

POLITICAL CULTURE: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The emergence of novel methodologies in the field of Political Science has been the most notable advancement during the Post Second World War era. It has brought about some drastic and fundamental changes and has given birth to a large number of new concepts like political system, political culture, political socialization, power, authority, influence, legitimacy, etc. Political culture is a recently introduced concept in the field of Political Science. In order to understand the functioning of any political system, it is important to have knowledge of the political culture prevalent in that particular nation. Almond and Powell say that it "may provide us with a valuable conceptual tool by means of which we can bridge the micro-macro gap in political theory".¹ System theorists argue that political systems can be differentiated not only by their form, but also by the political culture in which they are deeply rooted.² The functioning of a specific political system is profoundly influenced by the political culture within which it operates. The political culture has exerted significant influence, especially in developing nations, on the establishment and dismantling of the political system. The political system is influenced by its surroundings and, in turn, influences them. One crucial element of this environment is the specific political culture that shapes, expresses, and resolves (or fails to resolve) political issues. Hence, the examination of this notion holds immense importance. It has become a crucial factor in the analysis of political systems from a morphological perspective.

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Gabriel Almond coined the phrase “political culture” in his 1956 article “Comparative Political System.” Samuel Beer and Adam Ulam used this term in “The Pattern of Government” in 1958. However, Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba conducted groundbreaking research in the topic with their book ‘The Civic Culture’: Political Attitude and Democracy in Five Nations (1963). In which an attempt was made to study the attitude to ‘the masses’ in England, Germany, Italy, Mexico, and the United States. Over time, this phrase gained popularity and has now become a crucial idea in the study of the political system’s morphology. Before entering into any meaningful discussion on the term political culture, a brief introduction of the concept ‘Culture’ within which political culture is a part is essential.

Culture

Culture is a crucial topic in the fields of anthropology and sociology. The term ‘culture’ refers to the collective way of life of a social group, encompassing both the physical and abstract aspects of their surroundings that are created by the group. These aspects are passed down from one generation to the next through the processes of learning and community, sometimes through symbolic means. Culture refers to the complex system that encompasses the assimilation of human knowledge, a collection of shared values, attitudes, beliefs, conventions, customs, art, music, traditions, behaviours, and other learned and shared abilities and habits among people of societies.¹

As per the Encyclopaedia of Britannica, Culture encompasses several elements such as language, ideas, beliefs, conventions, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, artwork, rituals, ceremonies, and other associated components. Culture encompasses all the abilities and behaviours that individuals develop as members of a society.²

Graham Wallas, a renowned psychologist and political philosopher says, “Culture is a compendium of ideas, values, and objects. Social legacy refers to the cultural knowledge and practices that we receive from previous generations via learning, as opposed to biological heritage, which is inherited through genes.”³

Political Culture

Political Culture refers to the collective attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and values of a society that pertain to the political system and political issues. As per Almond and Powell, political culture refers to the collective attitudes and orientations towards politics exhibited by individuals inside a political system. The subjective sphere is the underlying foundation that imbues political activity with significance.”⁴

In his renowned book “Aspect of Political Development,” Lucian Pye defines “Political culture is collection of attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments that establish structure and significance in the political process. It also encompasses the fundamental assumptions and laws that dictate behaviour inside the political system. It includes both the political principles and operational standards of a political entity. Political culture is the collective expression of the psychological and subjective aspects of politics.”⁵

Political culture refers to the distinct political orientations and patterns derived from political philosophy. It encompasses a range of intricate phenomena, such as beliefs, values, and attitudes regarding the proper functioning of government and political systems.

Component of Political Culture

Political culture refers to the collective set of attitudes and orientations towards politics held by individuals within a political system. The subjective sphere is the foundation that underscores and imparts significance to political action. Almond and Powell define Political Culture as comprising three fundamental components of orientation:

1. Cognitive orientations
 2. Affective orientations
 3. Evaluative orientations
1. Cognitive orientations refer to an individual’s understanding and attitudes of the political system, including its roles, objects, officials, input, and output.
 2. Affective orientations refer to the emotional attachment, involvement, rejection, and similar feelings towards the political system, its individuals, and other political entities.
 3. Evaluative orientations refer to the process of forming judgements and opinions on political objects and events by applying value criteria.⁶

Importance of Political Culture

The examination of political culture has led to a range of theories and methodologies that help us comprehend the lifestyle and attitudes of individuals in contemporary society. It plays a significant effect in influencing the political development of a country. Political culture provides insight into the reasons why certain nations embrace democratic institutions more readily, while others choose authoritarian methods. Almond and Powell argue that political culture is a useful conceptual instrument for bridging the gap between micro and macro levels in political theory.

Types of Political Culture

After dealing with meaning, components, foundation and factors of political culture let us examine the various types of political culture. It would be beneficial for us to have a better understanding of the characteristics of the political system. Here, we might define political culture as the level of understanding individuals have regarding political matters and their importance in personal actions. Political culture can be categorised based on the level of citizen engagement in the political process and their expectations of receiving benefits from government activities. This classification distinguishes between an active relationship, where individuals actively participate and anticipate benefits from the decision-making process, and a passive relationship, where individuals have limited knowledge about government activities and do not expect to be involved in the decision-making process. In their Comparative study of political cultures, Almond and Verba in their Comparative study of political cultures have classified political culture in three ways. According to them it can be classified in the following three categories:-

1. Parochial Political Culture
2. Subject Political Culture
3. Participant Political Culture

1. Parochial Political Culture

Parochial Political Culture means people have little or no awareness of their political system and such individuals are to be found in any society. But, their number is more in a traditional society and even now in the backward societies their number is great.⁷

2. Subjective Political Culture

Subject Political Culture exists where one finds a high frequency of orientations to the system as whole and its outputs, but very little to its inputs or the self as a political actor. The relationship is passive. When there is democratic structure, the affective and normative reaction may be against them, as for example with the French royalists. Those citizens, who are aware of numerous government roles such as those of tax- collections and law making, are called political subjects.

3. Participant Political Culture

The third and most often recognised kind is the participation political culture. In highly developed countries, political culture is present, characterised by active citizen participation in the political arena and a strong identification as citizens of the polity. They were aware of their rights and responsibilities.⁸

These three sorts of political culture are considered ideal categories, but they do not exist in their pure form in any civilization. This is because individuals within a political system cannot be expected to have the same orientation or beliefs. Almond and Verba enumerate the following mixed types of political cultures.

1. The parochial- subject political culture
2. The subject- participant political culture
3. The parochial-participant political culture
4. Parochial, subject and participant political culture. The Parochial, subject and participant political culture is given the name of '**Civic Culture**'.⁹

Thus, in most of the societies, these varieties of political culture are found in the mixed form. In India, the position is different from that of western countries. Ours is developing nation and most of the people are illiterate. So in India, we find more parochial and political subjects and few political participants.

There are also some other types of political culture, such as 'elite' and 'mass culture'. 'Homogeneous' or 'integrated' and 'heterogeneous' or 'fragmented' culture. Also, there are British- American democratic culture and U.S.S.R.- China communist culture, etc.

Besides the three kinds of political culture as given by Almond and Verba, there are other kinds of political culture also. Some of them are as follow:-

Civic Culture

Civic political culture is present in a society where a specific elite group holds the decision-making authority, and the general population does not directly participate in the process. They solely convey their emotions through their delegates. However, the representatives have a duty to be accountable to the public. This form of political culture is present in a democratic society. Essentially, the civic culture reconciles the conflict within democracy between the control of the people and the efficiency of governance.¹⁰

2. Secular Political Culture

This form of political culture is present in societies where individuals possess a secular mindset, characterised by rationality and analytical thinking. According to Almond and Powell, secular culture is characterised by a shift from traditional beliefs and attitudes to more active decision-making processes. These processes involve gathering and evaluating information, considering different options, selecting the most suitable course of action, and testing whether the chosen action produces the desired outcomes.¹¹

3. Ideological Political Culture

It is such a political culture in which free political tendencies don't find a scope for development rather a particular ideology is encouraged and a particular type of political orientation finds a way for development. Strict principles determined by a decided code of conduct and governed by particular ideology are developed. In such a political culture, people are generally abided by a particular political ideology and do not make use of free thinking. This type of political culture is available where communistic views are applied as it is in Russia. In such a situation, people having particular ideology, do not make political life dynamic rather it becomes static.

4. Homogeneous Political Culture

In a country where political ideas are not heterogeneous, there homogeneous or integrated political culture exists. When the people hold similar views about political objectives and the means for their attainment and different leaders of political parties have the same ideology, homogeneous political culture is found in that country. The politics of America and England are the examples of such a political culture.

5. Fragmented Political Culture

This type of political culture is found in such countries where the political standards of various people are different and it is not easy to bring about a compromise among them. Such political culture is found where multi-party system exists e.g. France and Italy. At such places, people belonging to deferent parties, classes and castes try to live separately from each other.¹²

Criticism

Critics argue that obtaining a comprehensive understanding of a political system's culture is challenging due to the lack of distinct political opinions or attitudes among the populace. Political academics studying political culture can provide an overview of political views and attitudes in a society and make predictions regarding political performance. However, the actual outcomes may differ from their expectations. The notion of political culture is merely a rebranding of preexisting concepts, with little improvement or novelty. Undoubtedly, the concept of political culture has made a substantial contribution to the advancement of political science.

Conclusion

The notion of political culture has made a substantial contribution to the advancement of contemporary political theory. The idea signifies a notable progression towards the amalgamation of psychology and sociology with political

science, resulting in a more comprehensive comprehension of politics. Various political systems develop distinct value-patterns influenced by their historical context and the process of socialisation. The political culture of a country serves as its unique and distinguishing identity that sets it apart from other political systems.

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