Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Describe the meaning of politics and define the concept of state.
2. Discuss political power as well as the sources and types of power.
3. Distinguish between interpretive and behavioral approaches to political science.
4. Summarize the differences between empirical and normative theories in political sciences.
5. Describe liberalism and conservatism and their proponents.
6. Explain how modern political ideologies evolve and new ideologies emerge.
7. Identify and evaluate the key aspects of major political ideologies, including communism, socialism, fascism, as well as modern 21st century ideologies.

Written Lecture

Introducing Political Science

A group of schoolboys are stranded on an island without adults after their plane goes down. Within the group, two leaders emerge. Ralph is a leader interested in creating shelter and being rescued. Jack, on the other hand, leads a band of hunters interested in killing food and protecting the group from “the beast.” The two vie for power and authority over the island. In the beginning the majority of the boys vote Ralph as the leader, but as their stay on the remote island lingers, the boys move their support to Jack, in a mob mentality, acknowledging his power to hunt and feed the group.

The story above is from the book, Lord of the Flies by William Golding, and is an example of the ideas of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) who wrote, Leviathan, in which he defended authority. In his book Hobbes stated that: “All people are selfish; in the absence of authority they will turn on each other, and life will be ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.’ To avoid this, people voluntarily band together into states and contract to give their rights to a sovereign, who will rule autocratically to provide peace and order for all.” In other words, we give up our free will to be ruled by another for the common good of all. Is this what we call politics? What is Hobbes referring to when he talks about “states”? What is political science?

Political science is the study and analysis of politics within states. In this instance we are not looking at states such as Texas or Alabama. When discussing politics in states we are looking at states in the broader sense. Great Britain and France are states (also known as countries). Political scientists read newspapers, watch the news, listen to talk radio, and participate in the political process. They try to analyze words and use them precisely in order to figure out issues, like how
much it costs a country to lose a war and what type of different styles members of Congress use to deal with their constituents. Politics involves two things: first, the making of common decisions for a group of people and second, a use of power by one person or a group of people.

**Power and Authority**

Power is the ability of one person to cause another to do what he/she wishes, by whatever means. There are different types of power. One form of power used is coercion, which is when a person is forced to do something they did not want to do. Another form of power is that of persuasion, which is when a person is convinced that someone else’s idea is what they really wish to do—think of Tom Sawyer convincing his peers to take over his chore of white washing the fence. Incentives can be used, and often are, to increase the power of persuasion. For example, the federal government gives the states money for education, as long as the states follow the guidelines set up by the feds.

In politics, to have power one must also have authority. Authority is the general agreement among others that a person or group has the right to control or make decisions for the rest of the group. Power itself can be manifest or implicit. If power is manifest, it is observable, allowing others to see where it comes from. However, if power is implicit, it is not always seen. A bully beating up another child at recess for his lunch money is using manifest power. A year later, however, an observer may not understand why that child automatically hands over his lunch money when the bully passes by—the manifest power has changed to implicit power. Some view politics as a way to work out the best solution rationally while others view it as a way by which some people dominate other people. In the end it is a mixture of both.

**Ideologies**

Ideologies play a major role in politics. An ideology is an organized set of related ideas that modify each other. These ideas help us to make sense out of politics and help us to gather allies for public argument. Our ideologies change to fit what we need and often reflect what we want. Some of the ideas that have impacted politics are liberalism, conservatism, socialism, communism, fascism, neoliberalism, and religion. While each of these ideologies has seen its use within the political realm, they have all changed and evolved with the needs of those being governed.

Liberalism, in many forms, has its foundations in 18th and 19th century Europe. When industrialism hit Great Britain, the idea of liberalism moved the country out of the medieval system into the new commercial and industrial system that the elite needed. Liberalism, in its European form, espouses the ability of the members of that society to develop their individual capacities to the fullest extent. From this European idea of liberalism, Americans created their own form of liberalism that divided the country into liberals and conservatives. In contrast to the European version, liberals in America are concerned more about the plight of the underdog, whether it is the worker or the environment. Conservatives, on the other hand, want to maintain an ordered community with common values and morality. In the current American political system, liberals are known as Democrats who want big government, and conservatives are Republicans who want less government.

Socialism was an ideology that spoke to the working class of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Karl Marx, who was a great socialist writer, gave his views on how he thought that society consisted of classes, not individuals. He felt that “the working class should take over control of the government and the government
should take over industry, so that the workers, through their government, would control the industries in which they worked and this would ensure fair treatment for everyone” (Shively, 2011, p. 33). The idea behind socialism is that all people are equal and should have equal opportunities to develop their talents. There was a lot of socialism in the early formation of the unions that fought for more rights for workers. They wanted workers to have social insurance, like unemployment, and they also wanted the government to regulate workers’ hours and working conditions. These ideas brought forth many strikes in the 19th century, such as the Hay Market and Carnegie Steele strikes. Many countries today have socialized medicine (e.g., Great Britain and Canada), and even the United States has some forms of socialism, such as Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare.

A man by the name of Lenin would take Marx’s idea and use it to bolster the Bolshevik revolution, overthrowing the Russian Empire in 1917 and turning it into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), thus becoming the first communist country. While today the USSR has fallen and is no longer communist, communism can still be seen under the Chinese and Cuban government regimes.

Rather than an ideology, fascism was more a style of politics and a movement. This movement was seen before and during WWII in countries such as Germany (Adolf Hitler), Italy (Benito Mussolini), and Spain (Francisco Franco). While using ideas of modernism to help put forward their message, in reality these men hated intellectualism and focused on a national rebirth. In fascism there was usually a charismatic leader who used terror and violence to advance their movement. After WWII fascism ended; however, small radical groups showing similarity to the fascism movement still occasionally spring up.

During the 1990s, a movement of neoliberalism began within the United States. In neoliberalism there is a cutback on government regulation of the economy, a privatization of state-run businesses, and independence for banks from government direction. After watching the success of neoliberalism within the United States other countries, such as China, began trying modified versions of this ideology. In China, while the state is still run by the communist party, they have opened up their economy to neoliberal reforms, allowing businesses more freedom to do business. Neoliberalism works because of globalization and the easy flow of ideas around the world and across borders.

In America, ideologies may be untidy, but they get the job done. Remember “an ideology helps us make sense out of politics for ourselves and gather allies for public argument. We develop our ideologies in such a way that they fit our needs and predispositions, reflecting what we want; but they also take on a life of their own and guide our decisions” (Shively, 2011, p. 21). An ideology is not set in stone and will grow and change with us throughout our lives and experiences.

Reference

Learning Activities (Non-Graded)

For a review of the key terms of the unit, you may want to complete this crossword puzzle. Click here to access a PDF of the Unit I Learning Activity. The answers to the crossword puzzle are provided at the bottom of the puzzle. This is an optional, non-graded assignment.