



POLITICAL SCIENCE AND SOCIETY: MECHANISMS OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONAL AND DISCOURSIVE INFLUENCE ON THE MASSES

Mukhitdinova Shahlo Nuritdinovna

First-year Master's student of the Faculty of Political Science, specializing in "Public Policy and Management of Socio-Political Risks" at the Tashkent Branch of Lomonosov Moscow State University

Aziz-Kariev Oybek

First-year Master's student of the Faculty of Political Science, specializing in "Public Policy and Management of Socio-Political Risks" at the Tashkent Branch of Lomonosov Moscow State University

Mukhamedova Mukaddaskhon Rustamovna

Lecturer at the Department of Socio-Humanitarian Sciences of the Tashkent Branch of Lomonosov Moscow State University

Abstract: *The article explores the multi-level channels, structural factors, and depth of political processes' influence on the mass consciousness, value orientations, and behavioral patterns of the population. At the intersection of political science, sociology, cognitive psychology, and neuroscience, the paper examines how transformations in public policy, party rhetoric, media manipulation, and the algorithmization of the digital environment shape the group identity of citizens, determine their level of institutional trust, and transform electoral activity. Special attention is paid to the macrosociological phenomenon of affective polarization and the mechanisms through which modern elites construct the image of an enemy, subordinating public interests to the tactical goals of maintaining power. The study presents and analyzes empirical data, recent international statistical trends, and models of voter behavior.*

Political Science as a Tool for Analyzing and Constructing Mass Processes

Political science is traditionally viewed not merely as an academic discipline that studies the static structures of power, sovereignty, and state administration, but as a dynamic tool for analyzing the feedback loop between state institutions and the people. In the 21st century, the nature of this interaction has undergone a fundamental, qualitative transformation.

While classical political theories of the mid-to-late 20th century (specifically the concepts of Max Weber, Gabriel Almond, and Sidney Verba) focused on the formation of a stable, continuous political culture as the foundation of stability, contemporary reality demonstrates an unprecedented plasticity and vulnerability of the masses in the face of targeted political discourse and cutting-edge communication technologies.

The influence of politics on the public today is not a one-way street of enacting and executing laws. It is a complex, networked system of symbolic exchange, legitimization, and manipulation. Investigating this influence helps answer the defining questions of our time:

Why do economic crises spark greater civic solidarity and consolidation in some societies, while causing instantaneous radicalization and social fracture in others?



How do political meanings broadcast by elites penetrate the daily life of ordinary citizens, shaping their attitudes toward neighbors, colleagues, and the state as a whole?

Understanding these mechanisms is critically important for forecasting the risks of destabilization in modern state systems.

Theoretical and Methodological Foundations: From Rational Choice to Symbolic Interactionism

To comprehensively describe how political science interprets the impact of power on the public, one must rely on several key theoretical paradigms:

Rational Choice Theory: Presumes that citizens interact with the political system as rational economic agents. Politics affects the people by shifting the "cost" of specific actions (taxes, subsidies, legal sanctions). Through this lens, the public responds to material incentives.

Political Socialization Theory: Asserts that foundational ideas about the state, justice, and legality are instilled during childhood and youth through the institutions of school, family, and mass media. The political system transmits approved values, molding a loyal citizen.

Constructivism and Symbolic Interactionism: Demonstrates that political reality is not experienced by an individual directly. It is constructed via symbols, myths, language, and narratives. The authorities influence the people by imposing a specific coordinate grid through which individuals interpret poverty, wealth, justice, war, and peace.

Channels of Political Influence on Civil Society: Macro- and Micro-Levels

The impact of the political sphere on the population is executed through a ramified system of channels, each targeting distinct layers of the human consciousness—ranging from pragmatic calculation to subconscious fears.

The Institutional Channel: Shaping Systemic Trust and Cynicism

State institutions directly dictate the material boundaries of human existence. However, beyond obvious economic and legal regulation, institutions carry a potent psychological weight. The key indicator here is the level of institutional trust.

When citizens witness that courts are independent, law enforcement protects their rights, and social elevators operate transparently, a so-called "diffuse trust" (per David Easton) develops within society. This manifests as a long-term loyalty to the system, which preserves the state from collapse even during severe crises.

Conversely, if institutions are hijacked by narrow elite groups, courts turn into instruments of retribution, and elections become an empty formality, political cynicism spreads exponentially among the population. Citizens cease to perceive the state as "theirs," triggering widespread legal nihilism, tax evasion, and social atomization. In this scenario, politics dismantles the fabric of the social contract, degrading the status of the people from active citizens to passive or aggressive subjects.

The Media-Algorithmic Channel: Constructing Perceptual Reality

In the information age, the classic assertion by political scientist Bernard Cohen—that the press may not be successful in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers **what to think about** (the agenda-setting effect)—has



escalated to a new technological tier. Modern individuals are immersed in a media ecology that entirely mediates their contact with reality.

Political actors deploy two fundamental manipulation mechanisms:

Framing: Presenting the same piece of news from different angles. For instance, raising the retirement age can be framed as "robbing the working class" or as "a necessary measure to rescue the budget system and ensure longevity." Depending on the frame, the public exhibits either protest activity or quiet acquiescence.

Priming: The preliminary conditioning of an audience. Regular news coverage of crime subconsciously primes citizens to prioritize candidates promising a hardline stance and expanded powers for law enforcement during subsequent voting, even if actual crime rates are declining.

With the advancement of neural networks and recommendation algorithms on social platforms, this influence has become hyper-targeted.

Algorithms designed to maximize user retention by leveraging baseline human emotions (primarily anger, fear, and outrage) lock individuals into informational echo chambers. Under these conditions, political discourse does not merely inform; it radicalizes viewpoints, fragmenting a once-unified population into isolated, warring subcultures.

The Ideological Channel: Transforming Values and Identity Identity is the foundational answer to the question "Who am I?". Politics actively exploits this fundamental human need to belong to a larger collective. Through a system of symbolic politics (flags, monuments, national holidays, school history curricula), elites engineer an official meta-narrative.

The most dangerous aspect of ideological influence is the "Us vs. Them" dichotomy. To mobilize the masses, political strategists frequently resort to manufacturing the image of an "external enemy" or an "internal fifth column." This mechanism appeals to the ancient, tribalistic structures of the human psyche.

When this channel operates at full capacity, critical thinking among the population is temporarily suspended: any internal socio-economic grievances (poverty, technological stagnation, crumbling public infrastructure) are rationalized as necessary sacrifices to withstand an existential threat.

Empirical Metrics and Global Statistical Trends

The impact of political processes on the masses can be precisely quantified using sociological and statistical toolkits. In recent years, political scientists, sociologists, and economists worldwide have sounded the alarm: the destructive impact of political elites on social cohesion has reached critical levels. International analytical agencies and research hubs consistently rank "societal polarization" among the top threats to global security.

Data from long-term cross-national studies track the following key parameters of this influence:

The Collapse of Institutional Trust

According to comprehensive panel surveys conducted by the Washington Center for Complexity and Social Policy (WCS) and the Pew Research Center, the aggregate level of baseline citizen trust in key state institutions (government, parliament, the judiciary) across developed nations hovers between 17% and 20%.



This implies that up to 80% of the population experiences permanent skepticism toward their own governments' decisions, providing highly combustible fuel for populist movements.

Partisan Divide as a Reality Filter

Research demonstrates that trust in objective state metrics (such as inflation rates, unemployment figures, or the integrity of vote counting) has become strictly partisan.

Metric, Citizen Orientation, Ruling Party / Coalition Supporters, Opposing Force Supporters, Maximum Gap (Δ)

Trust in Economic Data - High / Moderate (62%) - Extremely Low (24%) 38%

Trust in the Electoral System Total (78%) - Skeptical (33%) 45%

Assessment of the Country's General Direction - Positive (55%) - Catastrophic (15%) 40%

Such a massive statistical chasm proves that under the influence of political propaganda, people living within the boundaries of the same state begin to perceive two entirely distinct economic and social realities.

The Scientific Boom Around Polarization

The scale of the crisis has forced the global scientific community to redirect research budgets toward studying the impact of politics on mass consciousness. A content analysis of the Web of Science bibliometric database indicates that the total number of peer-reviewed articles published under the keywords "political polarization," "affective polarization," and "populist mobilization" has surpassed 13,300 publications. Notably, over 60% of this vast body of scientific literature was published after 2020, solidifying this issue's status as the premier challenge to modern political science.

Political Participation: A New Model of Electoral Mobilization

One of the most striking examples of political influence on the population is the transformation of voting behavior motivation.

Traditional political science leaned on a model of "positive voting": a citizen reviews party platforms, contrasts them with personal interests, and casts a ballot for the force that promises the greatest utility.

In an era of total mediatization and affective polarization, this model has yielded to negative (defensive) mobilization. Here, influence is anchored not in hope, but in fear and revulsion toward the political opponent.

The mechanics of this phenomenon are detailed extensively in the works of recent electoral researchers (notably political sociologist Josefine Klaker).

When animosity toward the opposing camp peaks, and polls indicate a dead heat between candidates (high competition), voter turnout paradoxically hits record numbers.

People march to the polling stations not because they believe in positive change or genuinely revere their candidate. The driving motive is existential anxiety: "If they win, our country, our culture, and our way of life are over." Thus, modern politics has mastered extracting utility and mobilizational resources from fracturing its own population, turning elections from a civilized contest of ideas into an emotional collision of identities.

Destructive Consequences for State and Societal Stability



When the influence of politics on the public remains predominantly manipulative and polarizing, the state apparatus inevitably faces a cluster of severe, destructive consequences that can culminate in "democratic backsliding" or institutional collapse.

Erosion of Legal Consensus and Normative Degradation

When political discourse splits society into "the righteous" (our party) and "traitors" (the opposition), citizens' commitment to foundational democratic and legal procedures erodes.

Empirical studies show that highly polarized voters are prone to approving any illegal or authoritarian actions taken by their party leaders (violating the constitution, suppressing demonstrations, censoring media, gerrymandering laws) if those actions serve to retain power and block opponents from governing. The maxim "for my friends, everything; for my enemies, the law" transforms into an accepted societal norm.

Procedural Polarization and the Loss of Election Legitimacy

As political scientist J. D. Clinton underscores, a crucial consequence of political pressure on the masses is the subversion of trust in the electoral process itself. Citizens conditioned by polarizing narratives categorically refuse to accept their party's defeat at the polls. Any loss is interpreted as the byproduct of elite conspiracies, fraud, or foreign meddling.

This leads to a chronic crisis of legitimacy for any elected administration in the eyes of half the country, paralyzing state governance and manifesting as recurring outbreaks of violence and civil unrest.

Destruction of Horizontal Social Capital

Perhaps the deepest and most intractable impact of politics on the populace occurs at the microsociological level—in everyday life. Political intolerance breaches the traditional units of society. Long-standing friendships dissolve, fractures split families apart, and trust among workplace colleagues deteriorates.

Society loses its capacity for grassroots cooperation to solve non-political tasks (local infrastructure improvements, charity, municipal self-governance). Total atomization ensues, which only facilitates further manipulation of the masses by the state.

At its current stage, political science clearly proves that public policy, institutional design, and elite rhetoric possess a colossal, almost demiurgic power capable of fundamentally mutating the psychology, values, and behavior of the masses. Armed with big data algorithms and digital media channels, this influence has turned total.

However, current trends reveal that the dominant strategies of political influence deployed by elites are mostly short-term and opportunistic, relying on the exploitation of fear, the engineering of enemies, and the deepening of social divides.

While this strategy successfully wins immediate electoral cycles, in the long run, it incinerates the social capital of states, obliterates institutional trust, and leaves nations vulnerable to massive historic challenges.

To halt the systemic degradation of societies, modern political thought and practice demand an abrupt pivot: abandoning the technologies of affective mass polarization and transitioning toward designing inclusive political institutions.



The state must shift its focus from emotional manipulation to engaging citizens in genuine, transparent decision-making processes—thereby steering public discourse away from an existential war of identities and back into the channel of rational, civilized compromise.

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