Fundamentals of Politics
What is political science?

• is the systematic study of politics.

• is the study of governments, public policies and political processes, systems, and political behavior.

• the systematic study of governance by the application of empirical and generally scientific methods of analysis.
Basics of Modern Political Science

Modern university departments of political science (alternatively called *government* or *politics* at some institutions) are often divided into several fields, each of which contains various subfields.
What are the subfields of political science?

**Traditional Subfields**

- Political theory
- Comparative politics
- Public administration
- International relations
- Public law
- Political methodology
- Political economy
‘Man is by nature a political animal.’

ARISTOTLE, Politics, 1
What is politics?

- is a “process whereby
- a group of people, whose opinions or interests are initially divergent,
- reach collective decisions, which are generally accepted as binding on the group, and enforced as common policy”.
### Basics of Modern Political Science

#### Approaches to defining politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitions of politics</th>
<th>Politics as an arena</th>
<th>Politics as a process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definitions of politics</strong></td>
<td>The art of government Public affairs</td>
<td>Compromise and consensus Power and the distribution of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approaches to the study of politics</strong></td>
<td>Behaviouralism Rational-choice theory Institutionalism</td>
<td>Feminism Marxism Post-positivist approaches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Basics of Modern Political Science

Basic theoretical assumptions of modern political science can be expressed in the following ‘fundamental equation of politics’

Preferences + Institutions = Outcomes

Preferences are the personal wants and desires of political actors. Institutions are the formal and informal rules that determine how collective decisions are made. Outcomes (public policies and new institutional forms) result from the interaction between preferences and institutions.
Common Assumptions

Political actors are

- ‘rational’; this means that actors have a clear set of ‘preferences’ about what outcomes they want from the political process.
- ‘not in isolation’; they must take account of each other’s interests and expected actions.
Common Assumptions

• **Political outcomes** are seen as the result of strategic interaction between competing actors.
  o *Optimal*- interaction results in the best outcome for the actors involved
  o *Suboptimal*- actors pursue strategies that do not lead to the best outcome

• **Institutions** are the main constraints on actors’ behaviour.
  o *Formal*- constitutions and rules of procedure
  o *Informal*- behavioural norms, shared beliefs and ideology
  o Institutions are not fixed. If an actor thinks he/she will be better off under a different set of institutions, he/she will seek to change the institutional arrangements.
Basics of Modern Political Science

Preferences + Institutions = Outcomes

This equation illustrates two basic rules of politics:

• If preferences change, outcomes will change, even if institutions remain constant.

• If institutions change, outcomes will change, even if preference remain constant.
Government and Governance

A **government** consists of institutions responsible for making collective decisions for society. More narrowly, government refers to the top political level within such institutions.

**Governance** refers to the process of making collective decisions, in which government may not play a leading, or even any role.
How state differs from government?

- The state is the more abstract term, referring to the ensemble formed by government, population and territory.
- It defines the political community of which government is the executive branch.
The State

A legal and political arrangement through which all large-scale political communities are organized, combining *territory* with *sovereignty*, *independence* and *legitimacy*. 
The qualities of the State

**Territory**
States operate within fixed and populated territories marked out by legal boundaries.

**Sovereignty**
The institutions of the state have a monopoly over the expression of legal and political power within its boundaries.

**Independence**
States do not come under the jurisdiction or control of other states or international organizations.

**Legitimacy**
The authority of a state and its institutions is recognized by the inhabitants of the territory and by the governments of other states.
The Nation and Nationalism

• If a state is a legal and political entity, then a nation is primarily a cultural entity:

A group of people who identify with one another on the basis of a mix of real and mythical qualities, which include language, ancestry, history, culture, territory, religion, and symbols.

Ernest Renan described nations as ‘a soul, a spiritual principle’; Benedict Anderson described them as ‘imagined communities’.

• Nationalism: a belief in the value of preserving the identifying qualities of a nation, and in promoting and protecting its interests.
International Organizations

A body that functions in two or more states, or that is set up to promote cooperation among states.
International Organizations

The underlying motives have varied:

• promoting peace,
• encouraging trade,
• sharing ideas and resources,
• reducing duplication,
• addressing shared problems such as illegal immigration, environmental decline, cross-border crime, and financial regulation.
The qualities of the IOs

Voluntary cooperation
While states have governments and systems of law that can be used to compel or force citizens into certain patterns of behaviour, IOs rely on consent and voluntary cooperation.

Communal management
While states are self-governing, IOs organize themselves and make decisions on the basis of the shared views of their members.

Shared interests
While states will usually make decisions on the basis of self-interest, IOs provide a forum within which members identify and work on shared interests.

Minimal autonomy
The institutions set up to manage or coordinate the interests of the IO have few, if any, independent powers, and can typically do only what the member states allow.
International Organizations

Most IOs fall into one of two major categories:

- **International nongovernmental organizations (INGOs)** whose members are individuals or the representatives of private associations. (Amnesty International, Greenpeace, and the International Red Cross, and multinational corporations such as Ford, Toyota, Royal Dutch Shell, ING, and HSBC)

- **Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)** whose members are states and whose goal is to promote cooperation among state governments. (United Nations, the World Trade Organization, NATO, the OECD, and Interpol)
Regional Organizations

International cooperation can evolve into support for **regionalism**.

This usually happens when a group of states forms a regional integration association (RIA) designed to encourage collective action and develop common rules on shared interests.
Regional Organizations

Integration is not necessarily a linear process, and different groups of states will have different motives and unique thoughts about the appropriate steps to take, but if there was a European model of integration, it would appear as follows:

1. Agreement of **free trade area** with the removal of internal barriers to trade (such as tariffs and border restrictions) while maintaining a common external tariff against non-member states.

2. The creation of a **single market**, meaning the removal of barriers to the free movement of people, money, goods and services.

3. Efforts to promote **monetary union**, where smaller currencies are tied to a leading currency (as with the Common Monetary Area of southern Africa which links several countries to the South African rand, but has not yet achieved a single currency) or efforts are made to agree a single currency (as with the euro).

4. RIAs often talk in general terms about the value of peace and political cooperation, and even of political 'unity', but so far the idea of **political union** has been too controversial to be anything more than a theoretical goal.
What Is the EU?
## Where to start?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Assumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>International organization</strong></td>
<td>Its institutions have little or no autonomy, and the EU makes its most important decisions through negotiations and bargains among governments. Best understood using theories of international relations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional integration association (RIA)</strong></td>
<td>It is comparable with other regional blocs such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the African Union, again using IR approaches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unique (sui generis)</strong></td>
<td>It emerged out of a unique set of circumstances, that has unique qualities and goals, and that might never be replicated elsewhere – and might not even have emerged in Europe if the process of integration had started much later than it did.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political system in its own right</strong></td>
<td>It is a European superstate, and its structure and operating principles can be compared with conventional states. Best understood using approaches of comparative politics, with a particular focus on federalism and confederalism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Combination</strong></td>
<td>It is a mix of elements of all the above.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theorising the EU

**International Relations**
The study of relations among states, focusing on alliances, diplomacy, and the dynamics of decisions reached by states working together or in competition with each other.

**Comparative Politics**
The study of different political systems, usually based on cases, and aimed at drawing up general rules about how those systems function.
Major Theories of International Relations

Intellectual Background

Realism

• A theory of international relations which argues that we live in an anarchic global system (one without rules or an authority above the level of the state), and that states relate to and compete with each other according to their self-interest.

• States must use both conflict and cooperation to ensure their security through a balance of power among states.
Major Theories of International Relations

**Functionalism:** The idea that if states cooperate and create new functionally specific interstate institutions and agencies, regional integration will develop its own internal dynamic, and peace can be achieved through the creation of a web of interstate ties without the need for grand intergovernmental agreements.

The best way to bring about peace was not through alliances and agreements among governments, but by setting up a network of functionally specific international institutions dealing with relatively noncontroversial matters such as postal services or the harmonization of weights and measures, and managed by bureaucrats.

David Mitrany (1888-1975)
Major Theories of International Relations

**Federalism**: Promotion of, or support for, the idea of federation. For European federalists this means a belief in the merits of replacing the European state system with a new European federation, or a United States of Europe.

Jean Monnet (1888-1979)  
Altiero Spinelli (1907-1986)
IR Theories of European Integration

Neofunctionalism: The theory that integration in one area of activity will lead to pressures and political support for integration in other related areas.

Integration would take on a life of its own (an ‘expansive logic’) through the phenomenon of spillover, described by Leon Lindberg as a process by which ‘a given action, related to a specific goal, creates a situation in which the original goal can be assured only by taking further actions, which in turn create a further condition and a need for more action’

Ernst Haas (1924-2003)
IR Theories of European Integration

**Intergovernmentalism:** A political dynamic in which key decisions are made as a result of negotiations among representatives of the member states of an IGO. The EU primarily as a forum within which member states negotiate in an attempt to achieve a consensus, and where all decisions are taken by the representatives of the member states.

Hoffmann argued that while non-state actors played an important role in the process of integration, state governments alone had legal sovereignty, the political legitimacy that came from being elected, and the authority to decide the pace of integration.

Stanley Hoffmann (1928-
IR Theories of European Integration

Supranationalism

A political dynamic by which IGOs become the forum for the promotion of the joint interests of state members, which involves the transfer of authority to joint institutions functioning above the states.

Liberal Intergovernmentalism

A theory combining elements of neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism, arguing that intergovernmental bargains are driven by pressures coming from the domestic level.

American political scientist Andrew Moravcsik argues that the positions of the governments of the member states are decided at the domestic level, and European integration then moves forward as a result of bargains reached among those governments negotiating at the European level.
IR Theories of European Integration

TO CONCLUDE !!!
There is no grand theory of European (or even of regional) integration.

As Michael Burgess neatly summarized;

‘the EU works in practice but not in theory’
What is the EU?

Theories developed by scholars of International Relations, who mainly see the European Community/Union as a cooperative arrangement among governments.

By contrast, the arguments made by scholars of comparative politics and public policy focuses on the European Union as a political system in its own right.
Dimension of the EU

The three main competing sets of views about the personality of the EU, which lies somewhere within the area indicated by the hexagon—but just where is a matter of debate.
Is EU a State?

Since 1980s;

• the process of integration has accelerated,
• the relationship between EU institutions and the member states has changed, and
• the reach of EU institutions, law and policy has expanded.

This has led some to conclude that we should consider the EU a political system in its own right, using the methods and principles of comparative politics.
Comparative Approaches to the EU

- In 1975, Donald Puchala hinted at new thinking about the Community as an international regime within which member state governments cooperated on the basis of rules, norms, and decision-making procedures.

- In 1983, William Wallace argued that the Community was ‘more than an international regime, but less than a fully developed political system’.

- In 1992 Alberta Sbragia suggested that comparative federalism in particular had much to offer as a way of understanding the Community, and that perhaps the study of the Community could be incorporated into and contribute to the study of comparative politics rather than being isolated.

- In 1994, Simon Hix argued that while the political system of the Community might only be part-formed, the practice of politics in the EC was not so different from that in any democratic system.
Comparative Approaches to the EU

Since few scholars would agree that there is a European government as there are national or local governments in the member states, some instead prefer the looser term **European governance**

- **Government**: The institutions and officials that make up the formal structure by which states or other administrative units (counties, regions, provinces, cities, towns, and even universities) are managed and directed.
- **Governance**: An arrangement by which decisions, laws and policies are made without the existence of formal institutions of government.
- **Multilevel governance**: An administrative system in which power is distributed and shared horizontally and vertically among many different levels of government, from the supranational to the local, with considerable interaction among the parts.
Comparative Approaches to the EU

The invention and adoption of new conceptual terms reflects how little agreement there has been on how best to understand the EU.

The best options may be the simplest, and here we might focus on two older and better-developed concepts, namely:

• Federalism
• Confederalism
Federalism

There is no clear-cut academic school of European federalism, mainly caused by:

• the political nature of the federalist debate
• the difficulty of pinning down what federalism actually means

A federation is a system of administration involving two or more levels of government with autonomous powers and responsibilities while the term federalism refers either to the principles involved in federal government, or to advocacy for the idea of federation.

Federalism is a concept with ‘no fixed meaning’, and more recently has warned that ‘there is no single pure model of federalism’ and that we cannot ‘just pick models off a shelf’. On the contrary, federations come in many different forms, the specifics changing according to the relationship between the whole and the parts.

Quasi-federation: An arrangement by which powers are divided between central and regional government, resulting in some of the features of federalism without the creation of a formal federal structure.
# Federalism

There are about two dozen formally-declared federations in the world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federations</th>
<th>Transitional or quasi-federations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Comoros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia Herzegovina</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micronesia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palau</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Kitts and Nevis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Based on Watts (2008).*
Confederalism

A conceptual cousin of federalism, describing a looser form of association among states.

A confederation is a group of sovereign states with a central authority deriving its authority from those states, and citizens linked to the central authority through the states in which they live.

While the number of federations has been growing, there have been few examples in history of confederations, and none have lasted.

- Switzerland; in the medieval era and from 1815 to 1848
- United States; from 1781 to 1789
- Germany; from 1815 to 1866
In a federal system, there are at least two levels of government with which the people have a direct relationship. In a confederal system, the people relate to the ‘central government’ only through the states of which they are residents.

**FEDERATION**

National (that is, federal) government has sole power over foreign, security and monetary policy, and there is a single currency and a single national defence force.

Local government looks after education, policing, criminal justice, maintaining roads, and similar issues.

Federal and local systems of law coexist, and federal and local levels of government and bureaucracy are supported by their own constitutions, executives, legislatures, courts, and systems of taxation.

Residents are citizens of the federation, not of the states that are members of the federation, and have a direct political relationship with both the federal government and state governments.

For a state to leave a federation would be considered secession and might lead to political conflict and possibly even war.

**CONFEDERATION**

Confederal government has few if any independent powers or areas of responsibility.

States retain the bulk of power and authority over most areas of policy.

The states create shared institutions that are given authority by the states to carry out a limited number of functions, and where decision-making is mainly intergovernmental.

Residents are citizens of the member states, not of the confederation, and they have a direct political relationship only with their state governments, who speak on behalf of their citizens in the meeting-rooms of the confederal institutions. Citizens live in their own separate political communities.

Member states are free to leave the confederation whenever they wish.
The federal features of the EU

- The EU has several levels of administration (European, state, provincial, urban, and local), and each has some autonomy in different areas of policy.
- It has treaties that are the functional equivalent of a constitution and that allow for administrative institutions that function above the level of the member states, and that distribute powers between the European institutions and the member states.
- One of the core treaty principles is subsidiarity, or the idea that policy responsibilities should be transferred to the EU institutions only where they are more efficiently dealt with at the European level rather than the state level. This seems to confirm the existence of two levels of government.
- The European Court of Justice acts as an umpire that works independently of the member states and rules on disputes about the distribution of power within the EU.
- There is direct representation of the views of the member states within the EU institutions, notably in the European Council and the Council of Ministers.
- There is a separate executive/bureaucracy (the European Commission), a separate legislature (the European Parliament), and a separate court (the European Court of Justice), that coexist and share powers with their national equivalents. The existence of the European Parliament takes the EU beyond a confederation.
- There are at least two systems of law: European and national (and sub-national systems of law in federations such as Austria, Belgium and Germany).
- The member states of the EU are increasingly defined not by themselves but in relation to their EU partners, and Europeans increasingly identify with Europe and with European priorities.
The confederal features of the EU

- While the minimum necessary two levels of administration needed for a federal system both exist, the EU institutions are weaker relative to national institutions than is the case in a ‘conventional’ federal system.
- Although the EU has treaties and administrative institutions, the interests of the member states play a greater role in the relationship between the whole and the parts than is the case in federations.
- There is no European constitution adopted by the member states and capable of being amended and developed by proposals from the EU institutions and the approval of a majority of member states. Instead the EU is based on a series of treaties that each had to be accepted by all member states before they were adopted.
- One of the key qualities of a confederation is indirect representation in the joint government through state governments. Although EU voters are directly represented through the European Parliament (a federal quality), much power still lies in the hands of the European Council and the Council of Ministers, which are more clearly confederal in character.
- The member states are still distinct units with separate identities, they have their own national defence forces and policies, they can still sign bilateral treaties with non-EU states, and the governments of the EU states can still argue that the EU institutions exist at their discretion.
- Unlike federations, the EU is a voluntary association, so its members are free to leave if they wish.
- Although the EU has leaders and institutions that look much like a European government, they have fewer powers than their national counterparts.
- The EU may have its own flag and anthem, but most of the citizens of the member states still have a higher sense of allegiance towards national flags, and anthems and they cannot surrender their state citizenships and become citizens of the European Union.
What is the EU?

TO CONCLUDE !!!
Combining federal and confederal explanations and understanding EU is a hybrid, containing features of both.

“federal-confederal union”
“new confederation”
“association of compound states”
“hybrid confederation-federation”

Just as there is no general agreement on how and why the EU evolved the way it did, so there is no general agreement on what it has become.

BUT

The EU can be a ‘political system’ without also having to be a ‘state’.
The EU: a Political System but not a State

Democratic political systems consists of four main elements:

1. A stable and clearly defined set of institutions for collective decision-making and a set of rules governing relations between and within these institutions.

2. Citizens and social groups that seek to realize their political desires through the political system

3. A significant impact on the distribution of economic resources and the allocation of social and political values across the whole system.

4. A continuous interaction (‘feedback’) between these political outputs, new demands on the system, new decisions and so on.
The EU possesses all these elements:

1. The basic institutional quartet – the Commission, the Council, the European Parliament (EP) and the Court of Justice.

2. An increasing number of groups such as individual corporations and business associations to trade unions, environmental and consumer groups and political parties.

3. EU outputs have a significant impact on the ‘authoritative allocation of values’ (Easton, 1957) and determine ‘who gets what, when and how’ in European society (Lasswell, 1936).

4. The real essence of EU politics lies in the constant interactions; within and between the EU institutions in Brussels; between national governments and Brussels, within the various departments in national governments, in bilateral meetings between governments, and between private interests and governmental officials in Brussels and at the national level.
The EU: a Political System but not a State

The EU does not have a ‘monopoly on the legitimate use of coercion’ which, remains in the hands of the national governments of the EU member states.

As a result, the EU is not a ‘state’ in the traditional Weberian meaning of the word.

The EU can function as a full-blown political system without a complete transformation of the territorial organization of the state – unlike the evolution from the city-state to the nation-state in the early-modern period of European history.