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**Marcus A. Stadelmann, PhD**

Professor of Political Science and  
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# Political Science

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Professor of Political Science at the University of Texas at Tyler

**for  
dummies**  
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## **Political Science For Dummies®**

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## Table of Contents

### Cover

### Introduction

[About This Book](#)

[Conventions Used in This Book](#)

[Icons Used in This Book](#)

[Beyond the Book](#)

[Where to Go from Here](#)

### Part 1: Understanding Political Science

#### Chapter 1: Discovering the Discipline of Political Science

[Looking at Politics and Political Science](#)

[Studying Political Power](#)

[Searching for Sources of Legitimacy](#)

#### Chapter 2: Shaping Research in Political Science: Looking at Major Approaches

[Starting with Traditionalism](#)

[Switching to Behavioralism](#)

[Moving Leftward with Post-Behavioralism](#)

[Comparing Political Science Theories](#)

[Looking at Historical Sociology](#)

[Seeking Benefits: Rational Choice Theory](#)

## **Chapter 3: Dealing with Political Culture**

[Analyzing Political Culture](#)

[Sustaining Democracy: The Civic Culture](#)

[Working on Political Socialization](#)

[Moving from Materialist to Postmaterialist](#)

## **Part 2: Comparing Governments**

### **Chapter 4: Discussing Different Forms of Government**

[Identifying Types of Governments](#)

[Dividing Powers](#)

### **Chapter 5: Setting the Rules: Constitutions**

[Looking at Constitution Basics](#)

[Creating a New Country: The U.S. Constitution of 1789](#)

[Checking on a New Document: The Russian Constitution](#)

### **Chapter 6: Comparing Political Institutions: Systems of Government**

[Comparing Democratic Political Systems](#)

[Studying the U.S. Congress](#)

[Looking at Great Britain](#)

[Analyzing Executives](#)

[Going Bureaucratic](#)

[Settling Disputes](#)

### **Chapter 7: Elections, Political Parties, and Interest Groups**

[Studying Elections](#)

[Political Parties — Necessary for Democracy](#)

[Interest Groups: Influencing the Government](#)

## **Part 3: Going Global: International Relations**

### **Chapter 8: Thinking Globally: The Study of International Relations**

[Understanding the Origins of International Relations](#)

[Getting into the Theories of International Relations](#)

[Getting Real: The Power of Realism](#)

[Doing Good: Idealism](#)

[Being Equal through Global Humanism](#)

[Striving for Change with Constructivism](#)

### **Chapter 9: Creating Some Order: International Law and Diplomacy**

[Defining International Law](#)

[Studying Sources of International Law](#)

[Connecting with Diplomacy](#)

### **Chapter 10: Creating Order through International Organizations**

[Getting Together in Europe — The Concert of Europe](#)

[Calling for a League of Nations](#)

[Needing a United Nations](#)

### **Chapter 11: Not Going to War: The Cold War 1946-1991**

[Explaining the Cold War](#)

[Highlighting the Cold War](#)

[Analyzing Strategic Doctrines and the Arms Race](#)

### **Chapter 12: Dealing with Political Violence: War and Terrorism**

[Examining Warfare](#)

[Looking at the Causes of War](#)

[Dealing with Terrorism](#)

[Going to War with Evil](#)

[Exploring the Costs of War](#)



## **Chapter 13: Mixing Disciplines: International Political Economy**

[Fusing Economics and Politics](#)

[Creating a New Economic Order](#)

[Discovering Economic Theories](#)

[Examining Population and the Division of Wealth](#)

[Causing Economic Decline in the Third World](#)

[Seeking Globalization: An Integration of Countries](#)

## **Part 4: Going from Classical to Modern Political Ideologies**

### **Chapter 14: Starting in Greece: The Roots of Political Science**

[Studying Ancient Greece and the Start of Political Science](#)

[Questioning Everything: Socrates](#)

[Putting Political Philosophy into Play: Plato](#)

[Seeking a Scientific Approach: Aristotle](#)

[Putting Ethics to Use](#)

### **Chapter 15: Going Modern: Middle Ages to the Present**

[Taking a Lesson on Catholic Theory](#)

[Understanding Power](#)

[Moving to Classical Conservatism](#)

[Advocating for Classical Liberalism](#)

[Putting the Government Back in Charge: Modern Liberalism](#)

### **Chapter 16: Moving to the Right: Fascism, Neofascism, and Right-Wing Populism**

[Getting a Sense of Fascism](#)

[Starting Out: The Beginnings of Fascism](#)

[Rising of Neofascism](#)

[Challenging the Elite: Populism](#)

[Swinging Right: Right-Wing Populism in Europe](#)

## **Chapter 17: Going Left: Communism, Socialism, and Social Democracy**

[Causing Socialism](#)

[Starting with Karl Marx](#)

[Updating Marxism: Lenin](#)

[Traveling to Asia: Maoism](#)

[Going Democratic: Social Democracy](#)

## **Part 5: The Part of Tens**

### **Chapter 18: Ten Political Science Books Everyone Should Read**

[Politics \(335-323 BCE\)](#)

[The Prince \(1513\)](#)

[Leviathan \(1651\)](#)

[Two Treatises of Government \(1690\)](#)

[The Wealth of Nations \(1776\)](#)

[The Communist Manifesto \(1848\)](#)

[The American Voter \(1960\)](#)

[Man, the State, and War \(1959\)](#)

[Who Governs? \(1961\)](#)

[Who's Running America? \(8th Edition, 2017\)](#)

### **Chapter 19: Ten Modern Political Scientists**

[David Easton](#)

[Gabriel Almond](#)

[Hans Morgenthau](#)

[Kenneth Waltz](#)

[Vladimir Orlando Key](#)

[Samuel P. Huntington](#)

[John Rawls](#)

[Francis Fukuyama](#)

[Robert Gilpin](#)

[Robert O. Keohane](#)

## **Index**

[About the Author](#)

[Advertisement Page](#)

[Connect with Dummies](#)

[End User License Agreement](#)

## List of Tables

### Chapter 4

[TABLE 4-1 Forms of Government](#)

[TABLE 4-2 Three Systems of Governments](#)

## List of Illustrations

### Chapter 1

[FIGURE 1-1: Greek philosopher Aristotle is credited with founding political sci...](#)

[FIGURE 1-2: James Madison is the developer of pluralism.](#)

### Chapter 4

[FIGURE 4-1: Adolf Hitler of Germany \(a\) and Joseph Stalin of Russia \(b\) were le...](#)

### Chapter 8

[FIGURE 8-1: The theory of hegemonic stability.](#)

### Chapter 9

[FIGURE 9-1: Hugo Grotius, father of international law.](#)

[FIGURE 9-2: Jean Bodin created the concept of sovereignty.](#)

### Chapter 10

[FIGURE 10-1: United Nations headquarters in New York City.](#)

[FIGURE 10-2: Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt reporting to Pres. Harry Truman on her trip...](#)

### Chapter 11

[FIGURE 11-1: George F. Kennan, American diplomat and creator of the policy of c...](#)

[FIGURE 11-2: Building the Berlin Wall in 1961.](#)

## **Chapter 12**

[FIGURE 12-1: Global military spending in percentages.](#)

## **Chapter 13**

[FIGURE 13-1: The KOF Index of Globalization.](#)

## **Chapter 14**

[FIGURE 14-1: Greek philosopher Socrates.](#)

[FIGURE 14-2: Early Western political philosopher, Plato.](#)

[FIGURE 14-3: Greek philosopher and creator of the academy, the Lyceum, Aristotl...](#)

## **Chapter 15**

[FIGURE 15-1: Saint Augustine, a founding father of the political theory of Chri...](#)

[FIGURE 15-2: Saint Thomas Aquinas, Catholic theorist and author of \*Summa Theolo...\*](#)

[FIGURE 15-3: Niccolo Machiavelli, influential Renaissance philosopher.](#)

[FIGURE 15-4: Thomas Hobbes, a founding father of modern political theory.](#)

[FIGURE 15-5: John Locke, English political philosopher and godfather of classic...](#)

[FIGURE 15-6: Montesquieu, political theorist and author of \*The Spirit of the La...\*](#)

[FIGURE 15-7: Jean Jacques Rousseau, author of \*The Social Contract\*.](#)

[FIGURE 15-8: Edmund Burke, statesman and philosopher.](#)

[FIGURE 15-9: Adam Smith, founding father of classical liberalism.](#)

## **Chapter 16**

[FIGURE 16-1: Benito Mussolini, Prime Minister of Italy.](#)

[FIGURE 16-2: Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder of the National Front.](#)

[FIGURE 16-3: Marine Le Pen, chair of the National Rally party.](#)

## **Chapter 17**

FIGURE 17-1: Karl Marx, the father of Communism.

FIGURE 17-2: Lenin, Russian revolutionary and political theorist.

FIGURE 17-3: Mao Zedong, founding father of the People's Republic of China.

# Introduction

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As a professor of political science, some of the most frequently asked questions I receive from students include the following: Why study political science? Why should different forms of government and world politics matter to me? Why study political theory and learn about foreign cultures? Most students assume that political events occurring either at home or in faraway countries don't impact their daily lives and are therefore not too concerned about them. Why would someone in Texas care about a new senator being elected in Oregon? Why would a college student living comfortably in the U.S. care about what's happening in Central Asia? What is globalization, how does it impact us, and why care about it? Why read a book written by an old Greek guy who has been dead for thousands of years? Because learning these concepts helps define how people come together and the importance of being a citizen of the world.

By reading this book and becoming a student of political science, you'll acquire the necessary tools to become familiar with, study, and hopefully become interested in both domestic and international political affairs. I hope that this political interest will then get you involved and encourage you to participate in politics.

Studying politics isn't easy. Many factors shape it — individuals, such as leaders of political parties and countries; international organizations, such as the United Nations; domestic factors, such as political cultures and public opinion; and even disasters, such as the COVID-19 outbreak. Albert Einstein put it best almost a century ago when asked why men could discover the structure of the atom but were unable to keep it from destroying the world, stating: "This is

simple, my friend; it is because politics is more difficult than physics.”

## ***About This Book***

This book is intended as an introduction to the study of politics and political science. I assume no prior knowledge of the political process or the discipline of political science. While writing this book, I’ve strived to be nonpartisan, meaning that I didn’t write with any type of political ideology in mind. I also didn’t attempt to push certain political ideas and concepts while ignoring others.

One of the purposes of this book is for readers to come to their own conclusions and become more informed citizens and participate in not just debates on politics but in the political process. With politics being the process of making decisions for the public, it affects us all. Therefore, citizens need to be educated on the issues of the day and must be willing to participate in politics.

Whenever the text discusses certain concepts, such as federalism, I provide not only a definition of the term but also real-life examples of the concept. I show how it’s being applied in countries and how it works. I draw many examples from democracies, mostly located in Europe, but I also focus on the rest of the world, especially in the section on international organizations, globalization, and warfare.

I designed this book to provide a solid foundation on the discipline of political science. It will prove to be helpful whether you’re studying political science, writing a paper, or reading to expand your knowledge. I tried to make the book entertaining by including little-known tidbits on many topics. So whether you’re a political

science student or just someone interested in the discipline, this book is for you. My hope is that this book will prove one point: Politics matters, and everyone needs to get involved in it.

## *Conventions Used in This Book*

The information in some chapters is relevant to more than just that chapter. When this is the case, I include cross-references to these chapters by chapter number. For example, I discuss the U.S. Constitution in [Chapter 5](#). However, I also analyze specific constitutional powers of the American legislature and executive in [Chapter 6](#).

## *Icons Used in This Book*

As you read and enjoy this book, you'll see two different icons that alert you to specific aspects related to political science, its subfields, and major writers and their works.



**REMEMBER** This icon points out important information you should be aware of as you read the section, the chapter, or the book. This icon covers only the most important events, people, and issues.



**TECHNICAL STUFF** Historical information often case-specific, including treaties, important battles, strategic doctrines, and other relevant material or events have this icon beside them. This information isn't



necessary for grasping certain concepts but is required for a political scientist in the making.

## ***Beyond the Book***

In addition to what you're reading right now, this book comes with a free access-anywhere Cheat Sheet that includes a list of political scientists and their major works as well as a handy bank of major political science concepts. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and type "Political Science For Dummies Cheat Sheet" in the Search box.

## ***Where to Go from Here***

Feel free to start with any chapter in the book that interests you. Keep in mind that all the chapters are nonlinear, so you can start with any topic in any chapter. Happy reading!

## **Part 1**

# **Understanding Political Science**

## **IN THIS PART ...**

Discover what politics is all about and why it's relevant to every person alive and thus needs to be studied.

Find out how political science developed from being very descriptive and nonexplanatory to a discipline that today tests propositions and creates theories to try to explain global behavior and conflict.

Explore how political culture determines how people act politically in their countries. Plus, find out how the process of political socialization of people, referring to how people receive their political values, determines how they behave politically.

# Chapter 1

## Discovering the Discipline of Political Science

---

### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding what politics and political science entail
  - » Finding out about political power
  - » Looking into sources of legitimacy
- 

*Political science* is the study of politics and more precisely power. *Politics* is the process by how government decisions are made. It involves some members of society making decisions for all of society because they hold political power over others. Politics, in turn, determines who gets what, where, when, and how. For this reason, politics is an ongoing competition between individuals, groups, or even nation-states. In the United States, politics can involve two interest groups competing for benefits from the government. At the international level, politics could be a competition for natural resources, such as oil, or new powerful allies.

A political scientist is interested in who holds political power in a society, what type of political institutions (forms of government) are best suited to bring about the least amount of conflict, and what form of government is best for its citizens. To be more precise, political scientists are interested in who gets elected to office, how elections are won, how policy is made, how leaders

maintain themselves in power, and the all-important question, why does war occur and could it be prevented?

This chapter looks at the study of politics and political science, including the beginnings of political science.

## ***Looking at Politics and Political Science***

Many believe that political science is a way of training for future politicians. Although taking a political science class can be helpful if you want to venture into politics, this isn't what political science is all about. Political science is a method or a way to study politics.



**REMEMBER** Political science is an academic discipline that studies the relationship between people and political institutions. A discipline is a field of study usually represented by an academic department at a college or university. Political science is a discipline, and so are history, sociology, and biology.

Politics impacts people daily, and most of the time they're not aware of it. Politics determines tax rates, the way businesses are run, the textbooks a child uses in high school, and even how much a person pays for a gallon of milk in the grocery store.

### ***Going back to the history of political science***

The founder of the discipline of political science is the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle (see [Figure 1-1](#)). He referred to political science as a master science, because

everything in life can be political in nature. Aristotle was the first political scientist to collect data and then base his research on it.

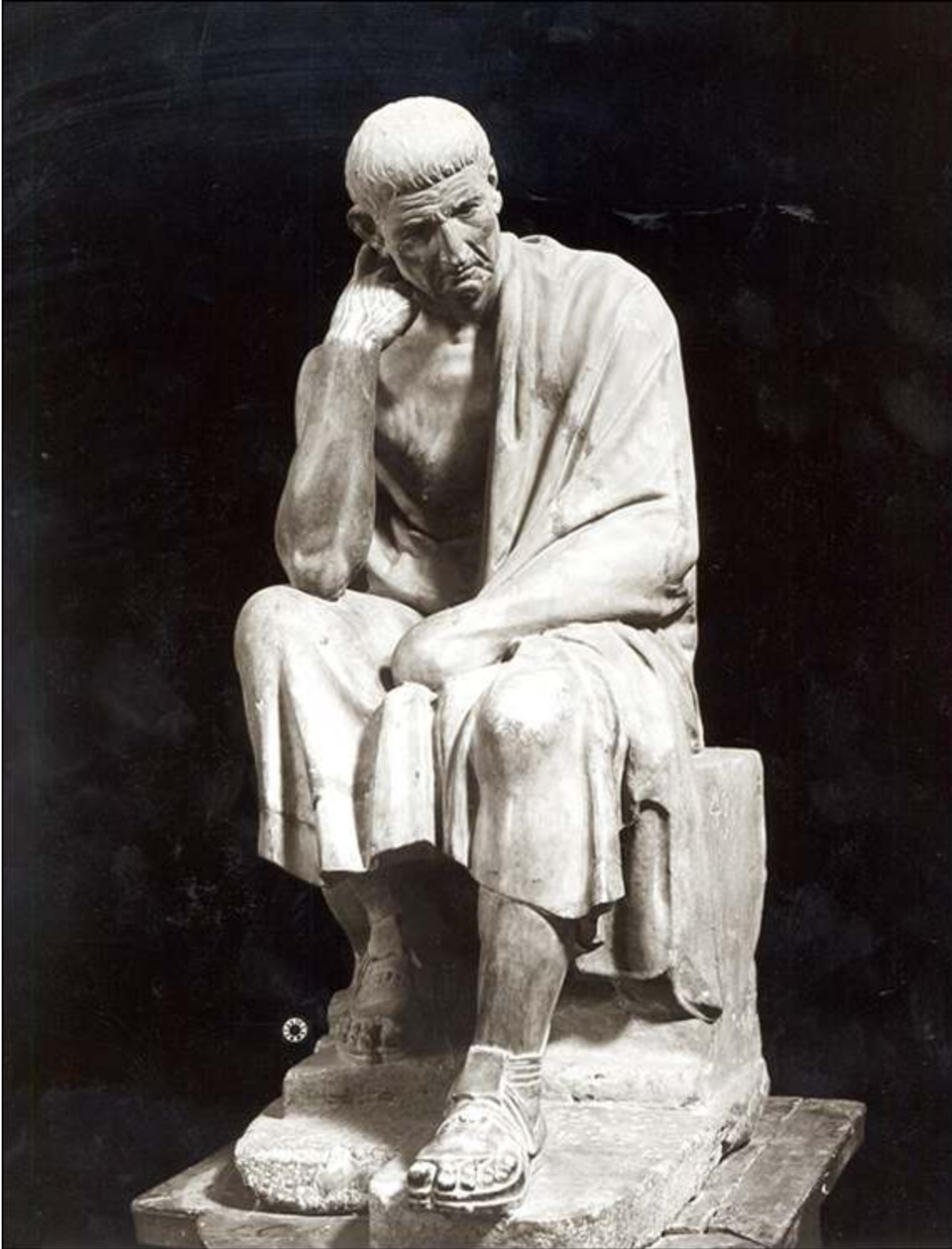


TECHNICAL  
STUFF

Aristotle and his teacher Plato were concerned with the decline of his home city-state Athens. He wanted to know what caused the decline of his beloved Athens and more important how to save Athens. So he sent his students to the other Greek city-states to gather data. He wanted to know why some city-states were doing well and why others weren't. Based on the data his students collected, Aristotle wrote his famous book *Politics*. In it, he describes the various forms of governments and institutions his students discovered in the Greek city-states. Then he discusses his own preferences. Political science and normative theory (see [Chapter 2](#)) were born.



**REMEMBER** The term *politics* comes from the ancient Greek *polis*, which means city-state. The first person to use the term was Aristotle, who lived during the time of the Greek city-states dominating Greek politics. So politics for Aristotle referred to the interaction between the Greek city-states.



*Source: Bridgeman Images*

**FIGURE 1-1:** Greek philosopher Aristotle is credited with founding political science.



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

A *city-state*, or polis, was the dominant political structure of ancient Greece. Each city-state had an urban center, walls for protection, and controlled a piece of the surrounding countryside. There were over 1,000 city-states, and the largest ones were Athens, Sparta, Corinth, Thebes, Syracuse, and Rhodes. Each city-state ruled itself and had a different form of government. For example, Athens was a democracy while Sparta was ruled by two kings and a council of elders.

## ***Being a part of the social sciences***

Political science is a part of the social sciences. Social sciences study how people interact with each other, how they behave toward others, and how power is distributed and used within societies. Social sciences include anthropology, economics, criminology, political science, sociology, and psychology. The social sciences that political science heavily draws on contribute to political science in the following manner:

- » **Sociology:** The discipline of sociology studies human beings and how they interact. Sociology focuses on how small and large groups form and become large organizations, even nation-states. Political scientists use sociology to explain the behavior of small groups, such as members of a parliament, and the creation of large groups, such as nation-states. In addition, studies are conducted on how people acquire and maintain power within groups.
- » **Economics:** The discipline of economics is important for the political scientist. Economics and politics often intersect. The political scientist uses economics to



examine government programs such as social security or to discuss international trade agreements or even punitive sanctions.

- » **Anthropology:** Anthropology is the study of ancient and modern-day cultures. The discipline is useful for political scientists when conducting culture studies (see [Chapter 3](#)). Anthropology allows the political scientist to compare processes, norms, and institutions in different societies. For example, political scientists for decades have studied cultural aspects that maintain or destroy democracy in a nation-state. Also, as [Chapter 12](#) shows, certain cultural traits can make societies more aggressive and warlike in the international arena. Anthropology helps find these cultures and hopefully change them to prevent global conflict.
- » **Psychology:** Psychology studies the way human beings think and behave within the national or international system. The political scientist can use psychology to analyze people, studying voting behavior in countries or examining the leading politicians in different countries to see how and why they make certain decisions.

All social sciences have impacted and still impact the discipline of political science. It's impossible to be a political scientist without having knowledge of the other social sciences.

### ***Being fragmented***

The discipline of political science itself isn't a cohesive discipline but actually is made up of various subfields, which in turn are broken down into more subfields. They are

- » **American politics:** The study of American politics involves studying American political institutions such as Congress or the presidency, as well as local or state governments. For example, the study of Texas politics falls into this category. Further, it includes the role of political parties and interest groups as well as the American electorate. Today, subfields within American politics have developed. They include public administration, which studies bureaucracies; public policy making; and the role of courts, which looks on the evolution of the constitution.
- » **Comparative politics:** Comparative politics studies other nations and cultures. It creates theories and frameworks that explain why and what happens and then identifies similar patterns and differences between political systems. Comparative Politics compares, for example, American culture to Swedish culture or looks at the voting behavior of Australians and compares it to U.S. voters. In addition, comparative politics studies various forms of governments (authoritarian, totalitarian, or democratic) and creates theories or concepts on the foundations for democracy (see [Chapter 3](#)).
- » **International relations:** International relations studies relationships between nation-states. It looks at international conflict, diplomacy, and international organizations and discusses issues such as human rights and terrorism. It also has two subfields: international political economy, which analyzes how economics and politics impact each other, and foreign policy studies, which looks at the interaction of countries with foreign nations.
- » **Political theory:** Political theory studies the great thinkers of the past and present. Most political scientists believe that the great Greek philosophers

Aristotle and Plato set the foundation for political science. Political theory studies how and why people behave in a certain way politically and develops theories about the nature of people, the nature of liberty and freedom, ethics, and the role of the individual within a political system. It further includes studies on political ideologies, such as fascism, communism, and the various types of democracies.

## *Studying Political Power*

Political science is the study of power. The discipline is enamored with the concept of power, namely how A gets B to do what A wants. Therefore, political science studies who holds power and how it's being used.



**REMEMBER** Political power is the ability to get others to do what you want. It can take force or peaceful means, such as persuasion, to achieve this. Political power is exercised over people in many ways. In the U.S., for example, the federal government exercises political power over its population by forcing its citizens to pay taxes. Who would volunteer to pay taxes once a year unless the federal government had the power to force someone to pay up! Most important, this use of power of the U.S. government is considered rightful by its population. Therefore, the federal government possesses the legitimate use of power over its population.



**REMEMBER** The term government describes the people and institutions that are responsible for making laws and policies in a country.

## ***Exercising political power***

In the U.S. and other federal societies, such as Germany, states or regions also exercise political power over their population. In the U.S., the states set speed limits on their roads, and in Germany, states have the power to set tax rates.

Finally, specific people, such as teachers, can also exercise political power. Whenever teachers assign homework, they're exercising political power over students. Students consider teachers to have authority and their use of power legitimate and therefore will do something, such as homework, they wouldn't normally do for fun. Authority refers to a general agreement that a person has the right to make certain decisions and that these decisions should be complied with.

## ***Different thoughts on political power***



**TECHNICAL STUFF** Both ancient and modern political scientists were concerned with how power is used in societies. The famous Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle believed that political power should be held by the best educated in society and should be used for the good of society (for more on the ancient Greek philosophers, see [Chapter 14](#)).

Niccolo Machiavelli (see [Chapter 15](#)) disagreed in his seminal work *The Prince*. He argues that power is needed to maintain the security of the state both at home and internationally. His work focuses on how to acquire power and then use it for the good of the state. Fellow political philosopher Thomas Hobbes not only agrees but also claims that political power shouldn't be used for ethical governance but to prevent conflict both domestically and internationally.

The more modern theorists such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (see [Chapter 15](#)) argue differently. They believe that the people should exercise political power in a nation-state and need to be able to hold their leader accountable. For Locke, whose work became the foundation for the American political system, a contract exists between leaders and citizens on how to exercise political power. If leaders violate the contract, the people can remove them from their positions.

More recent thinkers such as John Rawls (see [Chapter 19](#)) have added the components of social justice and economic equality to their theories.

### ***Views on who holds the power***

One of the ongoing questions in political science is how can the researcher determine who holds power in a society. Over time, six different explanations were developed.

- » **Bureaucratic theory:** Bureaucratic theory assumes that bureaucracies in countries hold power and make the most important decisions for society. It's therefore not politicians nor other leaders but top-level bureaucrats who run a country. They work for the good of the country, not to amass wealth, and their policies are based on what's best for a country. When studying

France or Japan, two countries with powerful bureaucracies, bureaucratic theory can be used to study political power.

- » **Pluralism:** Pluralism, as developed by James Madison (see [Figure 1-2](#)) in Federalist Paper Number 10, believes interest groups will be created as societies become more economically and socially complex. People will join together to push for their own interests and for government benefits. These interests can be economic, professional, ideological, environmental, or even religious. All these diverse groups will now compete for public benefits, ensuring that public policy will benefit not only a few people but a majority in the country. Political power is therefore held by interest groups, representing the people.



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

As soon as one group of citizens feel disadvantaged, they'll begin to organize and compete for benefits. Suddenly, many interest groups are competing for political benefits and hopefully balancing each other out overall. Pluralism assumes that everybody will get a little bit from policymakers, but nobody will get everything he asks for. This balance makes every interest group accept lawmakers' policy decisions without complaining or, more importantly, without taking action against policymakers.