

POWER

Politics is considered as the study of “shaping and sharing of power”. Power is one of the most basic concepts in political science. It holds the same importance in political science as money has in economics. In a general sense, the concept of power links, to the ability to achieve the desired outcome sometimes referred to as power. At an individual level, it is the individual’s ability to impose one’s will on others. At a global level, it is the capability of a country to carry out its affairs without interference from other countries in global politics.

Power has three significant components –

- (a) Force
- (b) Influence and
- (c) Authority

Relation Between Power and Authority

Authority = Power + Legitimacy

If power is the ability to influence others’ behaviour, then authority is right to do so.

Authority and power are interlinked.

Authority is rarely exercised in absence of power, and power always means some amount of authority.

Max Weber considered authority as a form of power, a legitimate power.

Power is the ability to influence. It is often identified with persuasion, pressure, threat, coercion, or violence, Constitutional overtone is absent.

Authority is a form of constitutional power. It is rightful power. It has both a legal and moral tone.

Conventional View of Power

In a conventional sense, power is same as domination. As per Robert Dahl, power is a relational concept, power is the capability to get things done by others even against their wish. Power is considered coercive by nature. It includes Liberal Theory, Marxist Theory, Elitist Theory, and Pluralist Theory of Power.

Non – Conventional View of Power

Power is not considered domination but empowerment. It is inclusive of Gramsci's concept of Hegemony and Hannah Arendt's concept of Acting in Concert.

Steven Luke gave a 3 dimensional view of power –

1. Power in the formal sense (Max Weber's View)
2. Power as agenda setting (Marxist View) and
3. Power as a thought control process (Gramscian View)

Elite Theory v/s Pluralistic Theory of Power

Pluralist Theory of Power – According to this theory, power in society not concentrated in a single group, power is distributed among various organisations or associations. The stress is on immediate power. If an individual cannot keep up with politics, their interests will be safeguarded by interest groups. Compromise and bargaining define the Pluralist Theory. Government has a check and balance system that evens out the power. Can easily be frozen in decisions by different interest groups. People in decision making positions are constantly moving in and out of power. It presents the Polyarchy view of Robert Dahl.

Elitist Theory of Power – As per this theory, power lies within a small group known as elites. Stress on the material representation of power. Only successful individuals who have proven power may enter the political system. The superiority of the property owning, upper class define elitist theory. The government is comprised of a single mind type that creates policies. Next they need to elevate some non – elites to power circles to appease the masses. Power is decided at the top and the masses are uniformed. Thinkers are Pareto, Robert Michel, Mosca, and CW Mill are important exponents.

Post Modern Theory of Power

The foremost explanation of power from a postmodern point of view is suggested by Michael Foucault in his book "Discipline and Punish" where he gave the social theory of power. His famous quotes about power is "Knowledge is Power". His theory of power is unconventional in nature. As per Michael Foucault, "Power is everywhere" and "Power flows throughout the society in the form of a network of capillaries."

Power operates through disciplinary rules rather than through a command and obedience relationship. Power is now exercised via various institutions that organize and manage people in a complex division of labour. These institutions are inclusive of not only schools, offices, police departments and prisons, but also hospitals, clinics, and many welfare organisations. Michael Foucault's analysis of power is considered a post structural view of power. Instead of a macro view of power, Michael Foucault gives a micro view of power. As per him, each of us is powerful and powerless at the same time. We are under the power of someone, and we are exercising our power on someone.

Important Definitions

H Lasswell and A Kaplan – “Political science is the “study of the shaping and sharing of power”.

Hobbes – “There is a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire for power that ceases only in death”.

Bertrand Russell – Power denotes the ability of a person to fulfill his desires to achieve his objectives.

HV Wiseman – Power is the ability to get one's wishes carried out despite opposition.

Hannah Arendt – Only power but never violence can create legitimate authority.

Robert M MacIver – Power is the capacity to command services or compliance of others.

Nietzsche – Power is a capacity to redefine reality.

Lord Acton – Power tends to corrupt, absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Pareto – History of mankind is nothing but a graveyard of the aristocracy.

Important Authors and Books

Bertrand Russell – Power: A New Social Analysis.

Robert MacIver – The Web of Government.

Vilfredo Pareto – The Mind and Society.

Gaetano Mosca – The Ruling Class.

Robert Michaels – Political Parties.

C. Wright Mills – The Power Elite.

Robert Dahl – Who Governs? And Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy.

Steven Lukes – Power: A Radical View.

Hannah Arendt – On Violence.

Michael Foucault – The Birth of the Clinic (1963)

Madness and Civilisation (1969)

Discipline and Punish (1975)

The History of Scrutiny (1976)

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