

# Political Positivism -An Overview

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## Abstract;

We discuss the following questions: "Which one of these approaches is the best, and is it possible that the two schools of thought be "united" for the perfection of science development?" In accounting methodology or in any particular study, it is better that the use of both approaches were left to their respective researchers in discussing a topic, without criticizing each other and claim that one approach is better than the other. The two may complement and refine each other's topics studied in depth from different perspectives. Thus, it is expected that the development of science will lead to perfection with the development of various approaches used. Political science is the study of political institutions, constitutions and policy processes. It aims at an accurate description and explanation of these features of politics. It is an empirical (positive) science in terms that it seeks to collect data and analyses it much as a natural scientist would collect a sample and put it under the microscope. The empirical study of institutions and laws is a vital part of any study of politics. If political science asks 'what are the key building blocks of politics?' political theory may ask 'why are these, the key building blocks of politics?' If political science identifies human-rights legislation as a key feature of contemporary politics,

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## Introduction;

Political science is the study of political institutions, constitutions and policy processes. It aims at an accurate description and explanation of these features of politics. It is an empirical (positive) science in terms that it seeks to collect data and analyses it much as a natural scientist would collect a sample and put it under the microscope. The empirical study of institutions and laws is a vital part of any study of politics. If political science asks 'what are the key building blocks of politics?' political theory may ask 'why are these, the key building blocks of politics?' If political science identifies human-rights legislation as a key feature of contemporary politics, political theory might ask 'is this just?' The scholars like Arthur Bentley (The Process of Government), George Catlin (The Science and Method of Politics), David Easton (The Political System), Robert Dahl (Modern Political Analysis) and others have treated political theory as a science. However, all science is not political theory, just as all political theory is not science. Political theory is not an exact science like natural or physical science. In political theory, unlike natural science, there are no universally recognized principles, no clear cause-effect relationships, no laboratories and no prediction can be made. It can only be termed as a science so far as it admits concepts and norms which are both observable and testable, and in so far as it responds to the requirements of reason and rationalism.

In the 1950s onwards, the American political scientists in general and behaviorists in particular sought to create a science of politics and indulged in the process of reductionism. Political theory can be termed as a science so far as it can be applied to a social gathering and the definitive rules of the exact sciences are applicable within the limitations as in any social science. So far as its methodology and its analysis is concerned it can be called a science. Colin Hay in his work Political Analysis: A Critical Introduction rightly points out that political theory admits objectivity in association with subjectivity, facts in relation to values, research together with theory. Political theory as science generates neutral, dispassionate and objective knowledge. Present-day scientific method is fundamentally a product of empirical and logical

approaches to knowledge. Positivism is generally understood as having three distinct stages, associated with the name of Auguste Comte, Ernst Mach and finally Carnap, the Vienna Circle and Logical Positivism.

**The First Positivism** was initiated by Auguste Comte, who coined the word “positivism,” and is associated with the notion of Progress, such as in Comte’s description of the development of humanity from “a Theological stage, in which free play is given to spontaneous fictions admitting of no proof; the Metaphysical stage, characterised by the prevalence of personified abstractions or entities; lastly, the Positive stage, based upon an exact view of the real facts of the case.” [from A General View of Positivism by Auguste Comte]. For Comte, society and history were governed by Laws, and once the sciences had developed sufficiently, it would become possible to understand these laws, and social and historical development could be subject to scientific management.

**The Second Positivism** emerged in the 1860s and '70s and Ernst Mach is widely recognized as its foremost exponent, though Avenarius, Poincare and others also made significant contributions. These writers were motivated by problems which had begun to emerge in physics, ultimately leading to the Quantum/Relativity revolution in 1905 (both Mach and Poincare are sometimes credited with anticipating Einstein’s solution to these problems, and Einstein himself credited Mach with providing inspiration, but this is questionable), the failure of Sociology to achieve the anticipated rigour of the natural sciences, and the “marginal revolution” in Economics, which overthrew the objectivist standpoint of the Political Economists, replacing it with a subjectivist understanding of value and price. It was this Second Positivism which was criticized by Lenin in his famous:

**Materialism and Empirio-Criticism.** There is no doubt that the second positivism and the scientists who were influenced by it, gained important insights by giving more weight to the subjective point of view, as opposed to the one-sided, or “mechanical” materialism of earlier natural science. However, with Mach, for example, epistemology had reached the point of the very denial of the existence of a knowable material world beyond sensation, and adopting the standpoint of an extreme psychologism. In this sense, the Second Positivism is reminiscent in many ways of the most extreme forms of Post-structuralism of the people like Foucault in the late twentieth century. Sociologists and historians of the Second Positivism would reject the idea of any ‘meaning,’ lawfulness or ‘essential development’ in history, restricting science to the study of appearances. Max Weber emphasized that history was always told and investigated from a specific point of view and with different aims.

**The Third Positivism;** or “neo-positivism,” is linked up with the activity of the Vienna Circle (O. Neurath, Carnap, Schlick, Frank and others) and of the Berlin Society for Scientific Philosophy (Reichenbch and others), which combined a number of trends: logical atomism, logical positivism and semantics. The main place in the third positivism is taken by the philosophical problems of language, symbolic logic, the structure of scientific investigations, and others. The Third Positivism renounced psychologism of Mach &Co., but instead sought a solution to epistemological problems in formal logic and mathematics. Generally speaking, the Third Positivism was superseded by Percy Bridgman’s Operationalism and the pragmatism of William James et al, which owed a great deal to Charles Sanders Peirce and Einstein’s own pragmatic explanation of his methods. Pragmatism is however quite distinct from Positivism. The words “positivism” and “positivist” do, however, crop up from time to time across a wide range of discussions in political science and political thought. Those sympathetic to the scientific study of politics use these terms approvingly, as synonymous with clear and rational thinking, and in opposition to mystical, speculative, romantic, and obscurantist thinking. Those who regard scientific approaches as abstract, sterile, and unsuited to the study of human beings and their societies, if not outright pernicious, use “positivism” and “positivist” in derogatory senses (see, e.g., Storing 1962; Johnson 2005). It is difficult to pin down a precise meaning of positivism in political science

## **Advantage of Positivism**

### **(1) Quantitative Approach**

Positivism relies on quantitative data that positivists believe is more reliable than qualitative research. Quantitative research is more “scientific” in its methods than qualitative research and thus more trustworthy. In research, quantitative data provides objective information that researchers can use to make scientific assumptions.

(2) Structure Positivism follows a well-defined structure during studies and discussions. Positivists believe that since there are set laws and rules followed, there will be minimum room for error. This structure also gives little room for variance and drastic variable changes, thus making the study more accurate when it comes to experiments and applications as it tries to follow specific rules using objective mathematical and scientific tools.

## **Disadvantage of Positivism**

(1) Human Behavior; Positivism believes that objective inferences and conclusions can be reached as long as the person doing the observation is objective and disregards her emotions. However, human behavior naturally comes with emotional responses. Although positivism encourages researchers to disregard human emotion and behavior, there is no guarantee that this will occur at all times during studies.

(2) Inflexibility; Some scholars believe that since positivists believe everything can be measured and calculated, they tend to be inflexible. Positivists see things as they are and tend to disregard unexplained phenomena. If a theory that says A only occurs when B and C combine, then B can never be A. This belief can eliminate lateral thinking, which is the process of finding answers by creatively and indirectly finding out ways to solve a problem.

## **Conclusion:**

Various opinions of and support for the two approaches, positivism and Alternativism, are emerging today. They support and criticize the arguments with the perspectives of the respective author or researcher. Philosophically, the mixed approach is considered difficult to implement, especially on ontological analysis. This is due to the differing perceptions of an object, which is value-free and independent, depending on the individual's background. However, methodologically, mixed approach can be implemented as an effort to lead the development of science into perfection, and to balance or to complement the methodology. What mentioned above doesn't apply to the mixed method. The latter is, in practice, applicable as an auxiliary to research approaches and to the development of the study results. However, it is philosophically difficult to implement because they differ in ontology, epistemology, theoretical perspective, and methodology. However, regardless of the approaches and the arguments, the most important thing is their Political science continues to be haunted by unreflective positivism. Overt attention to positivism and anti positivism may wax and wane, but the disputed issues do not go away.

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