

Political Science Major, Paper 8, Semester 5

Structural Functional Approach in Modern Political Aspects

Introduction

The structural-functional approach is a significant theoretical perspective in political science and sociology, focusing on how political systems and structures perform functions necessary for their maintenance and survival. Developed by scholars like Talcott Parsons and applied to political analysis by Gabriel Almond, this approach examines the roles and interrelations of structures within political systems.

Key Concepts

1. Structure: Institutions, organizations, patterns of roles (e.g., legislature, bureaucracy).
2. Function: Purposes or tasks performed by structures (e.g., rule-making, interest articulation).
3. System: Political system as a whole, interacting with environment.
4. Equilibrium: Balance and adaptation for system persistence.

Core Functions (Almond's Framework)

Gabriel Almond identified key political functions:

1. Interest Articulation: Expression of demands by groups/ individuals.

2. Interest Aggregation: Combining interests into policy alternatives.
3. Rule-Making (Legislation): Formulation of laws/rules.
4. Rule Application (Administration): Implementation by bureaucracy.
5. Rule Adjudication (Judicial): Interpretation, dispute resolution.
6. Communication: Exchange of information within system and externally.

Aspects of Structural Functionalism

- System Persistence: How structures contribute to stability.
- Functional Requisites: Necessary tasks for system survival.
- Differentiation: Specialization of structures (e.g., modern bureaucracies).
- Integration: Coordination among components for coherence.
- Adaptation: Response to environmental/internal changes.

Examples and Applications

- India's Parliamentary System: Structures like Lok Sabha perform legislative functions.
- US Presidential System: Separation of powers reflects functional differentiation.
- China's Governance: State structures serving Communist Party-led governance.
- European Union: Supranational structures with functional roles in policy-making.

Theoretical Perspectives

- Talcott Parsons: Emphasized functional prerequisites (AGIL: Adaptation, Goal attainment, Integration, Latency).
- Gabriel Almond: Applied structural-functionalism to comparative politics.
- Critiques: Seen as overly systemic, neglecting conflict/change dynamics.

Modern Relevance

- Governance Analysis: Understanding institutional performance.
- Comparative Politics: Examining cross-country structural variations.
- Policy Implementation: Role of bureaucracies, other structures.
- Globalization Impacts: How structures adapt to transnational challenges.

Challenges and Adaptations

- Globalization: Pressures on state structures.
- Technological Change: E-governance, digital politics altering interactions.
- Democratization Waves: Structural adjustments in transitioning polities.
- Crisis Management: How structures respond (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic).

Conclusion

The structural-functional approach offers insights into political systems' operations and institutional roles, though its application requires sensitivity to contextual dynamics and critiques of its assumptions.

