

Introduction

This book helps make sense of different ways of analyzing politics.

Its title is in conversation with Professor Robert Dahl's seminal introduction to political analysis, *Modern Political Analysis*, first published in 1963. At the time, the professional study of politics was energetically organizing itself around a single method or approach, that of empiricism. Empiricism still directs a great deal of political science research, but in the over sixty years that have passed, political analysis has diversified significantly. In contemporary political science, there are at least five major approaches to the analysis of politics: empiricism, interpretivism, critical theory, discourse analysis, and postcolonial subaltern analysis.

Making Sense of Modern Political Analysis introduces students to the key premises and goals of each approach. A single chapter is dedicated to each. Subsequent chapters build upon the discussions in prior ones to illuminate and compare the analytical goals of each approach. The discussions explore criticisms and provide extensive illustrations as guides for practicing each approach in one's own work. The illustrations are drawn from contemporary political issues and used to compare and contrast the different analytical goals discussed. Each chapter also explains and illustrates the different ways that the five major approaches to political analysis seek to make their research practically useful in the real world of politics.

A variety of emphases are available within each approach. These different emphases generate different forms of each, which are also discussed.

Students taking courses in political science—or in any discipline that engages in political analysis—will find this book especially useful, because it makes sense of the underlying premises of much of their studies. Individual courses are most often organized around specific political topics. As a result, the underlying presuppositions and goals of political analysis that shape the entire presentation of the material, including assignments and exams, remain implicit and unexplained.

This book brings these deeper organizing principles and objectives to explicit awareness, so that students may understand the ways they are being trained to think about—to analyze—politics. This expanded awareness helps

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to produce research and work that is both more informed and more precise in relation to the deeper analytical aspirations of the study of politics.

This book is also written for readers in professional spheres outside the classroom who are involved in political analysis, and who, like many social scientists, have only been exposed to a few of the approaches presented. *Making Sense of Modern Political Analysis* both expands their analytical competences and makes possible fruitful conversation with colleagues who approach analysis with different goals and objectives.

One preliminary note about the relationship between these approaches. While they offer very different guides and agendas for study, they are very much in conversation with each other. Sometimes that conversation connects their purposes, other times it establishes points of significant disagreement. For example, all four of the post-empiricist approaches stress the importance of analysis that is empirically based, without agreeing with the empiricist understanding of what empirical analysis entails. Similarly, all of the approaches engage in important forms of criticism, without necessarily endorsing the specific form of criticism found in critical theory. Three of the approaches—critical theory, discourse analysis, and postcolonial subaltern analysis—may all be considered forms of critical theory. Their very different critical projects emerge in part from different understandings they have about interpretive analysis. The discussions in each chapter draw out these connections and disagreements in greater detail.

It is not uncommon for analysts of politics to employ tools from several different approaches in their research and work. This is because each approach offers valued insight about a different aspect of social and political experience.

The names of each approach are therefore less rigid boundary markers—which is how they sometimes appear in the formal organization of the discipline of political science—than signposts for different goals and emphases one may pursue in one's research. These different emphases allow political analysts to achieve different purposes, even within the same analysis, because the complexity of the subject matter sometimes requires it.

Because book length studies have been written about each of the five major approaches, not to mention other less prominent ones, a comprehensive study of the range of methods available in contemporary political analysis exceeds what is possible here. The following is an introductory discussion that enlarges the reader's understanding about contemporary ways of analyzing politics, and the different forms of substantive insight and practical intervention they make possible.