

ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL DISCONTENT AND POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

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Abstract: This article analyzes social discontent and political movements from an anthropological perspective. It explores the causes of discontent emerging in society, how it shapes individual and group consciousness, and how it influences political movements. Additionally, the article examines the forms of discontent and mechanisms of movements within various cultural and social environments. By applying analytical methods at the intersection of anthropology and political science, the author highlights the role of human consciousness, traditions, and group interests in the process of social change. The article contributes to a broader understanding of how political activism and collective movements manifest within a wider social context.

Keywords: social discontent, political movements, anthropology, culture, group consciousness, social change, active citizenship.

INTRODUCTION

Social discontent reflects the attitudes of individuals and groups who are dissatisfied with various aspects and sectors of society. The study of social discontent is grounded in theories of collective behavior, relative deprivation, social movements, and social networks. These theories examine social discontent through different approaches. Utilizing diverse foundations and methods in this research allows for a broader understanding of the processes through which social discontent forms, leading to political mobilization and shifts in societal order.

The theory of collective behavior, which emerged in the early 20th century, attributes collective movements to spontaneous actions driven by emotional reactions among people. According to this theory, social processes appear as spontaneously occurring phenomena and are not necessarily determined by social structures. As social discontent intensifies, rebellious groups emerge through patterns of individual interaction and influence.

Gustave Le Bon believed that when a person joins a crowd, their behavior becomes dominated by irrationality and aggression. Immersed in a crowd, individuals lose their sense of self and responsibility, relying on anonymity and invisibility to justify acts of violence. In such contexts, critical reasoning is overridden by emotional

influence and a herd mentality. Individuals in crowds may become inclined toward destructive behavior, guided by primitive instincts and irrational beliefs.

Psychological tension within society creates favorable conditions for the activity of radical social groups and marginalized individuals. Le Bon, building on Neil Smelser's theory, argued that emerging social changes may lead to various degrees of tension or conflict within certain key aspects of social order. Normative tension arises when existing norms conflict with emerging values, particularly under conditions of societal change. Tension also emerges when societal values hinder the satisfaction of essential needs for specific segments of the population.

According to Neil Joseph Smelser (1930–2017), social tension that triggers social movements stimulates a range of structural changes. Structural openness leads people to believe in the existence of serious problems within society. Structural disruptions motivate socially deprived individuals to take action. As the scope of perceived problems expands, efforts to find solutions intensify.

Typically, a spark or triggering event is required for an outbreak of discontent to transform into a social movement. At the same time, weakened social control opens the possibility for efforts aimed at changing or reorganizing the current state of affairs [Smelser, 1965].

RESEARCH DISCUSSION

Within the framework of collective behavior theory, Richard Turner and Lewis M. Killian proposed the concept of norm emergence. According to this concept, individuals evaluate their actions based on behavioral norms and the prevailing opinions of those around them. However, in situations of social discontent and uncertainty, the deviant behavior of certain individuals can become normative for the entire social group. Each group develops its own behavioral models.

The formation of behavioral norms is less influenced by the homogeneity or conformity of the group and more by the social roles played by leaders and their followers. Today, the manifestation of social discontent is no longer attributed to spontaneous asocial reactions but is increasingly explained by deliberate, conscious actions.

Sidney Tarrow further developed ideas related to the theory of collective behavior. He used these ideas to explain the rise and fall of social movements, and to identify the strength of mutual influences based on cultural, organizational, and individual resources. The dynamics of social movements are shown to be linked to changes in the structure of political opportunities. Tarrow identifies deprivation, the availability of resources, cultural boundaries, and political struggles as primary reasons for initiating collective action. In an environment of social discontent, organized and goal-oriented collective movements that persist over time evolve into social movements.

The concept of relative deprivation arises from discrepancies between personal aspirations and actual or desired conditions. A key point of this theory is that people are motivated to act based on feelings of deprivation, inequality, and unfulfilled hopes. Individuals compare themselves to others who hold higher social status or have access to power and economic resources, and they desire upward mobility. Discontent and hopelessness drive people to engage in mass action. Notably, discontent may not only arise during economic hardship but also when rising expectations outpace actual opportunities. People's feelings toward their social conditions are influenced not only by reality but also by subjective satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and by comparisons with others.

Unique aspects of the deprivation concept are also found in the works of Alexis de Tocqueville. He observed a correlation: the higher the level of economic prosperity, the faster old regimes and laws disappear, leading to political liberalization and the intensification of revolutionary sentiments. During periods of economic growth, citizens' material well-being may increase, but their general mood may become more anxious and less content. As the need to change social order increases, social discontent deepens, hatred toward outdated institutions intensifies, and revolutionary conditions emerge.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Basic Principles of the Concept of Relative Deprivation

The basic principles of the concept of relative deprivation were first formulated by Samuel Andrew Stouffer. According to him, deprivation manifests only under specific conditions:

- (a) The individual possesses certain knowledge about the system of social advancement, mobility, or rewards;
- (b) The individual does not receive the benefits he or she expected;
- (c) These expectations are evaluated by comparing the individual's own situation, contribution, and reward with those of many peers belonging to a referent (interested) group;
- (d) The individual experiences a sense of injustice, which is reflected in criticism of the mobility system.

Walter Runciman's Theory

Walter Runciman, in turn, offered one of the earliest formal definitions of relative deprivation and outlined four necessary conditions for the intensification of discontent:

1. A person lacks something;
2. This person is aware that others possess that thing;
3. The person desires to obtain it;
4. The person believes they have reasonable opportunities to obtain it.

Runciman distinguished between two types of deprivation:

1. *Egoistic relative deprivation* – arises when a person feels they are being treated unfairly in comparison with others;
2. *Fraternal relative deprivation* – emerges in connection with the collective actions of large social groups. [Runciman, 1967]

Davies's J-Curve Hypothesis

Researchers have tried to explain the reasons behind intensifying dissatisfaction using Davies's *J-curve hypothesis*. According to this hypothesis, revolutionary events occur when a period of long-term socio-economic growth is suddenly followed by a sharp decline.

During economic crises, people's satisfaction with the current situation declines rapidly, while their hopes for improvement continue to rise. A sharp disparity between hopes and actual satisfaction leads to revolution. [Davies, 1962] The logic of this hypothesis is reflected in several assumptions of the relative deprivation theory.

Although there may be clear signs of growing social discontent in real life, these processes often remain latent and are not perceived by society as systematic or deliberate phenomena. When discontent in society becomes excessive, the psychophysiological states of social groups reach their limits, leading to the expansion and regularization of social conflicts. As a result, dissatisfaction begins to manifest openly.

At this stage, discontent does not appear as an independent process but rather as a characteristic of social imbalance. It is often expressed in the form of mass protests, civil disobedience, regular strikes, and other informal forms of civic activity.

Overall, the review of foreign research on social discontent provides insights into the theoretical foundations of this phenomenon. The formation of negative sentiments in society is viewed as a multifactorial process influenced by various political, economic, and social determinants. The causes of rising discontent are often seen as the result of government policies, ineffective governance, and unpopular decisions by the authorities.

One important factor in the formation of social discontent is the expansion of digital communication environments. Social media platforms disseminate information that encourages dissatisfaction, which then spreads across various communication channels. "Angry citizen" communities emerge, eventually turning into platforms for organizing collective actions.

CONCLUSION

The anthropological examination of social discontent and political movements reveals that dissatisfaction within society is deeply rooted in cultural, symbolic, and social frameworks that shape human behavior. Discontent is not merely a response to material deprivation or political exclusion but is profoundly influenced by collective identities, historical memory, normative expectations, and the interplay between

tradition and change. Political movements emerge as both expressions and instruments of this discontent, reflecting the lived experiences, aspirations, and grievances of diverse social groups.

Through an interdisciplinary lens that bridges anthropology and political science, this study underscores the importance of understanding political activism as a culturally embedded phenomenon. Movements do not occur in isolation; they are shaped by narratives, rituals, and shared meanings that give coherence to collective action. The anthropological perspective thus provides a critical contribution to decoding the symbolic dimensions of protest, the moral foundations of resistance, and the social mechanisms through which movements gain momentum and legitimacy.

Ultimately, this analysis enriches our understanding of social transformation by illustrating how political movements are grounded in the human pursuit of meaning, justice, and belonging. Recognizing the cultural and emotional substrates of discontent enables a more nuanced approach to studying both the causes and consequences of collective mobilization across societies.

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5. Смелзер Н. Социология// https://scepssis.net/library/id_580.html.
6. Deprivation (Lat. *deprivatio* — loss, being deprived).
7. Social determinism (Lat. *determinare* — to determine, to define).
8. Pattern (Eng. *pattern* — model, example, template).
9. Irrational behavior — actions driven by emotions and instincts that do not align with logic.