



THE DYNAMICS OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL ANALYSIS: AN ESSAY

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the evolution and contemporary dynamics of political analysis, tracing its development from philosophical, historical, institutional and legal approaches to modern empirical and interdisciplinary frameworks. It explores how the dissatisfaction with descriptive and normative methods in early political science led to the behavioural revolution, which emphasised scientific precision, value-neutrality and the systematic study of political behaviour. The subsequent post-behavioural movement reintroduced ethics, relevance and social responsibility, bridging scientific inquiry with societal needs. This work situates comparative politics as the foundation of modern political analysis, emphasizing its logic, scope, and challenges in the study of systems, institutions, and behaviour across diverse contexts. It highlights contemporary transformations driven by globalisation, data analytics, and neocolonial thoughts, showcasing how interdisciplinary perspectives from economics to sociology and postcolonial theory have expanded the frontiers of political inquiry. This research argues for a reflexive and inclusive political science that balances scientific rigour with ethical commitment and contextual understanding. It concludes by projecting future trajectories of political research toward greater interdisciplinary, methodological innovations and epistemic diversity in the quest for a more humane and globally relevant discipline.

Keywords: Politics, political analysis, behavioural revolution

Introduction

Political analysis occupies a central place in trying to understand how states, societies and individuals interact within frameworks of power, decision-making and governance. The term “political” carries far more than mere reference to public affairs; rather, it signals the set of activities, institutions, and relationships through which humans, by virtue of living in communities, organise their collective life, mediate conflicts, distribute resources, and regulate the sphere of the state, economy, and civil society (Ndu, 1998; Rufus, 2026a; Easton, 1965/1971). In contrast, “analysis” denotes a systematic, critical, and methodical process of inquiry whereby concepts are unpacked, relationships are explored, underlying patterns are sought, and theoretical frameworks are tested against evidence (Davis & Lewis, 1981).

Understanding political dynamics thus requires both a grasp of what is at stake in politics, that is, the interactions of the state,

economy and individuals, and how scholarly inquiry can interrogate, explain, and predict these interactions. Given that humans are inherently social and live in interdependent networks, political life is characterised by conflict, negotiation, cooperation, and the mobilization of values. As David Easton famously observed, politics is the “authoritative allocation of values” in society; this is a definition that underscores the centrality of power, legitimacy, and the distribution of scarce and valued goods within political systems (Easton, 1965/1971). This allocation presupposes mechanisms, institutions, and behaviours through which interests are contested, resources are allocated, and collective decisions are made, hence, the imperative for political analysis. It is evident that wherever humans engage in the activities of daily life, they do so in collaboration with others. This suggests that there are inherent impulses that drive people to come together. The fundamental needs of human survival, such





as eating and working, necessitate social interactions and relationships. The process of producing essential resources, however, is often accompanied by greed, which creates disparities and lays the groundwork for property acquisition, inequality, and ultimately, conflict. This inherent contradiction reveals that the same impulses that unite people also serve as the basis for societal conflicts. To mitigate these contradictions, social regulations are established through the process of politics. Politics, therefore, can be understood as a process aimed at reconciling the contradictions that arise from collective human existence or group life (Rufus, 2026b).

In the contemporary era marked by globalization, technological change, plural identities, and expanding governance arenas beyond the nation-state, the dynamics of political analysis have become more complex and multifaceted. Scholars are now called to examine not only institutions but behavioural patterns, comparative systems, interdisciplinary influences, and methodological innovations (Easton, 1965; Davis & Lewis, 1981; Nwaorgu, 2002). Within this context, this chapter seeks to advance a nuanced understanding of political analysis by tracing its historical foundations, explicating its conceptual contours, assessing its contemporary modalities and demonstrating the role of comparative politics, why we compare, what we compare and the methodological challenges entailed.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach in order to examine the dynamics of contemporary political analysis. The qualitative method is considered appropriate because the topic focuses on interpretation, explanation and understanding of political ideas, behaviours and trends rather than numerical measurement. The study relies mainly on descriptive and analytical techniques to explore how political analysis

is shaped by current social, economic and technological changes. This approach allows for an in depth examination of concepts and provides room for critical reflection on emerging political realities (Obasi, 2000).

Data for the study are gathered through secondary sources. These include academic books, peer reviewed journal articles, policy papers, government publications and credible online materials that discuss modern political analysis and related themes. The use of these sources ensures that the discussion is grounded in existing scholarly knowledge and contemporary debates. Relevant materials are carefully selected, reviewed and organized according to themes such as political behaviour, media influence, governance and public participation. This process helps to provide a broad and balanced understanding of the subject.

The collected information is analyzed using content and thematic analysis. Key ideas and arguments from the sources are compared and interpreted to identify patterns, similarities and differences in perspectives on contemporary political analysis. Through this method, the study is able to draw logical conclusions and present informed insights about the changing nature of political processes and decision making. This systematic procedure ensures clarity, reliability and academic rigor in the findings of the essay (Amara & Amaechi, 2010).

The Relationship between Politics, the State, the Economy and Human Nature

Politics cannot be separated from the state and economy, for these spheres together constitute the institutional expression of human coexistence. The state, as Max Weber (1946) asserted, is a human community that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. The economy provides the material basis for social life and shapes political choices through the distribution of wealth, labour, and capital. Human nature, characterized by sociability, need, and competition, lies at the





centre of these dynamics. Because individuals seek to satisfy desires and protect interests, conflicts inevitably emerge; politics arises as the mechanism for mediating and regulating such conflicts (Held & McGrew, 2007).

Political analysis, therefore, explores how these dimensions of human motivations, economic interests, and institutional authority interact to produce governance outcomes. For instance, Marxist and political-economy approaches emphasise how material relations and class structures shape political institutions (Miliband, 1969), while behaviouralists focus on individual and group behaviour as determinants of political outcomes (Easton, 1965). Both traditions illuminate the deep interdependence between social structure, human agency, and state power.

The Analytical Tradition and the Transition from Normative to Empirical Political Study

The evolution of political analysis reflects a long transition from philosophical speculation to empirical investigation. Early political thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine and Machiavelli approached politics normatively asking what ought to be rather than what is. Their analyses were largely moral and prescriptive, concerned with justice, virtue and the ideal polity (Sabine & Thorson, 1973). This classical tradition laid the moral foundations of political thought but lacked systematic observation, or data-driven testing. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, political science began to adopt the empirical orientation of the natural and social sciences.

The rise of positivism and advances in sociology and psychology influenced scholars to seek measurable regularities in political life. The behavioural revolution of the 1950s and 1960s marked a decisive break from purely normative inquiry. Scholars such as Charles Merriam, David Truman and David Easton championed scientific

methods; surveys, statistical analysis, and hypothesis testing to study political behaviour and systems objectively (Easton, 1965). This movement transformed political analysis into a systematic study grounded in observation rather than philosophy.

The empirical turn did not entirely abandon normative concerns. The subsequent post-behavioural revolution of the 1970s reasserted the relevance of values, ethics, and social responsibility in political research (Easton, 1971). Modern political analysis therefore, integrates both traditions: it combines the rigour of empirical methods with normative reflection on justice, legitimacy, and governance. The analytical enterprise is now pluralistic, drawing insights from behaviouralism, rational-choice theory, institutionalism, feminism, and postcolonial perspectives to capture the complexity of political life (Marsh & Stoker, 2010).

Characteristics of Political Analysis

Political analysis is distinguished by several defining features that mark its evolution into a modern social science:

Behavioural Emphasis: It focuses on the *behaviour* of political actors, voters, elites, and institutions rather than merely on constitutional or legal frameworks (Dahl, 1961).

Scientific Orientation: Analysis proceeds through systematic observation, data collection and testing of hypotheses to explain political behaviour (Easton, 1965).

Empirical and Value-Neutral Approach: It seeks objectivity by distinguishing between facts and value judgments, allowing conclusions to be verifiable.

Use of Tools and Techniques: Quantitative and qualitative methods, statistical surveys, interviews, and comparative models are employed to make political inquiry more rigorous (Gerring, 2007).

Comparative and Interdisciplinary Perspective: Political analysis draws from





sociology, economics, psychology, and anthropology, integrating diverse insights to understand power and governance (Almond & Powell, 1966).

Historical Foundations of Political Analysis

The study of political analysis is rooted in a long and complex intellectual lineage that spans from ancient philosophical reflection to contemporary empirical science. To appreciate its current dynamics, one must trace the historical foundations: traditional approaches such as historical, philosophical, institutional, and legal, their relevance and limitations, and the shift toward scientific rigour.

Traditional Approaches: Historical, Philosophical, Institutional, and Legal Methods

For much of its history, the study of politics was dominated by the traditional approaches: normative, descriptive, and institution-centred. The historical approach emphasised that political phenomena were best understood in their temporal development and contextual particularities. For example, scholars argued that the age, place, and social situation of a state determined its political character (Timalsina, 2024). The philosophical approach placed values, ethics, and the ideal state at the heart of political inquiry: Plato, Aristotle, and later Hobbes and Rousseau deliberated on justice, virtue, and the “good polity” (Roskin, 2025; Sabine & Thorson, 1973). The institutional or legal approach focused on the structures of government; executive, legislature, judiciary and the formal rules that governed them (Magadh Mahila College, 2018). These methods insisted on understanding politics as a matter of institutions, normative ideals and historical continuity. Their relevance lies in offering deep insights into the moral and institutional dimension of political life, anchoring analysis in rich philosophical tradition and institutional structures. However they also had major limitations:

they were often descriptive rather than explanatory, normative rather than empirical; they focused on formal structures and neglected individual behaviour, quantitative measurement and comparative analysis. As Timalsina (2024) notes, the traditional approach lacks systematic generalisation, pays little attention to social science tools, and tends to value judgments rather than causal analysis.

Relevance and Limitations of Traditional Methods

The traditional methods contributed foundational knowledge: they enriched the conceptual vocabulary of political science, grounded normative debates about governance and helped map institutional structures across epochs. Aristotle’s investigation of Greek city-states provided early typologies of regimes that still influence political analysis (Roskin, 2025). The legal-institutional method underpinned the early work of Bodin, Austin and Bentham in defining the state, sovereignty, and legal frameworks (Magadh Mahila College, 2018). Yet the limitations became increasingly pronounced as the 20th century progressed: political science still lacked predictive power, empirical testing, and comparative breadth. The normative focus prevented systematic theory-building; the heavy emphasis on institutions meant less attention was given to behaviour, culture, or structural variation. In short, the field began to recognise that understanding what ought to be was insufficient for explaining what is.

There was early dissatisfaction with the search for scientific rigour in political science due to the perceived inadequacies of the Traditional method. As a result, a shift emerged in the mid-20th century: scholars began advocating for a more scientific, empirical, behavioural and comparative political science. The demand for scientific rigour stemmed from several sources: the need to understand political change in newly independent states after World War II, the





rise of social science methods such as survey research, statistical analysis and institutional support such as the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in the United States (Thary, 2025). American political scientists such as Charles Merriam and David Easton championed the “behaviouralist” approach which argued for systematic study of behaviour rather than mere institutions (Easton, 1965). According to the Britannica overview, Aristotle’s empirical observation of Greek city-states served as a precursor, but the full transformation to a science of politics emerged only when political science separated from history and philosophy and adopted hypotheses, measurement and causation (Roskin, 2025). The analytical tradition thus moved from normative description to empirical investigation: scholars sought to explain, predict and compare political phenomena.

Methodological pluralism gradually replaced monolithic normative frameworks (Thary, 2025). This transition marks a key moment in the discipline’s evolution. From the 19th to the 20th centuries, political science began to professionalise, establishing dedicated university chairs, journals, and associations that pushed for empirical research (Thary, 2025). The behavioural revolution, emphasizing individual and group behaviour, survey research, and hypothesis testing, represented a decisive turn (Easton, 1971). Yet even as this empirical turn matured, critique arose: critics argued that behaviouralism neglected values, culture and macro-structures, leading to the post-behavioural response that called for relevance, values, and the reintegration of normative concerns (Easton, 1971). The shift from institutional and legal focus to behavioural measurement, and then to interdisciplinary and comparative methods, defines the historical trajectory of political analysis.

The Behavioural Revolution and Its Intellectual Roots

The mid-twentieth century witnessed a profound transformation in the discipline of political science: the so-called behavioural revolution. This shift marked a departure from institution-centred and normative study of politics toward an empirical, behavioural and quantitative orientation. Understanding this revolution and its intellectual roots illuminates the methodological foundations of contemporary political analysis.

The origins of the behavioural revolution lie principally in the United States, rooted in dissatisfaction with the traditional legal-institutional, normative approaches in political science. Scholars such as Charles Merriam in the 1920s and 1930s emphasised the need to study individual and group political behaviour rather than exclusively institutional structures (Lathateacher, 2021). The movement gained institutional momentum through funding agencies such as the Ford Foundation, which supported behavioural-science programmes in the 1950s and 1960s, thereby entrenching behaviouralism in American political science. Moreover, the European sociologists most notably Max Weber brought methodological realism, typology and comparative perspectives to American scholars, reinforcing the intellectual roots of the behavioural turn (Roskin, 2025).

Key institutional landmarks include the establishment of the American Political Science Association’s focus on behavioural research and the Social Science Research Council’s committees dedicated to political behaviour rather than constitutional or institutional study (Easton, 1965). These developments signalled that political science aspired to the same standards of empirical verification as other social sciences.

The behavioural revolution rests on several core features and principles:

- i. **Regularities:** Advocates argued that political behaviour exhibited patterns





- and regularities that could be observed, generalised and theorized.
- ii. **Verification:** Hypotheses about behaviour could be tested using data, rather than relying solely on normative assertion.
 - iii. **Quantification and Techniques:** The use of survey research, statistical modelling, and scaling, as well as comparative cross-national data collections became central.
 - iv. **Systematisation:** Behaviouralists advocated building mid-range theories about behaviour and institutions, rather than grand normative systems.
 - v. **Interdisciplinarity:** The movement embraced insights from psychology, sociology and anthropology, not just law or philosophy.
 - vi. **Value-neutral pretence:** Behaviouralism sought to minimise normative judgments and focus on measurable phenomena.

Impact of Technology, Data and New Methodologies

The behavioural revolution coincided with advances in technology and data collection methods: telephone surveys, mass sampling, computing, and statistical packages enabled political scientists to work with large -N datasets and test models. The use of computers to manage survey data, conduct regression analyses and perform cross-national comparisons allowed the discipline to approach the standards of other social sciences. The rise of public-opinion polling, election - studies centres and large-scale international collaborations expanded the scope and scale of behavioural research (Roskin, 2025). Political science shifted from descriptive institutional accounts to predictive models of political behaviour.

Reasons for the Growth of the Behavioural Revolution

Several interrelated forces explain why behaviouralism rose to prominence:

Dissatisfaction with Traditional Political Science: Scholars such as Charles E. Merriam and David Truman criticized the descriptive and historical orientation of earlier political studies, arguing for a more analytical, predictive approach (Merriam, 1925).

Influence of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC): Institutional support in the 1920s fostered interdisciplinary collaboration and large-scale empirical studies in political behaviour (Farr, 1995).

Impact of World War II: The global conflict exposed the need for research that could address real-world social and political problems, blending theory with policy relevance (Easton, 1969).

Technological and Data Innovations: Advances in computing and survey research enabled large-N analyses, encouraging quantification and hypothesis testing (Coppedge et al., 2019).

European Intellectual Influence: The migration of scholars such as Max Weber and Karl Deutsch introduced sociological and systemic approaches that reshaped American political inquiry (Weber, 1949).

Factors Leading to the Emergence of Political Analysis

The evolution of political analysis as a rigorous academic discipline did not occur in a vacuum. It emerged from a constellation of factors that challenged the old frameworks, demanded new methods, and reshaped the scope of inquiry. Four inter-related forces stand out: (1) growing dissatisfaction with the traditional political science paradigm; (2) the rise of scientific and empirical methods; (3) global historical events especially the aftermath of the Second World War and the decolonization wave; and (4) the establishment and influence of institutional supports such as the Social Science Research Council (SSRC).





Dissatisfaction with Traditional Political Science

By the early 20th century, many scholars felt that political science remained overly descriptive, normative and institution-bound. The customary focus on constitutions, legal frameworks and formal institutions valuable as they were had limitations in explaining why political behaviour varied, how policies emerged, and why systems changed (Roskin, 2025). The normative orientation that asked “what ought to be” increasingly gave way to the question “what actually is?” (Thary, 2025). Scholars such as Robert Adcock trace how, in America between 1875 and 1910, the professionalisation of political science involved a shift away from the historian’s narrative toward the political scientist’s explanatory and generalising aim (Adcock, 2003). The dissatisfaction created a fertile ground for rethinking how politics should be studied: with more attention to behaviour, to social context, to comparative and empirical methods. It marked a tipping point: political science would no longer be just normative reflections on governance but a social science oriented toward explanation and prediction.

Emergence of Scientific Methods

Concomitant with this dissatisfaction was the rapid expansion of the social sciences and their methodological repertoire. Political scientists began to borrow from sociology, psychology, statistics, and the new quantitative techniques of the early 20th century. The concept of hypothesis testing, surveys, comparative data, and statistical inference gained traction (Roskin, 2025). The scholarly shift involved treating political phenomena as giving rise to patterns, regularities and relationships that could be discovered through systematic investigation rather than mere philosophical reflection. The bedrock of political analysis thus emerged in a belief that political life could be studied with similar rigour to other social

phenomena observed, measured and generalised.

Global Events: WWII, Decolonisation and New States

The cataclysmic disruptions of the Second World War and the subsequent wave of decolonization created profound changes in the global political landscape, which in turn forced scholars to rethink political analysis. New states emerged, colonial institutions were dismantled or transformed, and democracy, stability and governance challenges loomed large (Roskin, 2025). In this environment, the old frameworks developed primarily around European and North American institutions proved inadequate to explain the complex realities of newly independent societies. As the Britannica account notes, one of the drivers of modern political science was the post-war imperative to study systems in Africa, Asia and Latin America as part of an expanding discipline (Roskin, 2025). This created urgency: understanding political behaviour, institutions, legitimacy, and change in very different settings became imperative. As a result, political analysis shifted toward more empirical, comparative, and global perspectives.

Influence of Institutional Supports such as the SSRC

Structural support and funding mechanisms played a critical role in shaping the emergence of modern political analysis. The Social Science Research Council (SSRC), established in 1923 in the United States, operated as a coordinating body for social science research and provided the institutional infrastructure for behavioural and empirical studies (Rosenfield, 2022). For example, the SSRC’s Committee on Political Behaviour, established in 1945, and its Committee on Comparative Politics (1953) provided pathways and legitimacy for systematic research on political behaviour and cross-national comparison. During the





post-war period, the SSRC collaborated with foundations and federal agencies to produce programmes and datasets that equipped political scientists with the tools of empirical inquiry. Such institutional backing mattered because it permitted the cultivation of large scale survey research, data archives, and international comparative projects and gave impetus to the behavioural and comparative turn in political analysis.

The Post-Behavioural Revolution: A Shift toward Relevance

The ascendancy of the behavioural revolution in the 1950s and 60s, with its emphasis on empirical measurement, quantification and the behavioural study of individuals, inevitably provoked a counter-movement within political science. This counter-current, commonly labelled *post-behaviouralism*, emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a reaction to perceived shortcomings of behaviouralism: its over-scientific pretensions, its claim to value-neutrality, and its detachment from pressing societal and political issues (SynopsisIAS, 2025; Roskin, 2025).

Critiques of Behaviouralism

Central to the critique of behaviouralism was the argument that its pursuit of scientific respectability modeled on the natural sciences led to a narrowing of political inquiry. Critics pointed out that while behaviouralists excelled in generating large datasets, applying statistical models and seeking regularities in behaviour, they often neglected the normative, ethical and structural dimensions of politics (IgnTU, 2018; Roskin, 2025). For instance behavioural studies of voting behaviour or public opinion could identify correlations, but were less effective at explaining power relations, institutional change, or questions of justice and legitimacy (Roskin, 2025). Furthermore, the claim to value-neutrality was exposed as problematic: human values seep into the selection of problems,

interpretation of data, and research agendas (Johnston, 2017). In short, behaviouralism was criticized for being too detached from the meaningful normative issues of political life and for reducing politics to technically measurable phenomena.

The Rise of Post-Behaviouralism

In his 1969 Presidential Address to the American Political Science Association, David Easton himself declared that the discipline was entering a “new revolution” one he labeled post-behaviouralism (Easton, 1971). Post-behaviouralists did not entirely, reject behavioural methods, but argued that political science should prioritise substance over technique, embrace values rather than deny them and orient research toward meaningful social and political problems (Fiveable, 2025). They insisted on the moral responsibility of scholars: that “to know is to act” and that academic research should contribute to justice, public policy and democratic citizenship. Qualitative methods, historic-institutional approaches, normative analysis, and mixed-method designs thereby regained prominence alongside quantitative tools.

The shift to post-behaviouralism marked a deepening of political analysis relevance to policy, governance, development, and global challenges. The late 1960s and 1970s were times of social upheaval, civil rights struggles, the Vietnam War, decolonization, increasing global interdependence, and political scientists could no longer comfortably claim value-free distance from these realities (SynopsisIAS, 2025). Post-behavioural scholars argued that political science must engage with issues such as inequality, authoritarianism, war, human rights, and governance reform. In doing so, the discipline re-expanded its scope: from the study of individual behaviour to include institutions, culture, structure, and global systems of power. This broadened the analytical tradition from a narrow empirical focus toward integrated, problem-oriented,





interdisciplinary inquiry. The result is a more inclusive and relevant political analysis that bridges theory and practice, values and evidence.

Contemporary Dynamics of Political Analysis

The evolution of political analysis in the 21st century reflects an ongoing transformation in both theory and method. Whereas early political inquiry focused on institutions and statecraft and mid-twentieth-century behaviouralism sought scientific precision, contemporary political analysis has become interdisciplinary, technologically informed, and globally contextualized. It combines economics, sociology, psychology, and data science to interpret political behaviour, governance, and institutional dynamics in increasingly complex societies (Hay, 2002; Dalton, 2013).

Modern political science no longer operates in isolation. The field has expanded beyond its classical disciplinary boundaries to draw heavily from the social and computational sciences. Political economists integrate market structures and class relations into the understanding of governance (Ake, 1981), while sociologists illuminate how culture, identity, and social stratification shape political participation and legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1991). Psychology contributes behavioural insights into decision-making and leadership (Kahneman, 2011), while data science and information technology have revolutionized the study of political communication, electoral trends, and public opinion (Tufekci, 2015).

The Rise of New Theoretical Paradigms

Emerging in the 1970s, rational choice theory re-conceptualised political actors as utility-maximizing individuals operating under institutional constraints (Downs, 1957; Olson, 1965). It offered a precise, micro-foundational model for explaining voting, coalition formation, and legislative bargaining. Rational choice and public

choice theories brought mathematical clarity and predictive models to political analysis, influencing both democratic and authoritarian studies. However, critics argued that its reductionist assumptions neglect culture, morality, and collective identity (Green & Shapiro, 1994).

In contrast, feminist political theory foregrounded the exclusion of gender and the invisibility of women in traditional political science. Thinkers such as J. Ann Tickner (1992) and Iris Marion Young (1990) expanded the discipline to interrogate how power, inequality and patriarchy structure political systems. Postcolonial theory rooted in scholars like Edward Said (1978) and Mahmood Mamdani (1996) challenged the Eurocentric paradigms of political analysis by centering colonial legacies, hybrid identities and the epistemic authority of the Global South. These perspectives collectively reassert the importance of historical context, ethics and justice in political analysis.

Ake (1981) and Cox (1987) advanced the tradition of political economy as a counterbalance to the overly positivist orientation of behaviouralism. Political economy emphasises the inseparability of politics and production, linking global capitalism with state power and inequality. In the 21st century, this approach has expanded to engage critical realism, integrating material, ideational, and institutional dimensions of political life (Jessop, 2008).

Globalisation has redefined the scope of political analysis, from national to transnational systems. Issues such as climate governance, migration, cyber warfare, and digital surveillance transcend state boundaries, demanding a globalised analytical lens (Held & McGrew, 2007). The digital transformation of political life through social media, artificial intelligence, and big data has created new power structures and vulnerabilities. Political analysis now examines algorithmic





governance, disinformation, and the impact of digital platforms on democratic participation (Tufekci, 2015; Castells, 2009). This technological turn has also reshaped research methods. Big data analytics, network mapping and computational text analysis allow scholars to measure political discourse and sentiment at unprecedented scale (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013). However, it also raises ethical and methodological challenges about privacy, data bias, and the representation of marginalized voices (Kitchin, 2014).

Modern Methodological Tools and Comparative Analytics

Contemporary political analysis integrates mixed methods, the blending of quantitative, qualitative and computational techniques to produce deeper and more reliable insights (Creswell, 2014). Traditional case studies are now complemented with comparative analytics using cross-national datasets such as the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) and the World Values Survey. These datasets facilitate global comparisons of political institutions, participation, and rights (Teorell et al., 2019). The comparative method, as Lijphart (1971) argued, remains central to political inquiry but has evolved to accommodate diversity, context, and complexity. Scholars combine statistical models with historical institutionalism, network theory, and ethnographic observation to understand how systems function in practice. This pluralistic methodology embodies what Gerring (2007) calls “methodological pragmatism” using whatever tools best answer the political question at hand.

Comparative politics is one of the oldest and most enduring subfields of political science. It involves the systematic study and comparison of political systems, institutions, and processes across different societies, with the aim of identifying both similarities and differences that explain patterns of governance and behaviour (Lijphart, 1971;

Hague, Harrop, & McCormick, 2019). Comparative politics emerged from the Aristotelian tradition. In *Politics*, Aristotle compared 158 Greek constitutions to determine the best form of government an early attempt at empirical political analysis (Aristotle, trans. 1996). During the Renaissance and Enlightenment, scholars such as Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Tocqueville expanded this comparative logic to study statecraft, law, and liberty in different polities.

In the early twentieth century comparative politics became formalized as a discipline within political science. However, it remained descriptive and legal-institutional, focusing primarily on constitutions, governmental structures, and formal rules. The behavioural revolution of the 1950s and 1960s transformed the field by introducing empirical and scientific methods survey research, statistical analysis and system-level theory moving comparative study beyond description to explanation (Almond & Coleman, 1960; Easton, 1965). From the 1980s onward, the field diversified again. New paradigms such as rational choice, institutionalism, feminism and post-colonial comparative studies redefined the boundaries of analysis, integrating questions of identity, power and global inequality (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Tickner, 1992). Thus comparative politics has evolved from a narrow study of formal institutions into a global, interdisciplinary science of political variation.

The Logic of Comparison in Political Science

The logic of comparison rests on the premise that political phenomena cannot be properly understood in isolation. Comparison allows scholars to identify regularities, causal relationships, and contextual differences. As Lijphart (1971) argues, comparison is not merely an empirical exercise; it is the methodological foundation of political science itself.





Through comparison, political scientists can:

- i. Detect patterns of political stability, participation, and institutional performance.
- ii. Formulate hypotheses that explain why systems differ.
- iii. Test theories across diverse contexts to establish generalizable knowledge.
- iv. Reveal the impact of culture, history, and economy on governance outcomes.

Giovanni Sartori (1970) warned, however, that comparative inquiry must avoid “conceptual stretching,” the misuse of terms across incompatible contexts. Thus, modern comparison emphasises conceptual precision and contextual sensitivity. Comparison is both analytical and contextual. It transforms politics from a parochial to a global science.

Comparative politics is central to modern political analysis because it bridges the normative and empirical traditions. It provides the methodological scaffolding for understanding how institutions operate, how citizens behave, and how systems endure or collapse. In this sense comparative politics underlies every major approach from behaviouralism and rational choice to post-behavioural and critical theories (Almond & Powell, 1966; Hay, 2002).

The comparative approach fosters cumulative knowledge through systematic contrast. For instance, the study of democratization draws heavily on cross-national comparisons of regime transitions (Huntington, 1991); analyses of welfare states compare institutional arrangements among advanced economies (Esping-Andersen, 1990); and post-colonial scholars compare governance trajectories between Global North and South (Mamdani, 1996). Comparative politics enhances policy relevance by identifying what works where and why. It links political theory with practice, enabling the evaluation of constitutional design, decentralization, and governance reforms across nations. Thus,

comparative politics embodies the evolution of political analysis from philosophical reflection to empirical investigation and applied problem-solving.

The Theoretical and Practical Justifications for Comparison

Comparison lies at the intellectual core of political science. The act of comparing political systems is not simply descriptive; it is the essential means through which political knowledge advances. As Arend Lijphart (1971) argues, comparison is indispensable because it allows scholars to move beyond single cases and discern general principles that explain political variation. In both theory and practice, comparative analysis enables political scientists to ask why and how political phenomena differ across societies and what those differences reveal about governance, legitimacy, and power. Comparison serves to build and refine concepts, test hypotheses, and develop generalizable theories of politics. It helps to explain why democracy stabilizes in some nations but fails in others, why similar institutions perform differently under diverse cultural conditions, and why citizens’ political participation varies globally. Practically, comparative analysis provides policymakers and reformers with a tool for learning from experience for identifying successful institutional models, policy innovations and patterns of accountability that can be adapted across contexts (Almond & Powell, 1966; Hague, Harrop, & McCormick, 2019). Political science compares because it seeks explanation, prediction and improvement. Without comparison, political knowledge would remain fragmented, confined to isolated cases, and devoid of systematic insight.

Comparative Analysis as a Tool for Theory-Building and Prediction

The comparative method provides the foundation for theory-building in political





science. It is through the juxtaposition of different political systems that scholars can identify the causal mechanisms linking structure, culture and behaviour (Ragin, 1987). Through comparing cases systematically, political analysis transforms raw description into causal explanation.

Lijphart (1971) distinguishes between case studies which explore single contexts in depth and comparative studies which examine multiple contexts to test and refine theory. For example studies of transitions from authoritarianism to democracy (Huntington, 1991) use comparison to identify recurring variables, elite negotiation, civil society mobilization, and institutional design that shape political outcomes. Comparative research on welfare states or electoral systems generates predictive frameworks for understanding policy performance and institutional resilience (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Norris, 2004).

Comparison strengthens prediction and generalization. Through studying patterns across nations, scholars can forecast how similar institutions might behave under comparable conditions. The comparative method thus bridges empirical observation and theoretical abstraction, creating a dynamic interplay between reality and explanation, the hallmark of scientific political analysis (Gerring, 2007; Hay, 2002).

Case-Oriented vs. Variable-Oriented Comparisons

Within comparative politics, two major methodological orientations dominate: case-oriented and variable-oriented comparison. Both share the goal of identifying causal relationships, but they differ in approach, scope, and epistemological orientation.

Case-oriented analysis focuses on a small number of cases (the small-N approach) and seeks deep contextual understanding. Scholars using this approach often within historical institutionalism or qualitative traditions study each case holistically,

identifying causal processes and sequences unique to particular contexts (Skocpol, 1979; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). Methods such as process tracing and historical comparison allow for rich, context-sensitive analysis of political phenomena, such as revolutions, regime transitions, or state formation. Case-oriented studies prioritize depth over breadth, emphasizing interpretive richness, complexity, and causal pathways that large-scale statistical models may overlook.

In contrast, variable-oriented comparison examines many cases simultaneously to identify general patterns across a wide range of societies. Using statistical or quantitative methods, this approach isolates variables such as income inequality, institutional type, or voter turnout and examines their correlation with political outcomes. The aim is generalization: to explain why certain variables consistently influence specific political behaviours or institutional performances (Przeworski & Teune, 1970; Norris, 2004). Variable-oriented comparison underpins much of modern empirical political science, particularly cross-national surveys like the World Values Survey, Polity Project, or Varieties of Democracy (Teorell et al., 2019).

What Do We Compare?

The act of comparison in political science is not arbitrary; it is guided by what scholars seek to understand about the nature of power, governance, and political behaviour. As Sartori (1970) argued, the value of comparison depends on the clarity of what is being compared. Political scientists compare units that reveal variation across systems, institutions, cultures, and policies to discover how and why political outcomes differ. The choice of comparison reflects both theoretical purpose and methodological orientation, shaping how generalizations and explanations are constructed (Lijphart, 1971; Hague, Harrop, & McCormick, 2019).





Comparing Political Systems and Regimes

At the broadest level, comparative politics examines political systems the overall configuration of authority, legitimacy and decision-making within societies. These systems may be classified as democracies, authoritarian regimes, hybrids, or traditional monarchies, each defined by distinctive institutional logics and legitimacy structures (Dahl, 1989; Linz & Stepan, 1996). Comparing systems allows scholars to explore why some societies institutionalize accountability, participation and the rule of law, while others entrench coercion, clientelism, or instability. Studies of regime transitions, such as Huntington's (1991) *The Third Wave*, demonstrate how structural, cultural and external factors combine to shape democratization processes. System-level comparisons reveal how global influences such as economic globalization or digital surveillance reshape national sovereignty and citizen-state relations in the 21st century (Held & McGrew, 2007).

Comparing Political Structures and Institutions

Institutions constitute the organizational machinery of governance, legislatures, executives, judiciaries, bureaucracies, and electoral systems. Comparing institutional design is vital for understanding how power is distributed and exercised. For instance, scholars compare presidential and parliamentary systems to evaluate differences in executive-legislative relations and policy stability (Lijphart, 1999; Shugart & Carey, 1992). Electoral systems are also key objects of comparison majoritarian, proportional, and mixed systems each produce distinct patterns of representation and accountability (Norris, 2004). Federal versus unitary systems are compared to assess how decentralization affects conflict management and service delivery (Elazar, 1987). Institutional comparison thus provides insight into how rules and procedures shape political outcomes,

reinforcing the behavioural and structural links that define political systems.

Comparing Political Culture, Participation and Ideology

Beyond structures, comparative politics also investigates the cultural and behavioural dimensions of political life. Political culture, the shared values, beliefs, and attitudes that shape citizens' engagement with authority, varies widely across societies and directly affects the legitimacy and performance of political systems (Almond & Verba, 1963). Comparative studies of political culture and participation, such as the World Values Survey and European Social Survey, reveal how trust, civic identity, and ideology influence political participation and policy preferences (Inglehart, 1997; Dalton, 2013). For instance, societies with participatory cultures tend to sustain democratic consolidation, whereas apathy and distrust often correlate with populism or authoritarian regression. Ideological comparison also uncovers how historical traditions of liberalism, socialism, conservatism, and nationalism manifest differently across contexts. In the postcolonial world, indigenous ideologies such as African communalism or Asian developmentalism redefined the conceptual boundaries of democracy and governance (Ake, 1981; Chabal & Daloz, 1999). Thus, comparative politics not only contrasts institutions but also interrogates the values and meanings that sustain them.

Comparing Socioeconomic and Historical Contexts

No political system exists in a vacuum. Comparative analysis must account for the historical trajectories and socioeconomic structures that shape political behaviour. Colonial legacies, patterns of industrialization, class formation, and global dependency relations all condition how institutions emerge and function (Moore, 1966; Mamdani, 1996). For instance,





postcolonial African states reflect the historical imprint of indirect rule and extractive economies, which continue to influence governance and legitimacy (Ake, 1981). The relationship between economic development and democracy, once assumed linear, has been re-evaluated through comparative historical analysis, revealing that context mediates modernization effects (Przeworski et al., 2000). Thus, comparing social structures and historical experiences deepens understanding of why similar institutions perform differently across space and time.

Challenges to Comparative Politics

Despite its enormous contributions to political science, comparative politics faces enduring theoretical, methodological, and epistemological challenges. The expansion of comparative inquiry across diverse political contexts has deepened understanding but also exposed the discipline to risks of conceptual ambiguity, data limitations, and cultural bias. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected through globalization, comparative politics must constantly adapt its tools and assumptions to remain both relevant and rigorous.

Conceptual Stretching and the Problem of Equivalence

One of the most persistent challenges in comparative politics is conceptual stretching, a term famously coined by Giovanni Sartori (1970) to describe the careless extension of concepts beyond the contexts for which they were designed. When scholars apply the same term to vastly different political realities, they risk losing analytical precision. For instance, using the same indicators of democracy to describe both Sweden and Nigeria can obscure the contextual differences that define each political order. Sartori argued that as the number of cases in a study increases, the conceptual validity of terms tends to decrease unless categories are

carefully refined. The solution lies in conceptual discipline, building “ladder-like” distinctions between abstract and concrete concepts, ensuring comparability without sacrificing meaning. Maintaining equivalence, which is ensuring that concepts and measures carry the same significance across contexts, remains central to rigorous comparative analysis. Without conceptual clarity, comparative research risks producing misleading generalizations or ethnocentric distortions.

Data Comparability and Access in the Global South

A second major obstacle concerns data availability and comparability, especially in developing and post-colonial states. While advanced democracies often have extensive, transparent datasets, many countries in the Global South suffer from inconsistent statistics, limited archives, and politically manipulated data (Coppedge et al., 2019). This asymmetry produces a global data divide that skews comparative findings toward Western experiences. Large-N studies relying on standardized indicators such as corruption indices, democracy scores or human rights metrics may misrepresent political realities where record-keeping is weak or where state structures differ fundamentally from Western models (Mamdani, 1996).

Moreover, local languages, informal institutions, and hybrid governance systems often defy quantitative codification. Overcoming these challenges requires methodological pluralism, combining surveys, ethnography, participatory observation, and archival work to balance statistical breadth with contextual depth (Gerring, 2007; Creswell, 2014).

Cultural Bias and Methodological Nationalism

Comparative politics has also been criticized for cultural bias, the tendency to privilege Western epistemologies and treat non-





Western experiences as deviations from an assumed norm (Ake, 1981; Chabal & Daloz, 1999). This bias often stems from what Beck (2000) calls methodological nationalism, the assumption that the nation-state is the natural and self-contained unit of political analysis. Such perspectives obscure the diversity of political life in regions where clan networks, ethnic federations, or religious authorities wield as much influence as formal state institutions. They also underestimate how colonial legacies and transnational linkages shape governance in the Global South. Addressing these biases requires a decolonial turn in comparative inquiry: grounding analysis in local histories, languages, and epistemologies, while remaining attentive to global interconnections. Comparative politics must thus evolve into a genuinely plural discipline, one that recognizes multiple modernities rather than a single Western trajectory.

The Influence of Globalisation and Transnational Actors

Globalisation has transformed the scope and substance of comparative politics. The increasing interdependence of states, markets, and societies challenges the assumption that political processes are confined within national borders (Held & McGrew, 2007). Issues such as climate change, migration, digital governance, and transnational terrorism require comparative frameworks that extend beyond the state. The growing influence of international organizations, multinational corporations, and global civil society introduces new actors whose power transcends territorial boundaries. These actors blur the distinction between domestic and international politics, compelling comparativists to adopt multi-level analytical frameworks that integrate global, regional, and local dynamics (Keohane & Nye, 2000).

Globalization intensifies diffusion processes, how ideas, norms, and policies spread across borders (Dolowitz & Marsh,

2000). Understanding how global forces interact with national institutions is now essential for explaining contemporary governance outcomes. Comparative politics, therefore, must continually reinvent itself to capture this complexity without losing its empirical and theoretical coherence.

Questioning Western Epistemologies in Political Analysis

For much of its history, political analysis has been dominated by Western epistemological frameworks, categories, and assumptions rooted in European modernity. The concepts of “the state,” “democracy,” “citizenship,” and even “development” have largely reflected experiences of the Global North, later imposed as universal norms. As a result, political science has too often silenced or misrepresented the realities of the Global South, treating them as “deviations” from an idealized Western model (Ake, 1981; Connell, 2007).

A reflexive and decolonial political analysis begins by questioning this epistemic hierarchy. It demands awareness of how knowledge is produced, who produces it, and in whose interests it operates (Mignolo, 2011). Reflexivity means that political scholars must turn their analytical lens inward to examine not only political systems but also the assumptions embedded in their own theories and methods. Decoloniality, in turn, seeks to delink from Eurocentric frameworks and reclaim the validity of local, indigenous, and subaltern perspectives as legitimate sources of knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

Decolonial Critique and the Legacy of Western Modernity

Colonialism reordered knowledge production by defining what counted as rational, scientific, and civilized. This legacy persists in contemporary political science, where concepts and categories born in Europe continue to shape the interpretation of non-Western societies (Mamdani, 1996;





Quijano, 2000). According to Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014), the “epistemologies of the South” challenge the “monoculture of scientific knowledge” by recognizing multiple ways of knowing: experiential, spiritual, communal, and historical. In African contexts, for example, political authority is often understood not as Weberian bureaucracy, but as a negotiated relationship embedded in kinship, morality, and communal reciprocity (Chabal & Daloz, 1999; Mbembe, 2001). This perspective does not reject Western theories outright; rather, it provincializes them, situating them as particular, not universal (Chakrabarty, 2000). The goal is an inclusive political analysis that values plural epistemologies and context-sensitive interpretation, bridging global theory with local realities.

Indigenous and Global South perspectives offer alternative ways of understanding political order, legitimacy, and power. African political thought emphasises communitarianism; the belief that personhood and governance derive from collective interdependence, not individual autonomy (Gyekye, 1997). Similarly, the Andean notion of *buen vivir* (living well) links politics to harmony with nature and community, challenging extractive models of development (Gudynas, 2011). These perspectives disrupt Western dichotomies between state and society, tradition and modernity, rationality and spirituality. They remind us that the political is not confined to formal institutions but extends to social practices, cultural rituals, and moral economies (Mbembe, 2001; Wiredu, 1998).

A reflexive and decolonial turn in political analysis calls for methodological pluralism and contextual embeddedness. It encourages scholars to integrate ethnographic insight, oral histories, and indigenous philosophies into mainstream political inquiry. This does not undermine scientific rigor; it expands it by incorporating cultural and experiential dimensions that conventional positivism

overlooks. New paradigms such as postcolonial institutionalism (Mehta, 2015), Southern theory (Connell, 2007), and decolonial comparative politics (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018) exemplify this shift. These approaches reject the one-way transfer of theories from North to South and instead promote horizontal learning, where knowledge flows in multiple directions. Reflexive analysis also demands attention to power in research itself: Who defines categories? Who funds research agendas? Who benefits from the production of political knowledge? Addressing these questions transforms political science from a discipline about power into one conscious of power.

Limitations of Political Analysis

Despite its sophistication, political analysis faces conceptual and methodological limitations that constrain its explanatory power:

Over-Reliance on Quantification: The emphasis on measurement and statistics sometimes overshadows qualitative dimensions such as culture, identity, and emotion (Bevir, 2010).

Value-Neutrality Dilemma: While aspiring to objectivity, analysts inevitably interpret political events through ideological or cultural lenses, challenging the claim of complete neutrality (Easton, 1971).

Contextual and Cultural Constraints: Western-derived theories often fail to capture the realities of non-Western political systems, leading to partial or distorted interpretations (Ake, 1981).

Data Scarcity and Reliability Issues: Especially in developing countries, limited archives, inconsistent statistics, and political censorship hinder accurate analysis (Coppedge et al., 2019).

Complexity of Human Behaviour: Political behaviour is influenced by psychological, social, and historical factors that resist





generalization or predictive precision (Sartori, 1970).

Conclusion

The evolution of political analysis reflects the long intellectual journey of political science from the traditional study of institutions and legal structures to the modern emphasis on behaviour, empirical methods, and interdisciplinary inquiry. What began as a normative and descriptive discipline has matured into a field grounded in scientific reasoning, comparative logic, and contextual sensitivity. Contemporary political analysis now integrates insights from economics, sociology, psychology, history, and geography as well as data science, while also reclaiming ethical and decolonial dimensions. The field no longer seeks only to explain political behaviour but to understand and transform it, linking theory with practice and knowledge with justice. Looking forward, the future of political research lies in interdisciplinary synthesis, global inclusivity, and methodological innovation. As technology, globalization and identity politics reshape governance and participation, political analysis must remain dynamic, reflexive, and humane; committed not only to accuracy but also to relevance and equity in understanding the complexities of power in a changing world.

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