

POWER, SOCIETY, AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

The Nature of Power

Ordinary men and women are driven by forces in society that they neither understand nor control. These forces are embodied in governmental authorities, economic organizations and markets, social values and ideologies, accepted ways of life, and learned patterns of behavior. However diverse the nature of these forces, they have in common the ability to modify the conduct of individuals, to control their behavior, and to shape their lives. **Power** is the capacity to affect the conduct of individuals through the real or threatened use of rewards and punishments. Power is exercised over individuals and groups by offering them things they value or by threatening to deprive them of those things. These values are the power base, and they can include physical safety, health, and well-being; wealth and material possessions; jobs and means to a livelihood; knowledge and skills; social recognition, status, and prestige; love, affection, and acceptance by others; and a satisfactory self-image and self-respect. To exercise power, then, control must be exercised over the things that are valued in society.

Power is a special form of influence. Broadly speaking, influence is the production of intended effects. People who can produce intended effects by any means are said to be influential. People who can produce intended effects by the real or threatened use of rewards and punishments are said to be powerful.

Power can rest on various resources. The exercise of power assumes many different forms—the giving or withholding of many different values. Yet power bases are usually interdependent—individuals who control certain valued resources and are likely to control other resources as well. Wealth, economic power, prestige, recognition, political influence, education, respect, and so on, all tend to “go together” in society.

Power is never equally distributed. “There is no power where power is equal.” For power to be exercised, the “powerholder” must control some base values. By *control* we mean that the powerholder is in a position to offer these values as rewards to others or to threaten to deprive others of these values.

Power is a relationship among individuals, groups, and institutions in society. Power is not really a “thing” that someone possesses. Instead, power is a relation-

power

the capacity to affect the conduct of others through the real or threatened use of rewards and punishments

power

based on control of valued resources
unequally distributed

ship in which some individuals or groups have control over resources valued by others.

ELITES AND MASSES

The **elite** are the few who have power; the **masses** are the many who do not. The elite are the few who control what is valued in society and use that control to shape the lives of others. The masses are the many whose lives are shaped by institutions, events, and leaders over which they have little control. Political scientist Harold Lasswell wrote, “The division of society into elites and masses is universal,” and even in a democracy, “a few exercise a relatively great weight of power, and the many exercise comparatively little.”¹

elite and masses
the few who have power and the many who do not

POWER, AUTHORITY, AND LEGITIMACY

Legitimacy is the belief that the exercise of power is “right” or “proper” and that people are morally obligated to submit to it. Legitimacy depends on people believing that the exercise of power is necessary and valuable to society. As long as people believe in the legitimacy of the institutions in which power is lodged and believe that power is being used rightfully and properly, force will seldom be required. People feel obliged to obey laws, follow rules, and abide by decisions that they believe to be legitimate. But if people begin to question the legitimacy of institutions (that is, governments, corporations, churches, the military, and so on) and if people come to believe that laws, rules, and decisions are no longer rightful or proper, then they will no longer feel morally obligated to abide by them. Institutional power will then rest on sheer force alone—as, for example, when unpopular, “illegitimate” governments rely on repression by police or military forces to exercise power over their populations.

legitimacy
belief that the exercise of power is right and proper



Legitimate governments exercise authority through the threat of sanctions against those who do not comply with the law. Here, an inmate is being processed to begin a prison sentence. What other sanctions do legitimate governments use to compel compliance among citizens?

authority

power that is exercised
legitimately

AUTHORITY

Authority refers to power that is exercised legitimately. Not all power is legitimate: A thief who forces us to turn over money at gunpoint is exercising power, not authority. A tax collector from the Internal Revenue Service who forces us to turn over money under threat of a fine or jail sentence is exercising authority—power that is perceived as legitimate. Authority, then, is a special type of power that is believed to be rightful and proper. Political leaders in all societies surround themselves with elaborate symbols of office in order to help legitimize their authority. Authority and legitimacy depend on beliefs, attitudes, and values of the masses. Authority, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. The elite know this, so they try to influence mass beliefs and values in order to maintain the legitimacy of institutions they control and to reinforce their own authority. The elite do not like to rely on force alone.

SOURCES OF LEGITIMACY

What are the sources of legitimacy? Early in the twentieth century, a German sociologist named Max Weber (pronounced “Vayber”) suggested three general sources of legitimacy:

1. *Tradition*: Legitimacy rests on established beliefs in the sanctity of authority and the moral need to obey leaders.
2. *Charisma*: Legitimacy rests on the personal heroic qualities of a particular leader.
3. *Legality*: Legitimacy is based on a commitment to rules that bind both leaders and the people.

Historically, most leaders have depended on tradition for their authority. The rule of tribal chieftains, pharaohs and kings, and feudal lords and ladies has been accepted as right because “it has always been that way.” Some have relied on charismatic leadership—from Napoleon to Hitler to Gandhi to Mao Zedong. The authority of these leaders was based on the faith of their followers. Still other elites depend on legitimacy conferred by rules that are agreed on by both leaders and followers. Weber referred to this type of legitimacy as **rational-legal authority**. Leaders exercise their authority not because of tradition or personal charisma but because of the office or position they occupy.

**rational-legal
authority**

legitimacy conferred
by rules that are agreed
on by both leaders and
followers

INSTITUTIONAL POWER

Power is exercised in large institutions—governments, corporations, schools, the military, churches, newspapers, television networks, law firms, and so on. Power that stems from high positions in the social structures of society is stable and far-reaching. Sociologist C. Wright Mills once observed: “No one can be truly powerful unless he has access to the command of major institutions, for it is over these institutional means of power that the truly powerful are, in the first instance, powerful.”² Not all power, it is true, is anchored in or exercised through institutions. But institutional positions in society provide a continuous and important base of power. As Mills explained,

If we took the one hundred most powerful men in America, the one hundred wealthiest, and the one hundred most celebrated away from the institutional positions they now occupy, away from their resources of men and women and money, away from the media of mass communication that are now focused upon them—then they would be powerless and poor and uncelebrated. For power is not of a man. Wealth does not center in the person of the wealthy. . . . To have power requires access to major institutions, for the institutional positions men occupy determine in large part their chances to have and to hold these valued experiences.³

POWER AND IDEOLOGY

Ideas have power. Indeed, whole societies are shaped by systems of ideas that we call **ideologies**. The study of ideologies—liberalism, conservatism, socialism, communism, fascism—is not a separate social science. Rather, the study of ideologies spans all the social sciences, and it is closely related to philosophy. Ideologies are integrated systems of ideas that rationalize a way of life, establish standards of “rightness” and “wrongness,” and provide emotional impulses to action. Ideologies usually include economic, political, social, psychological, and cultural ideas, as well as interpretations of history.

Ideologies rationalize and justify power in society. By providing a justification for the exercise of power, the ideology itself becomes a base of power in society. Ideology “legitimizes” power, making the exercise of power acceptable to the masses and thereby adding to the power of the elite. However, ideologies also affect the behavior of the elite; because once an ideology is deeply rooted in society, powerholders themselves are bound by it.

ideology

an integrated system of ideas that rationalizes and justifies the exercise of power in society



Mao Zedong led the Communist Revolution in China in 1949 and then was the leader of China until his death in 1976. His control over China’s people and government is often attributed to his charismatic leadership ability. This 1938 photo shows Mao in Shensi Province speaking to fellow communist revolutionaries during a six thousand-mile “Long March” during that country’s revolution. Are there any political leaders today who derive power from their charisma?

In our study of power and ideology, we will first explore the ideology of *classical liberalism*—an ideology that attacked the established power of a hereditary aristocracy and asserted the dignity, worth, and freedom of the individual. Classical liberalism and capitalism justify the power of private enterprise and the market system. Whereas classical liberalism limits the powers of government, *modern liberalism* accepts governmental power as a positive force in freeing people from poverty, ignorance, discrimination, and sickness. It justifies the exercise of governmental power over private enterprise and the establishment of the welfare state. In contrast, *modern conservatism* doubts the ability of the governmental planners to solve society’s problems; conservatism urges greater reliance on family, church, and individual initiative and effort. We also will explore *neoconservatism*, which de-emphasizes the smaller governmental ideal advocated by traditional conservatives but often asserts military-based solutions to foreign policy dilemmas.

We will then look at ideologies that have influenced other societies. *Fascism* is a power-oriented ideology that asserts the supremacy of a nation or race over the interests of individuals, groups, and other social institutions. *Marxism* attacks the market system, free enterprise, and individualism; it justifies revolutionary power in overthrowing liberal capitalist systems and the establishment of a “dictatorship of the proletariat.” *Communism* calls for the evolutionary democratic replacement of the private enterprise system with government ownership of industry.

We will describe the collapse of communism and the reasons for its failure in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, as well as its evolution in China.

Power and the Social Sciences

social science

the study of human behavior

interdisciplinary

the study of a topic using ideas, methods, and data from all of the social sciences

anthropology

the study of people and their ways of life

society

a group of people who depend on one another and share a common culture

Social science is the study of human behavior. Actually, there are several social sciences, each specializing in a particular aspect of human behavior and each using different concepts, methods, and data in its studies. Anthropology, sociology, economics, psychology, political science, and history have developed into separate “disciplines” but all share an interest in human behavior.

Power is *not* the central concern of the social sciences, yet all the social sciences deal with power in one form or another (see *Masters of Social Thought*, “Bertrand Russell: Power Is to the Social Sciences What Energy Is to Physics”). Each of the social sciences contributes to an understanding of the forces that modify the conduct of individuals, control their behavior, and shape their lives. Thus, to fully understand power in society, we must approach this topic in an **interdisciplinary** fashion—using ideas, methods, data, and findings from all the social sciences.

ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology is the study of people and their ways of life. It is the most holistic of the social sciences in that it studies all aspects of a **society**—a group of people who depend on one another for their well-being and who share a



Bertrand Russell: Power Is to the Social Sciences What Energy Is to Physics

Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), English philosopher and mathematician, is regarded as one of the twentieth century's greatest thinkers, mainly because of his contributions to mathematics and symbolic logic. However, Russell possessed a great breadth of interest that included history, economics, and political science, as well as education, morals, and social problems. He received the Nobel Prize in literature “in recognition of his many-sided and significant authorship, in which he has constantly figured as a defender of humanity and freedom of thought.” He summarized his views about the importance of power in society in a book significantly entitled *Power: A New Social Analysis*.

First of all, power is fundamental to the social sciences:

The fundamental concept in the social sciences is power, in the same sense in which energy is the fundamental concept in physics.

Second, the desire for power as well as wealth motivates people:

When a moderate degree of comfort is assured, both individuals and communities will pursue power rather than wealth: they may seek wealth as a means to power, or they may forgo an increase of wealth in order to secure an increase of power, but in the former case as in the latter, their fundamental motive is not economic. . . .

Third, power takes many forms:

Like energy, power has many forms, such as wealth, armaments, civil authority, and influence on opinion. No one of these can be regarded as subordinate to any other, and there is no one form from which the others are derivative. The attempt to treat one form of power, say wealth, in isolation can only be partially successful. . . . To revert to the analogy of physics, power, like energy, must be regarded as continually passing from any one of its forms into any other, and it should be the business of social science to seek the laws of such transformations.

Finally, power produces social change:

Those whose love of power is not strong are unlikely to have much influence on the course of events. The people who cause social changes are, as a rule, people who strongly desire to do so. Love of power, therefore, is a characteristic of the people who are causally important. We should, of course, be mistaken if we regarded it as the sole human motive, but this mistake would not lead us so much astray as might be expected in the search for causal laws in social science, since love of power is the chief motive producing the changes that social science has to study.

SOURCE: Selection from *Power: A New Social Analysis*, by Bertrand Russell, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., p. 11. Copyright © 1938 by Bertrand Russell. Copyright renewed 1966 by Bertrand Russell.

physical anthropology

the study of the development of human biological and physical characteristics

cultural anthropology

the study of the ways of life of both ancient and modern peoples

archaeology

the study of the physical and cultural characteristics of peoples and societies that existed prior to recorded history

prehistory

the time before written records

culture

all the common patterns and ways of living that characterize society

sociology

the study of relationships among individuals and groups

social stratification

the classification and ranking of members of a society

common culture. Some anthropologists are concerned primarily with the development of human biological and physical characteristics; this field is called **physical anthropology**. Other anthropologists are interested primarily in the ways of life of both ancient and modern peoples; this field is called **cultural anthropology**.

Archaeology uses the study of both the physical and cultural characteristics of peoples and societies that existed in the distant past. It is similar to history but reaches further back in time, into **prehistory**, the time before written records. It endeavors to reconstruct the history of a society from the remains of its culture. Some of these remains are as impressive as the pyramids of Egypt and the Mayan temples of Mexico; some are as mundane as bits of broken pottery, stone tools, and garbage.

Culture is all the common patterns and ways of living that characterize a society. Cultural anthropologists describe and compare societies and cultures. They describe and explain a great many things: child rearing and education, family arrangements, language and communication, technology, ways of making a living, the distribution of work, religious beliefs and values, social life, leadership patterns, and power structures.

Power is part of the culture or the way of life of a people. Power is exercised in all societies because all societies have systems of rewards and sanctions designed to control the behavior of their members. Perhaps the most enduring structure of power in society is the family: Power is exercised within the family when patterns of dominance and submission are established between male and female and between parents and children. Societies also develop structures of power outside the family to maintain peace and order among their members, to organize individuals to accomplish large-scale tasks, to defend themselves against attack, and even to wage war and exploit other peoples.

In our study of power and culture, we will examine how cultural patterns determine power relationships. We will also examine patterns of authority in traditional and modern families and the changing power role of women in society. We will focus special attention in Chapter 4 on how social science looks at sex in America. We will also take up a long-standing controversy regarding value judgments about cultural practices in a feature called “Cultural Relativity and Female Circumcision.” We will examine the origins and development of power relationships, illustrating these concepts with an example involving the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a state that is also a chiefdom.

SOCIOLOGY

Sociology is the study of relationships among individuals and groups. Sociologists describe the structure of formal and informal groups, their functions and purposes, and how they change over time. They study social institutions (such as families, schools, and churches), social processes (for example, conflict, competition, assimilation, and change), and social problems (crime, race relations, poverty, and so forth). Sociologists also study social classes.

All societies have some system of classifying and ranking their members—a system of **stratification**. In modern industrial societies, social status is associ-

ated with the various roles that individuals play in the economic system. Individuals are ranked according to how they make their living and the power they exercise over others. Stratification into social classes is determined largely on the basis of occupation and control of economic resources.

Power derives from social status, prestige, and respect, as well as from control of economic resources. Thus, the stratification system involves the unequal distribution of power.

In our study of power and social class, we will explore stratification and the extent of inequality in America. We will discuss the differing lifestyles of upper, middle, working, and lower classes in America and the extent of class conflict. We will examine the ideas of sociologist C. Wright Mills about a “power elite” in America that occupies powerful positions in the governmental, corporate, and military bureaucracies of the nation. Taking our study of power relationships to an international level, we will look at global inequalities. We will examine the ideas of Karl Marx about the struggle for power among social classes. Finally, we will describe the differential in political power among social classes in America.

PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology may be defined as the study of the behavior of people and animals. Behavior, we know, is the product of both “nature and nurture”—that is, a product of both our biological makeup and our environmental conditioning. We will examine the continuing controversy over *how much* of our behavior is a product of our genes versus our environment. There is great richness and diversity in psychological inquiry. **Biological psychology** examines the extent to which electrical and chemical events in the brain and nervous system determine behavior. **Behavioral psychologists** study the learning process—the way in which people and animals learn to respond to stimuli. Behavioral psychologists frequently study in experimental laboratory situations, with the hope that the knowledge gained can be useful in understanding more complex human behavior outside the laboratory. **Social psychologists**, on the other hand, study interpersonal behavior—the ways in which social interactions shape an individual’s beliefs, perceptions, motivations, attitudes, and behavior. Social psychologists generally study the whole person in relation to the total environment. **Psychoanalytic (Freudian) psychologists** study the impact of subconscious feelings and emotions and of early childhood experiences on the behavior of adults. **Humanistic psychologists** are concerned with the human being’s innate potential for growth and development. **Cognitive psychologists** emphasize how people learn about themselves and their environment. Many other psychologists combine theories and methods in different ways in their attempts to achieve a better understanding of behavior.

Personality consists of all the enduring, organized ways of behavior that characterize an individual. Psychologists differ over how personality characteristics are determined. Some psychologists study the impact of physical aspects of the brain—particularly chemicals and electrical impulses—on personality traits (biological psychology). Other branches of psychology explore whether

psychology

the study of the behavior of people and animals

biological psychology

the study of electrical and chemical events in the brain and nervous system

behavioral psychology

the study of human and animal responses to stimuli

social psychology

the study of interpersonal behavior

psychoanalytic (Freudian) psychology

the study of the effects of subconscious feelings and early childhood experiences on behavior

humanistic psychology

the study of the growth and development of the human personality

cognitive psychology

an approach to psychology that emphasizes how people learn about themselves and their environment

personality

all the enduring, organized ways of behavior that characterize an individual

characteristics are acquired through the process of reinforcement and conditioning (behavioral psychology), products of the individual's interaction with the significant people and groups in his or her life (social psychology), manifestations of the continuous process of positive growth toward "self-actualization" (humanistic psychology), the results of subconscious drives and long-repressed emotions stemming from early childhood experiences (Freudian psychology), or some combination of all these.

In our study of power and personality, we will examine various theories of personality determination in an effort to understand the forces shaping an individual's reaction to power. We will explore the recurring question of "nature versus nurture," biology versus environment, in determining the human condition. Using a Freudian perspective, we will study the "authoritarian personality"—the individual who is habitually dominant and aggressive toward others over whom he or she exercises power but is submissive and weak toward others who have more power; the individual who is extremely prejudiced, rigid, intolerant, cynical, and power oriented. We will explore the power implications of B. F. Skinner's ideas of behavioral conditioning for the control of human behavior. We will also describe the treatment of mental illness from these various psychological perspectives. In a case study, we will describe the startling results of an experiment designed to test the relationship between authority and obedience.

ECONOMICS

economics

the study of the production and distribution of scarce goods and services

Economics is the study of the production and distribution of scarce goods and services. There are never enough goods and services to satisfy everyone's demands, and because of this, choices must be made. Economists study how individuals, businesses, and nations make these choices about goods and services.

Economic power is the power to decide what will be produced, how much it will cost, how many people will be employed to produce it, what their wages will be, what the price of the good or service will be, what profits will be made, how these profits will be distributed, and how fast the economy will grow.

Capitalist societies rely heavily on the market mechanism to make these decisions. In our study of economic power, we will explore the strengths and weaknesses of this market system, as well as the ideas of economic philosophers Adam Smith and John Maynard Keynes. We will examine America's great wealth—how it is measured, where it comes from, and where it goes. In addition, we will consider the role of government in the economy, where it gets its money and how it spends it. We will also examine the concentration of corporate power in America and whether the corporate elite use that power to benefit the stockholders or themselves. Finally, we will describe the globalization of economic power and the emergence of giant multinational corporations.

POLITICAL SCIENCE

political science

the study of government and politics

Political science is the study of government and politics. Governments possess *authority*, a particular form of power—that is, power that may include the legitimate use of physical force. By *legitimate*, we mean that people believe the

exercise of power is “right” or “proper.” In legitimate governments, the people generally consent to the government’s use of this power. Of course, other individuals and organizations in society—for example, muggers, street gangs, terrorists, violent revolutionaries—use force. But only government can legitimately threaten people with the loss of freedom and well-being as a means of modifying their behavior. Moreover, governments exercise power over all individuals and institutions in society—corporations, families, schools, and so forth. Obviously the power of government in modern society is very great, extending to nearly every aspect of modern life “from womb to tomb.”

Political scientists from Aristotle to the present have been concerned with the dangers of unlimited and unchecked governmental power. We will examine the American experience with limited, constitutional government and the meaning of democracy in modern society. We will observe how the U.S. Constitution divides power, first between states and the national government, and second among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. We will review the continuing controversy over whether the people themselves should decide important issues by voting directly on them or whether elected representatives should do so. We will examine the growth of power in Washington, DC, and the struggle for power among the different branches. We will observe that the president of the United States enjoys more power than the writers of the Constitution envisioned. We will explore what factors appear to strengthen and weaken presidents and how scholars rate the performances of past presidents. Finally, in our look at “Media Power: The Presidential Debates,” we will examine the growing power of television in American politics.

HISTORY

History is the recording, narrating, and interpreting of human experience. The historian re-creates the past by collecting recorded facts, organizing them into a narrative, and interpreting their meaning. History is concerned with change over time. It provides a perspective on the present by informing us of the way people lived in the past. History helps us understand how society developed into what it is today.

history

the recording, narrating, and interpreting of human experience

The foundations of power vary from age to age. As power bases shift, new groups and individuals acquire control. Thus, power relationships are continuously developing and changing. An understanding of power in society requires an understanding of the historical development of power relationships.

In our consideration of the historical development of power relationships, we will look at the changing sources of power in American history and the characteristics of the individuals and groups who have acquired power. We will describe the people of power in the early days of the republic and their shaping of the Constitution and the government it established. We will discuss Charles Beard’s controversial interpretation of the Constitution as a document designed to protect the economic interests of those early powerholders. We will also discuss how westward expansion and settlement created new powerholders and new bases of power. We will explore the power struggle between northern

commercial and industrial interests and southern planters and slave owners for control of western land, and the Civil War, resulting from that struggle. In addition, we will explore the development of an industrial elite in America after the Civil War, the impact of the Great Depression on that elite, and the resulting growth of New Deal liberal reform. In analyzing the Reconstruction Era and African-American history, we will examine how history occasionally overlooks the experiences of powerless minorities and later reinterprets their contributions to society. Finally, we will undertake a brief historical study, “The Vietnam War: A Political History,” which argues that despite military victory, this war was “lost” through failures of America’s political leadership.

Social Sciences and Social Problems

Social problems—the major challenges confronting society—include racism, sexism, poverty, crime, violence, urban decay, increasing globalization, and international conflict. These problems do not confine themselves to one or another of the disciplines of social science. They spill over the boundaries of anthropology, economics, sociology, political science, psychology, and history—they are **interdisciplinary** in character. Each of these problems has its *historical* antecedents, its *social* and *psychological* roots, its *cultural* manifestations, its *economic* consequences, and its impact on *government* and public policy. The origins of these social problems, as well as the various solutions proposed, involve complex power relationships.

interdisciplinary study

the use of theory, methods, and findings from more than one social science

RACIAL AND GENDER INEQUALITY

Historically, no social problem has challenged the United States more than racial inequality. It is the only issue over which Americans ever fought a civil war. We will describe the American experience with racism and the civil rights movement that brought about significant changes in American life. We want to understand the philosophy of that movement, particularly the “nonviolent direct action” philosophy of Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. However, we will also examine continuing inequalities between blacks and whites in income, employment, and other conditions of life in the United States. We will also explore the problems confronting Hispanic Americans in our society and describe the tragic history of Native Americans. In addition, we will look at sexism in American life, particularly in the economy. We will describe the successes and failures of the women’s movement over the years and examine the issue of sexual harassment and the constitutional status of abortion as a privacy right. We will explore the controversies over “affirmative action” and “racial preferences” and their implications for how America is to achieve real equality.

powerlessness

a sociopsychological condition of hopelessness, indifference, distrust, and cynicism

POVERTY AND POWERLESSNESS

The American economy has produced the highest standard of living in the world, yet a significant number of Americans live in poverty. Poverty can be defined as **powerlessness**—a sociopsychological condition of hopelessness, in-

difference, distrust, and cynicism. We will discuss whether there is a “culture of poverty”—a way of life of the poor that is passed on to future generations—and, if so, what are the implications for government policy. We will describe governmental efforts to cope with poverty and discuss the controversial question regarding the effect of welfare reform policies on the poor. We will focus special attention on homelessness in America and on the problem of poverty among children in the United States.

CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Governmental power must be balanced against *individual freedom*. A democratic society must exercise police powers to protect its citizens, yet it must not unduly restrict individual liberty. We will explore the problem of crime in society and how crime is defined and measured. We will also describe the constitutional rights of defendants and the role of the courts in protecting these rights. We will describe the economics of crime and explore a controversial question of whether more prisons mean less crime. An even more controversial question that will be addressed is the relationship between drugs and crime and whether drug use should be legalized. We will summarize economic, psychological, and social explanations of crime and violence. Finally, we will describe briefly the history of violence in American society and the role that violence has played in American struggles for power.

GLOBALIZATION

A variety of social problems affect the quality of life throughout the world. The solution to these problems, if there is any solution, depends in great part on how governments choose to exercise their powers. We will examine world population growth and worldwide urbanization. We will examine some of the most important crises facing people throughout the world, including war, poverty, hunger, warfare, disease, and lack of personal freedom.

INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

The struggle for power is global, involving all the nations and peoples of the world, whatever their goals or ideals. Nearly two hundred nations in the world claim **sovereignty**: authority over their internal affairs, freedom from outside intervention, and political and legal recognition by other nations. But sovereignty is a legal fiction; it requires power to make sovereignty a reality. Over the years, nations have struggled for power through wars and diplomacy. The struggle has led to attempts to maintain a fragile balance of power among large and small nations, as well as attempts to achieve collective security through the United Nations and other alliances. We will provide a brief history of the long Cold War between two nuclear “superpowers”—the United States and the former Soviet Union. We will describe the especially dangerous issue of nuclear arms and efforts to bring them under control. The United States continues to face challenges related to global politics. We will take up the highly controversial question, “When should the United States use military force?”

sovereignty
authority over internal affairs, freedom from outside intervention, and recognition by other nations

Throughout the book, whether in discipline-specific discussions within the social sciences, or in the topical, interdisciplinary analysis, we see power as an important concept integral to all disciplines and issues in the social sciences. Chapters 2 and 3 continue to place the concept of power in perspective, and introduce the methodological and ideological framework that shapes the social sciences' analysis of this concept.

About This Chapter

Power in society is not just an abstract concept or a convenient focus for academic exercise. Nor is power something that is located exclusively in the nation's capitals. Power is very much a real factor that affects the lives of each of us. We experience it in some form in our families, in school, and at work; we feel its effects in the grocery store and on the highway. And we each react to it in characteristic ways. Our aim in this chapter was to understand just what power *is*. We also saw why it provides us with a useful perspective from which to gain a unified view of the social sciences and the social problems that concern us all.

Now that you have read this chapter, you should be able to

- Define power in society and describe its characteristics.
- Define the area of study of each of the social sciences, as well as their common focus, and discuss how each relates to power in society.
- Identify the major social problems that the social sciences study and explain why they are interdisciplinary in nature and how they relate to power.

For Discussion

1. How would you define power? What characteristics of power deserve to be discussed in any definition of power?
2. Consider the power relationships that directly and indirectly affect your life. On the basis of your experiences and observations, assess the validity of these statements by Bertrand Russell: "The fundamental concept in the social sciences is power, in the same sense in which energy is the fundamental concept in physics. . . . When a moderate degree of comfort

is assured, both individuals and communities will pursue power rather than wealth. . . . Love of power is the chief motive producing the changes which social science has to study."

3. Identify and briefly define the area of study of each of the social sciences. Discuss how you would study power from the perspective of each of these disciplines.
4. What is meant by the *interdisciplinary* study of social problems?

On the Web

EXPLORING POWER AND SOCIETY

The Internet is an invaluable tool for researching topics related to the study of power and society.

In this section at the end of each chapter, you will find suggestions for websites that can guide your research into topics discussed in that chap-

ter. The website for this text, www.thomsonedu.com/login, offers many resources for each chapter. In addition, searching the Internet by using key terms on search engines will also yield an abundance of information. Of course, when us-

ing the Internet, one must be wary of the sources of information. Be skeptical of information that cannot be verified by several sources and consider the source of the information before relying on it in your research.