

Exploring the dynamics of politics: An archival examination of definitions, traditions, and cultural influences

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Abstract

The meaning of the word politics has been changing through the years; historical experience, cultural norms, and ideological orientations influence the dynamics of change. In this context, this article aims to contribute to the understanding of how such political definitions have been identified, developed, and applied to practice in the realm of governance and civic engagement. To achieve this, through the review of archival materials, primary and secondary historical sources, and political writings, including state documents, this research attempts to identify the key factors that determine how people and society view politics. In particular, this article pays much attention to how state traditions, political ideologies, and cultural factors define these interpretations, which explores and compares diverse political thoughts and their use in explaining the various aspects of governance, public institutions, and political participation. Accordingly, it has employed methodical archival research to analyze political definitions from a variety of historical periods to show how philosophical, institutional, and ideological factors affect the idea of politics and discuss the relevance of these changing definitions to the present political discourse. The findings indicate that political philosophy is dynamic, not static, and the effects of social interactions, political leaders, and historical settings on political philosophy are real. Specifically, the case study of the archive inquiry provides useful findings on how, over time, political narrative has been employed to justify governments and their power structures, as well as the role of the public. Overall, this research makes a great contribution of this research to political science, historical political analysis, and cultural studies, as it presents a systematic review of the political definitions from an archival perspective. Finally, it also highlighted the role of historical political discourse in the formation of contemporary governance and called for further studies on political concepts and state traditions from an interdisciplinary perspective.

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1. Introduction

Politics is an integral part of the life of social beings, without which their lives are considered impossible, as articulated by Taylor (2021). From the outset, philosophers made significant contributions to the recognition of their real nature and significance, thanks to which the theoretical foundation was laid for the possibility of elaborating the civility that we enjoy today

(Apel, 2023). Moreover, the concept of politics and political activity has long been investigated and debated by various scientists, as this situation has arisen since politics and political activity are complex phenomena that often numb and shine with various indications and expressions (Bareis & Katzenbach, 2021). Consequently, these are the most problematic definitions of politics in the science of political science, which create possible misunderstandings. Importantly, the theoretical and practical difficulties of determining concepts are not only problems of theoretical research but are directly related to practical policies (Cairney, 2021).

In light of this, due to the problems caused by the problematic definitions of political science, the search for an easier and generally available definition of the concept of politics has a distinguished place in contemporary political science literature, as indicated by Rancière (2023). In particular, the search for the most adequate definition of politics creates a wide range of tasks in the different approaches presented to it; understandings of the ancient world are quite interesting on this topic (Baylis, 2020). As emphasized by a growing number of scholars (Barker, 2012; Murphy & Garrard, 2019; Rahe, 1994), according to Plato in the ancient world, ancient sages defined politics as the most important civil affairs and activities. Additionally, Hershkoff and Loffredo's (2022) investigation reveals that political institutions and their legal structure should then settle and solve civil disputes, ensuring the maintenance of order and preventing injustice. Furthermore, as extensively documented in the literature (Linklater, 2020; Yack, 2023), Aristotle, one of Plato's students, in his work *Politics*, understands politics as a higher and wider authority and formulates an institutional structure intended to maintain the relations of people in the *polis*. Indeed, these ancient eminent showed why the issues of the countless ancient societies and examinations in the practice of those issues were of great interest to them. In doing so, they undermined the structure and foundations of their civilization and anticipated the work of future generations in the transcendent transformation of political practices (Holmes, 2024). This ongoing development ensures that political practices do not lose the intended political content. Ultimately, research overwhelmingly suggests that without this scientific approach, policy studies will be slightly different undertakings because they will distance themselves from society and public understanding, losing the political content (Habermas, 2022; Weible et al., 2020).

1.1. Background and rationale

The evolution of political studies and the terminology of global leaders has led to a fundamental and central inquiry: What is politics? Closely related to this is another philosophical probe: What should politics be? Researchers such as Fox (2018) explored this concept, while Paxton et al. (2020) and Toffler (2022) analyzed the nature, structure, and exercise of political power, revealing its far-reaching impact on every aspect of society and its connection to a nation's legal framework. Despite the diversity of definitions of politics in political studies, it is not said directly in official definitions that it is a rule that derives from the nature of the existing regimes or lies in the instinctive nature of the individuals in a society (Halperin & Heath, 2020; Pierre & Peters, 2020). In this regard, various methods provide clarity and make the political power used visible.

Within this framework, Mahatma Gandhi's emphasis on self-reliance and moral values in education has been viewed as a call to assess the significance of politics in empowering individuals and communities. Likewise, Rabindranath Tagore's cosmopolitan approach to education and his focus on nurturing creativity, self-expression, and individualism offer valuable insights into the importance of inclusivity and diversity in political discourse. As Tagore aptly observed and noted, power in all its forms is irrational; it resembles a horse that drags the carriage while blindfolded, and the moral element in this is solely embodied by the

man who drives the horse (Gandhi et al., 1997). This perspective highlights the need for ethical leadership and responsible exercise of authority in politics.

Furthermore, political scholars are crucial in offering solutions for various issues in modern society, as indicated by recent research (Chater & Loewenstein, 2022; Hanson & Sigman, 2021; Head, 2022; Mikac & Wahdyudin, 2021; Nightingale et al., 2019). This scholarly focus aligns with Mahatma Gandhi's emphasis on self-sufficiency and empowering communities, along with Rabindranath Tagore's global perspective on education, emphasizing the significance of inclusive, ethically guided, and innovative approaches to political problem-solving. In addition, these sources (Axford et al., 2005; Wolff, 2023) discuss various perspectives on contemporary organizations, power structures, and interactions in the international system, definitions of peace, and internal political conflicts. Nevertheless, in order to address these inquiries, one must have an understanding of the fundamental question: What is politics? (Davis, 1999; Wasserman & Fullmer, 2023).

1.2. Research objectives

1. To investigate how politics has evolved through archival research, analysing pivotal events, ideologies, and institutions that have shaped society's political landscape.
2. To examine how state tradition and political culture influence the understanding of politics, considering factors like civic engagement, governance, and power dynamics.
3. To determine the crucial factors that shape both societal and individual definitions of politics, including historical, cultural, and social influences.

1.3. Research questions

1. How have politics evolved, and what pivotal events, ideologies, and institutions have shaped the development?
2. How do state tradition and political culture influence political understanding, particularly in civic engagement, government, and power dynamics?
3. What historical, cultural, and social factors shape both societal and individual definitions of politics?

1.4. Scope and limitations

The article aims to address the poor visibility of politics in political theory by interpreting how politics are defined. To achieve this, an elaborated understanding of politics is developed by reviewing definitions and analyses of politics in the *Oxford English Dictionary* about a large set of dictionary definitions and analyses of government, especially during the period from 1783, when the OED's fourth lexicographical source begins, to 1865, as provided free on the internet by Project Gutenberg (Abrams, 1971). In addition, a further analysis was made using the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, from the point of view of the history of the words, their voice, tense, and grammatical form, and the analogy from the root to its derived forms. Specifically, the focus of this article is on how politics are defined in the language because the language, itself the product of bottom-up entrepreneurial action, is the only institution in which definitions can be construed entirely *modus voluntaries* or bottom-up. Therefore, of concern, then, is how political matters are argued about, discussed, thought through, learned, and understood in the first place, conceived, as in the OED, as the abstract consideration of something. It is important to note that the aim of this article is neither to review a political subject nor to provide an account of the evolution of political behavior over time, even though the history of the words is given in the OED etymology.

2. Theoretical framework

There are some fundamental theories related to the definition of politics. Different scholars have expressed different views on the topic. Indeed, almost every school of thought has forwarded its concept of politics according to its perspective. A few prominent examples are discussed below:

(1) To begin with, according to the modern concept, politics is considered a science (Shively & Schultz, 2022). It is the study of laws and examines every aspect of political activity with an emphasis on the technique of dealing with people. The rules for handling, controlling, and manipulating individuals are essential techniques that a statesman must learn to produce the desirable outcomes of political action. At the same time, earlier views of politics still hold relevance. For instance, when Aristotle defined politics, he observed that men are political animals who live together in societies and cannot exist in isolation. Their relationships form a political organization where the government plays a constructive role. In this context, politics is regarded as the supreme science that deals with the highest matters and the highest aim of man, both as an individual and as a member of an organized society (Selznick, 2020).

(2) Furthermore, according to the concept of government-based understanding, politics is essentially about the distribution of power and resources in society, with various definitions emerging from different perspectives, as noted by Sommer and Hargrove (2020). In this regard, Aristotle viewed politics as the conduct of the government toward its citizens. Building on this idea, a well-known political scientist, Harold Lasswell (2013), defined politics as who gets what, when, and how, focusing on the distribution of power and resources. This definition emphasizes who holds power, how decisions are made, and who benefits from those decisions. In addition, other scholars, such as Easton (2024), have explored the authoritative means and political mechanisms that shape a society. According to Easton, politics emerge from decision makers who determine how values are to be allocated. Thus, the definition by Harold Lasswell also aligns with the government-citizen relationship and reflects a broader understanding of political dynamics.

2.1. Conceptualizing politics

Every discipline of knowledge is grounded in organic criteria, including its underlying philosophy and methodology (Benton & Craib, 2023). As emphasized by an increasing number of scholars (Orr et al., 2020; Razavi et al., 2021), the foundation of any discipline involves key components: the problems it investigates, the research methods it employs, the objectives it pursues, the core concepts it holds, and the interrelationships between those concepts. In essence, disciplines evolve through the conceptualization and interpretation of these relationships. According to Borsboom et al. (2021) and Sandberg and Alvesson (2020), when a discipline organizes itself around certain concepts, it simultaneously shapes its philosophy and methodology. Consequently, any inquiry into its philosophy and methodology raises questions about all aspects of the discipline itself.

Moreover, the concepts within a discipline are defined based on internal investigations and scholarly inquiry. These include the discipline's aims, the domains it operates in, the types of behavior it examines, the techniques it utilizes, and the reasoning models it applies. Since definitions are influenced by distinct philosophical and methodological orientations, and as each approach embodies unique characteristics, no concept can be regarded as universally fixed or exact (Williams, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to analyze and clarify the concepts of each discipline to properly establish its theoretical foundation.

In the context of this study, which investigates the concept of politics, definitions have been drawn from the field of sociology (Dahinden et al., 2020). Methodologically, document analysis was employed, with archival research serving as the primary technique. To determine whether sociological concepts are external impositions or products of the society under investigation, it is useful to analyze how these concepts are defined. Archival research relies on credible sources, including books, newspapers, magazines, photographs, and documents produced by various institutions and individuals. Furthermore, archives and libraries from other social science domains may also be treated as valid archival sources.

As McLeod and Connor (2022) explained, archives reflect a society's products, services, cultural norms, political tendencies, technological developments, demographic patterns, and self-conceptions. They document societal challenges and perspectives, encompassing diverse elements of cultural history and heritage across graphic, written, oral, cinematic, and photographic formats as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of political definitions and theories

Political theory	Key figures	Definition and impact
Traditional political theory	Aristotle and Plato	Emphasizes justice, government, and the ideal state.
Theory of the social contract	Rousseau, Hobbes, and Locke	Uses a fictitious contract to illustrate the validity of governmental power.
Marxist thought	Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx	Examines capitalism, class conflict, and the state's function in social institutions.
Contemporary political theory	Schmitt, Rawls, and Weber	Examines political legitimacy, power relations, and democracy in modern settings.

2.2. Key perspectives in defining politics

Given that this research investigates manifest expressions before drafting items with latent or non-obvious political indicators, it becomes clear that the definition of politics provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is particularly useful, as emphasized by Debarbieux et al. (2021) and Matasci (2020). A significant advantage of the UNESCO approach lies in its broader conceptual framing, especially as only a limited number of specialized dictionaries offer historical etymologies or explore the nuanced meaning of terms such as native citizens. Consequently, UNESCO's inclusive definition offers a more expansive interpretive lens.

Notably, several major American political science textbooks also adopt similar frameworks, albeit with slight modifications. This convergence suggests a disciplinary shift toward understanding politics not only in terms of governance structures or electoral processes but also through broader social, cultural, and epistemic lenses. In this context, the study demonstrates the value of assembling a multi-domain database of political artifacts accumulated across different historical and disciplinary trajectories.

The Oxford English Dictionary provides comprehensive etymological insight into the term *politics*, including its linguistic origins, evolving meanings, and contextual applications. Definitions now typically encompass practical aspects of political practice, material attributes of political systems, and the associated social rights and obligations of citizenship (Haig, 2020; Honig, 2023).

This expanding conceptual landscape invites deeper inquiry: *Can the non-political ever become political?* Is politics always confined to formalized domains such as elections or state governance? What phenomena lie outside the realm of politics, if any? For instance, is the killing of a spider political? What about the entrance or withdrawal of a predator during the process of discovery?

Such questions challenge static definitions and point to the blurred and often contested boundaries between the political and the non-political. They invite us to consider whether politics is less about the domain in which an act occurs and more about the power relations, symbolic meanings, and implications for agency and structure embedded within the act itself.

2.3. Historical evolution of political definitions

Politics as a concept can be traced back to ancient civilizations. While it is commonly asserted that politics originated in ancient Greece, particularly in Athens, where the earliest known form of democracy was practiced among citizens, other scholars argue that its origins may lie even earlier, in ancient Mesopotamia and India (Hedges, 2021). In ancient Greece, philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle articulated their political ideas, with Aristotle's *Politics* remaining a foundational text. However, the political insights of many early philosophers, theologians, and revolutionaries are not always systematically presented in their writings.

Studies have shown that Mesopotamian and Indian civilizations played influential roles in the formation of political thought. Unfortunately, these contributions are often overlooked in favor of Western traditions (Koukounaras, 2022; Tridimas, 2021). Even within Greek political thought, the significant religious and traditional influences are frequently neglected by political theorists. Understanding the historical evolution of politics is vital to comprehending the complexity and diversity of the concept. By tracing its development across various societies and civilizations, we can better grasp the forces that continue to shape modern political ideologies, institutions, and behaviors.

Despite the existence of a few scholarly works that recognize the pre-Greek origins of political thought, many fail to trace definitions or frameworks across time or to draw connections between these early ideas and contemporary political theory or practice (Govigli et al., 2021). As a result, definitions of politics remain highly contested and fragmented, shaped by disciplines, historical periods, and ideological orientations. While current debates are often well-informed and sophisticated, they tend to exclude earlier, non-Western traditions or treat them as peripheral to the main discourse.

This lack of inclusive historical continuity has left the concept of politics vulnerable to definitional instability. Earlier definitions often set high philosophical and normative benchmarks, yet their underlying assumptions vary significantly across time. Contemporary political thought, in turn, continues to grapple with the challenge of defining politics in ways that are both inclusive and context-sensitive (Kitromilides & Tsoukalas, 2021). Consequently, politics, as both a practice and a field of inquiry, remains elusive. Its definition is persistently contested, shaped by embedded cultural, ideological, and disciplinary frameworks that resist

simplification and attempts to decisively isolate the political from the non-political, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Important political customs and their cultural impact

Political tradition	Region	Political and cultural influence
Confucianism	East Asia, China	emphasizes meritocracy, ethical leadership, and hierarchical government.
Liberalism in the West	North Africa and the Middle East	combines political and legal institutions with religious beliefs.
Western Liberalism	North America and Europe	encourages free markets, democracy, and individual rights.
Native American Administration	Different areas	emphasizes conventional leadership systems, sustainability, and group decision-making.

3. Methodology

The authors adopted an archival research design, utilizing secondary sources alongside qualitative content analysis to explore the historical development of politics within society. This methodological approach allows for an in-depth examination of the complex evolution of political ideas and practices. The framework draws upon the methodological guidance of established scholars such as Clark and Creswell (2008), Creswell (2021), and Creswell et al. (2004). Furthermore, the study is informed by Frisch and Kelly's (2012) influential work, *Political Science and the Archives*, featured in *Doing Archival Research in Political Science* (Amherst Press), which provides essential strategies and considerations for archival inquiry in the field of political science.

The archival corpus compiled for this study includes a wide array of textual materials, not limited to private diaries and journals, but also encompassing inventories, estate plans, daybooks, and letter remittances. The authors of these documents represent diverse social and professional backgrounds, including planters, absentee landowner representatives, estate managers (both active and retired), estate solicitors, and even enslaved individuals. This diversity of authorship is a notable strength, as it enables a broader and more nuanced understanding of historical language use and political meaning.

As Duranti (2009) emphasizes, Contextualized Referential Semantics (CRS) provides a valuable strategy for ensuring that entries in the corpus reflect potential variations in language usage across social classes, age groups, professions, and historical periods. Although the corpus is limited to English-language texts to maintain methodological consistency, it is important to recognize that multiple languages were in active use in British Caribbean plantation societies. These linguistic interactions likely influenced the contextual meanings conveyed in English-language texts, and their impact will be addressed in the subsequent sections of the study, as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3. Archival sources in political research

Source Type	Example	Significance
Records of the government	Treaties and legislative documents	provides authoritative records of governance and policy choices.
Historical records	Memoirs, letters, and diaries	provides individual viewpoints on political leaders and events.
Archives of media	Political broadcasts and newspapers	monitors political events and public opinion throughout time.
Scholarly works	Books and journals	examines and evaluates governance forms, political ideas, and ideologies.

3.1. Authenticity and reliability

As historical documents are evidence of the past, fundamental principles are, therefore, to guarantee and prove the authenticity and reliability of the document in all studies concerned with the collection and documentation of these types of historical sources. Specifically, authenticity is a guarantee and proof that the document is what it says it is and was written or produced as claimed. In contrast, reliability is the determination of a source document that refers accurately and truthfully. However, for long documents, this process is very difficult, and, for that reason, it is possible to consider documents, particularly those in the public archive, as authentic in case they have not been tampered with too much, which means that the process to maintain authenticity and reliability is generally to maintain the archive. In this regard, in the context of the document, authenticity is the guarantee that a certain document is the authentic document that it claims to be. Moreover, in the digital sense, the term authenticity refers to the assurance that electronic records are what they purport to be and have not been intentionally altered. Whereas analog authenticity encompasses the documents, the paper, ink, printer or typewriter, author's signature, and other aspects, by contrast, electronic authenticity is associated with more complex tasks like the origin of the document, the chain of custody, the technical processes and/or system used to create and handle the document over time, and the ability of the document to be explicitly presented in the way that the author originally presented it.

4. Case studies in political definitions

This section critically examines varied definitions of politics over time, drawing upon foundational works such as those by Bodin and Tooley (1955). In the latter part of their seminal text, *The Six Books of a Commonwealth*, Bodin and Tooley argue that politics is the supreme science, combining theoretical ideals with practical governance skills. This perspective, in turn, underscores the dual nature of politics as both a philosophical reflection and a tool for societal management (Sabine & Thorson, 2018). Furthermore, these thinkers emphasize that an effective sovereign must possess extensive knowledge across disciplines, including law, economics, and social theory, to navigate and balance societal interests effectively (Skinner, 1978). Consequently, this approach reveals the depth of intellectual preparation needed for wise governance.

4.1. Historical perspectives

Often regarded as the father of political science in Western thought, the Greek philosopher Aristotle provided a foundational yet broad definition of politics. In his seminal work *Politics*, Aristotle explored not only the nature of the state but also essential social structures such as households, families, and constitutions, alongside matters of legal propriety. Importantly, he viewed the state as embodying significant moral and spiritual purposes, emphasizing its role in shaping an organized and ethical society. By positing that humans are inherently political animals, Aristotle suggested that social and political engagement is a fundamental part of human nature, wherein individuals naturally seek communal life within a structured polity.

Centuries later, Hobbes (1999) revisited this notion of humanity's political inclination, though with a markedly different outlook. Through his concept of the state of nature, Hobbes presented a pessimistic view, arguing that in a world without a central authority, individuals would act primarily out of self-preservation, leading to a war of everyone against everyone. According to him, this state of perpetual conflict would necessitate the establishment of a sovereign power to provide security and social order. Thus, Hobbes's interpretation underscored the role of the state as a mediator of limited resources, a safeguard against human conflict driven by competition and survival instincts.

Building on this, Green's work (1993) further contributed to political theory by introducing the concept of a two-phase international society, emphasizing the importance of an organized state structure to protect the lives and property of citizens. In his view, the state's primary function was to maintain peace and security among its citizens, who, in the absence of universal political rules, might otherwise disrupt social harmony. Similarly, Holsti (1996) argued that states and systems lack the inherent ability to establish stable, cooperative relations without a neutral, overarching authority. As a result, such a lack leads to inherent instability in the state of nature, where political order is precarious and subject to the unpredictability of power dynamics.

Reinforcing this, Hobbes's notion of the state of nature highlights the intrinsic conflicts that arise in the absence of a centralized power. He maintained that limited resources and inherent self-interest inevitably drive humans into conflict, necessitating a governing body to impose order. Ultimately, this emphasis on the relationship between authority and conflict resolution reflects his belief that political systems are essential in transforming the chaotic tendencies of human nature into a structured, stable society.

4.2. Contemporary applications

A close examination of historical works reveals the evolving meanings of politics and state, shedding light on how these concepts have shaped societal structures and governance over time (Finer, 1997). By tracing these definitions through historical narratives, we can draw parallels to contemporary political issues. For instance, Melko (2008) provides a holistic perspective on the evolution of political thought, illustrating how foundational ideas continue to inform modern interpretations. An illustrative example in an anthology recounts a story where a young child cares for a sick calf, feeling a deep sense of joy from nurturing it back to health (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). In contrast, an elderly individual reflects on their sadness upon being denied the right to slaughter the calf by an authority figure, here, the child's father.

At first glance, this seemingly simple story, set in an ancient society on the threshold of becoming one of the first historical civilizations, hints at complex power dynamics and societal roles. More specifically, the context indicates that such individuals, positioned as future high-

ranking priests, experienced both privilege and restriction, with their distress symbolizing a renunciation of worldly desires (Claessen & Skalník, 1978). In essence, the narrative reflects the societal expectations of their role as intermediaries between the divine and the secular world, a function requiring self-discipline and sacrifice (Eisenstadt, 1993).

Thus, this story not only captures the tensions between personal desire and communal responsibility but also exemplifies the broader educational practices that were central to early political development. By cross-referencing historical accounts from both Eastern and Western traditions, we find evidence of similar rites and educational experiences that formed the foundation of early political systems (Geertz, 1980). Ultimately, these stories underscore the role of social and moral training in shaping individuals who would lead and guide society, reinforcing the understanding of politics as both a practical and a symbolic mediator of power, ethics, and communal duty.

5. Analyzing and interpreting data

While a comprehensive examination of the conservative-liberal dichotomy and its effectiveness in explaining the diversity of global political systems falls beyond the scope of this article, the dichotomy nevertheless remains a valuable heuristic framework for tracking shifts in core beliefs and assumptions within these ideologies over time (Gerring, 1998). Specifically, this binary approach helps scholars trace the evolution of conservative and liberal thought, noting how each tradition adapts to historical changes and sociopolitical pressures (Carter, 1954). By analyzing primary sources, we can identify key distinctions between conservative and liberal ideologies, where historical context significantly influences their respective foundational beliefs (O'Sullivan, 1976).

For instance, conservative thought generally emphasizes preserving tradition, authority, and stability, whereas liberalism advocates for individual rights, reform, and equality. These contrasting ideologies reflect diverse societal values and priorities, each adapted to the specific historical and cultural circumstances of different nations. As such, given the wide variety of global political systems, the flexibility of conservative and liberal approaches allows them to address distinct social and political challenges, making these ideologies relevant across a broad spectrum of political contexts (Lipset, 2003).

Moreover, the selected definitions and concepts within these ideologies also play a pivotal role in shaping policy frameworks and decision-making processes. Indeed, the defining concepts of a political party, whether rooted in conservative or liberal thought, set the tone for its policy choices and strategic goals, influencing both domestic and international agendas (Schumpeter, 1976).

Ultimately, the policymaking process within any political party is shaped by its guiding ideological principles, which act as a foundational lens for interpreting issues and formulating responses (Weber, 2009). Thus, the conservative-liberal dichotomy not only informs ideological discourse but also serves as a fundamental driver of practical governance, guiding the application of political ideals within real-world contexts.

5.1. Coding and categorization

To capture the nuanced distinctions in definitions of political concepts, we employ a rigorous content analysis, focusing on key terminology to create clear, structured definitions. In doing so, this approach highlights the interdisciplinary nature of political science, drawing from

diverse perspectives across philosophy, sociology, and political theory (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000; Tichenor & Sridhar, 2019). To this end, to develop a comprehensive typology of political definitions, we follow a structured, four-step conceptual framework adapted from Tichenor's methodological approach.

1. **Literature collection and theoretical deliberation:** First, we collect a broad range of scholarly articles where authors engage in discussions about the fundamental essence of politics. These articles often contain implicit or explicit theoretical definitions, providing insight into how different schools of thought approach the subject. This step establishes a foundational perspective by including varied interpretations of politics and capturing the diversity of scholarly discourse (Schreier, 2012).
2. **Systematic identification of core definitions:** Next, we use qualitative research techniques to systematically identify explicit definitions of politics from a curated selection of introductory textbooks and leading political science journals. This selection includes seminal works from top academic institutions and influential authors in the field, such as Aristotle, Bodin, and Taylor, whose foundational theories have shaped political discourse over centuries (Bodin & Tooley, 1955; Taylor, 2021; Terchek & Moore, 2000). To ensure the accuracy and relevance of our sources, we focus on definitions provided in the opening sections of the texts, where foundational concepts are typically outlined. By cross-referencing multiple editions and confirming unique listings of authors, we avoid duplication and ensure the completeness of our analysis (Cresswell, 2013).
3. **Comparative analysis of conceptual variations:** To understand the extent of variation among definitions, we conduct a comparative qualitative content analysis. Each definition is analysed for its underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions, such as whether politics is framed as an institutional structure, a human interaction process, or an ethical construct. This analysis enables us to identify patterns, distinctions, and recurring themes within each perspective, establishing a comparative framework that links definitions to broader theoretical underpinnings (Patton, 2014).
4. **Constructing a typology of political definitions:** Finally, we synthesize these insights into a typology that categorizes political definitions according to their conceptual foundations. This typology offers a structured and comprehensive framework that can be used to analyse political language and discourse across different academic disciplines. The resulting framework provides a clearer understanding of how definitions of politics have evolved, serving as a basis for future research and comparative studies within the social sciences (Saldaña, 2021).

This methodological approach not only clarifies the subtle differences in political terminology but also serves to bridge perspectives from various disciplines, reinforcing the interdisciplinary relevance of political studies.

5.2. Thematic analysis

Braun and Clarke (2021) described thematic analysis as a versatile and theoretically flexible approach, well-suited for research that seeks to identify patterns and themes within qualitative data. Importantly, their method accommodates various epistemological stances, making it ideal for examining the evolution of political definitions over time, as thematic analysis can capture both explicit content and underlying meanings.

Similarly, Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) endorse an inductive, sense-building approach in thematic analysis, where themes are generated directly from data, such as interview transcripts. Their emphasis on an organic coding process allows the data to reveal structures and meanings. As such, this approach is valuable for the present research, as it facilitates a thorough exploration of the shifts in political definitions by letting recurrent ideas and discourses emerge naturally from the data.

In addition, Smith (2024) highlights the importance of initial categorization during the coding process, recommending that researchers begin by coding each piece of data to create preliminary categories. This first stage of open coding lays the groundwork for a structured analysis, where the researcher identifies core themes before moving to more specific categorizations. Furthermore, many thematic analysts recommend employing multiple coders during this stage to enhance the reliability and validity of the analysis, as diverse perspectives can strengthen the analytic process (Guest et al., 2012).

Although some differences exist in the approaches advocated by Cresswell (2013) and Smith (2024), the actual analysis process remains largely consistent across both methods, involving six stages. These stages typically begin with data preparation, including transcribing, re-reading, and reviewing the interview recordings, steps that align with Knoblauch's (2005) suggestion for familiarizing oneself deeply with the data. Such immersion fosters a more profound understanding of the material, essential for capturing the nuanced shifts in political terminology.

Once familiarity with the data is established, themes are generated by a systematic process of identifying and labelling concepts within responses, called coding. This process involves a detailed and structured approach, which includes line-by-line coding to enable the researcher to capture fine-grained details. As Smith (2024) notes, line-by-line coding is an important part of the qualitative analysis as it allows for stratifying the data into more manageable units and looking for patterns in the details.

By integrating these steps, thematic analysis becomes a robust tool for examining how definitions of politics have changed across decades. Ultimately, this layered approach allows for a comprehensive and theoretically grounded analysis, suitable for understanding both the explicit and latent content within complex qualitative data.

6. Discussion and implications

This study examines the dynamic evolution of political definitions, tracing how societal conceptions of politics have transformed across historical eras. Through comprehensive archival research, we identify key events, ideologies, and institutions that have collectively shaped the political landscape. Notably, our findings reveal that the interplay between state tradition, political culture, and individual perspectives plays a crucial role in shaping contemporary understandings of politics, with implications for both civic engagement and governance. Consequently, this evolving understanding underscores the significance of context in political thought, highlighting how definitions of politics are melded by historical, cultural, and social factors.

Moreover, diverse interpretations of politics emerge from scholars in various disciplines, including political scientists, legal theorists, and philosophers. Although a consensus exists around the notion of politics as a pursuit of social power, distinct viewpoints emphasize different facets of political activity. For instance, Robert Dahl's influential work conceptualizes

politics as both science and art, focusing on the intricate power dynamics within states. This dual characterization reflects the complexity of politics, as it encompasses both systematic analysis and the strategic maneuvering inherent in governance. Thus, the lack of a single, unified definition of politics speaks to its multifaceted nature; politics is a field where the exercise of power intersects with ethical, cultural, and social dimensions (Dahl, 2020).

In light of this complexity, scholars must integrate the dispersed knowledge across various fields, delineating both the subjects and objects of political inquiry. Such integration, in turn, would allow political science to bridge theoretical insights with practical applications, enhancing the discipline's relevance to real-world issues. Accordingly, our research contributes to this synthesis, illuminating the intricate, ever-evolving nature of politics. By capturing the diversity of political definitions and contexts, we aim to foster a nuanced understanding of political theory that resonates across disciplines.

For those seeking further insights, historical archives and comprehensive scholarly analyses provide invaluable resources for tracing the conceptual evolution of politics. Engaging with these sources allows researchers to uncover the shifting definitions and core principles that continue to shape the political domain today. Furthermore, supplementing archival research with contemporary sources and expert analyses further enriches the understanding of politics, offering a holistic view of its role in society and governance.

6.1. Synthesizing findings

This research seeks to move beyond merely defining the concept of politics, aiming instead to explore and clarify the diverse interpretations that have emerged over time. Rather than offering a single, fixed definition, our objective is to establish a semantic framework that allows for a nuanced understanding of politics. In doing so, this framework provides readers with the tools to analyze, contextualize, and integrate various theoretical perspectives, ultimately fostering the ability to generate new insights within political discourse. Importantly, this stage represents the core of our humanities-oriented approach, where meaning, reasoning, and conceptual creativity converge.

To organize our findings, each conceptual aspect was presented as an independent subtopic that could be analyzed in its own right. This strategy avoids redundancy and ensures that each topic area is addressed in alignment with the intensity of the findings. Through our analysis of sixteen key articles, we identified 45 distinct definitions of politics proposed by political scientists, philosophers, and sociologists. These definitions were then categorized into four main thematic groups, each associated with specific theoretical frameworks and historical contexts. By compiling definitions from different historical periods, we sought to illustrate the continuity and transformation of political concepts over time.

Notably, many definitions incorporate themes such as authority, the state, governance, power, and collective organization, which are central to the concept of politics. Moreover, our findings indicate that political definitions often include references to elements like order, dissent, theoretical inquiry, decision-making processes, resource allocation, optimization of societal interests, problem-solving, public interest, and the common good. Together, these components represent fundamental aspects of politics as a discipline and practice. Consequently, they form a comprehensive framework for understanding politics as a complex, multi-dimensional process.

The management of these elements, both within and beyond state borders, involves intricate relationships between internal and external political entities. Within this structure, policymakers, legislators, and governing bodies serve as mediators, balancing the interests of communities and state power. As such, this research categorizes these functions and roles under the overarching concept of politics and briefly addresses how they relate to specific subfields within political science.

By presenting this structured approach, we provide a lens through which to interpret political definitions about broader theoretical and contextual factors. Ultimately, this framework not only enhances our understanding of politics but also supports further research that examines the evolving nature of political thought across different contexts and periods.

6.2. Theoretical contributions

This study's primary theoretical contribution lies in its advancement of political theory, particularly in exploring the fundamental nature and organizational structure of politics. As articulated by Easton (1968), political theory seeks to uncover the essence of politics and how political concepts and processes are systematically organized. In this view, political theory can be understood as an evolving body of knowledge aimed at constructing an organized framework of truth. Within this framework, two primary decisions emerge: explicit decisions concerning the inherent nature of politics and implicit decisions regarding the appropriate focus of political inquiry. Therefore, political theory engages with profound, foundational questions about the nature of politics itself and organizes these questions to uncover core meanings and purposes.

Building upon this, Burgess (2019) further categorizes the definitions of politics into two distinct realms: as a matter of state and as a universal human activity. This analytical distinction helps to clarify the dual role of politics in society, recognizing it both as a formalized system and as a broader, intrinsic aspect of human life. Specifically, the matter of state perspective refers to the public, institutionalized political processes through which authoritative decisions that affect society are made. This includes government structures, formal institutions, and procedural relationships expressed through societal, economic, and ethical rules. In this sense, politics manifests as the authoritative actions of a sovereign state, involving public institutions, policymaking, and the delivery of services that directly impact society.

Conversely, viewing politics as a universal human activity broadens its scope beyond institutional frameworks, positioning it as an intrinsic element of human cooperation, belief systems, and social interactions. From this standpoint, politics transcends formal state structures, representing a deeply embedded aspect of human experience. Thus, political activity is not solely tied to government but is instead a manifestation of human collaboration and conflict resolution, rooted in shared values and collective goals. In this broader conception, politics is interwoven with aspects of life, ethics, and wisdom, making it an inseparable facet of human existence.

By examining and integrating these dual dimensions, this study contributes to political theory by suggesting that politics cannot be wholly encapsulated within state-centered definitions alone. Rather, by acknowledging both institutionalized processes and the universal aspects of political engagement, this research proposes a more holistic understanding of politics. Ultimately, such an understanding reinforces the idea that politics is not only a function of governance but also an essential expression of social organization and human interaction, transcending formal boundaries and existing wherever there is human life.

7. Conclusion

This study reviews and examines key definitions of politics, drawing on the research values and approaches of prominent scholars such as H.D. Lasswell, David Easton, and Harold Lasswell. Through an analysis rooted in secondary sources, this research explores how politics has been defined within varying theoretical frameworks and objectives, providing illustrative examples that underscore the diversity of perspectives in the field. As a result, the findings highlight the critical role that these scholars' contributions have played in shaping political science literature, offering insights valuable to researchers, students, and readers alike.

One central aim of this study is to demonstrate that the essence of political inquiry cannot be fully captured by any single attribute of politics. Instead, it is found within a constellation of elements, social power, governance, public interest, conflict, and cooperation, that appear in different combinations and magnitudes across diverse contexts. These elements, however, do not neatly fit into rigid categories but are best understood in a dynamic, flexible framework that reflects the inherent complexity of political life. Moreover, a noted limitation of traditional descriptive lists of political attributes is their occasional lack of reference to conflict and their focus on group consensus, which may overlook the underlying tensions and disagreements that are also essential aspects of politics. For a more holistic understanding, political definitions must include analytical depth, focusing not only on collective interests but also on the inherent conflicts and power dynamics within societies.

In this regard, discussing politics is essential, even if achieving a consensus on its definition proves challenging. The field must, therefore, embrace diverse and often conflicting perspectives, maintaining tolerance for disparate opinions without necessarily endorsing all views. Unlike other sciences, politics resists neutrality and abstention. While sciences such as physics or chemistry may operate with objective detachment, politics is deeply embedded in human action and social structures, making it difficult to remain apolitical. Indeed, it permeates both individual behavior and collective actions, carrying significant consequences. Thus, politics is omnipresent, an inescapable facet of social life.

In line with this, the notion of zero politics is, in essence, a theoretical abstraction, akin to discussing nature or human essence. For example, the Greek term *politikos*, which implies an engaged citizenry, underscores the idea that being political is intrinsic to human social existence. Even as early as the work of Meleager of Gadara, who edited the anthology *Apophoreta*, there was an acknowledgment that to participate in society is to engage in politics. In conclusion, this study highlights the enduring relevance of politics and the importance of a broad, inclusive approach to understanding its role in shaping human interaction and governance.

7.1. Summary of key findings

After establishing definitions of political science and politics, this study then explores the perspectives of prominent thinkers on these concepts. Rather than merely providing tautological definitions, the primary purpose of this work is to delve into the substantive aspects of political science and politics, examining what these concepts encompass and how they interrelate. Consequently, this study incorporates the views of influential philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Sophists, figures often associated with early inquiries into political and ethical norms. Their perspectives are included to highlight foundational methodological questions relevant to both research and education, which may be overlooked in introductory-level textbooks.

As a modern academic discipline, political science has evolved through the application of objective scientific methods, including observation, analysis, and induction. In this regard, the discipline aims to systematically investigate, understand, and categorize the principles that govern political structures and behaviors within human societies. This scientific approach has involved the gradual refinement of theoretical data and the collection of empirical findings across various subfields, establishing a framework within which political phenomena can be studied systematically. Thus, the essential objective of political science is to analyse, interpret, and organize the guiding principles and rules that shape political institutions and social governance. By employing rigorous scientific methods, political science seeks to elucidate the norms and behaviors that underpin institutions, providing a basis for understanding how these structures influence human interactions within a society.

In addition, political science has gained substantial significance in modern society by examining the elements that constitute political systems, drawing comparisons across different systems, and establishing conceptual classifications that aid in understanding political organization. Through these processes of scrutiny, comparison, and conceptualization, political science not only contributes to the academic understanding of governance but also plays a crucial role in supporting the development and cohesion of political communities. By evaluating and defining the principles that contribute to national unity and effective governance, political science aids societies in creating frameworks for stability, equity, and the promotion of the public good.

7.2. Future research directions

Future research should aim to test whether the interrelationships among the variables identified in this study remain consistent under conditions of spontaneous preferences or emergent dilemmas. For example, preferences among the British elite may have existed independently of regulatory frameworks, whereas similar preferences among French, German, and Russian elites likely evolved in response to different contextual pressures. In addition, the notion of state security might have activated these elite preferences selectively, highlighting the influence of external threats or perceived vulnerabilities on elite decision-making processes.

This line of inquiry opens a range of theoretical and empirical questions. One important consideration is whether testing spontaneous preferences within political elites could foster greater realism in theorizing, by capturing more nuanced, situational responses. Alternatively, could such preferences be effectively analyzed without introducing additional dimensions, such as European Security Operations Centre mapping? Investigating whether elite preferences reflect crisis management strategies or arise as security paradoxes could deepen our understanding of elite behaviors in politically volatile settings.

Moreover, it would be valuable to examine whether these so-called security paradoxes were addressed simply by establishing the ESOC's precautionary role or if the institution evolved in response to more complex security dynamics. To answer these questions effectively, future research should leverage archival data, ensuring that the natural order or the situation before regulatory interventions is considered. Archival research would provide the necessary historical context to understand how elite preferences and behaviors have shifted over time, offering insights into the durability of these relationships under varying conditions of stability and threat.

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The authors used ChatGPT and QuillBot to polish the language in some parts of the article. However, they declared that the content of the article is totally theirs.

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