Dimensions of Political System

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Abstract

All the states whether developed or developing are political states and they are not just states viewed as territory but a political system. It has two components, structures and functions. Structure ensures political efficacy and development whereas functions show realization of demands. Political system is activated by huge number of demands and converts these inputs into outputs which are decisions and authoritative policies. There should be balance between input and output structures. The functioning of the political system may be viewed on system level, the process level and the policy level. The stability of the system depends on the balance among these three levels. In every political system, there exist five capabilities i.e. extractive, regulative, distributive, responsive and symbolic. These capabilities depend on the structural functional specialization. If the goal of development is to be achieved, system should be responsive, integrative, adaptive and innovative.

Keywords: infrastructures, Monitoring Mechanism, Conversion Mechanism, socialization, interest articulation, interest aggregation, rule adjudication, capabilities

Introduction

"Society is usually viewed as the most inclusive entity within which systems may be evaluated. Systems thus are abstractions of the real society."[1] In any society, different systems exist although boundaries may be employed to delineate different systems, e.g. Political, Economic, Social, Cultural and Psychological systems. The variables of all these systems may include structures, functions, actors, values, norms, inputs, outputs, response and feedback.

The term political system has become very common and it is frequently used in Comparative Politics. The old works used terms as government, nation, or state to describe what we call a political system. The new terminology involves more than a change in style; it reflects a new way of looking at politics. It includes some new names for old things and some new terms that refer to activities and processes not formerly recognized as aspects of politics.[2]

The older terms – state, government and nation are limited by legal and institutional meanings. State is something which is associated with authority. Government expresses the will of the state and also makes us feel the authority of the state. Lastly a nation is a group of people who identify themselves as one whole. Political system covers everything which comes under state, government and nation. It also studies people behind these institutions.

In the 1960's and 1970's the focus of Comparative Politics switched to examining politics in its social context. After the 2nd World War new social science techniques were developed which the younger political scientists were keen to apply to politics. In addition to it, new nations emerged as a result of decolonization where the formal institutions of government proved to be weak. So the term political system developed instead of government institutions.[3]

Modern world is divided into two categories that are developed states and developing states. The developed states being highly industrialized have attained their political system. They have a system of their own.

The developing nations, on the other hand, have no political system of their own. They have borrowed their systems from the alien rulers e.g. Pakistan.

All the states whether developed or developing states are political states. Japan is an economic giant but still it is a political state. State is created for the welfare of man. State is not just a territory but it is a political system. State should be mechanized catering to the demands of the people by means of a political system.

The term political system was used in post IIWW era. The system approach to politics was pioneered by David Easton. "The political system refers to all the factors which influence collective decisions even if those factors are not formerly part of the government."[4] Thus parties, voters and social movements all form part of the system of politics, even though they are rarely mentioned in constitutions and other formal documents. Other political scientists who used this term include Almond & Powell, Sameul P. Huntington, David Aptor, Robert Dahl, Laswall & Kaplan, Karl Deutsch and other scholars.

Political system has two components structure and functions. Main purpose of the structure is to ensure political efficacy and development. Functions denote realization of demands and promotion of development. Since demands and developments are variables, state is a system in action.

Easton's System Analysis

There are two approaches regarding political system. One approach is given by David Easton. He published "The Political System" in 1953 claiming that he was attempting to construct a theory to embrace all the social sciences. Since then "Easton has become one of the prominent supporters of the application of general systems theories to political science and one of the few to come from within the discipline rather than from the other social sciences."[5]

David Easton stressed on the structures of the political system. The traditional search for a systematic interpretation of society was carried on by him in his application of general system theory to politics. According to Easton, "the political system consists of all those institutions and processes involved in the authoritative allocation of values for society."[6] The political system transform inputs into outputs while adjusting mechanisms allow for a feedback from the outputs on the input mechanism. This is shown in the diagram:

Easton's model of the political system[7]
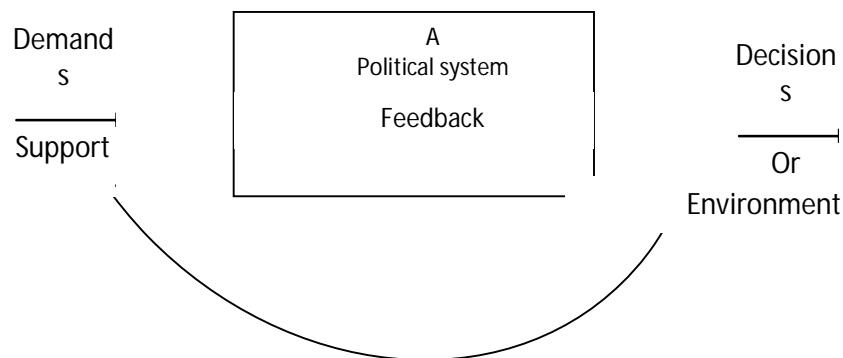
Inputs are of two kinds. These consist of (a) demands, which can be broad, or specific, detailed and precisely expressed, or vague or even latent; (b) there are supports which can equally well either be applied precisely to specific problems or in favor of specific individuals or, on the contrary be applied to the political institutions of the community or the regime as a whole.

The political system comes into action as a result of inputs. It is just like complex machine activated by a huge number of demands and supports at various levels of specificity. The Political system converts these inputs into outputs – authoritative policies and decisions. These policies are applicable to the whole society.

These outputs then feedback to society so as to effect the next cycle of inputs. Feedback is the spontaneous reaction of the people on the policies made by the Government. However inputs are regulated by gate keepers, such as parties and interest groups, which bias the system in favor of certain demands and against others.[8]

In any governmental system, two broad types of 'mechanisms' are found. Firstly, the "Monitoring Mechanism" by which the system registers inputs i.e. demands and supports so as to activate the machine and secondly, "Conversion Mechanism" which turns these inputs into outputs after some process of selection, limitation or rearrangement.[9]

Almond's Functional Approach

The other approach structural-functional approach propounded by Almond and Powell was based upon the fundamental idea that functions, not structures were the most important and significant features of political system and the structures are understandable only in terms of functions.[10]

When we speak of the structure of a political system, we are referring to the activities which make up that system, activities that have a certain regularity of behavior, intention and expectations. Structures include social and economic groupings, parties, executives, assemblies and advisory councils, judiciaries, administrative bodies.[11] All the structures have assigned functions to perform. Structures are functionally specialized and autonomous. When the individuals are involved, all the institutions have specific role to play e.g. Court is a structure, judgeship is a role performing judicial functions. Witness is a role.

Thus, one of the basic units of political system is the role. Structure consists of related and interacting roles and of the "political system as a set of interacting structures."[12] Structures can be political, economic and social such as political structures include electorates, interest groups, bureaucratic agencies, legislative assemblies, executives, military and judiciary etc.

At the outset Almond made clear his intention to renovate the concepts of Comparative Politics. The terms role and structure are used instead of office and institution to emphasize the actual behavior of the individuals involved in politics and the actual performance of the political institutions. Functionalism was a deliberate attempt to broaden the traditional institutional framework of executive, assembly and judiciary. Even if the political systems differ in their institutional arrangements, there are certain functions which any political system must perform in order to survive and operate effectively. Almond and Powell provided the most important analysis of the functions of the political system.

This framework of Almond is limited. "It is still too close to the generic model of a system, with its interdependence, its boundaries and its inputs and outputs, to be particularly discriminating in the political field."[13]

Almond's Classified Seven Functions of a Political System

Input functions: 1. Political socialization and recruitment.
2. Interest articulation and aggregation.
3. Political culture
4. Political communication.

Output functions: 5. Rule making
6. Rule enforcing
7. Rule adjudication

The outputs are government functions and correspond to the traditional use of three separate powers within government. Thus rule making replaces legislation, rule application implies administration and rule adjudication relates to the judicial process.

Almond stresses on functional activities of and responses to and from a political system. He laid more emphasis on input functions. He argued that the input or political functions, not the output or government functions are crucial in characterizing the political systems of the developing areas. He believes that decisions (outputs) are a synthesis of input demands. To him, thus, a political system is functional and developmental persistently undertaking a flow of unending demands from the input public sector to the output governmental sector. A both way feedback process synthesizes the input-output interaction.

Levels of Functioning: System, Process and Policy

The functioning of any system may be viewed on three different levels. We shall call these the system level, the process level and the policy level. The system level involves the system maintenance and adaptation functions.[14] In political system, the Incumbents of various roles like diplomats, military officers be recruited to these roles and they should learn how to perform these roles. In the same way attitudes of the people are formed, sustained or changed in the political culture of the society. This is political socialization. For Almond, political socialization induces people to participate in the political culture of society; socialization takes place through the family, school, job, religious group, voluntary association, political party and even government institutions. Political socialization involves the recruitment of people from classes, ethnic groupings and the like into the political system of parties, bureaucracy and so on. Both attitude formation and continuing behavior depends on the communication of information between individuals.

At the process level, inputs of demands and supports are converted into outputs of authoritative policies and decisions through a conversion process. At this stage interest groups and individuals express demands for policy change or continuation. The political process is set in motion when some group or individual makes a political demand. This process of demand making is called interest articulation.[15]
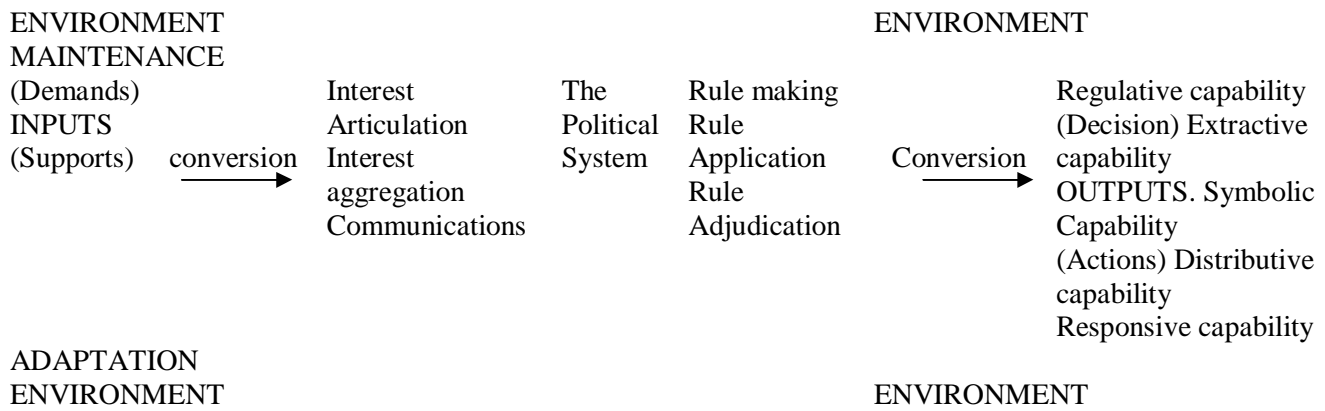
The demands articulated by political parties, interest groups and other political entities are aggregated into smaller numbers of major policy alternatives. Political communication serves all of these political functions. Political socialization, recruitment, articulation and aggregation occur through communication.

After the aggregation of demands, these demands are converted into authoritative policies. This stage is of policy-making. "Policy making is the pivotal stage of the political process the point at which effective political demands are converted into authoritative decisions."[16] Theses effective demands are enacted according to some rules. Every political system has a constitution "a set of ongoing rules that define the sites of political power and the nature of resources necessary for a coalition to make authoritative decisions and policies."[17] e.g. in America, the constitutional rules for policy making includes the majority vote of legislature and signature of the President.

After the policy making, comes the stage of policy implementation. All those policies which are made by the authorities according to some definite rules must be implemented. These policies are implemented thorough bureaucratic agencies, but other structures are also involved in the implementation of policies like interest groups, parties, and other structures.
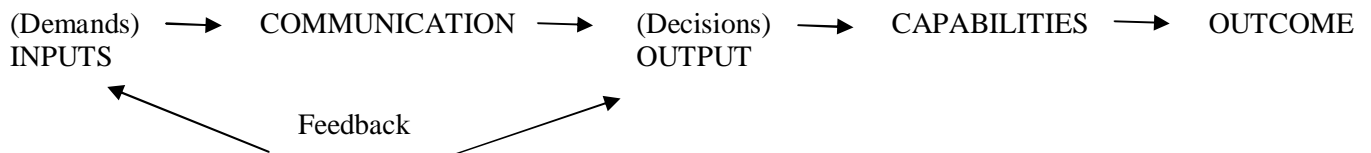
At the policy level, the focus is on the behavior of the system as a whole as it relates to other social systems and to the environment. Here comes capability functions regulation, extraction, distribution and symbolic response. These functions relate to the performance of the system within its environment. Policy level is also concerned with outcomes that are result of policy outputs. It is also concerned with feedback effects by which the change in environments leads to input.

The stability of the system depends on the balance among these three levels. If the same structures go on performing the same functions over time, balance must be established between system, process and policy levels. If this balance breaks down then there is strain on the system and new leaders may be recruited. These leaders may create new structures like Hitler or they try to rebuild the system like de Gaulle.

ENVIRONMENT MAINTENANCE				ENVIRONMENT	
(Demands) INPUTS	Interest Articulation	The Political System	Rule making Rule Application Rule Adjudication		Regulative capability (Decision) Extractive capability OUTPUTS. Symbolic Capability (Actions) Distributive capability Responsive capability
(Supports) conversion	Interest aggregation Communications			Conversion	

ADAPTATION
ENVIRONMENT   ENVIRONMENT

Alomnd's Political System and Levels of Functions

System is composed of infrastructures (inputs) and ultrastructures (out puts). Demands that are the inputs are raw material, aggregated by political parties and pressure groups, are converted into decisions through parliament, bureaucracy and army. In between the two sets of structures is the communication media formal i.e. media informal i.e. agitation.

(Demands) $\longrightarrow$ COMMUNICATION $\longrightarrow$ (Decisions) $\longrightarrow$ CAPABILITIES $\longrightarrow$ OUTCOME
INPUTS   OUTPUT

Feedback

Demand making process is a strain on the political system and resources. There are two main categories of demands vital and secondary demands.

1. Vital Demands

These demands are a strain on the political system. They present a pragmatic model. These demands are non-compromising, non-bargainable. They are fundamentally rigid and less flexible. They include (a) demands for security, stability and national honor; (b) demands for socio-economic change; (c) Demands for equitable extraction and distribution of resources and (d) demands for democratization and system conceptualization.

2. Secondary Demands

These demands are compromisable. There can be bargaining over these demands Secondary Demands. Among the secondary demands are (a) demands for system adaptability; (b) demands for behavioral change; and (c) demands for information flow. In the environment, we have such systems as the ecology, economy, culture, personality, social structure and demography. Each of these constitutes major set of variables in the setting that helps to shape the kinds of demands entering a political system. But not all the demands are external. Important types stem from situations occurring within a political system itself. Those are internal demands.[18]

The political process is set in motion when some group or individual makes a political demand. This process of demand making is interest articulation.[19] In a simple political system, there will be no specialized structure for demand making. In a modern political system interest articulation is done primarily by the organized associations. Interest articulation can also be done through non-specialized structures.[20] Main function of the structures is to absorb political demands, entertain demands, ensuring efficacy and promoting development. Structures are supposed to be legitimate. When the pubic make demands, the system should have efficacy to reciprocate demands for the ultimate goal of development.

Political system is a "set of interacting roles. These roles are to be specialized. All structures are designed accordingly. Demands are dynamic.

They are never static. Mobility of demand is a stress on the system. The main purpose of the political system is to aggregate demands coming from the public; transforms into decisions with the goal of social change. Demands are the raw-material put into the system through political action. After the demands have been fed into the political system, it will perform two analytically distinct operations. The political system will select and combine these demands through the process of interest articulation and interest aggregation.

After the demands have been articulated they are aggregated. "The function of converting demands into major policy alternatives is called interest aggregation."[21] Demands become major policy alternatives when they are backed by substantial political resources like votes of citizens who support candidates, votes of legislators, support of bureaucratic groups. For political demands to become serious policy alternatives they have to be backed by decisive resources in the political system. Political aggregation then consists of the processes that combine demands into policy alternatives and mobilize resources behind these policy alternatives e.g. a political party gets itself involved in interest aggregation when it receives the demands of labor unions, business community, ethnic groups, poor belonging to urban areas and after juggling, bargaining and improving these demands coming from different sectors aggregate them into some form of policy statement that may support.

Structures Performing Interest Aggregation

All groups and organizations performing interest articulation may also perform interest aggregation. In the developed system structures involved in interest aggregation are specialized structures. They mobilize resources behind the emergent proposals e.g. political parties. The agencies involved in interest aggregation are individual elites, interest groups, political parties, military governments etc.

Individual leaders play a significant role in shaping political alternatives. "Individual leaders may be able to establish network of individual supporters on the basis of personality exchanges of favors and support. Such networks may allow individual leaders to accumulate substantial political resources."[22] The collective interests of the followers are not being expressed but their sources are being aggregated through the personal exchanges built by individual leaders. Such personal networks are found in all the societies but they are prominent in peasant societies as in Latin America, Southeast Asia and in industrial societies as in Japan and Italy.

Secondly, there are various interest groups engaged in the interest aggregation. Among them are associational, non-associational and institutional groups. The structure of the associational interest groups enables their leaders to learn the opinions of their members and to mobilize their activities in favor of particular policies. These groups whether formed on the basis of specific issue representation or for presenting general class or ethnic group identity can mobilize considerable electoral or financial resources merely by changing the members and coordinating their activities. Although these interest groups are only for the support of political parties they can also collect sufficient resources to become contenders in their own right. But sometimes they become important subsystems within political parties, even control party policies.

Non-associational interest groups based on religion, language, Kinship, tribe and the like can be influential to develop policy making among many individuals and subgroups. They play an important role in aggregating interests of group members. They perform either as factions within the party or in bureaucratic structures or as contenders in their own rights.

Institutional interest groups like bureaucratic and military factions are also important interest aggregators. Although the function of bureaucracy is to implement the policies, it may negotiate with the groups to ascertain their preferences to mobilize their support. Military interest groups also act as interest aggregators because of their monopoly. Whenever system break down the military becomes decisive like in Pakistan, there is always military intervention. But effective military intervention requires that the military itself be able to aggregate the coercive resources they control into a united pattern of action. The aggregation of individual and group interests into backing for new policy initiative is performed by institutional interest groups within the civilian and military bureaucracy.

Thirdly there are political parties. The political party is the specialized interest aggregation structure of contemporary societies.[23] Different political parties have different goals and organizational structures and operate in different political settings. Similarly they vary in their performance of interest aggregation. The political party is distinctively modern structure of political aggregation and it regulates the performance of aggregative function by the other structures. Distinction should be made between competitive political parties and non-competitive political parties. Competitive parties may seek to mobilize electoral resources behind their policy proposals; non-competitive parties seek to organize the backing of powerful subgroups.

Military governments are one of the most important interest aggregators. In those countries where the military holds coercive resources it gives military great power as political contender. The major limitation is that their internal structures are not well designed for interest aggregation across a range of issues. The military organizations are not easily adapted to rally or communicate with social groups outside the command hierarchy. Military governments lack advantages in support mobilization held by party systems.[24] The effective or aggregated demands are those demands which are advocated by the political contenders who have resources like votes, seats in legislature, important seats in the government and private life, money, technical knowledge and expertise, control over the media of communication or means of coercion. After the aggregation of demands rules are drawn up through rule making, they are implemented and enforced through rule adjudication. Communication affects all these activities.

Capabilities of Political System

The study of the performance or capabilities of political system enables us to deal more effectively with problems of political change. The stimulus for political change can come from the three sources: from the political system itself; from social groups in the domestic environment and from the political system in the international environment.[25] These three sources of political change interact with one another e.g. pressure coming from the political elite which effect changes in the capabilities of the political system may produce changes in the society or in the international political system which in turn may change the pattern of demand and support. At the level of interaction with the environment the changes in magnitude and content of flow of inputs and outputs may be the stimuli of political change.

In every political system, there exist five capabilities i.e. extractive, regulative, distributive, responsive and symbolic. By extractive capability of the political system we mean measures of the range of performance of the political systems in drawing material and human resources from the domestic and international environment.[26] For example, imposition of taxes and collection of revenues. In some countries agriculture is the only source. In Venezuela or Kuwait oil is the single source. The failure of crop or decrease in prices of oil may undermine the extractive capability of the political system.

The regulative capability refers to the exercise of control over behavior of individuals and groups employ legitimate coercion to control behavior e.g. in U.S.A political system regulates many economic activities. It protects the businessmen from unfair practices, unions from suppression, protects consumers from monopoly pricing etc. Various types of interpersonal relationships are also regulated like marriage, and parental responsibility. But in some aspects of life people are free. It is only in the arena of political life that regulation becomes important. These two capabilities of a political system are interdependent. A system needs resources to regulate but it is through the use of control and coercion that resources are extracted.

After the resources have been extracted and regulated they are distributed. "The distributive capability refers to the allocation of goods, services, honors, statuses and opportunities of various kinds from the political system to individuals and groups in the society."[27] The political system distributes benefits among individuals according to their respective needs e.g. government jobs are distributive. Taxation structure is also distributive as it levels income distribution and wealth in the society. Regulation of behavior of one individual may benefit other. It is also distributive.

The symbolic capability is another output aspect of the political system which effectively used dung crisis and emergency situations in which symbols, flags, statements or personality may mobilize a large number of people into the favor of the government. The distributive and symbolic capabilities can be used to reinforce one other.

While extractive, regulative, distributive and symbolic capabilities are ways of describing the pattern of outputs of political system into the internal and external environments, the responsive capability is a relationship between inputs and outputs.[28] Every political system is responsive to something which keeps it dynamic and alive. The extractive, regulative, distributive and symbolic capabilities denote the credibility of any political system while responsiveness gives legitimacy to the political system. The political system responds to the external and internal demands. That system in which political elites do not respond to the demands of the people, that system has low responsive capability. On the other hand, a political system with a highly developed political parties and pressure groups and responsive in policy making is a system with a highly developed responsive capability.

Conclusion

Demands, decisions and capabilities keep the political system dynamic. The demands of the people, capabilities of political system and decisions of the political elites gives an outcome which shows the development process or decaying process in the political system. Demand becomes a vital factor in suggesting a social change. Culmination of decisions into outcomes are subject to the capabilities of the system. The quantum of change determines the quantum of satisfaction.

According to Almond input structure should be given priority. Integrated demands are fed into the system if there is cultural coherence. Functional theory of Almond is superior to Easton's behavioral approach. If people are socialized, trained politically, the political culture is raised to high level. If the culture is politically fragmented, there will be variety of cultures and there will be no coherence of demands.

Political recruitment is the essence of developmental change. High level of recruitment ensures political change. If the induction of manpower and material resources in the system is of higher level, then the capabilities and ultimately outcomes will be high. In our country the level of outcome is low due to the factor that demands of the people are not responded to and there is great wastage of capabilities.

Capabilities of a political system depends on the structural functional specialization. Higher the level of structural functional specialization, higher is the system efficacy. Higher the level of its resourcefulness, higher the system capabilities will be enhanced. If the quantum of socialization, culture and recruitment is higher than there will be political development and social change. If the goal of development is to be achieved, there should be higher level of capabilities, efficacy and recruitment. Manpower and natural resources are utilized for the achievement of efficacy.

According to Binder and Lucian Pye, for political development, specific level of capabilities is needed. System should be responsive, integrative, adaptive and innovative. We can say that there should be balance between input and output structures. Strong input structures can ensure demand aggregation in an effective way and strong output structures can ensure the desired ends based on incoming demands. Input-output activity is evaluated through political culture, socialization and recruitment. Recruitment is important because it represents the level of participation of people.

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