

3. BASIC POLITICAL SCIENCE: PROVIDE PARTICIPANTS WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW POLITICAL SYSTEMS WORK AND HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE WITHIN THEM.

In an attempt to define an object of political analysis that was neither excessively generic (like power) nor inappropriately reductive and contingent (like the State and its elites), political science has identified its own, main object of study in the system politic.

The concept of political system in particular was born with the awareness that to understand politics it was necessary to refer to the relationship between political elements, not necessarily present within the State, whose functioning refers to the concept of political regime.

David Easton defines the political system as «a system of interactions, abstracted from the totality of social behavior, through which values are assigned in an imperative way for a society, a set of interactions in which values are assigned in an authoritative way in favor of a society.

Politics has progressively become independent from other areas of human action (economy, society, religion, morality) and political systems perform an irreplaceable function because any community needs to be governed both in relation to internal order and in relation to defense from the outside.

The concept of political system, developed by Easton, constitutes a much more general notion than that of the State: it refers to every political order from antiquity to today, whereas, however, the State constitutes a much more restricted reality in time (born in the modern age) and, initially, also in space, given that it developed on the European continent.

The political system, on the other hand, is defined by the interaction of those units and related behaviors that in a society affect the authoritative assignment of values and in turn implies four notions, typical of systems theory:

- 1) of **environment**: within which the system moves and by which it is influenced;
- 2) **input**: which refers to inputs into the system, requests for decisions relating to the authoritative assignment of values and support for the various components of the system;
- 3) **output**: response, which recalls the system emissions;
- 4) **feedback** or feedback, which is the reflection of the ability or otherwise of a system to provide adequate responses to inputs. The concept of political system is crucial in political science because it allows us to embrace all the political systems that have occurred in history.

Central to this definition is the concept of system, as specified by one of the great theorists of the systems approach, **Anatol Rapoport** : the system "is something consisting of a set of entities, among which a set of relations is specified in such a way that (3) it is possible to deduce some relationships, the behavior and the history of the system from other

relationships" From Rapoport's definition, Easton captures and underlines the aspect of interactions, that is, the parts also defined by the whole, by the set of them. 'Political' interactions, however, have a peculiarity: in the end they are based on decision-making processes in which advantages and resources - values - are distributed to groups or individuals in a given society, which is also present in a certain territory.

Such decision-making processes have at their core the concrete exercise of power, command and authority, as RA Dahl argues; always imply "the use or threat of the use of legitimate physical force", as stated by GA Almond and B. Powell who, taking up M. Weber, lead to a certain distribution of benefits, but also of costs, as highlighted by HD Lasswell and Kaplan.

The **components of the political system** are for Easton:

1. the POLITICAL COMMUNITY, made up of all those who are exposed to the procedures, norms, rules and institutions of the political system;
2. the AUTHORITIES, the holders of political power, those who are authorized by the procedures, norms, rules and institutions of the regime to produce imperative assignments of values;
3. the REGIME, composed of: a) - principles (norms, rules, procedures, values, the Constitution) b) - performance (the activity carried out within the scope and limits of the principles) c) - institutions (representation structures, government, administration)

The Units identified by Easton to identify the elements of the political system also belong to the State but, in the concept of political system, other elements are also included: the parties, the unions, all the associations of interest and all the informal aspects so important in the very functioning of the state.

Recurrent over the years has been the *controversy* between the opportunity and usefulness of using the notion of political system versus that of the State.

The spread of the word **State** can be attributed to Machiavelli with particular reference to Territoriality: there is a state when a political authority has control over a contiguous territory. Political systems, but also the State, have a political order, specific institutions through which power is exercised.

Their **appearance** is often explained, through a **functionalist approach**, in reference to the emerging functions they performed for the maintenance of the social system and identified in a territory:

- 1) Imposition of legal rules and a related sanctioning system
- 2) Regulation of private interests
- 3) Programming and management
- 4) Relations with other countries

Politics, the government of the *city of the many*, is a consequence of social life and the political order is the institutionalized system through which individuals or groups exercise power and make decisions.

Power, as the sociologist **Max Weber stated**, can be exercised over a community in a legitimate or illegitimate way. Legitimate power is exercised when the community recognizes that whoever exercises it has the right to do so. Weber used the term authority in reference to forms of legitimate power, identifying **three ideal types of legitimate authority**: traditional, rational and charismatic authority.

A political system based on **traditional authority**, power is legitimized by tradition, beliefs, religious elements, birth status and often not based on written laws. Political systems based on legal-rational authority, power is legitimized by rules and procedures that explicitly define rights and obligations also of the rulers, rules and procedures in the form of legal norms, are often found in constitutional acts or other types of legal norms.

A political system based on **rational authority** is based on the "government of laws" and public officials can exercise power within the limits previously established by legal norms.

In the political system based on **charismatic authority**, power is legitimized by the exceptional qualities of an individual that the community attributes to a leader.

Every political system but every State has its own **political regime**, a term not to be understood with a negative value but a term that indicates the **particular form of institutionalization of the political order**: a complex of political institutions (structures, rules, and procedures) that define a certain political order, the structure of relationships that bind the authorities and the community.

The classification of political regimes includes **two macro-classes: democratic regimes and non-democratic regimes**.

The democratic regime from the Greek *démos*, people and *kràtos* power, sovereignty belongs to the people who exercise it, in current social systems, indirectly, i.e. through their representatives.

Broadly speaking, the democratic regime institutionalizes the principle of the division of legislative, executive and judicial powers:

- Legislative power: power to issue legal rules;
- The executive power has the most administrative function, that is, to make the rules enforceable;
- judicial power: administration of justice
- enhances political representation through universal suffrage
- institutionalizes pluralism recognizes and protects human rights and fundamental freedoms

In the philosophical-juridical debate of the twentieth century, according to **Carl Schmitt**, it would consist in the identity between governors and governed, while **Hans Kelsen** believes that it has a relativistic foundation, as it excludes the possession of absolute truths by individuals or groups, admitting only relative truths; Kelsen also believes that democracy is not based on the principle of equality, but on the principle of freedom.

More generally, several authors have underlined the essential role of minority guarantees, defining *d.* systems in which the legal mechanisms aimed at limiting the power of majorities are absent or insufficient are *totalitarian*.

Other scholars have preferred to speak of **constitutional rights**, highlighting the centrality of the Constitution where, in this conception, constitutional rights are no longer understood only as limits (in the manner of Jean Jaques Rousseau) but as essential instruments of the liberal-democratic order .

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights issued by the UN in 1948 is a great contribution to the affirmation of democratic regimes and the recognition of human rights.

According to the **minimum definition of democracy**, **four fundamental requirements** must exist which are based on the essentiality of the real guarantee of civil and political rights:

1. universal suffrage, male and female;
2. free, competitive, recurrent, fair elections;
3. party pluralism;
4. different and alternative sources of information.

Rights and freedoms can be traced back to a set of formalized rules or procedures that characterize real democracies for which an empirical definition of democracy is "That set of rules and procedures that result from a compromise agreement for the peaceful resolution of conflicts between the socially relevant, politically relevant actors and the other institutional actors present in the political arena".

This definition highlights a fundamental aspect of any democratic regime, namely the presence of rules and institutions that balance different principles.

Democracy, in fact, according to a purely sociological interpretation, constitutes the exemplary form of rational power, given that authority is held by bureaucratic officials or representatives elected by the people. In other words, authority is based on a set of formal rules, to which everyone feels bound, as they allow social institutions to function effectively. In fact, **Robert Alan Dahl** 's two postulates are interesting for identifying the **elements attributable to an ideal type of democracy**:

1. for a regime to be capable of responding over time, all citizens must have similar opportunities to:
 - to. formulate their preferences;
 - b. express those preferences to others and to government through individual or collective action;
 - c. obtain that one's preferences are considered without discrimination regarding their content and origin.
2. for these three opportunities to exist in current nation-states, at least the following eight institutional guarantees must exist:
 - to. freedom of association and organization;
 - b. freedom of thought and expression;
 - c. right to vote;

- d. right for political leaders to compete for electoral support;
- And. alternative sources of information;
- f. possibility of being elected to public offices (passive electorate);
- g. free and fair elections;
- h. existence of institutions that make government policies dependent on voting and other expressions of preference

Still from a sociological perspective, it is important to underline that the element of analysis of democracy is **political participation**, because the structure of power sees multiple elements that interact and the possibilities, **methods and degree of participation can certainly influence the configuration of the political system**.

The repertoire of possible modes of action of the citizen in the political sphere includes individual and group activities, relating to the private and public spheres, in conventional and unconventional forms, to protect particular or general interests.

The list does not claim to be complete and, obviously, does not intend to offer indications on the importance of this or that form of participation, but simply serves to illustrate the vast range of options open to the citizen and in fact used with greater or lesser frequency in contemporary political systems.

Participatory behaviors have been affected by the increase in education levels, changes in organization and working hours, the processes of urbanization first and then suburbanization, changes in lifestyle, and other factors. Among these, technological change assumes particular importance, in particular for its effects on the quantity and quality of communication flows both within a country and between one country and another.

Over the last half century, the phenomenon of participation in democratic political systems has been the subject of numerous studies in political sociology and political science.

The **indicators of political participation** in classical literature are those behaviors, each indicating a certain degree of political participation, or involvement in political life, in an order that approximately goes from a minimum degree to a maximum degree of participation:

1. Expose yourself to political stress
2. Vote
3. Start a political discussion
4. Trying to convince someone else to vote a certain way
5. Wear a political badge
6. Having contact with an official or political leader
7. Making monetary donations to a party or candidate
8. Participate in a political rally or assembly
9. Contribute your time to a political campaign
10. Become an active member of a political party
11. Participate in meetings where political decisions are made
12. Solicit monetary contributions for political causes
13. Become a candidate for elected office
14. Hold public or party positions.

Political participation is a multidimensional phenomenon that is expressed at different levels, institutional and otherwise, visible and invisible. The visible or direct one concerns small groups of the population. It takes collective forms (attending a rally, taking part in a procession) also through interaction with a party, to which time and effort is dedicated for free or financial support is offered.

An ISTAT research on POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ITALY | YEAR 2019 shows citizens more distant from political life.

Between 2014 and 2019, the share of people aged 14 and over who do not participate in political life increased from 18.9% to 23.2%.

Political participation occurs mainly indirectly, that is, by informing or talking about it (74.8%) and little actively (8.0%).

Young people are the most involved in active politics, 14%, aged between 14 and 24, have participated directly, especially by going to marches (12.8%).

In 2019, 15 million 800 thousand people find out about political events via the Internet. Newspapers used by only a third of the population who inform themselves about politics (42.2% in 2014).

Which factors determine the levels and degree of citizen participation in politics has been the subject of studies since the 1970s, correlating the two methods with the presence or absence of certain socioeconomic characteristics that can facilitate, or inhibit, the involvement of individuals in the political sphere. According to this thesis, variations in participation rates can largely be traced back to the degree of social centrality or marginality of individuals. Taking part in political life is easier for those who are educated, have a medium-high income, carry out professional activities of a certain type, are included in a network of social relationships in their community which bring them closer to the sphere of politics and, conversely, participation, at least in some of its forms, is made difficult for those who, for one reason or another, occupy peripheral social positions.

It is a plausible thesis and accompanied by numerous findings offered by comparative research on the topic, which demonstrate how the possession of resources (cognitive, economic or even quantity of time available) is linked to participatory behavior.

A second thesis, largely complementary to the first, highlights the importance of the presence in the social environment in which citizens move of associations or organizational networks which, with their initiatives, constitute opportunities for participation also for those groups of the citizens less likely to be involved in the political sphere. It is in fact reasonable to assume that where there are functioning associative structures they constitute mobilization agents that stimulate or facilitate participatory behavior on the part of more or less large sectors of the population. In essence, while the first thesis hinges on resources, this second point of view underlines the importance of the opportunities that the social context makes available to citizens.

In addition to the differential distribution of resources and opportunities, there is a further element that must be taken into account to satisfactorily explain variations in participation

rates. These appear to be connected, at least to a certain extent, also to socio-cultural factors, that is, to existence in a specific social milieu with particular configurations of values and orientations, role definitions, prevailing expectations, etc. All these cultural traits can function in turn either as elements to stimulate and support participation or as real inhibitory brakes. Just think of the effects that a widely shared definition of politics as a 'dirty thing', 'dangerous activity' or 'not suitable for women' could have on participation rates. In this regard, it should be noted the importance that individuals' feelings of belonging to particular subcultures or 'political families' can have for different sectors of the electorate, in some of which commitment to the life of one's community constitutes a value while in others it is not.

Finally, it is also useful to take into consideration what could be called the thesis of 'induced disaffection'. According to this point of view, if participation rates are relatively low and many citizens live on the margins of political life, this is due not so much to their disinterest or their cultural deficiencies but rather to the very nature of the forms of participation prevalent in democratic systems contemporaries. Two types of causes would contribute to not encouraging or discouraging citizens soon. Firstly, the difficulties of the common citizen in following the political debate, often conducted with deliberately obscure language and moreover focused on complex issues that almost always require specialist knowledge. Anyone who ventures into this labyrinth without the necessary equipment cannot help but get lost and end up withdrawing from the political arena disappointed or frustrated. The disaffection could originate, secondly, in the fact that the most common forms of participation open to citizens would not allow them to truly take part personally and as main actors in the community's decision-making processes. In essence, apathy would arise as a response from those who would be willing to participate, but immediately realize that doing so within traditional channels would not significantly change their role as a citizen substantially excluded from the most important decision-making processes.

Only the overcoming of representative democracy - say the supporters of this thesis - and the transition to forms of direct democracy would make it possible to overcome the crisis of participation which, to a greater or lesser extent, characterizes all contemporary political systems. Research and reflections on the relationship between citizens and the political sphere raise important questions relating to the nature and quality of mass democracies as they have concretely taken shape during the 20th century. The findings of this experience indicate that the average levels of citizen participation in political life are far below the standards explicitly or implicitly set by normative theories of democracy. Despite the improvements that have occurred on a socioeconomic level, at the end of the century the real citizen is still very different from the model described and hoped for in civic education books.

In relation to **policies** and decision-making processes, it can be stated that in relation to the content / object of the sessions, as Theodore Low identifies in his studies, there are essentially four major categories of public policies: **distributive, regulative, redistributive, constitutive.**

Distribution policies, usually produced by elected assemblies and their commissions and implemented by government agencies and bureaucracies, generally concern services of

various types, mostly linked to social security and assistance. They distribute resources and are financed through taxes.

Regulatory policies concern the production of norms that regulate behavior, often benefiting some individuals and groups and disadvantaging other individuals and groups. They are also produced by elected assemblies and implemented by relatively decentralized agencies. Redistributive policies visibly and explicitly take away resources from some groups and give them to others. They are, therefore, rather conflicting policies, which require considerable intervention by the executive power and rather centralized implementation.

Constitutive policies concern the formulation of rules that supervise the creation and functioning of authority structures and the authorities themselves. They are, therefore, relatively rare policies, especially in stabilized political-institutional contexts, as functioning democratic regimes usually are. Some authors have criticized Lowi's typology because it does not take into account the importance of symbolic policies, which do not distribute resources and do not regulate behavior but serve to strengthen and/or change collective identities, feelings of belonging, bonds between those holding political power and the citizens.

Even today, scholars are divided into those who maintain that public policies are not the product of political variables, i.e. institutional structures, the party system, the color of governments and others for whom they are essentially the product of socioeconomic variables. Stating that, given the same availability of resources, or economic development, political systems that are otherwise different in terms of institutional structure and party structure will produce significantly similar public policies.

These two positions are inserted into the so-called studies of the literature of political science and political sociology which has as its object the causes and the production process of active policies starting in particular from the subjects who are the inputs of such policies. Political science literature has identified **6 main models**, by no means exclusive and individually exhaustive, of the **production process of public policies** :

- party government;
- neocorporatism;
- the iron triangles;
- thematic networks;
- political communities;
- comitology.

In the party government model, the role of decision makers of public policies is attributed to actors of party affiliation, extraction or nomination, and by controllable and replaceable parties. It finds safer and more lasting concrete implementation essentially in two-party systems, characterized by party discipline and programmatic nature of the parties themselves, as well as by their interest in producing public policies that are perfectly referable and attributable to them. However, elements of prevalence of party actors in the production processes of public policies are also widely and widely found in non-two-party systems in which the parties, their leaders and representatives designated by them are

always present, often in prominent positions, even in different and alternative models to party government.

The second descriptive interpretative model of the production methods of policies is neocorporatism for which the protagonist groups are three: governments and their executive apparatus, trade unions, business associations, organized, stable groups with resources that have contractual power to reach agreements. The scope of the policies that are decided through neo-corporate agreements is broad, but they mainly concern the economic and social sphere, in which entrepreneurial interests and trade union interests could otherwise come into conflict. It is possible to argue that a large part of the policies are based on a neo-corporatist model even if social differentiation, international economic pressures, fragmentation of interests, cultural challenges, social differentiation and fragmentation of interests can configure a more diluted model.

In the "iron triangles" model the most relevant public policies would be produced. The reference to the triangle is due to the fact that this model identifies three main aggregations of actors: 1) interest groups; 2) the bureaucratic-administrative agencies; 3) the parliamentary commissions. The "iron" characterization aims to highlight the solidity of the relationship that is established and maintained between the three aggregations of actors. It is important to underline that iron triangles can be quite numerous, widespread and scattered in the same political system. The persistence of iron triangles is based on the mutual ability of each of the components of the triangle to keep their commitments. Each of the actors contributes to the functionality of the triangle in terms of decisions, resources, votes and, therefore, to its effectiveness and its duration and reproduction over time.

The fourth model is defined as "thematic networks". It is less structured than the previous one, it is more open to a multiplicity of participants, it consists of episodic and occasional interactions, intended to be exposed to the public and to last a short time,

Another model called "policy communities" has been formulated in which the actors continue to be, as in thematic networks, quite numerous, but are mostly the same. Policy communities are formed through contacts between politicians, bureaucrats, representatives of interest groups and experts who have a high continuity of role over time. This continuity, translated into community and interactions, guarantees some of the advantages deriving from personal knowledge and the possibility of structuring a mutually satisfying decision-making process. According to some scholars, the image of policy communities represents the process of formation of public policies in Italy better than any other (including the model of party government).

The comitology model provides for the very high participation of a plurality of actors ("international, supranational or cross-national" committees), with policy contents that vary from minimum importance to maximum importance. This model of public policy formation is often used to explain the production of European Union policies.