THE CONDUCT OF POLITICAL INQUIRY

Behavioral Political Analysis

LOUIS D. HAYES
RONALD D. HEDLUND
editors

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LOUIS D. HAYES *University of Montana*

RONALD D. HEDLUND *University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee*

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PREFACE

As the sophistication of the social sciences increases, in terms of more widespread use of complex methods and techniques for investigating and explaining social phenomena, it is becoming necessary to develop materials designed to acquaint students with some fundamentals of social science inquiry. Lack of an adequate grounding in at least the basic assumptions and approaches to social science research will prevent the student from making full use of the best knowledge in the field. In political science, especially, the gap between levels of research and levels of training results in part because students have not been exposed to the nature of inquiry, which may be broadly defined as the systematic search for answers to questions.

Before 1945 political science as a discipline was primarily occupied with attempting to answer practical or philosophical questions about politics. The results tended to take the forms of moralistic discussions, institutional descriptions, and political reports. Little attention was given to the alternate approaches a researcher might use when seeking answers to questions concerning the political world. Now, however, larger numbers of political scientists are concerned with the structure of inquiry as well as with the subject matter of politics. Investigators are giving greater attention to research strategies and techniques, as may be seen in the growing number of scholarly books and articles partially or entirely devoted to the structure and procedures of inquiry. As a result of this attention, the post-1945 development of political science methodology surpasses its entire evolution up to that time.

Many of these developments have been toward adopting more scientific approaches for political inquiry such as those used in the "exact sciences." A wide variety of adjectives has been used to describe the nature of these new approaches, including *behavioral*, *objective*, *scientific*, and *empirical*. But political scientists differ regarding which adjective most appropriately describes the outlooks, approaches, and structures of contemporary political inquiry. Since all of these adjectives accurately describe some aspect of current political inquiry, any one of them might be used. Many political scientists would no doubt prefer using empirical or scientific in referring to the inquiry described in this book. However, these terms have fairly narrow meanings and may not be completely descriptive of contemporary political inquiry. We have chosen, therefore, the term *behavioral* because of its more comprehensive meaning.

This greater emphasis upon behavioral inquiry encouraged many political scientists to consider its nature and its relationship to understanding political phenomena. Such considerations pose a variety of questions, for example: What are the goals of inquiry? What are the approaches to inquiry? What are the common elements among these approaches to inquiry? Without answers to these questions, understanding and utilization of the various forms of contemporary political inquiry will probably be more limited. The editors of this volume have selected excerpts from some basic source material on inquiry, which hopefully provide insights into the major concerns of contemporary political science.

No doubt some of our colleagues will find parts of this volume objectionable. We are not, however, advocating a particular methodological viewpoint here, but have consistently attempted to steer a middle course through a field about which there is considerable disagreement. Accordingly, the reader should keep in mind that this effort is intended for students, especially those in introductory courses, and is not directed to professional political scientists.

The readings and commentaries that follow are intended to broaden understanding of political research by presenting a basic introduction to the structures and procedures of inquiry. In an effort to lend coherence to the various topics covered in the readings, we have included an original essay in which we discuss the main issues of contemporary political inquiry. The reading selections which follow this essay are divided into four parts: (*1*) the nature and development of political science as a field of inquiry; (*2*) the logic of behavioral political inquiry, especially the elements within it; (*3*) the methods and techniques used in behavioral inquiry; and (*4*) some of the conceptual frames of reference employed in various behavioral studies of political phenomena.

In our endeavor we have drawn upon suggestions, comments, and en-

couragement of colleagues from all areas of the discipline. We wish to acknowledge the help of Professors John Wahlke, Cornelius P. Cotter, Roy G. Francis, Robert P. Boynton, Irvin L. White, Meredith W. Watts, Jr., Ira S. Rohter, David J. Koenig, and Robert Erikson. We are also indebted to William Ferris, Joyce Beilke, Gilda Malofsky, and Rose Karlsen for their research and secretarial assistance. We owe a special debt to our wives and families for their patience and support; but, of course, we alone assume full responsibility.

L.D.H.
R.D.H.

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Behavioral Political Analysis

I THE CONDUCT OF POLITICAL INQUIRY: AN OVERVIEW

The Study of Politics

The study of political phenomena is one of the oldest areas of inquiry. Although most disciplines, at one time or other, have attempted to trace their lineage back to ancient Greece, few have been able to establish quite as secure a claim for this heritage as has political science. That Plato and Aristotle were concerned with the Greek polity is not disputed. Many of the questions considered by the Greeks are discussed in political science today. One issue that has preoccupied students of politics throughout history is: Given the necessity for government, how can it best be accomplished? Plato sought to answer this question by exploring the nature of the ideal state, whereas medieval philosophers concerned themselves with a framework for establishing God's kingdom on earth. More recent discussions on the necessity for government have focused on the nature of political power.

Topics currently under investigation by political scientists indicate that students of politics are by no means in agreement over the definition of their subject matter. One thing is clear, however; traditional notions of what constitutes politics seem inadequate for describing the topics currently under investigation. For example, definitions of politics only in terms of governments, states, sovereignty, and authority appear too restrictive for characterizing contemporary investigations. Many political scientists seem more at ease with broader definitions of politics, such as the ones offered by David Easton (Politics is the authoritative allocation of values)[1] and Harold Lasswell (Politics

[1]David Easton, *The Political System: An Inquiry Into the State of Political Science* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1953), pp. 129–34.

is who gets what, when, and how).[2] These definitions and others like them, though perhaps more vague and ambiguous than traditional definitions, indicate a reluctance by political scientists to restrict politics to narrow limits.

Further, contemporary definitions of politics take into account the impracticality of drawing distinct lines around the subject matter of the field in order to state that all "x" is political and all "non-x" is nonpolitical. Little can be gained by disciplinary provincialism, which, in effect, says to the sociologist or economist: "Do not Trespass—Property of Political Science!" Accordingly, political scientists consider it legitimate to study topics like "Psychopharmacology and Political Belief,"[3] and "Card Sorting, A Psychometrically 'Clean' Method for Survey Interviewing,"[4] in addition to more familiar topics like "Committee Characteristics and Legislative Oversight of Administration,"[5] "Ballot Forms and Voter Fatigue: An Analysis of the Office Block and Party Column Ballots,"[6] and "Transaction Flows in the International System."[7]

The appearance of new and less restrictive conceptualizations of politics has been accompanied by a somewhat different posture on the part of many political scientists regarding what one ought to study and how one ought to go about it. The older, established orientation, the traditional, has been faced with competition for prominence in the discipline by a new approach, the behavioral. These two orientations differ primarily in the manner by which inquiry is undertaken, the traditional being heavily philosophical and descriptive and the behavioral being more empirical and analytical.

Traditional political inquiry consists in general of three types of studies—political philosophy, institutional description, and primitive empiricism. Political philosophy has three identifiable features: a tendency to employ

[2]Harold Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1936).

[3]Albert Somit, "Psychopharmacology and Political Belief," paper delivered at the 39th annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, November 2–4, 1967.

[4]Lester W. Milbrath, Everett F. Cataldo, Richard M. Johnson, and Lyman A. Kellstedt, "Card Sorting, A Psychometrically 'Clean' Method for Survey Interviewing," paper delivered at the 39th annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, November 2–4, 1967.

[5]John F. Bibby, "Committee Characteristics and Legislative Oversight of Administration," *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 10 (February, 1966), 78–98.

[6]Jack L. Walker, "Ballot Forms and Voter Fatigue: An Analysis of the Office Block and Party Column Ballots," *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 10 (November, 1966), 448–63.

[7]Steven J. Brams, "Transaction Flows in the International System," *American Political Science Review*, 60 (December, 1966), 880–98.

deductive reasoning in deriving conclusions (Assuming the validity of a general proposition, what specific conclusions logically follow?), an emphasis on the normative element (a concern with what ought to exist), and to a lesser extent a concern with the nature of politics and its place in the human order. As a result, the major contribution of political philosophy is the development of political values and ideas. These studies are largely conjectural and speculative, their contributions being evaluated in terms of their logical coherence, insightfulness, and the relative moral desirability of the conclusions rather than by their objective accuracy.

Institutional descriptions are discussions of the formal properties of political organizations and processes. These accounts tend to be legalistic in that they draw upon constitutions and legal documents to describe structures and organizations. Their purpose is to depict the formal characteristics of some political institution or governmental structure. Implicit in these studies is the notion that political structures remain relatively unchanged over time. Numerous examples of this approach can be found in studies of organization and procedure in the British House of Commons, the American Congress, and bureaucratic agencies.

The third type of traditional political study can be labeled primitive empiricism. Research included in this category is concerned more than that of the others with political *phenomena*. There is also a greater tendency to use empirical methods at the expense of intuition, argumentation, and related methods. Concern for political events leads to a regard for the dynamic elements of politics as well as the institutional framework. These studies are generally not as systematic or objective in procedure as are more recent examples of empiricism. Although the rigor of observation and analysis may be minimal, the conclusions are in many cases extraordinarily accurate. For example, an analysis of political and social reality in several South American societies was undertaken by James Bryce early in the twentieth century. His conclusions were extremely accurate and were drawn from a sound empirical basis, but his methods for data collection and analysis were not always rigorous. In comparison, studies of contemporary political and social reality, such as those by Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba reported in *The Civic Culture*, also have an empirical basis, but their data gathering methods were more rigorous.[8]

[8]See James Bryce, *South America, Observations and Impressions* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912); and Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1963). (We recognize that the *The Civic Culture* has certain methodological limitations. We cite it merely as an illustration of attempted rigor in data gathering.)

More recent trends in political inquiry have departed from the traditional approaches by seeking new modes for answering political science questions. The emphasis is upon studying observable behavior in order to make accurate statements about political phenomena. Thus the form of reasoning favored is basically inductive rather than deductive in its development of conclusions; that is, reasoning proceeds from specific observations to general conclusions. This reliance on inductive reasoning should not be interpreted to imply that deductive reasoning no longer appears in inquiry; it means that in deriving conclusions the behavioralist seeks specific information and from this he generalizes. Deductive reasoning is useful for behavioral inquiry in suggesting questions for the researcher to study and also in formulating possible answers. From existing knowledge deductive reasoning may be used to formulate specific questions, which when answered, are used inductively to generate more comprehensive explanations.

Another departure from traditional inquiry advocated by many behavioralists concerns the goals of inquiry. Behavioralists argue that questions concerning "what is" take precedence over questions concerning "what ought to be." Therefore, normative discussions are regarded as more meaningful when conducted in the light of empirical evidence. The distinctions outlined above are not always maintained in research. Exceptions can be pointed out concerning behavioral aspects of traditional research and traditional aspects of behavioral research. We feel that the basic difference lies in the distinctive research mood advocated by these two approaches. Behavioralists are inclined to use objective, systematic, and empirical research methods to offer explanations. A more precise differentiation between traditional and behavioral is presented in the readings that follow.

Political science experienced a growing interest in behavioral research around the end of World War II although traces of this approach were evident much earlier. This concern with behavioralism has sometimes been labeled a revolution because it advocated changes in the outlook of the discipline *qua* discipline. In spite of this change in mood, traditional approaches continue to be used for describing certain features of politics, especially in subject areas in which behavioral data are impractical—for example, political philosophy.

Part of the explanation for the behavioral revolution probably rests with the radical changes that have taken place in the world during the twentieth century. These changes have, among other things, broadened the sphere of politics. Throughout the world, more complex political institutions have emerged, particularly with more widespread acceptance of the welfare state

concept. At one time governments had relatively few duties to perform, but with the emergence of welfare states they have become directly involved in almost every aspect of human activity. Further expansion of governmental action has been fostered by technological change. The industrial revolution, automation, and related technological changes have created more problems that the individual cannot solve alone. Such problems as air and water pollution, economic depression, and riots are beyond the effective control of individuals. The expansion of governmental activity in these areas has presented the political scientist with larger numbers of phenomena appropriate for behavioral study.

Developments in international relations have also contributed to the mood for behavioral inquiry. Since World War II, international relations have become increasingly complex and the involvement of the United States in international affairs has changed from relative isolation before the War to complete participation today. As a result, government officials and the general public want to know more about international political phenomena. This desire has spurred political scientists' investigations into the international scene.

The acceptance of behavioral approaches in other social science disciplines has also influenced their development in political science. Widespread application of such approaches alone would not have convinced political scientists of their usefulness; however, the success other disciplines have had in producing useful and reliable findings through the use of behavioral approaches has been a persuasive argument for their acceptance by political science. Interdisciplinary sharing of approaches, techniques, and concepts has been generally accepted when such sharing has noticeably contributed to the expansion of knowledge.

Finally, the inability of traditional methods to provide verifiable answers to certain questions about politics created a mood among many political scientists that favored the emergence of new approaches. This dissatisfaction is particularly evident with respect to the inability of traditional methods to explain individual political behavior. Traditional explanations tended to focus on public organizations, governmental institutions, and political processes rather than on individual behavior.

Behavioral Political Inquiry

The growing use of empirical methods of inquiry in political research has fostered greater interest in the nature and structure of inquiry itself. Although

such concerns are comparatively recent in political science, they have been of interest longer in other disciplines, particularly philosophy, sociology, and the physical sciences in general. The study of inquiry, sometimes called the philosophy of science, has an extensive literature. This literature has served as resource material in the movement toward behavioral political inquiry. Because much of the literature on the conduct of inquiry is addressed to the physical sciences, one initial task has been to establish its relevance for the study of political phenomena. Having accomplished this, political scientists have devoted considerable attention to the extension and refinement of behavioral methods in the conduct of political inquiry.

One major reason that political scientists are concerned with methodological questions stems from the tendency for the new types of inquiry to pose research problems that are relatively new to the discipline. Previously, when students of politics asked questions about the "good life" in politics, they did not direct much attention to questions of methodology. But once they began to investigate the nature of observed political phenomena they were unavoidably confronted with the task of deciding how meaningful inquiry into these topics was to proceed.

The Nature of Behavioral Political Inquiry In evaluating the interest of political scientists in behavioral forms of inquiry, one must consider the nature of these investigations. They are sometimes falsely said to reveal ultimate truth, but no type of inquiry can make this claim. Likewise, behavioral inquiry cannot be recommended because it is easier to undertake—such inquiry involves skills that are not easily acquired. Rather, the advantages of behavioral inquiry stem from the fact that findings are considered more reliable and precise than findings obtained by other means.

One quality of behavioral inquiry is its use of "scientific methods." In this context a scientific method of research means identifying a problem, hypothesizing the existence of certain relationships among factors, collecting pertinent data, and empirically testing the hypotheses advanced. Any one of several combinations of techniques may be exemplary of scientific methods. Behavioral inquiry relies heavily upon empirical techniques and procedures. Empiricism is a theory of knowledge which postulates that the most valid information about phenomena is that gathered through actual experience or observation. Thus, by advocating the use of empiricism, behavioralists show preference