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Structural analysis in the social sciences 4

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*University of Minnesota*



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Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1990

First published 1990  
First paperback edition 1994

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.*

*A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.*

ISBN 0-521-37552-5 hardback  
ISBN 0-521-47762-X paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2003

Cambridge University Press  
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To Roberta and Kathryn

## Contents

List of tables and figures	viii
Preface	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
1 Politics in structural perspective	1
2 Voting and political participation	29
3 Social movements ( <i>written with Nancy Wisely</i> )	57
4 Organizational power ( <i>written with Naomi J. Kaufman</i> )	85
5 Community power structures	119
6 Elites in the nation state	149
7 International relations ( <i>written with Jodi Burmeister-May</i> )	175
8 Toward a structural political economy	203
Appendix: Some fundamentals of network analysis	235
References	241
Index	283

## *Tables and figures*

### *Tables*

2.1 Characteristics of ego political networks	51
2.2 Multiple classification analyses of political activities by ego networks: deviations from dependent variable means	53
7.1 Exports among twelve nations in 1980	188
7.2 Military and political treaties (1980)	197
7.3 Block images for trade and treaty relations	200
8.1 Micro-structural to macro-structural relations	204

### *Figures*

1.1 Types of power as combinations of influence and domination	5
2.1 Three hypothetical ego networks	40
2.2 Hypothetical egocentric networks of varying political form and content	49
4.1 Hierarchical authority structure in a department store	92
4.2 Informal communication structure in a department store	94
5.1 Condensed digraph of elite informal social relations in Altneustadt	131
5.2 Community affairs discussion network in Altneustadt, smallest space analysis	132
5.3 Hypothetical oppositional models	135
5.4 Ideal types of brokerage roles	145
6.1 Communication distances among fourteen labor policy clusters	166
6.2 Legislative event collective actors in U.S. labor policy domain	170
7.1 Spatial distances in world system of trade and treaty relations	198
A.1 Directed-graph and matrix representations of hypothetical political discussion network	237

## *Preface*

Structural analysis in its contemporary form is less than two decades old. In that time it has matured from an intellectual social movement to an established specialty spanning several traditional disciplines. Steadily expanding literatures employing the network perspective on social behavior have accumulated. A set of interdisciplinary journals and regular professional meetings in the United States and Europe provide the critical mass to sustain this collective enterprise. Several generations of scholars are concurrently consolidating theoretical and empirical research advances using sophisticated structural analysis concepts, data, and principles. The aim of this book is to enhance the appreciation of structural analysis for improving our knowledge of political phenomena at all levels from primary groups to the world system. The primary audience is other serious scholars who study power with various intellectual tools. We do not assume a great familiarity with sophisticated mathematical techniques, although a brief appendix of technical terms is provided. Rather, we seek to convince our readers at the conceptual level of comprehension and leave to their own discretion how much quantitative depth they wish to acquire from numerous network methodology primers. By making detailed examinations of the roots of structural analysis, its ties to and divergences from alternative theoretical and methodological perspectives, and its contributions to political research, my coauthors and I hope to persuade the members of a wider intellectual community that the network approach to power has much to offer them.

Each substantive chapter focuses on key relational dimensions of political power in a different social institution. After presenting existing alternative approaches, we show how structural principles can be applied to illuminate unexplained features of the phenomena. Recent empirical research writings are reviewed for contributions, and some illustrative analyses of previously unpublished data are presented to demonstrate the power of network power analysis. “Looking Forward” sections at the end of each chapter offer agendas for theory construction and research projects that could make significant contributions to knowledge. Our hope is that both old hands and new converts to the structural analysis perspective will



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x      *Preface*

pursue these topics and others of their own devising, thereby advancing the frontiers of our collective understanding.

*University of Minnesota*  
*August 1989*

Cambridge University Press

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## *Acknowledgments*

Anyone who analyzes structural relations for a living realizes how much we owe to other people for ideas, inspiration, and support. This book is no exception, as I have acquired over the years a large network of colleagues who have shaped my perceptions of social theory and research. I have benefited in multiple ways from their advice, papers, articles, book reviews, conference sessions, editorial work, research assistance, data and computer programs, collaboration, criticism, encouragement, and emotional support. I hope I have reciprocated, if not in kind, then in complement. I have never attempted to diagram my egocentric intellectual network for fear that the ramifying threads beyond the first-order zone would be a tangled, indecipherable web. So out of expedience, I merely list here all the direct contacts that I can recall over the years who contributed in some form or another to my development as a network scholar. I praise them all for their unstinting efforts to raise the standards of scholarship to new heights: Mark Abrahamson, Howard Aldrich, Duane Alwin, Steve Berkowitz, Lawrence Bobo, Richard Braungart, Frank Burleigh, Jodi Burmeister-May, Paul Burstein, Ronald Burt, Elisabeth Clemens, James Coleman, Hilda Daniels, James Davis, Bonnie Erickson, Harmut Esser, Roberto Fernandez, William Form, Joseph Galaskiewicz, Mark Granovetter, Miguel Guilarte, Thomas Guterböck, Robert Huckfeldt, Hans Hummell, Naomi J. Kaufman, Arne Kalleberg, Edward Kick, Young-Hak Kim, Bert Klandermans, James Kuklinski, Edward Laumann, Joel Levine, Doug McAdam, Bernard McMullan, J. Miller McPherson, Peter Marsden, Joanne Miller, Nicholas Mullins, Norman Nie, Franz Pappi, Bernice Pescosolido, Walter Powell, David Prensky, Larry Raffalovich, David Rogers, Kay Lehman Schlozman, Thomas Scott, W. Richard Scott, Thomas Smith, Lynn Smith-Lovin, Wolfgang Sodeur, Joe Spaeth, Susan Stephens, Frans Stokman, Sheldon Stryker, Ad Teulings, Michael Useem, Jan van den Bos, Sidney Verba, Stanley Wasserman, David Whetten, Barry Wellman, Douglas White, Harrison White, Robert White, Nancy Wisely, James Wood, Christine Wright-Isak and many anonymous referees and reviewers. I also thank the following organizations for providing financial support and facilities at various data collection, analysis, and writing phases of projects reported herein: the National Science Foundation,

xii *Acknowledgments*

the National Institute of Mental Health, the Russell Sage Foundation, the Fulbright Commission, the General Social Survey at the National Opinion Research Center, the University of Chicago, Indiana University, the University of Minnesota, Christian Albrechts Universitaet zu Kiel, and the Cambridge University Press. Finally, but far from least, the continuing bonds with Joann and Margaret are inseparable from the quality of work and love.

Grateful acknowledgment is made for permission to reprint the following quotations:

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From Mark Granovetter, 1985. "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness." *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 91, permission granted by the University of Chicago Press.

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From Edward O. Laumann, David Knoke, and Yong-Hak Kim, 1985. "An Organizational Approach to State Policymaking: A Comparative Study of Energy

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xiii

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xiv     *Acknowledgments*

- From David Knoke, 1983. "Organization Sponsorship and Influence Reputation of Social Influence Associations." *Social Forces*, Vol. 61, permission granted by University of North Carolina Press.
- From Norman Schofield and James Alt, 1983. "The Analysis of Relations in an Organization." *Quality and Quantity*, Vol. 17, permission granted by Elsevier Science Publishing Co., Inc.
- From Roger V. Gould and Roberto M. Fernandez, 1987. "Structures of Mediation: A Formal Approach to Brokerage in Transaction Networks." Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona, Department of Sociology, permission granted by Roberto M. Fernandez.