The Social Bases of Politics

Arnold K. Sherman

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To Jeanette Marian Ullman Sherman, who challenged me to think, allowed me to be independent, provided opportunities to take responsibility, questioned my decisions, and taught me the Vermont way of trying to leave things a little better than you found them.

AKS

To my husband, Kenneth Leon Heitner, and my children, Ariel Ron and Ethan Sam Heitner, who have taught me what the real priorities are.

AK

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Preface

When we first took political sociology as graduate students in the 1960s, it was one of the most popular courses in the sociology department, with brimming enrollments and overflowing classrooms. Now that we teach political sociology—we have taught it for a combined total of more than twenty years—we still find it exciting and relevant. Possibly more than any other course in sociology, political sociology fulfills C. Wright Mills's vision of the sociological imagination: It enables us to understand the broad historical scene in terms of its meaning for our lives, to translate private "troubles" into public "issues," and to comprehend the connection between history and biography.

Like many textbooks, this book grew out of our frustration with the existing textbooks in the field. We could not find a textbook that suited the way we teach this course, so we decided to write one. Little did we realize that this project would take seven years to complete. In the course of these seven years the political world moved on, as it inevitably does, so each chapter had to be rewritten many times just to keep abreast of political events.

This book is innovative both intellectually and stylistically. Intellectually, the book attempts to link the past with the present, the individual with the collectivity, the socioeconomic with the political. Stylistically, it aims at making abstract concepts and theories come alive.

Unique Features

- This book provides up-to-date information on rapidly changing political phenomena, such as voting trends, campaign financing, and the ideological underpinnings of political behavior.
- It incorporates a feminist perspective on a number of issues, including power, stratification, and voting patterns.
- It stresses both a historical and comparative approach to social thought, providing both an overview of historical events and the intellectual background of specific issues within political sociology.
- It provides a balanced appraisal of different theoretical models, including the social construction of reality, the consensus, and the conflict models.
- It stresses the reciprocities among social structure, ideas, and political institutions. The chapters on stratification, socialization, and ideology link those concepts to the political system.

- It distinguishes between substantive and functional rationality and between utopian and diagnostic thinking and uses these concepts to understand problems in contemporary society.
- It links the political process and the PEWS (political economy of the world system) models to provide a solution to the problem of levels of analysis with respect to understanding social change and social movements.
- It provides a theoretical and empirical critique of the oversocialized view of the political person, replacing this view with a concept of the political actor as potentially changeable.

Organization and Style

Stylistically, we belive this book will appeal to professors and students of political sociology for a number of reasons:

- It is written clearly and succinctly with student readers in mind.
- Each chapter is clearly organized with a preview that introduces the topic and links it to material previously covered, a main substantive section, and a summary.
- There are numerous examples from current and historical events that help to clarify theoretical concepts and bring them to life. These examples illustrate the relevance of political sociology to students' lives and encourage them to apply the concepts toward a better understanding of the world around them.
- In addition to the examples in the text, several self-contained boxes provide more detailed illustrations of specific issues, such as politics in the Sunbelt, the press coverage of the Falklands War, and big-city political machines.
- Difficult theories and concepts are illustrated by tables and charts, as are comparisons among different theories.

We hope that this book will do justice to students' needs and professors' expectations and convey the excitement we have felt in teaching political sociology and in writing about it.

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This book is the result of a truly joint effort. The order in which the coauthors are listed does not reflect any priority of authorship.

It goes without saying that we take all the responsibility for any errors.

AKS and *AK*

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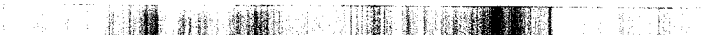
Issues, Perspectives, and Political Variations



CHAPTER ONE

Political Sociology: Developments, Issues, and Perspectives

Preview

What Is Political Sociology?

The Problem of Knowledge
The Scientific Approach to Political Sociology
The Comparative-Historical Approach to Political Sociology
The Importance of Definition
What Is Politics?

Theoretical Perspectives in Political Sociology

Key Concepts and Issues

The Role of the State in Society
Political Power
Ideology and Utopia
Political Socialization
Political Participation

Summary

Preview

We live in a time of contradiction and change. We are moving into a new postindustrial age, an age as distinct from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century industrialism as industrialism itself was different from the feudal, aristocratic-agricultural period that preceded it. We enter this new age without ideological, utopian, or diagnostic views to provide direction or coherence.

As the United States moves into the new era, 80 percent of the world's population still live in agricultural societies. More than 80 percent of the world's population make less than $1,300 per year, and 30 percent, or 1.3 billion people, have an average per capita yearly income of only $260 (The World Bank 1985). The people of the eighteen industrialized countries have a daily caloric intake that is 131 percent of the daily requirement, while the people of the thirty-eight underdeveloped countries have a daily caloric intake that is only 91 percent of the daily requirement. This figure does not take into account periodic famines.

Beyond the contrasts of affluence and poverty are additional contradictions. The number of nation-states has grown dramatically as previously colonial states achieve independence, but the drive for autonomy operates at the regional as well as the national level. Conflict exists both within and between nation-states on the basis of ethnic identity and the desire for regional self-determination. Political and bureaucratic centralization and the increasing dominance of powerful multinational corporations are accompanied by a resurgence of regional ethnicity. Thus, the trend toward centralization is counterbalanced by the trend toward fragmentation and decentralization (see Ronen 1979).

Other recent phenomena include the rise in political and religious fundamentalism and political violence; increasing unemployment and a growing awareness of the limits of economic growth; improved technology in transportation, communications, and weaponry; and the replacement of the Protestant ethic, a philosophy of hard work and little pleasure, with consumerism, a practice that ceases to make sense in light of the limits on economic growth.

We live at a time when the old conceptions of reality no longer apply. The field of political sociology, too, is wracked by controversy. We start our discussion with the basic question of knowledge: How can we know anything?

What Is Political Sociology?

The Problem of Knowledge

The problem of knowledge stems from the fact that there is a separation between the things about which we want to know, our perceptions or observations of those things, and the symbols that stand for them. Since a separation exists between things, concepts, and symbols, each is a possible starting point for political analysis. In the political world it is possible to start with the written record, that is, the symbols that represent knowledge in the realm of political sociology. It is also possible to start with concepts such as revolution, political participation, and conflict and with theories about their causes and consequences. Finally, it is possible to start with specific revolutions, elections, civil wars, and other historical events. The last approach avoids the pitfalls of imposing preconceived notions on reality. Political sociologist Theda Skocpol (1979) argues that she was fortunate in having read the histories of the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions before she read the theories about the causes of these revolutions, since she was not tempted to accept

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