The process of institutionalisation and political development

An introduction to the concept and role of institutions in selected American political science approaches

John Martinussen

The title of this lecture may leave wrong impressions in two respects:
- firstly that there exists a homogeneous political science tradion in the United States, which is not the case;
- secondly, that I am going to cover - in about 60 minutes - everything that comes under the heading 'American political science', which is absolutely impossible.

Therefore, let me stress right from the beginning that I intend to deal only with a few selected approaches and that the whole presentation remains rather superficial. Still, I think it is important to remind ourselves that there are, within American political science, a long and fine tradition for discussing and analysing the role of political and other institutions in development.

I think our research and our Ph.D. programme can benefit considerably from entering into a dialogue with several of these political science approaches.

Selected approaches

The approaches selected for presentation and discussion here are not easily defined and there is no general agreement on the names they should be given. Several theories incorporate elements from more than one of the approaches, which I am going to identify. Besides, theorists have changed their concepts and hypotheses over time to the extent that their approaches have also changed.

Despite that I think it is justified and expedient to distinguish between three major approaches:

A) Classical modernisation theories

Representative theorists include Gabriel Almond, James Coleman, Lucian Pye, Bingham Powell and several others sometimes referred to as the Princeton School - after the University and its Press which published several of the works written by this group of theorists. Another - commonly used - term for their approach is 'political development theory'.

B) Revisionist modernisation theories

Exponents include Reinhard Bendix, Lloyd and Suzanne Rudolph, S.N. Eisenstadt. It was Samuel P. Huntington who first referred to the writings of

these scholars as 'modernisation revisionism'. This terminology is also used by Randall and Theobald in their critical introduction and review. I would prefer to talk about dialectic theories of modernisation - for reasons to be mentioned later.

In certain basic respects this approach informs some of the more recent writings about politics and society in Africa by scholars like Jackson and Rosberg, Richard Sandbrook and Göran Hydén. Apart from mentioning this resemblance I am not going to deal with these authors in the present lecture, but we will definitely have to discuss them in the course of our programme.

C) State building theories

Or what Randall and Theobald calls a 'politics of order' approach. The most prominent representative here is Samuel P. Huntington, but I would regard also Christopher Clapham as a state building theorist - although his focus and emphases are different from Huntington's.

In the following, I will discuss briefly how political institutions and processes of institutionalisation are conceived of in these three theoretical frameworks. The emphasis will be on characteristics distinguishing the three traditions from each other.

Classical modernisation theory

Classical modernisation theory, which emerged in the 1950s and came to dominate American political science in the 1960s, has its methodological and theoretical roots in the writings of Talcott Parsons and David Easton.

Almond's initial idea was to elaborate what Easton had called the 'conversion functions', i.e. the way in which a political system converts inputs into outputs. Subsequently, he wanted to investigate - like Parsons - the relationship between the conversion functions and particular structures (cf. Randall & Theobald, p. 23).

The aim was not to define structures or institutions in the organisational sense. Instead, Almond wanted to define functions necessary for the persistence and development of a political system and only then investigate the institutions involved in the execution of these functions - or if functions were not performed in a satisfactory manner, then to identify necessary institutional re-arrangements and developments.

To understand Almond's and his associates' endeavours in their proper theoretical context it may be helpful to briefly re-capitulate Easton's model of a political system (not included here).

Easton's objective was to extricate from the total political reality those aspects that can be considered the fundamental processes or activites without which no political life in society could continue.

18

Almond essentially accepts Easton's model of political life but adds to it a dynamic dimension in the form of his distinction between mod-ern political systems and traditional ones.

Almond identified the following processes on the input side:

a) Political socialisation
The process through which citizens acquire attitudes towards the political system. Institutions involved here include the family, the school, the political party, and the media.

b) Political recruitmen
The involvement of citizens in political life through interest organisations, political parties, etc.

c) Articulation of interests
The process of making demands upon decision-makers (from Easton).

d) Aggregation of interests
The process through which articulated demands are combined into programmes and general policy alternatives. Interest organisations, political parties and government bureaucracies all play important roles in this process.

Output processes are not particularly relevant in our present context. We will therefore leave them aside.

But a cross-cutting process, in addition to the input and output functions should be mentioned, namely that of political communication. The transmission of political information within the system.

Almond initiated a comprehensive research programme which aimed at identifying how and through what kind of institutions these various functions were performed in the developing countries. The first major work emerging from this programme was *The Politics of the Developing Areas* from 1960. There is an interesting review of this volume in Randall & Theobald, pp. 24-27, to which I refer.

In the years following the publication of this volume the classical modernisation theories within political science were considerably elaborated and transformed into what may be called theories of political development.

These theories essentially maintained that traditional institutions in developing countries inhibited modernisation and that the traditional institutions had to be replaced and dissolved if these countries were to develop politically.

The theories, furthermore, regarded political development as a precondition for economic and social development.

The assumed **conflict between traditional and modern institutions** is a distinguishing characteristic of the classical modernisation theories as well as of the political development theories.

In the early works, political modernity was essentially equated with a high degree of differentiation and specialisation, which, in turn, implied resemblance with the political systems of the Western countries.

In subsequent works by Almond, Powell and Pye the focus was changed somewhat. Now they talked about political development as synonomous with increased capabilities of a political system in certain specified respects.

They pointed to five main capabilities of a political system:

A) The extractive capability
   The system's ability to extract physical and human resources from society.

B) The regulative capability
   Refers to the system's control over the behaviour of individuals and groups.

C) The distributive capability
   The system's ability to allocate goods, services, status and other kind of opportunity in society.

D) The symbolic capability
   This refers to the extent to which the system commands symbolic means of creating support for the national political entity and its government.

E) The responsive capability
   The ability to react adequately to inputs which could imply repression of demands or a transformation of these into outputs.

Almond and his associates retained the basic idea that increased capabilities in these respects implied a higher degree of resemblance to the Western political systems. But it is interesting to note that other exponents of the political development theories elaborated the development concept into a less etnocentric form by focusing on the increased capacity to make decisions and implement them. Strictly speaking, such increased capacity could also result in a rejection of the development objectives (like economic growth) which are so typical of the Western societies (cf. Riggs in: Sartori, p 163 f.).

Although the theorists of political modernisation focused on the political system and political life they did pay attention to other processes of social change. In this context it is worth mentioning that they assumed the various processes of change to be intimately related and going together, perhaps even reenforcing each other. Thus, they beleived the following processes to be mutually supporting:

Political development
Social mobilisation
Increased political participation - and:
Social change or modernisation.

A final remark here about the theorists of political modernisation concerns their *development strategy*. Two aspects should be emphasized:

One is that they recommended an institution building strategy which involved the transfer and implantation of modern Western institutions into the developing societies. These institutions would then gradually ensure the modernisation of these societies.

Some of the representatives of this approach - including Pye - quite explicitly stated that the institution best suited to this task was the military. Pye argued that the process of acculturation to modern life is more successful in the army than elsewhere. He also maintained that a military establishment comes as close as any human organisation can to the ideal type for an industrialised and secularised enterprise. Consequently, the military is the institution best suited to induce modernising attitudes in the developing societies. According to Pye, this particular role assigned to the military was not in contradiction with the overall objective of establishing liberal democracy.

The second aspect of the development strategy worth mentioning here relates more directly to this preferred form of regime. The theorists of political modernisation have argued that political development necessarily implies mass participation. Increased political participation can be delayed or suppressed, but political development and meaningful participation cannot and *ought* not to be separated.

We shall now turn to the two other approaches to see where they deviated from classical modernisation theories.

Dialectic modernisation theories

These attacked the classical theories on several accounts. I shall confine myself here to two major areas of disagreement.

The first concerns the dichotomy between tradition and modernity. According to the dialectic modernisation theorists this alledged dichotomy is not a real one. Actually, it is false at least on two accounts: Firstly, it is false to regard everything that is not modern as simply traditional. That leaves us with a sort of residual category of traditional institutions which have very little in common. Secondly, traditional institutions and traditional societies are not all stagnant. On the contrary, one may refer to several instances of very dynamic traditional societies.

Based on this kind of criticism, the dialectic modernisation theorists emphasize that
- traditional institutions may or may not inhibit development

21

and modernisation, and
- modern institutions may or may not promote development
and modernisation.
This all depends on the specific features of the different institutions and the context in which they are placed.

For the development strategy this implies that there can be no *a priori* preference for modern institutions.

The whole relationship between traditional and modern institutions is conceived of in dialectic terms where both types of institutions have to adapt to each other and consequnetly are changed in the process. The evolution of modern political institutions in India and the manners in which they have been influenced by and at the same time affected the Indian caste system can be used as a illustration of this point, as shown in the study by the Rudolphs: *The Modernity of Tradition*(1967).

The second area of disagreement concerns the delineation of the major institutional spheres. The political development theorists in principle accepted that all social institutions could be subjected to closer scrutiny. In practice, however, they paid much more attention to institutions closely resembling modern Western institutions than to other institutions rooted in the particular culture of the various developing societies. Here the dialectic modernisation theorists - as in many other respects - applied a much more open approach attentive to the unique features of the societies studied. This implied a much stronger focus on institutions like family and kinship, marriage, gender related institutions, patron-client relationships, etc.

Many of the theories that will be presented under our Ph. D. programme have emerged from this dialectic modernisation approach with its openness and its emphasis on the specific conditions prevailing in the societies studied. Therefore, we will have several opportunities for a more elaborate discussion of this approach.

In this introductory presentation I shall now pass on to the criticism levelled against the classical modernisation theories by Huntington and other adherents to state building theories.

State building theories

Huntington did not attack the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, but he argued that modernisation and political development are processes in basic conflict with each other. In this respect he strongly disagreed with the classical modernisation theorists, which he criticised also for there naive and unwarranted expectation that some form of liberal democracy would prevail in the developing countries. Based on empirical observations Huntington instead argued that political decay and instability prevented these countries from developing democratic institutions.

In order to understand Huntington's theory it is necessary to refer first to some basic assumptions and normative elements in his theoretical framework. These may be summarized in the following manner:

Political stability is an end in itself and also a precondition for economic and social development.

Existing institutions in the developing countries - be they traditional or modern implants - are generally too weak to ensure political stability.

Consequently, all endeavours aimed at developing and modernising these countries have to start with the building and/or strengthening of political institutions that can ensure stability. The key element in political development therefore is **political institutionalisation.** This refers to an increased capacity of governments to absorb, reconcile and act upon the diverse pressures and demands to which they are subjected. Following this line of reasoning the degree of government becomes more important than the form of government - as reflected in Huntington's opening statement in his classical work, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968).

Having stated these basic assumptions we may briefly review Huntington's conception of the relationship between political development and social change.

According to Huntington, socio-economic development in general tends to encourage higher levels of political participation, more diverse forms of participation, more complex bases of participation, and a higher ratio of autonomous to mobilised participation. (Summarised in this way in *No Easy Choice* (1976)).

Higher levels of political participation under the circumstances prevailing in most developing countries will create political disorder and inhibit economic and social progress. Unless the increased participation is controlled and channeled through political institutions. In other words: Stability can be attained only if political institutionalisation proceeds at the same speed or faster than mobilised and autonomous participation is increased..

Since stability is preferable to change and since elite-directed change is preferable to changes produced by the demands of the masses - according to Huntington - it follows by implication that it may be necessary to suppress participation in order to consolidate the instruments of political control. This line of reasoning was predominant in Huntington's early works. It led to the conclusion that the safest way of ensuring stability was by consolidating and strengthening the civil bureaucracy and the military. These were the political institutions entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining order. They were already, in almost all the developing societies, the dominant components of their political systems and at the same time not particularly prone to promoting increased political participation.

In his later works, it appears that Huntington has changed his analyses and recommendations. In the book, *No Easy Choice*, from 1976, written together with Joan Nelson, it is emphasized that as development proceeds, participation becomes increasingly costly to suppress. Therefore, elites are constrained to channel rather than to suppress participation, that is to control its forms and guide the selection of issues. The civil bureaucracy and the military are not the institutions best suited to control and gu-

ide, if at the same time widespread citizen support for the government is aimed at. Consequnetly, Huntington and Nelson emphasize the importance of developing a party system and other institutions which can simultaneously control and guide participation and ensure ligitimacy and widespread support for the government.

Another elaboration of Huntington's original concepts and theories has been provided by Christopher Clapham in his *Third World Politics. An Introduction* (1985). Clapham strongly disagrees with Huntington in many respects. He does not at all defend the right of the elites to suppress mass participation. Nor does he regard the civil bureaucracy or the military as institutions conducive to development. Instead he talks about government of the state, by the state and for the state. He also maintains that when the maintenance of order and political stability is the most important priority this may result in development policies which are not really aimed at developing the countries but rather at consolidating the state. Despite these and other disagreements with Huntington I think it is worth noting the similarity between the two authors when it comes to the empirical analyses of the conditions prevailing in Third World countries. They both stand for a particular form of realism aimed at exposing misuse of power, misappropriation of public funds, etc.

      I will not elaborate on this point here, but end my presentation of these selected approaches to the study of political development by re-formulating one of my opening remarks: These approaches and the associated theories are still worth dealing with, partly because they contain relevant and interesting insight into the functioning of political institutions in developing countries, partly because they still exercise significant influence on the thinking of decision-makers throughout the World.