

## Political Culture

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### Introduction

The concept of political culture relates to the population's political attitudes and behavioural patterns, and it is considered that this culture heavily influences citizens' relationships with the political system. The majority of studies on political culture assert that specific aspects of this culture have an effect on the operation of political institutions. Political culture encompasses both an individual's perception of himself or herself as a competent political actor and his or her understanding of his or her position within the political system. Strictly speaking, political culture only refers to the attitudes of citizens, but in practice it also encompasses patterns of behavior that are directly related to these attitudes. This paper begins by examining the evolution of studies on political culture, focusing on the contributions of Gabriel Almond, Sidney Verba, and Robert Putnam. The prospective directions of this subfield of political science are then discussed. Subsequently, its future directions in this subfield of political science.

### Proponents of Political Culture

- **Gabriel Almond**

Gabriel Almond, a renowned political scientist, made notable contributions to the study of political culture. Alongside Sidney Verba, Almond introduced the concept of civic culture in their seminal work, "The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations" (1963). They argued that a participatory political culture, characterized by citizen engagement, trust, and support for democratic values, is crucial for the stability and effectiveness of democratic systems. Almond emphasized the significance of political socialization and the transmission of political values across generations in shaping political culture.

- **Sidney Verba**

Sidney Verba, collaborating with Gabriel Almond, conducted extensive empirical research on political culture. Their work focused on the relationship between political culture and political participation. Verba's notable contribution was his analysis of the role of political socialization in shaping political culture. He emphasized the importance of citizen engagement, political knowledge, and trust in democratic institutions. Their influential book, "The Civic Culture Revisited" (1980), expanded on their earlier work and examined changes in political culture over time.

- **Robert Putnam**

Robert Putnam expanded the study of political culture by introducing the concept of social capital. In his influential book, "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community" (2000), Putnam explored the decline of social connectedness and its impact on political participation and

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democratic institutions. He argued that diminishing levels of social capital, characterized by decreased civic engagement and trust, have detrimental effects on democratic systems. Putnam's work shed light on the

importance of social networks, associations, and community participation in fostering a healthy political culture.

### **Studies on Political Culture**

#### **The Civic Culture**

The publication of "The Civic Culture" (TCC) by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba in 1963 has had a profound impact on the study of political culture. The book argues that a specific orientation towards politics is vital for maintaining the stability and continuity of democratic political systems. Almond and Verba advocate for a strong culturalist approach to understanding democratic stability, asserting that political culture plays a fundamental role in the effectiveness and longevity of a political system. They challenge various forms of institutionalism by asserting that reliable and effective institutions and constitutional rules alone are insufficient for democratic stability.

The authors of TCC identify three distinct phases in the development of political cultures. The first phase is the provincial political culture, typically found in closed societies, where strong local ties and deference to a charismatic leader are prevalent. The second phase is the subject political culture, characterized by more differentiated roles and functioning within nation-states. In this culture, citizens see themselves as subjects with a duty to obey the commands of the head of state. The subject political culture historically emerged alongside absolute monarchy, where the monarch's power was not subject to public opinion and was often legitimized through historical or religious claims.

However, Almond and Verba argue that the subject political culture became unsustainable in the developed democracies of the 20th century. As education levels and economic statuses increased, it became challenging to limit citizens' roles to mere obedience. Instead, a participant political culture emerged, wherein citizens assert their right to express themselves on political matters and participate in decision-making processes. Throughout the 20th century, the participant political culture gained strength, making it difficult for the political elite to ignore demands for greater participatory openness.

While Almond and Verba acknowledge the importance of routine citizen participation, they also express concerns about the potential overload of the political system. They argue that if a significant number of citizens constantly demand participation and reject the outputs of the political system when their demands are unmet, the system's governance capacity may be compromised. According to Almond and Verba, citizens should be potential participants who can interfere if necessary but also accept the decisions of the democratic process. They propose that the ideal civic culture combines elements of all three forms, wherein citizens feel empowered to participate, remain loyal to the political system, and adhere to its decisions.

"The Civic Culture" has had a lasting impact on the study of political culture for several reasons. Firstly, it was one of the pioneering works in the application of comparative survey research. By including survey data from five different countries, Almond and Verba were able to establish more robust claims about causality and relationships between variables than previous studies focused on a single country. Secondly, their emphasis on public opinion and the effect it has on political stability was a novel and influential contribution. They highlighted the significance of survey data, which were

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limited before the 1950s, in supporting claims about public opinion's impact. This revitalized the culturist approach in the study of politics. Lastly, the book resonated with the concerns of the time, as there was widespread worry about the stability of democratic regimes in the face of communist rule and decolonization. TCC provided a solution by advocating for the establishment of a civic culture among populations.

It is worth noting that TCC aligned with the prevailing moderate view of political culture during the early 1960s. While Almond and Verba supported the normative ideal of an active citizenry, they also emphasized the importance of citizens' loyalty to the political system. However, during the 1970s, as support for citizen activism grew, the book faced criticism for its focus on Anglo-Saxon political cultures and its preference for stability and incremental changes. The Almond and Verba framework did not evaluate revolutionary or disruptive forms of political participation favorably, which led to critiques during that period.

### **Social Capital and Political Culture**

Research on political cultures in modern democracies received a significant boost with the publication of Robert Putnam's 1993 volume on civic traditions in modern Italy. Putnam's work can be seen as a reexamination of the question posed by Almond and Verba three decades earlier: What factors contribute to the functioning of democracy? The innovative aspect of Putnam's research was the quasi-experimental setting he had to work with. In 1970, 20 regional governments in Italy gained a significant degree of autonomy, allowing for a comparison of their performance in subsequent years.

Putnam aimed to explain why some regional governments exhibited greater effectiveness and responsiveness to citizen demands, while others struggled with corruption, lack of initiative, and poor service quality. The unique aspect of the Italian context was that prior differences in policy could not account for the observed variations, making it easier to establish causal links.

Drawing on extensive data sources and analysis, Putnam concluded that the presence of a civic political culture was the primary determinant of government performance. In regions with a vibrant civic culture, regional governments were more likely to effectively respond to citizen demands. Putnam identified several elements of this political culture. Firstly, he emphasized the significance of voluntary associations as structural components of social capital. These associations not only socialize members into a value pattern oriented towards collective goals but also enable citizens to establish and pursue these goals effectively. Secondly, following political news in the mass media was considered a crucial indicator of civic culture. When citizens read newspapers, they acquire political information and possess the means to hold politicians accountable for their decisions and outcomes.

Putnam's research demonstrated that in Italian regions where these elements of civic culture were present, regional governments performed significantly better. However, the study remains somewhat ambiguous regarding the precise causal mechanisms involved. On one hand, active citizen interaction likely leads to the internalization of democratic political attitudes, fostering a greater sense of involvement in societal functioning. On the other hand, political elites may experience greater pressure from public opinion, compelling them to respond more responsively to citizen demands. Putnam posits that the origins of present-day political culture in Italian regions can be traced back several centuries. The establishment of self-rule in northern Italian city-states during the 14th century, which granted political power to privileged groups, instilled a sense of democratic awareness among citizens. In contrast, southern Italy remained under autocratic monarchies, fostering a subject political culture. Putnam argues that even six centuries later, this division continues to shape

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contemporary Italian society.

### **Developments in Contemporary Political Culture**

The study of political culture has witnessed significant developments in recent decades, challenging and expanding upon the earlier notions put forth by Almond and Verba. Starting in the 1970s, scholars increasingly criticized the emphasis on loyalty and deference to authority in the civic culture approach. Instead, there was a growing demand for greater citizen activism and freedom of expression. Ronald Inglehart emerged as a prominent figure in this line of research, arguing that Western societies were undergoing a cultural shift characterized by the emergence of post-modern values.

Inglehart posited that as material needs were increasingly satisfied for a majority of the population, citizens began to prioritize post-material values, such as quality of life, equality, and environmental protection. An essential characteristic of this value pattern is the appreciation of individuality and the need for self-expression. Citizens with post-modern values are less likely to defer to authority and demand that their individual opinions and perspectives be taken into account in the decision-making process. In contrast to Almond and Verba's concern about potential overload on the political system, Inglehart argued that political systems need to find ways to handle the increasing volume of demands from citizens. According to Inglehart, the presence of critical citizens does not pose a problem for the stability of democratic societies.

Empirical evidence presented by Inglehart suggests that post-modern values are most widespread in the most stable democratic systems worldwide. Other scholars also emphasized the cultural changes in Western societies, noting that group identities have become less salient as individualization processes have led to a more individualistic outlook on the political system. Class and religious cleavages have weakened in their ability to predict political preferences and behaviors. Loyalty towards political leaders has eroded, and citizens have become more critical of the political system.

Furthermore, there is a strong demand for more effective means of political participation and decision-making. These developments pose challenges to political systems, which must devise new ways to meet these societal demands. However, it is important to recognize that these developments do not indicate a crisis for democracy. Survey research indicates that citizens express stronger support for democratic governance than ever before. Simultaneously, they have become increasingly critical of the political institutions that are expected to embody democratic principles.

Overall, contemporary developments in political culture emphasize the shift towards post-modern values, increased individualization, and a demand for more inclusive and effective political participation. These changes highlight the evolving nature of political culture and the need for political systems to adapt and address the expectations and demands of citizens in a changing societal landscape.

### **Future Directions**

The study of political culture continues to be a vibrant field within political science, but there are several areas that require further exploration and research. One ongoing challenge is the debate between cultural and institutional perspectives on the development of political culture. The question of how to effectively establish a democratic political culture remains unresolved, particularly in former authoritarian regimes where support for democratic principles is low. While an institutional approach argues for improving the functioning of political institutions to increase trust, reducing corruption, and fostering democratic values, cultural approaches argue that profound changes in

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political culture are necessary to address these issues.

The stability of political cultures is another crucial area of inquiry. Samuel Huntington's argument in "The Clash of Civilizations" suggests that political cultures are inherently stable and resistant to change, leading to enduring conflicts when cultures interact. However, there are examples, such as the transition in Germany from concerns about its political culture in the 1950s to a stable democracy in the following decades, that challenge this view. Understanding the factors that contribute to such transitions and how they can be replicated in different contexts requires further investigation.

The impact of the rise of a new generation of critical citizens is another important topic for exploration. The increased critical attitude observed among younger and highly educated cohorts in Western democracies raises questions about the functioning and stability of political systems. The potential consequences of weakening loyalty and diffuse support for political systems are not yet fully understood. This trend could have implications for the rise of extremist or populist parties and pose threats to the stability of democratic political systems. Exploring the effects of this generation of "critical citizens" is a fundamental question for political science and the social sciences at large.

Additionally, there is a need to investigate the relationship between education levels and democratic political culture. While indicators suggest that higher education is associated with greater trust and political efficacy, the expected results of increased education levels sometimes fail to materialize. Understanding why this is the case and exploring the complex relationship between education and political culture would provide valuable insights into the dynamics of citizen attitudes and behaviors.

In conclusion, the study of political culture faces ongoing challenges and opportunities. Exploring the establishment of democratic political culture, the stability of political cultures, the impact of critical citizens, and the relationship between education and political culture are crucial avenues for future research. By delving into these areas, political scientists can enhance our understanding of political systems and contribute to the development of effective governance and democratic practices.

### **Conclusion**

The concept of political culture plays a significant role in understanding citizens' attitudes and behaviors within the political system. It is widely acknowledged that a democratic political culture is crucial for the stability and effectiveness of democratic regimes. However, the debate continues regarding the relationship between political culture and institutional factors, and the direction of causality remains unresolved. Scholars question whether a democratic political culture leads to democratic stability or if effective institutions foster the development of a democratic political culture.

Additionally, the challenge of building a democratic political culture in newly democratic systems is a pressing concern. The transition from authoritarian rule to democracy often requires significant efforts to establish democratic values, norms, and institutions among the population. Scholars and policymakers need to explore strategies and mechanisms to foster the development of democratic political culture in these contexts.

As the study of political culture progresses, there is also a need to address emerging trends and challenges. The rise of a new generation of critical citizens, the impact of post-modern values, and the relationship between education and political culture are areas that require further investigation. Understanding these dynamics will contribute to a deeper understanding of citizen attitudes and behaviors within political systems.

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In conclusion, political culture remains a vital area of research within political science, with ongoing debates and questions about its development, impact, and relationship with institutions. By continuing to explore these issues, scholars can enhance our understanding of the functioning of democratic political systems and contribute to the development of effective governance and democratic practices.

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