



Behavioural Approach

Modern Approach

Meaning

Imagine Political Science being reborn in the 20th century. Instead of asking “What is justice?” or “What is the ideal state?” scholars now asked: “How do people actually behave in politics?”

That is the **Behavioural Approach** — a **modern approach** that treats politics as **pure science** and studies **politics as a process**, not just as institutions or ideals.

- It focuses on **political behaviour** (how citizens vote, how leaders act, how power is shaped and shared).
- Instead of values, it studies **facts and patterns** of political action.

In short: from “**what ought to be**” → “**what actually is.**”

Exponents

- **Chicago School** under **Charles Merriam** → pioneers of this trend.
- **Gregg Catlin** in *The Science and Method of Politics* → argued that politics should be **value-free** and a **pure science**.
- **Robert Dahl** → declared the “**death of discipline**”, criticizing:
 - Historicist tendencies (the old, century-old obsession with history).
 - Institutionalism (which neglected the socio-cultural factors shaping politics).

They wanted Political Science to be **empirical, observable, and testable**.

Think of it like this:

- Traditional political theory was like

philosophers drawing blueprints of an ideal city.

- Behaviouralism said: “Forget blueprints — let’s go out into the city, watch how people actually live, vote, fight, cooperate, and then build theories from real behaviour.”

That’s why it’s called **modern** — because it aligned Political Science with **scientific methods, data, and real processes**.

Features of Behavioural Approach

Let’s step into the world of **Behaviouralism** — a movement that wanted Political Science to look like physics or biology: **systematic, scientific, and value-free**.

But as **David Easton** himself later admitted, it entered a **state of decline**, because reality is always messier than science. Still, its **8 foundational stones**, laid down by APSA (American Political Science Association), are worth remembering.

1. Regularities

- Behaviouralists believed **human behaviour follows observable patterns**.
- Example: voter turnout increases with literacy.
- BUT — the same person may not behave the same way next time! Behaviour is patterned, but not as rigid as laws of physics.

2. Techniques

- They loved **maths and statistics**: social network analysis, maximum likelihood estimation, survey research.
- This gave Political Science **precision**, but also **compromised its normative scope** (justice, equality, ethics got sidelined).

3. Verification

- Theories had to be **verified with data**.



- Yet in politics, only a **few things can be rigorously verified** — you can't put democracy or liberty in a lab!

4. Systemisation

- Hypotheses, data, and technology had to be linked in a **systematic way**.
- This made Political Science more **analytical** rather than just **procedural description**.

5. Integration

- Political Science was integrated with **science, sociology, psychology**.
- Example: borrowing from psychology to study political behaviour, like leadership traits or voter psychology.

6. Measurement

- Behaviouralists set **measurement as a standard**.
- No vague speculation — everything had to be quantified, surveyed, and coded into data.

7. Value Neutrality

- Behaviouralism claimed to be **value neutral**: politics studied as it is, not as it ought to be.
- But **Leo Strauss** criticised this: "If you don't distinguish between clean water and dirty water, you fail as a discipline." In other words, without **values**, Political Science risks losing its moral compass.

8. Pure Science Orientation

- The final dream: make Political Science a **pure science**, as objective and reliable as physics.
- So, Behaviouralism gave us **rigour, data, and methods**, but it also **emptied politics of values and ethics**. It's like having a microscope that can see every detail, but forgetting to ask the big question: "*Why does it matter?*"

Achievements of Behavioural Approach

Before we criticise, let's give credit where it's due. Behaviouralism *did* bring big achievements:

1. Rich Data Collection

- For the first time, Political Science became **data-driven**.
- Example: large-scale studies of **voting behaviour** in the US and Europe. Instead of just speculating, we had surveys, polls, and hard evidence.

2. Verified Theories

- Approaches like the **Structural-Functional Approach** (Gabriel Almond) were tested with empirical data.
- This gave Comparative Politics a **scientific grounding**.

3. Contribution to Comparative Politics

- Its **biggest contribution**: Comparative Politics.
- Instead of studying constitutions in isolation, scholars compared actual political processes across countries — elections, interest groups, parties.

In short, it gave us **tools and methods** that modern political science still uses.

Criticism of Behavioural Approach

No theory escapes criticism — and Behaviouralism invited plenty.

1. Narrow Scope

- Traditionalists argued it **compromised the scope and relevance**.
- It missed the **bigger picture** — questions of *justice, rights, liberty* were sidelined.

2. Overuse of Scientific Jargon

- It used **complex scientific jargons** that alienated ordinary understanding.



- Too many equations, too little philosophy.

3. Costly & Resource Heavy

- Large surveys and data collection were **expensive**.
- And often, they reached **similar conclusions that could have been achieved by logic alone**.

4. Marxist Critique

- Marxists hit hard: they saw Behaviouralism as a **Cold War ideology**.
- Born in the **USA**, it lacked true **value neutrality**, filled with **ideological orientalism** — judging the rest of the world by Western liberal standards.

5. Systems Bias

- Its **systems approach** was modelled on the **Western liberal political system as ideal**.
- This led to **status quoist tendencies** — justifying the existing order rather than challenging inequality or exploitation.

So, Behaviouralism was like a **giant microscope** — great for detail, great for data, but sometimes it forgot the soul of politics. It helped Comparative Politics grow, but by **ignoring justice and rights**, it risked becoming a servant of the Cold War and a justification of liberal democracy as the “only way.”

Relevance of Behavioural Approach

Whenever we study a theory, the natural question arises: “*Why should we still care about it?*” Behaviouralism, despite heavy criticism, still holds **relevance** — let’s see how.

1. Western Liberal Justification

- Critics argue its **hidden purpose** was to justify the **Western liberal way of life**.
- In the Cold War era, it often projected liberal democracy as the “normal” or “ideal” system.

2. Arresting Decline of Political Science

- But at the same time, let’s be fair.
- There was a **genuine interest to arrest the decline of Political Science** as an academic discipline.
- Remember: before behaviouralism, many thought political theory was “armchair speculation.” Behaviouralism gave it **scientific credibility**.

3. Scientific Methods

- It introduced **scientific methods** into Political Science:
 - **Survey research** – asking structured questions.
 - **Structured questionnaires & interviews** – collecting first-hand data.
 - Institutions like **Pew Research Survey** continue this tradition.
- This was revolutionary — it made political analysis **evidence-based**, not just opinion-based.

4. Reliable Knowledge & Credibility

- By applying these methods, behaviouralists generated **reliable knowledge** about voter behaviour, party systems, and political attitudes.
- This gave **Political Science credibility** — closer to Sociology and Economics as “social sciences.”

Even though **behaviouralism tilted towards Western liberalism**, we cannot dismiss its contribution.

It **rescued Political Science from decline**, introduced **scientific rigour**, and left us a **toolbox of methods** we still use — from **surveys to interviews to data analysis**.

In other words: behaviouralism may have been



biased, but it also **professionalised Political Science**.

Post Behaviouralism

Context

By 1969, the world was not calm — there were **black movements, women's movements, environmental activism** shaking societies. This forced political scientists to ask: *"What good is our discipline if it cannot respond to real struggles of people?"*

Here enters **David Easton**. He warned scholars against sitting in an **ivory tower**, obsessed with refining **technique**, while overlooking the **contemporary crisis**.

Thinkers

- **Dante Germino** strongly criticised **ideological reductionism** — reducing everything to neat formulas while ignoring the complexity of life.
- **Easton** gave his famous lecture **"Credo relevance"**, saying: *"Political Science must not only explain reality but also transform it."*

Seven Features (Easton)

- **Subject matter > Technique** → Don't worship math, focus on human problems.
- **Invite values** → Normative concerns like justice and rights must return.
- **Capacity to solve crisis** → Political theory should address wars, inequality, poverty.
- **Promote civilisational value** → Ideas that sustain humanity.
- **Responsibility of social scientist** → Scholars can't be neutral bystanders.
- **Applied science > Pure science** → Knowledge should guide action and policy.
- **Political Science is useful** → Not just for

university and research, but for society at large.

Post Behaviouralism was a **rebellion** within Political Science. Realised: *data alone cannot save humanity*. We need **relevance + action + values**. Or as Easton insisted, *"creative theory should lead to relevance."*

So, if **Behaviouralism** gave us numbers, **Post Behaviouralism** gave us **meaning**.

Nature

Remember this clearly: **Post Behaviouralism is not a return to traditionalism**.

- It still retains the **basic assumption of scientific inquiry** — we cannot throw away objectivity altogether.
- But it also recognises that **politics is about human beings**, so some **relaxation** is necessary.
- Think of it this way: it is *"as scientific as possible, but human where necessary."*
- That's why it is close to **sociology** and **psychology** — disciplines that study people, emotions, and society, not just abstract laws.
- So, don't confuse it with rejection — it is **taking behaviouralism forward**, not backward.

Influences

Two giants shaped its intellectual foundation:

- **Thomas Kuhn** – His idea of **paradigm** reminded scholars that science itself changes through shifts in perspective. So political science too must adapt when crises demand.
- **Karl Popper** – His idea of **falsification** told us: no theory is final; what matters is openness to correction. This encouraged political science to remain scientific but humble.

**Present**

2019, 10

And now, why is Post Behaviouralism so important today?

- Because it is the **most acceptable approach** in the discipline. It balances science with values.
- **M.B. MacPherson** carried it forward with his **critical egalitarian liberalism**.
- **Amartya Sen** too builds upon it — his **Development as Freedom** is a perfect example of blending **empirical analysis with normative goals**.
- **Robert Dahl** gave perhaps the most practical insight: he said there is **no fact–value dichotomy**, only a **continuum**. In other words, *there is not much difference if values are incorporated into facts* — both are needed to understand democracy.

So **Post Behaviouralism is the middle path**:

- **Not dry science like Behaviouralism.**
- **Not arm chair speculation like Traditionalism.**

It is **relevant, scientific, and human at the same time**. That's why today, when we debate justice, gender equality, environment, or development, we are unknowingly speaking the language of **Post Behaviouralism**.

PYQ

1. Comment on: Behavioural approach to Political Science. 2024, 10
2. 'Credo of Relevance' in post-behaviouralism advocates the importance of action science. Analyze. 2023, 15
3. Examine the importance of behavioural approach in political theory. What led to its decline? 2021, 15
4. Comment on: Resurgence of political theory.

5. Comment on: Decline of Political Theory. 2018, 10
6. Comment on: The Post-Behavioural Approach. 2016, 10
7. Examine the significance of the behavioural revolution in politics. 2011, 30
8. Explain the changing analytical perspectives in the development of political theory. 2008, 60
9. What is the nature of the crisis in political theory? Suggest remedies to overcome it. 2004
10. Post-behaviouralism is not a negation of the behavioural revolution but only its corrective. How does it seek to raise the status of the discipline of political Science? 2000, 60