



# Political Development: Major Models

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**ABSTRACT:** The concept of political development has been widely discussed in political science as a process through which political systems transform and adapt to changing social, economic, and institutional conditions. Scholars have approached political development from multiple theoretical perspectives, emphasizing aspects such as democratization, social change, institutional capacity, and crisis management. This paper examines the major theoretical models that explain political development and their contributions to understanding political transformation. In particular, the paper focuses on three influential perspectives: the Modernization Model, the Dependency Model, and the Political Institutionalization Model. The modernization approach emphasizes the transition from traditional to modern societies through economic growth and structural transformation. In contrast, the dependency perspective critiques global inequalities and highlights how historical power relations and international economic structures influence development patterns. The political institutionalization model, associated with Samuel P. Huntington, emphasizes the role of strong and stable institutions in maintaining political order and managing increasing political participation. By analyzing these models, the study demonstrates that political development is a complex and multidimensional process shaped by internal institutional dynamics as well as external economic and historical forces.

**KEYWORDS:** Political Development; Modernization Theory; Dependency Theory; Political Institutionalization; Political Change.

## I. INTRODUCTION

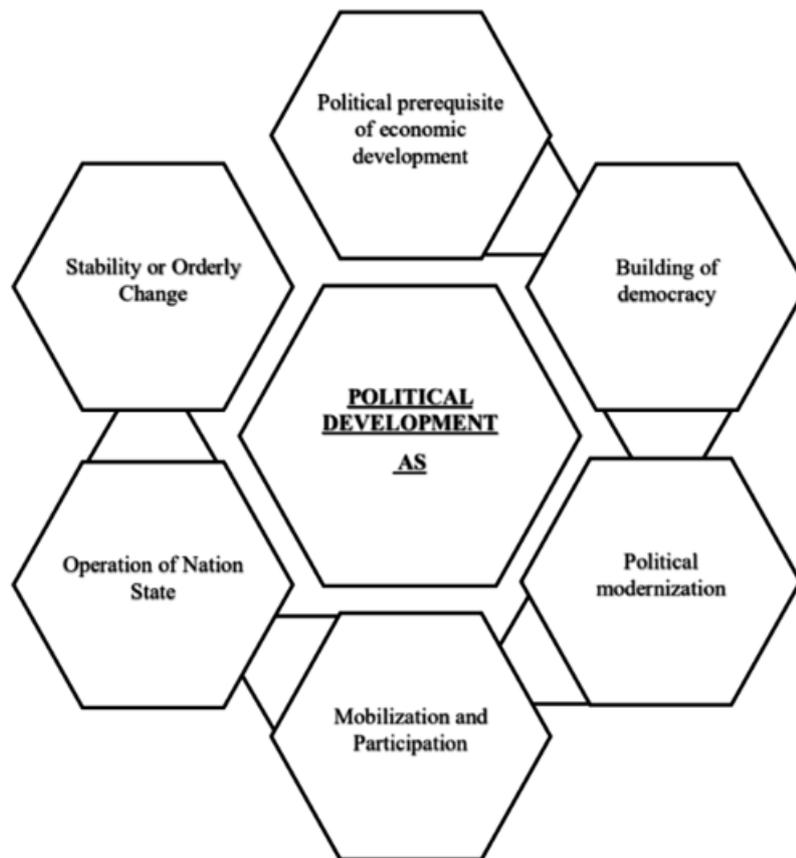
The concept of political development has attracted considerable attention in political science, particularly in discussions concerning modernization, governance, and institutional change. Scholars have approached this concept from different theoretical perspectives, each emphasizing particular dimensions of political change and institutional growth. In general terms, political development is associated with the transformation of political institutions, expansion of political participation, strengthening of governance structures, and the ability of the political system to respond effectively to the needs and expectations of society. Because societies differ in their historical experiences, social structures, and political traditions, the understanding of political development has also evolved through multiple theoretical interpretations. Political development has therefore been discussed separately within different intellectual traditions and analytical frameworks. Ronald H. Chilcote argues that theories of political development can broadly be categorized into three main groups (Chilcote, 1981):

1. Those that consider political development to be equivalent to democracy.
2. Those that focus on the relationship between political change and development.
3. Those that analyse political development through crises and stages of political transformation.

This classification provides a broad overview of the major perspectives through which scholars have attempted to understand political development. The first group includes theorists such as Carl J. Friedrich, James Bryce, Lucian W. Pye, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Arthur Smith. These scholars generally associate political development with the expansion of democratic institutions and practices. In their view, indicators such as parliamentary elections, the existence of multi-party systems, political competition, freedom of the press, and political legitimacy represent key elements of political development within a society. The second group of theorists attempts to establish a connection between political development and processes of social and political change. Among the scholars whose works fall within this perspective are Carl J. Friedrich, Lewis A. Coser, and Robert Nisbet. Researchers within this tradition pay particular attention to social transformation, the dynamics of conflict, and the patterns of change that occur within different societies. They emphasize that social conflicts, shifts in social structures, and the continuous evolution of institutions are natural processes in human societies and play an important role in shaping political development. The third group of scholars examines political development by focusing on crises and transitional stages within political systems. Important contributors to this perspective include Leonard Binder, James S. Coleman, Joseph LaPalombara, and Sidney Verba. These scholars analyse the functional aspects of political development, including political capacity,

social justice, distribution of resources and opportunities, and the formation of political and social classes. Their research also explores how power is distributed within society, how different groups compete for political authority, and how governments respond to crises such as challenges to political legitimacy and institutional stability (Emamjomehzadeh, 2013). These ideas are further reflected in the conceptual framework proposed by Lucian W. Pye. Figure 1 represents Lucian W. Pye’s characteristics of political development. According to Pye, political development can be understood through several interrelated dimensions. These include political modernization, building of democracy, mobilization and participation of citizens, effective operation of the nation-state, political stability or orderly change, and the role of political structures as prerequisites for economic development. Together, these elements illustrate that political development is a multidimensional process involving institutional strength, public participation, stability, and the capacity of the state to support broader social and economic progress (Nawaz, 2023).

**Fig 1: Lucian Pye’s Characteristics of Political Development**



*Source: Nawaz (2023)*

In a broader sense, political development can be understood as the gradual transformation of political systems from relatively less organized and less responsive structures into more stable, efficient, and accountable systems of governance. During this transformation, societies often encounter various challenges that test the effectiveness of political institutions and leadership. According to Lucian W. Pye and Leonard Binder, political development typically involves the successful management and resolution of five major crises: identity, legitimacy, participation, penetration (influential), and distributive crises. Among these, the penetration crisis and distributive crisis play a particularly significant role in determining the ability of the state to govern effectively and maintain stability. The penetration or influential crisis refers to the extent to which a central government is capable of extending its authority and implementing its policies throughout the entire territory and social structure of the state. As explained by Joseph LaPalombara, such a crisis emerges when governments lack sufficient administrative strength or political capacity to

enforce their policies, or when citizens refuse to recognize or accept the authority of the state. This situation is especially common in developing countries where political institutions are weak, administrative systems are underdeveloped, and societies are characterized by significant ethnic, regional, or social divisions. Under such circumstances, governments may face resistance, social unrest, or a decline in public loyalty toward the political system. The distributive crisis, on the other hand, concerns the manner in which resources, services, opportunities, and values are allocated among different groups within society. According to David Easton, politics fundamentally involves the authoritative allocation of values within a society. When governments fail to distribute resources fairly or when certain groups are systematically excluded from economic benefits and political decision-making, tensions and dissatisfaction begin to grow within society. These inequalities can lead to social conflicts and weaken the legitimacy of political institutions. Therefore, the successful advancement of political development requires the strengthening of political institutions, the enhancement of governmental capacity, and the establishment of fair and balanced mechanisms for the distribution of resources and opportunities. By addressing these challenges effectively, political systems can improve stability, enhance public trust, and create conditions that support long-term political and social development (Ghafoori & Kafurdi, 2016). In this context, it becomes important to examine the major theoretical approaches that explain the process of political development; therefore, the present study aims to analyze the major models of political development and their contributions to understanding political change and institutional transformation.

## II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT: MAJOR MODELS AND PERSPECTIVES

The concept of political development has been explained through various theoretical models developed by scholars from different disciplines. These models attempt to interpret how political systems evolve, how institutions strengthen, and how societies move toward stability and effective governance. Each model emphasizes different factors such as economic transformation, global structural relations, or the role of political institutions in shaping development. Among the most influential perspectives in this field are the Modernization Model, the Dependency Model, and the Political Institutionalization Model. Together, these models provide important analytical frameworks for understanding the processes, challenges, and dynamics involved in political development.

## III. MODERNIZATION MODEL

The modernization approach emerged from long-standing concerns within Western intellectual traditions regarding processes of social, economic, and political transformation. A central idea within modernization theory is the contrast between “traditional” and “modern” societies, which became one of the defining features of this perspective. The theory developed through contributions from several social science disciplines, including sociology, economics, political science, and anthropology. Within this framework, the categories of “traditional” (often associated with simpler social structures) and “modern” (linked to more complex forms of organization) were frequently compared with the differences between Western and non-Western societies. Because of this association, modernization theory has often been criticized for being normative and ethnocentric, as it tends to present Western institutions and values as the universal model for development (Hout, 2016). Among the numerous scholars who contributed to modernization theory, the economist Walt W. Rostow is particularly prominent. Rostow proposed a developmental framework consisting of five stages that societies pass through as they move from traditional to modern conditions characterized by mass consumption. His analytical model was based on patterns of production relations and the distribution of income between consumption, savings, and investment, as well as changes in investment structures and sectoral development within the economy (Rostow, 1960). According to Rostow, traditional societies are largely dependent on agriculture and generally exhibit low levels of productivity. The second stage, known as the preconditions for take-off, emerges when scientific and technological innovations generate economic surpluses that can be invested in further development. The third stage, take-off, represents a period of sustained economic growth during which industrialization expands rapidly and entrepreneurial groups play a crucial role in promoting economic progress. The drive to maturity, the fourth stage, involves diversification of industries and the emergence of new sectors that replace earlier sources of growth. Historically, this stage was evident in Europe during the Industrial Revolution, when heavy industry expanded significantly. Finally, the age of high mass consumption marks the stage in which societies shift their focus from production to consumption and experience rising living standards.

In addition to economists and sociologists, political scientists also played an important role in shaping modernization theory. One of the early and influential contributions in this field was by Gabriel A. Almond (1960), which examined political systems in developing regions. This work emphasized the functions performed by political structures within societies regardless of their cultural background or level of institutional differentiation (Almond, 1960). However, by the late 1960s modernization theory faced growing criticism. Scholars argued that it overlooked the broader international context within which developing countries operate. Critics, especially those studying Latin America, emphasized that colonial history and economic dependence on powerful states such as the United States significantly shaped patterns of development and underdevelopment. These critiques eventually contributed to the emergence of dependency theory, which offered an alternative explanation of global development patterns.

#### **IV. DEPENDENCY MODEL**

Dependency theory gained prominence during the 1960s, largely as a response to the work of the Argentine economist Raul Prebisch. Prebisch observed that economic growth in wealthier industrial nations often occurred at the expense of poorer countries. His research suggested that the global economic system tended to benefit developed countries while simultaneously reinforcing the economic disadvantages of less developed regions. As a result, dependency theorists argued that international economic relations create structural inequalities that hinder the development of poorer countries. The theoretical foundations of dependency theory are influenced by Marxist perspectives, which interpret globalization as the expansion of capitalist market relations and private enterprise. According to this view, the global economy operates through a hierarchical structure in which developed “core” countries dominate and exploit the resources and labor of less developed “peripheral” countries (Trần & Dar, 2022). Within this framework, the international division of labour ensures that industrial production and technological advancement remain concentrated in the core, while peripheral nations remain dependent on exporting raw materials and low-value goods.

Despite the evolution of global economic structures over time, several central principles of dependency theory continue to hold relevance. First, institutions—both domestic and international—are shaped by historical power relations and often play a role in maintaining existing inequalities. Even though contemporary global governance institutions may not perfectly reflect the deterministic assumptions of classical dependency theory, the global economic system still tends to favour certain countries and interests over others. Some scholars even suggest that the opportunities available for development may be shrinking for countries that remain on the periphery. Second, scholars such as Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto emphasized that political and social agency also plays a significant role in shaping development outcomes. In their view, historical structures influence but do not completely determine the future. Political decisions, collective action, and leadership can modify structural constraints and create alternative development trajectories. As they noted, historical outcomes ultimately depend on the choices and initiatives of political actors rather than solely on theoretical predictions (Cardoso and Faletto, 1979). Third, dependency theory represents a critical and politically conscious perspective that emerged primarily from scholars in the Global South. It challenged dominant modernization theories by highlighting how historical processes such as colonialism and unequal economic exchange contributed to persistent global inequalities. While the simple core-periphery framework may not fully capture the complexity of today’s global economy—especially with the rise of rapidly developing economies such as China, India, and Brazil—it remains useful in understanding structural imbalances in international economic relations. These emerging economies demonstrate that development paths are shaped by diverse historical and political conditions rather than by a single universal trajectory (Heller et al., 2009).

#### **V. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONALIZATION MODEL**

The Political Institutionalization Model, most clearly associated with the work of Samuel P. Huntington, interprets political development primarily in terms of the strength and stability of political institutions. Huntington argued that political development, political order, and political stability are closely linked to the degree of institutionalization within a political system. He defined institutionalization as the process through which political organizations and procedures acquire durability, legitimacy, and recognized value in society (Huntington, 1968). Within this perspective, the level of political order in a society depends largely on the relationship between political participation and institutional capacity. When political participation expands more rapidly than the ability of institutions to manage it, instability often emerges. Such situations may lead to corruption, political violence, or military intervention in politics. Conversely, when institutions are sufficiently strong and capable of managing political demands, they contribute to a

more stable and orderly political environment. Huntington identified four key characteristics that determine the level of institutionalization within a political system: adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and coherence. Adaptability refers to the ability of institutions to survive and adjust to changing political conditions. Complexity indicates the degree of structural differentiation and specialization within the political system. Autonomy describes the independence of political institutions from particular social interests and external pressures, while coherence refers to the internal unity, discipline, and collective identity of political organizations. Together, these attributes determine the overall strength and effectiveness of political institutions.

The institutionalization model attracted considerable attention in comparative politics because it offered a systematic framework for analysing political instability in developing societies. Scholars such as Gabriel Ben-Dor highlighted the importance of institutional capacity in shaping political development. Huntington argued that rapid processes of modernization—including urbanization, rising levels of education, and economic growth—often lead to a rapid expansion of political participation. If political institutions do not develop at the same pace, societies may experience what he described as “praetorianism,” where social groups such as the military, bureaucracies, or interest groups directly compete for political power due to weak institutional structures. Despite its significance, the institutionalization model has also been the subject of several conceptual and methodological critiques. Some scholars have argued that Huntington’s definition of institutionalization combines both structural and behavioural aspects. For example, Edward Feit pointed out that institutions should not be equated simply with organizations. While organizations represent structural arrangements, institutions involve socially accepted patterns of behaviour and norms that give meaning to those structures. Similarly, Mark Kesselman suggested that excessive institutionalization might sometimes limit political participation rather than strengthen it, a phenomenon he described as “over-institutionalization.” Empirical research on institutionalization has also produced mixed results. For instance, Michael C. Hudson found only weak statistical relationships between institutionalization and political stability in cross-national studies. In contrast, research conducted by Peter R. Schneider and Ann L. Schneider indicated that the balance between social mobilization and institutional capacity could explain significant variations in political violence and instability. These differing findings illustrate the difficulty of measuring institutionalization and applying the concept consistently across different political contexts. Nevertheless, the idea of political institutionalization continues to be an important contribution to the study of political development. As emphasized by Gabriel Ben-Dor, the theory offers a valuable framework for understanding how institutional strength, political participation, and political stability interact within political systems. Although further refinement and more precise empirical indicators are required, the institutionalization approach remains an influential tool for analysing the dynamics of political order and development in both developed and developing societies (Ben-Dor, 1975).

## VI. CONCLUSION

Political development is a multifaceted process that involves the transformation of political institutions, the expansion of participation, and the strengthening of governance mechanisms capable of responding to social demands. The theoretical perspectives examined in this study demonstrate that political development cannot be explained by a single universal model. Instead, it is shaped by a combination of internal institutional structures, historical experiences, economic conditions, and global power relations. The modernization model emphasizes the importance of economic growth, technological advancement, and structural transformation in moving societies from traditional to modern stages. However, critics have pointed out that this approach often overlooks the historical and international factors that influence development trajectories. The dependency model emerged as a critical response to these limitations by highlighting the structural inequalities within the global economic system and the historical conditions that shape the development of peripheral countries. At the same time, the political institutionalization model emphasizes the role of strong and stable institutions in maintaining political order and managing the increasing demands of political participation. Taken together, these models provide complementary perspectives that deepen our understanding of political development. They illustrate that sustainable political progress requires not only economic growth but also effective institutions, equitable distribution of resources, and the capacity of political systems to manage social and political change. By examining these major models, this study contributes to a broader understanding of the theoretical foundations of political development and highlights the importance of integrating different perspectives when analysing the evolution and stability of political systems.

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