; Identity politics; Federal-state relations; Institutional reform
5	Public Policy	Analysis of how governments design and implement policies	How are problems defined and solved? Why do some policies succeed or fail?	Problem definition, policy cycle, actors, public value	Paul Sabatier, The Policy Orientation Implementation, evaluation	Evidence-based policy; Behavioral public policy; Complexity and wicked problems
6	Public Administration	Study of the management and implementation of public programs	How are organizations structured and managed? How is efficiency and accountability achieved?	Bureaucracy, management, accountability, public value	Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization (1922)	New Public Management; Governance; Digital government; Performance metrics
7	Political Economy	Study of the political aspects of economic life	How do politics and economics influence each other? What benefits from economic arrangements?	Market, state, regulation, class, capitalism, inequality	Karl Marx, Capital (1867); Douglas North, Institutions, Inc. (1990)	Inequality Globalization; Populism; Economic crisis and recovery
8	Political Sociology	Study of social structures, institutions, and political life	How do social structures shape politics? How do groups and identities matter?	Class, status, social movement, norms, inequality	Max Weber, Economy and Society (1922); Talcott Parsons (1954)	Social movements; Inequality; Race, ethnicity and group identity
9	Political Psychology	Study of psychological factors in political attitudes and behavior	Why do people support or oppose leaders and policies? How do identity and emotions matter?	Cognition, attitudes, identity, emotions, motivation	Theodor Adorno et al., The Authoritarian Personality (1950)	Affect and polarization; Behavioral insights; Identity threat
10	Judicial Politics & Law and Politics	Study of courts, law, and legal institutions in politics	How do courts make decisions? How do law influence politics?	Judicial review, precedents, rights, legal interpretation	A.V. Dicey, Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution (1885)	Judicial activism vs. restraint; Courts and democracy
11	Elections, Voting Behavior & Party Politics	Study of elections, voting, and political parties	Why do people vote? How do parties organize and win?	Electoral, parties, ideology, mobilization, voting behavior	Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy (1957)	Disillusionment vs. malignment; Populism; Third parties
12	Legislative Politics	Study of legislatures and lawmaking	How do legislatures organize and make decisions? Why do laws pass or fail?	Representation, committees, agenda setting, lobbying	Richard F. Fenno, How Style Works (1978)	Gerrymandering; Institutional reform; Deliberative legitimacy
13	Executive & Presidential Politics	Study of executives and presidential power	How do executives lead? What are the limits of executive power?	Leadership, agenda control, veto, unilateral action	James MacGregor Burns, Leadership (1978); Robert A. Dahl, The Presidential System (1967)	Executive overreach; National security; Administrative state
14	Bureaucratic Politics	Study of bureaucracies and organizational behavior	How do bureaucracies make decisions? Why do they resist or implement change?	Hierarchy, discretion, red tape, principal-agent	Richard Smith, Administrative Behavior (1947)	State local bureaucracy; Agency capture; Accountability
15	Local & Urban Politics	Study of local governments and urban governance	How do cities govern? How do local institutions affect outcomes?	Decentralization, local democracy, urban policy	Elisavinda Ostrom, Governing the Commons (1990)	Urban inequality; Smart cities; Local fiscal crisis
16	Democracy & Democratization	Study of democratic systems and the spread and quality of democracy	Why do democracies emerge and endure? Why do they fail?	Democracy, participation, electoral systems, civil society	Robert Dahl, Polyarchy (1971); Larry Diamond, Developing Democracy (1999)	Democratic regression; Populism; Deliberative vs. majoritarian democracy
17	Authoritarianism & Dictatorship	Study of non-democratic regimes	Why do authoritarian regimes arise and survive? How do they fail?	Patrimonialism, repression, legitimacy, co-optation	Juan Linz, Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes (1975)	Hybrid regimes; Information control; Elite divisions
18	Revolution, Social Movements & Collective Action	Study of mass mobilization and political change	What causes revolutions? How do movements succeed?	Mobilization, opportunities, framing, collective identity	Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions (1979)	Digital activism; Smart cities; Local fiscal crisis
19	Political Elites & Ruling Classes	Study of elites, leadership, and powerful groups	Who are the elites? How do they recruit and maintain power?	Elites, oligarchy, social closure, networks, insider power	William F. Floyd, The Mind and Society (1916); C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite (1956)	Elite circulation; Technocracy; Inequality and elite power
20	Political Communication, Public Opinion & Media Politics	Study of communication, opinion formation, and media effects	How are opinions formed? How do media and communication shape politics?	Agenda-setting, framing, persuasion, public opinion	Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion (1922); Hans-Dieter Klingemann (1988)	Misinformation; Social media; Filter bubbles; Trust in media
21	Identity Politics (Race, Ethnicity, Religion, Gender)	Study of how identities shape politics and representation	How do identities influence political behavior and representation?	Identity, intersectionality, discrimination, recognition	Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks (1952); Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991)	Representation; Backlash; Intersectionality; Minority rights
22	Political Violence, Civil War, Terrorism & Security	Study of violence, conflict, and security	Why do violent conflicts occur? How do states maintain security?	Conflict, deterrence, terrorism, security dilemmas	Barbara Walter, Civil Wars (2017); Bruce Hoffman, Inside Terrorism (1988)	Terrorism vs. counterterrorism; Asymmetric warfare; Cyberterrorism
23	Foreign Policy Analysis	Study of how states make foreign policy decisions	Why do states pursue certain foreign policies? How do these decisions matter?	Interest, perception, strategy, diplomacy	Graham Allison, Essence of Decision (1971)	Rational vs. bureaucratic models; Leader psychology; Domestic politics
24	International Political Economy & Global Governance	Study of global markets, finance, and economic change	How do economic interdependence and institutions affect politics?	Globalization, regimes, institutions, interdependence	Robert Keohane, After Hegemony (1984); Susan Strange, States and Markets (1988)	Global inequality; Trade vs. sovereignty; Global public goods
25	Development Politics & Environmental Politics	Study of development, poverty, and environment	Why do some countries develop? How do politics shape the environment?	Development, sustainability, climate policy, resilience	Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom (1999); Garret Hardin, Tragedy of the Commons (1968)	Climate change; Just transition; Resource conflicts
26	Political Methodology	Study of research methods in political science	How do we know what we know? How to design rigorous research?	Research design; measurement; inference; validity	Charles Ragin, The Comparative Method (1987); Gary King, Design of Social Inquiry (1996)	Causal inference; Big data; Regression; Mixed methods

III. THEORETICAL & ANALYTICAL APPROACHES

- Behavioralist/Quantitative:** Focus on formal/informal data and regression.
- Behavioralist/Qualitative:** Emphasize observable behavior, attitudes, and empirical regularities.
- Power & Elite (Contextual):** Analyze power distribution, domination, and ruling groups.
- Historical & Structural Approaches:** Emphasize history, social structures, and long-term change.
- Rational Choice Theory:** Actors are rational, utility-maximizing decision-makers.
- Behavioralism & Post-Behavioralism:** Empirical, value-aware, and policy-oriented research.
- Institutionalism & New Institutionalist:** Institutions shape incentives and outcomes; path dependence.
- Marxism:** Class conflict, modes of production, ideology, capitalism.
- Elite Theory:** Elites as cohesive groups exercising dominance.
- Pluralism:** Competing groups balance power in open systems.
- Communitarianism:** Ideas, norms, and identities shape interests.
- Realism:** Power, gender, and intersectionality in political life.
- Critical Theory:** Power, ideology, and emancipatory critique of social domination.

IV. RESEARCH METHODS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

Quantitative Methods

- Statistical Analysis & Political Economics
- Survey & Polling
- Experimental (Lab, Field, Survey)
- Causal Inference (Do, Don't, IV, RDD)
- Big Data & Computational Methods
- Text mining, network analysis

Qualitative Methods

- Case Studies (Single & Multiple)
- Interviews & Elite Interviews
- Discourse & Content Analysis
- Process Tracing
- Ethnography & Participant Observation

Formal Theory & Game Theory

- Formal Theories of Strategic Interaction
- Game Theory (Static & Dynamic)
- Mathematical Models of Political Action

Mixed-Methods Research

- Combining Qual & Quant
- Triangulation
- Critical & Embedded Designs

V. POLITICAL SCIENCE IN ACTION: REAL-WORLD CASES

Political science integrates multiple fields and methods to understand complex political phenomena and inform better governance in a changing world.

VI. UNIFYING SEQUENCE OF FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

Core Theme	1. What is power?	2. How is power exercised?	3. How is authority legitimized?	4. How is power distributed?	5. How is power contested?	6. How is power transformed?	7. How is power challenged?
Key Questions	Who has power?	How is power exercised?	How is authority legitimized?	How is power distributed?	How is power contested?	How is power transformed?	How is power challenged?
Examples	Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Rawls	Max Weber, Elitism, Pluralism, Rational Choice, Institutionalism	Max Weber, Elitism, Pluralism, Rational Choice, Institutionalism	Max Weber, Elitism, Pluralism, Rational Choice, Institutionalism	Max Weber, Elitism, Pluralism, Rational Choice, Institutionalism	Max Weber, Elitism, Pluralism, Rational Choice, Institutionalism	Max Weber, Elitism, Pluralism, Rational Choice, Institutionalism

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Publication Note and Scope

This report is designed as a disciplinary map rather than a narrow textbook chapter. It treats political science as a family of overlapping research programs organized around recurring questions of power, authority, institutions, behavior, collective choice, policy, conflict, and political order. Field boundaries vary by university and professional association; therefore the classifications used here are analytical rather than jurisdictional.

“Representative scholars and works” are illustrative, not exhaustive. The contemporary-debate sections emphasize research agendas visible in the mid-2020s, including democratic backsliding, polarization, state capacity, geoeconomics, digital politics, AI governance, climate politics, causal inference, and the politics of expertise.

Executive Map: What Political Science Studies

Political science is the systematic study of political power and collective rule. It asks how communities make binding decisions, who controls the institutions that make and enforce those decisions, how authority becomes legitimate or contested, how citizens and organized actors behave, how policies are produced and implemented, and how domestic political orders interact with one another internationally. Its subject is not limited to “government.” It includes the state, law, parties, elections, bureaucracies, courts, social classes, elites, movements, firms, media, public opinion, violence, international organizations, and the political consequences of economic and technological systems.

Definition and Etymology

The term political science joins “political,” from Greek polis (city or political community) and politika (affairs of the polis), with “science,” from Latin scientia (knowledge). In modern usage, the discipline combines normative inquiry about how political life ought to be ordered with empirical inquiry into how political systems actually work. It is therefore simultaneously interpretive, explanatory, causal, comparative, historical, formal, and normative.

Principal Objects of Study

- **State:** The durable set of institutions claiming authoritative rule over a territory and population, including coercive, fiscal, legal, and administrative capacities.
- **Government:** The officeholders and institutions that make, administer, and adjudicate collective decisions.
- **Power:** The capacity to shape decisions, agendas, institutions, beliefs, resources, or behavior - including coercive, economic, organizational, ideological, informational, and network power.
- **Authority:** Power regarded as rightful or institutionally authorized.
- **Legitimacy:** The belief or normative judgment that institutions and rulers have a justified right to rule.
- **Institutions:** Formal and informal rules, organizations, procedures, norms, and routines that structure political action.
- **Law:** Rules backed by public authority and the institutions that create, interpret, and enforce them.
- **Policy:** Substantive governmental choices concerning problems, instruments, allocation, implementation, and evaluation.
- **Political behavior:** Voting, participation, protest, opinion, leadership, identity, persuasion, coalition building, and strategic choice.
- **Political process:** The sequence through which demands become agendas, decisions, laws, implementation, feedback, conflict, and change.
- **Groups, classes, and elites:** Organized interests and socially structured actors that possess unequal resources, status, access, or organizational capacity.
- **International order:** Patterns of sovereignty, hierarchy, institutions, alliances, norms, markets, conflict, and cooperation beyond the state.

Academic Purposes

- **Explanation:** identify mechanisms and causes of political outcomes.
- **Description and measurement:** define concepts and build valid indicators of political phenomena.
- **Comparison:** identify similarities, differences, and scope conditions across cases.
- **Prediction and forecasting:** estimate likely outcomes while recognizing uncertainty and strategic adaptation.
- **Normative evaluation:** assess justice, legitimacy, rights, democracy, and the moral limits of coercion.
- **Institutional and policy design:** evaluate how rules and organizations alter incentives, capacity, accountability, and distribution.
- **Historical understanding:** explain how political orders emerge, reproduce themselves, transform, and collapse.

The Architecture of Modern Political Science

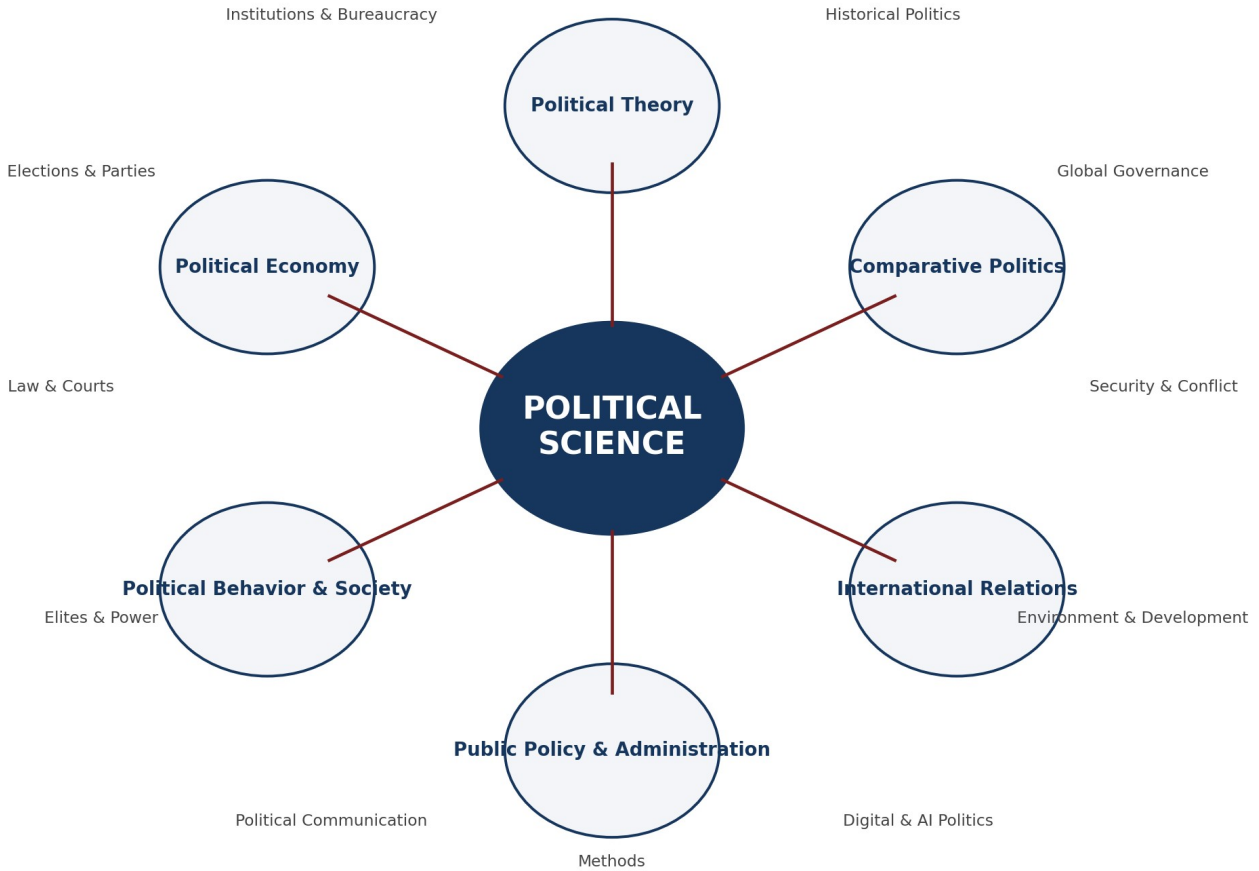


Figure 1. A functional map of the discipline. The major fields overlap rather than forming sealed compartments.

Part I. Major Fields of Modern Political Science

The following 31-field classification is intentionally expansive. Many departments combine several of these under broader headings such as comparative politics, American politics, international relations, political theory, public policy, or methodology.

Field	Primary Level of Analysis	Typical Core Question
Political Theory and Political Philosophy	Normative / conceptual	What is justice?
Comparative Politics	Institutions / groups / state-society	Why do regimes differ?
International Relations and International Politics	Cross-border / system / state	Why do wars occur?
American Politics and Politics of Individual Countries	Institutions / groups / state-society	How do constitutional arrangements, federalism, parties, race, public opinion, courts, and organized interests shape political outcomes?
Public Policy	Institutions / groups / state-society	How do issues reach agendas?
Public Administration	Organization / state apparatus	How should bureaucracies be designed?
Political Economy	Institutions / groups / state-society	How do economic interests shape politics?
Political Sociology	Institutions / groups / state-society	How does social stratification become political inequality?
Political Psychology	Individual / group / mass behavior	How do people form political beliefs?
Judicial Politics and Law and Politics	Institutions / groups / state-society	How do judges decide?
Elections, Voting Behavior, and Party Politics	Individual / group / mass behavior	Why do people vote?
Legislative Politics	Institutions / groups / state-society	Why do legislators organize into parties and committees?
Executive and Presidential Politics	Institutions / groups / state-society	How do executives build power?
Bureaucratic Politics	Organization / state apparatus	Why do agencies behave as they do?
Local and Urban Politics	Institutions / groups / state-society	Who governs cities?
Democracy and Democratization	Institutions / groups / state-society	Why do democracies emerge, survive, deepen, or decline?
Authoritarianism and Dictatorship	Institutions / groups / state-society	Why do dictatorships survive or collapse?
Revolution, Social Movements, and Collective Action	Institutions / groups / state-society	Why do people mobilize despite costs?
Political Elites and Ruling Classes	Institutions / groups / state-society	Who actually governs?
Political Communication, Public Opinion, and Media Politics	Individual / group / mass behavior	How do media and political actors shape attention and beliefs?
Identity Politics: Race, Ethnicity, Religion, and Gender	Institutions / groups / state-society	When do identities become politically salient?
Political Violence, Civil War, Terrorism, and Security Studies	Institutions / groups / state-society	Why do armed conflicts begin and persist?
Foreign Policy Analysis	Cross-border / system / state	Why do states facing similar environments choose different policies?
International Political Economy (IPE)	Cross-border / system / state	Why do states open or restrict trade and capital?
International Organizations and Global Governance	Cross-border / system / state	When do international institutions matter?
Politics of Development and Development Political Economy	Institutions / groups / state-society	Why do some states develop faster?

Environmental Politics	Institutions / groups / state-society	Why are environmental problems difficult to govern?
Politics of Technology, Digital Politics, and AI Governance	Institutions / groups / state-society	Who governs digital platforms and AI?
Historical Political Science and Political Development	Institutions / groups / state-society	How did present institutions emerge?
Political Geography and Geopolitics	Cross-border / system / state	How does geography constrain or enable states?
Political Methodology	Research design / inference	How can political claims be measured, tested, and causally identified?

1. Political Theory and Political Philosophy

Definition: Normative and conceptual study of political life: justice, liberty, equality, authority, obligation, rights, legitimacy, democracy, citizenship, and the good political order.

Central research questions: What is justice? When is political authority legitimate? What rights do persons possess? What should democracy require? When may coercion, resistance, or civil disobedience be justified?

Principal objects of inquiry: Political concepts, moral principles, constitutional ideals, canonical texts, ideologies, arguments about institutions and citizenship.

Major concepts and theories: Justice; liberty; equality; rights; legitimacy; consent; sovereignty; citizenship; republicanism; liberalism; democracy; domination; recognition.

Representative scholars: Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, J. S. Mill, Marx, Arendt, Rawls, Nozick, Habermas, Foucault, Pettit, Sen.

Classic or field-defining works: Plato, *Republic*; Aristotle, *Politics*; Hobbes, *Leviathan*; Locke, *Second Treatise*; Rousseau, *Social Contract*; Mill, *On Liberty*; Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*; Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Egalitarianism vs sufficientarianism; freedom as noninterference vs nondomination; democratic legitimacy under polarization; multiculturalism and group rights; global justice; migration; climate justice; algorithmic governance and AI legitimacy.

2. Comparative Politics

Definition: Systematic comparison of political systems, institutions, regimes, behavior, and state-society relations across countries and subnational units.

Central research questions: Why do regimes differ? Why are some states capable and others weak? Why do democracies emerge, survive, or erode? How do electoral systems, parties, constitutions, and social cleavages shape outcomes?

Principal objects of inquiry: Regimes, states, constitutions, parties, elections, bureaucracies, social movements, ethnic politics, development, political violence, subnational governments.

Major concepts and theories: Regime type; state capacity; democratization; authoritarianism; institutional design; path dependence; cleavage; clientelism; federalism; comparative historical analysis.

Representative scholars: Tocqueville, Weber, Barrington Moore, Lipset, Huntington, Lijphart, Skocpol, Theda Skocpol, Przeworski, Linz, Levitsky, Way.

Classic or field-defining works: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*; Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*; Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*; Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*; Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development*; Levitsky & Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Democratic backsliding and its measurement; state capacity and governance; populism; party-system change; ethnic conflict; causal identification in cross-national research; subnational comparison; regime hybridity.

3. International Relations and International Politics

Definition: Study of political relations across borders among states, international organizations, firms, transnational networks, and other actors under conditions of limited central authority.

Central research questions: Why do wars occur? Why do states cooperate? What produces alliances, deterrence, institutions, hierarchy, order, and change? How do ideas, identities, domestic politics, and economic interdependence affect world politics?

Principal objects of inquiry: States, alliances, wars, diplomacy, institutions, norms, international law, transnational networks, global markets.

Major concepts and theories: Anarchy; sovereignty; balance of power; security dilemma; deterrence; cooperation; institutions; norms; hierarchy; polarity; power transition.

Representative scholars: Morgenthau, Waltz, Keohane, Nye, Wendt, Jervis, Schelling, Fearon, Mearsheimer, Ikenberry, Lake.

Classic or field-defining works: Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*; Keohane, *After Hegemony*; Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*; Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*.

Leading contemporary research debates: U.S.-China competition; deterrence in multi-domain conflict; erosion or adaptation of the liberal international order; economic security and sanctions; climate security; cyber and AI; Global South agency.

4. American Politics and Politics of Individual Countries

Definition: Intensive study of one political system, often combining institutions, behavior, public law, parties, policy, and political development.

Central research questions: How do constitutional arrangements, federalism, parties, race, public opinion, courts, and organized interests shape political outcomes? How distinctive is a country relative to comparative patterns?

Principal objects of inquiry: National constitutions, elections, parties, Congress/parliaments, presidents/prime ministers, courts, federalism, states/provinces, policy regimes.

Major concepts and theories: Separation of powers; federalism; representation; incumbency; polarization; racial order; policy feedback; constitutional development.

Representative scholars: Tocqueville, V. O. Key, Richard Fenno, David Mayhew, Theda Skocpol, Stephen Skowronek, John Aldrich, Frances Lee.

Classic or field-defining works: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*; Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*; Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make*; Aldrich, *Why Parties?*; Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Polarization, party asymmetry, executive power, federal-state conflict, voting administration, racial and geographic realignment, institutional hardball, nationalization of local politics.

5. Public Policy

Definition: Study of how governments define problems, select instruments, adopt programs, allocate resources, implement choices, and evaluate outcomes.

Central research questions: How do issues reach agendas? Why are some solutions adopted? Who wins and loses? How do evidence, institutions, interests, ideas, and feedback affect policy?

Principal objects of inquiry: Policy agendas, legislation, regulation, budgets, programs, policy instruments, implementation systems, evaluation.

Major concepts and theories: Agenda setting; policy streams; punctuated equilibrium; policy feedback; advocacy coalitions; policy design; implementation; evaluation.

Representative scholars: Harold Lasswell, Herbert Simon, Charles Lindblom, John Kingdon, Paul Sabatier, Frank Baumgartner, Bryan Jones, Paul Pierson.

Classic or field-defining works: Lasswell, *The Policy Orientation*; Lindblom, *The Science of Muddling Through*; Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*; Baumgartner & Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Evidence-based policy; polarization and policy capacity; distributive effects; behavioral policy; policy learning; crisis governance; climate and industrial policy; AI-assisted policymaking.

6. Public Administration

Definition: Study of administrative organizations and the management, implementation, accountability, and performance of public programs.

Central research questions: How should bureaucracies be designed? How do administrators exercise discretion? How can governments balance expertise, efficiency, legality, responsiveness, and democratic accountability?

Principal objects of inquiry: Administrative agencies, civil service, public management, budgeting, contracting, street-level bureaucracy, intergovernmental administration.

Major concepts and theories: Bureaucracy; hierarchy; delegation; principal-agent problems; discretion; merit systems; administrative burden; public value; performance management.

Representative scholars: Woodrow Wilson, Max Weber, Herbert Simon, Dwight Waldo, James Q. Wilson, Michael Lipsky, Elinor Ostrom, Christopher Hood.

Classic or field-defining works: Weber, *Economy and Society* (bureaucracy); Simon, *Administrative Behavior*; Waldo, *The Administrative State*; Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy*; Wilson, *Bureaucracy*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Politicization vs expertise; administrative state legitimacy; outsourcing; digital government; algorithmic administration; administrative burden; resilience and emergency management.

7. Political Economy

Definition: Study of the reciprocal relationship between political power and economic institutions, distribution, markets, taxation, regulation, labor, capital, and development.

Central research questions: How do economic interests shape politics? How do political institutions shape growth and distribution? Why do inequality, redistribution, regulation, and industrial policy vary?

Principal objects of inquiry: Markets, firms, labor, taxation, welfare states, regulation, finance, inequality, property rights, development institutions.

Major concepts and theories: Collective action; rent seeking; redistribution; varieties of capitalism; institutions; credible commitment; class conflict; fiscal politics.

Representative scholars: Marx, Polanyi, Olson, North, Buchanan, Acemoglu, Robinson, Hall, Soskice, Hacker, Pierson.

Classic or field-defining works: Marx, *Capital*; Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*; Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*; North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*; Hall & Soskice, *Varieties of Capitalism*; Acemoglu & Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Inequality and political influence; industrial policy; deglobalization and geoeconomics; market concentration; labor power; housing; financialization; climate transition; AI and the distribution of rents.

8. Political Sociology

Definition: Study of how social structures, classes, status groups, organizations, identities, networks, and social movements shape political power and institutions.

Central research questions: How does social stratification become political inequality? How do classes and identities organize? How do states and societies transform each other?

Principal objects of inquiry: Classes, social movements, civil society, status groups, networks, social capital, identities, state-society relations.

Major concepts and theories: Class; status; cleavage; social capital; mobilization; hegemony; social closure; embeddedness; political opportunity.

Representative scholars: Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Gramsci, Lipset, Tilly, Bourdieu, Skocpol, Putnam.

Classic or field-defining works: Weber, *Economy and Society*; Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*; Lipset, *Political Man*; Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*; Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Class dealignment and realignment; race and ethnicity; declining organizations; social capital; networked movements; precarity; geographic sorting; elite closure.

9. Political Psychology

Definition: Study of psychological mechanisms underlying political judgment, identity, emotion, leadership, persuasion, participation, and intergroup conflict.

Central research questions: How do people form political beliefs? How do identity, threat, emotion, cognition, personality, and motivated reasoning shape behavior?

Principal objects of inquiry: Voters, leaders, groups, attitudes, identities, emotions, perceptions, decision-making.

Major concepts and theories: Heuristics; motivated reasoning; authoritarian predispositions; social identity; affective polarization; threat perception; framing; bias.

Representative scholars: Herbert Simon, Philip Converse, Daniel Kahneman, Amos Tversky, John Zaller, Donald Kinder, Leonie Huddy, George Marcus.

Classic or field-defining works: Converse, *The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics*; Kahneman & Tversky, *Prospect Theory*; Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*; Lodge & Taber, *The Rationalizing Voter*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Affective polarization; misinformation correction; identity-protective cognition; elite cues; political emotions; authoritarian attitudes; AI-mediated persuasion.

10. Judicial Politics and Law and Politics

Definition: Empirical and theoretical study of courts, judges, legal institutions, constitutional interpretation, rights, litigation, and the political effects of law.

Central research questions: How do judges decide? When are courts independent? How do legal doctrines interact with ideology, institutions, and public opinion? When can courts generate social change?

Principal objects of inquiry: Courts, judges, constitutions, litigants, legal doctrine, judicial review, rights enforcement, prosecution systems.

Major concepts and theories: Judicial review; precedent; legal mobilization; attitudinal model; strategic model; judicial independence; constitutionalism.

Representative scholars: Alexander Hamilton, Alexis de Tocqueville, Robert Dahl, Martin Shapiro, Lee Epstein, Jack Knight, Gerald Rosenberg, Ran Hirschl.

Classic or field-defining works: Hamilton, *Federalist No. 78*; Dahl, *Decision-Making in a Democracy: The Supreme Court as a National Policy-Maker*; Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope*; Epstein & Knight, *The Choices Justices Make*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Judicial supremacy vs departmentalism; politicization and legitimacy; constitutional hardball; emergency powers; rights retrenchment; comparative judicialization.

11. Elections, Voting Behavior, and Party Politics

Definition: Study of electoral rules, voter choice, turnout, campaigns, representation, political parties, party systems, and partisan identities.

Central research questions: Why do people vote? Why do they choose particular candidates or parties? How do electoral rules shape party competition and representation? Why do party systems realign?

Principal objects of inquiry: Voters, campaigns, candidates, parties, party organizations, electoral systems, primaries, turnout, districting.

Major concepts and theories: Partisanship; retrospective voting; spatial competition; turnout; realignment; issue ownership; electoral systems; Duverger's law.

Representative scholars: Anthony Downs, V. O. Key, Campbell et al., Maurice Duverger, Giovanni Sartori, John Aldrich, Gary Cox, Alan Abramowitz.

Classic or field-defining works: Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*; Campbell et al., *The American Voter*; Key, *The Responsible Electorate*; Duverger, *Political Parties*; Cox, *Making Votes Count*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Affective polarization; nationalization; electoral integrity; populist parties; demographic realignment; campaign technology; social media; ranked-choice and electoral reform.

12. Legislative Politics

Definition: Study of legislatures as institutions for representation, lawmaking, bargaining, oversight, agenda control, and coalition formation.

Central research questions: Why do legislators organize into parties and committees? How are agendas controlled? How do rules affect bargaining, polarization, and policy?

Principal objects of inquiry: Parliaments, congresses, committees, parties, caucuses, legislative rules, roll calls, oversight.

Major concepts and theories: Agenda control; conditional party government; pivotal politics; distributive theory; informational theory; coalition formation; oversight.

Representative scholars: Richard Fenno, David Mayhew, Kenneth Shepsle, Barry Weingast, Gary Cox, Mathew McCubbins, Keith Krehbiel.

Classic or field-defining works: Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*; Fenno, *Home Style*; Shepsle, *The Giant Jigsaw Puzzle*; Krehbiel, *Pivotal Politics*; Cox & McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Party leadership and centralization; gridlock; minority rights; procedural warfare; legislative capacity; oversight under polarization; comparative coalition governance.

13. Executive and Presidential Politics

Definition: Study of presidents, prime ministers, executive leadership, unilateral powers, appointments, agenda setting, crisis management, and executive-legislative relations.

Central research questions: How do executives build power? When can they act unilaterally? How do elections, parties, courts, bureaucracy, and crises constrain executives?

Principal objects of inquiry: Presidents, prime ministers, cabinets, executive offices, appointments, decrees, vetoes, emergency powers.

Major concepts and theories: Formal and informal powers; unilateral action; veto bargaining; presidentialization; executive aggrandizement; administrative presidency.

Representative scholars: Richard Neustadt, Stephen Skowronek, Terry Moe, William Howell, George Edwards, Juan Linz.

Classic or field-defining works: Neustadt, *Presidential Power*; Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make*; Howell, *Power Without Persuasion*; Linz, *The Perils of Presidentialism*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Expansion of unilateral power; emergency governance; politicization of administration; executive accountability; presidentialism and democratic erosion.

14. Bureaucratic Politics

Definition: Study of how administrative agencies and officials make political choices, compete for jurisdiction, implement policy, and interact with elected principals and organized interests.

Central research questions: Why do agencies behave as they do? How do delegation, information, incentives, expertise, and organizational routines shape decisions?

Principal objects of inquiry: Agencies, civil servants, regulators, interagency processes, implementation networks.

Major concepts and theories: Principal-agent theory; bureaucratic drift; capture; delegation; discretion; organizational routines; street-level implementation.

Representative scholars: Max Weber, Herbert Simon, Graham Allison, James Q. Wilson, Terry Moe, Michael Lipsky, Daniel Carpenter.

Classic or field-defining works: Allison, *Essence of Decision*; Wilson, *Bureaucracy*; Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy*; Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy*.

Leading contemporary research debates: State capacity; expertise vs political control; regulatory capture; civil-service independence; administrative burden; data and algorithmic governance.

15. Local and Urban Politics

Definition: Study of cities, metropolitan regions, local governments, urban coalitions, land use, public services, local democracy, and intergovernmental relations.

Central research questions: Who governs cities? How do land, housing, policing, schools, fiscal constraints, and growth coalitions shape urban outcomes? How do local institutions affect participation and inequality?

Principal objects of inquiry: Municipal governments, mayors, councils, local bureaucracies, neighborhoods, developers, metropolitan institutions.

Major concepts and theories: Urban regimes; growth machines; home rule; local public goods; zoning; fiscal federalism; machine politics; neighborhood effects.

Representative scholars: Robert Dahl, Clarence Stone, Harvey Molotch, Paul Peterson, Elinor Ostrom, Jessica Trounstein.

Classic or field-defining works: Dahl, *Who Governs?*; Stone, *Regime Politics*; Peterson, *City Limits*; Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*; Trounstein, *Segregation by Design*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Housing supply and exclusion; policing; fiscal stress; metropolitan inequality; local democracy; preemption; climate adaptation; smart-city governance.

16. Democracy and Democratization

Definition: Study of democratic institutions, transitions, consolidation, participation, accountability, representation, democratic quality, and erosion.

Central research questions: Why do democracies emerge, survive, deepen, or decline? How do citizens, elites, institutions, inequality, and international forces affect democratic stability?

Principal objects of inquiry: Regime transitions, constitutions, elections, civil society, parties, democratic norms, accountability institutions.

Major concepts and theories: Polyarchy; transition; consolidation; democratic quality; horizontal accountability; democratic norms; backsliding; resilience.

Representative scholars: Robert Dahl, Seymour Martin Lipset, Juan Linz, Alfred Stepan, Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, Adam Przeworski, Nancy Bermeo.

Classic or field-defining works: Dahl, Polyarchy; O'Donnell & Schmitter, Transitions from Authoritarian Rule; Linz & Stepan, Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation; Przeworski et al., Democracy and Development.

Leading contemporary research debates: Measurement of backsliding; voter tolerance of norm violations; polarization; constitutional safeguards; party-system resilience; federalism; democratic norms and informal institutions.

17. Authoritarianism and Dictatorship

Definition: Study of non-democratic rule, repression, co-optation, elite management, authoritarian institutions, information control, succession, and regime survival.

Central research questions: Why do dictatorships survive or collapse? How do rulers manage elites and masses? When do elections, parties, legislatures, and courts stabilize authoritarian rule?

Principal objects of inquiry: Personalist, military, party, monarchical, electoral-authoritarian, and hybrid regimes; security apparatuses; ruling coalitions.

Major concepts and theories: Selectorate; repression; co-optation; authoritarian institutions; personalism; coup-proofing; information problems; elite splits.

Representative scholars: Juan Linz, Barbara Geddes, Milan Svolik, Jennifer Gandhi, Beatriz Magaloni, Steven Levitsky, Lucan Way, Sergei Guriev, Daniel Treisman.

Classic or field-defining works: Linz, Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes; Geddes, Paradigms and Sand Castles; Gandhi, Political Institutions under Dictatorship; Svolik, The Politics of Authoritarian Rule; Levitsky & Way, Competitive Authoritarianism; Guriev & Treisman, Spin Dictators.

Leading contemporary research debates: Digital repression; informational autocracy; authoritarian learning; sanctions; succession; hybrid regimes; autocratization within elected systems; cross-border authoritarian influence.

18. Revolution, Social Movements, and Collective Action

Definition: Study of mass mobilization, protest, rebellion, revolution, civil resistance, contentious politics, and the organizational problems of collective action.

Central research questions: Why do people mobilize despite costs? When do protests scale? What causes revolutions? How do movements frame issues, build organizations, exploit political opportunities, and produce change?

Principal objects of inquiry: Movements, protests, revolutions, strikes, insurgencies, civil resistance campaigns, movement organizations.

Major concepts and theories: Collective action; political opportunity; resource mobilization; framing; repertoires of contention; threshold effects; diffusion.

Representative scholars: Mancur Olson, Charles Tilly, Theda Skocpol, Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, Mark Granovetter, Erica Chenoweth.

Classic or field-defining works: Olson, The Logic of Collective Action; Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions; McAdam, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency; Tilly & Tarrow, Contentious Politics; Chenoweth & Stephan, Why Civil Resistance Works.

Leading contemporary research debates: Leaderless and digitally networked movements; repression and backlash; nonviolent vs violent tactics; revolutionary waves; movement institutionalization.

19. Political Elites and Ruling Classes

Definition: Study of concentrated power among political, economic, bureaucratic, military, media, and professional elites and the mechanisms of elite recruitment, circulation, coordination, and reproduction.

Central research questions: Who actually governs? How are elites selected and reproduced? How do organized minorities maintain cohesion? How autonomous are elites from mass preferences?

Principal objects of inquiry: Political classes, ruling coalitions, economic elites, party leaders, senior officials, policy networks, elite institutions.

Major concepts and theories: Ruling class; political class; elite circulation; oligarchy; power elite; social closure; interlocking networks; organized minority.

Representative scholars: Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, Robert Michels, C. Wright Mills, Floyd Hunter, Pierre Bourdieu, G. William Domhoff.

Classic or field-defining works: Mosca, *The Ruling Class*; Pareto, *The Mind and Society*; Michels, *Political Parties*; Mills, *The Power Elite*; Domhoff, *Who Rules America?*

Leading contemporary research debates: Elite capture and inequality; technocracy; donor influence; professionalization; revolving doors; elite polarization; network methods; transnational elites.

20. Political Communication, Public Opinion, and Media Politics

Definition: Study of how political information is produced, framed, distributed, interpreted, and converted into attitudes, agendas, participation, and power.

Central research questions: How do media and political actors shape attention and beliefs? How does public opinion form? When do propaganda, misinformation, framing, and agenda-setting affect behavior?

Principal objects of inquiry: News media, social platforms, campaigns, publics, journalists, political advertising, messaging networks.

Major concepts and theories: Agenda setting; priming; framing; selective exposure; persuasion; propaganda; misinformation; media systems; opinion leadership.

Representative scholars: Walter Lippmann, Paul Lazarsfeld, John Zaller, Maxwell McCombs, Donald Shaw, Shanto Iyengar, Kathleen Hall Jamieson.

Classic or field-defining works: Lippmann, *Public Opinion*; Lazarsfeld et al., *The People's Choice*; McCombs & Shaw, *The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media*; Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Platform power; algorithmic amplification; misinformation; local-news decline; partisan media; synthetic media and deepfakes; creator politics; AI-generated campaigning.

21. Identity Politics: Race, Ethnicity, Religion, and Gender

Definition: Study of how politically salient identities are created, institutionalized, mobilized, represented, and linked to hierarchy, discrimination, solidarity, and conflict.

Central research questions: When do identities become politically salient? How do institutions classify groups? How do intersectional identities shape participation, representation, policy, and conflict?

Principal objects of inquiry: Racial, ethnic, religious, gender, national, linguistic, caste, and other identity groups; identity-based movements and institutions.

Major concepts and theories: Identity; social construction; intersectionality; recognition; group threat; descriptive representation; ethnonationalism; boundary making.

Representative scholars: W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Benedict Anderson, Rogers Brubaker, Kimberle Crenshaw, Iris Marion Young, Melissa Harris-Perry.

Classic or field-defining works: Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins*; Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*; Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Representation vs universalism; racialized state power; intersectionality; religious nationalism; migration and citizenship; backlash politics; measurement of identity.

22. Political Violence, Civil War, Terrorism, and Security Studies

Definition: Study of coercion and organized violence within and across states, including civil war, insurgency, terrorism, repression, counterinsurgency, and security institutions.

Central research questions: Why do armed conflicts begin and persist? How do organizations recruit and govern? Why target civilians? What explains deterrence, escalation, repression, and conflict termination?

Principal objects of inquiry: Armed groups, states, militaries, civilians, insurgencies, terrorist organizations, security agencies, conflict zones.

Major concepts and theories: Commitment problems; information asymmetry; insurgency; selective violence; terrorism; deterrence; state repression; security dilemma.

Representative scholars: Thomas Schelling, James Fearon, David Laitin, Stathis Kalyvas, Robert Pape, Barbara Walter, Paul Staniland.

Classic or field-defining works: Schelling, *Arms and Influence*; Fearon & Laitin, *Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War*; Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*; Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Drone and autonomous warfare; urban conflict; civil-war recurrence; transnational militant networks; cyber conflict; civilian protection; political violence in democracies.

23. Foreign Policy Analysis

Definition: Study of how states and leaders formulate external policy by linking international pressures to domestic institutions, bureaucracies, leaders, perceptions, and coalitions.

Central research questions: Why do states facing similar environments choose different policies? How do leaders, bureaucracies, domestic groups, and decision processes matter?

Principal objects of inquiry: Leaders, cabinets, foreign ministries, security agencies, domestic coalitions, crises, diplomatic decisions.

Major concepts and theories: Two-level games; bureaucratic politics; operational code; prospect theory; leader traits; domestic audience costs; strategic culture.

Representative scholars: Graham Allison, Robert Putnam, Valerie Hudson, Alexander George, Margaret Hermann, Jack Levy.

Classic or field-defining works: Allison, *Essence of Decision*; Putnam, *Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games*; George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Leader effects; personalization of foreign policy; domestic polarization; economic security; sanctions; crisis signaling; intelligence and misinformation.

24. International Political Economy (IPE)

Definition: Study of how international markets, finance, trade, production, technology, currencies, and institutions interact with political power and distribution.

Central research questions: Why do states open or restrict trade and capital? Who gains and loses from globalization? How do currencies, sanctions, supply chains, and firms affect state power?

Principal objects of inquiry: Trade regimes, monetary systems, capital flows, multinational firms, sanctions, supply chains, international economic organizations.

Major concepts and theories: Open economy politics; embedded liberalism; hegemonic stability; interdependence; global value chains; monetary power; weaponized interdependence.

Representative scholars: Robert Gilpin, Robert Keohane, Helen Milner, Jeffry Frieden, Peter Katzenstein, Susan Strange, Henry Farrell, Abraham Newman.

Classic or field-defining works: Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations*; Frieden, *Global Capitalism*; Keohane & Nye, *Power and Interdependence*; Farrell & Newman, *Weaponized Interdependence*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Geoeconomics; sanctions; friend-shoring; industrial policy; dollar power; supply-chain security; digital trade; strategic technology controls.

25. International Organizations and Global Governance

Definition: Study of formal and informal institutions through which states and non-state actors coordinate, regulate, adjudicate, finance, and govern transnational problems.

Central research questions: When do international institutions matter? How are they designed? Who controls them? Why do states comply, defect, reform, or exit?

Principal objects of inquiry: UN, WTO, IMF, World Bank, regional organizations, treaty regimes, transgovernmental networks, NGOs.

Major concepts and theories: Institutional design; delegation; legalization; compliance; regime complexity; orchestration; legitimacy; multilateralism.

Representative scholars: Robert Keohane, Lisa Martin, Barbara Koremenos, Kenneth Abbott, Duncan Snidal, Michael Barnett, Martha Finnemore.

Classic or field-defining works: Keohane, *After Hegemony*; Abbott et al., *The Concept of Legalization*; Barnett & Finnemore, *Rules for the World*; Koremenos, *The Continent of International Law*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Institutional gridlock; great-power rivalry; legitimacy; informal clubs; fragmentation and regime complexes; global health; climate governance; private governance.

26. Politics of Development and Development Political Economy

Definition: Study of how political institutions, state capacity, conflict, colonial legacies, distribution, and international forces shape economic and human development.

Central research questions: Why do some states develop faster? How do institutions, elites, land, education, taxation, and conflict affect development? What makes reforms politically feasible?

Principal objects of inquiry: Developing states, institutions, public goods, taxation, land, firms, aid, infrastructure, education, health, poverty programs.

Major concepts and theories: State capacity; institutions; clientelism; credible commitment; resource curse; political settlements; structural transformation; public goods.

Representative scholars: Albert Hirschman, Douglass North, Amartya Sen, Daron Acemoglu, James Robinson, Robert Bates, Merilee Grindle, Lant Pritchett.

Classic or field-defining works: Hirschman, *The Strategy of Economic Development*; Bates, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa*; Sen, *Development as Freedom*; Acemoglu & Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*; North, Wallis & Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders*.

Leading contemporary research debates: State capacity vs inclusive institutions; industrialization; aid effectiveness; political settlements; climate-development tradeoffs; migration; digital public infrastructure.

27. Environmental Politics

Definition: Study of political conflict, institutions, collective action, and policy surrounding climate change, energy, biodiversity, pollution, land, water, and environmental justice.

Central research questions: Why are environmental problems difficult to govern? How do interests, institutions, ideas, federalism, and international cooperation shape policy?

Principal objects of inquiry: Climate policy, energy systems, environmental agencies, treaties, firms, movements, local adaptation, natural resources.

Major concepts and theories: Collective action; externalities; common-pool resources; environmental justice; carbon pricing; policy feedback; just transition.

Representative scholars: Elinor Ostrom, Robert Keohane, David Victor, Robert Falkner, Kathryn Harrison, Leah Stokes.

Classic or field-defining works: Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*; Keohane & Victor, *The Regime Complex for Climate Change*; Stokes, *Short Circuiting Policy*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Climate clubs; green industrial policy; permitting; energy transition; distributional politics; adaptation; climate finance; backlash and policy durability.

28. Politics of Technology, Digital Politics, and AI Governance

Definition: Study of how technological systems reshape political power, institutions, participation, surveillance, information, regulation, and geopolitical competition.

Central research questions: Who governs digital platforms and AI? How do algorithms shape information and participation? How do surveillance, data, automation, and compute alter state and corporate power?

Principal objects of inquiry: Platforms, algorithms, AI models, data infrastructures, digital campaigns, surveillance systems, cyber institutions, tech firms.

Major concepts and theories: Platform governance; algorithmic amplification; surveillance; digital authoritarianism; computational propaganda; AI regulation; data power; compute governance.

Representative scholars: Lawrence Lessig, Zeynep Tufekci, Shoshana Zuboff, Yochai Benkler, Bruce Schneier, Nathan Sanders, political communication and information-politics scholars.

Classic or field-defining works: Lessig, *Code*; Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*; Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*; Schneier & Sanders, *Rewiring Democracy* (2025).

Leading contemporary research debates: AI in campaigns and deliberation; deepfakes; platform regulation; digital sovereignty; automated decision-making; authoritarian surveillance; AI safety and democratic accountability; geopolitical concentration of compute.

29. Historical Political Science and Political Development

Definition: Study of political institutions and power through time, emphasizing sequences, critical junctures, path dependence, state formation, and long-run institutional development.

Central research questions: How did present institutions emerge? Why do early choices persist? How do wars, reforms, crises, and coalitions produce durable political orders?

Principal objects of inquiry: State formation, constitutions, parties, bureaucracies, welfare states, race relations, political orders, institutional change.

Major concepts and theories: Path dependence; critical juncture; sequencing; increasing returns; state building; policy feedback; gradual institutional change.

Representative scholars: Max Weber, Barrington Moore, Theda Skocpol, Charles Tilly, Stephen Skowronek, Paul Pierson, Kathleen Thelen, James Mahoney.

Classic or field-defining works: Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*; Skowronek, *Building a New American State*; Pierson, *Politics in Time*; Mahoney & Thelen, *Explaining Institutional Change*.

Leading contemporary research debates: How to combine historical explanation with causal inference; long-run inequality; race and state formation; institutional layering; temporality and sequence in contemporary politics.

30. Political Geography and Geopolitics

Definition: Study of how territory, borders, spatial distribution, resources, distance, settlement patterns, and geographic scale shape political power and conflict.

Central research questions: How does geography constrain or enable states? Why do borders and territory matter? How do urban-rural divides, resource locations, and spatial networks affect politics?

Principal objects of inquiry: Territory, borders, regions, cities, electoral districts, resources, transport corridors, maritime spaces, strategic geography.

Major concepts and theories: Territoriality; geopolitics; electoral geography; spatial sorting; core-periphery; borders; strategic depth; chokepoints.

Representative scholars: Halford Mackinder, Nicholas Spykman, Edward Soja, John Agnew, political geographers and spatial political economists.

Classic or field-defining works: Mackinder, *The Geographical Pivot of History*; Agnew, *Geopolitics*; contemporary spatial-politics research on sorting, place, and representation.

Leading contemporary research debates: Urban-rural polarization; climate migration; Arctic and maritime competition; critical infrastructure; border politics; spatial inequality; redistricting and geographic representation.

31. Political Methodology

Definition: Study and development of research designs, measurement strategies, statistical models, formal models, computational tools, and inferential standards used to answer political questions.

Central research questions: How can political claims be measured, tested, and causally identified? How should uncertainty, selection, measurement error, external validity, and model dependence be handled?

Principal objects of inquiry: Research designs, datasets, surveys, experiments, observational studies, text, networks, causal models, formal models.

Major concepts and theories: Identification; causal inference; potential outcomes; measurement; Bayesian inference; experiments; regression; matching; instrumental variables; text-as-data; network analysis.

Representative scholars: Gary King, Donald Rubin, James Fearon, Andrew Gelman, Kosuke Imai, Jens Hainmueller, Rocio Titiunik, Adam Glynn, many formal and computational methodologists.

Classic or field-defining works: King, Keohane & Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*; Brady & Collier, *Rethinking Social Inquiry*; Angrist & Pischke, *Mostly Harmless Econometrics* (cross-disciplinary); Imai, *Quantitative Social Science*.

Leading contemporary research debates: Design vs modeling; causal inference under interference; external validity; measurement with machine learning; reproducibility; research ethics; multimodal and generative-AI methods; combining qualitative evidence with causal designs.

Part II. Where Major Areas Overlap - and Where They Differ

Political philosophy vs empirical political science

Both study power, legitimacy, institutions, and democracy. Political philosophy asks what ought to be justified; empirical political science asks what exists, why it occurs, and with what consequences. Modern work often connects them through democratic theory, constitutional design, political ethics, and empirical tests of normative assumptions.

Comparative politics vs international relations

Comparative politics primarily explains variation within and across domestic political systems; IR primarily explains interaction across borders and features of the international system. The boundary blurs in foreign-policy analysis, diffusion, internationalized civil wars, sanctions, democratization, migration, and globalization.

Political sociology vs political science

Political sociology begins more explicitly from social structure, class, status, organizations, networks, and identity; political science more often foregrounds institutions, decision processes, and authoritative allocation. Both converge in state-society relations, movements, elites, inequality, and political behavior.

Political economy vs economics

Political economy endogenizes political institutions, power, distribution, and collective choice in economic outcomes. Economics may study similar topics but often begins from market behavior and resource allocation. Modern political economy increasingly shares formal models, causal inference, and microeconomic tools with economics while retaining politics as a central explanatory variable.

Public administration vs political science

Public administration focuses on how public organizations are structured, managed, staffed, and made accountable; political science situates administration within delegation, institutions, elections, law, and power. Bureaucratic politics is the bridge.

Public policy vs political science

Public policy centers on specific policy problems, agenda setting, instruments, implementation, and evaluation. Political science asks more broadly how institutions, actors, power, and behavior generate those policies. Policy studies is often more problem-oriented and interdisciplinary, drawing on economics, law, management, and substantive expertise.

Part III. Reclassifying Political Science by Theoretical and Analytical Approach

Fields classify political science by substantive domain; approaches classify it by what researchers think does the explanatory work. The same phenomenon can be studied simultaneously with institutional, behavioral, rational-choice, historical, constructivist, feminist, Marxist, elite, pluralist, or critical lenses.

Approach	Core Assumption	Typical Question	Signature Concepts
Institution-centered research	Treats rules, organizations, constitutions, bureaucracies, courts, and institutional arrangements as key causes of political behavior and outcomes.	How do formal and informal rules structure incentives, authority, veto points, and feasible strategies?	Constitutionalism; state capacity; veto players; delegation; federalism; institutional design.
Behavior-centered research	Explains politics through attitudes, identities, preferences, cognition, participation, and observable behavior of individuals and groups.	Why do citizens and elites act as they do? How are attitudes formed and translated into action?	Voting; public opinion; political psychology; participation; group behavior.
Power- and elite-centered research	Focuses on unequal control over resources, organizations, agendas, institutions, and decision-making.	Who governs in practice? How do organized minorities, classes, donors, firms, and state elites shape outcomes?	Elite theory; ruling class; agenda control; capture; organizational power.
Historical and structural approaches	Explains political outcomes through long-run structures, sequencing, critical junctures, class relations, state formation, and path dependence.	How do inherited structures constrain later choices? Why do similar shocks generate different trajectories?	Path dependence; state formation; critical junctures; sequencing; structural transformation.
Rational choice theory	Models actors as strategically choosing under constraints, often with explicit preferences, information, and equilibrium concepts.	What strategies are optimal given institutions and other actors? What equilibria emerge from interaction?	Utility; equilibrium; collective action; principal-agent; bargaining; voting games.
Behavioralism	Postwar movement emphasizing observable behavior, measurement, hypothesis testing, surveys, and quantitative regularities rather than formal-legal description alone.	Can political behavior be studied empirically with generalizable concepts and methods?	Survey research; voting behavior; attitudes; empirical regularities.
Post-behavioralism	Reaction emphasizing relevance, values, substantive political problems, and the limits of method detached from normative and social concerns.	How should rigorous research remain socially and ethically relevant?	Relevance; responsibility; normative-empirical integration; problem-oriented research.
Institutionalism and new institutionalism	Reasserts institutions as causal, while distinguishing historical, rational-choice, sociological, and discursive institutionalism.	How do institutions emerge, persist, shape preferences, and change?	Path dependence; transaction costs; norms; organizational fields; institutional change.
Marxism	Analyzes politics through class relations, modes of production, capital accumulation, ideology, state structures, and conflicts over material power.	How do capitalist relations shape the state, class power, ideology, crisis, and social transformation?	Class; capital; exploitation; hegemony; state autonomy; crisis.
Elite theory	Explains governance through minority organization, elite circulation, oligarchy, and concentrated control of strategic resources.	Why do organized minorities dominate unorganized majorities? How are elites selected and reproduced?	Political class; oligarchy; elite circulation; power elite; social closure.
Pluralism	Views politics as competition among multiple groups and centers of power, with no single	How do groups organize, bargain, and countervail one another? When is power dispersed or	Interest groups; polyarchy; bargaining; multiple access points; countervailing power.

	actor permanently dominant.	biased?	
Constructivism	Emphasizes that identities, interests, norms, categories, and political realities are socially constructed and reproduced through interaction.	How do ideas and norms constitute actors and interests? How do meanings change?	Norms; identity; discourse; socialization; legitimacy; norm diffusion.
Feminism	Analyzes gendered power, patriarchy, representation, care, violence, labor, institutions, and the public-private divide.	How are political institutions and concepts gendered? Whose experiences and labor are excluded?	Patriarchy; intersectionality; representation; care; embodiment; gendered institutions.
Critical theory	Critiques domination, ideology, exclusion, and taken-for-granted categories while connecting explanation to emancipation and reflexive social critique.	How do power and ideology shape what appears natural or legitimate? How can domination be exposed and transformed?	Ideology; hegemony; discourse; domination; recognition; emancipation.

How to Use Multiple Approaches on One Problem

Consider democratic backsliding. An institutionalist asks whether constitutions, courts, federalism, electoral rules, and veto points constrain incumbents. A behavioralist studies voter tolerance of norm violations. A rational-choice scholar models strategic incentives facing incumbents and opposition parties. An elite theorist examines capture of parties, media, finance, and administrative offices. A historical institutionalist traces long-run institutional weakening and critical junctures. A constructivist studies changing meanings of democracy and legitimacy. A feminist or critical theorist asks whose rights and voices are systematically marginalized. These are not mutually exclusive explanations; a mature research design specifies which mechanisms operate at which level.

Part IV. Research Methods in Political Science

Research Methods: A Multi-Dimensional Map

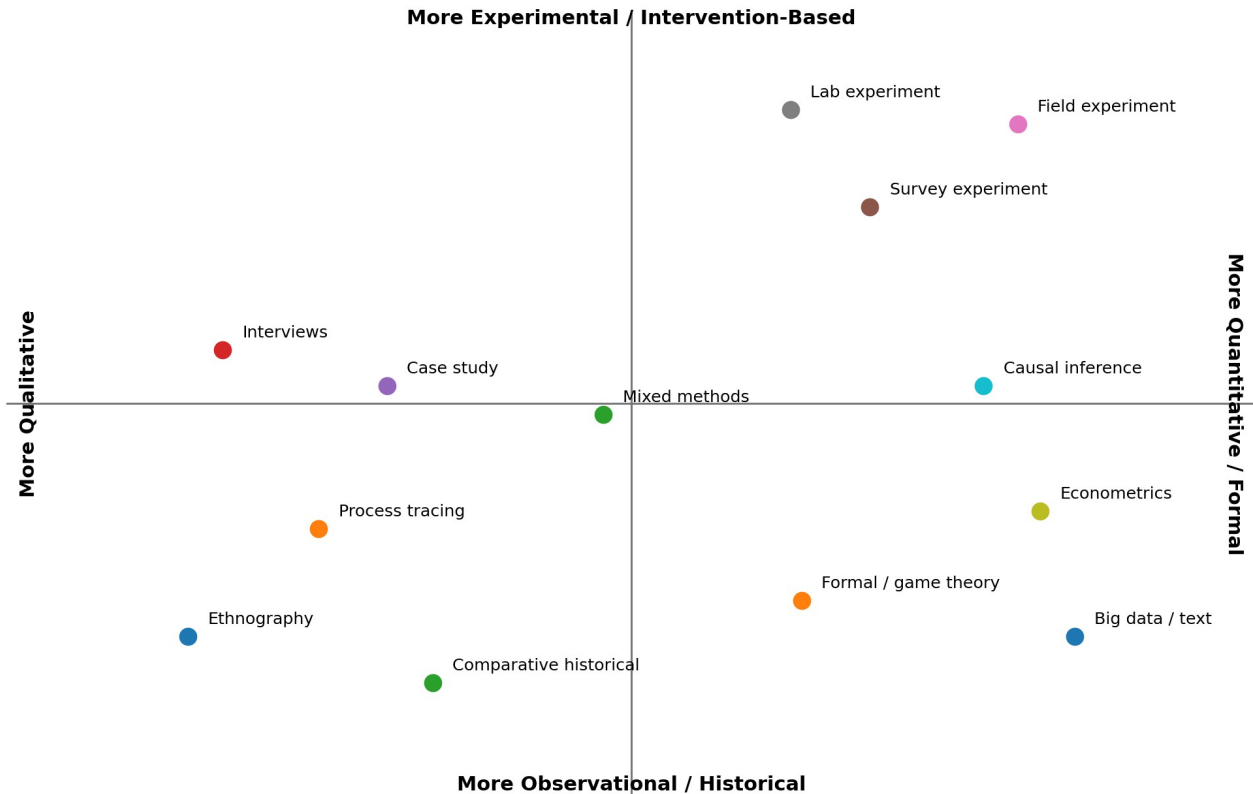


Figure 2. Methods differ along multiple dimensions; “qualitative vs quantitative” is only one axis.

Statistical analysis and political econometrics

Regression, limited dependent-variable models, panel data, time series, multilevel models, spatial models, Bayesian analysis, and design-based estimators are used to test relationships, quantify uncertainty, and estimate effects.

Surveys

Probability samples, panels, cross-national surveys, and specialized elite surveys measure attitudes, beliefs, identities, knowledge, participation, and preferences.

Experiments

Laboratory, survey, field, natural, and quasi-experiments manipulate or exploit variation to identify causal effects. Central issues include ethics, interference, compliance, external validity, and treatment heterogeneity.

Causal inference

Potential-outcomes and structural approaches use randomization, matching, instrumental variables, regression discontinuity, difference-in-differences, synthetic controls, panel designs, and sensitivity analysis to distinguish correlation from causal effects.

Big-data and computational analysis

Large-scale text, social-media, network, geospatial, administrative, image, and digital-trace data permit measurement of agendas, discourse, networks, mobilization, and information flows. Machine learning is increasingly used for prediction and measurement, with growing attention to bias and validation.

Case studies

Intensive analysis of one or a few cases can identify mechanisms, test observable implications, build concepts, analyze rare events, and evaluate scope conditions.

Comparative historical analysis

Uses temporal sequences and carefully selected comparisons to explain state formation, revolutions, welfare states, democratization, and long-run institutional change.

Interviews and documentary analysis

Elite interviews, archival records, legislation, court opinions, administrative files, media, and organizational documents reveal preferences, interpretations, decision processes, and hidden mechanisms.

Process tracing

Reconstructs causal sequences within cases and evaluates evidence for competing mechanisms using diagnostic observations.

Ethnography

Participant observation and immersive fieldwork examine informal rules, meaning, identity, authority, implementation, and everyday state-society interactions.

Formal theory and game theory

Mathematical models clarify strategic interaction, bargaining, voting, coalition formation, delegation, deterrence, collective action, and equilibrium conditions.

Mixed methods

Combines complementary forms of evidence - for example, a cross-national statistical pattern plus process tracing, or an experiment plus interviews - to improve measurement, mechanism identification, external validity, and theory development.

Methodological Principles

- Concept before measurement: a variable is only as useful as the concept it validly represents.
- Research design before estimation: identification assumptions matter more than statistical sophistication.
- Mechanism plus effect: knowing that X affects Y is different from knowing how and under what conditions.
- Scope conditions: political relationships are often conditional on institutions, time, geography, and strategic context.
- Triangulation: different data sources and methods can expose different forms of bias.
- Reproducibility and transparency: code, data provenance, preregistration where appropriate, and sensitivity analysis strengthen cumulative knowledge.
- Ethics: political research can affect subjects, communities, elections, and institutions; informed consent, privacy, risk, deception, and field intervention require explicit scrutiny.

Part V. Political Science in Action: Combining Fields to Explain Real Political Phenomena

1. U.S. presidential elections

Fields combined: Elections & parties + political psychology + political communication + American politics + methodology

Vote choice depends on partisanship, retrospective evaluations, identity, candidate evaluations, campaign information, electoral rules, turnout institutions, and geographic distribution. Methods range from surveys and experiments to precinct returns and causal designs.

2. Congress and the president

Fields combined: Legislative politics + executive politics + parties + public law + bureaucratic politics

Separation of powers is a bargaining system: agenda control, vetoes, party polarization, oversight, appointments, appropriations, unilateral action, and courts jointly determine outcomes.

3. The Supreme Court

Fields combined: Judicial politics + constitutional theory + American politics + public opinion

Court decisions reflect legal doctrine, institutional roles, ideological preferences, strategic interaction, appointment politics, implementation, and legitimacy among publics and elites.

4. Party polarization

Fields combined: Elections + political psychology + political sociology + institutions + media politics

Polarization can be ideological, affective, elite-driven, identity-based, geographic, and media-amplified. Research asks whether causes and consequences are symmetric, how parties sort, and when polarization erodes democratic norms.

5. Lobbying and campaign finance

Fields combined: Interest-group politics + elite theory + political economy + law & politics

Money matters through access, agenda setting, candidate selection, information, organizational capacity, and long-term network building; legal rules define channels and constraints.

6. Media and public opinion

Fields combined: Political communication + psychology + parties + technology politics

Agenda setting, framing, selective exposure, partisan cues, platform algorithms, social networks, and misinformation shape what citizens encounter and how they interpret it.

7. Bureaucracy

Fields combined: Public administration + bureaucratic politics + public policy + executive politics

Delegation creates expertise and implementation capacity but also discretion, drift, capture, and accountability problems. Street-level implementation often determines citizens' real experience of policy.

8. Democratic backsliding

Fields combined: Comparative politics + constitutional politics + parties + political behavior + public administration

Backsliding often proceeds through elected incumbents, executive aggrandizement, electoral manipulation, attacks on referees, politicization of administration, and norm erosion. Measurement and voter responses remain major debates.

9. Authoritarian regimes

Fields combined: Comparative politics + elite theory + political economy + communication + security

Regime survival depends on elite bargains, coercion, co-optation, institutions, information control, economic performance, succession rules, and external support.

10. Revolutions

Fields combined: Comparative-historical politics + movements + political sociology + violence

Revolutionary outcomes combine state breakdown, elite splits, mass mobilization, organizational networks, repression, diffusion, and international pressures.

11. Wars

Fields combined: IR + security studies + foreign policy analysis + domestic politics

War can arise from bargaining failure, commitment problems, private information, domestic incentives, nationalism, alliance dynamics, misperception, and technological change.

12. U.S.-China competition

Fields combined: IR + IPE + geopolitics + technology politics + foreign policy

Military balancing, trade, investment screening, semiconductors, supply chains, alliances, sanctions, standards, and AI/compute governance increasingly merge security and economic policy.

13. International organizations

Fields combined: IR + global governance + law + IPE

Institutions can reduce transaction costs, provide information, monitor commitments, delegate authority, socialize actors, and distribute resources, but are constrained by power, legitimacy, and member-state conflict.

14. Financial crises

Fields combined: Political economy + IPE + public policy + comparative politics

Crises involve financial institutions, regulatory choices, distributional coalitions, central banks, fiscal capacity, international capital, and political blame. Recovery policies create long-run feedback effects.

15. Inequality

Fields combined: Political economy + elite theory + political sociology + public policy + elections

Inequality is both an economic outcome and a political process involving taxation, labor institutions, education, housing, wealth, campaign finance, representation, and unequal voice.

A Mid-2020s Research Frontier: Democratic Norms, Backsliding, Expertise, Revolution, and AI

Recent research illustrates how contemporary political science increasingly combines conceptual clarification, measurement, experiments, comparative evidence, and institutional analysis. Work published in the 2024-2026 period has sharpened debates over how democratic backsliding should be defined and measured; how citizens and oversight institutions respond to incumbent transgressions; how expertise and civil services operate under democratic stress; how revolution should be conceptualized across mass uprisings and regime change; and how AI, social platforms, and synthetic media are reshaping campaigns, deliberation, surveillance, and political communication. These debates are best understood as cross-field problems rather than as belonging to a single subdiscipline.

Part VI. A Unified Sequence of Fundamental Questions

A Unified Sequence of Political Science Questions



Power -> institutions -> behavior -> policy -> international interaction -> stability and change

Figure 3. A synthetic sequence linking the discipline from power acquisition to political order.

Fundamental Question	Fields Most Directly Connected	Typical Mechanisms / Variables
Who possesses power?	Political elites; political sociology; political economy; interest groups; identity politics; local/urban politics.	Distribution of resources, organization, class, status, networks, agenda control, elite circulation.
How is power acquired?	Elections and parties; political communication; social movements; revolutions; executive politics; authoritarianism.	Voting, persuasion, mobilization, coalition building, leadership, coercion, organization, legitimacy.
Which institutions organize and constrain power?	Comparative politics; constitutional/judicial politics; legislative politics; executive politics; public administration; historical institutionalism.	Constitutions, federalism, separation of powers, electoral systems, bureaucracy, courts, formal and informal rules.
How do political actors behave?	Political psychology; political behavior; elections; public opinion; rational choice; political sociology.	Preferences, identities, emotions, cognition, incentives, strategic interaction, participation.
How are public policies made?	Public policy; public administration; legislative politics; executive politics; bureaucratic politics; political economy.	Agenda setting, bargaining, regulation, budgeting, implementation, feedback, evaluation.
How does domestic politics interact with the international order?	International relations; foreign policy analysis; IPE; global governance; security studies; geopolitics.	War, diplomacy, alliances, trade, finance, sanctions, institutions, norms, supply chains, technology.
Why do political orders remain stable or collapse?	Comparative politics; democracy; authoritarianism; revolution; civil war; historical political development; political economy.	Legitimacy, state capacity, elite cohesion, institutions, inequality, repression, collective action, external shocks.

Part VII. Recommended Learning Roadmap

Foundation: Build the Vocabulary of Power and Institutions

1. Learn the core concepts: state, government, sovereignty, power, authority, legitimacy, institutions, law, representation, democracy, authoritarianism, parties, bureaucracy, policy, and international order.
2. Read one foundational work each in political philosophy, comparative politics, American politics, international relations, and political economy.
3. Learn how to distinguish normative, descriptive, explanatory, and causal questions.
4. Acquire basic statistics, probability, research design, and comparative reasoning.
5. Use current events as applications: identify the actors, institutions, incentives, resources, and constraints in each case.

Intermediate: Learn the Major Explanatory Traditions

6. Compare institutionalist, behavioral, rational-choice, historical, sociological, constructivist, Marxist, elite, pluralist, feminist, and critical explanations of the same phenomenon.
7. Study elections and parties, legislatures, executives, courts, bureaucracies, public policy, political economy, and international relations as interacting systems rather than isolated courses.
8. Learn regression, causal inference basics, survey design, case-study logic, process tracing, and at least an introduction to formal/game-theoretic reasoning.
9. Practice reading journal articles by extracting: research question, theory, mechanism, identification strategy, evidence, assumptions, findings, and scope conditions.
10. Conduct small comparative projects that combine one macro-level and one micro-level explanation.

Advanced: Integrate Theory, Methods, and Domain Expertise

11. Specialize in one or two substantive fields while maintaining fluency in adjacent fields and methodology.
12. Learn advanced causal inference, panel and time-series methods, Bayesian analysis, formal theory, computational text/network methods, or intensive qualitative methods depending on research questions.
13. Develop theory that specifies actors, preferences, institutions, mechanisms, temporal sequence, and observable implications.
14. Build research designs that explicitly address selection, endogeneity, measurement validity, missing data, external validity, and alternative mechanisms.
15. Use mixed methods when the inferential problem requires both broad pattern identification and mechanism-level evidence.
16. Engage the normative stakes of empirical findings: political science is strongest when it can explain power without losing sight of legitimacy, rights, accountability, and human consequences.

Part VIII. Essential Classic and Major Contemporary Works

A. Classic and Field-Defining Works

- Plato - Republic
- Aristotle - Politics
- Machiavelli - The Prince; Discourses on Livy
- Hobbes - Leviathan
- Locke - Second Treatise of Government
- Rousseau - The Social Contract
- J. S. Mill - On Liberty; Considerations on Representative Government
- Tocqueville - Democracy in America
- Marx - The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte; Capital
- Weber - Economy and Society; Politics as a Vocation
- Mosca - The Ruling Class
- Pareto - The Mind and Society
- Michels - Political Parties
- Schumpeter - Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy
- Lasswell - Politics: Who Gets What, When, How
- Dahl - Who Governs?; Polyarchy
- Downs - An Economic Theory of Democracy
- Campbell et al. - The American Voter
- Olson - The Logic of Collective Action
- Lipset - Political Man
- Rawls - A Theory of Justice
- Nozick - Anarchy, State, and Utopia
- Schelling - The Strategy of Conflict; Arms and Influence
- Waltz - Theory of International Politics
- Keohane - After Hegemony
- Skocpol - States and Social Revolutions
- Mayhew - Congress: The Electoral Connection
- Neustadt - Presidential Power
- Simon - Administrative Behavior
- Ostrom - Governing the Commons
- King, Keohane & Verba - Designing Social Inquiry

B. Major Contemporary Works and Research Directions

- Putnam - Bowling Alone (2000)
- Pierson - Politics in Time (2004)
- Kalyvas - The Logic of Violence in Civil War (2006)
- Acemoglu & Robinson - Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (2006)
- McCarty, Poole & Rosenthal - Polarized America (2006; later editions)
- North, Wallis & Weingast - Violence and Social Orders (2009)
- Levitsky & Way - Competitive Authoritarianism (2010)
- Mahoney & Thelen, eds. - Explaining Institutional Change (2010)
- Hacker & Pierson - Winner-Take-All Politics (2010)
- Svobik - The Politics of Authoritarian Rule (2012)
- Achen & Bartels - Democracy for Realists (2016)
- Mason - Uncivil Agreement (2018)
- Farrell & Newman - Weaponized Interdependence (2019)
- Berman - Democracy and Dictatorship in Europe (2019)
- Tufekci - Twitter and Tear Gas (2017)
- Zuboff - The Age of Surveillance Capitalism (2019)
- Staniland - Ordering Violence (2021)
- Guriev & Treisman - Spin Dictators (2022)
- Grumbach - Laboratories Against Democracy (2022)
- Walter - How Civil Wars Start (2022)
- Helmke & Rath - Defining and Measuring Democratic Norms (Annual Review of Political Science, 2025)
- Dargent Bocanegra - Expert Knowledge in Democracies: Promises, Limits, and Challenges (Annual Review of Political Science, 2025)
- Clarke - Revolution as Mass-Based Regime Change (Annual Review of Political Science, 2025)
- Schneier & Sanders - Rewiring Democracy: How AI Will Transform Our Politics, Government, and Citizenship (MIT Press, 2025)

- Recent Political Science Research and Methods / Cambridge debates on democratic backsliding, polarization, and oversight (2024-2026)

Selected Current Research Notes (2024-2026)

- Gretchen Helmke & Josiah Rath, "Defining and Measuring Democratic Norms," Annual Review of Political Science 28 (2025). <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041322-040610>
- E. Dargent Bocanegra, "Expert Knowledge in Democracies: Promises, Limits, and Challenges," Annual Review of Political Science 28 (2025). <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-polisci-033123-020420>
- K. Clarke, "Revolution as Mass-Based Regime Change," Annual Review of Political Science 28 (2025). <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-polisci-040623-114124>
- Andrew T. Little and related symposium contributions on measuring and theorizing democratic backsliding, PS: Political Science & Politics (2024). <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ps-political-science-and-politics/article/measuring-democratic-backsliding/9EE2044CDA598BD815349912E61189D8>
- Political Science Research and Methods, "Backsliding under contested oversight" (published 2026). <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/political-science-research-and-methods/article/backsliding-under-contested-oversight/42447E8B583D7272071F6A5DCD08824B>
- APSA Information Technology and Politics Section, recent awards highlighting AI, social media, and mass politics research (2025-2026). <https://apsanet.org/membership/organized-sections/organized-section-awards/past-awards/section-18/>
- Bruce Schneier & Nathan E. Sanders, Rewiring Democracy: How AI Will Transform Our Politics, Government, and Citizenship (MIT Press, 2025). <https://mitpress.mit.edu/9780262049501/rewiring-democracy/>

Appendix: Visual Summary Poster

The following generated overview image is included as a visual orientation aid. The text of the report, not the image, is authoritative for definitions, names, and bibliographic details.

THE COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO POLITICAL SCIENCE

FIELDS, THEORIES, METHODS, AND APPLICATIONS

1. WHAT IS POLITICAL SCIENCE?

DEFINITION
Political science is the systematic study of power, authority, institutions, behavior, politics, and ideas in the context of the state, government, and broader political order—domestically and internationally.

ETYMOLOGY
From Greek: *politikos* = city-state, community; *epistēmē* (knowledge). Thus, the "knowledge of the polis" or the science of political life.

ACADEMIC PURPOSES

- To describe and explain political phenomena
- To assess consequences, outcomes, and behavior
- To understand theoretically justice, legitimacy, and the good society
- To inform public decision-making and civic life

HOW POLITICAL SCIENCE EXAMINES CORE CONCEPTS

State & Government	Power	Authority	Legitimacy	Institutions	Law	Policy	Process of Politics	Political Ideologies	Groups & Movements	Electoral Systems	International Order
Study of sovereignty, authority, territory, and the machinery of governance. Examination of the state, what, where, and how—by question, generation, resources, or institutions.	Focus on the right to rule and the acceptance of commands.	Analysis of belief in the righteousness of political rules and institutions.	Study of formal rules and organizations that structure political life.	Study into legal systems, rights, justice, and the role of law.	Investigation of how public policies are designed, adopted, and implemented.	Study of political systems, institutions, and the process of politics.	Study of political systems, institutions, and the process of politics.	Study of political systems, institutions, and the process of politics.	Study of political systems, institutions, and the process of politics.	Study of political systems, institutions, and the process of politics.	Study of political systems, institutions, and the process of politics.

Authors: The American Newspaper | <https://www.americannewspaper.org> | AmericanTV | <https://www.americanstv.org>

2. MAJOR FIELDS OF MODERN POLITICAL SCIENCE (CONTINUED)

Field	Definition	Central Research Questions (Examples)	Key Concepts & Theories	Representative Scholars & Classic Works	Leading Contemporary Debates
Political Theory / Political Philosophy	Normative inquiry into politics, the good life, rights, the state, and political obligations.	What is justice? What are rights? What is the good society?	Justice, liberty, equality, rights, legitimacy, contractarianism.	Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, Rawls (A Theory of Justice).	Liberalism vs. communitarianism; multiculturalism; deliberative democracy.
Comparative Politics	Study of political systems across countries.	Why do regimes vary? What causes regime change?	Regime, democracy, authoritarianism, change, institutions.	Arnold J. Levinson, Robert Dahl (Democracy and Its Critics).	Democracy: resiliency, institutions vs. culture, elite vs. popular.
International Relations & International Politics	Study of interactions among states and non-state actors internationally.	Why do states cooperate or conflict? What causes peace?	Sovereignty, power, security, interests, internationalism.	Morgenthau (Politics Among Nations), Waltz (Theory of International Politics).	Great power competition; liberal vs. realist; realism vs. constructivism.
American Politics & Society	Study of the U.S. political system and political culture.	How do institutions shape politics? Why is it so difficult to change?	Federalism, separation of powers, parties, interest groups.	Tocqueville, The Federalist Papers, Key (The Responsible Citizen).	Partisanship; racial politics; dysfunction; democratic reform.
Public Policy	Study of how government addresses public problems.	How are issues placed on the agenda? What policies work?	Agenda-setting, policy formulation, evaluation, implementation.	Day (Understanding Public Policy), Sabatier (The Politics of Policy Process).	Evidence-based policy; public policy; governance capability.
Public Administration	Management and organization of public agencies and programs.	How are public organizations run? What is performance management?	Bureaucracy, organizational behavior, public management.	Wilson (The Study of Administration), DiMaggio.	New Public Management vs. Public Value; governance networks.

Page 2

2. MAJOR FIELDS OF MODERN POLITICAL SCIENCE (CONTINUED)

Field	Definition	Central Research Questions (Examples)	Key Concepts & Theories	Scholars & Classic Works	Leading Contemporary Debates
Political Economy	Analysis of the relationship between politics and economic life.	How do politics shape the economy? How is wealth distributed?	Markets, inequality, state, capitalism, redistribution.	Marx (Capital), Rawls (The Great Transformation), Toulmin.	Inequality, globalization, state vs. market, Neoliberalism.
Political Sociology	Study of the social foundations of politics.	How do class, race, religion, and culture shape politics?	Class, social movements, identity, change.	Wallerstein (Modern World-System), Alinsky (Hunger for Memory).	Identity politics; social capital; Postmodernism (Lyotard).
Political Psychology	Study of the psychological bases of political attitudes and behavior.	Why do people hold certain beliefs? What drives leadership?	Cognition, identity, framing, personality.	Adorno (The Authoritarian Personality), Janowitz.	Affective polarization; identity politics; heuristics and bias.
Law Politics / Judicial Politics	Study of the relationship between law, courts, and justice.	How do courts interpret the law? How is law made?	Rule of law, judicial review, legal institutions.	Marbury v. Madison (The Least Dangerous Branch).	Judicial activism; judicial politics; constitutional interpretation.
Electoral, Voting, Behavior & Party Politics	Study of elections, votes, parties, and political competition.	Why do people vote? How do parties form and compete?	Electoral systems, identity, coalitions, coalitions.	Downs (An Economic Theory of Democracy), Lipset & Rokkan.	Comparing regimes; third parties; electoral reform.
Legislative Politics	Study of legislative institutions and legislative behavior.	How do legislatures operate? Why do legislators cooperate or compete?	Committees, lobbying, representation.	Mayer (Divided We Govern), Cox & McCubbins (Legislative Leviathan).	Grocery, polarization of legislatures.

Page 3

2. MAJOR FIELDS OF MODERN POLITICAL SCIENCE (CONTINUED)

Field	Definition	Central Research Questions (Examples)	Key Concepts & Theories	Scholars & Classic Works	Leading Contemporary Debates
Foreign Policy Analysis	Study of how states formulate and implement foreign policy.	Why do states choose certain foreign policy goals?	Interests, strategy, balance of power, politics.	Alfred (The Balance of Power), Kissinger (The Nuclear Age).	Great power rivalry; strategy in world politics.
International Politics	Study of global relations among states and institutions.	How do global relations change? What causes conflict?	Trade, finance, globalization.	Kroeber (The Structure of International Relations), Kissinger (The Nuclear Age).	Resource competition; global inequality; supply chains.
International Development & Global Governance	Study of development, aid, and global governance.	Why do states aid? What are global problems?	Regimes, cooperation, norms, legitimacy.	Korten (When Did I Stop Loving the World?), Alesina & Wacziarg.	UN reform; climate change; global inequality; effectiveness.
Politics of Development & Development Politics	Study of development and state-society relations in the global South.	Why do some states develop? Why do others not?	Development, state capacity, dependency, institutions.	Sen (Development as Freedom), Acemoglu & Robinson.	Inclusion vs. extractive institutions; state capacity.
Environmental Politics	Study of politics of the environment and climate change.	How do environmental problems arise? What policies address them?	Sustainability, climate policy, collective action.	Common (The Limits to Growth), O'Rourke (The Green New Deal).	Climate justice; energy transition; global cooperation.

Page 4

2. MAJOR FIELDS OF MODERN POLITICAL SCIENCE (CONTINUED)

Field	Definition	Central Research Questions (Examples)	Key Concepts & Theories	Scholars & Classic Works	Leading Contemporary Debates
Political Theory & Ideology	Study of ethics, power, justice, and what is good.	What is the good? How do we achieve it?	Justice, rights, class, power.	Wills (The Power of the Moral Law), Rawls (The Moral and Political Philosophy).	Ethics; distributive justice; distributive justice.
Political Communication	Study of political communication and media.	How do messages shape politics? How do campaigns work?	Framing, persuasion, media, information.	Laswell (Political Science and the Media), Lasswell (The Media and Politics).	Disinformation; media and politics; information technology.
Public Opinion & Media Politics	Study of mass attitudes and media in politics.	What shapes public opinion? How does media influence politics?	Opinion formation, media effects, trust.	Lippmann (Public Opinion), Lippmann (The Public Opinion).	Polarization; media fragmentation; misinformation.
Identity Politics (Race, Ethnicity, Religion, Gender)	Study of how identity shapes politics and representation.	How do identities shape politics? How is identity represented?	Identity, intersectionality, representation.	Critchlow (The Color of Politics), Fraser (Justice Interrupted).	Backlash; inclusion vs. exclusion; representation.
Political Violence (War, Terrorism, & Security Studies)	Study of violence, conflict, terrorism, and security.	Why do states use violence? Why do non-state actors use violence?	Conflict, deterrence, terrorism, civil war.	Kayser (The Logic of Violence), Wicks (The Logic of Violence and Terrorism).	Asymmetric warfare; human security; cyberterrorism.

Page 5

2. MAJOR FIELDS OF MODERN POLITICAL SCIENCE (CONTINUED)

Field	Definition	Central Research Questions (Examples)	Key Concepts & Theories	Scholars & Classic Works	Leading Contemporary Debates
Political Technology	Study of how technology shapes politics and digital rights.	How do technologies shape politics? How do digital rights change?	Privacy, surveillance, power, surveillance.	Wallerstein (The World-System), Wicks (The Logic of Violence).	Tech oligarchy; digital rights; digital divide.
Political Science & Economics	Study of digital politics, platforms, privacy, and the government.	How do digital technologies shape politics? How do digital rights change?	Algorithms, data, platforms, privacy, AI ethics.	Zuboff (Surveillance Capitalism), Zuboff (The Age of Surveillance).	Algorithmic bias; digital authoritarianism.
Political Science & Law	Study of political systems and legal systems.	How do legal systems shape politics? How do legal rights change?	Path dependency, state formation, modernization.	Hartmann (Political Order in Changing Societies), Hartmann (Political Order and Social Change).	Path dependency; state building; historical events.
Political Geography & Regional Studies	Study of spatial dimensions of politics and geography.	How do geography shape politics? What does geography mean?	Territory, borders, resources, space.	Mackinder (The Heart of the Matter), Mackinder (The Heart of the Matter).	India-Pakistan rivalry; resource conflict; border politics.
Political Anthropology	Study of methods of political inquiry and research design.	How do we know what we know? How do we test theories?	Variables, measurement, validity.	King (The Structure of Politics), King (The Structure of Politics).	Qualitative vs. quantitative; mixed methods.

Page 6

3. THEORETICAL & ANALYTICAL APPROACHES IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

Approach	Definition	Central Research Questions (Examples)	Key Concepts & Theories	Scholars & Classic Works	Leading Contemporary Debates
Historical Institutionalism	Study of how institutions shape politics and digital rights.	How do institutions shape politics? How do digital rights change?	Path dependency, state formation, modernization.	Hartmann (Political Order in Changing Societies), Hartmann (Political Order and Social Change).	Path dependency; state building; historical events.
Behavioral Science	Study of political systems and legal systems.	How do legal systems shape politics? How do legal rights change?	Path dependency, state formation, modernization.	Hartmann (Political Order in Changing Societies), Hartmann (Political Order and Social Change).	Path dependency; state building; historical events.
Comparative Politics	Study of political systems across countries.	Why do regimes vary? What causes regime change?	Regime, democracy, authoritarianism, change, institutions.	Arnold J. Levinson, Robert Dahl (Democracy and Its Critics).	Democracy: resiliency, institutions vs. culture, elite vs. popular.
International Relations	Study of interactions among states and non-state actors internationally.	Why do states cooperate or conflict? What causes peace?	Sovereignty, power, security, interests, internationalism.	Morgenthau (Politics Among Nations), Waltz (Theory of International Politics).	Great power competition; liberal vs. realist; realism vs. constructivism.
American Politics	Study of the U.S. political system and political culture.	How do institutions shape politics? Why is it so difficult to change?	Federalism, separation of powers, parties, interest groups.	Tocqueville, The Federalist Papers, Key (The Responsible Citizen).	Partisanship; racial politics; dysfunction; democratic reform.
Public Policy	Study of how government addresses public problems.	How are issues placed on the agenda? What policies work?	Agenda-setting, policy formulation, evaluation, implementation.	Day (Understanding Public Policy), Sabatier (The Politics of Policy Process).	Evidence-based policy; public policy; governance capability.
Public Administration	Management and organization of public agencies and programs.	How are public organizations run? What is performance management?	Bureaucracy, organizational behavior, public management.	Wilson (The Study of Administration), DiMaggio.	New Public Management vs. Public Value; governance networks.

Page 7

3. THEORETICAL & ANALYTICAL APPROACHES IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

Approach	Definition	Central Research Questions (Examples)	Key Concepts & Theories	Scholars & Classic Works	Leading Contemporary Debates
Historical Institutionalism	Study of how institutions shape politics and digital rights.	How do institutions shape politics? How do digital rights change?	Path dependency, state formation, modernization.	Hartmann (Political Order in Changing Societies), Hartmann (Political Order and Social Change).	Path dependency; state building; historical events.
Behavioral Science	Study of political systems and legal systems.	How do legal systems shape politics? How do legal rights change?	Path dependency, state formation, modernization.	Hartmann (Political Order in Changing Societies), Hartmann (Political Order and Social Change).	Path dependency; state building; historical events.
Comparative Politics	Study of political systems across countries.	Why do regimes vary? What causes regime change?	Regime, democracy, authoritarianism, change, institutions.	Arnold J. Levinson, Robert Dahl (Democracy and Its Critics).	Democracy: resiliency, institutions vs. culture, elite vs. popular.
International Relations	Study of interactions among states and non-state actors internationally.	Why do states cooperate or conflict? What causes peace?	Sovereignty, power, security, interests, internationalism.	Morgenthau (Politics Among Nations), Waltz (Theory of International Politics).	Great power competition; liberal vs. realist; realism vs. constructivism.
American Politics	Study of the U.S. political system and political culture.	How do institutions shape politics? Why is it so difficult to change?	Federalism, separation of powers, parties, interest groups.	Tocqueville, The Federalist Papers, Key (The Responsible Citizen).	Partisanship; racial politics; dysfunction; democratic reform.
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Page 8

4. RESEARCH METHODS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

Method	Definition	Central Research Questions (Examples)	Key Concepts & Theories	Scholars & Classic Works	Leading Contemporary Debates
Quantitative Methods	Study of how technology shapes politics and digital rights.	How do technologies shape politics? How do digital rights change?	Privacy, surveillance, power, surveillance.	Wallerstein (The World-System), Wicks (The Logic of Violence).	Tech oligarchy; digital rights; digital divide.
Qualitative Methods	Study of digital politics, platforms, privacy, and the government.	How do digital technologies shape politics? How do digital rights change?	Algorithms, data, platforms, privacy, AI ethics.	Zuboff (Surveillance Capitalism), Zuboff (The Age of Surveillance).	Algorithmic bias; digital authoritarianism.
Formal Theory & Game Theory	Study of political systems and legal systems.	How do legal systems shape politics? How do legal rights change?	Path dependency, state formation, modernization.	Hartmann (Political Order in Changing Societies), Hartmann (Political Order and Social Change).	Path dependency; state building; historical events.
Mixed-Methods Research	Study of political systems across countries.	Why do regimes vary? What causes regime change?	Regime, democracy, authoritarianism, change, institutions.	Arnold J. Levinson, Robert Dahl (Democracy and Its Critics).	Democracy: resiliency, institutions vs. culture, elite vs. popular.
International Relations	Study of interactions among states and non-state actors internationally.	Why do states cooperate or conflict? What causes peace?	Sovereignty, power, security, interests, internationalism.	Morgenthau (Politics Among Nations), Waltz (Theory of International Politics).	Great power competition; liberal vs. realist; realism vs. constructivism.
American Politics	Study of the U.S. political system and political culture.	How do institutions shape politics? Why is it so difficult to change?	Federalism, separation of powers, parties, interest groups.	Tocqueville, The Federalist Papers, Key (The Responsible Citizen).	Partisanship; racial politics; dysfunction; democratic reform.
Public Policy	Study of how government addresses public problems.	How are issues placed on the agenda? What policies work?	Agenda-setting, policy formulation, evaluation, implementation.	Day (Understanding Public Policy), Sabatier (The Politics of Policy Process).	Evidence-based policy; public policy; governance capability.
Public Administration	Management and organization of public agencies and programs.	How are public organizations run? What is performance management?	Bureaucracy, organizational behavior, public management.	Wilson (The Study of Administration), DiMaggio.	New Public Management vs. Public Value; governance networks.

Page 9

4. RESEARCH METHODS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

Method	Definition	Central Research Questions (Examples)	Key Concepts & Theories	Scholars & Classic Works	Leading Contemporary Debates
Quantitative Methods	Study of how technology shapes politics and digital rights.	How do technologies shape politics? How do digital rights change?	Privacy, surveillance, power, surveillance.	Wallerstein (The World-System), Wicks (The Logic of Violence).	Tech oligarchy; digital rights; digital divide.
Qualitative Methods	Study of digital politics, platforms, privacy, and the government.	How do digital technologies shape politics? How do digital rights change?	Algorithms, data, platforms, privacy, AI ethics.	Zuboff (Surveillance Capitalism), Zuboff (The Age of Surveillance).	Algorithmic bias; digital authoritarianism.
Formal Theory & Game Theory	Study of political systems and legal systems.	How do legal systems shape politics? How do legal rights change?	Path dependency, state formation, modernization.	Hartmann (Political Order in Changing Societies), Hartmann (Political Order and Social Change).	Path dependency; state building; historical events.
Mixed-Methods Research	Study of political systems across countries.	Why do regimes vary? What causes regime change?	Regime, democracy, authoritarianism, change, institutions.	Arnold J. Levinson, Robert Dahl (Democracy and Its Critics).	Democracy: resiliency, institutions vs. culture, elite vs. popular.
International Relations	Study of interactions among states and non-state actors internationally.	Why do states cooperate or conflict? What causes peace?	Sovereignty, power, security, interests, internationalism.	Morgenthau (Politics Among Nations), Waltz (Theory of International Politics).	Great power competition; liberal vs. realist; realism vs. constructivism.
American Politics	Study of the U.S. political system and political culture.	How do institutions shape politics? Why is it so difficult to change?	Federalism, separation of powers, parties, interest groups.	Tocqueville, The Federalist Papers, Key (The Responsible Citizen).	Partisanship; racial politics; dysfunction; democratic reform.
Public Policy	Study of how government addresses public problems.	How are issues placed on the agenda? What policies work?	Agenda-setting, policy formulation, evaluation, implementation.	Day (Understanding Public Policy), Sabatier (The Politics of Policy Process).	Evidence-based policy; public policy; governance capability.
Public Administration	Management and organization of public agencies and programs.	How are public organizations run? What is performance management?	Bureaucracy, organizational behavior, public management.	Wilson (The Study of Administration), DiMaggio.	New Public Management vs. Public Value; governance networks.

Page 10

5. APPLYING POLITICAL SCIENCE: ANALYZING REAL-WORLD PHENOMENA

Phenomenon	Definition	Central Research Questions (Examples)	Key Concepts & Theories	Scholars & Classic Works	Leading Contemporary Debates
U.S. Presidential Election	Study of how technology shapes politics and digital rights.	How do technologies shape politics? How do digital rights change?	Privacy, surveillance, power, surveillance.	Wallerstein (The World-System), Wicks (The Logic of Violence).	Tech oligarchy; digital rights; digital divide.
European Union	Study of digital politics, platforms, privacy, and the government.	How do digital technologies shape politics? How do digital rights change?	Algorithms, data, platforms, privacy, AI ethics.	Zuboff (Surveillance Capitalism), Zuboff (The Age of Surveillance).	Algorithmic bias; digital authoritarianism.
Climate Change	Study of political systems and legal systems.	How do legal systems shape politics? How do legal rights change?	Path dependency, state formation, modernization.	Hartmann (Political Order in Changing Societies), Hartmann (Political Order and Social Change).	Path dependency; state building; historical events.
Global Inequality	Study of political systems across countries.	Why do regimes vary? What causes regime change?	Regime, democracy, authoritarianism, change, institutions.	Arnold J. Levinson, Robert Dahl (Democracy and Its Critics).	Democracy: resiliency, institutions vs. culture, elite vs. popular.
International Relations	Study of interactions among states and non-state actors internationally.	Why do states cooperate or conflict? What causes peace?	Sovereignty, power, security, interests, internationalism.	Morgenthau (Politics Among Nations), Waltz (Theory of International Politics).	Great power competition; liberal vs. realist; realism vs. constructivism.
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Page 11

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Page 12

Conclusion: Political Science as the Study of Organized Power

Political science can be understood as a layered study of organized power. At the most basic level it asks who possesses resources and authority. It then studies the channels through which power is acquired, the institutions that structure and constrain it, the behavior of citizens and elites operating within those institutions, the policies and distributions that result, the interaction of domestic orders with the international system, and the mechanisms that make political orders stable, adaptive, coercive, legitimate, fragile, or revolutionary. The discipline becomes coherent when its many subfields are seen as different vantage points on this common architecture.

For advanced study, the most productive habit is to resist treating subfields as silos. A presidential election is simultaneously a problem of institutions, psychology, communication, parties, geography, law, and data. A war is simultaneously a problem of international bargaining, domestic coalitions, leadership, political economy, and technology. Inequality is simultaneously an economic distribution, a social structure, an elite-power relationship, a policy outcome, and an electoral force. The strongest political science therefore combines conceptual clarity, explicit theories of power, appropriate methods, historical awareness, and careful attention to the institutional context in which political actors operate.