

## **Political anthropology**

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### *Chapter 1 Introduction to political systems*

#### Introduction on Politics

*Power* is the ability to exercise one's will over others. *Authority* is the socially approved use of power. We may adopt the classical typology of political organizations developed by numerous anthropologists.

- a. *Bands* are small kin-based groups found among foragers.
  - b. *Tribes* are associated with non intensive food production and have villages and/or descent groups, but lack formal government and social classes.
  - c. The chiefdom which is a form of sociopolitical organization that is intermediate between the tribe and the state, still kin-based, but characterized by a permanent political structure with some degree of differential access to resources and a political structure.
  - d. The state is characterized by formal government and social classes.
- In bands and tribes, the political order (polity) is not a distinct institution, but is embedded in the overall social order.

There are many correlations between economy and sociopolitical organization.

- a. Foragers tend to have band organization.
- b. Horticulturalists and pastoralists tend to have tribal organization.
- c. Agriculturalists tend to have either chiefdom-level or state-level organization.

In general, as the economy becomes more productive, population size increases leading to greater regulatory problems, which give rise to more complex social relations and linkages (greater social and political complexity)?

#### 2 - Bands and Tribes

##### A. The Forager Debate

2-1. In anthropology there is a debate between traditionalists and revisionists over the nature and state of foragers in the modern world.

- a. Traditionalists, argue that foragers like the San of the Kalahari are autonomous foragers with a unique cultural identity.
- b. Revisionists, argue that the San are not isolated foragers but are deeply integrated into the food-producing communities in the area and as a result tell us very little about the foraging societies before the emergence of agriculture.

2-2. Both sides are correct in that modern foragers are not living relics of the Stone Age, but to the extent that they base their subsistence strategies on foraging, they do provide important data regarding that way of life.

##### B. Foraging Bands:

2-3. In foraging societies the only two social groups that are significant are the nuclear family and the band.

- a. Membership in these groups is fluid and can change from year to year.
- b. Kin networks, both real and fictive, are created and maintained through marriage, trade, and visiting.

- 2-4. Foraging bands are egalitarian, in that all differences in status are achieved.
- 2-5. Foragers lack formal law as conflict resolution is embedded in kinship and social ties (e.g., blood feuds).
- 2-6. Prestige refers to esteem, respect, or approval for culturally valued acts or qualities.

C. Tribal Cultivators:

- 2-7. Tribes usually have a horticultural or pastoral economy and are organized by village life and/or descent-group membership.
- 2-8. Social classes and formal government are not found in tribes.
- 2-9. Small-scale warfare or intervillage raiding is commonly found in tribes.
- 2-10. The main regulatory officials are village heads, "big men," descent-group leaders, village councils, and leaders of pan tribal associations.
  - a. The officials have limited authority.
  - b. They lead through persuasion and by example, not through coercion.
- 2-11. Like foragers, tribes are egalitarian.
  - a. Tribes often have marked gender stratification.
  - b. Status in tribes is based on age, gender, and personal traits and abilities.
- 2-12. Horticulturalists are egalitarian and tend to live in small villages with low population density.

D. The Village Head:

- 2-13. The Yanomani can be used as an example of a society with a village head.
- 2-14. The position of village head is achieved and comes with very limited authority.
  - a. He cannot force or coerce people to do things.
  - b. He can only persuade, harangue, and try to influence people to do things.
- 2-15. The village head acts as a mediator in disputes, but he has no authority to back his decision or impose punishments.
- 2-16. The village head must lead in generosity.
  - a. He must be more generous, which means he must cultivate more land.
  - b. He hosts feasts for other villages.
- 2-17. In the last decade, particularly, the Yanomani have suffered greatly from violence and disease, both of which have come from the encroaching mining and ranching industries of Brazil.

E. The "Big Man":

- 2-18. A big man is like a village head, except that his authority is regional in that he may have influence over more than one village.
- 2-19. The big man is common to the South Pacific.
- 2-20. Among the Kapauku, the big man is the only political figure beyond the household.
  - a. The position is achieved through generosity, eloquence, bravery, physical fitness, and supernatural powers.
  - b. His decisions are binding among his followers.
  - c. He is an important regulator of regional events (e.g., feasts and markets).
- 2-30. In order to be a tribal leader, a big man, or village head, a person must be generous.
  - a. They must work hard to create a surplus to give away.
  - b. This surplus is converted into prestige.

2-31. The big man is a temporary regional regulator who can mobilize supporters from several villages for produce and labor on specific occasions.

#### F. Pan-tribal Sodalities and Age Grades

2-32. Sodalities are non-kin-based organizations that may generate cross-societal linkages.

- a. They are often based on common age or gender.
- b. Some sodalities are confined to a single village.
- c. Some sodalities span several villages; these are called pan tribal sodalities.

2-33. Pan-tribal sodalities tend to be found in areas where two or more different cultures come into regular contact.

- a. Especially in situations where warfare is frequent.
- b. Since pan-tribal sodalities draw their members from several villages, they can mobilize a large number of men for raids.

2-34. Pressure from European contact created conditions which promoted pan tribal sodalities (age sets are one example).

2-35. Age sets are sodalities that include all of the men born during a certain time span.

- A. Similar to a cohort of class of students, like the class of 2004.
- b. Members of an age set progress through a series of age grades together (e.g., initiated youth, warrior, and adult, elder).

2-36. Secret societies are sodalities with secret initiation ceremonies.

2-37. Sodalities create non-kin linkages between people based on age, gender, and ritual and create a sense of ethnic identity and belonging to the same cultural tradition.

#### G. Nomadic Politics

2-38. Nomads must interact with a variety of groups, unlike most sedentary societies.

2-39. Powerful chiefs are commonly found in nomadic groups that have large populations (e.g., the Basseri and the Qashqai of southern Iran).

2-40. The Basseri have a smaller population and their chief, *khan*, is similar to a village head or big man.

- a. The position is achieved.
- b. Allegiances are with the person, not the office.

2-41. The larger Qashqai have multiple levels of authority and more powerful chiefs.

- a. Their authority can be more coercive.
- b. Allegiances are with the office, not the person.

### 3- Chiefdoms

#### A. Chiefdoms and States

3-1. Chiefdoms are a transitional form of sociopolitical organization between tribes and states.

3-2. Carneiro (1970) defines the state as "an autonomous political unit encompassing many communities within its territory, having a centralized government with the power to collect taxes, draft men for work or war, and decree and enforce laws."

- a. Archaic or non-industrial states
- b. Industrial or modern states

### B. Political and Economic Systems in Chiefdoms

3-3. Unlike band and tribal political systems, chiefdoms and states are permanent: their offices outlast the individuals who occupy them.

3-4 . An office is a permanent position of authority that exists independently of the person who occupies it.

a. It must be refilled when it is vacated.

b. Offices ensure that the sociopolitical organization endures across generations.

3-5. Chiefs play an important role in the production, distribution, and consumption of resources.

a. Chiefs collect foodstuffs as tribute (upward movement).

b. Chiefs later redistribute these collected foodstuffs at feasts (downward movement).

### C. Social Status in Chiefdoms

3-6. In chiefdoms, social status is based on seniority of descent.

3-7. All of the people in chiefdom are believed to have descended from a group of common ancestors.

a. The closer you and your lineage are related to those founding ancestors, the greater your prestige.

b. In chiefdoms, there is a continuum of prestige with the chief at one end and the lowest ranking individuals at the other.

c. The chief must demonstrate his seniority of descent.

3-8. Chiefdoms lack social classes.

### D. Status Systems in Chiefdoms and States

3-9. Unlike tribal and band organizations, there are systemic status distinctions in chiefly and state societies.

3-10. State and chiefdom status systems are based upon differential access to wealth and resources, and differential allocation of rights and duties.

a. States are characterized by much clearer class divisions than chiefdoms, typically associated with *stratum endogamy*.

b. The result of stratum endogamy is social stratification, the hierarchical arrangement of unrelated classes.

c. Social stratification, social classes, is one of the key distinguishing features of states.

### 3-11 Weber's Dimensions of Social Stratification

a. Wealth or economic status.

b. Political status is based upon power.

c. Social status is based upon prestige.

d. In chiefdoms, all three dimensions are tied to kinship and descent.

e. In the early states, distinctions in all three dimensions appeared between endogamous groups for the first time.

### 3-12 Cast systems

3-13 In archaic states there were two basic class distinctions.

a. The super ordinate stratum was the elite or higher class that had privileged access to wealth, power, and other valued resources.

b. The subordinate stratum was the lower or underprivileged class.

#### 4- States

##### A. States have specialized units that perform specific tasks.

- 4-1. Population control: fixing boundaries, establishing citizenship, and the taking of a census.
- 4-2. Judiciary: laws, legal procedure, and judges.
- 4-3. Enforcement: permanent military and police forces.
- 4-4. Fiscal: taxation.
- 4-5. These subsystems were more or less embedded into the overall ruling systems of archaic states.

##### B. Population Control

- 4-6. States use administrative divisions to control their populations.
  - a. Provinces, districts, counties, townships.
  - b. Each administrative division is managed by state officials.
- 4-7. States displace the role and importance that kinship has in bands, tribes, and chiefdoms.
- 4-8. States foster geographic mobility and resettlement.
- 4-9. States assign differential rights to different status distinctions.
  - a. citizens vs. noncitizens
  - b. elites vs. commoners vs. slaves
  - c. soldiers vs. Civilians.

##### C. Judiciary

- 4-10. Laws are explicit codes for behavior, issued by the state, and are distinct from the consensual mores and expectations that exist in non state societies.
- 4-11. The state is unique as a political system in that it governs family affairs.
- 4-12. The presence of laws has not reduced violence--indeed, states are responsible for some of the most violent episodes in human history.

##### D. Enforcement

- 4-13. A judiciary obligates the existence of a system of enforcement.
- 4-14. The judiciary and enforcement typically work not only to control internal and external conflict, but also to preserve the existing state hierarchy.

##### E. Fiscal Systems

- 4-15. State rulers typically perform no subsistence activities.
- 4-16. The fiscal system serves to support the rulers and ruling structure by collecting a portion of that produced by other members of the state.
- 4-17. Fiscal systems of archaic states also worked to maintain and elaborate class distinctions, as in the support of sumptuary goods for the elites.

*Chapter 2: The Development of Political Anthropology  
Around Evans-Pritchard paradigm.( Tutorial)*

#### Introduction:

Trends within political anthropology followed general developments from inside and outside the social sciences. Early anthropological works were informed by 19<sup>th</sup> century evolutionary theory. The works of Maine and Morgan mark a shift in perspectives. The early twentieth century in anthropology reacted against social evolutionary theory and methodology, albeit differently in the U.S. and Europe. The latter, following Durkheim, developed more elaborate and careful studies of the structure and function of societies (e.g. how “social facts” provide a system within which individuals must operate). In the U.S. the rejection of evolutionary theories was more radical with Boas’ *historical particularism* repudiating the comparative method and encouraging in-depth field work.

The British led structural-functionalist approach to political anthropology is represented by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard’s edited piece entitled *African Political Systems* (1940). These works are characterized by “high above” descriptions of societies that focus on norms, values and ideal structures that form a framework within which socio-political activity takes place.

Evans-Pritchard’s *The Nuer* is a classic example of this genre of ethnography and theory. He explains that the Nuer are organized according to segmentary lineages (where authority is dispersed among groups rather than among individuals) that keep conflict in check by creating alliances between individuals that vary according to the context—those who are one’s enemy in one context are at the same time one’s ally because of lineage alliances. Ultimately, Evans-Pritchard shows, the Nuer stay united because they have a common enemy, the Dinka.

The 1950’s saw a number of transitional works that modified the “social equilibriumism” of structural-functionalism. Leach (*Political Systems of Highland Burma*, 1954) and Gluckmann (*Custom and Conflict in Africa*, 1956 and *Rebellion in Tribal Africa*, 1960)

The trend toward attention to processes of decision-making and politics was also catching on in the U.S. (e.g. Swartz and Ronald Cohen) and in Europe (F. Barth the Swat Pathans). This emphasis on recording, analyzing, and understanding individuals’ “working the system” proved well-suited to the changing climate in formal political organization, especially in post-colonial states. Hence, the defined “process approach” (which includes “action theory” and “game theory” and other similar dynamic models for understanding political processes) usurped structural-functionalism as the dominant orientation for political anthropologists in the U.S. and Europe.

### *Chapter 3: The Evolution of the State*

The state is a relatively recent type of political organization. What is the most useful theory for the origin of the state? If we can understand this it could provide insight into the core organization of states.

There are numerous theories for the origin of states:

#### 3-1) Internal Conflict:

An increase in technology leads to a surplus of goods because of more effective exploitation of the environment. Surplus of goods leads to privatization. Privatization leads to hoarding by some individuals, which creates and entrenches social stratification. This is an unstable situation because of the inequalities; hence, more and more elaborate organizing mechanisms must be created to keep society relatively stable.

#### 3-2) External Conflict:

Competition with outside groups creates need to pursue militaristic organization. These would prevail over weaker groups, uniting them under a centralized government that has a monopoly on the use of force. A hierarchy develops to control the military might of the society.

### 3-3) Hydraulic Civilization:

The basis for states is a reliable system of intensive agriculture which often requires an irrigation system. The construction and operation of elaborate irrigation systems requires complex levels of social organization, power, and the coordination of labor (Wittfogel model)

### 3-4) Population Pressure:

Populations grow and place pressure on food supplies (Malthusian ideas) but instead of checking the population a response can be the intensification of production due to new technology (like irrigation, exploit more land, new crops, etc.). This would lead to increases in population density that would require more complex socio-political organization (e.g. Harris' "techno-environmental determinist" argument that argues socio-political organization and ideology is determined by technological means of exploiting environment).

### 3-5) Institutionalization of Leadership:

Integrative theory that shifts arguments away from environmental determinist theories to strategies of decision making. In all societies some individuals will get more, do better, or stand out in some way from the other members of the society. The resulting inequalities will combine with the need to organize resources more effectively and leaders will rise to the top. The need to stabilize the leadership roles results in leadership statuses that are then legitimated through rituals, etc. This creates a number of supportive institutions that become more and more complex and assume more and more responsibilities.

## *Chapter 4: Religion in Politics*

Religion and ideas about the supernatural play a major role in politics at all levels of socio-political complexity. There are three main ways that religion can intersect with a state (or that a state uses/relies on religion as a tool):

4-1) Theocracy: this gives sacred legitimacy to a state because its organization and operations are one and the same as the divine's will.

4-2) Religion legitimates elite: a king or ruling class is considered legitimate because of his/her/their relationship to the divine.

4-3) Religion provides underlying structures and beliefs used by those who seek power: in this way religion becomes one of the resources power-seekers can manipulate and it can be an effective way to show that enemies (or political opponents) do not have the legitimate right to rule.

### *Chapter 5: Political Succession*

Once power is concentrated to a status or individual the question is who will succeed the political leader in a way that allows the political organization to remain stable. A fundamental problem in succession is that if the rules are too rigid then the top individual may be too weak. There are four main ways of determining political succession:

4-1) Diffused Leadership: when individuals must carry their own legitimacy. New leaders must demonstrate their ability to exercise power when the time comes for a person to succeed the previous leader (e.g. big men in Papua New Guinea).

4-2) Hereditary Succession: Following kinship or lineages. The rules for this vary (e.g. prescriptive, preferential, personality, political, or electoral) with the more stable types of organization creating a “pool” of potential rulers to succeed.

4-3) Republican Government: The succeeding ruler must win the consensus of the people even if the general population is not represented by those who give support that matters.

4-4) Periodic Military Interventions: The control of the army or institutions of force are key instances for the reproduction of power.

### *Chapter 6: Structure and Process*

The shift from structural-functionalism to a process oriented approach happened in the 1950s and 1960s was marked by “a transition from the study of norms, values, and a temporal social structures to an emphasis on competition, conflict, history, and change”.

Structural-functionalism was synchronic, teleological, and African oriented/rooted, and concerned with closed systems.

This approach was rejected by process theory/approach, As Bailey notes: “without the fixed points which are provided by a static structural analysis we have no means of describing the change that is taking place” (1960).

The definition of politics as the study of processes allows for the integration of individual agency into a flexible model.

#### 6-1 The use of *political field* and *political arena*:

These concepts provide a new way of using structures that are flexible enough to adjust to specific situations. The field is a fluid area of dynamic tension in which political decision-making and competition takes place. The political arena is a focus on a few individuals within the field who are essential to the activities in the field (making the rules for regulating the conflict clear). Power is involved in politics in a variety of ways. Power can be either independent (based on direct capabilities of individual) or dependent (individual granted, allocated, or delegated right to make decisions). A further distinction in power is whether it is attained by force/coercion or through consensus/legitimacy. These are very often intertwined. People’s expectations about the nature of power and how it should be attained and can be exercised depend is termed *the political culture*. Legitimacy relies on a group’s political culture and it lacks the specific sanctions and rewards typical of coercion. Both coercion and legitimacy can be negative or positive.

### *Chapter 7: The Individual in the Political Arena*

The process approach allows both the breakdown of structural-functional accounts in all types of societies and the shift from broad structural views of whole systems to actions of

individuals within systems. Action theory is premised on the idea of “political human” who maximizes power at all opportunities.

7-1 Social Dramas: Is one way of structuring action theory. It is an account of political men involved in a struggle or conflict to achieve a goal. Turner maps the development of the political phase in a social drama: period of mobilization of political capital-showdown-crisis (juncture or turning point in relations between parts of political field) - deployment of adjustive/redressive mechanisms (arbitration/ritual) - restoration of peace.

7-2 Game Theory is another way to understand and study political processes. Bailey understands game theory as a set of rules in a competitive game with agreed upon goals. He then describes types of rules, political structures, teams, and possible outcomes or changes involved in political game theory.

#### 7-2- 1 The rules

Normative rules: public and vague (e.g. honesty, sportsmanship), they allow actions to be judged as ethically right or wrong.

Pragmatic rules: About winning—effectiveness, they shift according to the field and arena in which the process is taking place.

There are five elements of the political structure in the game:

- 1) goals/prizes: culturally defined and valued by actors;
- 2) Personnel: entire political community, political elite, and/or teams;
- 3) Leadership: individuals supported by personnel, they make decisions and settle disputes;
- 4) Competition: the confrontation and encounter;
- 5) Judges: those who decide on rules and consequences for violators.

#### 7-2-2 There are two types of teams:

1) Contract teams: those who are out for profit; and

2) Moral teams: those who are out for affirming beliefs and raising legitimacy. In all cases middlemen play a crucial role.

Three types of change can take place as result of political processes/game:

1) Repetitive Change: normative and pragmatic rules stay in place, basic structure of system stays same but changes in content occur (e.g. succession).

2) Adaptive Change: Normative rules stay the same but pragmatic rules are adjusted. There is no return to equilibrium—structures reorganized.

3) Radical Change: Both normative and pragmatic rules change—structures replaced.

#### 7-3 Factions:

Important part of understanding how individuals influence political processes is to understand *factions*. Factions are temporary political conflict groups. Tend to cross-cut typical social structural lines thus usually lacking an ideological focus. Factions tend to be informal, spontaneous, leader-follower groups that are usually formed in opposition to other groups.

Factions tend to end in one of four ways:

- 1) They become legitimate formal group;
- 2) They serve the functions of larger dominant group;
- 3) They continue to compete with other factions/groups and become part of the political structure;
- 4) they become an institutionalized political party.

*Chapter 8: Politics in Industrial Society*

Political anthropology has typically focused on informal groups and their influence or the relationship between a group, individuals, and the wider context when studying modern societies. Increasingly, anthropologists have looked at the way in which loyalties shift to and from the local/ethnic/religious level to the nation-state (citizenship) level. Social differentiation and social mobilization are at the core of modernization (or the processes involved in nation-state socio-political organization). These can stand in stark contrast to local levels of belonging, creating challenges for social integration that are particularly felt in colonial states where the formation of a larger political organization was imposed rather than developing internally. Bureaucracies are an important part of the nation-state because they offer rationalized structure that explicitly defines goals and has a formal organization designed to implement those goals. Yet the goals of the bureaucracies do not always fit neatly with the goals of various segments of societies.

Some elements on the Weberian state will be given to the students and redeveloped during the sequence on Institutions and Governance

*Chapter 9: State, civil society and democracy:* texts are given to students

*Chapter 10: mondialisation and nation- collapse?*

*Chapter 11: Are African states patrimonial states?*