

Power

C. Wright Mills (1959) set out to develop among all of us a self-consciousness that was inherently about power and politics in their social context. The sociological imagination, as taught in introductory sociology, connects us to essentially political themes: personal troubles, public issues, and the interplay between biography and social history. The troubles we hear about—for example, unemployment, providing mental health services to war veterans, and failures of our schools—all have a personal dimension, a human face, and very real biographies. What Mills wants us to understand is that these personal troubles are often really public issues that are the result of larger, social, and global forces. These forces are even more apparent at this point in social history, as technology and globalization push societies together, structuring interactions in ways never seen before. Mills was influenced by his own historical epoch in 1959 but, nonetheless, was offering timeless lessons for political sociology about the nature of power, and the role of biography and the public. Mills believed that the sociological perspective brought great “promise” to the study of politics and power, valuable to building insights into the study of power, politics, and society, ultimately distinguishing political sociology from other disciplines of study.

While Mills was captivated by the role of science—namely, social science—much of his work focused on how sociologists could most successfully explore the relationships between society and politics. This textbook is a summary of the very diverse scientific and humanistic understandings that make up political sociology today and, in many ways, celebrates Mills’ ingenious perspective on the connections between society, politics, and power.

This text begins with a definition of power, bringing focus to recent attempts to define a very abstract concept about social life. The insights that come about through the use of two analytical tools commonly used in the study of power—politics and society—help us to engage our thinking about a fairly difficult concept. The strengths of theory and research behind a rich history of exploration are found in the three major theoretical frameworks in political sociology—pluralist, elite-managerialist, and social-class perspectives. These classical frameworks set the foundation for a number of new perspectives in political sociology, guided no doubt by the sociological imagination, in the study of power and politics. Political sociology has been instrumental in outlining the many contours of power in a variety of social spaces and social contexts. We discuss this in the next section. Our introduction to political sociology asserts power as the essential overriding idea behind the topics found in the pages ahead. As Mills observed—and we hope that you agree—the study of power is a summary of a tradition of “intellectual craftsmanship,” which is known as political sociology. It invites students of sociology and politics to the “sociological imagination our most needed quality of mind” (Mills 1959: 13).

POWER: THE KEY CONCEPT IN POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

If we begin with the idea that politics is “the generalized process by which the struggle over power in society is resolved” (Braungart 1981: 2), at the outset, then we can understand that power is at the core of the work of political sociologists. The goal is to explain the connections between social interactions, social structures, and social processes altered by struggle and resolution. We must define what we mean by power. Defining power is not as straightforward as one might think. Certainly we all have experienced power in some way, perhaps the influence of a friend who cajoles and pushes us to go to a political meeting, or the force of a mugger who confronts us, taking an iPod at gunpoint! Power is encountered every day and every hour. Let’s take a look at several definitions, identifying as we go the differences that reflect debates on how power is conceptualized.

The works of Karl Marx and Max Weber serve as the classic foundations for defining power. Marx established that economic structures like corporations, owners of capital, and more immediately, the boss represent societal sources of power. The use of wages to influence worker performance or attendance is a significant creation of capitalist society. According to Marx, the relationship between worker, wage, and class interests was the source of alienating individuals not only from pursuing nonwork-related self-interests but also alienating individuals from each other. For Marx, power has an economic context rooted in the relationships between and among social classes. Weber picks up this theme and offers one of the first formal political sociological analyses of power. Unlike Marx, Weber located power in a variety of social spaces including both economic and noneconomic contexts. For Weber, power was rooted in formalized social systems such as organizations or bureaucracies, as well as in social institutions such as religion and law. Weber differed from Marx in that he argued that power was not simply just about economic relationships, but rather a function of social patterns, culture, and social organization. These early approaches to the study of power offer one of the first debates in political sociology about the nature of the society–politics relationship.

Weber developed many of the early formal statements about power and politics, defining power as: “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” (1947: 152). This definition was launched after nearly a century of attempts at clarification, precision, and nuanced understandings

of power. Since Weber's study of power in the early 1900s, social scientists have focused on what is meant by the distribution of power in society, as well as identifying what kinds of resources make some individuals and groups powerful or powerless. Others have extended the notion that politics is inherent in most if not all aspects of social action and expression in human interactions. Consider the many definitions summarized in Textbox 1.1. These definitions offer evidence of a field of study characterized by diverse views about power and social and political processes.

Specifically, these various definitions reveal the insights into the characteristics of power as related to political and social outcomes, interests, intents, capacities for action, and resources. Drawing from these many approaches, *we define power as individual, group, or structural capacity to achieve intended effects as a result of force, influence, or authority.*

Metaphors and Paradoxes: Sociological Tools in the Study of Power

Students studying power, politics, and society will find that insights developed thus far come from applications of the sociological imagination. These insights are typically conveyed through the use of metaphors and paradoxes. These are useful tools in sociological thinking.

TEXTBOX 1.1

Varieties in the Definition of Power

Power Defined as . . .	Author
the production of intended effects.	Bertrand Russell (1938: 2)
Power has to do with whatever decisions men make about the arrangements under which they live, and about the events which make up the history of their times . . . men are free to make history but some are much freer than others.	C. Wright Mills (1959: 181)
the generalized capacity to secure the performance of binding obligations, when the obligations are legitimized with reference to their bearing on collective goals and where, in the case of recalcitrance, there is a presumption of enforcement by negative sanctions.	Talcott Parsons (1967: 297)
all kinds of influence between persons or groups, including those exercised in exchange transactions, where one induces others to accede to his wishes by rewarding them for doing so.	Peter Blau (1964: 115)
the capacity of some persons to produce intended and foreseen effects on others.	Dennis Wrong (1979: 2)
the capability to secure outcomes where the realization of these outcomes depends on the agency of others.	Anthony Giddens (1976: 111–112)
In the end, we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are bearers of the specific effects of power.	Michel Foucault (1980: 94)
the social capacity to make binding decisions that have far-reaching consequences for society.	Anthony Orum (1989: 131–132)
the ability to affect the actions or ideas of others.	Olsen and Marger (1993: 1)

Metaphors are analytical devices commonly used to depict ideas or concepts, especially when we as sociologists are “trying to make sense of mysteries” (Rigney 2001: 3). Rigney finds that sociologists frequently use metaphors, such as models or pictures, to illuminate what are otherwise abstract ideas about social life. Models or pictures are useful in describing how social forces like power influence interactions. For example, recall that functionalists typically describe societies as social systems. A metaphor for a social system might be a car. The car (society) is made up of certain components like the transmission, engine, or electronics (subsystems) that all operate together to make the car (society) move forward. Each subsystem in turn has its various parts that are required in order for the whole (car or society) to move forward. If we think of a society as made up of various components (Talcott Parsons talked about religious systems, governments, and education as various components of a society), we create a metaphor for describing the nature of social dynamics.

Metaphors have been constructed to explain in detail the nature of power in society. According to Hindess (1996), power has historically been described as a type of capacity for either action or obligation. He argues that action and obligation are central to the role power plays in political processes. The metaphor he uses to understand *power as capacity* comes from the science of physics. Recall the old dictum from physics or introductory courses in the sciences, “for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” When a series of physical events are put into motion in nature, such as a bowling ball being hurled down the hallway of a college dorm, there will be a number of reactions from this initial force (e.g., the ball hits the RA’s door at the end of the hallway and breaks the door or a roommate stumbles into the hallway and his toe is run over by the rolling ball causing great pain). Using this metaphor, we are prompted to ask what started the ball rolling. The capacity to *force* a bowling ball through a hallway represents an ability, a skill, or the wherewithal to set up a series of actions. It also suggests that someone had an *interest* or a desire to roll the ball down the hallway, and the command of the resources to get a bowling ball, pick it up, and use it as a way to act on these interests. The metaphor here describes power as capacity to achieve some outcome or act on a particular interest.

Capacity for action is distinct from capacity for obligation and duty. Hindess argues that here is where we find the essence of politics and power moving from the individual to the societal level. Obligation is hidden at a different layer of social interaction, and power is not always action on interests or desires but rather power is acquiescence or *duty*. In democratic societies, social order is achieved through duty to the law. Law is created by the sovereign or in many cases by a legislature or parliament that in principle represents the citizenry and their interests. When citizens follow the speed limit, or pay their taxes, or immunize their children before school begins each fall, they may grumble, but for the most part, they oblige the state through compliance. A useful metaphor for describing this second distinction is that of the parent. The state is a parent—it creates, monitors, and enforces rules, including punishing violators to keep things in order. The power of the state or parent derives from the fact that we come to understand the state as legitimate authority; we give it power by agreeing to obey. This dimension of power is perhaps more subtle but nonetheless effective in describing the concept of legitimate power in shaping social patterns.

Another analytical tool used in sociology is *paradox* (Crow 2005). For political sociology in particular, we find that life in a democratic society is sometimes characterized by contradiction or patterns of power that are contrary to expectations, public opinion, or values about democratic life. Political sociologists grapple with a number of paradoxes about the distribution of power in order to bring attention to significant research questions. This analytical tool, much like metaphor, is about explaining mysteries. Consider, for example, the paradox studied in a great deal of research on American society: Are all Americans politically equal as suggested by the

Constitution of the United States? Voting is a form of power in a democratic system. But are all votes *truly* equal? Only within the last century have women been given *more equal* power by being granted the right to vote in 1920. Women did not have this power in the political system prior to the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Or consider the argument made by some that the Iowa caucuses give Iowans *more influence* in the process of selecting a presidential candidate than citizens in states that vote later in the presidential nominating process. Much of this argument rests on the belief that the winner in Iowa gets more media attention, and thus can ride a bandwagon effect (the media call it a “bump” from winning early nomination primaries), resulting in more positive polls and campaign donations. Paradoxically, this means all votes are not equal in the sociological sense that early voting states may have more influence than later-voting states. Identifying paradoxes in social systems, social outcomes, and social interactions is an important analytical goal of political sociology.

What insights are gained from the exploration of metaphors, paradoxes, and the application of the sociological imagination to the study of power and politics? By focusing on the debates, mysteries, and contradictions about power in social life, we develop keen insights into the nature of politics in society. Moreover, political sociology makes use of sociological tools to map out its focus for research. Lewis Coser (1966) defined political sociology as

that branch of sociology which is concerned with the social causes and consequences of given power distributions within or between societies, and with the social and political conflicts that lead to changes in the allocation of power. (1)

Political sociology thus in its most basic orientation focuses on two elements: power and conflict. This definition of political sociology reflects the “state” of sociology in the late 1950s and 1960s. According to Coser, the various topics of the study of political sociology include:

1. attention to the state and institutions,
2. organization of power,
3. competition and order among groups, and
4. development of political associations.

This approach stands in contrast to the work of political science, which typically focuses on the nature of the state and its various manifestations. Political sociology casts its analytical net more broadly to capture the nature of the many power-based relationships between social structures, culture, and individuals.

Metaphors of Power Arrangements

Political sociologists have revealed the forms and nuances of the abstract notion of power by creating typologies of power. These various typologies highlight the nature of power in situations or the characteristics of power as they play a role in the construction of capacity, exchange of resources, and distribution of power in society. These various typologies and conceptualizations of power share the notion that society shapes and is shaped by individuals, groups, organizations, governments, and other societies in a broadly interactive process. The classic and contemporary typologies point to at least three types of power of interest to the study of society and politics:

1. Coercive and dominant power
2. Authority and legitimate power
3. Privileged and interdependent power



Both pro-choice and pro-life activists demonstrate in front of the U.S. Supreme Court, December 4, 2002, as oral arguments are being heard inside on the National Organization for Women (NOW) vs. Scheidler case that won the first-ever nationwide injunction against anti-abortion violence. The Court was deciding on the issue of punishment against those activists that use violence to protest against abortion clinics

Source: JOYCE NALTCHAYAN/AFP/Getty Images

Political sociologists have consistently studied these forms of power and patterns of social–political interactions, beginning especially with the work of Max Weber. Weber launched the sociological analysis by claiming that power existed in two forms: coercion and authority. Textbox 1.2 summarizes the variety of typologies that have been presented to better understand the contours of a rather abstract concept. We turn our focus to three typologies that have been central to the work of political sociology.

COERCIVE AND DOMINANT POWER When we think of power, we most likely start with metaphors or pictures of coercion and dominance. For instance, coercive power in the form of physical force is clearly exercised as one nation-state invades and conquers another. The resources used to coerce may include brute force, military prowess, and the strength of large armies. Perhaps this type of power is the raw or most pure form. *Dominance* also reflects the use of resources with consequences for others in society. In this regard, Parenti (1978) reminds us that, “To win a struggle is one thing, but to have your way by impressing others that struggle would be futile, that is power at its most economical and most secure” (78). Coercion and dominance share a central tenet of command of resources with immediate and future submission by subjects to this form of power.

As we will see in Chapter 9, war and terrorism are important societal dynamics related to the brute use of dominance and coercion. The nature of coercion and dominance in totalitarian regimes has also been studied. Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958), studied the social and cultural influences that gave rise to Nazi Germany. The influence of economic

TEXTBOX 1.2**Typologies in the Study of Power**

Power Conceptualized as ...	Types/Characteristics	Author
exerted through command of resources	utilitarian coercive persuasive	Etzioni (1968)
varying by resources and intent of the actor	force dominance authority attraction	Olsen (1978)
influence either unintended or intended (power)	force physical (violent or nonviolent) psychic manipulation persuasion authority coercive induced personal competent legitimate	Wrong (1979)
relational, resource-driven, and socially organized	force authority influence dominance	Marger (1987)
defined in terms of its intended outcome	destructive or threat (stick) productive or economic (carrot) integrative (hug)	Boulding (1989)
the absence or presence of domination and influence	egalitarian (no dominance/no influence) coercive (dominance/no influence) persuasion (no dominance/influence) authority (dominance/influence)	Knoke (1990)

hardship, fear of outgroups, control of political party apparatus, use of propaganda, and creation of a military state are common to the creation of such regimes. Although totalitarianism as a form of political rule seems to be on the wane, the documentation of coercive forms of power is important to understanding the nature of power in alternative ruling systems. Since the Al Qaeda attacks on New York City and the Pentagon, considerable attention has been given to finding what causes terrorism, especially as a tool designed to advance political demands and claims. The nature of modern-day terrorism may usher in yet another field of study in which questions of coercion and domination through military excursions or political violence must be better understood.

The use of coercion for political gain or outcome is an important aspect of power not limited to studies of conquering figures in history. The modern democratic state uses coercion in several ways. Marger (1987: 12) equated coercion with *force*, which is based on “the threat or application of punishment or the inducement of rewards to elicit compliance.” Periodically, we are reminded that the police power that we extend to specific agencies of the state is inherently coercive. Police power to control rioting, protests, or dissent is not uncommon, as seen during the civil rights protests of the 1960s or with dissent in North Korea, Cuba, or Pakistan. The coercive nature of police work in a free society can test the boundary between freedom to act or seek changes in the nature of rule through protest, while also attempting to maintain a semblance of social order through enforcing the law. The study of coercion and dominance is an important part of political sociology.

AUTHORITY AND LEGITIMATE POWER Authority is a form of power that emerges from the acquiescence of individuals and groups based on a sense of *legitimacy and obedience* or duty. Individuals and groups within society create order by recognizing the power of law, tradition, or custom. They behave based on the belief that the power of the state protects members of society while preserving community interests. Consider the legitimate power of a police officer in the United States. Police act with authority, which is distinguished in the general population by a uniform and badge. The authority is strong as police officers are one of few agents in the United States who can stop free individuals, ask them questions, and apprehend them. The extent of police power is best symbolized by the fact that police officers carry weapons that can be used to force compliance with the law. The legitimacy of this power is found in the idea of representative lawmaking and the duty to obey as a member of the community.

Weber wrote extensively about the nature of authority in industrial society. In particular, he focused on the authority that would come from individuals and offices in large-scale organizations created to structure interactions based on law and procedures. He identified three types of authority:

- *Charismatic authority* emanates from the personality or character of leaders. Weber suggested that charismatic power and influence flow from an individual’s heroic status or other achievements. Thus, the people follow, swayed by the conviction, style, and projection of the leader. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a charismatic leader, and his influence in a time of significant social unrest was important to bringing about changes in civil rights law in the United States. Even though he held no formal political office, he retained national influence in efforts related to social justice for racial-ethnic minorities as well as the poor.
- *Traditional authority* gains its legitimacy through custom and tradition. There is a certain sacred dimension to these traditions or appeals to customs that results in acquiescence to authority. Monarchies are a good example of traditional forms of governance in some societies. The Queen of England, for example, retains authority through appeals to tradition and custom, typically enacted through symbolic and ritualistic dramas that reinforce her authority. Similarly, the Pope, as the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, retains power through appeals to custom and tradition, holding influence over Church policy.
- *Rational-legal authority* is grounded in rules by which people are governed. Legitimacy stems from an appeal to law, commands, and decision making that is regarded as valid for all in the population. A good example is the Constitutional order of the United States. Recall the election in the year 2000, when George W. Bush won the electoral vote, but Al Gore won the popular vote. The outcome of the election was contested in Florida, and

legal claims about voting were made by both sides. Eventually the U.S. Supreme Court made a ruling that resulted in the election of Bush to the presidency. The legitimacy of law and rational-legal authority was seen in this acceptance of the outcome. In societies where there was no rational-legal authority to make such decisions, riots may have broken out, or revolution. Life went on in the United States—order was maintained as a result of the legitimate exercise of power by constitutional authorities.

As we will see in Chapter 2, the power of the democratic state is defined by its legitimacy to rule in contrast to authoritarian states. Weber's work marks an important beginning in the study of authority and rule in political sociology. All forms of power are better understood by examining the state, law in everyday life, and political socialization, as well as attempts to shape coalitions to legitimize state rule.

INTERDEPENDENT POWER Power can operate in more subtle ways, resulting in dramatic changes in social interactions and the distribution of power in society. Certainly the typologies that focus on coercion or authority share this view, but this third body of research in political sociology encourages us to dig deeper into power relationships in society. In many ways, political sociology advanced beyond the simplicity of thinking of power as coercion or authority. As research on power evolved, especially in the 1960s, power came to be understood as quite complex. The idea of *interdependent power* depicts power relationships between individuals and social groups as reciprocal. That is, power is a two-way street where actors, even though they may think they have no influence, actually do, given the way in which the social system is set up. One insight from this approach explores power that quietly wraps around systems of inequality that constructs differences in who has what, when, and how.

Recently, Piven and Cloward (2005) urged political sociologists to consider more fully the role of rule breakers in the study of power. Their analysis highlighted how most of political sociology has focused on “rulemaking,” which would include lawmakers or administrative bodies that create laws or policies to direct social interactions. Sometimes these rules are challenged. When societies experience protest and challenges to the distribution of power, political authority can be undermined. These forms of challenge by rule breakers may not be coercive but rather, much like the bumper sticker says, seek to “subvert the dominant paradigm.” In other words, the power exercised in certain social contexts is intended to be disruptive to bring attention to claims.

The model of power that Piven and Cloward suggest advances current political sociology about power in an alternate direction. Most studies begin with the assumption that power is about the distribution of resources among individuals, groups, and social structures. Piven and Cloward believe that power is more complex than the mere distribution of resources (e.g., wealth, knowledge or skills, and property). Their notion of power is based on the idea that power is meaningful in social connections, or “interdependencies.” In other words, power derives its significance when individuals exchange resources of many kinds in these interdependencies.

Complex organizations are stages for seeing the power as a function of social interdependencies. For example, a university in many ways is a small social system where each part of the system (e.g., the food service staff, faculty, financial aid office, and campus security) contributes to the order of the larger system called a university. Traditionally, models of power would have focused on the distribution of resources to understand who is powerful. For example, students pay tuition, which brings in financial resources that help pay the salaries of the vice presidents. The administrators, as the university elite (much like society), hold more wealth in comparison to the food service staff or hall janitors. If the food service staff become angry about their pay, they can go on strike, or negotiate for a wage increase. Or, they could walk off the job and most

likely be replaced with new employees who might in fact be paid a lower wage as they come into entry-level positions. Thus, the distribution of resources would change again.

But, what if all the faculty at a university stopped teaching? Given the shortage of professors in some fields, would the university be able to offer majors or continue to offer degrees? Piven and Cloward would point to this type of *leverage in an interdependent system* as an example of power not extensively considered in political sociology:

People have potential power, the ability to make others do what they want, when those others depend on them for the contributions they make to the interdependent relations that are social life. Just as the effort to exert power is a feature of all social interactions, so is the capacity to exert power at least potentially inherent in all social interaction. And because cooperative and interdependent social relations are by definition reciprocal, so is the potential for the exercise of power. (2005: 39)

Their argument is that protests, or challenges to the core purpose of an interdependent relationship (e.g., faculty teaching courses is a core purpose of the interdependencies that constitute the organization we call a university) are how power can be wielded in the social structure. If all middle-class Americans agreed not to pay income taxes for one year as a protest against unethical behaviors in Congress, would they wield power? Piven and Cloward suggest considering these interdependent social connections. Political sociologists can study power under this model by identifying leverage points in social embeddedness, connections that build trust, strengthen relationships, or achieve goals. The focus shifts from *who controls* the resources in society, who has the most education, and what groups compete for votes, to what *power comes from the connections themselves* and what systems collapse or are changed if the connections are severed?

Recent work by Alan Johnson (2006) highlights the nature of power in social interdependencies. His work focuses on how privilege is constructed in interdependencies using *privilege* to describe the nuances of power. He links privilege to the various ways society makes differences important or significant in use, allocation, and access to resources. Johnson identifies “unearned advantage” and “conferred dominance” as forms of power that create privilege in society. Unearned advantage emerges when one group in society is rewarded or benefits over another. One unearned advantage in society is found in hiring into the occupational structure; for many jobs, white males gain easier access than, say, minority females. This preserves white male privilege in job opportunities. This group reaps the gains, while the other is left out. Dominance takes a more active form, indicating that the privilege is solidified when one group pressures another group into conformity to privilege. Privilege that comes from interdependencies based on gender, race, sexuality, or social status can sustain institutional patterns of social difference.

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF POWER IN POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

Political sociologists have traditionally organized the study of the relationships between society, politics, and power into three frameworks: the pluralist, the elite-managerial, and the social-class perspectives. These frameworks represent very different views of how power is distributed in society, how politics is socially organized, and how significant individuals, groups, organizations, and the state are. In this section, we examine the basic assumptions of each framework. The discussion also looks at the works of classical and contemporary thinkers associated with each framework. Finally, we consider recent criticisms of each framework as these are important to the development of new ways of conceptualizing the nature of power in society.

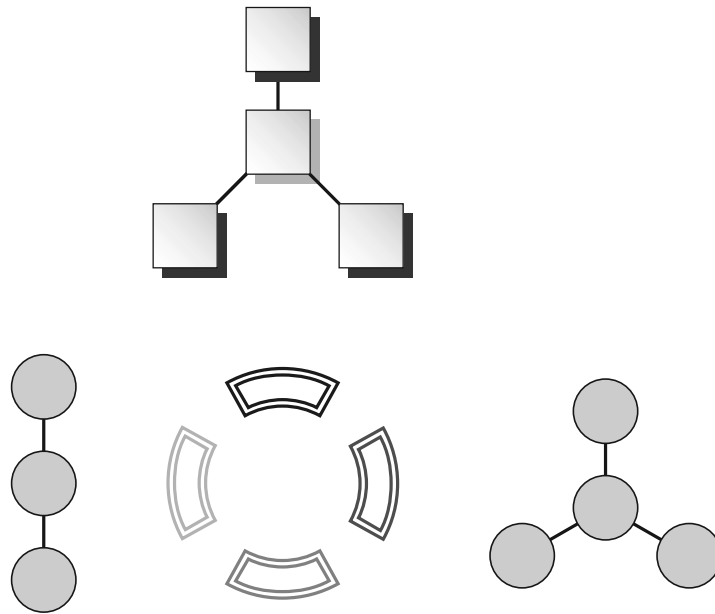


FIGURE 1.1 The Pluralist Metaphor of Power: Groups and Coalitions at the Political Table

Source: Figure created by Tim Buzzell

Pluralist

The pluralist approach to the study of politics and society is based on the assertion that power is distributed throughout society among a “plurality” of power centers. These power centers include political parties, interest groups, voters, associations, and a variety of other social actors. According to pluralism, these various centers within society compete for power. Thus, pluralism finds that power is fragmented, often changing as one group wins and another loses, and that coalitions are formed only to fall apart over time. The pluralist framework essentially views power as balanced as a result of the multitude of groups bargaining for roles in the political processes, including the policy-making process that affects the distribution of resources in society (Figure 1.1).

The groups that compete for power vie for control of the state, that is, the governing apparatus of society. Pluralists view the state as a structure that retains legitimate power (authority) to guard the rules of the political process, especially as they involve access to the governance structure, selection to office, or maintenance of order throughout society. The state itself is characterized by checks and balances, with groups or individual citizens serving as an ultimate check on the potential concentration of power. Pluralists also have understood the state as a collection of various power centers, such as different branches of government, or a system of federalism. Chapter 2 will provide a more extended discussion of pluralist views of the state.

CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PLURALIST APPROACHES One of the earliest studies of politics in the United States brought attention in a unique way to the social nature of how power was structured in the newly created republic. After completing his own studies of the French Revolution of 1789, Tocqueville (1805–1859) was intrigued by the ways in which the government of the United States created equality in contrast to the ruling aristocracy found in France. During his famous travels throughout the United States in the 1830s, Tocqueville recorded what would come to be understood as aspects of American character, or culture, contributing to basic democratic processes. His observations were the basis for his two-volume study called *Democracy in America* (1945[1835]).

The historical and ethnographic insights in this work make a significant contribution to understanding American democracy in the 1800s as well as offer insights that are still relevant. The key to American democracy, Tocqueville claimed, was the ability of citizens to create associations of many kinds, including trade organizations and civic groups, or to gather in town-hall meetings. He concluded:

In no country in the world has the principle of association been more successfully used or applied to a greater multitude of objects than in America. Besides the permanent associations which are established by law under the names of townships, cities, and counties, a vast number of others are formed and maintained by the agency of private individuals. (198)

In this passage, we find a number of sociological insights. First, Tocqueville offers an understanding that association in a social sense has different levels. Not only is association understood as a function of individuals taking initiative (agency) to form private groups but association also has a broader social characteristic, as individuals are organized into townships and cities. Second, he suggests that association has been paramount to the functioning of social order and the advancement of the common good. This is viewed as an essential principle of social life guaranteed in the Constitution of the United States. This associational nature of the early American republic reflects the pluralist argument that power is found in organizing. Tocqueville also advanced the basic pluralist assumption that social groupings constitute power centers in society to accomplish civic outcomes.

A century later, social scientists began to rigorously test the assumptions of the pluralist view of power in the United States. In a classic study of politics in the city of New Haven, Connecticut, Robert Dahl (1961) found that groups and coalitions in the city would compete for victory in elections for city office, or coalitions would be formed to address city issues of concern. Community life, Dahl would suggest, was indicative of the nature of power in the United States. He found that while the citizens of the community participated in elections to select city leaders, the business of governing was dispersed into sectors reflecting economic, social, and political interests. Each sector in the community was made up of groups and associations with the requisite resources (e.g., wealth or prestige) to influence decision-making processes. Dahl reported an image of a division of labor in governance whereby power was dispersed among interest centers within the community. There was no concentration of power per se, assured by a process characterized by negotiation and exchange of “this for that” in order to make decisions that affected the larger community. New Haven was essentially a mirror of the larger social pattern that Dahl and other pluralists believed best described American democracy in the 1950s and 1960s.

Following Dahl, various research projects (Hunter 1953; Polsby 1963) advanced knowledge about power at the local level and were key tests of basic pluralist assumptions. Studies of New York City (Sayre and Kaufman 1960) and Chicago (Banfield 1961) and Miller’s (1970) cross-cultural study of Seattle, Bristol (England), Cordoba (Argentina), and Lima (Peru) confirmed a pattern of shared power across groups rather than concentrations of power. The studies of power in the 1960s came to be known as the community power studies. The pluralist conceptualization of power was supported by these early studies of local politics.

However in the 1970s, the focus would shift as the social upheaval of the 1960s prompted political sociologists to examine social movements, collective behavior, and eventually the state. The idea that power was dispersed across groups and sectors would be tested amidst a social backdrop of social conflict and change. Pluralist assumptions were challenged as segments of society asked whether power in society was truly equal and whether individual citizens, as well as

those organized into interest groups and associations, could exercise power to achieve policy outcomes. Women, youth, and racial and ethnic minorities organized collective protests to demonstrate that power was not equal. But as pluralists would acknowledge, as a result of protest and collective action, the system of governance responded and accommodated change. For example, the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in changes in election laws and employment laws, and in 1972, the voting age was lowered to 18 as a result of protest. The revolution was seen as a response to demands of organized citizens. Traditional pluralists would claim that the governance in the United States demonstrated its responsiveness to organized coalitions and collective efforts to change.

In the 1990s, explorations of pluralism took different directions. The focus shifted to what some argued was the disappearance of engagement in collective political action found in the 1960s and 1970s. This suggests a paradox that pluralists could not explain. In a discussion of “civic engagement,” Skocpol and Fiorina (1999) observed that:

Even as more voices speak up on behalf of social rights and broad concepts of the public interest, millions of Americans seem to be drawing back from involvements with community affairs and politics. Most prominently, voting rates have dropped about 25 percent since the 1960s. Moreover, the proportion of Americans who tell pollsters that they “trust the federal government to do what is right” has plummeted from three-quarters in the early 1960s to less than a third at the turn of the twenty-first century. American civil society may also be weakening. (2)

The decline of civil society struck a theme in pluralist research and was connected to the weakening of social ties that Tocqueville celebrated as a strength of American democracy. Researchers turned to explaining how citizens build trust and social solidarity through a variety of associations and social connections. Research on what came to be called *social capital* suggests that individuals who are more connected in groups and associations (e.g., PTA, soccer club, and Rotary) are more likely to participate in politics (Coleman 1990; Putnam 2000). Membership in social groups, according to this pluralist line of analysis, fosters a sense of the collective, which, Durkheim argued a century earlier, contributes to the ability of the community to solve problems in cooperative, collaborative ways. This sense of civil connection is an important claim in the pluralist approach.

CRITICISMS OF PLURALIST THEORY The pluralist explanation of power and politics in society is not without criticism. The pluralist framework has in many ways stood as the baseline for counterargument and paradox in political sociology. Much of this has to do with the fact that pluralism in many ways aligns best with the assumptions of a U.S. democratic society. There are a number of ways this framework is weak in accounting for the social bases of power in society, in some cases failing altogether to explain some phenomena. A number of weaknesses in the pluralist model of power have been identified:

1. Much of the research that had gone into building the pluralist framework was based on U.S. democratic society; few tests of the pluralist model in a global context exist (Marger 1987).
2. The emphasis on groups assumes that individuals participate in political processes as a result of their group memberships. This assumes that individuals in the social system have equal access to political groups and associations across the horizon of state and public spheres. Some research indicates that this is not the case (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999).

3. There is also evidence that individuals who join politicized groups and associations tend to come from high-status segments of the population. This is also true for individuals who participate through voting. Thus, pluralism cannot account for significant differences in associational and political activity based on wealth, gender, or race.
4. These social cleavages in turn can create polarization and not a consensus of values as pluralism maintains. In many ways, the winner-take-all election rules exclude those who lose in the political game: typically those with fewer resources (Piven and Cloward 1988).
5. As will be seen in the following section, some argue that bureaucracy trumps democracy (Alford and Friedland 1985). In other words, the reality of politics is such that experts, bureaucrats, and policy professionals influence the state more so than the masses who typically participate on a cyclical (elections every two or four years) or periodic basis.

Elite/Managerial

The elite perspective in political sociology stands in stark contrast to the pluralist perspective. The focus here is on the concentration of power in society in the hands of few who are distinguished by shared background characteristics such as expertise, personality, social ties, or membership in select strata of society (Figure 1.2). The elite perspective explains the concentration of power in society by focusing on social groups, organizations, bureaucracies, and elite circles of interaction. It is the elite power center that controls the distribution of resources in society through its various structures and complex organizations.

The elite perspective thus places significant emphasis on how the concentrated power centers of society control the state and its governing apparatus. Studies of the state based on the elite framework focus on the bureaucracy in particular. Much of this emphasis is founded on Weber's classic argument that postindustrial life would rely on complex organizations and rationalization processes to manage social order. The ways in which a social elite controls these complex organizations and ultimately uses bureaucracies to exercise power are a principal focus of traditional elite approaches in political sociology.

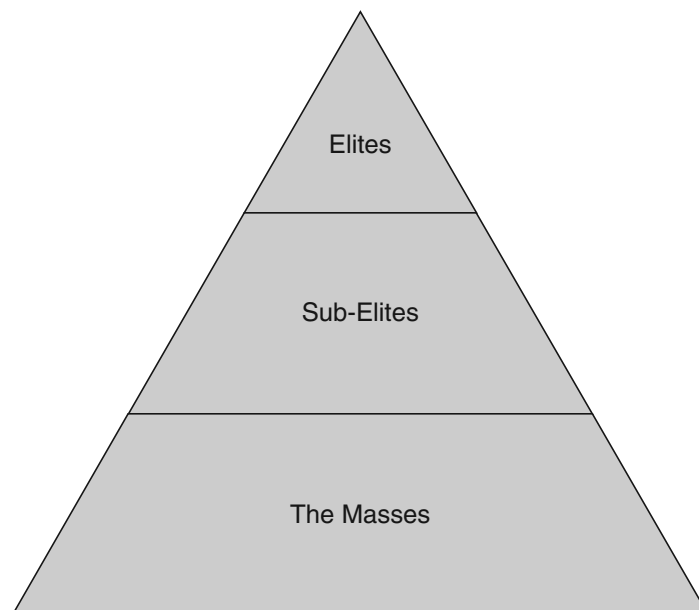


FIGURE 1.2 The Elite/Managerial Metaphor of Power: Dominance at Top

Source: Figure created by Tim Buzzell

CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ELITE/MANAGERIAL APPROACHES The elite-managerial perspective has its first detailed articulations in the works of four European scholars heavily influenced by their observations and experiences of the Industrial Revolution: Max Weber, Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Robert Michels. While each described society as made up of the ruling elite and the ruled masses, they contributed very different observations about the characteristics of elite rule.

The contributions of Weber to the elite-managerial framework are perhaps the most significant. His writing served as the foundation for a great deal of work not only in political sociology but also in sociology more generally. Briefly, his work on the nature of bureaucracies in the creation of a truly “managerial” elite, the nature of leadership within these complex organizations, and the exercise of power in society are three important concepts he contributed to the elite framework in political sociology. Because Weber demonstrated how bureaucracy emerged as a part of the modern state to manage the complexities of industrial society, we will address the state more fully in Chapter 2. Suffice it to say here that Weber’s central contribution to the elite-managerial framework in political sociology is that complex organizations and bureaucracies are at the heart of elite rule in society. These are the instruments of power, especially in industrial and postindustrial societies. In other words, Weber teaches us that bureaucracies are social systems that harness the resources in society—financial, technocratic, and legal—over long periods of time. The result is a concentration of power in upper social strata.

Pareto (1935) described emerging Italian society, and European society for that matter, as made up of elites and masses. At the pinnacle of social interaction, with control of key organizations—military, educational, financial—was an elite that emerged as a result of achievement or placement in key social positions of power. Pareto argued that elites exercised power through “force and fraud.” He described the elite strata of society through analogy—that of lions (those who use force) and foxes (those who rule by fraud). Power was realized through the exercise of force or through cunning. Moreover, Pareto found that individuals could move or circulate from the governing to the nongoverning elite or they could move out of the elite and be replaced by members of the non-elite. This suggests a dynamic within the elite structure dictated by connections among lions and foxes in the ruling elite.

Mosca (1962[1915]) also, in observing Italian and European societies during the Industrial Revolution, described the elite as made up of its own layers of membership circles, with control of the pinnacles of power based on struggle between the various substrata of the elites. He suggested that while power was concentrated in the top positions of rule in society, there was a group of civil servants, bureaucrats, and military operatives all retaining a certain expertise that shapes understandings of social problems, political issues, and the interests, on occasion, of the masses. Mosca argued that the elite structure in society is made up of layers and that each layer contributes to periodic ebbs and flows in the exercise of power, rather than viewing elite rule as a matter of personality or achievement as suggested by Pareto. Shifts in the ability to exercise power are based on social conditions, the nature of organizational structure, and at times, the abilities of leaders within the elite structure.

Michels (1915) offered a fourth variant in the early conceptualization of the elite framework. His contribution comes from his rather famous observation still relevant to the study of why organizations and groups emerge within the elite: *oligarchy*. We refer to his “iron law of oligarchy” to describe the fact that a few typically tend to run organizations and groups. He draws upon the sociological notion of a division of labor to explain why this occurs. Simply stated, elite rule is reinforced by the fact that experts and specialists are rewarded in advanced industrial societies as legitimate leaders in a group or an organization. These are the individuals the masses

defer to because the masses have little interest in the complexities of state leadership, policy creation, or more generally stated, solving the problems of society. This elite formation assured that power was concentrated in the hands of a few, predisposed toward preserving power in the oligarchy, and resistant to changing over to rule by others within the elite.

From these important foundations in the work of the elite-managerial perspective emerge a variety of contemporary applications. The work of C. Wright Mills was influential in building insights into the nature of elite rule in the United States, the largest democracy in the world. Mills (1956) coined the term *power elite* to describe the upper strata where top politicians, top military leaders, and corporate executive interacted to exercise power over the government, military, and corporate institutions of society. What Mills revealed in his study of the power elite of 1950s was that America was governed by a cohesive body of rulers, who were at times able to trade positions (e.g., military leaders who became politicians or corporate leaders from wealthy families who became politicians) to create a power center in the United States. This research challenged the metaphors of power found in the community power studies by Dahl, Polsby, and others.

The study of elites in the United States today focuses on the connections between concentrations of wealth, military power, or political power at the top, and various aspects of political life. Mintz (2002) concludes that research on two aspects of elite rule—corporate elites and upper-class elites—shows how power is indeed exercised by a few. Her summary of research looks at the network or organizational approach to the study of elites and shows how these concentrations of networks within the upper strata exercise significant power. Evidence suggests that elites have power through financing of electoral campaigns, participation in policy groups or think tanks, and the creation of interest groups to lobby policy-making bodies. Studies of elite power have been dedicated to understanding how these networked concentrations of membership work and to mapping the extent to which elites exercise influence throughout the civil sphere (e.g., media, political associations, education, and religion). Higley and Burton (2006) show how elite patterns of rule have emerged alongside global patterns of political change. They argue that within democracies around the world, elite power has emerged as a dominant force of rule:

Elite theory holds that those who have serious and sustained effects on political outcomes are practically always few in number, are fairly well situated in society, and are mainly individuals who see some clear personal advantage in political action, despite its risks. These individuals and the tiny groups they form—elites—mobilize large numbers of people into more or less reliable blocs of supporters for various measures and causes. *In this respect, all politics, whether autocratic or democratic, are elitist in character.* (202; emphasis added)

This conceptualization of regimes throughout the world is a good example of how the elite framework continues to be a dominant model in describing, explaining, and predicting political outcomes in society.

CRITICISMS OF THE ELITE/MANAGERIAL THEORY This framework has not fully explained all aspects of the society–politics relationship. Marger (1987) identified three major criticisms of the elite-managerial argument:

1. It is ambiguous as to whether or not elites are in fact cohesive enough to rule as a single unity. There is evidence that members in the elite circulate among positions and offices, much like Michels suggested. Thus, with membership in the elite changing, can we pinpoint a group with leadership that sets the agenda for power and governance? Moreover, as

we will see from the research by Domhoff (2010), it is unclear if the elite is a ruling segment of society or in fact a social class.

2. Another argument especially relevant for the United States is that masses still have some power to challenge elites, especially given the diversity of both. One line of research that raises questions about the ability of the masses to participate is the role the Internet plays in dissemination of political information through Web sites or political blogs. Are these controlled by the elite or is this an example of how elite rule is challenged through the adaptation of Internet technology for the expression of political interests by the masses? This implies too that the masses may include a new layer of technologically savvy, regulation- and law-focused experts who hold a higher-participatory position in the upper end of the triangle where the masses have traditionally been relegated. For instance, Figure 1.2 suggests that a subelite made up of experts, technocrats, and lawyers serves elite rule by working with the masses.
3. Related to this idea is that the old elite–masses model is too simple and it may not be dichotomous; is there room here for other layers? As the masses have become more educated since the Industrial Revolution, and as the middle class has grown to include financial assets that correlate with participation, additional layers of power may be found just below the elites, further distinguishing the masses into strata not previously identified by the research.

Social Class and Politics

The class perspective in political sociology, to some extent, is consistent with the elite framework, arguing that power is concentrated in the hands of a few. But the class framework suggests that the basis for the concentration of power is not necessarily based on characteristics of individuals who hold power. Rather, the traditional class argument suggests that *economic interests* are the basis for power in society. More directly, the class perspective studies how control of capital, labor, markets, and raw materials is maintained by the capitalist classes. This framework is based on Marxist theories, that power rests in the classes that control the means of production.

The class approach would thus consider politics and associated structures as “captured” by the capitalist class. The governing apparatus, the bureaucracy, political parties, and methods of selecting individuals for political office are shrouded in class interests. Variations on this basic argument are numerous and will be discussed throughout this textbook. At this point, remember that the class framework, much like Marx suggested, which originally sees the state as a social structure that grows out of economic interests in society, ultimately serves the interests of those who control the means of production. Thus, the state plays a key role in the distribution of resources in society, usually to advance economic demands of the owners of capital, or to placate the periodic uprisings of laborers.

CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY CLASS APPROACHES The essence of Marx is best summarized by a key statement in his work, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1970[1859]):

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material

life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness. (Bottomore 1973: 51)

These dynamics stand in contrast to societies organized around the principles of feudalism or slavery. Marx's historical analysis was an important advance in developing an empirical theory of power in societies as they stood during that period in history known as the Industrial Revolution. This historical analysis was comparative (capitalism compared to feudalism), and Marx pinpointed the paradoxes of what was at the time thought to be advances in the democratic experience. For Marx, power in capitalist society was to be understood as broad social forces and social structures created through the relations of production, the economic structure of society, and the superstructures.

Marx refers to the *relations of production* in a society as the day-to-day interactions between individuals along several dimensions. This concept rests on the notion that such day-to-day interactions are based on materialism, or on the basic needs of human life. The *relations of production* refer to the relationships between workers and their products and workers and submission to authority, and how facets of production are owned and distributed in a society. The modes of production are the technologies used in production such as coal, crops, steam engines, or farmland. Marx argued that the relations and modes of production constitute the "substructure" of a society, which contributes to social conflict.

The "superstructures" are those institutions arising out of the substructures. Once these superstructures evolve, they work to maintain the oppression of the working class. In other words, political organizations, ideology, religion, and other superstructures contribute to the dominance-characterizing relations of production. The superstructures generate the necessary conditions to assure that the working class is subservient to the owners of capital through control over the means of production, influencing the relationships among workers and dominating workers, and through the ownership and distribution of labor-based outcomes (material goods) distributed in a society for profit. The extent of this dominance is significant. Based on the concept of materialism, Marx and Engels wrote:

The production of ideas, conceptions of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the real language of life . . . The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (Marx and Engels, in Collins 1994: 4–5)

This dominance based on materialism and ideology, Marx concluded, was characteristic of the nature of power in advanced capitalist societies. This dynamic is the key variable in exploring how economic structures dictate the conscience of members of society.

The struggle between the classes in a capitalist society occurs as a result of the inequality in the ownership of scarce resources and the means of production. The bourgeoisie, through private ownership, controls these resources, as well as the means of production. The result of the capitalist superstructures is the exploitation of the labor sold by the proletariat in exchange for what amounts to a minimal wage. The profits taken by the capitalists are the surplus value of those goods produced by the exploited workers. The superstructures that develop as a result of this aspect of capitalist society serve to maintain control by the bourgeoisie. Such dominance continues until, according to Marx, the proletariat is enlightened and asserts its interests, thus

overthrowing the dominant class through revolution. The conflicting interests of these two classes are the focus of Marxist notions of inequality. This conflict emerges from the materialist tendencies of humans; thus, Marx asserts that all social action is determined by economic structures and not by the consciousness of man.

According to the basic class argument, the essential characteristic of all social relationships in society is conflict. Simply stated, as substructures change, new superstructures emerge, and as superstructures are destroyed, new relationships between substructures are developed. This cyclical characteristic is how Marx accounts for patterns of social change. More specifically, he argues that the conflict inherent in a capitalist society occurs between classes. This moving force of history, which arises out of industrial production as owned by the bourgeoisie and produced by the labor of the proletariat, is the essence of Marx's concept of class conflict and the resulting political patterns.

Weber made a number of significant contributions to the study of power and society that built on the works of Karl Marx. As mentioned earlier, Weber developed a typology of power, descriptions of bureaucracy and the state, and, for the class perspective, a political sociology based on the interactions between what he called "class, status, and parties." He argued that classes were "clearly the product of economic interests" (Runciman 1978: 45). The term *class* is appropriately used when: "(i) a large number of men have in common a specific causal factor influencing their chances in life, insofar as (ii) this factor has to do only with the possession of economic goods and the interests involved in earning a living, and furthermore (iii) in the conditions of the market and conditions of labour" (Runciman 1978: 44). Throughout his analysis of classes, Weber, like Marx, demonstrates how the control of property or other economic interests is the basis for social associations of interests. He suggests that these associations contribute to the emergence of a phenomenon described by Marx as "class consciousness."

The term *status* is defined by Weber as a distinct phenomenon and, for the most part, unrelated to class. Status "means a position of positive or negative privilege in social esteem which in the typical case is effectively claimed on the basis of (a) style of life, (b) formal education, whether based on empirical or rational instruction, together with the corresponding forms of life, and (c) the prestige of birth or occupation" (Runciman 1978: 60). Status can transcend economic conditions, and thus, power in a status position may flow from prestige, occupation, or expertise. However, as Weber demonstrates, each of these elements is often related to economic conditions. As he notes, class is often associated with the relations of production while status can be associated with the principles of consumption.

The concept of "parties" was used by Weber to describe power relationships within society. He observed that class is based on economic order, status is based on social order, and parties are concerned with social power. The purpose of parties is to influence communal action by forming associations around a common interest. In this sense, party differs from class and status in that it is intentionally established to exert power over the apparatus of state or economic order. The party has an objective plan of action with specific goals to be achieved. Implementing this plan requires that members of the party be placed in positions of control and influence in a bureaucracy.

Weber's analysis of class is agreeable with Marx's notions of class in that both find economic forces dictating the emergence of certain associations within society. The notion of status provides clarification of how workers may be detached from the outcomes of production as well as how consumption patterns in a society contribute to differentiation between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Finally, Weber's use of the concept of party suggests how those who dominate the structures of a society control it. This notion is similar to Marx's argument that those who control society are those members exercising power over the forces of production. In these and other ways, Marx clearly influenced the analysis offered by Weber.

From the foundations of Marx and Weber, the class perspective in the study of politics and society has taken divergent paths. In some ways, the class perspective has fragmented into so many different directions that it is difficult to claim that the framework offers a unified conceptualization of power. We include Weber in our discussion of the class perspective (he serves as a foundational thinker in the elite framework too) because his approach to politics included, much like Marx, an emphasis on the role of power differences and how these differences affected individuals, groups, classes, and the status structures of society. At least three distinct approaches to the study of politics have emerged from the Marx–Weber traditions. This collection of approaches in the class tradition suggests that the framework is composed of many different versions of the original teachings, including class conflict and political structures, the nature of class consciousness and views of power, and the effects of inequality for different groups in society. The latter reveals how power in society is used to exclude persons from politics.

CLASS, POLITICS, AND STRUCTURALISM The first track of inquiry in the class tradition has emphasized how the class conflicts described by Marx and Weber are the social roots of political structures, including a state controlled by ruling-class interests. These “structuralists” place an emphasis on understanding how the state itself, political groups, and policy outcomes represent ruling-class interests. The basic assertion by structuralism is that the ruling class protects and preserves its position by dominating less powerful interests in society. The state is a superstructure that is created in capitalist societies in order to use law and policy to advance the interests of the capitalist class.

In an ongoing research focus on social class and politics, Domhoff (1967, 1970, 1978, 1996, 2010) has elaborated on earlier findings to describe in great detail a “ruling class” in the United States. By studying power as who benefits, who governs, and who wins, Domhoff provides evidence of what he calls a “class-domination theory of power” (2002: 181). Consistent with the class perspective, Domhoff traces power to those holding dominant positions in corporations and economic institutions. The ruling class in turn creates a unified effort to capture positions of political, cultural, and economic power in the United States. The upper class benefits as it controls the state to assure protection of economic and cultural interests.

CLASS AND POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS The second line of work in the class framework has examined how, as Marx observed, consciousness is changed by class dynamics. Here the emphasis has been on describing the nature of distractions from the pursuit of self-interest. Recall that Marx believed that once workers understood the nature and extent of their exploitation, they would rise up in revolution. Historically this has not played out as Marx predicted. One explanation for this is that the consciousness-changing power of advanced capitalism continues to blind the working class from exerting power in society.

Much of the work in political consciousness stems from the assertion by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (1947[1886]) that “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas . . . its ruling intellectual force” (39). Political sociology in the class tradition has described this societal capture of ruling ideas as “hegemony.” Antonio Gramsci advanced this notion as a world outlook that workers incorporate into their own thinking much to their disadvantage. Hegemonic power is based on ruling class culture, ideology, law, and everyday practices (routines). Carnoy (1984) defines hegemony as follows:

Hegemony involves the successful attempts of the dominant class to use its political, moral, and intellectual leadership to establish its view of the world as all-inclusive and universal, and to shape the interests and needs of the subordinate groups. (70)

A modern extension of this apparatus is the media, which are corporate entities. Modern campaigns are geared toward the manipulation of candidate images and themes, and thus, candidates from the ruling class use the media to advance world views consistent with ruling-class ideas rather than working-class needs. For example, Mantsios (1995) argues that the media help to hide a basic understanding of the class structure in the United States, noting that since 1972, on average, 80 percent of the respondents in the General Social Survey identify themselves as members of the middle class. Images or language in society that places a greater value on being a part of the great American middle class—even though the gaps in wealth are significant—is an example of hegemonic thinking about class distinctions in the United States.

THE CRITICAL CLASS THEORISTS AND POWER IN SOCIETY Thirdly, the work of Marx has given rise to an emphasis on understanding the significance of using power to exclude persons from power. Here we can look at political sociologists who study the role of gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation, or the nature of citizenship in the modern political era as sources of social difference used to exclude some from holding power in various social contexts. Research on feminism, racism, citizenship, and the nature of upper-class dominance and power in society can be considered extensions of what came to be known as “critical class theory.” The focus of this tradition has been on challenging power centers in society and utilizing knowledge of class inequalities to expose the hidden divisions of power. Early critical theory was associated with the work of scholars at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, in the early 1920s. These scholars would conceptualize power differently from traditional Marxist notions, emphasizing instead the nature of human relationships in language, cultural symbols, ways of life, and daily interactions. The Frankfurt School developed a program of study that endeavored to expose how power was used to create social inequalities, social differences, and paths of exclusion.

T. H. Marshall (1950) explored how modern political life was changing the nature of citizenship. In his work on citizenship and social class, he argued that the evolution of capitalism changed the definitions of citizenship. He conceptualized citizenship as legal and political rights that would grow out of class and economic interests reflective of their historical era. The eighteenth-century rights were focused on individual freedoms (e.g., free speech). Debates over these rights changed with the Industrial Revolution to political rights, characterized mostly by voting (e.g., the suffrage movement in the United States). In the twentieth century, citizenship was framed in economic terms as rights related to social welfare and economic security. The significance of Marshall’s work is that he cast citizenship—a political sociological concept—in terms of social evolution, following a historical progression that in each era revealed that certain groups in the society were excluded from citizenship. Questions of citizenship and social inequality remain an important part of the agenda in political sociology (Kivisto and Faist 2007; Turner 1993).

A great deal of work in political sociology has been done using the feminist perspective on the nature of power in society. In their recent global analysis of women holding positions of power, Paxton and Hughes (2007) concluded that “Although women have made remarkable inroads into both higher education and traditionally male occupations, the political sphere remains an arena where women have far to go” (3). Their research shows that despite progress in increasing the presence of women in political authority structures, this increase has only marginally affected power differentials. For example, in their study of 185 countries, 36 percent of the nations have women holding 10 percent of the seats in the national parliamentary body—this is the highest proportion of female representation. While representation brings voice to feminist concerns, for most parliamentary systems 10 percent is insufficient to exercise broader power in the political process.

The politics of race also holds a significant place in the study of power differences in society. Omi and Winant (1994), for example, trace the role of the state in changing the nature of how race is contested in the civil sphere. They argue that the civil rights movement of the 1960s offered one way that society conceptualized race (political rights). After the 1960s and 1970s, race was conceptualized as policies of equal employment, or job discrimination (economic rights), which Omi and Winant suggest continued ruling-class (white capitalist) dominance in economic spheres. Political questions of race were transformed from one struggle to another, with power being maintained by the white ruling class.

Criticisms of the Class Perspective

Some have argued that social class is a dead concept in political sociology, and more generally in sociology. This is a major criticism of the basic assumptions of the class perspective. In summarizing the weaknesses, Marger (1987) suggests that the class approach fails in the following ways:

1. One of the strongest cross-currents in the class perspective right now is that the traditional class model does not give attention to influences of key social factors such as sex, age, or issue politics. A recent study of populist politics suggests this pattern. Frank (2004) asks, “What’s the Matter with Kansas?” to highlight how voters and political groups are distracted by single issues such as abortion or gay rights, often to the detriment of their own social-class positions. Why would laborers and farmers squelch their own economic interests in the political process to contribute to the success of political coalitions that in the end support policies to their detriment?
2. Politics are not simply influenced by economics, and can be shaped by other aspects of social change and social life. Religion, for example, has had significant influence in political change, in some cases revolution, and this appears to be a global phenomenon. Much like Weber observed about status, the role of technology and expertise can create what Derber, Schwartz, and Magrass (1990) called a “mandarin class” of experts whose power is found in their bureaucratic, legal, and scientific expertise.
3. Groups emerge that cannot be accounted for by the class model, such as a new class or elites of managers who do not necessarily emerge from the modes of production. As Marger (1987: 49) states, the class model is unable to fully explain the pattern that “The few dominate the many regardless of the nature of property relations.” From this perspective, elites, rather than upper classes, have power. This criticism highlights the fact that much research in the class tradition fails to distinguish between a ruling elite and a ruling social class.

THE TRADITIONAL FRAMEWORKS TODAY

The three frameworks we know as pluralist, elite-managerial, and the social-class perspectives are at the foundation of the ways in which political sociology has conceptualized power. As theories have been tested through research, addressing unexplained paradoxes and political realities not captured by the metaphor of a particular theory, revisions have been proposed. The struggle in political sociology to explain political processes has created debates among proponents of the frameworks. A good example of the debates created by the three frameworks is found in the 1974 study of power by Lukes. His analysis of politics in society—which he revised in 2005 to elaborate on some of these tensions created by competing models of politics—highlights the differences between pluralist and elite/class approaches. Lukes builds a three-dimensional understanding of

politics. The first dimension guides us to see politics as the observable exertion of power with tangible outcomes of decisions. For example, the first dimension would focus on how voters concerned about health care policy choose between Republicans and Democrats. The second dimension of politics would ask the question: How does health care become an issue of concern in an election, and just as important, how do we explain when the issue is ignored during an election by political candidates? The second dimension of politics, according to Lukes, requires us to uncover the less visible role of agenda setters who exert influence over what is on the table for deliberation. Democratic Party leaders may encourage candidates they fund to avoid discussing health care because it is too complex for voters to understand. The third dimension is even more subtle, according to Lukes. The third dimension is invisible, where cultural and hegemonic forces are at work shaping the beliefs and values in society that alter decision outcomes and choices in agenda setting. Health care is never addressed because the upper-middle and upper classes in the United States for the most part enjoy basic health care coverage. The belief that employers can sustain private health care insurance is sustained in a capitalist belief system that perpetuates the argument that government-funded health care is “evil” or “inefficient and wastes money.” Often, candidates do not even spell out their arguments against government-funded health care; they just label it “socialized medicine” as if this in and of itself is sufficient to dismiss it as a policy option.

Lukes’ purpose with his study of power is to suggest that the first dimension (pluralist) and the second dimension (elite) do not fully explain political outcomes. He points to a persistent question in the study of power: What happens when we think of power as acquiescence or non-decision where outcomes are a function of subjective forces (socially constructed) rather than objective (rational) forces? To extend this criticism of commonplace assumptions about democratic societies in particular, Egan and Chorbajian (2005) identified what they call “vernacular pluralism” (xvii). Much like Lukes pushes us to think beyond tacit assumptions and unchecked beliefs, these authors argue that:

As long as there are social classes and other social divisions, there will be different and opposing class interests. Vernacular pluralism conceals this and contributes to making people naïve or apathetic and ultimately easier to manipulate and control. In this sense it is dangerous and holds back rather than promotes the strengthening and extension of democracy. (xviii)

As a result of these ongoing paradoxes in current studies of power and politics, political sociology has turned to a number of alternative frameworks to describe the nature of the relationship between society and politics.

Lukes warns that the few who make up the elite may use modern political processes to generate fears, guilt, and/or jealousy within the larger democratic community, and ultimately disrupt doing what is best for the community as a whole. In other words, Lukes explains that power will continue to be concentrated in the hands of a few when the few convince if not dissuade citizens to act in ways that are in fact not in the interests of the community as a whole. This work and others have pushed political sociology to address failures in the pluralist notion of democracy, or the inability of the elite-managerial framework to account for changes in political regimes, to construct new theories of power. Perhaps, this is admittedly an oversimplification. But questions posed by political sociologists have resulted in new directions in conceptualizing power and politics in society, building on the research of the past century.

NEW DIRECTIONS AFTER THE TRADITIONAL FRAMEWORKS

After a comprehensive assessment of the state of political sociology, Janoski, Alford, Hicks, and Schwartz (2005) argued that the debates between proponents of the different frameworks helped to identify yet unexplained patterns in politics and power. In particular, they identified three “challenges” that confronted political sociologists at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The first challenge is “where to put culture” in the study of politics. Increasingly in the last two decades, sociologists have given more attention to the study of culture. While there are many definitions of culture used, we find that as political sociologists incorporate the study of culture into their work, they focus on topics associated with culture—values, beliefs, customs, traditions, symbols, and knowledge found in society.

The second challenge has to do with other research that more and more embrace the model that individuals and social groups act in rational ways, seeking to maximize benefits in certain outcomes. For political sociologists, this means understanding how groups in society use power to bring greater benefits to the group and its members.

The third challenge focuses on the growing theoretical tradition commonly referred to as *postmodernism* in sociology. While some may argue that this framework has its roots in social critique and the work of Marxist or conflict sociology, postmodernists argue it avoids labels and instead attempts to identify the ways in which power in society is subtly structured by dominant social forces. This framework is associated with the influences of Michel Foucault (1977, 1980), who traced through time the ways by which society maintains differences in power through language, ideas, inherited practices, or social “narratives.”

As any field completes its research agenda, it develops theoretical revisions. Contemporary political sociology builds on the successes and failures of past understandings of power in society and has developed a number of new perspectives. Some of these incorporate lessons from the past. For example, there is now a more solid connection between the elite-managerial perspective and some aspects of the social class approach. Domhoff’s (2010) work is a good example of how the class framework and elite/managerial framework have been tied together to understand the nature of a ruling elite. We identify four frameworks that are building interesting alternative metaphors for the social bases of power in society: the rational choice approach, studies of political culture, the institutionalist approach, and postmodern sociology.

RATIONAL CHOICE Rational choice theories begin with the assumption that individuals and groups are moved to action by articulated desires and goals. In this sense, choices made reflect actions that are assumed to reflect the group’s efforts to achieve certain goals. Criminologists have applied rational choice theory to explanations for crime by depicting certain criminal acts as a function of motivations and goals of an offender, the likelihood of detection or even arrest, and how these rewards and risks change given certain opportunities for crime (Cohen and Felson 1979; Felson 1987). In simplest terms, an offender might rob a business if he or she thinks that the cash take would be high with low likelihood of being caught. The outcome in this case might yield high dollar rewards with low risk. Rational choice theorists in political sociology suggest similar assessments of the risk–reward–opportunity in the political landscape. Are there potential rewards for an interest group going to the expense of organizing a get-out-the-vote campaign to gain a majority on a city council, or to lobby Congress to change policies that might benefit the group?

Using an economic model of human behavior, rational choice situates the study of power in the incentive-based connections between individuals, groups, and institutions. Participation in

politics is assumed to be linked to reward structures. For example, one question addressed by this perspective is, which is more powerful, Congress or bureaucracies? Individuals and advocacy groups lobby government agencies that award grants or set regulations, much in the same way they try to influence members of Congress. Grants and entitlements are incentives for policy outcomes, and the details of how these are given may sometimes thwart congressional intent behind legislation creating the program. Rational choice research would focus on the flow of incentives from these agencies and the creation of groups that behave according to bureaucratic power rather than congressional.

Are interest groups motivated to achieve rewards from the government? Most likely so, and they have organized to see that their interests are in fact recognized in policy outcomes. Are there costs or risks to pushing interest-group agendas? One could say yes, that the risk may be inherent in a game that has limited resources, such as a state budget. What political opportunities arise to see that rewards are maximized and risks or loss minimized? Interestingly, political opportunities for interest groups may emerge when new political majorities gain power in Congress or the state legislature, or when interest groups work together to create coalitions to lobby a bill through Congress (opportunities for action). The old saying “politics makes for strange bed fellows” perhaps captures this idea that when interests are realized, the rational thing to do is align with others to achieve those interests. For example, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) worked with groups from the pornography industry to oppose congressional attempts in the 1990s to regulate pornography on the Internet. The alliance was perhaps an odd combination on the surface, but the shared goal of the ACLU and pornographers was similar enough to create a coalition to support claims to First Amendment rights. On the other side was an even stranger coalition of feminists and religious conservatives opposed to the acceptance of pornography of any kind. The rational choice approach would understand these coalitions as an outcome of rational group behavior designed to bring about success in policy decision making in the policy arena.

Rational choice theories depict much of the political process as a game, with different interests competing in the game, which is constrained by certain rules and, in some situations, laws. Individuals, organizations, and nation-states all are players in an arena where there is competition for scarce resources. Nation-states as rational actors may compete in a foreign policy game over oil. We know that the competition for oil can in fact become intense enough to result in war or armed conflict. A war requires an army of individuals, in some cases paid for a career in the armed services, or in other situations drafted into service by the nation-state. Thus, the risk of life is seen as a willing expenditure on the part of nation-states that go to war to protect or control interests in the Middle East. Rational choice perspectives or game theory would understand the exercise of power by studying the self-interests of actors.

POLITICAL CULTURE As the study of culture has flourished, so have explorations in the role of culture in the society–politics relationship. When Weber defined culture as a “switchman” on a train track of life directions, he was highlighting just how significant culture is in shaping social interactions, including the nature of political interactions at the individual, group, organizational, and societal levels. At first glance, the study of politics and culture has focused as one may expect on the nature of values, beliefs, knowledge systems, and political symbolism in society. Almond and Verba (1963) describe in their study of civic culture that democratic forms of governance flourish in societies with higher levels of educational achievement. This early argument in the study of political culture brought culture to the study of power.

Interest in the interconnections between culture and politics is organized around a number of themes (Berezin 1997; Jasper 2005). In broadest terms, the study of political culture currently focuses on (1) values and belief systems in society that affect politics; (2) the nature of ritual,

symbolism, and the construction of meaning in political systems; and (3) the nature of agency in shaping political culture, which stems from individual understandings of power in society. As will be seen throughout the text, culture now plays an important role in sociological descriptions of power in social and political systems.

When we are introduced to sociology, we typically develop an understanding of culture as a system of norms, values, and beliefs assumed through socialization processes across the life course. The ways in which values and beliefs about power and politics are shaped have been studied in a number of ways. Inglehart (1990, 1997), for example, has found that historical events such as wars, periods of scarcity or wealth, and the experiences of generations throughout history can result in variations in belief systems about lifestyles as well as politics. He suggests that prior to World War II, individuals had a materialist conceptualization of the world as a result of experiencing World War I and the Great Depression. As a result, their political preferences were oriented toward pragmatism. In contrast, he found that the postmaterialists were influenced by periods of sustained economic growth. As a result, political action was understood as a way to achieve rights to protect certain lifestyles. For example, debates about legal recognition of intimate partners (e.g., gay marriage) or regulations about what constitutes a suitable family environment for children (e.g., adoptions by same-sex couples) reflect contemporary lifestyle choices that have become politicized.

Political groups and organizations typically stage rituals and symbolic expressions of meaning attached to political agendas. These rituals may be helpful in communicating throughout society what one group or political party believes is an important theme about the nature of power in society. Current research on far-right-wing political groups focuses on the role of ritual and symbolism in constructing a political agenda that in some cases seeks separation from the U.S. government, or a social reorganization of power based on race, gender, or sexual orientation. For example, sociologists have found that the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi groups have staged rallies and protests to bring attention to their demands for white separatism (Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 1997). The use of staged rituals or rallies on state capitol steps or courthouse lawns, where leaders wear Nazi uniforms and swastikas, is a protest technique that uses Nazi symbolism to bring attention to the political demands of the group as part of what is called “new social movements” (Jenness and Broad 1997). These rituals are found in both the United States and Europe. Political sociologists who study these rallies examine the nature of the protest rituals, or what Tilly (1986) calls “repertoires of contention,” that is, techniques or methods of challenging current power arrangements inevitably rooted in the cultural stock of the society.

If values and worldviews shape individual perceptions of power, and ritual and symbolism are further manipulated to project political demands or beliefs, then one is left with questions about what impact these cultural influences have on individual and group political actions. The nature of agency, or the ability of individuals to shape culture, to push back as it were, becomes an important question in the study of political culture. Giddens (1990), for example, has written extensively on the role of state power and authority in the lives of modern citizens. He argues that all individuals retain a “dialectic of control” where even in the most dire situations they can exercise some power against formalized rules or authority. For example, Best (2002) uses this concept to suggest that an individual being imprisoned can exert control against the authority through suicide, through a hunger strike, or by refusing to leave the prison cell. Albeit small, the individual has *agency* in this sense, shaping the influences around him by, at the very least, not complying.

INSTITUTIONALIST Sociologists define institutions as enduring or lasting patterns of social organization, usually significant in shaping not only individual actions but also larger social outcomes. Similarly, the institutionalist approach in political sociology argues that there are significant enduring, stable, historical patterns related to struggles over power in society. As a result, there are patterned political outcomes. As the name suggests, institutionalists examine

what creates these patterns of organized political processes. This theoretical approach follows several paths of analysis (Amenta 2005). At one level, institutionalists rely on the study of *structures*, namely interest groups, unions, organizations, international corporations, and parties, as well as the state and other associated structures typically with a political focus. At another level, institutionalists understand political processes as patterned by political norms, practices, belief systems, and traditions. Thus, political outcomes such as public policy or political movements are understood as a combination of organizational influences as well as cultural influences. We believe the institutionalist framework seems especially comprehensive when it is combined with the political culture approach.

The concentric circles in Figure 1.3 depict the relationships suggested by the institutionalists. The overlaps between the state, interest groups, and culture suggest areas where political sociologists find concurrent influences in politics that in the traditional frameworks were treated as separate concepts. For example, we can think of routines or political phenomena associated with the work of certain groups in society, advocacy organizations, or social institutions (the left circle in Figure 1.3), such as religious organizations. Groups in society may seek limits on behaviors, and thus policies are created by the state, reflecting demands by the polity for addressing a particular concern (the top circle in Figure 1.3). Some policies are likely to emerge under certain cultural conditions or as a result of values or attitudinal influences in the legislative body where policy is made (the right circle in Figure 1.3). Institutionalists would hypothesize that a policy, such as banning gay marriage, emerges as a result of the work of advocacy groups around changing definitions of marriage, how groups over time elect legislators that share this view or shape the work of a particular political party, and that groups and legislative leadership on gay marriage prohibition evolve out of a cultural pattern associated with religious, economic, and political conservatism in the polity. The point is that institutionalists attempt to bring these concepts together to explain political outcomes, political structures, and aspects of political culture.

A recent example of research extending the institutionalism framework suggests that a vast global system of organizational networks and groups provides an international cultural context for the creation of policy. Beckfield (2003) finds evidence that policy ideas, such as educational change, regulation of same-sex relationships, laws related to population change and others, can be influenced by “policy scripts” that are dominant in “rich, core, Western societies” (401). He uses the concept of “world polity” as a global cultural backdrop of sorts where tracks about what constitutes effective policies in these areas are enacted as a result of international nongovernmental organizations’ influences on societies throughout the world. In other words, interest groups

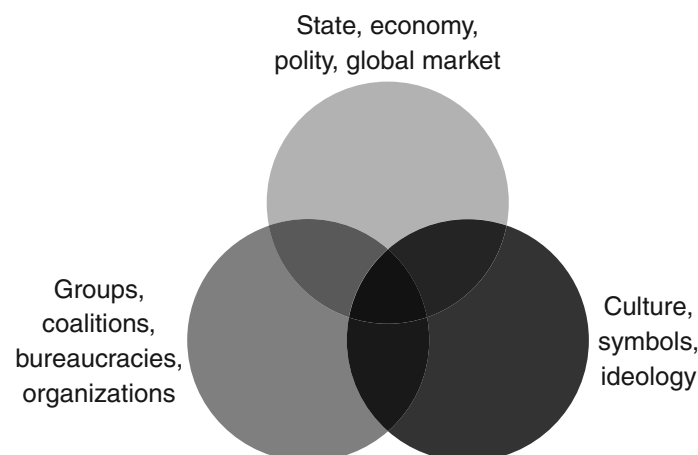


FIGURE 1.3 The Institutionalists’ Metaphor of Power

Source: Figure created by Tim Buzzell

working throughout the world will tend to follow similar paths of creating policy regardless of the system of government in a particular country. What institutionalists study is this path of policy creation, such as identify the policy problem, document the problem through the use of experts or research, prepare model legislation, activate aligned interest groups in the society to gain local support, and approach appropriate state actors for policy implementation. This institutionalist approach demonstrates that culture, policy ideas, organizational actions, and policy outcomes blend together to reveal the institutionalist model in explaining global politics. Studies using this framework will be reviewed in our discussions of the state, political organizations, and policy.

POSTMODERN POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY A distinct alternative path in the study of the relationship between society and politics is that represented by the influences of what we call here postmodernism. Rooted in the philosophical and empirical challenges to sociology as science in the 1960s and 1970s, the postmodern turn in political sociology has generated a unique perspective on the study of power.

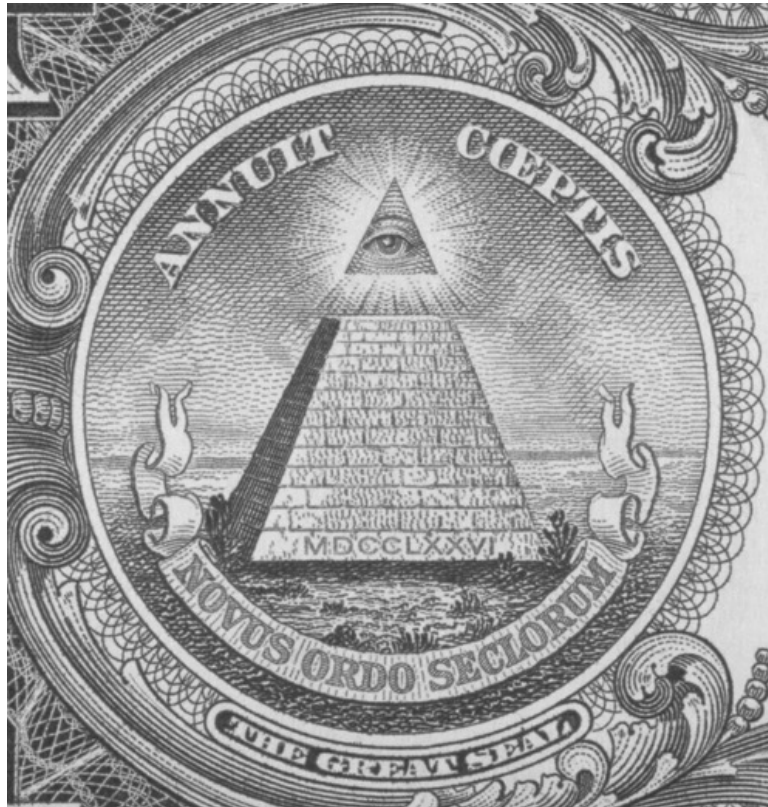
Because postmodern thought takes many different forms, it is difficult to summarize its central argument. There are several themes running through this body of work. We highlight what postmodernism has to say about the nature and study of power. The first theme found in this work is that power must be understood in the subtle, hidden aspects of everyday life. For example, research on what is referred to as the *surveillance state* (Marx 2004; Staples 2000) documents how power has shifted to those who control forms of watching the behaviors of others, such as cameras on ATMs or cameras installed on street corners and traffic signals (see Textbox 1.3). The nature of being watched shifts power over the body, movement, and privacy to other authorities. The second theme in this work emphasizes that power will no longer be understood merely as a function of social structures per se. The emphasis shifts from the study of the state or social groups to the construction of individual identities in the face of social resistance. Here language becomes important. Power is found in the discourse about human sexuality, for example, and in the nature of making others less powerful by enacting historical scripts about homosexuality or sexual expression in general. The third theme found in this work emphasizes power in a global context. The nature of communication and social interaction in a postmodern era is such that human connections take electronic forms and transcend geographical and time boundaries. In this regard, power is exercised in the command of information or technologies to shape global awareness about groups. We will explore these themes throughout the text, finding that the postmodern turn in political sociology casts a very different light on understanding the nature of power.

One of the key figures in this perspective is French scholar Michel Foucault who wrote extensively on the nature of power. His insights are intriguing. In fact, he might be critical of our attempts to define power as we did at the onset of this chapter; he suggests that power “can be identified better by what it does than what it is” (quoted in Fiske 1993: 11). In this sense, power is a part of everything social, and the social consequences of power relations are, according to postmodernists, to be exposed and revealed. Postmodern analysts trace the nature of societal power throughout history, finding that many consequences of power relationships are subtle and hidden. Such was Foucault’s (1977) study of discipline and punishment in society, which demonstrated how, through time, the exercise of state authority to punish through public executions in the town square was transformed by the state into controlled, private, nonpublic spaces away from the masses. When the eyes of the masses are unable to see the exercise of punishment, what happens to legitimacy or authority? Foucault argues that it becomes even more dominated by experts such as “corrections officials” or experts cloaked in the traditions of psychiatry. Because punishment was moved by the state from public venues to hidden prison cells, Foucault

TEXTBOX 1.3

Surveillance and Types of Power

As we have seen in this chapter, some sociologists who study power in its various forms at the end of the twentieth century argue that technology has played a significant role in changing the ways power is expressed/exercised in our day-to-day interactions. These sociologists see power as taking the form of *surveillance*, and they suggest that everywhere individuals are watched by different power centers in society.



"Eye" in the pyramid on the one dollar bill

Source: Thinkstock

French philosopher Michel Foucault concluded that science had come to be used in many different ways to control different categories of people. The diffusion of techniques of surveillance benefited significantly from this technology. For example, the science of criminology was eventually used to design "state-of-the-art" prisons that would use forms of "rehabilitation" as well as architectural designs to control individual routines and interactions. Often justified as a form of crime control or security, science to promote surveillance expanded the tools available to armies, law enforcement, school resource officers, deans of students, and parents! Foucault talked of the "gaze" or that knowing we are being watched causes us to reflect on our actions and behaviors. Power systems often use surveillance without our awareness. The state often utilizes surveillance to control citizens. College students are no exception!

Conduct an inventory of your day-to-day interactions and note which aspects of your person are being watched by others. Look for the following:

- cameras mounted on university buildings or in classrooms;
- images and interactions on Facebook, MySpace, or Web pages;

(Continued)

- cameras on street corners or buildings in town;
- ways ATMs monitor transactions;
- ways students are tested for things other than material learned in class (e.g., drinking habits in college and psych-metrics to measure motivation to learn);
- cell phones that record still or moving images;
- geographical positioning systems (GPSs) in cars.

When you start to inventory the various ways a person can be observed, watched, monitored, or tracked, or that someone can know where you are at all times, you are clearly subject to surveillance. But who is watching? What figures of power (authorities and nonauthorities) are monitoring your behaviors?



Warning sign at a metro bus stop

Source: Photo by Lisa K. Waldner

Do you think that being watched is a form of coercive, legitimate, or interdependent power? Is your conclusion based on “who” is watching?

Using Lukes three-dimensional understanding of power, how would you explain the role of surveillance in contemporary society? Does monitoring behavior represent an informed rational willingness by citizens to promote social order? Or does monitoring and tracking of behavior suggest manipulation through fear and increased distrust, mostly as a way to preserve power in the hands of a few? Discuss.

claimed that the philosophy of self-rule through diligent citizen monitors was given up to social control by experts watching the once-diligent citizenry. Clearly, Foucault has offered an important way of understanding power in the modern civil society.

Other contemporaries have taken postmodernist views of politics in similar directions, building on this theme that all things social are political—all things societal are about power. Anthony Giddens (1985), a prominent British sociologist, considers power to be at the heart of relationships between politics and social institutions including family, religion, education, and the economy. One theme that runs throughout much of his work is that the modern state blurs the lines between the state, public, private, and market spheres as we described earlier in this chapter. The exercise of power in this sense is all around us as resources are allocated by social systems (e.g., physical things) or as authoritative resources (e.g., supervision of employees) are allocated by social systems. In this regard, and much like Foucault, Giddens treats power relations as ubiquitous. Political sociology using this approach studies the nature of state control over allocation or exercise of authority in all aspects of life.

These frameworks each reveal different dynamics in society–politics relationships. Pluralist approaches to politics will ask different questions about the nature of power than the elite approaches do. And now we ask, what role does culture play in shaping elite preferences, or class-based expressions of resistance. In this regard, the various frameworks represent continuing debates about politics in society, highlighting a number of questions that will be addressed in the decades ahead. These many metaphors for power are built around resolutions to paradoxes of political and social life. Clearly the work of political sociology is not complete. The chapters that follow explore the many questions being studied today.

CONCLUSION

A conceptual mapping of the various paths in political sociology is helpful for visualizing the analytic territory of this introduction to political sociology. We are in a position to take advantage of research on the social bases of politics over the past hundred years. Coser offered an important conceptual baseline of sorts when he identified the four core topics of political sociology. But our understanding of power in its social context has greatly advanced in just the past fifty years. As a result, we can conceptualize the work of political sociology as that described recently by Hicks, Janoski, and Schwartz (2005):

The very nature of the field that makes political sociology sociological comes from civil society in the broadest sense—everything about society that is either not the state or whether the state has overlapped into other arenas. (21)

Thus, the study of power takes in a variety of directions, arenas, or spheres of social and political interaction. Power is exercised through the authority and legitimate rule in the state sphere. Power is dynamic and conflictual in the public sphere as social groups compete for attention or control of the state. Power is economic and rational perhaps in the market sphere, where rules of capitalist economies dictate the allocation of resources. And in modern times, the private sphere, the day-to-day social place of interaction among family members, friends, and intimates, also becomes subject to the exercise of power by the state, the market, and the actors in the public sphere. These spheres constitute “civil society” and map the terrain for the study of power in political sociology.

Civil society then presents a stage where paradoxes are played out. These paradoxes emerge perhaps from belief systems that guide actors in the civil society. For example, societal discourse about abortion represents one issue where we find conflict between the private sphere (family, sexual relations), the public sphere (social movements, voluntary associations), and the state (judicial

branch, police). Thus, the work of political sociologists is in several domains of the civil society. Researchers may turn their attention to studies of pro-life advocacy associations, the impact of abortion laws on teens and their families, or the ideological backgrounds of members of the judiciary. All of these areas of analysis constitute the focal points for political sociology.

We conclude this chapter by identifying three major themes that continue to characterize the study of power in political sociology. Some of these themes emerge as a result of challenges to our commonsense views of politics in democratic societies, or the tensions and conflicts created locally by global influences:

1. Power is concentrated in democratic societies;
2. Power operates not only in direct but also in indirect ways; and
3. Politics is not just about the state but imbues all social relations.

These themes are important to how much of the research in political sociology is organized. This is not to suggest that all of political sociology is about just three concepts; it's more complex than that to be sure. Rather, we suggest these ideas as we close the first chapter of this textbook and challenge students of political sociology to orient their thoughts to ideas ripe for inquiry. Debates among conceptual frameworks and emerging theories are the focus of this text as we prepare to move into more detailed considerations of the pluralist, elite/managerial, and social-class frameworks, especially considering attempts to synthesize these frameworks into a more unified political sociology, and to consider these frameworks in light of emerging research pushing the field into new vistas of understanding.

Power is concentrated, even in democratic societies. The Enlightenment thinkers like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau believed that freethinking rational individuals could engage in self-governance. This was in contrast to the pre-Enlightenment thinking that created a power structure in society based on divine right of the monarch. The experiences of the Industrial Revolution were the focus on sociological attention in what is considered the founding writings of the discipline. Marx brought attention to the ways in which class conflict and the concentrations of wealth created a paradox in Enlightenment hopes of self-governance. How could a parliament of elected citizens self-govern when the representatives in the parliament were owners of property, industry, and capital? Has the Enlightenment philosophy of self-governance met its ideal expression? Or have the struggles over power and the resolution of these struggles favored a few instead of the many?

Power operates in direct and indirect ways. The early studies of power focused on the direct exercise of power usually in the form of capacity for action as described in the previous paragraph. We can all think of obvious examples of direct forms of power—coercion, for example—where force is used to bring about compliance with interests or desires. Weber documented the role of bureaucracies in organizing human action into outcomes that would be legitimated through something as simple as writing things down in a procedures manual. His concept of rationalization would highlight the paradox of constrained will in democratic societies. Rationalization of society, according to Weber, was the transformation from informal exchanges between social groups to interactions and exchanges that more and more were governed (power) by the appeal to procedures and rules. The forces of rationalization including the creation of “more law” to govern an increasingly complex society after the Industrial Revolution would become part of the social mindset. Weber would highlight how deep into social interactions these rules would go, suggesting power is understood in its

many subtle, more indirect forms found in the values, beliefs, and customs (culture) of complex societies.

For political sociologists, *power is about more than overt forms of governance* found in political institutions. Early works of political scientists focused on the nature of governmental systems. But these works were criticized for being too systems focused. Consider the work of feminist sociologists in the last forty years. While they focus on the impact of governmental structures on policy outcomes for women, or the fact that women do not hold a majority of the seats in Congress, the work of feminists has also identified the nature of power in all social interactions. Power in the workplace has typically been exercised by men, which has resulted in a “glass ceiling,” a discriminatory barrier to women’s advancement into key positions of corporate governance. Prior to the 1980s, the idea of “sexual harassment” had no form in law or in describing the nature of sexist language that creates oppressive environments for women and men through language. Identifying barriers, impediments, language, norms, and structures that differentiate people into social groups with power and social groups without power is a key task of political sociology. The field offers a deeper understanding of politics by emphasizing the role of social status and social institutions, in addition to politics, culture, and global influences.

Politics and power are central concerns of sociology and have been since the birth of the discipline. The ways in which power is played out in social networks of all kinds constitute one of the core areas of study. This chapter has shown how Marx, Weber, and Durkheim called our attention to the questions of social order and, how it was maintained through the exercise of power—as manipulated masses, or as moralists following the need for order in the community. The chapter also suggested that the exploration of political sociology assumed a significant place in the discipline of sociology thanks to the work of C. Wright Mills, who, in the 1950s, called our attention to age-old themes in the study of who wins and who loses as essential to the work of sociology. His application of the sociological imagination to power-based relationships in society marked a significant shift in how sociologists would study politics. Throughout the text, we will come to understand the role of the sociological imagination in understanding current debates about the nature of politics in contemporary society.

The tools political sociologists bring to the study of power have offered much insight and understanding about things that sometimes challenge our commonsense beliefs about the nature of politics. As a result of these analytical approaches, political sociology is rich with metaphors that reveal greater insights into the nature of power at many levels of society. Moreover, these tools have been helpful in identifying the nature of social paradoxes related to power. This chapter builds upon these ideas that are intricately part of the sociological imagination found in political sociology. With this brief introduction to power in mind, the chapter has described in more detail the ways in which political sociology has defined power and the typologies (metaphors) constructed to help understand the forms of power studied. The second portion of the chapter presented the three theoretical traditions (metaphors) that have evolved in political sociology. These traditions and others that are now developing tackle head-on the paradoxes that generate the questions and work for the field of political sociology. These theoretical approaches to understanding power are taking new forms as a result of debates and controversies in how power is understood in contemporary society.

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