

1 *Politics in structural perspective*

Almost all political analysts are unwitting structuralists, because they define social power primarily in relational terms. Power is not a property or attribute that is inherent in an individual or group in the way that an electrical battery stores so many volts of energy. Rather, power is an aspect of the actual or potential interaction between two or more social actors. (*Actor* is a generic term for a unitary social entity, whether an individual person or a larger collectivity, such as a corporation or a nation state.) Most formal definitions of social power explicitly indicate this relational dimension. For example, Bertrand Russell wrote of power as “the production of intended effects” (Russell, 1938: 25), which Wrong modified to “the capacity of some persons to produce intended and foreseen effects on others” (Wrong, 1979: 2). Similarly, Max Weber’s two famous definitions of power (*Macht*) underscored the coercive aspect of relationships between two or more actors:

‘Power’ is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests. (Weber, 1947: 152)

We understand by ‘power’ the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action. (Weber, 1968: 962)

Note that Weber allowed for opposition to a power wielder’s intended efforts, but he did not require it (“despite resistance” and “even against the resistance”). That is, although force is the ultimate foundation in any power relation, in many situations one actor may comply voluntarily, even eagerly, with the will of another. Assent or consent to commands characterizes many exercises of power. Weber called this subjective acceptance

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with which the ruled obey their commanders *Herrschaft*, variously translated from German as “domination,” “imperative coordination,” or “legitimate authority” (Bendix, 1960: 291–92; Weber, 1947: 152, 328ff.). Whether carried out with force, acquiescence, or enthusiasm, the exercise of social power in its various forms inevitably requires interaction among several social actors. Indeed, how any credible conceptualization of power could be cast in absolutely quantitative terms is impossible to imagine.

Three contemporary treatments of power each echoed the Weberian theme of overcoming potential opposition within a relationship. Herbert Simon wrote of actors’ causal intentions: “The statement ‘A has power over B’ is equivalent to the statement that ‘A causes B’s behavior’” (Simon, 1957: 5). Robert Dahl expressed his “intuitive idea” of power as “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do” (1957: 202–3). And Richard Emerson stated an exchange-oriented definition: “The power of actor A over actor B is the amount of resistance on the part of B which can be potentially overcome by A” (Emerson, 1962: 32). In these and many similar definitions two themes recur; power is a relationship of one social actor to another and it is specific to a situation. Power enjoyed on one occasion may not be transferable to other sets of conditions. To take a clear if trivial instance, a policeman who has just been turned down for an automobile loan can turn around and arrest the bank officer for overdue parking tickets. (A more interesting interaction would be the patrolman’s agreement to fix the banker’s tickets in return for the loan. The potential power obligations would be quite illuminating.)

Because power is inherently situational, it is dynamic and potentially unstable. Force, violence, and coercion aside, voluntary compliance may fluctuate markedly over time, even reversing itself dramatically among the same set of actors. A corporation’s promotion of an underling to a managerial position routinely alters the power relations between the new executive and his former peers. At times, such power shifts can greatly disrupt work routines and decrease productivity, for example, when women become the bosses of men (Kanter, 1977: 206–42; see also the movie *9 to 5*, in which Dolly Parton, Lily Tomlin, and Jane Fonda prove more adept than their chauvinistic male supervisor at running the office). If relational power is a situation-specific continuum – with a probability ranging from zero to one that an actor’s command will be obeyed by another – then it waxes and wanes in response both to the various characteristics of actors in power relationships and to external circumstances in which their relationships are embedded. Much political analysis is concerned with trying to uncover the variables that systematically explain changes in the temporal magnitudes of power relations.

Fundamental forms of power

Power relationships are asymmetrical actual or potential interactions in which one social actor exerts greater control over another's behavior. But, such generic definitions reveal little about the forms that power relations may take in social life. Many typologies classify the varieties of power (e.g., French and Raven, 1959; Parsons, 1963; Gamson, 1968; Wrong, 1979) and it may be presumptuous to construct yet another. However, some scheme is necessary to order the diversity of political relations. The one presented here specifies all power relationships as combinations of two fundamental dimensions: influence and domination.

Influence occurs when one actor intentionally transmits information to another that alters the latter's actions from what would have occurred without that information (see Gamson, 1968: 60; Parsons, 1963). Influence operates by providing information that changes an actor's perception of the connection between an action and its consequences. Influence is a relational dimension of power because a communication channel must exist between influencer and influencee. To be effective, the target of influence must believe the information to be credible and/or the source to be trustworthy. For example, a physician who advises a patient to avoid a heart attack by giving up smoking and taking up jogging can be said to exercise influence if the patient accepts the recommendation and complies with the advice. The basis of the doctor's influence resides in his expert knowledge of medical matters that the patient finds credible. Similarly, a mayor may persuade her electorate to pass a tax levy because she possesses data about the projected revenue and expenditure needs of the municipal service bureaus. Again, her influence over the voters stems from providing them with information that changes their views of the fiscal situation.

Influence is possible only when communication occurs between social actors; one actor must transmit a message to another, and the second actor must receive, decode, interpret, and react to that message. Rebuttal and counterargument may ensue before final resolution and compliance are reached. This intersubjective aspect of political influence requires that meaningful communication channels be established and maintained among actors. Not only must actors speak a common formal language, but they must share connotative understandings of words and symbols used in political discourse – freedom, equality, justice, peace, country, flag, prosperity. Influence is possible only if perceptions of situations can be framed in ways that are compelling to audiences. The rhetoric of political communication is effective if a reasonable level of agreement about terms and their meanings can be sustained among citizens. When the expression of desires and intentions is distorted as it passes through communication

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devices, the political community breaks down: "Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities" (Arendt, 1958: 200). Influence thus originates in communication structures that link a set of disparate social actors into a genuine community of political discourse. Small wonder that totalitarian regimes first seek to monopolize the means of communication, then to empty the language of all meaningful distinctions, so that war becomes peace, slavery means freedom, and hate is love.

The second fundamental form of power, *domination*, is a relationship in which one actor controls the behavior of another actor by offering or withholding some benefit or harm. In other words, one actor promises or actually delivers a *sanction* (reward or punishment) to an actor in order to gain compliance with commands. Sanctions may be physical events (a salary increase, a new highway, execution at sunrise), but may also involve primarily intangible symbols (a redesigned flag, a benediction, ridicule on the editorial page). Obviously, domination can occur only if the dominee is responsive to the sanction. Even the threat of death may be ineffective in gaining compliance, as in the case of religious and political martyrs. Domination is clearly relational, because it involves one actor exchanging some valued (or abhorred) resource for obedience by another actor.

To use the municipal example again, the mayor dominates her city council when she awards public works contracts to the friends of those council members who support her policies. The classic urban party machines were clearly systems of domination, relying on both rewards and punishments to keep their entourages in line (see further analysis of patron-client relations in Chapter 5). Attempts to dominate in international relations occur often, for example, the Ayatollah Khomeini's threat to sink Persian Gulf oil tankers straying inside his unilateral restriction zone. As with an influence relationship, domination persists only while the dominator's capacity to deliver the promised sanctions are believed to be credible. Note that positive and negative sanctions are asymmetrical in their potency. A promised reward ultimately must be delivered to assure continued compliance. But, a threatened harm need not be carried out so long as the dominee complies with the dominator's commands (Oliver, 1980; Laumann and Knoke, 1987: 153–62). As in poker, however, calling one's political bluff is not unknown.

In every domination relationship the potential for truly evil uses of power inevitably lurks: might, force, coercion, manipulation, violence. The exertion of will by one actor implies the subordination, however apparently willing, of other actors. The capacity to realize one's interests through the application of rewards and punishments is always a temptation for unscrupulous actors to serve their private rather than collective purposes. Whether justified as benefiting the fatherland, racial purity, or the revolutionary proletariat, power relations that originate in domination always risk

the destruction of the political community by turning some actors from subjects into mere objects for the achievement of others' desires. The dramatic histories of all nations are replete with horror stories of domination that degenerated into slavery and slaughter. Carried to such extremes, naked forms of domination may be ultimately self-limiting. At some unclear point, resistance to domination is sparked, revolt erupts, and a reconstitution of social power on a more equitable basis will be sought by the oppressed. Superior-subordinate relations rest on precarious foundations: "Ruling classes do not justify their power exclusively by *de facto* possession of it, but try to find a moral and legal basis for it" (Mosca, 1939: 70). Hence, the pure process of domination is usually accompanied by appeals to other grounds for obedience – religious, ethical, or ideological.

Influence and domination are not mutually exclusive processes within a power relation. Indeed, both dimensions comprise a mixed strategy in many real situations. Fig. 1.1 suggests schematically how these two dimensions can accommodate four pure types of power. Although shown and discussed here for convenience as dichotomies, influence and domination should be conceived as continuous concepts varying from entirely absent to present in increasing magnitudes. Strictly speaking, *egalitarian power* is not a form of power at all, because neither actor possesses means to control the other's behavior. Clearly, actors who lack any direct or indirect connection with one another stand in an egalitarian, if vacuous, relationship. *Coercive power*, otherwise known as force and violence, depends solely on threats and applications of negative sanctions. It is not accompanied by information that convinces the recipient of the rightness of the dominator's action. Indeed, coercion requires no acceptance by its victims. Brute force in prisons, concentration camps, invasions, and Kissingerian realpolitik

		INFLUENCE	
		Absent	Present
DOMINATION	Present	Coercive Power	Authoritative Power
	Absent	Egalitarian "Power"	Persuasive Power

Figure 1.1 Types of power as combinations of influence and domination.

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exemplify unadorned coercion. In contrast, *persuasive power* relies only on the informational content of messages, with no ability to invoke sanctions for refusals to comply. Television advertising in electoral campaigns is almost a pure case; media consultants cannot even control people's ability to switch off their sets!

When influence and domination occur simultaneously, power relations take the form of *authoritative power*. Its essence is the issuing of a command with the expectation of uncontested obedience by the recipient (Wrong, 1979: 35). The source of the command rather than its content induces compliance with orders. Although voluntary compliance may be secured at low cost by providing information that appeals to an order-taker's self-interest, the expectation of benefit or the threat of deprivation is never entirely absent from any authority relationship. Authority always seeks to cloak its iron fist in a glove of sweet reason. The bases on which subordinates obey their superiors may be quite diverse, leading to a variety of subtypes of authority. Perhaps the most important special case of authority is Weber's "legitimate power" (Weber, 1947: 325). The legitimization of a command involves a special type of communication, information that justifies obedience to the command on the basis of previously established norms and beliefs. For example, President Reagan's order sending naval escorts to the Persian Gulf was implemented by admirals and sailors because they implicitly believed his command was authorized by the Constitution. In a legitimate power relationship, the subordinate participants strongly believe that their superior's exercise of power is appropriate and acceptable, to the extent that sanctions seldom need to be invoked to assure their compliance with commands. In general, these sentiments are widely shared by the members of a collectivity; indeed, followers may compel one another to comply with their leader's directives because it is "the right thing to do," regardless of latent positive and negative sanctions:

The group's demand that orders of the superior be obeyed makes obedience partly independent of his coercive power [i.e., domination] or persuasive influence over individual subordinates and thus transforms these other kinds of social control into authority. (Blau and Scott, 1962: 29)

A legitimate power relationship is reciprocal; a ruler issues a command in the expectation of compliance, and obedience to the command is guided by the ruled's subjective beliefs that the orders are legitimate. Weber, of course, was famous for his classification of the bases for claiming legitimate power: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal (Weber, 1947: 328–9; see Willer [1967] for an argument of a fourth type: ideological authority). But, regardless of the particular grounds for subordinates' beliefs, the legitimate power form of authority ultimately rests on domination com-

bined with influence. The necessity of having both power bases in a legitimate power relationship was succinctly captured by Stinchcombe's (1968: 162) notion that ultimately a power-holder can call on other power centers to back up his command with sanctions. The legitimacies of both the Somoza and the Sandinista regimes depended both on their capacity to persuade the Nicaraguan people of the rightness of their rule *and* on their ability to use the armed forces to fight against challengers. As tyrants from Pisistratus to Nicolai Ceausescu have learned, domination without influence in the long run proves ineffective in sustaining an illegitimate authority in power.

To this point, the abstract discussion of relational power has concentrated on dyads – pairs of social actors. But most power interactions occur in complex situations. When considering power relations among many actors in a large political system, the idea of a social network is helpful.

Political systems as social network

The basic units of any complex political system are not individuals, but positions or roles occupied by social actors and the relations or connections between these positions. Anthropologists and sociologists conventionally conceive of *roles* (or *statuses*, the action components of a role) as clearly articulated bundles of rights, duties, obligations, and expectations that guide the characteristic conduct of persons assuming such positions in a social system (e.g., Linton, 1936: 113 ff.; Nadel, 1957: 20–44; Merton, 1957). A role is not merely a shorthand label for a set of appropriate activities, it also indicates how an incumbent is expected to interact with other roles under appropriate circumstances. These relationships refer to constants of behavior and to the particular contents or qualities of the interaction between people occupying the different role positions (Nadel, 1957: 102). Every social role – whether that of *mother*, *lawyer*, *boss*, or *sergeant* – exists concretely only in relation to one or more complementary roles with which it regularly interacts – *daughter*, *client*, *employee*, *private*. For any given role pair, the rules or norms of behavior typically specify which actor is more likely to comply with the commands of the other. Mothers often tell their teenage daughters to straighten up their rooms, and they occasionally find their instructions obeyed! Every political system consists of a division of labor among participants that can potentially be analyzed in terms of its component power relationships.

In many political systems, role incumbents come and go, but the power configurations among the positions remain fairly stable. Thus, universities and hospitals experience frequent turnovers in staff and clients, yet the unequal doctor-patient and teacher-student power relations persist. The

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inauguration of a new U.S. president usually leaves unaltered his position's power relations vis-à-vis the Congress, armed forces, civil bureaucracies, and the federated states (but not so in 1860, even before Lincoln was sworn in). Or, the configurations of military alliances among the world's nations remain relatively durable from year to year and decade to decade, despite numerous changes in regime personnel. Because so many political systems are highly stable, they can be analyzed as structures of power relations among their component social positions. The basic idea of a *social structure* is a stable order or pattern of social relations among positions, consisting of the set of direct and indirect connections between the actors occupying these different social positions (Laumann and Pappi, 1976: 6). The primary analytic focus is on the relational connections as such – the ties among the positions – and not on the attributes of the incumbent individuals who occupy these positions. These linkages may be singular or multiple and may vary along numerous dimensions of intensity, frequency, duration, content, affect, and the like. These varied features of structural relations are examined in greater detail elsewhere in this book.

In contrast to the conventional depiction of social role systems as fairly rigid positions, constraining the incumbents' actions in the same way that a script dictates actors' speeches, no claim is made here about the a priori existence of social positions apart from the relationships among them. Indeed, position and relationship are inseparable aspects of a unitary structural phenomenon – the social network. Continually changing interactions among persons or groups occupying a network's social positions can alter role-based performances, allowing new roles to emerge and old roles to be transformed. Thus, the role of the urban political party leader in the United States during the twentieth century was transformed from a dominating boss to a mediating broker when politicians developed personalized resource and information exchange relations with their constituencies under pressures from increasingly media-driven electoral campaigns. By emphasizing that positions must be identified not by descriptive labels, but from careful examinations of actual interactions that take place between actors in multiple networks, structural analysts can adopt a flexible and sensitive stance toward the amount of rigidity and innovation occurring in any particular social system.

Formal representations of social structure place powerful mathematical tools at the disposal of structural analysts. These diverse procedures pass under the general rubric of *social network analysis* (see Berkowitz, 1982; Burt, 1982; Knoke and Kuklinski, 1982; Freeman, White, and Romney, 1988). The two basic components of all network analyses are a set of objects (variously called *nodes*, *positions*, or *actors*) and a set of relations among these objects (variously called *edges*, *ties*, or *links*). Network analysts proceed by developing formal models to represent accurately selected features of real-world social behaviors (that is, their models are *isomorphic*

with reality). A formal network model permits examination of social structures by rigorously applying mathematical graph and topology principles to the data. Social structures can be displayed as pictorial graphs involving points and lines or, equivalently, as algebraic matrices. By mathematically manipulating these network representations, the structural analyst seeks to uncover the fundamental forms and processes of social and political behavior. The Appendix at the end of the book presents some basic concepts and terms in network analysis. This Appendix should be read to acquire a vocabulary that is useful in understanding many of the ideas in this and later chapters. With these network concepts, new insights into the influence and domination relations of political systems are possible.

The prime directive

Structural analysis is not a unified theory, but an assemblage of loosely connected perspectives on interaction within social networks. If limited just to describing the linkages among political actors in a social system, structural analysis will cause little intellectual ferment. But the structural approach offers an explicit premise of great import: “The structure of relations among actors and the location of individual actors in the network have important behavioral, perceptual, and attitudinal consequences both for the individual units and for the system as a whole” (Knoke and Kuklinski, 1982: 13). Or, in Mitchell’s (1969) eloquent phrase, “The patterning of linkages can be used to account for some aspects of behavior of those involved.” Both the forms and contents of relations among social positions have significant consequences for the formation of political attitudes and behaviors. Regardless of the particularities of a given structural analysis, virtually all network analysts share the presumption that a complete explanation for some social phenomenon requires knowledge about the relationships among system actors. To ignore structures gives, at best, a deficient explanation and, at worst, an incorrect one.

The basic objective of a structural analysis of politics is to explain the distribution of power among actors in a social system as a function of the positions that they occupy in one or more networks. A position’s power – its ability to produce intended effects on the attitudes and behaviors of other actors – emerges from its prominence in networks where valued information and scarce resources are transferred from one actor to another. Positions are stratified according to the dependence of other positions on them for these essential resources. Not only the direct connections are important in determining positional power, but the indirect connections are critical because they comprise limits and opportunities for obtaining desired ends. The local and global structures of alternatives for

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exchanging resources and information largely determine the relative power of each actor in the network. In general, a position has greater power to the extent that others depend on it for information, goods, and affection that are unavailable elsewhere. A position lacks power when other actors enjoy many alternatives for securing their preferences. Basic principles of social exchange are operative (see Chapter 4). Over time, incumbents of positions that enjoy fewer structural choices must compensate others for the information and resources they receive by agreeing to the exchange terms offered by less-dependent positions (Emerson, 1962). Structurally disadvantaged positions pay their debts by subordinating themselves, complying with the commands of those positions to whom they are indebted (Blau, 1964: 22). Thus, positional power derives from networks of structural relations and it exists apart from actors' knowledge or ignorance about the larger opportunity structures within which their positions are embedded.

The structural approach to power requires that analysts assess a position's prominence by taking account not only of its direct but also its indirect connections in complete networks. Two conceptions of prominence can be distinguished according to the types of exchange relations presumed to make actors' positions visible to system members (Knoke and Burt, 1983: 198). *Centrality* concepts do not differentiate sending from receiving relations, but simply treat all connections as symmetric. The most central positions in a network are those involving many reciprocated ties to other actors. Network stars acquire power because they are close to many system actors, in effect, by lying between positions that must use them to transmit messages and goods (Freeman, 1977, 1979). For example, a parliamentary leader often discusses legislative tactics with his party whips, who are in constant touch with the rank-and-file legislators, and with the opposition leaders who also communicate with *their* parties' members. Thus, centrality prominence is useful for analyzing positional power in symmetric exchange networks, such as communication structures. In contrast, *prestige* concepts preserve the asymmetry of ties among positions so that prominence increases with the extent to which a position receives many relations but does not reciprocate. The quality of ties, not their sheer volume, is crucial; the prominence of a position's contacts determines, in part, its prominence (Knoke and Burt, 1983: 206). The most prestigious positions in an asymmetric exchange network are those receiving strong relations from many actors who are themselves the recipients of strong ties from many actors. Prestige prominence is especially useful in analyzing the power of positions in networks where commands or goods are not reciprocally exchanged. For example, the U.S. president is the target of numerous government and private-sector organizations that seek access to make their pitches for his support; but he is very selective about those to whom he grants audiences, seeing mainly the actors with the most power to help or hurt his agenda (see Chapter 8). Given their different