

This Week's Citation Classic®

CC/NUMBER 26
JUNE 30, 1986

Lipset S M. *Political man: the social bases of politics.*

Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960. 432 p.

[Department of Sociology and Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA]

Political Man deals with democracy as a characteristic of social systems. The principal topics are: the conditions necessary for democracy in societies and organizations; the factors that affect participation in politics, particularly the behavior of voters; and the sources of support for values and movements that sustain or threaten democratic institutions. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicates that all editions of this book have been explicitly cited in over 1,410 publications.]

Seymour Martin Lipset
Departments of Political Science
and Sociology
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305

May 20, 1986

The genesis of *Political Man* was a series of projects commissioned by Bernard Berelson, of the Ford Foundation, to inventory knowledge in the social sciences. I chaired a group at Columbia University that included Richard Hofstadter, Herbert Hyman, and David Truman, which took on the task for the political behavior area. After a number of false starts, we decided that integrated analyses of the research literature would be more useful. Our project ultimately resulted in three books: *Political Socialization* by Hyman (1959),¹ *The Politics of Mass Society* by William Kornhauser,² and *Political Man* (1960).

The materials that went into *Political Man* were first assembled in an 800-page draft manuscript, which I wrote, mainly during 1955-1956—a year spent as a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. Juan Linz, then writing his dissertation with me, and I read through a mass of research literature. (Linz is not only a fantastic bibliophile, but he knows fluently the major European languages.)

The task I took on was an analysis of the social bases of political cleavage, that is, the factors that differentiate electorates in all democratic countries. This led to a focus on social class or socioeconomic differences, followed by an effort to analyze the other substantive variables that modify the impact of hierarchically based conflicts, e.g., education, religion, ethnicity, gender, regional variations, center-periphery differences, generation, and age. Many of these could be subsumed under the concept of stratification, since

they vary in terms of ranking on the power and status dimensions.

I continued to work on the manuscript at Berkeley the following year. I was somewhat dissatisfied with what appeared to me to be an overly simplistic principle of integration and tried other approaches. At the suggestion of another graduate research student, Amitai Etzioni, I decided to break the long manuscript into a series of articles. This was done during the next few years with the assistance of Etzioni and, later, Robert Alford.

Nathan Glazer, then the social science editor at Doubleday, read some of these papers and suggested that I weave them into a book. Thus, the process went full circle from book-length manuscript to discrete articles to book.

I believe the reason the book was so well received when it appeared was that it pointed up the existence of an international research community in political sociology that was producing works that cumulated intellectually. Although the published work focused on political behavior within different countries, much of it bore on the same set of theories and hypotheses. And where the results differed from one country to another, the variations led to an awareness of structural variables that would not have been noted within a purely national or contemporary framework.

The book's reception was beyond all my expectations. It received the MacIver Prize in 1962, and more recently it was one of a small number of books discussed as "social science classics" in articles in the (London) *Times Higher Education Supplement*.³ I am not sure how many copies have been sold, but the total is well over 250,000 in the US. The work has appeared in two other separate English-language editions and has been translated into 14 other languages. It is still in print in most of these editions, and a recent edition⁴ includes a new 120-page section that both incorporates the relevant research of the intervening 20 years and reacts to critical evaluation.

The explanation for the book's high ranking on the list of the most-cited works rests on its wide availability in many languages and the fact that it has proven relevant to work in three disciplines: history, political science, and sociology. In particular, my treatment of the social conditions for democracy; working-class authoritarianism; fascism—left, right, and center; and the end of ideology have given rise to considerable follow-up research and/or controversy. Among my subsequent books, two are particularly relevant as follow ups, *Revolution and Counterrevolution*⁵ and *Consensus and Conflict*.⁶

1. Hyman H. *Political socialization*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959. 175 p. (Cited 305 times.)

2. Kornhauser W. *The politics of mass society*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959. 256 p. (Cited 490 times.)

3. Kavanaugh D. Original testament to a liberal democracy. *Times High. Educ. Suppl.* 5 July 1985. p. 16.

4. Lipset S M. *Political man: the social bases of politics*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981. 586 p.

5., *Revolution and counterrevolution*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1970. 416 p.

6., *Consensus and conflict: essays in political sociology*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1985. 375 p.

1-14