

Political Power

Political science deals with political power, its influence and distribution. In a society that person would be identified as powerful who can influence the behaviour of other persons. The weight of influence is judged by the amount of change in the position of the actor influenced. Sometimes, the compliance on the part of the influenced is very high. In such situations, the power holder requires little efforts to exercise influence.. An example of such an influence may be seen in the power of the father in the family. This is an example of spontaneous influence. On the other hand, in other instances, the compliance may be very low requiring force to impose power. This is known as **coercive influence**. Generally, political power has been termed as coercive influence. It is the use of threats or sanctions to influence others. These threats may be accompanied by possibilities of injuries or sanctions to influence others. While penalties or punishments are negative sanctions to power, rewards are positive sanctions. **Thus power may be defined as the capacity to affect other's behaviour by the use or the threat of the use of negative or positive sanctions.**

Distinguishing features of power

There are certain distinguishing features of power. Firstly, power is relational and is not a personal property. Power is exercised only in relation to others. It has been defined as the capacity to affect other's behaviour. Secondly, power is behavioural. It consists in the behaviour of the two actors towards one another. Being behavioural, power is subject to measurement and comparison. It is measured and assessed on the basis of its influence. Thirdly, power is situational. In order to know it one must relate it to a specific situation. Power is known by the specific role of the power holder in a specific situation.

Power when involves coercion may mean the following things:

1. **Force** : It is a physical activity employing visible resources.
2. **Domination** : It takes place when an actor clearly communicates his intention to the power addressee.
3. **Manipulation** : It is an attempt to influence other's behaviour without communicating the actual intention. It is often used in political situations to avoid direct communication between the most powerful and the actual power addressee.

Bases of power

Power relations depend on power bases. The power bases differ from one culture to another and also from one level to another in the same culture. These power bases may be as follows:

1. **Wealth** : Power due to possession of wealth shows that wealth has the power base. This is particularly found in the capitalist societies.

2. **Control over means** : Control over means indicates possession of arms, ammunitions and all sorts of weapons of violence. Iraq under Saddam Hossain and North Korea under Kim Jun Un are the better examples.
3. **Skill** : Personal skill is a power basis observed in the case of powerful individuals in different societies.
4. **Power itself** : Power over one issue area itself helps in its extension to other issue areas. Therefore, in such cases, power itself serves as a power basis.

Power and Influence

It is admitted by all that power and influence are co-related terms. Influence turns into power when sanctions enter. Suppose A is an office who asks B (another subordinate official) to obey his orders. B refuses to do the work and A suspends B from the office. So in this case, A has used power. Therefore, it is the process of sanctions which differentiates power from influence in general.

Power and legitimacy

When some has power, it means he has authority. Authority is always legitimate and backed by the power of law and common consent.

Power wielders or exercisers in a state

In a state, power is exercised by a cross-sections of the people belonging to different organizations, associations or groups. The power exercised is authorized by the state, and each individual exercises power in his own way and manner. The question is : who are these individuals?

First, we have to look into the question from a Marxist perspective. Marxist theory represents one of the earlier attempts to explain the distribution of power in a society. According to Karl Marx, political power in every civilized society is unevenly distributed. The ruling class is the capitalist class that owns all means of production with power in all walks of life. The brunt of their powerfulness is felt by the proletariat class who are without property or any kind of power in the society. The social order is, therefore, marked by perpetual conflict between the ruler and ruled classes.

Second, it is the elite class that exercises power in the society. The elitist thinkers believe in the hierarchical structure of the society. A coterie of people lies at the apex point of the hierarchy and they enjoy political power. These persons are placed at the most ranks of the institutions holding a pivotal position in the society, such as the military, the big corporations and the political executives. The elite group is a minority community and political power is always concentrated in their hands. These political elites consider power as cumulative. Power brings in more power. They can fully regulate the entry of the non-elite into it.

Third, there is the exercise of power by the managerial class. With time, the elite class faces a crisis in the capitalist society. They gradually become only a leisured class divorced from the actual production process. The production process gradually passes into the hands of the managerial class. Ultimately, this managerial class takes control of the means of production and thus receives preferential treatment. The capitalist elite class is gradually replaced by the managerial elite. According to Burnham, the government in the modern declining capitalist societies will be ultimately run by the managerial elite.

Fourth, the society is ruled by the political class, the elite of the minority which is composed of superior individuals occupying economic, military or religious possessions. Due to its organized nature, the elite minority tends to maintain its power. However, it should be borne in mind that there can be the intervention of non-elite class in the affairs of the elite class as the latter's deeds may not always be logical.

Fifthly, the state cannot always exercise its coercive power in a democratic polity for the following reasons: (i) the political rests in the hands of the people or their elected representatives; (ii) people are the final judges in the field of administration; (iii) the executive is responsible to the representatives of the people; (iv) the legislature is responsible to the masses; (v) the judiciary takes care of the people; (vi) the constitution of the state takes due care of the rights of different sections of the people; (vii) the people control the government. They can even remove it or change it; (viii) the government remembers the values of equality, liberty and fraternity. Every citizen is given equal rights before the court of law.

Sixthly, in a totalitarian state, the coercive power of the state is more pronounced. The disadvantages of a totalitarian state are glaring. These are ; autocratic government, supremacy of the state, elimination of fundamental rights, narrow and aggressive nationalism, lack of international consciousness, racism, moral degeneration, opposition to public welfare and false propaganda.
