You are probably wondering why you have to consider politics when your degree doesn't have anything to do with the subject. In any position we have in our life, as a friend, partner, mother or father, politics is at play. Lasswell (1958), a political scientist, said politics is the process of determining "who gets what, when, and how" (p. 2). For Lasswell, studying politics meant assessing and examining where the power, order, and justice lie. Think about these concepts in your everyday life. At home, who has the power? How is order kept? Finally, what are the notions of justice in your family? Now, let's look at these concepts in more depth.

Power:

We have all heard and used power. Depending on our career, we might have some positional power or a way of controlling others through our title. For example, in healthcare, the head of nursing wields a lot of power to control nurses at the hospital based on their position. Naturally, power is about managing and controlling others. When examining politics, power is an important concept; it’s the currency for all that happens in politics. In the United States government system, a person is given authority and obedience from people, through the election process. When we vote, we give up a certain amount of our power to our representative who acts as our authority in whatever halls of government the representative was elected. For example, in 2016, Donald Trump was elected to the nation’s highest office, the Presidency. Due to our system, even if you disagree with his politics, he has the power and authority to govern the nation. The presidency has power associated with the job.

Order

Order includes all of the “structures, processes rituals, and rules” of the political system (Magstadt, 2017, p. 6). The government is the structure in which the United States and many other nations use to maintain order. For example, in politics order is established by the election system that contains all the rules, laws, and rituals of electing a candidate to office.

Justice:

The last concept is justice. Justice is at least the appearance of equality for all. Aristotle, a philosopher, declared that humans used their intellect to determine what was just and unjust, which was a fundamental difference a human has withseparating us from animals. However, many would argue that we spout a lot about justice, but that many of our governmental actions and policies are anything but just. Justice, though, is a concept that many believe are missing since not every person is treated in a just manner. Take, for example, the fact that for decades powerful white men have been able to harass women sexually then deny the accusations when they come to light putting the burden of proof on the accuser.

Studying Political Science

In utilizing the scientific method, political scientists collect empirical data, or factual information, which allows them to present conclusions regarding human behavior as it relates to political matters. They do this to understand the actions of people as they come into contact with their governmental structures. Unfortunately for them, human behavior is not always predictable, which is why political science is categorized as a social science, rather than natural science.

Political science is an academic field that has been around for over a century. Its importance is represented every time a new world leader steps onto the scene, or each time one nation interacts with another. Every change of the political realm impacts those living within and outside of its borders. As political scientists examine how and why political actions happen, (i.e. voting habits of people from a particular region)they also provide factual data to support their conclusions thus engaging in the scientific method

For example, a political scientist might want to find out why people in Pennsylvania (PA) voted for President Trump in large number. To test this research question, a political scientist would follow the scientific method by first deciding on what research methodology would help them draw reliable conclusions. There are three: quantitative, qualitative, or mixed. In this particular experiment, the political scientist decided to survey the people in PA asking questions to determine their reason for voting for President Trump. This scientist reviews existing literature and theories to bolster his claims and hypothesis; so, for this example, he might look at PA voters from the last presidential election while reviewing theories on human behavior and voting. After conducting the survey, the political scientist analyzes all of the data to determine if a hypothesis is correct. Since political science encompasses most disciplines and has many subfields, the experiments that can be completed in the fieldare almost infinite.

When it comes to the study of politics itself, it is essential to understand that political science incorporates sound scientific methods as a means of understanding the political realm. This approach, although providing validity to the research, does not always give a clear way to predict the future as human nature can never be entirely anticipated. However, the discipline of political science can make seemingly random acts make sense by explaining the patterns and cycles behind state behavior.

Public Good

Some might wonder why the government even exists if there is politics; in fact, anarchists believe there should be no government while libertarians believe that the government should be minimized only to intervene when individual rights are being upended. The government exists to allow people the ability to achieve "prosperity, security, liberty, and justice" (Magstadt, 2017, p. 25). This concept is known as public good. The idea behind public good is the government uses its power to compel the people to act for the greater society. We see public good benefits in the Social Security Act of 1965 that created a retirement fund for people unable to work due to illness or age. We know the idea of public good in political theories and ideologies.

Invariably,whenever power is a concept necessary for an institution to exist,various (and often times competing) ideologies emerge: liberal and conservative, Democrat and Republican, left and right. Therefore, when political scientists begin to ask questions about politics or/and government, they seek to understand what both sides believe as a fundamental truth of their own ideology or theory. This understanding is essential not only for the political scientist but also for you, a human being. Most of the political decisions made go back to the ruling party's fundamental beliefs about human nature, the role of government, justice, power, and order.

Summary

In this lesson, several concepts were explained that relate to and set a base for the continuing discussion for the rest of the course. What happens in the House of Representatives has a profound effect on our daily lives from the food we eat to the cars we drive to the beds we sleep in, which is why studying politics and its impact on government is essential to being an educated citizen.