

Political System

Political system is an important concept in political science. A political system determines political power, political culture, and nature of the state, political mobility and so on. Before we discuss the meaning of political system, it is desirable to explain the words 'political' and 'system'. The political refers to power, influence, control or authority, use or threat of use of physical force etc. On the other hand, a system refers to a few elements that are in interaction with each other. At the state level, such a system denotes a number of structures, groups, agencies and organizations etc. that operate at different levels for different purposes.

A political system shows how the various units that constitute a system become the objects of power, influence, control or authority that a state possesses. It is to be borne in mind that a state despite its unrestricted power cannot apply force on any unit at its will. There must be the rationale behind the application of force by a state. In other words, the force to be applied on the system units should be **legal and legitimate**. Thus, **Max Weber defines a political system 'as a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory'**. Two important elements can be deduced from this definition. **First**, although the state enjoys unlimited and unrestrained power, its application on the system units should be legitimate. **Second**, the force is to be applied on the system elements living within the space as demarcated for the state.

Characteristics of a political system

The following are the characteristics of a political system:

1. The first characteristic of a political system is that it allows the legal authority to use force. But the force to be applied should be **legitimate**.
2. The political system involves interactions between the formal and informal institutions. Among the formal institutions are the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. The informal institutions include political parties, interest groups, media and communication, traditional structures like kinship, clan, caste, groupings etc.
3. All the parts of a political system are interdependent. For example, if there is a labour strike for wages, there may be the intervention of trade unions, police and even governmental authority to resolve the issue.
4. Political system is comprehensive because it includes all the interactions from the formal as well as informal institutions in the society. For example, it includes the interaction of regionalism, religious upheavals, inflation, party politics, tactics of pressure groups and social changes brought about by modernization.
5. Since a political system consists of different actors, such actors change their boundary. It means that the same individuals who perform role in social and economic system also play their notable role in political sphere.

Functions of a political system

A political system performs the following two types of functions:

- (1) **Input functions (political functions) and**
- (2) **Output functions (Governmental functions)**

(1) **Input functions** : David Easton classifies input functions into two types, **demands and supports.**

Demand: Among the demand side are the following:

- (a) **Allocation of goods and services** such as demands for more wages, and fixation of working hours, opening of educational institutions, provision of recreational facilities, roads and transportation.
- (b) **Participation in the political system**, such as the right to vote, to hold office, to petition government bodies and officials, and to organize political associations such as pressure groups and political parties.
- (c) **Regulation of behaviour** such as provision for public safety, control over markets and rules pertaining to marriage, health and sanitation.
- (d) **Communication and information**, such as demand for communication norms and policy, power of the political system in time of threats or on ceremonial occasions.

Support

The examples of support which the people get in the political system are:

- (a) **Material support** such as the payment of taxes or other levies and rendering services as labour or public works or military services.
- (b) **Attention paid to government communications and the manifestation of respect to public authority, symbols and ceremonials.**
- (c) **Obedience to laws and regulations**
- (d) **Participatory support such as voting**, political discussions and other forms of political activity.

2. Output functions

These are the functions performed by the government in response to the input (political function)

- (a) **Rule making** : Rule making is known as **legislation**. Rule making goes on in every type of government whether democracy, dictatorship or monarch. Now-a-days in a democratic set-up, the rule making power is exercised by the legislature or parliament.
 - (b) **Rule application** : The rules made by the legislature or the Executive are enforced by the bureaucracy, therefore its role and importance have considerably increased. Moreover, rule application also implies that the established goals of the society are fulfilled. It also sees their interaction of the laws on the society.
 - (c) **Rule adjudication** : It is the duty of the judiciary to interpret the laws and punish the guilty. Judiciary also resolves the conflicts between the government and citizens and the citizens themselves.
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