

Structure functional approach

Almond & Powell

Structural functional approach is an improvement upon systems approach for political analysis. Systems approach was too general and did not elaborate on the functions of the structures. Structural Functional Approach modal of analysis was first developed by social anthropologists Radcliffe Brown and Malinowski and later adopted by sociologists Talcott Parsons, Merton and Levy. The major influences on Structural Functional approach were, David Easton's Input-Output modal of political system and institutional approach of comparative politics. Structural functional approach integrates systems approach and institutional approach. The focus shifted from institutions to functions.

Gabriel Almond and Coleman (*The politics of Developing Areas*) had identified four characteristics of the political system:

All political systems have political structures.

All political systems perform some function to different extents using different structures.

All political structures are multi-functional.

All political systems are mixed systems (mixture of modern and traditional culture)

Structural functional approach was further developed by Gabriel Almond and Powell in *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach*. They argued that all political systems, irrespective of their nature have to perform some functions to stay relevant. These are the functional requirements of the system. They suggested the use of 'functions' and 'functional requisites' instead of 'inputs' and 'outputs' as modifications to Easton's modal. They have provided seven functions which a political system has to perform in order to sustain themselves and stay relevant. They concede that these functions might be performed by different political structures based on the stage of political evolution. They believe in mature systems there is functional specialization.

Political socialization and recruitment:

It is the process by which members are provided information about the political system. They inculcate the values, beliefs, norms of their community towards the system. Primary socialization at home, locality and educational institutions indoctrinate and inculcate the members with attitudes, opinions, and orientations towards the political phenomenon.

Such political education and mobilization enable the acclimatization and eventual recruitment of new members.

Interest articulation:

As there are limited resources, there is a perpetual competition for attention. Coherent demands are placed by various structures such as peer groups, pressure groups, interest groups, associations, etc to preserve and further their interest.

Interest aggregation:

It is the process by which demands are translated into policies and decisions which could be acted upon.

Political communication:

It is a process by which the components of a political system such as individuals, groups, and institutions transmit and receive information regarding the functions of the political system. Mass media and lately social media are most suited to perform this action.

These input variables are translated into three output variables –

Rule making is done primary by legislature (may be performed by different structure depending upon the polity)

Rule application is done by executive. Executive function is to implement the laws and rules.

Rule adjudication is performed by judiciary.

Almond and Powell have also identified two factors to identify the stage of 'political development'. They are i) structural differentiation and ii) secularization of culture. The more evolved and mature the clearer is the distinction and differentiation between the roles of political structures. Secularization of culture denotes the process by which traditional attitudes and orientations give way for more dynamic decision making. Objective gathering and evaluation of information along with analysis of alternative policies transcending parochial loyalties would enable the realization of collective good of entire community.

Critics have pointed out that the system is primarily concerned about its own survival and the analysis is based on Western democratic political modal. They do not allow for the development of institution in developing societies based on their own genius and specific requirements. They believe the system incorporates the belief that western modal is superior to that followed elsewhere.

The systems functional approach serves as an important tool in comparative political analysis. It helps in understanding the political system and structures better.