Political Science Fundamentals Cheatsheet

A quick reference guide covering key concepts, theories, and ideologies in political science. This cheat sheet is designed to aid students and enthusiasts in understanding the core principles of the field.

Core Concepts

Basic Definitions

Politics	The process by which groups of people make collective decisions. It involves power, influence, and authority.
Power	The ability to influence the behavior of others, even against their will. Can be coercive, persuasive, or based on legitimacy.
Authority	Legitimate power; the right to exercise power and influence, often based on law, tradition, or charisma.
State	A political entity with a defined territory, a permanent population, a government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states.
Government	The institutions and processes through which a state is ruled. Can be democratic, authoritarian, or totalitarian.
Legitimacy	The belief that a government or ruler has the right to exercise power. Crucial for stability and effective governance.

Types of Political Systems

Democracy	A system of government in which citizens exercise power directly or indirectly through elected representatives.
Authoritarianism	A system of government characterized by strong central power and limited political freedoms.
Totalitarianism	A system of government that seeks to control all aspects of public and private life.
Monarchy	A system of government in which a single person (a monarch) rules through hereditary succession.
Oligarchy	A system of government in which a small group of people holds power.
Republic	A system of government in which power is held by the people and their elected representatives, and which has an elected or nominated president rather than a monarch.

Political Ideologies

Major Ideologies

Liberalism	Emphasizes individual rights, freedoms, and limited government intervention. Key thinkers include John Locke and John Stuart Mill.
Conservatism	Prioritizes tradition, order, and social stability. Advocates for limited government and individual responsibility.
Socialism	Advocates for economic equality, social justice, and public ownership or control of the means of production.
Communism	A political and economic ideology that advocates for a classless society in which the means of production are owned communally.
Fascism	A political ideology that emphasizes nationalism, authoritarianism, and militarism. It opposes liberalism, communism, and democracy.
Anarchism	A political philosophy that advocates for self-governed societies based on voluntary institutions. It rejects all forms of compulsory government.

Contemporary Ideologies

Neoliberalism	A modified form of liberalism tending to favor free-market capitalism.
Social Democracy	A political ideology that combines a commitment to social justice with a belief in a market economy. It aims to reduce inequality and promote social welfare through government intervention.
Environmentalism	A political and ethical ideology focused on protecting the natural environment. It advocates for sustainable development, conservation, and environmental justice.
Populism	A political approach that seeks to appeal to ordinary people who feel that their concerns are disregarded by established elite groups.
Feminism	A range of political movements, ideologies, and social theories that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes.

Political Theories

Classical Theories

Plato's Ideal State	Advocated for a philosopher-king and a society divided into classes based on merit and function.
Aristotle's Politics	Examined different forms of government and emphasized the importance of the rule of law and constitutionalism.
Machiavelli's The Prince	Focused on the acquisition and maintenance of political power, often advocating for pragmatic and ruthless tactics.
Hobbes' Leviathan	Argued for a strong, centralized government to maintain order and security in a state of nature.
Locke's Two Treatises of Government	Advocated for natural rights, limited government, and the social contract.
Rousseau's The Social Contract	Explored the concept of the general will and argued for popular sovereignty.

Modern Theories

Behavioralism	Focuses on observable and quantifiable behavior to explain political phenomena.
Rational Choice Theory	Assumes that individuals are rational actors who make decisions to maximize their self-interest.
Institutionalism	Emphasizes the role of institutions in shaping political behavior and outcomes.
Constructivism	Argues that social reality is constructed through shared meanings and understandings.
Critical Theory	Seeks to critique and transform social and political structures to promote emancipation and justice.

Key Political Processes

Electoral Systems

First-Past-The-Post (FPTP)	The candidate with the most votes in each district wins. Leads to two-party systems.
Proportional Representation (PR)	Seats in the legislature are allocated based on the proportion of votes each party receives. Leads to multi-party systems.
Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP)	Combines elements of FPTP and PR. Voters cast two votes: one for a candidate and one for a party.
Alternative Vote (AV)	Voters rank candidates in order of preference. If no candidate receives a majority, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and their votes are redistributed until a candidate wins a majority.

Political Parties

Party Systems	Single-party, two-party, multi-party, dominant-party.
Party Functions	Interest aggregation, political socialization, candidate selection, government organization.
Party Ideologies	Liberal, conservative, socialist, green, etc.

Interest Groups

Types	Economic, public interest, single-issue.
Lobbying	Direct contact with policymakers to influence legislation.
Grassroots Mobilization	Organizing citizens to contact policymakers and demonstrate public support.
Political Action Committees (PACs)	Organizations that raise and spend money to elect and defeat candidates.