YOUTH AND POLITICS: A PRETHEORETIC MODEL

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ABSTRACT

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The paper analyzes the relationship between student orientations to politics and certain systemic variables. Its purpose is to develop a comparative framework for explaining why students in various polities behave the way they do.

The model is based upon students' views of the legitimacy of political authority and the extent to which they are aware of and involved in politics. Systemic variables identified as strongly influencing the nature of student political attitudes and behavior are: (1) the structure of the educational system, (2) the propensity of authorities to impose sanctions, and (3) the degree of congruity or incongruity between students and the political elite. On the basis of these variables we ask, under what conditions are norm or value oriented types of student movements likely to arise? The resulting model allows us to evaluate the relationship and importance of social-psychological and systemic variables as well as to view student movements comparatively.

YOUTH AND POLITICS: A PRETHEORETICAL MODEL

David J. Finlay

The burgeoning literature on the relationship of youth to politics has focused on the attitudes, opinions and beliefs of university students. Linkage between students and societal institutions have tended to be analyzed in terms of students' socio-economic backgrounds, socialization experiences and their political activism. Certainly there is much to be lauded in these studies. What has been lacking in the research, however, is a comparative framework combining social-psychological and systemic variables to explain why students in various societies behave the way they do.

It is unfortunate that the analysis of students in terms of social-psychological characteristics minimizes the fact that they are also actors in the political system. If a political system is to persist, one of its major tasks is to provide for a minimal level of support for a regime of some kind.[1] Therefore, although schools are conceived to be politically neutral, they must necessarily serve the political objective of building that minimal support. Yet political systems generally do not conceive of students as participants in politics and are dismayed when schools prove to be sources of political stimulation and contention. The mechanism through which the system attempts to build

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[1] David Easton and Jack Dennis, "The Child's Acquisition of Regime Norms: Political Efficacy," American Political Science Review, LXI, No. 1 (March, 1967), pp. 25-38.

support, such as civic education programs in the schools (political socialization), emphasize passive roles of obedience for students with some promise of future eligibility for political participation. Thus there is an inherent contradiction in education for democratic citizenship within institutions that are themselves undemocratic internally.

Where students find themselves ignored by or without participatory roles in the adult power structure, they are likely to seize the initiative in an effort to make their demands known (whether the authority in question is a particular individual, the school, the larger political community, or some other "establishment"). The result is confrontation politics between students and authority. Confrontation politics also results when students feel that authority is not acceptable or legitimate. The legitimacy orientations of students are an expression of their evaluation of the appropriateness or inappropriateness of authority, particularly a political regime. We can classify at least three possible legitimacy orientations: supportive, oppositional, and acquiescent.

To the extent that students regard authority as legitimate, they will tend to perform political roles which are supportive of or at least acquiescent to the system (even though their opposition may be activated by some particular issue such as civil rights or Vietnam). When legitimacy is not granted to authority, oppositional roles predominate among the active few, and there is a greater likelihood of more involved and serious confrontations. Of course the majority of students generally neither support nor oppose the political regime (or particular authorities) but merely acquiesce, either from ambivalent

or simply neutral attitudes toward the power structure, or from lack of ego involvement.

A student's legitimacy orientations partially determine his political activity. However, his political activity will also be a result of the degree to which he is politicized, that is, the degree to which he is politically aware and personally involved in the world of politics and government. Politicization has two dimensions: one is the perceptual dimension of awareness of government and its relevance to one's own life; the other is the behavioral dimension of political action based on perceived relevance. The behavioral dimension in conjunction with legitimacy orientation implies a direction to political perceptions and to political attitudes.

The assessment of students according to their legitimacy orientations and politicization may uncover probable sources of political stability and instability, the success or failure of political socialization and civic education, and the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of communications between students and authorities. As Daniel Goldrich has pointed out, "such a design applied to students, intellectuals and similar people approaches a reduction to practical applications of Crane Brinton's 'desertion of the intellectuals' stage of revolution, as well as placing these actors in the general process of political change."[2] We are also in a position to compare empirically "democracies" and "non-democracies" without use of implicit "good" and

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[2] Daniel Goldrich, Sons of the Establishment, (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966) p. 6.

"bad" normative assumptions concerning such systems.

In our model for analyzing youth and politics, the first elements are legitimacy orientations and levels of politicization. Put in matrix form the twelve cells represent possible behavioral roles.

FIGURE 1

A MATRIX OF POLITICIZATION
AND LEGITIMACY ORIENTATIONS

Legitimacy orientation	Politicization Level: unrelated perceptually	related perceptually, inactive	related perceptually minimal participant	related perceptually moderate participant	related perceptually high participant
Supportive			Voting discussion	Party Membership, campaign support	candidacy, Active party membership
Acquiescent			Ritual participation		
Opposed			Voting, discussion	Demonstrations, formation of parties	Riots, Rebellion, Emigration

The acquiescent student is unlikely to play a political role beyond the ritualistic ones defined by the political culture; we would not expect to find him in the moderate or highly participant cells. The politicized student whose legitimacy orientation is supportive, however, has several role possibilities depending on his level of behavioral politicization. If he is inactive, his behavior is indistinguishable from the acquiescent or opposed individual although his attitudes about legitimacy differ. Almost the same is true at the level of minimal participation, for activity will not go much beyond rituals.

The oppositionally oriented individual expresses his legitimacy orientations by abstaining from ritual participation or by expressing disapproval through minimal and "acceptable" activities such as voting. It is at the moderate and high participation levels -- where we begin to deal with the minority of students who are activitists -- that significant behavioral variations occur.

Thus far the discussion has focused primarily on the legitimacy of the political regime, but research should differentiate among regime, particular authorities (e.g., police, president, and so forth), political parties, the larger political community, school authorities and so forth. We hypothesize that as roles become more specific there is also more specificity in attitudes and attitude objects.

If a model for analyzing student political behavior is to be comparative it is necessary to specify essential systemic variables influencing behavior. Three such variables appear to be crucial: (1) the structure of the educational system, (2) the propensity of the authorities to sanction (positively or negatively)

political opposition, and (3) the degree ofcongruence between the student population and the political elite.

Structure of the educational system: An educational system may be either elitist or mass in both quantitative and qualititative terms. An elitist system is one in which the restrictiveness of the upper-levels of the educational pyramid virtually guarantees the elite status of those in institutions of higher education. An elitist system may be based upon a philosophy of education, as in Europe before the second world war (or in ex-colonial dependencies which have followed metropole patterns), or on the financial impossibility of providing wider opportunity. The careful selection process required by the elitist system means that those who survive it are virtually assured high-status roles in the society. Since students in such systems realistically expect to enter the elite they tend to identify with elite circles. The consequences of alienating oneself from the power elite are obviously very great. Presumptive elite status removes two of the most salient grounds for making political demands -- the probability of benefiting from a change in the political regime, and dissatisfaction with mobility opportunities.

The legitimacy orientations of students in elitist systems tend to be supportive of the regime even though there is no clear-cut relationship between size or rate of expansion of the student body and patterns of political behavior. The essential element behind regime support or acquiescence is the liklihood that expectations -- particularly those related to careers -- will be fulfilled. Thus the salience of oppositional activity (if not also the salience of politics itself)

is decreased.

The mass educational system, because it is more heterogeneous, contains within it greater numbers of students disposed toward political activism. A mass educational system is defined as one in which access is not restricted to those predetermined to hold elite status. Where such systems exist, a university degree is often a necessary but at times insufficient claim to an apprentice elite position. Students will tend not to identify with the existing political elite if the odds are against their joining them.

In his review of student behavior in several nations with mass educational structures, S. M. Lipset concluded that academic standards tend to be lower in mass than in elitist systems and curricula less stringent.[3] Studying under less supervision and less academic pressure, students in mass systems have more time to observe national politics and are more able to assemble in significant numbers for political activities than their counterparts in elitist systems. Thus polititics increases in saliency, particularly with increases in personal dissatisfactions. Often times the potential for oppositional behavior by students in elitist system is diminished by the physical characteristics associated with elitist education: small student bodies, residential accommodations of quality standards, close student supervision through low student-faculty ratios, tutorials, and often, geographic isolation of the campus. Academic standards are typically stringent, and the general atmosphere

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[3] S. M. Lipset, "University Students and Politics in Underdeveloped Countries," Comparative Education Review, X, No. 2 (June, 1966) pp. 132-163. See also in the same issue, S. M. Lipset and Philip G. Altbach, "Students and Politics in the United States," pp. 320-349.

encourages both submission to authority and an aloof attitude concerning non-university or school affairs.

At the qualitative level, elitist systems tend to emphasize values associated with a meritocracy and a universalistic outlook. Mass educational systems on the other hand, tend to function more like professional schools than liberal arts schools. In mass educational systems the value reference tends to be local rather than universal, the role models and objectives more specific and "practical" than in the more intellectual and tradition-oriented elite systems.

In countries where the economic infrastructure fails to keep pace with educational expansion, career opportunities are apt to be insufficient to meet the high expectations of graduates. Thus the introduction of mass education may lead to student frustration and alienation. If India is any example, the result may be a class of career students, unable and perhaps unwilling to leave the university, who are active dissidents in the political process.

We would predict that the legitimacy orientations of students in mass systems will tend to be oppositional in comparison with students in elitist systems, who have less reason not to support the system. In either elitist or mass systems, however, radical types of youth movements will tend to arise during those periods in which modernization or some other disruptive factor produces upheavals and cleavages in the body politic.

The Sanction Function: The second variable in the model is the likelihood of the political elites, or the authorities, to employ sanctions against

oppositional political activity. This variable has two interacting components: the propensity of the political authorities to punish deviant political behavior and attitudes, and the students' perception of their own vulnerability to sanctions. The combination of the two components are what we call the sanction function.

The first component, the propensity to impose sanctions, depends upon the degree to which the polity is closed, i.e., the degree to which open political competition is not allowed, and on the scope and nature of demands placed upon students to conform to standards defined by the political authorities. The system with a low propensity to sanction is usually associated with open or competitive political process, or even one party systems which are pluralistic rather than monolithic.

The second component, the sanctionability of the student, is a measure of the extent to which he believes he is vulnerable to sanctions -- that the threatened sanction (expulsion, blacklisting, detention, fines and the like) would deprive him of some present or future value. His perception of the political authorities, of the effectiveness of past sanctions against deviant political behavior, and of his own career opportunities are all relevant to the student's estimation of his sanctionability.

Where sanctions are severe or appear imminent, the salience of politics increases, and four types of adaptive responses may result: (1) increased activism, either supportive or oppositional; (2) opportunism as a means of decreasing threats and/or increasing gains; (3) acquiescence to

to assure safety; or (4) a retreat from all forms of involvement. The choice of a particular response will depend upon the student's perception of the costs and rewards involved.

What are the expected patterns of the sanction function in differing educational and political systems?

For purposes of analysis we assume that students in elitist systems are more vulnerable to sanctions than their counterparts in mass educational systems. We also assume open polities have a low propensity to sanction and that closed polities have a high propensity to impose sanctions. Theoretically, then, the following sanction functions result:

FIGURE 2

	Mass Educational System $-S_s$	Elitist Educational System $+S_s$
Open Polity: -p/s	1 $(-p/s)\ (-S_s) = -(f)\ S$	2 $(-p/s)\ (+S_s) = \overset{-}{+}(f)\ S$
Closed Polity: +p/s	3 $(+p/s)\ (-S_s) = \overset{+}{-}(f)\ S$	4 $(+p/s)\ (+S_s) = +(f)\ S$

Legend:

+ = high
- = low
p/s = propensity to sanction
S_s = sanctionality
(f) S = sanction function

The mixed sanction function that results in both cells two and three is not entirely identical, for we predict that the influence of a student's sanctionability is relatively more important than the propensity to sanction. In cell four, where the sanction function is high, students will tend to acquiesce rather than to assume oppositional roles, however disposed they might be in this direction. The costs of opposition would simply be too high. On the other hand, those who are supportive of the system have opportunities to participate in politics. Politicization at the perceptual level will be high for most students as a result of the sanction function.

Student--Elite Congruity: At least three factors must be considered in establishing degrees of congruity or incongruity between students and political elites. The first consists of the structural elements defining each group, such as similarity or differences in social backgrounds and recruitment. The second is the existence and extent of competition among elites. A more or less pluralistic elite structure tends to place competing demands upon students, and it offers them alternatives when congruity with political elites is low. On the other hand, if a single group holds the keys to mobility and students are not "sons of the establishment," their position is precarious. The third factor is the extent of shared (or opposed) attitudes, beliefs and values. It is important to consider the degree to which students identify with or oppose the political elites, for attitudinal congruity can mitigate the effects of structural incongruity.

The degree of congruity or incongruity between students and the political elite is a measure of the extent to which students identify with political elites in terms of personal and national goals and ideology. Congruity ranges, therefore, from situations in which there is high identification between students and elites, as in Britain several generations ago, to nearly total incongruity when, for example, students see themselves as superior to politicians as in Ghana before the coup d'etat in 1966.

For purposes of analysis, let us assume a simple dichotomy between (1) merely normal incongruity and (2) more than normal incongruity and combine these factors in a matrix including the sanction function, the educational structure and nature of the polity. The probable level of politicization and legitimacy orientation are indicated in each cell.

FIGURE 3

	Normal Incongruity C	More than Normal Incongruity Ø
-(f)S (open/mass)	1. -(f) S + C ⟶ normal politicization; supportive or acquiescent	2. -(f) S + Ø ⟶ high politicization; oppositional (and continuing strata of acquiescence)
±(f) S (open/elitist)	3. ±(f) S + C ⟶ low to normal politicization, supportive or acquiescent	4. ±(f) S + Ø ⟶ low politicization levels for acquiescent; high levels for oppositional; decrease in supportive
±(f) S (closed/mass)	5. ±(f) S + C ⟶ low for ritually supportive or acquiescent; high for supportive and high but sporadic for oppositional.	6. ±(f) S + Ø ⟶ behavioral level of politicization kinked; acquiescent & minimally active oppositional predominate but sporadically available for high-active oppositional
+(f) S (closed/elitist)	7. +(f) S + C ⟶ low for ritually supportive or acquiescent; high for supportive; no active opposition	8. +(f) S + Ø ⟶ low levels of ritual support; most will move into inactive opposition

Legend:

C = Normal Incongruity
Ø = More than Normal Incongruity
- = Low
+ = high
(f)S = Sanction Function

We may also present the model as a set of tentative hypotheses about student roles, given the three systemic variables.

I. In a mass educational system with a low sanction function, student politicization will be acquiescent or supportive in the minimal or moderate activity ranges if elite congruity is at the moderate-to-high end of a continuum.

I.a If, however, elite-student congruity is low for significant proportions of the student population, supportive orientations will be less frequent and oppostional orientations will increase and will be directed against the regime.

II. In a mass educational system in a closed political system with a high propensity to sanction (but with the sanction function still low), if student-elite congruity is high, participation will be largely ritually supportive or acquiescent, oppositional activity will be more sporadic than sustained and will be at a higher participation level when it does occur, i.e., there will be fewer attempts to form political parties but demonstrations and riots will occur involving larger numbers than in I.a.

II.a If student-political elite congruity is low, supportive orientations at any level of participation will largely disappear as students move into acquiescence and increasingly sporadic opposition. Oppositional politicization is at its height in this category with the largest number in the perceptually-related but minimally-

participant category. The discussion stage of oppositional politics will be at a sustained level and occupants of this cell will be available for sporadic opposition at higher activity levels initiated by the highly politicized participants. It is this cell of the model that provides instances of student riots that precipitate government or regime change in developing countries.

III. In an elitist educational system in an open polity (i.e., low sanction function due to low p/s), if student-political elite congruence is high, the politicization distribution will be normal and legitimacy orientations will be supportive.

III.a If, however, student-political elite congruence is low, legitimacy orientations will shift to ambivalence or opposition and levels of politicization will correspondingly depart from normal as the ambivalent take refuge in inactivity and the opposed become more active.

IV. In an elitist education system in a closed polity where the sanction function is at high levels, if student-political elite congruence is high, legitimacy orientations will be supportive and politicization levels will skew toward higher participation, particularly if a mobilization system demands overt manifestations of support.

IV.a If, however, elite-student congruence is low, legitimacy orientations will again move into the ambivalent or opposed

categories but activity will diminish to inactivity or minimal activity. The high sanction function combined with the careerist-orientation of elitist students will severely mitigate overt opposition at any level.

Given the possible combinations of these three systemic variables, what kinds of situations are conducive to student activism in politics? What conditions determine whether student activism will be directed mainly against the authority structures of society or whether it will be expressed through traditional affiliations with status quo political parties or social fraternities?

In approaching these questions it is necessary to differentiate two types of student movements. First are those student organizations which are norm-oriented, that is, interested in affecting particular norms or means to attain agreed upon social values. Typically such student movements are concerned primarily with particular issues such as student rights, university reform, or a particular government policy. These movements tend to be transitory. Periods of intense activism on specific issues are often followed by a sharp decline in activity once that issue has declined in salience. A second type of student movement is value-oriented, that is, concerned with ultimate ends or basic conceptions about social institutions. Value-oriented movements tend to press for more extreme and ideological programs than do norm-oriented groups. When norm-oriented movements head in the direction of value orientation, a split usually develops between leaders who tend to be

interested in totalistic changes and their followers whose objectives are usually limited to the issue which gave rise to the movement. Thus what looked like a mass movement in its normative phase may become a radical sect in its value-oriented stage.

Norm-oriented student movements tend to arise in either elitist or mass systems when there is low congruity between students and elites and a low propensity to sanction by authorities. The low sanction function enhances the probabilities of successfully resolving particular issues, and with success, militancy declines (unless, of course, the cleavages are so great that success breeds more sweeping demands). Value -oriented student movements tend to develop where congruity between students and elites is low and where a high propensity to sanction exists. The high sanction function minimizes opportunity for activism and alienates students. Thus, for those who are highly politicized, radicalism is virtually the only available alternative to acquiescence, and it is the highly politicized students who are affiliated with value-oriented movements. Movements concerned with value change tend to be more prevalent in developing countries whereas norm-oriented are typically found in developed nations.

Conclusion:

In this paper we have attempted to outline the parameters of a model incorporating both attitudinal and system variables crucial to an understanding of student political activity. However, before the model can be put into operational form, relationships must be clarified and specified. Likewise it

is necessary to establish the empirical relevance of the parameters and assumptions through secondary analysis of existing data. A partial step in this direction has been taken through utilization of a case study analysis of University of Ghana students.[4] A comparative analysis of students in Ghana and in Kenya is now in progress. Our goal is to establish an empirically based theory to guide and explain further research on students and politics.

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4 David J. Finlay, Roberta E. Koplin and Charles Ballard, Jr., "University and Polity," in Donald K. Emmerson (ed.), Students and Polities in Developing Nations, (forthcoming, Praeger).

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