

Power and Authority



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Power

- **Power** can be defined as the **ability to influence** the behaviour of another.
- Power brings about **compliance** through **persuasion, pressure, threats, coercion or violence.**

Faces of power

- Stephen Lukes said Sociologists should study power as having 3 “faces”.
- **The first face/Overt dimension**
 - ▣ This is based upon the work of Dahl who said that person who **wins and argument, or an issue**, has the power. This fits with the Classical Pluralist approach to power. For example: a **parent** wins an argument with their child, so they have the power.

Faces of power

□ The second face/covered dimension

- Power is activated on the second, not **only in order to triumph** over the other participants in the decision-making process, but also to prevent decision-making, to **exclude certain subjects or participants** from the process

Faces of power

- **The third face/latent dimension – Manipulating the view of others**
 - ▣ The third face of power described how power can covert **manipulate** others to do something they might not actually want to do by changing what they want.
 - ▣ Lukes, Marxist, said this can create a **false consciousness** as the working class will be convinced that what the ruling class want is actually what they want too.

Authority

- Authority and power are **separate** but closely related concepts.
- Authority is the **right to act or rule**. Authority lies with the **formal position and whoever occupies** it shall exercise and issue orders and commands.
- According to Max Weber, “ Authority is the **willing and unconditional compliance of people**, resting upon their **belief** that it is **legitimate** for the superior to impose his will on them and **illegitimate for them to refuse** to obey.”
- Thus compared to power, authority is characterized by legitimacy.
- **Power + Legitimacy = Authority**

Types of authority

- The German sociologists Max Weber classified authority into three types:
 - ▣ Traditional authority
 - ▣ Charismatic authority
 - ▣ Legal- rational Authority

Traditional authority

- In traditional authority, the **dominant person or group, usually defined by heredity**, is thought to have been preordained to rule over the rest.
- This type of authority is based on **customs, usages and precedents**. People obey because the tradition of the customs dictates they must do so.

Charismatic authority

- This type of authority is based on **exceptional personal traits of the ruler**.
- Here leaders are obeyed because they **inspire their followers**, who credit their heroes with exceptional and sometimes supernatural qualities.
- Charismatic leaders are **inspiring figures who emerge in times of crisis, and upheaval**.
- A significant feature of the charismatic authority system is that it is **unstable**, it breaks down when the leader dies or when the charismatic qualities of the leader declines.

Legal- rational Authority

- It is based on laws, rules and regulations.
- This system is called legal because authority is exercised by means of a **system of rules and procedures**.
- It is called rational because in it the means are expressly designed to achieve **certain specific ends**. It means that obedience is owed not to an individual but to **a set of principles**.
- **Modern bureaucracies** are the best example of this type of authority. We obey laws not just from **fear, nor from tradition**, nor from personal allegiance to the chief of police, but because we **feel law and order is necessary and desirable** in a rational society.

Suggested readings

- Andrew, H., 2004. *Political Theory An Introduction*. PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, pp-121-151.

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