

The study of politics as a science politics essay



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What is science? Science being such an extensive topic, can science actually be defined? In Websters New Collegiate Dictionary science is defined as, “ knowledge attained through study or practice, or “ knowledge covering general truths of operation of general law, especially if obtained and tested through scientific method and concerned with the physical world.” Simply put science may be described as a systematic field of study and/or the knowledge that is obtained from such study. Science can be put into two major fields one being natural science and the other being social science. Natural science is the study of the natural world; and social science is the systematic study of human behaviour and society.

Political Science falls under the category of social sciences. Political Science may be defined as the analysis, description and prediction of political systems, political behaviour and politics in general. Political science falls under the category of science and that too social science because of its nature in revolving more around subjective interpretations than hard data. Human behaviour being so overly complex and difficult to predict there will be a long time before political science is called anything other than a social science.

Many might argue, “ Is politics really a science and if it is how can you study it scientifically or is politics just not an art?” While there is an art to politics, I believe that there are basic laws that explain political behaviour and these laws can be discovered through scientific means. I strongly consider politics to be a science, however, in comparison to the natural and material sciences, political science remains in its early stages. Sciences cannot be categorised for example, one cannot deem natural and material science to

be hard and political science to be easy. Political science in itself is rather complex due to the difficulties involved in measuring key concepts and observing the political processes and behaviour that we have been attempting to study. The study of political science scientifically is nothing short of an amazing art, however it is by no means the only way to learn and study politics. Science is not the only way to create and learn knowledge and the art and humanities cannot be said to be the monopoly of education.

If Aristotle is right when he states, “ man is by nature a political animal,” then the study of politics would be the most important part of becoming an educated person and citizen. It should not be forgotten that Aristotle studied both the art and the science of politics. He is a classic example of a great scholar and philosopher who analysed the art of politics informed by systematic and empirical observation.

Science and art use different methods to answer different questions, and different knowledge and data is produced. It can be said the diversity of knowledge would benefit our society in general. We would be better off having both methods than to do with only one.

There are different ways in which politics can be studied scientifically. There is the quantification method which is useful for systematically recording observations and for checking reliability. It is vital for testing hypothesis and finding relationships in studies with numerous cases.

The other scientific method or the core goal of the scientific method is the hypothesis testing and theory building. Theory is concerned with how and why of natural phenomena and how and why it works the way it works. The <https://assignbuster.com/the-study-of-politics-as-a-science-politics-essay/>

building of theory proceeds from description to explanation and prediction. Description obviously being the critical first step because we need to know the essentials of the thing before we can go ahead to answer how and why it has ended up that way. Explanation is the key though because when something can be explained and how it can vary we can then be able to predict what will happen in other conditions.

As theory building involves testing hypothesis through empirical observation. Empirical testing suggests falsifying can take place. Popper states in the year 1959, " An empirical theory or hypothesis cannot be scientific unless there is at least the possibility of proving it wrong. Being proven wrong in science is not the worst thing that can happen and proven wrong is useful as it brings to end a certain story and starts to look for more promising explanations. A theory that can't be proven wrong has no benefits. The scientific method does not begin by proving what is true, but rather by eliminating the thing that is false.

In the 1920's there was an increase in the in the study of politics being more scientific with more emphasis on theory and quantification and the main person along with many others behind this transition was Charles Merriam. Merriam in 1923 was able to show there was significant progress towards the scientific study of politics. He noted several examples of the methods when he researched various types of institutes with the view of classifying, analysing, and discovering the similarities and dissimilarities within them.

There were difficulties in developing accurate measurement in the political phenomena, and he observed that controlled experiments " seemed to be

beyond the reach of the student of political or social science." Merriam was still very optimistic that this difficulty can be overcome because of the fact that political processes are ongoing and that's why she states, " It is possible to draw inferences and to verify these inferences by repeated observation."

To conclude the study of politics using the scientific method was present since the formative years and then started to become increasingly popular during the 1920's. Politics becoming a science is less a revolution but rather a trend that is evolving from its early days. The reason that political science is slow from developing is because of the fact that it is truly a " hard" science. The challenges we face to measure and observe our main concepts might be a lot more difficult than what the other sciences face. But by learning increasingly complex and complicated statistical methods will help us in abundance in our scientific development. The scientific method is just a long road to find the truth and the truth that we find along the way is at most time incomplete or is in transitory and might be something else from what was originally intended to find. This is just the nature of our education and the greatness of education is just a long journey.

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