
A User's Guide



HYPERPOLITICS

AN **INTERACTIVE** DICTIONARY
OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
CONCEPTS

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The Dictionary

The entries in *Hyperpolitics* are subdivided into three categories, each identified by a different format in the header:

- 1) MAIN ENTRIES
- 2) Short Entries
- 3) *Cross-Entries*

We do not provide a treatment for all one hundred keywords because we could not, in this first effort, master such a wide conceptual scope with the thoroughness and theoretical sophistication each entry deserves. However, the eighteen *main entries* plus the seventeen *short entries*, for a total of thirty-five matrices, present a comprehensive insight of the discipline's core vocabulary.

Moreover, the relational structure of the hyperdictionary offers an overview of the remaining entries through their links to the ones with a definition. In each *cross-entry* page the reader finds a list of its linked matrices and, thanks to the user-friendly graphical interface, can quickly locate that entry within the text of *main* or *short* definitions. For practical reasons, we have included in the Dictionary only those entries that present links to at least three related definitions (either the *main* or just the *short entries*), so that the reader can browse through a wide enough semantic universe. The *Web Companion* allows for access to the complete list of the hyperdictionary's keywords. This also defines the hyperdictionary as a work-in-progress, providing challenges and opportunities for improvements in our matrices and for entirely new definitions.

1) MAIN ENTRIES:

Entries with full-length definitions

Our choice of the eighteen concepts for full-length definitions was guided by a few transparent criteria. First and foremost was our shared familiarity, arising out of the classics we read from graduate studies to our preparation for our own writing and teaching. Many of these concepts—such as *legislature*, *corporation*, *bureaucracy*, *party*, *policy*, etc.—thus reflect our focus on institutions, with an emphasis on the developmental perspective. This is the common background which brought us together in the first place, though with different angles from the two shores of the Atlantic. Indeed, much of our theoretical effort through all these years has been to try to combine the Anglo-American and the continental European traditions, with their cultural and geopolitical nuances.

Another commitment was to include the normative cornerstones of political discourse: *justice*, *liberty*, *law*, *interest*, *opinion*, *liberalism*, *pluralism*, in full awareness that these were—either essentially or contingently—contested and controversial concepts.¹ These are the concepts where the relational and interactive structure of our hyperdictionary best serves the purpose of a confrontation with related concepts and/or alternative views of that concept. We have made, however, a few exceptions which were left undefined—such pillars of scientific and everyday parlance as *power*, *democracy*, *state*. The large number of competing approaches made it extremely hard to confine their definition within the space of one matrix. And Lasswell and Kaplan have provided confirmation and guidance: “In any set of definitions some terms must be left undefined on pain of circularity. The chain of definitions must have a starting point ... subject

1 See Walter B. Gallie, “Essentially Contested Concepts,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56 (1956): 167–98; John Gray, “On the Essential Contestability of Some Social and Political Concepts,” *Political Theory* 5 (1977), 331–48; and Terence Ball, *Transforming Political Discourse: Political Theory and Critical Conceptual History* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 13–14.

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only to the requirement ... that they be sufficiently intelligible without definition."²² For all these terms, the dictionary does however offer a variety of cues and indirect treatments through the cross-reference modality (see below), with its links to all the definitions where such terms appear as components of a matrix.

In order to enhance standardization, in the drafting of each entry we have followed a few basic rules which apply to all definitions.

First, we have tried our best to keep approximately the same length for all definitions, as this contributes to smoother reading and cross-referencing. Second, thanks to *Hyperpolitics'* innovative metalanguage, the argument can easily be followed step by step, as the various parts are illustrated in the text through the matrix graphics segments.

Each entry chapter is divided into seven sections:

- an introduction
- a presentation of the two axes
- four sections, one for each quadrant
- a conclusion

This effort toward standardization is a virtue most dictionaries tend to disregard, by presenting a wide range of formats, from the very brief to the extraordinarily long, while not offering any rationale for the variation.

Third, all of our definitions are grounded by a page showing the matrices to which they are linked in the hyperdictionary. The links page offers an extraordinary rich and yet synthetic overview of the wider conceptual domain of each entry. And it enables the readers to choose in which direction and through which links to pursue a more thorough understanding of a concept's universe.

2) Short Entries:

Entries with matrix and abstract

The seventeen short entries share the complexity, coherence, and interactivity of the full-length definitions, as well as their format. Each definition is first introduced by a brief statement of the concept's main elements and historical context. Then follows a presentation of the two axes, which are cross-tabulated to develop the matrix's four property spaces. The argument thus moves to the four quadrants, and is followed by a conclusion. And, through their linked matrices presented on a separate page, their semantic universe can be enlarged according to the reader's interests. These seventeen shorter versions are thus bona fide definitions, useful in themselves; but a matrix with only an outline rendering is open more to criticism, alteration, and experimentation, and may lead to an entirely new matrix. Serendipity and creativity are byproducts.

This is the hyperdictionary's pedagogy: experience, serendipity, and creativity. The drafting of an original rendering of a matrix is an experience in political theory, with original ideas and proposed changes in the matrix. And this is only the beginning of interaction not only with other students and users but with the authors. And thanks to the matrix, variations and substitutions occur within a controlled logical environment. One of the principal aims of our hyperdictionary is to serve as a platform for conceptual investigation and development.

Indeed, some of these matrices are themselves the result of a joint endeavor with a number of junior colleagues, participating in *Hyperpolitics* workshops at various stages of our project. We are happy to acknowledge their authorship and their confirmation that *Hyperpolitics* stirs the intellect and entices critical involvement.

2 Lasswell and Kaplan, *Power and Society*, 3.

3) *Cross-Entries:*

Entries with links only

The third category in the Dictionary consists of thirty-two entries, each on a single page, showing the matrices to which that entry is linked. Although there is no fully rendered definition of the concept, the user can get a substantial sense of its semantic scope by going to the pages where the entry appears as part of a definition, either on one of the two axes or on one of the four quadrants. Thanks to the matrix interface, the cross-references can be quickly found and easily contextualized as part of a more complex argument. Besides, browsing through the links can represent one first step for users to start working toward their own matrix and definition of that entry, using the arguments and sources found in the cross-referenced matrices as a stimulus for theorizing.

The link's basic use is to trace an entry within the context of a related matrix, one link at a time. However, to look at all the links of a concept in a single page and through the matrix's self-evident metalanguage is a novel intellectual experience, offering a commanding overview of a concept's semantic universe.

The Web Companion

This leads to one further asset of the *Hyperpolitics* platform: its electronic version. The interactive features of *Hyperpolitics* are enhanced by its *Web Companion*, a fully developed Web site allowing users to quickly—and powerfully—browse through the various matrices, as well as offering the opportunity for compiling their own definitions after reading those in the book (www.hyperpolitics.net). The online version can in fact be accessed in two modes: *read* or *write*. The *read* mode gives access to the matrices with their

outlines (no full-length definition available), thus serving as a concise illustration of what is to be found in the book. The *write* mode is an e-learning environment where students, as well as mature scholars, can work out their own definitions, taking full advantage of two key features: hypertextual links and selected electronic sources.

In both modes, the web platform allows for a more efficient use of the hyperdictionary's relational structure. In each matrix, both in the *read* and the *write* mode, all keywords work as immediate hypertextual links to all related matrices, thus making conceptual traveling an easier—though complex—experience. In this respect, the *Web Companion* is an invitation to navigate through the entire conceptual system, while remaining aware not to lose sight of the matrix's logical compass.

The same consideration applies to the access we provide to the ever-expanding universe of electronic literature. *Hyperpolitics* cannot possibly substitute for the choice of sources for developing a scientific argument, a choice that each individual scholar will do on the basis of personal taste and availability: whether online or on the stacks of a library or on one's own bookshelves. However, we have made a conscientious effort to provide a selection of sources that can be useful for developing a concept's definition. One first ancillary source is represented by hundreds of concise abstracts summarizing the content and methodology of each entry's definition in the dictionaries used for compiling *Hyperpolitics*' basic list of keywords. This offers an unprecedented comparative overview of different cultural blends and theoretical approaches in the discipline's vocabulary, one that can be easily used to make the early steps toward framing a more complex argument.³ The second ancillary source consists of a quick link to a selection of freely accessible electronic sources, such as encyclopedias or articles' repositories, directly showing the findings for the entry one is working on.⁴

3 See Annarita Criscitiello, "Gli attrezzi della scienza politica. Una rassegna critica di undici dizionari," *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica* 2 (2002): 83–110.

4 This module is partly a spin-off from the International Political Science Association Portal for electronic sources (www.ipsaportal.net), a more comprehensive gateway to political science electronic sources from which the Web sites' abstracts have been selected.

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Both these electronic features are mainly targeted for students, striving to find their way through a complex conceptual universe. Yet, these electronic sources can offer useful insights also for the experienced scholar, the more so as the Web environment is being transformed into the new frontier for higher education and research.⁵

How to Get Started

Hyperpolitics can be used at various levels of complexity, depending on the user's interests and skills.

- The simplest is reading one definition at a time, as in any other dictionary. The understanding of each concept will be further facilitated by *Hyperpolitics*' user-friendly graphic layout, which allows for step-by-step explanation of each definition.
- The next step is taking full advantage of the dictionary's hyperstructure, looking for the larger conceptual domain of each entry by browsing through one or more related matrices. Again, this is facilitated by the graphic layout, offering a bird's-eye view of all related matrices.
- One further, more engaging step consists of the opportunity for each individual user to alter or replace a matrix. Through its modular methodology, *Hyperpolitics* invites controversy, changes, improvements. This is the great virtue of *Hyperpolitics*—a perpetual prompter of thought.
- The interactive features of *Hyperpolitics* are enhanced by its *Web Companion*. As with the printed hyperdictionary, the *Web Companion* also allows for different levels of complexity.
 - The online platform is ideal for classroom use, as it provides a stepwise presentation of the construction of each matrix, thus inviting discussion and contributions from the students in the analysis of the various components of a definition: its axes and the four subtypes. Direct access to summaries from other dictionaries and on-line bibliographical sources enables the teacher to illustrate with background literature and to compare different cultural strands in each concept's definitions.
 - At a more advanced level, a concept's presentation may include some or all related matrices. In this case, students are introduced to a wider and more complex argument on that concept's possible uses and empirical background. This is particularly useful when a concept becomes the topic of a seminar and/or a research assignment. On the *Web Companion* students can easily follow how all links of a concept lead to the definitions of the related matrices.
 - A further step engages students in the drafting of their own definitions, after taking advantage of the ones presented in the book as well as of the online sources accessible through the *Web Companion*. The platform's user-friendly interface, with its built-in notepad, encourages tentative drafting as well as easy exchange with the teacher and/or other students. Once a matrix has been saved on the platform, it becomes visible to all interested users.
- This leads to the future use of *Hyperpolitics* as a social software, a platform open to the contribution of all those interested in developing, confronting, and exchanging their research experience in one or more conceptual domains through the form of a matrix-based definition. Much as we have tried our best to simplify this challenging endeavor, the results will, as always, depend on two basic requisites of all scientific endeavor: hard work and an open mind.

⁵ See Mauro Calise and Rosanna De Rosa, "E-Research: An Introduction to On-line Political Science Sources for Beginners (and Skeptics)," *International Political Science Review* 29 (2008): 595-618.