

## Anthropology and the Political Process

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**Abstract.** — *The comparative thrust of anthropology elicits insights into the nature of the political process as it occurs in different societies. The political system is differentiated from the political process in that the former is a subsystem within a particular society whose composition is shaped by and geared to the manner in which the society is organized and the level of technological development. The political process, on the other hand, arises from the universal existence in human societies of resources both material and symbolic that, by virtue of their scarcity defined in terms of the society's values and the necessity of deciding how to allocate such resources, generates responses on the part of individuals in the society as members of corporate groups to attempt to command as large a portion of these resources as possible for themselves. Such political activity results in a continuing process of segmentation, competition, and conflict within and among groups of individuals as issues arise with regard to the allocation of the scarce resources. Political decision makers derive power from the corporate groups in the society as these groups seek to the best of their ability to influence the way scarce resources are allocated by giving or withholding the support necessary for the political leaders to remain in office. The political order within which power and authority is distributed is perceived to be correct on the part of the populace insofar as it corresponds to their ideas of what that order should be, that is, if the "fit" between what is experienced and what is perceived to be the ideal arrangements, commonly validated on the level of the cosmological beliefs adhered to by the people, is not greatly at variance.*

An understanding of the political process is a matter of considerable moment to anthropologists. While the establishment of typologies of the various political systems found in human societies may have some limited utility, it seems that of vastly greater importance is the delineation of the essential relationships that exist between the various political structures in a given system together with the universal features of the political process —

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