

Chapter P

POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Penetrating Power



What to Expect . . .

What Is Power?

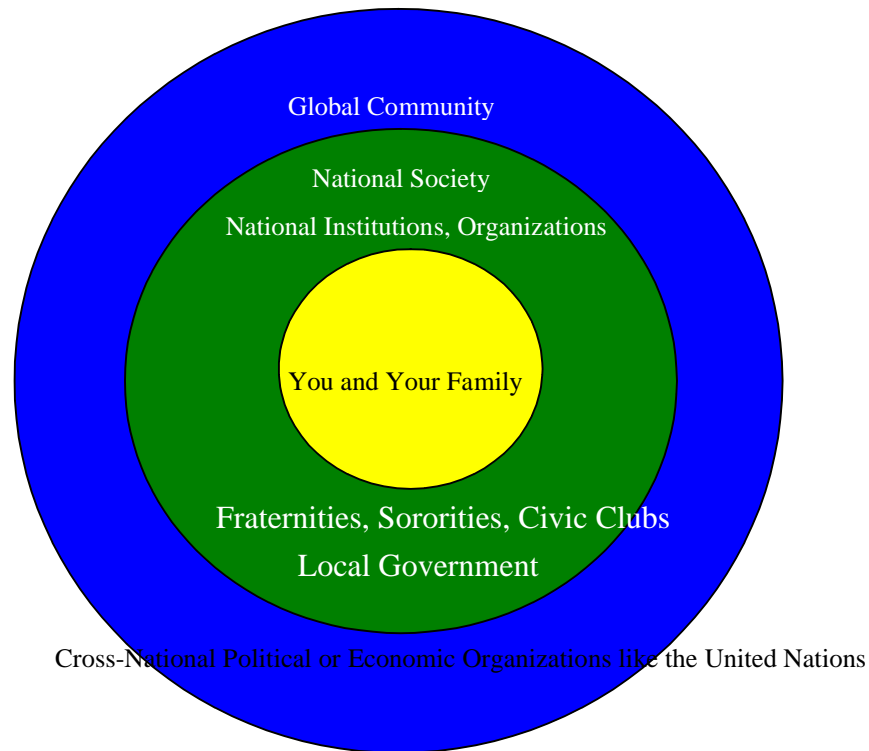
Power and Politics at Various Levels in the Social World

Theoretical Perspectives on Political Systems and Power

Micro-Level Analysis: Individuals, Politics, and Power

Meso-Level Analysis: Political Systems as Distributions of Power within a Nation

Macro-Level Analysis: National and Global Systems of Governance and Power



Think About It . . .

1. How do we know how power really works?
2. How does political power penetrate our lives and all levels of the social system?
3. How do people who are outside of the halls of power seek to penetrate those political systems and have a voice?
4. Why do power relations often devolve into war and terrorism?

Imagine that nuclear disaster has struck. The mortality rate is stunning. The few survivors gather together for human support and collectively attempt to meet their basic survival needs. They come from varying backgrounds and have diverse skills. Before the disaster, some—the stockbroker and the

business executive, for instance—earned more money and held higher social status than the others, but that is in the past. Faced with the new and unfamiliar situation, different skills seem more immediately important for survival.

Where should this group begin? Think about the options. Some sort of organization seems essential, a structure that will help the group meet its needs. Food and shelter are paramount. Those with experience in agriculture and building trades would need to take leadership to provide these initial necessities. As time goes on, the need for clear norms and rules emerges. The survivors decide that all members must work—must contribute their share of effort to the collective survival. At first these norms are unwritten, but gradually some norms and rules are declared more important and are recorded, with sanctions attached for noncompliance. Committees are formed to deal with group concerns, and a semblance of a judicial system emerges. Someone is appointed to coordinate work shifts and others to oversee emerging aspects of this small society's life. This scenario could be played out in many ways.

What is happening? A social structure is evolving. Not everyone in the group will agree with the structure, and some people will propose alternatives. Whose ideas are adopted? Leadership roles may fall to the physically strongest, or perhaps the most persuasive, or those with most skills and knowledge for survival. It is possible that the most competent at organizing will become the leaders, but that outcome is by no means assured.

Political systems that have developed and been refined over centuries probably went through similar processes, though under less immediately dire circumstances. However, a war, invading power, or revolutionary overthrow of an unstable government can change the form of a political system overnight, necessitating rapid reorganization. The daily news brings stories of governments overthrown by military leaders in coups, and new governments emerge to fill the gap.

The opening scenario and the political activity in our modern society share a common element: power. The concept of power is critical to our understanding of many aspects of our social world. Both the political and economic systems enforce the distribution of power in a society; our primary focus in this chapter is the political dimension of society. Political arrangements involve the relationships between individuals as well as the relationship between the individual and larger social institutions.

In this chapter, we will consider the basic concept of power, how individuals and groups hold power, how they direct or influence governments, how the political or governmental institution affects other institutions, variations in political systems, and how power relationships evolve into violence in the form of war or terrorism.



How would you construct a social system from scratch? Or how do you think one would evolve?

WHAT IS POWER?

Although everyone has some understanding of what power is, it is not easy to define. Max Weber (1947) is credited with the most often used definition of **power** in social sciences: “the ability of a person or group to realize their own will in communal action, even against resistance of others participating in the action.” Many social scientists base their views of power on this

classical definition. Some power is attained by action or by threat of physical force. Others wield power because they control valued resources—money, raw materials, or jobs—and they exchange these for control over other individuals and over decision making. Still others gain power because of their persuasive abilities and charismatic personalities.

Social philosophers since Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates have addressed the issue of political systems and power. Machiavelli—an early sixteenth-century Italian political philosopher, is perhaps best known for his observation that “the end justifies the means.” His understanding of how power was exercised in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries significantly influenced how monarchs would use the powers of state (the means) to obtain wealth, new territories, and trade dominance (the ends). Power has been an age-old theme in many great scholarly discussions, but these philosophical debates have also influenced the way national leaders around the globe think about governance and leadership.

Building on Weber’s (1947) analysis, others have suggested additional ways to understand the concept of power. One perspective is that there are *various arenas where power is exhibited—including not only politics but also work and culture*. The state attempts to control the behavior of individuals in each arena through *physical control* (police force) or outright *coercion* (threats and intimidation), through *symbolic control* constructed in people’s minds by the use of threats or intimidation, and through *rules of conduct* that channel behavior toward desired patterns (such as the workplace hierarchy). For instance, under late-twentieth century Haitian regimes, the military was accused of using torture, rapes,

and death to intimidate workers and families, representing physical control as a mechanism of power. Another political theorist expands on the ideas above by dividing power into ideological, economic, military, and political arenas. Which of these arenas is dominant fluctuates during various periods in a society’s development (Mann 1993).

A second elaboration on Weber (1947) describes power as *the ability to influence social life*. Wherever there are social interactions, activities, or organizations, power is a consequence (Olsen 1970). For instance, individuals who have an understanding of interorganizational dynamics and can manipulate organization members are likely to have more power than others in organizational settings.

A third perspective is based on *an analysis of class structures*. Those using a traditional Marxist approach to power argue that the *mechanisms of (economic) production* allow the ruling class to “exercise its rule and keep state power” (Therborn 1976). The dynamic behind this idea is class conflict and struggle; people who have economic resources use those resources to protect their self-interests by controlling political processes. Ruling-class power originates with ideology and economic constraint; it may involve control of physical or political resources through manipulation of the political system of the state.

Power is a component of all parts of the social world and is an element of every social science (Domhoff 1998; Kettl 1993) and of international relations as well. Social scientists are continually refining the meaning of power in the modern social world, especially as they examine its relevance at various levels of the social system (Wartenberg 1992).



THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

Think of an example of the use of power by an individual or group. How would the perspectives on power discussed above explain power in your example?

POWER AND POLITICS AT VARIOUS LEVELS IN THE SOCIAL WORLD

Power is operative at the most *micro levels of interaction*, from individuals to family groups. In family life, husband-wife relations often involve struggles and negotiation on how to run a household. Interactions between parents and children also involve power issues, for parents wield power as they socialize their children. Indeed, the controversies over whether spanking is effective discipline or abusive imposition of pain is a question of how parents use their power to control the behavior of their children.

At the *community level*, the city, county, and even state governments make decisions about which corporations receive tax breaks to locate their plants within the region. They pass laws that regulate everything from how long one's lawn can be before a family is fined to parking violations and how public schools will be funded. Because governments can control the way people live and make their living, people have an interest in influencing governments. One way to exert influence is to vote. Another is to contribute to political campaigns and help get the people who support one's views elected. Labor unions and other interest groups concerned about laws that might be passed to limit their

activities also try to influence the political process.

The political systems of *societies* dictate what policies will be operative and how those policies will be carried out. *Global politics* include international organizations such as the United Nations and World Bank, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and alliances of countries via treaties such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The power process pervades the micro, meso, and macro levels. Global treaties influence national autonomy; laws and programs at the national level influence state, province, or prefecture politics and policies; province laws shape what can and cannot be done at the local level; and locally organized groups can force change that influences politics at state or provincial, national, and global levels.

Power can be studied in political structures such as governments, in political parties, and in different types of political systems. It can also be understood in terms of the allocation of economic resources in a society and what factors influence patterns of resource distribution. Both economic and political systems are important in the sociologist's consideration of power

distribution in any society. First it is important to understand the theoretical

lenses that help us understand power and politics.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND POWER

Do you and I have any real decision-making power? Can our voices or votes make a difference, or do leaders have complete power? Many sociologists and political scientists have tried to sort out the puzzle pieces of power in different types of systems and come up with a complete picture of the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. The picture, however, depends on one's view of power. Interactionists focus on symbols and constructions of reality that allow persons to assume power. A core concern is the legitimacy of power. Functionalists believe that citizens legitimize political systems through their support and votes. They do this because political systems serve important functions in society by establishing and coordinating societal goals (for example, promoting stability, providing law and order, carrying out societal plans, engaging in relations with other countries, and providing protection and meeting social needs). A **pluralist** perspective stemming from functionalist theory views power as distributed among many interest groups in society. Conflict theorists believe the state protects the privileged position of a few, allowing them to consolidate power and perpetuate inequalities that keep them in power. The **elite theory** stems from conflict theory's contention that power is concentrated in the hands of the elite, and the masses have little power. These two contrasting views, the pluralist and the elite, are discussed below.

Micro Perspectives: Legitimacy of Power

For symbolic interactionists, a central question is how loyalty to the state is created—a loyalty that is so strong that citizens would be willing to die for it. In the early founding of the United States, loyalty tended to be mostly to the individual state. Even as late as the Civil War, northern battalions fought under the flag of their own state rather than of the United States. The Federalist Party, which stressed centralized government in the early period, faded from the scene. The Democratic Republican Party, which evolved into the current Democratic Party, downplayed the power of the federal government. It is interesting that the Democratic Party today tends to stress a larger role for the federal government than its rival, though Republican President George Bush has expanded the federal powers substantially. In any case, most people in the United States now tend to think of themselves as Americans more than Virginians or Pennsylvanians or Oregonians. The transformation of identity and of willingness to defend the country has been accomplished. As we discussed in Chapter 12, even religion is often used to sacralize the nation—with some churches even having pledges of loyalty to the flag and national symbols displayed prominently.

Flags and their treatment is an interesting issue as we look at the social construction of meaning around national symbols. Box P.1 explores this issue.

Sociology in Your Social World

The Flag, Symbolism, and Patriotism

Flags have become pervasive symbols of nations. Indeed, a nation without a flag in the contemporary world is hardly to be taken seriously (Billig 1995). In some countries, loyalty to the nation is taught with daily pledges to the flag, and that loyalty itself becomes sacred as does the flag—in the minds of the children. It is the symbol, par excellence, of the nation. Yet it has not always been so, and in some countries, the flag has less symbolic power.

In the United States, Betsy Ross was charged with making the first flag—a task she completed in the summer of 1776 (Betsy Ross Home Page 2006). The Continental Congress adopted a flag with 13 stars and 13 stripes, although the arrangement of stars was not established until 1912 by presidential order. Still, most Americans had more loyalty to their state than to a federal government for many decades after the nation was founded. The Civil War and especially its aftermath was the time when sense of nation as personal loyalty began to gel (Answers.com 2006). So as the symbol was created (externalization), it came to have a life of its own separate from its creator (objectification), and it came to be incorporated by people as a symbol that was meaningful (internalization). The flag has not always been a symbol of the nation, and in places such as Great Britain and India, it still does not have the internal resonance as a symbol of one's identity that it has in the United States. This is not because those countries are less loyal to the nation or less proud of their heritage; it is that other symbols work just as well.

An interesting example is the issue of burning the flag. If one reads the instructions on most statements of flag etiquette, it is clear that flying a flag that is faded, soiled, or dirty is considered an offense to the flag; it is unpatriotic. Yet many people do so. The proper thing to do with a worn or soiled flag, we are told, is to either burn it or bury it. These are the two ways one shows respect. However, there has been a debate in the United States about having a constitutional amendment prohibiting burning of the flag. This is because some protestors have burned the flag as a protest statement against American policies. Since this is done with a sense of rage and apparent disrespect, some patriots have a visceral reaction of outrage; they want flag burners punished and disrespect for the flag outlawed. This symbol is dear to their hearts and represents for them all that is good (Billig 1995).

As recently as June 2006, a vote in the Senate came within one vote of sending this amendment to the state for ratification (CNN.com 2006). However, those who oppose this amendment feel that only tyrannical countries limit freedom of speech and that freedom of speech must be allowed even if a sacred symbol is at stake. The principle of free speech is considered so central to democracy that it “trumps” concern about the sacred symbol. Indeed, opponents of the amendment think passing such a law would be a desecration of what that flag stands for. The two

sides have each attached different meanings to what is considered desecration of the national symbol. In the meantime, if you have a tattered or fading flag, burning it is the way you honor that flag—as long as you do so in private!

Other aspects of the U.S. Flag Code—which specifies what is considered official respect for or desecration of the flag—are interesting, precisely because many people violate this code while they believe themselves to be displaying their patriotism.

1. “The flag should *never* be used for advertising purposes in any manner whatsoever. It should not be embroidered on such articles as cushions or handkerchiefs and the like, printed or otherwise impressed on paper napkins or boxes or anything that is designed for temporary use and discard.”

No *part* of the flag—depictions of stars and stripes that are in any form other than that approved for the flag design itself—should ever be used as a costume, clothing item, or athletic uniform.

2. Displaying a flag after dark should not be done unless it is illuminated, and it should not be left out when it is raining.

3. The flag should never be represented flat or horizontally (as many marching bands do).

4. The flag should never be used as a ceiling covering. (U.S. Flag Code 2006)

According to the standards established by U.S. military representatives and congressional action, any of these forms of display may be considered a desecration of the flag, yet the meaning that common people give to these acts is quite different. Symbolic interactionists are interested in the meaning people give to actions and to the meaning and role of symbols themselves.



Is wearing a shirt or sweater with stars and stripes in some sort of artistic design an act of desecration of the flag or a statement of patriotism? Why?

Acquiring and maintaining power, then, involves intense socialization, including inculcation of a strong sense of the legitimacy and authority of the reigning government in a particular society. This includes loyalty to those symbols—whether a flag or a king—that represent the nation.

Legitimacy, Authority, and Power: Symbolic Interaction Theory

Max Weber (1947) distinguished between legitimate and illegitimate power. *Legitimate power*, which he referred to as *authority*, is recognized as rightful by those subject to it. Governments are given legitimate power when citizens acknowledge that they have the right to exercise it. This is measured by two factors: whether the state

can govern without the use of violence and the degree to which challenges to state authority are processed through normal channels (Jackman 1993[*PLS. PROVIDE REF.*]). Citizens of Western societies recognize elected officials and laws made by elected bodies as legitimate authority. They adhere to a judge’s rulings because they recognize that her or his decrees are

legitimate. Weber contrasted this form of power with illegitimate power, which he described as coercion—for example, being kidnapped or mugged in the park or living under force of a military regime (see Figure P.1). These distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate power are important to our understanding of how leaders or political institutions obtain power.

Figure P.1 Weber’s Formula Regarding Power

Force	+	Consent	=	Power
Force	<	Consent	=	Legitimate Power (Authority)
Force	>	Consent	=	Illegitimate Power (e.g., Dictatorship)
Consent must be the key factor in power for there to be a democracy; that is, consent must be a more important factor in power than is force.				

How Do Leaders Gain Legitimate Power?

In constitutional democracies, individuals do not have the right to hold people against their will, to take their property, to demand they make payments, or to kill them to protect others. Yet even in democracies, certain individuals have the right to carry out these duties. How do leaders get these rights?

In order to establish legitimate power and leadership—or authority—in the eyes of the citizens, leaders generally gain their positions in one of three ways identified by Max Weber (1947):

1. **Traditional leadership** is passed on through the generations, usually within a family line, so that positions are inherited. Tribal leaders in African societies pass their titles and power to their sons. Japanese and many European royal lines pass from generation to generation. Usually called a monarchy, this has been the most common form of leadership throughout history.

Authority is constructed as “normal” for a family or a person because of tradition; it has always been done that way, so no one challenges it.

2. **Charismatic leadership** is power held by an individual that results from the claim of extraordinary, even divine, personal characteristics. Charismatic leaders often emerge at times of change when strong, new leadership is needed. Mao Zedong in China and Mahatma Ghandi in India led their countries to independence and had respect that bordered on “awe.” A few women have triumphed in elections in patriarchal systems to become charismatic leaders of their countries or of political movements; Indira Gandhi of India, Margaret Thatcher of Britain, and Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar (Burma) are examples.

Other charismatic leaders such as Adolf Hitler, leader of Nazi Germany, and Jim Jones, leader of the Jonestown cult that urged its members toward mass suicide, were charismatic but led their followers to

negative ends. An important point is that what a charismatic leader says is considered true by followers simply because she or he said it. This is an inherently change-oriented and unstable form of leadership because authority resides in the wisdom of a single person. Ultimately, as stability reemerges, power will become institutionalized—rooted in stable routine patterns of the organization. Charismatic leaders are effective during transitional periods but are often replaced by rational-legal leaders once affairs of state become stable. Most important for our purposes here is that the construction of reality is rooted in attribution of authority in the personality of a dynamic individual.

3. **Rational-legal leadership** is most typical of modern nation-states. Leaders have the expertise to carry out the duties of their positions, and the leadership structure is usually bureaucratic and rule bound. Individuals are hired or appointed to leadership positions because they have proper training or have proven their merit. This is the form of leadership most familiar to individuals living in democracies. It seems normal to use because the construction of reality in our society has defined this as more “reasonable,” yet it seems entirely irrational and an invitation to chaos to people in tradition-oriented societies.

Each of these three types of leadership, according to Weber (1947), is a “legitimate” exercise of power because those who are governed by these forms give their consent. However, on occasion, leaders overstep their legitimate bounds and rule by force.

Macro Perspectives: Who Rules?

Pluralist Theory

Pluralists believe that power is distributed to all the people so that no one group rules. It is primarily through interest

groups that you and I—as part of the masses—influence decision-making processes. Our interests are represented by these groups, which act to keep power dispersed rather than concentrated in the hands of an elite few (Dahl 1991). As Dye and Zeigler (1983) put it, “Democratic values can be preserved in a system of multiple, competing elites who determine public policy through a process of bargaining and compromise, in which voters exercise meaningful choices in elections and new elites can gain access to power” (p. 10).

Politics involves negotiation and compromise between competing groups. Interest groups can “veto” policies that conflict with their own interests by mobilizing large numbers against certain legislative or executive actions. Witness the efforts to influence health care reform in the United States and to reform government and industry practices. Greenpeace, Nader’s Raiders, Common Cause, the Moral Majority, Earth First!, Bread for the World, the Christian Coalition, various labor unions, and other consumer, religious, and political action groups have had major impacts on policy decisions. Shared power is found in the political process and in each person’s ability to influence policy decisions and outcomes.

National or international NGOs can have a major impact on global issues and policy making, as exemplified by the NGOs at the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. NGOs exert influence on power holders because of the numbers they represent, the money they control, the issues they address, or the effectiveness of their spokespeople or lobbyists. Sometimes they form coalitions around issues of concern such as the environment, human rights, and women’s and children’s issues (Rothman and Black 1998). An example is opposition to the Patriot Act by Libertarians on the far right and the American Civil Liberties

Union on the far left. While they differ on many issues, their opposition to infringements of civil liberties and individualism brought them together to contest many aspects of the Patriot Act, which was intended to fight terrorism.

Dispersal of power did not always exist. In the late nineteenth century, power centers shifted in some societies. The upper class no longer controlled decision making, and many “veto groups” such as labor unions and ethnic groups began to influence policy (Riesman 1961). A concern for new states in Eastern Europe is to ensure that pluralism prevails where, not long ago, power was concentrated in the hands of a few.

Pluralist theory has received its share of criticism. Some social scientists question whether interest groups accurately reflect public opinion or only the view of those who are most vocal and active. In fact, studies of public opinion show that significant numbers of Americans feel powerless and believe that a small group runs America (Domhoff 1998).

According to pluralists, multiple power centers offer the best chance to maintain democratic forms of government because no one group dominates and many citizens are involved. They point out that although an interest group may dominate decision making on a specific issue, no one group dictates all policy. In a study of power in New Haven, Connecticut, Dahl (1991) found this to be the case. He determined how decisions regarding public education, political nominations, and urban renewal were made, and he assessed the number of individuals involved in the decision-making process. Essentially, his research supported the pluralist perspective, finding that many individuals from the New Haven community were indeed providing input and guidance in specific issues in the local policy process. However, this brings up another major

criticism: the vocal masses may have something to say about local issues, but are the real power centers at the national level controlled by an elite few?

Elite Theory

Power elite theorists believe it is inevitable that a small group of elite will rule societies. They argue that this is the nature of individuals and society and that pluralists are imagining a world that does not exist (Domhoff 1967, 1983, 1998; Dye 2000). The power elite who wield power through their institutional roles make decisions about war, peace, the economy, wages, taxes, justice, education, welfare, and health issues—all of which have a serious impact on citizens. These powerful elite want to maintain, perpetuate, and even strengthen their rule.

Michels (1911/1949), a well-known political philosopher, described this pattern of elite domination as the “iron law of oligarchy.” In democratic and totalitarian societies alike, leaders have influence over who is elected to succeed them and to whom they give political favors. This influence eventually leads those in elite positions to abuse their power. The social philosopher Pareto (1911/1955) expanded on this idea, pointing out that abuse by those in elite positions, whom he called the “foxes,” would cause a counter group of elite, called “lions,” to challenge them for power; eventually, the lions become corrupt themselves, and the cycle—a *circulation of the elite*—continues.

Elite theory raises important questions about democratic forms of government. Sometimes the decision-making elite do not hold the visible top positions, wielding their power instead behind the scenes. C. Wright Mills argues that there is an invisible but interlocking power elite in American society consisting of leaders in military, business, and political

spheres who make the key political, economic, and social decisions for the nation. This group then manipulates what the public hears (Mills 1956[*PLS. PROVIDE REF.*]). America's top elite include 7,314 people from these spheres (Dye 2000). For example, in the business sphere, the top corporations control more than half of the nation's industrial assets, transportation, communication, and utilities; they also manage two-thirds of the insurance assets. These corporations are controlled by 4,500 presidents and directors.

In his books *Who Rules America?* (1967, 1983, 1998) and *The Power Elite and the State* (1990), G. William Domhoff focused on social class interests and argued that the upper class in the United States assumes economic leadership, providing a cohesive economic/political power structure that represents upper-class interests. Private school education serves a role in the transmission of elite status (Persell and Cookson 1985). Many of those who hold top positions on national committees and boards or in the foreign policy-making agencies of national government attended the same private preparatory schools and Ivy League colleges such as Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton, and Yale.

Domhoff analyzed the elite in domestic and foreign policy decision making (Domhoff 1971, 1990) and found that the elite have the strongest impact on national policy decisions because they run large corporations and financial institutions and serve on national committees and boards. Their common characteristics promote a network of connections, or "higher circles," and constitute a pool of potential appointees to top positions. Key government executives come from industry, finance, law, and universities. They are linked with an international elite that helps shape the world economy. According to this

theory, Congress ultimately has minimal power; the elected representatives simply must accede to the corporate elite.

Pluralist theorists believe that one reason we have big government is that a very powerful government serves as a balance to the enormous power of the corporate world. Big business and big government are safety checks against tyranny—and each is convinced that the other is too big. Elite theorists believe that government seldom regulates business; business co-opts politicians to support their views by providing financial support needed to run political election campaigns.

Thus, although middle-level white-collar workers make decisions in specialized areas of interest, their decisions have much less influence on our lives than those made at the macro level by the few at the top. Elite theorists argue that the masses have virtually no power because they lack organization and direction on major policy issues, and they ultimately cannot elicit the loyalty of politicians who know where the money and power are located.

An alternative explanation of "who rules" is found in *power resource theory*. These theorists consider interest groups' different views on economic, political, social, and moral issues. Consider social classes; in most Western democracies, social class views are reflected in people's voting patterns (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Manza, Hout, and Brooks 1995). Classes organize themselves around issues of concern through interest groups or unions; the class or group with the best organization to represent the interests of its members has a better chance of winning elections and seats in congress or parliament. For example, socialist political parties are more successful where workers' unions are strong. Social issue candidates do well among constituencies that are concerned about their issues. For example, in the 2000 presidential election in the

United States, Al Gore got 90 percent of the African American vote and 62 percent of the Hispanic vote because he appealed to these

interest groups and their concerns (Gore-Bush race 2000).



THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

Is your national society controlled by power centers, or can individuals influence the power elite? What evidence supports your view?

MICRO-LEVEL ANALYSIS: INDIVIDUALS, POLITICS, AND POWER

Whether you had a new bike and a color TV or the latest electronic devices as a child depended in part on the political and economic decisions made by the government in power at the time. Political systems influence our personal lives in myriad ways, some of which are readily apparent: health and safety regulations, taxation, military draft, regulations on food and drugs that people buy, and even whether the gallon of gas pumped into one's car is really a full gallon. In this section, we explore the impact individuals have on the government and the variables that influence participation in political and economic policy-making processes.

Participation in Democratic Processes

Citizens in democratic countries have the power to vote. Most countries, even dictatorships, have some form of citizen participation; in only about four countries are there no elections. Sociologists ask many questions about voting patterns, such as what influences voting and why some individuals do not vote or participate in politics at all. Social scientists want to know how participation affects (and is affected by)

the individual's perception of his or her power in relationship to the state.

Ideology and Political Attitudes

Political ideology affects how people think about a variety of issues related to power. Consider the following examples:

1. What do we believe about the power of the individual versus the power of the state? If we believe that individuals are motivated by selfish considerations and desire for power, we may feel as the seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes did: humans need to be controlled, and order must be imposed by an all-powerful sovereign; this is more important than individual freedom and liberty. On the other hand, we might believe as did John Locke, another seventeenth-century political philosopher, that human nature is perfectible and rational, that we are not born selfish but learn that through experience with others. Humans, Locke argued, should have their needs and interests met, and among these needs are liberty, life, and ownership of property. He felt the people should decide who governs them. Thus, we can see that support for democracy

is influenced by one's core assumptions about what it means to be human.

2. Do we believe in equal distribution of resources, or do we think that those who are most able should receive more of the wealth? **Conservatives** tend to think that individuals have different abilities and are

therefore entitled to different rewards. Some will be successful and some will not.

Liberals think society should facilitate more equal distribution of resources simply because all persons are equally deserving of human dignity.

Figure P.2

Liberal-----**Conservative**

Communism Socialism/Welfare Capitalism Authoritarianism Fascism Totalitarian State

The continuum of political-economic types reflects attitudes, from communism to socialism to welfare state to capitalism to authoritarianism to fascism, each more conservative as one moves from left to right.

In the United States, for example, conservatives and liberals differ in their views of the state's obligations toward its citizens. Conservatives ("the right") tend to believe that individuals and local communities should take more responsibility for education, health care, welfare, child care, and other areas of common public concern. Liberals (the left) are more likely to argue for the federal government's social responsibility to the people. For instance, liberals have been concerned that leaving policies such as school integration to local communities would perpetuate inequality and discriminatory patterns in some communities. National government involvement, they feel, would protect the rights of all citizens. The ongoing debates about the national welfare system and health care policies in the United States reflect these different philosophies.

3. Do we believe that change is desirable? Generally, those on the right view change as a potential threat to stability. In fact, some may wish to go back to a former

ideal time—the "good old days." The left favors change such as policy reforms for the general population, occasionally even radical change or revolution, to bring about improvements in resource distribution. While ideology may not be the primary political force in most democracies, it does play a significant role for a small portion of the electorate.

In an early pioneering analysis, *The American Voter*, researchers revealed that voters often relied on party labels and personal party identification rather than ideology when deciding how to vote (Campbell et al. 1960). More recently, researchers have found that voters in many countries are influenced by issues such as environmental and immigration policy rather than traditional party ideology. In the United States, an increasing number of people are identifying themselves as "independents" rather than Democrats or Republicans because they do not want to commit themselves to one ideology or they are more

concerned with voting on individual issues

and do not affiliate with a party ideology.



THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

What do you believe about each of the above questions, and how do your beliefs affect your political affiliation and voting preferences?

Levels of Participation in Politics

The majority of people in the world are *apolitical*—that is, uninvolved and uninterested in the political process, either because they feel it has little relevance for them or because they do not feel they can affect the process. However, political decisions may affect these people directly, and they may be drawn unwittingly into the political arena. Peasants making a subsistence living may be forced off the land and into refugee camps by wars over issues that have little relevance to them; their children may be drafted and taken away to fight and be killed in these battles. Religious or ideological factions may force them to help pay for conflicts in which they see no purpose. Such situations have drawn the uninvolved into politics in recent years in many countries, including Guatemala, Uganda, Cambodia (Kampuchea), Haiti, Rwanda, Somalia, India, Iraq, Lebanon, and Gaza.

In representative systems in which citizens are encouraged to have a voice, some individuals remain uninvolved. In a comprehensive study of who does participate in politics and how, the authors conducted more than 2,500 interviews in 200 communities—a cross-sectional representation of the United States—and identified the following six levels of participation (Verba and Nie 1972):

1. The inactives (22%) take little to no part in

political life. Many feel that they can have no impact on the political processes or that decisions do not affect them directly.

2. The voting specialists (21%) vote in most local and national elections but otherwise do not participate in politics.

3. The parochial participants (4%) have contact with government representatives only when they have issues of personal concern.

4. The communalists (20%) are involved in local politics, serving on boards, committees, or service clubs, and work for issues of concern to them.

5. The campaigners (15%) are actively involved in campaigning for elections.

6. The complete activists (11%) are most involved, active in both community affairs and political campaigns.

These percentages have remained fairly constant over time, although voter turnout has gone down from 63 percent of eligible voters in 1960 to 50 percent in 1996 to 47.3 percent in 2000 (Committee for the

Study of the American Electorate 2000; Orum 2001). A higher percentage of citizens age 45 and older vote, and 61.8 percent of whites voted in 2000 compared to 56.8 percent of African Americans and 45.1 percent of Hispanics (LeMay 2000; U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). Among the reasons for low voter turnout in the United States are (1) the feeling that one's vote will not make a difference; (2) satisfaction with the economy and other national issues (Piven and Cloward 1988); (3) other outlets for concerns, such as interest groups or unions; and (4) the fact that citizens must make an effort to register to vote in the United States, whereas they are automatically registered in most other

countries. Indeed, in some countries such as Australia and New Zealand, it is a violation of the law to fail to vote; one must gain permission to miss a vote—which is often extended over many days to ensure that people can get to the polls.

Comparing voter turnout in the United States with other world democracies, participation in the United States is the second lowest of the Western democracies, as indicated in Table P.1 (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2002). This means that citizens are not exercising their right to vote; there are an unusually high number of “inactives,” a sign that is not encouraging for the vitality of a democracy (Orum 2001).

TABLE P.1 **Voter Turnout Percentages in Democratic Nations**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Voter/Register</i>
Australia	1998	95
Belgium	1999	90
Luxembourg	1999	87
Denmark	2001	87
Iceland	1999	84
New Zealand	1999	83
Germany	1998	82
Sweden	1998	81
Italy	2001	81
Austria	1999	80
Israel	1999	79
Greece	2000	75
Norway	2001	75
Netherlands	1998	73
Spain	2000	69
France	1997	67
Ireland	1997	66
Finland	1999	65
Portugal	1999	61
Canada	2000	61
Japan	2000	60
United Kingdom	2001	59

United States	2000	48
Switzerland	1999	43

Source: Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2002).



Consider each of the six levels of participation. What would be the consequences to society if most people were inactive, voting specialists, or parochial participants? What, on the other hand, would be the consequences if most people were complete activists?

MESO-LEVEL ANALYSIS: POLITICAL SYSTEMS AS DISTRIBUTIONS OF POWER WITHIN A NATION

In a southern African village, the chief has died. There is no male heir to the position, so a female from the same lineage is appointed. However, this woman takes on the legal and social roles of a male husband, father, and chief by acting as a male and taking a “wife.” The wives are assigned male sexual partners who become the biological fathers of children; this provides heirs for the lineage, but the “female husband” is their social father. This pattern has been common practice in more than 30 southern Bantu societies and among many other populations in four separate

geographic areas of Africa. Anthropologists interpret this as a means of maintaining public position of dominance and power in the hands of males and in a particular family (O’Brien 1977). Ruling groups in society have mechanisms for ensuring a smooth transition of power to keep the controlling structure functioning. While most of this chapter focuses on political processes of the nation, Box P.2 explores the fact that political processes are at work within national organizations at the meso level as well.

How Do We Know?

Box P. 2. Political Forces within a National Organization: Case Study of the United Steelworkers of America (USWA)

Unions represent the interests of workers to businesses, government, and the economic sector of society. As representatives of workers' interests, union officials listen to workers' views on issues, but do the workers really have a voice? Can labor union members bring about changes in their unions? Philip Nyden (1984) asked questions about grassroots efforts to bring about both structural and ideological reforms in labor unions. He used the case study method. Nyden looked at attempts by rank-and-file union members to make their unions more responsive to issues of job safety, promotion, scheduling, and speed of production in the workplace. Through intensive observation of one group involved in organizational conflict, Nyden gained in-depth information on the steelworkers union as a whole.

Nyden's first task was to state his problem. He was interested in several questions concerning the success or failure of rank-and-file labor union members' efforts to bring about change:

What are the conditions and issues that precipitate rank-and-file disenchantment? How does disenchantment get translated into a social movement that seeks to bring about union reforms and changes in workplace relations? How do the broader social, economic, and political environments, the structure of industry and government, affect the goals and strategies of rank-and-file insurgencies? How does the union structure affect reform goals and strategies? In what ways do the goals and strategies of the rank-and-file movement itself affect the probability that it will be successful in bringing about lasting changes in union policy? (Nyden 1984:1-2)

Nyden used a theory that he called a "capitalist institutional dominance model" to guide his research. This model looks at the meso- and macro-level changes that take place as social, political, and economic structures evolve in societies (Nyden 1984).

After considering several possible locations for his study, Nyden selected Hammond, Indiana, the largest steelworkers' union district. This union had 1.2 million members at its peak; this dropped to between 500,000 and 600,000 dues-paying members at the time of his study. This decline in membership has had a negative impact on the union and its position in the broader

political-economic arena. In order to study the organization, Nyden worked for four years at a nearby college as a “community organization counselor,” a position that gave him legitimacy in the community and provided contacts. The case study involved using several techniques of data collection, a process called *triangulation*. He interviewed three groups of people—management, union leadership, and rank-and-file workers—and obtained additional contacts by *snowballing*, one individual recommending that he should talk to another. All in all, Nyden taped more than 120 interviews of two to three hours each, mostly in homes of the respondents—those being interviewed. The questions he asked were open-ended, allowing the respondents to discuss issues.

Participant observation provided another method in putting together the case study. He attended union meetings and other gatherings that provided information for the study. Sometimes, the information Nyden obtained moved from union issues to politics or other concerns. It was necessary for him to develop some hypotheses related to theory as the study was progressing.

Some sociological studies result in recommendations for action and change; some do not. In Nyden’s case, he recommended some practical union strategies for dealing with changing environmental conditions.

Source: Nyden (1984).

What Purposes Do Political Systems Serve?

Most of us have had an argument over ownership of property, been in an accident, met people who needed help to survive, or been concerned about wars raging around the world. Political systems address these issues and serve a variety of other purposes, or functions, in societies.

For most people, interaction with the government begins with the record of their birth and ends with the record of their death. In between, the government is the institutional structure that collects taxes, keeps records of the work activities and wages of citizens, and may keep fingerprints and other personal information on file.

We have learned in earlier chapters that functional theorists look for the purpose or function served by each institution in

society. Just as family, education, medicine, and religion meet certain societal needs, so does the political system. The following six

activities are representative functions of political systems:

1. *To maintain social control within the nation-state.* We expect to live in safety, to live according to certain “rules,” to be employed in meaningful work, and to participate in other activities prescribed or protected by law. Ideally, governments help clarify expectations and customs and implement laws that express societal values. However, in some cases, governments rule with an “iron hand,” and people live in fear because of the social control imposed by government. This was the case in Afghanistan under the Taliban when leaders used armed attachés to terrorize the country by imprisoning, torturing, and killing suspected dissenters to make

sure the population did the Taliban's bidding. It is true today in Myanmar, where citizens love to have American tourists around, for the government leaves the people alone when there are tourists in the area.

2. To serve as an arbiter in disputes. When disputes arise over property or the actions of another individual or group, a judicial branch of government can intervene. In some systems, such as tribal groups mentioned above, a council of elders or powerful individuals performs this function; in others, elected or appointed individuals or groups have the right to hear disputes, make judgments, and carry out punishment for infractions.

3. To protect citizens of the state. Governments are responsible for protecting citizens from takeover by external powers or disruption from internal sources. However, they are not always successful. Cities are often violent, gangs roam the streets, terrorists threaten lives, minority groups receive unfair treatment, and governments lose territory or even control of their countries to external forces. Consider the case of Lebanon and the power of Hezbollah, a political-military group living in Lebanon; their actions provoked military strikes against positions in Lebanon by Israel and

external force. The existing powers in Afghanistan and Iraq have not been able to fend off the invading power of the United States in recent years, just as the democratic government of President Allende was not able to withstand the American-sponsored coup in Chile on September 11, 1978. (A dictatorship was put in its place, but it was a pro-American and pro-capitalist government, so the United States ignored the fact that they had disrupted a democracy.) A similar fate befell Guatemala in the 1950s when the democratically elected president proposed nationalizing certain natural resources and industries (Herman and Peterson 2006; Oliver 2003; Parenti 2006).

4. To make plans for the future of the society. As individuals, we have little direct impact on the direction our society takes, but the official governmental body—be it elected, appointed, or self-selected through force—shares responsibility along with economic institutions for planning in the society. In some political systems, this planning dictates what each individual will contribute to the nation. Some socialist societies plan how many engineers, teachers, or nurses they need; they then train people according to these projections. In other societies, power is much less

direct. In capitalist systems, for instance, supply and demand is assumed to regulate the system, and there is less governmental planning—especially in economic matters—than in socialist societies.

5. To provide for the needs of their citizens. Governments differ greatly in the degree to which they attempt to meet the needs of citizens.

Socialist economic systems provide for most of the health and welfare needs of citizens, while capitalist countries tend to leave this largely to individuals, families, local community agencies, and other institutions such as religion. Not everyone agrees that providing needs is an inherent responsibility of the state. The debates over a health care system and welfare system for the United States point to the conflicts over who should be responsible for health and welfare—the state or private

individuals. Should such services be coordinated by the government or left to “the invisible hand” of market forces? Should the economy regulate such things, or should this be in the realm of the political institution?

6. To represent the society in relations with other societies.

Individuals cannot negotiate agreements with foreign neighbors. Official representatives deal with other officials to negotiate arms and trade agreements, protect the world’s airways, determine fishing rights, and establish military bases in foreign lands, among other agreements.

The ways in which governments carry out these six functions are largely determined by their philosophies of power and political structures. Political systems, like family and religious systems, come in many forms. In essence, these variations in political systems reflect variations in human ideas of power.



THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

Describe how a government system with which you are familiar carries out these six functions.

Dominant Political Systems in the World Today

The dominant political systems found in the world today are wide-ranging: democracy, communism, socialism, authoritarianism, fascism, and totalitarianism. However, each culture puts

its own imprint on the system it uses, making for tremendous variety in actual practice. No two systems are exactly alike—whether they be democratic, socialist, or fascist. Two broad approaches are discussed below to illustrate the point.

Authoritarian Systems. The government of Kuwait is a hereditary monarchy based on traditional leadership. After the Persian Gulf War of 1991, it brought to trial and condemned to death a number of its citizens, mostly of Palestinian background, who were accused of collaborating with the Iraqis during the takeover of Kuwait. Although the sentences were commuted, this was a lesson to would-be dissenters. The regime has absolute power, allows little citizen involvement and no criticism of governmental decisions, and determines much of what happens in individuals' lives.

Authoritarian regimes headed by dictators or military juntas with absolute power are and have been common forms in the world. Saddam Hussein ruled in Iraq, and Muamar Ghadafi remains in command of Libya. Other examples from the recent past include Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, Idi Amin in Uganda, Benito Mussolini in Italy, and Eva (Evita) Perón in Argentina.

The **totalitarian** form is often based on a specific political ideology and run by a single ruling group or party, often referred to as an *oligarchy*. Russia under Joseph Stalin and Germany under Adolf Hitler were totalitarian dictatorships that followed strong ideologies and demanded adherence to them. In other systems, the state controls the workplace, education, the media, and other aspects of life. All actions revolve around state aims; dissent and opposition are discouraged or eliminated; interrogation by secret police, imprisonment, or torture may be used to quiet dissenters; terror is used as a tactic to deal with both internal and external dissent.

Considering all of the human beings throughout history, probably a majority have lived under authoritarian or totalitarian systems. Under certain conditions, totalitarian regimes can turn into democratic ones, and of course democratically elected leaders can become self-proclaimed dictators, as Ferdinand Marcos did in the Philippines. Box P.3 describes one totalitarian regime.

Sociology Around the World

Box P. 3. The Khmer Rouge Revolution: A Totalitarian Regime

The family of nine Cambodians (Kampuchians) stepped off the plane and into their new life in the United States. For five years, they had lived as best they could in a refugee camp on the Thai border. Five years before, they had left their farm and comfortable life, fleeing from two warring factions fighting over political issues that did not concern them directly but that threatened their lives and livelihood.

When the Khmer Rouge faction took over the government of Cambodia in 1978, they abolished private property, relocated urban dwellers to rural areas, seized personal property, classified some people as peasants, workers, or soldiers—and killed the rest. Their most amazing feat was the total evacuation of the capital

city, Phnom Penh. This was done to remove urban civilization and isolate Kampuchea from other political influences such as democracy.

This complete social and economic revolution under the leadership of Pol Pot was planned in Paris by a small group of intellectual revolutionaries. They believed it would allow Kampuchea to rebuild from scratch, eliminating all capitalism, private property, and Western culture and influence.

After urban dwellers were resettled in rural camps, the totalitarian regime tried to break down the family system by prohibiting contact between members, including sexual relations between husbands and wives. Many people, including defeated soldiers, bureaucrats, royalty, businesspeople, intellectuals with opposing views, Moslems, and Buddhist monks, were slaughtered for minor offenses—hence the term *the killing fields* to describe the executions estimated at more than 1.25 million. However, the Cambodian Genocide Program has uncovered meticulous records kept by Khmer Rouge leaders that, combined with evidence from new mass graves, may double that number (Crossette 1996; Mydans 1997).

Famine followed the killings, causing many Cambodians to flee their land, traveling by night and hiding by day to reach refugee camps across the border in Thailand. In the camps, life was rough and crime ridden.

Cambodia has never been a country at peace (Prasso 1994), and that seems to be true today. Violence still exists. The Human Rights Center reports chaos, corruption, poverty, and a reign of terror in Cambodia with the military killing and extorting money from citizens. Killings, violence, and intimidation surrounded elections in 2002 with more than 14 killings of political activists and candidates (U.S. Department of State 2002). The Khmer Rouge is still a threat to any hopes of democracy (Tomsen 1994). Since the United States government officially recognizes the current government in Cambodia, it will not grant political refugee status to any new refugees.

However, the economy in Cambodia is growing, especially in the areas of garment work and tourism, with the attractions at Angkor Wat drawing thousands of tourists each year. More than 80 percent of the citizens work in agriculture, and 90 percent of poverty is in rural areas (Asian Development Bank 2002). The 200,000 young women who work in the 200 export garment factories make clothes for companies such as GAP. Their wages are \$35 a month; to keep their jobs, they must often work overtime, up to 80 hours a week, with no extra pay (Gap worker shot 2002). Thus, as the country begins the process of recovery and modernization, political and economic institutions will change as well.

Democratic Systems. In contrast to totalitarian regimes, democratic systems are characterized by accountability of the government to the citizens and a large degree of control by individuals over their own lives. Democracies always have at least two political parties that compete in elections for power and generally accept the

outcome of elections. Mechanisms for the smooth transfer of power are laid out in a constitution or other legal document. “Ideal-type” democracies share the following characteristics, although few democracies fit this description exactly:

1. Citizens participate in selecting the government.

There are free elections with anonymous ballots cast, widespread suffrage (voting rights), and competition between members of different parties running for offices. Those who govern do so by the consent of the governed. The majority rules, but the minorities have rights and representation.

2. Civil liberties are guaranteed. These usually include freedom of association, freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion. Such individual rights ensure dissent, and dissent creates more ideas about how to solve problems; it is therefore *essential* for a democracy to thrive.

3. Constitutional limits are placed on governmental powers. The government can only intrude into certain areas of individuals’ lives.

Criminal procedures and

police power are clearly defined, thus prohibiting harassment or terrorism by the police. The judicial system helps maintain a balance of power.

4. Governmental structure and process are spelled out. Generally, some officials are elected while others are appointed, but all are accountable to the citizens. Representatives are given authority to pass laws, approve budgets, and hold the executive officer accountable for activities.

Many democratic governments are guided by written documents such as constitutions that serve as the basis for the development of legal systems. The constitutions describe activities in which the government must—or may not—engage. Constitutions provide some protection against tyrants and arbitrary actions by government. However, involvement in the democratic process is time-consuming, and they slow down the decision-making process. While much of their role is supposed to be administrative, they also have power in the legislative process—signing laws into existence or vetoing legislative decisions.

The two main forms of democratic constitutional government are *parliamentary* and *presidential*. In typical parliamentary governments, the head of state, often a monarch, and head of government—a prime minister, chancellor, or premier—are two different people; Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Great Britain, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden have these models. Presidential governments include France, Italy, the United States, and Germany. The presidents in these countries

tend to have more autonomy than the heads of parliamentary governments.

Many systems have upper and lower chambers or houses of government. Membership in upper houses is sometimes hereditary, as in the British House of Lords, or determined by geographical apportionment between states or cantons, as in Switzerland and the United States. Still other representative bodies base membership on constituencies such as business, labor, agriculture, or education. Lower houses represent the people more directly, usually on the principle of one person, one vote. Often the jurisdictions of the two bodies are different. For example, in some governments, the lower house is the only body that can remove an elected official by a “no confidence” vote.

Proportional representation means that each party is given a number of seats corresponding to the percentage of votes it received in the election. In winner-take-all systems, the individual with at least 51 percent of the vote gets the seat. In the United States, the “winner-take-all”

electoral college system for electing the president has come under attack because the winner of the popular vote could lose the electoral vote to an opponent who won only several of the most populous states. This actually happened in the presidential election in the United States: Al Gore received the most votes for president in 2000, but because each state had a winner-take-all system for electing the electoral college, George W. Bush became the next president as elected by the electoral college. Defenders of this electoral college system of choosing the president argue that this protects the voice of each state, even if each individual voice is not heard.

Constitutional governments may have from two to a dozen or more parties. Most have four or five viable ones. In Switzerland, however, there have been more than 11 political parties at a time vying for seats in the representative assembly. In European countries, typical parties include Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, Communists, Liberals, and other parties specific to local or state issues.



THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

Why might protections under democratic constitutions be considered necessary for democracy even when they create loopholes used by criminals to commit crimes?

Variations in Political Systems

Where power is not organized or structured, societies are characterized by anarchy. *Anarchy* refers to the absence of power held by the state or an official leader. Though stereotypically frowned upon, this is not always a negative condition. Peaceful simple societies often live in anarchical systems where power is shared among

members, but there is no recognized “state power.” However, in larger populations, anarchy often means political turmoil. The French Revolution, for example, was a time of violent political change. More recent demonstrations of anarchy include the breakup of Yugoslavia into ethnic enclaves and the conflicts over power among ethnic groups in Rwanda, Burundi, and Somalia.

According to functional theorists, societies are likely to be stable when their political systems are compatible with the other institutions in society. Analysts recognize a connection between the level of economic development and the type of political system that will work for a country (Diamond 1992). Some scholars believe the emergence of democracy, for instance, has certain preconditions:

- high levels of economic well-being;
- the absence of extreme inequalities in wealth and income;
- social pluralism, including a particularly strong and autonomous middle class;
- a market-oriented economy,
- influence in the world system of democratic states;
- a culture that is relatively tolerant of diversity and can accommodate compromise; and



Are any of these preconditions in danger in your nation?

Political Parties in the United States

Political parties are important to our understanding of distributions of power. They arose as a means of presenting candidates for election and establishing legitimate rule. America's party system, unlike those in many other countries, is a two-party system, but with options for other parties should they gain enough strength. Most third parties hope to put pressure on the two main parties to adopt certain positions on special issues, and they promise votes in return. Two examples are the Libertarian Party, which focuses on individual liberty, including an unfettered business climate for entrepreneurs, and the Green Party, which is concerned primarily

a literate population informed about issues (Bottomore 1979; Inglehart 1997).

Although there are differences of opinion about necessary conditions for democracy, the patterns are becoming clearer after over three decades of research. Socioeconomic development promotes democracy in two senses: development contributes to (democracy's) legitimacy and stability (Diamond 1992), as well as to the successful establishment of democracy in those places where it did not already exist. Thus, if developed countries want more democracies around the world, an important strategy is to support economic development in developing countries.

with protecting the environment. Unlike the United States, countries with parliamentary forms of government typically have multiparty systems.

Functions of Political Parties. In a democracy, the power of a political party is measured by its ability to win votes. The political party provides a link between the masses of citizens and the structures of government. Parties also provide a social mechanism for "interest aggregation." In other words, parties help structure and organize ideas and people to work toward political goals (Lipset 1959).

Parties have traditionally been a strong force in the American political process. Since the 1970s, however, the

proliferation of civil organizations, local issue groups, unions, and other interest groups (mentioned in the discussion of pluralist theory) has diminished the role of political parties in the United States (Gitelson, Conway, and Feigert 1984; White 1982). Interest groups now challenge the political parties as organizations for exerting influence over policy, assisting in organizing electoral campaigns, and funding individual campaigns. Almost 4,000 *political action committees* (PACs), for example, raise money to support candidates who support their special interests (U.S. Federal Election Commission 2002). Through their special interests, PACs involve a wide array of citizens in politics but also expect support on their issues from candidates they support (Clawson, Newstadt, and Scott 1992; Perrucci and Wysong 1999). Interest group members tend to have a great deal more political information and sophistication than the general public; environmental protection, abortion, immigration policy, and same-sex versus exclusively heterosexual marriage laws are examples of interest group issues. However, since interest groups are usually oriented to single issues, their potential for national or global influence is diminished.

Political Parties and Economic Interests. Research has linked political partisanship with socioeconomic status (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995). Working- and lower-class interests have usually been represented by parties to the left on the continuum. In the United States, Democrats have traditionally had the support of laborers, minorities, and others with lower economic status. The Republican Party typically has enjoyed support from upper-middle-class and wealthy members of American society. These patterns were particularly strong from the late 1800s through the 1960s. Today, interest groups discussed above have weakened ties to

political parties. This connection between economics and politics is so strong that it warrants more detailed discussion of the interconnections of these two institutions.

Politics and the Economic Institution

While *politics* refers to the social institution that determines and exercises power relations in society, *economics* is the social institution that deals with production and distribution of goods and services. Both focus on questions related directly to the concept of power and on the power relationships between individuals, organizations, nation-states, and societies.

The power of the state is closely linked with the economic system. Government officials have a vested interest in the well-being of the economy, for should the economy fail, the state is likely to fail also. Recessions, depressions, and high rates of inflation put severe strains on governments that need stable economies to run properly; when problems occur, government officials are drawn into increasing their roles in the economic sector. In many countries, the government is the largest employer; purchaser of goods; controller of exports, imports, and interest rates; and regulator of industry. In the United States, many government regulatory agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration, Department of Agriculture, and Justice Department watch over the economic sector to protect consumers (Heilbroner and Thurow 1981). The point is that economic issues are intertwined with politics.

How goods are distributed to the members of society is also often a question of who has power. In some cases, the strongest or most politically powerful individuals and groups control the process. Sometimes, individuals exchange or barter one needed good for another; other times, individuals buy goods with currency. In any

case, the switch from one type of system to another has implications for who and what are valued and who has power.

Types of Economic Systems

As societies become industrialized, one of two basic types of economic systems evolves: planned or market systems.

Planned or centralized systems involve state-based planning and control of property, whereas **market systems** stress individual planning and private ownership of property, with much less governmental coordination or oversight. These basic types seldom occur exactly as described because few systems work exactly as planned. For instance, China has a highly centralized planned economy with strict government control, yet some private property and incentive plans exist, and these are expanding. The United States is a market system, yet the government puts many limitations on business enterprises and regulates the flow and value of money. Distinctions between the two major types rest on the *degree* of centralized planning and the ownership of property. In each type of system, decisions must be made concerning which goods (and in what quantity) to produce, what to do in the event of shortages or surpluses, and how to distribute goods.

Market Systems: Capitalism

The goal of capitalism is profit, made through free competition between competitors for the available markets. It assumes that the laws of supply and demand will allow some to profit while others fail. Needed goods will be made, and the best product for the price will win out over the others. No planning is needed by any oversight group because the invisible hand of the market will ensure sufficient production and distribution of goods; this system also rewards innovative

entrepreneurs who take risks and solve problems in new ways. The result is growth and prosperity.

The goal of capitalist manufacturers is to bring in more money than they pay out to produce items. Since workers are a production cost, getting the maximum labor output for the minimum wage is the capitalists' goal. Thus, for example, multinational corporations look for the cheapest world sources of labor with the fewest restrictions on employability. Marx (1844/1896) predicted that there would be victims in such a system—those whom the system exploited. This potential for exploitation leads most governments to exercise some control over manufacturing and the market, although the degree of control varies widely.

Capitalism was closest to its pure form during the industrial revolution. At that time, some entrepreneurs managed to gain control of the capital and resources necessary for industrial development and to exploit others who needed work and became laborers. Using available labor and mechanical innovations, these entrepreneurs built industries. Craftspeople could not compete with the efficiency of the new machine-run shops, and many were forced to become laborers in new industries to survive.

Marx (1844/1896) predicted that capitalism would cause citizens to split into two main classes, the “haves” and the “have-nots.” He argued that institutions such as education, politics, laws, and religion would evolve to preserve the position of the elite. Religious ideology would stress hard work, driving entrepreneurs to increase profits. However, Marx believed that ultimately the workers would realize their plight, develop political awareness or consciousness, and rebel against their conditions. They would overthrow the “haves” and bring about a new and more egalitarian order. The

predicted revolutions have not occurred in most countries, however. Labor unions have protected workers from the severe exploitation Marx witnessed in the early stages of industrialization in England; therefore, workers have not been discontent to the point of revolt but have expressed frustrations through union walkouts and strikes followed by compromises between workers and owners.

Some contend that the largest corporations in the United States have such enormous power that they “own the United States.” The largest 635 corporations control three-quarters of corporate assets (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2001). Moreover, the combined sales of the 200 largest corporations surpass the combined federal budgets of all but 10 countries in the world (Rothenberg 2006). A few elite businesspeople control many top companies through a system of interlocking directorates, giving them enormous power (Domhoff 1967, 1971, 1983, 1998; Rothenberg 2006). The capitalist emphasis

on market control encourages a close relationship between corporate America and the government’s decision-making apparatus. Business interests often argue that government intervention in markets or regulation of commerce discourages competition, encourages mergers, and causes concentration of wealth and power in fewer and fewer hands (Mintz and Cohen 1971). Thus, it is in the best interests of corporate decision makers to have influence in politics and government. According to power elite theorists, they do!

One of the major criticisms of pure capitalism is that *profit* is the only value that drives the system; human dignity or well-being, environmental protection, rights of ethnic groups, and other social concerns are important only as they affect profits and the rights of individuals to pursue their own self-interests. The strong connection between profit and growth as a measure of success within capitalism is illustrated in Box P.4.

Sociology in Your Social World

Box P. 4. Capitalism, Growth, and Standards of a Health Social System

The idea of calculating gross national product (GNP) emerged during World War II as a way to measure the productive capacity of the United States. It has since been modified and is now referred to as the gross domestic product (GDP). This is used by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the U.S. Congress, and many other powerful agencies to determine economic prosperity and health. It is based on market system principles of growth and transformation of raw resources

into saleable goods. The key idea is that this measures the market value of all economic production in a country.

This GDP as a measure of economic well-being has come under severe criticism; the primary concern is that profits and transformation of resources into saleable products are an inadequate measure of prosperity. The International Forum on Globalization (2006) points out that using the GDP, clear-cutting forests, strip-mining and denuding beautiful mountains, constructing toxic dumps, many forms of crime, building prisons, war and the production of weapons, the aftermath and cleanup of war, and recovering from natural disasters all involve converting resources into commodities. Therefore, these are indicators of a healthy social system moving toward prosperity. Few of these actually help indigenous peoples or citizens at the lower ends of the economic scale. On the other hand, unpaid household labor, familial care for the elderly or the sick, or growing one's own food as an individual or as part of a food cooperative do not count as constructive economic behaviors, for no money exchanges hands.

The question is whether economic exchange, transformation of natural resources into saleable products, and profits made from these processes are an appropriate and accurate measure of social well-being (International Forum on Globalization 2006).

Planned Systems

When conservatives hear about planned systems, they often think of communism and its potential connection to oligarchy. *Communist systems* have attempted to eliminate private ownership of property and have insisted on the government doing economic planning rather than leaving everything to individual choices. All matters of production and labor are governed with the “communal” good in mind; there is deep suspicion of the exploitation that can occur when individuals all pursue their own self-interests. Those who hold to this philosophy believe that the market system results in a different kind of oligarchy—one run by the financial elite in the pursuit of their own self-interests. In theory, when a true communist state is achieved, motivating incentives for individuals such as earning more money are not needed. Marx's famous dictum outlined the communist ideal: “From each according

to his ability; to each according to his need.” Each individual contributes to the general welfare of the community or society in exchange for benefits from the communist system, including food, shelter, employment, schooling, and cultural events. The state oversees the total economy. Monotonous, tedious jobs are shared voluntarily by all. The idea is that this frees individuals to concentrate on the humanistic and culturally important aspects of life; values other than profits can be protected and affirmed. China, Cuba, and about 24 nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have socialist economies with industry controlled by the state (Freedom House 2002).

In reality, however, no system is a perfect communist state with the complete elimination of private property or exploitation. China, a communist country,

made rapid progress in tackling hunger, illiteracy, drug addiction, and other problems by instituting a strong central government and establishing five-year economic development plans. Today, however, the government is experimenting with new economic plans, including limited private entrepreneurship, more imported goods, and trade and development agreements with other countries. These changes in the economic system are likely related to the level of economic development; China has for the most part moved beyond the survival level and can experiment with modifications to the economic system such as limited private enterprise.

One key criticism of communist systems is that placing economic power and political power in the hands of the leadership can lead to control by a few leaders. Capitalism may not protect all social values, but some scholars argue that capitalism can create power centers in government, business, and the military that balance each other and help to protect against dictatorships and tyranny.

Democratic Socialism

The market system and the planned system each have their advocates, but each system also has its shortcomings. The question, then, is whether some type of economy can avoid the dangers of each. Only a little over two centuries ago, it was widely believed that democracy could not work. The notion of self-governance by the citizenry was discredited as a pipedream. Yet this experiment in self-governance is continuing, with all of its flaws and problems. Winston Churchill once said that democracy is a terrible form of government, but it is better than all of the alternatives ([*CITATION?*]). Some economists and social philosophers have argued that if the people can plan for self-governance, they

certainly should be able to plan for economic development in a way that does not put economic power in the hands of a political elite, as does communism.

Democratic socialism refers to the collective or group planning of the development of the society, but within a democratic political system. Private profit is of diminished value, and the good of the whole is paramount. Planning may include goals of creating equality, protecting the environment, or supporting families, but individuals' rights to pursue their own self-interests are also allowed within certain parameters. The system seeks checks and balances so that both political and economic decision makers are accountable to the public. Several countries, including Sweden, Great Britain, Norway, Austria, Canada, and France, have incorporated some democratic socialist ideas into their governmental policies, especially in public services (Olsson 1990).

Many Marxists in Europe believe that this is what Karl Marx really had in mind, not the bloated bureaucratic system that evolved in the Soviet Union, China, and elsewhere. Marx, after all, felt that the worst of all governments was state capitalism—a system in which the state controlled the economy. His early writings, in particular, put much more emphasis on decentralization and even a withering away of the government. Few social democrats today think the government will ever wither away, but they think that the public should have input into economic as well as governmental decisions and planning—not just the elite.

Sometimes these systems are called “welfare states.” Many Western European democracies are welfare states that redistribute income through progressive tax plans that tax according to people's ability to pay. The government uses this tax money to *nationalize* education, health plans and medical care, pensions, maternity leaves,

and sometimes housing and transportation for its citizens. Although much of industry is privately run, the government provides regulations for the industry and assesses high taxes to pay for government programs. Typically, public service industries such as transportation, communications, and power companies are government controlled.

Can such a system succeed? That is a good question. Such experiments are much more recent than democracy, which is also often called an experiment that is still on trial. In some ways, democratic socialist states outproduce capitalist ones, and in

some ways, they can seem cumbersome ways to run complex society. The bottom line in evaluating which system works best comes down to value priorities:

individualism and economic growth versus equality and protection of the environment.

The institutions of politics and economics cannot be separated. In the twenty-first century, new political and economic party relationships will emerge as each institution influences the other. Both institutions ultimately have an enormous connection to power and privilege.

MACRO-LEVEL ANALYSIS: NATIONAL AND GLOBAL SYSTEMS OF GOVERNANCE AND POWER

Power and the Nation-State

A *nation-state* is a political, geographical, and cultural unit with recognizable boundaries and a system of government. Boundaries of nation-states have been established through wars, conquests, negotiations, and treaties; these boundaries change as disputes over territory are resolved by force or negotiation. There are more than 200 nation-states in the world today, about 189 of which are represented in the United Nations (United Nations 2000). This number is changing as new independent states continue to develop in Europe, Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world. (Here we use the term *country* interchangeably with *nation-state*.)

Within each nation-state, power is exerted by the system of government in

office that holds control through leaders, laws, courts, tax structure, the military, and the economic system. Different forms of power dominate at different times in history and in different geographical settings.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle developed a typology representing what he described as “the cycle of political power” in countries. He believed power could be held by one person (monarch or tyrant), by a few people (aristocracy or oligarchy), or by the masses (polyarchy or mob rule). Each of these alternatives can have positive or negative consequences for the citizens, and each is generally a mixture of the two, depending on the political philosophy of the leadership (see Figure P.3). According to Aristotle, political regimes go through cycles from monarchy to mob rule and back to monarchy.

Figure P.3 Aristotle’s Typology of the State

<i>Good or Bad for People:</i>			
Healthy	Destructive		
<i>Rule by:</i>	One person	Monarchy	Tyranny
	A small group	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
	Many—the masses	Polyarchy	Mob rule

Sociology in Your Social World

The Internet and Democracy

Is high-tech technology—the Internet and other telecommunications technologies—a boon to democracy, an opportunity for people around the world to gain information necessary to be an informed electorate, or is it a burden that hinders thoughtful debate and civil engagement in ideas, essential ingredients if democracy is to work? Certainly, our technology has the potential for either outcome. This issue is one that has interested a well-regarded political scientist—Benjamin Barber.

The internet, fax machines, camcorders, and other telecommunications devices linking them to the outside world have been major instruments for indigenous people combating oppressive governments. On the other hand, blogs, talk shows, Web pages, and Internet discussions are often known more for sound bites and polemical attacks on opponents than for reasoned debates in which opposing sides seek win-win solutions to problems. Moreover, the key thing that these technologists bring is speed. Barber (2006) argues that speed is not necessarily good for democracy. He writes, “Democracy takes thought, patience, and reconsideration. That is why parliamentary procedure often requires several readings of a legislative bill prior to passage. The aim is to require time before precipitous action is taken. . . . Both representative and strong democracy are speed-averse, requiring time and patience to implement civic judgment” (p. 64).

Barber (2006) points out that there is not “democracy”; instead, there are “democracies.” This basic notion of accountability of the government leaders to the people who elect them is multifaceted in its forms. He focuses on two forms, “representative” and “participatory” (or “strong”) democracy. Representative democracy involves citizens electing officials periodically and then letting them make the decisions; the danger is that citizens may become apathetic and uninformed in the interim between elections. In the meantime, the officials do all

they can to manipulate the electorate in various ways. In a strong democracy, the voters themselves make major policy decisions, and citizens work in communities to govern their social life and create civic trust and social capital. This, of course, requires a well informed electorate, which does not always exist. To the question of the tie between technology and democracy, Barber writes that various features of technology relate in complex ways to various forms of democracy. We are only beginning to understand the connections.

Several features of technology are relevant here: (1) speed and the need for careful deliberation in the democratic process; (2) the tendency of digital media to reduce everything to simplistic binary opposites, as though only two choices are possible; (3) the tendency to isolate individuals behind their own keyboards and monitors, such that skills in community building and collaborative decision making may wane; (4) pictorial images that sensationalize an issue tend to influence decision making so it is based on emotional responses to images more than reasoning and deliberation; (5) immoderation, impulsive rhetoric, and divisive attacks by people who know little or nothing about the history of the problem (as often happens on blogs and talk shows) are defended as democracy in action but undermine a communal sense of responsibility and civic dialogue that lead to wise democratic decisions; (6) the tendency for the Internet (and many other media) to be primarily about commerce—selling something and creating a consumer mentality—rather than a place for debate, for listening, for thinking, for seeking solutions that meet many needs; and (7) a confounding of information—with which we are sometimes overloaded—with wisdom, the latter of which is created through painstaking conversion of information into knowledge and then knowledge into wisdom.

Rapid communication systems can help social movements communicate with each other, which may be helpful to democracy—unless the movement is a hate group intent on undermining the rights of other members of the society.

Moreover, rapid communication can help individuals stay in touch with their representatives in a representative democracy. The point is that if technology is to serve democracy, then we must be aware of the dangers as well as the benefits of the media. Barber (2006) writes, “Market forces will not put technology to . . . democratic uses, only to commercial ones” (p. 68). Thus, social policy consideration—careful deliberative reflection—is necessary if we are to have technology benefit and not undermine democratic systems. “In the end, the real challenge is political, not technological” (Barber 2006:68).



THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

Which of the seven issues of technology are problems for representative democracy? Which are benefits? How about for strong/participatory democracy?

In many societies, the nation-state has power to rule over the masses of citizens. This suggests that there is some power relationship between those who are ruled and those who rule. The symbolic interaction notion that legitimacy is socially constructed is a radical idea—giving hope to those who seek change and striking fear in the hearts of those conservatives in any society—for they do not want the current arrangements overturned.

Revolutions and Political Rebellions

In Weber's (1947) discussion of legitimate power, we explained that legitimacy of political leadership can be established in various ways, but this legitimacy can eventually be challenged. Divine right of kings was disputed in the French Revolution. The right of Britain to rule the American colonies was unchallenged in Virginia, Massachusetts, and elsewhere for centuries but eventually resulted in a war of independence.

The 1980s and early 1990s were characterized by significant social and political changes throughout the world. The Berlin Wall was dismantled, leading to unification of East and West Germany. The Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania became independent. In Eastern Europe, political and social orders established since World War II underwent radical change. When the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were dismantled, resulting in the redrawing of national boundaries, internal strife resulted from ethnic divisions formerly kept under check within strong centralized governments.

Were these changes *revolutions*? The term has had different meanings throughout history. Its origins can be traced to seventeenth-century Italy, where the word *rivoluzioni* was used to explain political changes in astrological terms. Today, *revolution* refers to “social and political

transformation of a nation, resulting from failure of state regimes” (Skocpol 1979). Revolutions can be violent, and they result in altered distributions of power in the society and the social structure.

Revolutions typically occur when the government does not respond to citizen needs and when leadership to challenge the existing regime emerges. Using these definitions, what occurred in Eastern Europe was a political revolution, in some cases violent. Three sociological perspectives that help explain revolutions are strain theory, the resource mobilization model, and the political processes model.

Strain theory: Most people have experienced anger building up inside to the point where they finally “explode” or “let off steam.” When pressure builds, a counterforce eventually erupts. In simplistic terms, this is what the strain explanations of revolution are about. As a result of structural changes in a nation due to economic, political, or social disruption, a psychological disruption occurs for its citizens. When this disruption reaches a certain point, the people engage in open revolt, usually against the existing political or social structure.

Relative deprivation theory, an example of strain theory, can be seen in the “Davies J-Curve of Rising Expectations” (see Figure P.4). Named after its author, James C. Davies (1962, 1974), the model suggests that over time, people in a society come to expect the social or political system to satisfy certain needs. In reality, however, some “gap” usually

exists between expected and actual performance. This is especially true when people feel deprived relative to another group or when conditions are improving and then reverse and become worse, as depicted by the “J-curve,” an upside-down J. It is at the point when the gap

between expectations and feelings of deprivation becomes intolerable that people openly revolt. In other words, the strain caused by the inability to have certain needs satisfied leads those experiencing dissatisfaction to rebel (Davies 1969).

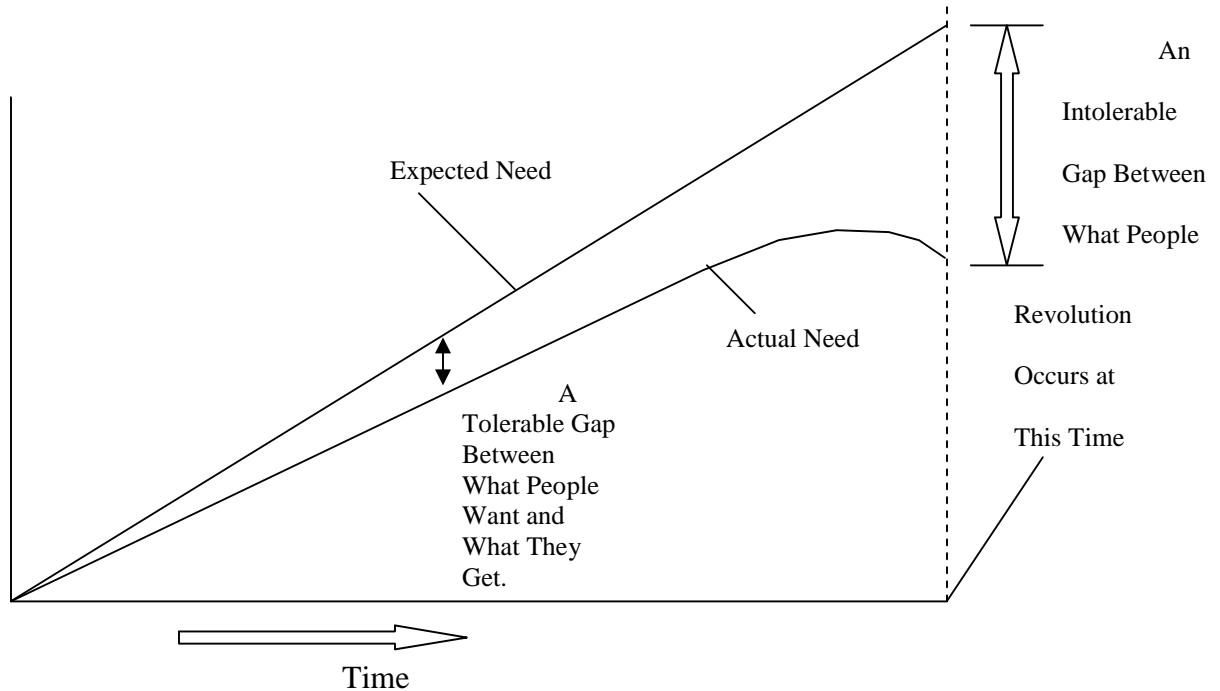


Figure P.4 The Davies J-Curve

Some sociologists explain the rapid change in the former Soviet Union this way; as the Soviet people found it increasingly difficult to obtain the basic staples of life, such as clothing or even food, they became rebellious. Anger and hostility against the Soviet communist bureaucracy boiled over in open revolt. In some parts of the country,

people in villages and towns rebelled against local communist party officials by marching in the streets. In Moscow, the capital, the people marched on the parliament building and took it over.

Resource mobilization theory:

Another theory suggests that revolutions and social movements arise because those

who are discontented get external resources and support to urge them into collective protest. A variety of external supporters or influences have been identified as playing some role in resource mobilization: educated elites with ideological goals, governments of foreign countries, or invaders.

The proponents of the resource mobilization model say that revolutions are carried out by groups in society that have resources. They examine how the movements gain membership, communicate, and initiate movement activities, often with support from elites. Successful movements are those with influential leadership to direct the resources toward some desired goal.

Political processes theory: Critics of the resource mobilization theory conclude that their explanation only works part of the time. These critics believe that resource mobilization fails to explain *mass insurgency movements* where resources

were not available, such as the U.S. African American riots in the 1960s. The originator of the political process theory (McAdam 1982) argues that rebellion occurs when several elements are present: the structure for political action, the opportunity to act in a political manner, and the growth of political coalitions or organizations.

If the insurgent group is to rise successfully, it must organize its protest and seize the right “opportunity” for action. Successful movements depend on recruiting members, individual motivations to participate, an effective communications network, and recognized leaders. To move from political opportunity to active movement, participants must share beliefs, called *collective consciousness*. This collective consciousness may develop because of a political crisis or loss of faith in the leaders, or when there is no other organized movement against the existing regime (McAdam 1987).



THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

How might each of the theories discussed above be applied to the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001?

Global Interdependencies and Politics

Dependency and world systems theorists point out the inequality between rich “core” countries and developing “peripheral” countries that are dependent on the core countries for survival. The more dependent a country is, the more inequality

is likely to exist between that country and core countries. The physical quality of life for citizens in dependent countries is also likely to be poor. For example, permitting a foreign company to mine resources in a developing country may produce a short-term gain in employment for the country, but when the exhaustible resources are gone,

the dependent country is often left with only destruction of natural resources and an even poorer economy.

These peripheral countries are thought to be poor prospects for democracy. Nonetheless, young democracies are emerging in peripheral countries in Eastern Europe, East Asia, and Latin America. In several Central and Latin American countries formerly ruled by civilian and military dictatorships, democratic governments are taking hold, and elected officials are gaining power. In Mexico, President Vincente Fox, a former successful businessman with degrees in business administration and management, ran the government, slowly replacing the six-decade-old ruling party and the military (BBC News 2000).

Despite the movement toward political liberalization, democracy, and market-oriented reforms in countries such as Chile, Mexico, Nigeria, Poland, Senegal, Turkey, and Thailand, not all of these societies are ready to adopt democratic forms of governance. In a study of the experiences of 26 developing Asian, African, and Latin American countries, the conclusion was that several factors were

important for these countries to develop stable democracies: political participation, interest groups, economic growth, control of corruption, and maintenance of order without reducing liberty (Diamond 1987, 1992).

The breakdown of the communist bloc has meant that dependent developing countries are freer to change political alliances and systems because they are not beholden to their former supporters. However, of all the possible replacement systems, strong central leadership and decision making seem to correlate with the most rapid economic advances in newly industrializing countries. Several African nations are looking to the economic success stories in Asia (Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Korea, for example) for models of development and finding strong central governments in some of these countries.

The breakdown of communism in Eastern Europe in recent years has not led automatically to democratic regimes. In fact, the former Yugoslavia has become less democratic with the changes in that part of the world, as illustrated in Box P.6.



Think of a situation in which a superpower tried to impose a government on a developing country. The U.S. involvement in Afghanistan or Iraq is an example. Based on the factors listed above, why do you think the effort was successful or unsuccessful?

Sociology Around the World

Box P. 6 Yugoslavia: Political Change and Transformation

Occupying much of the land along the Adriatic Sea—and bounded by Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania—was the country of Yugoslavia, a name that means land of the Slavs. Over the years, Yugoslavia saw many different forms of government. Before it became a single united country, Yugoslavia consisted of several nation-states, including Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia, Dalmatia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. A constitution united these areas under a king, but there were conflicts between the various ethnic groups. The king gradually became a dictator with total decision-making power and ability to eliminate opposition.

When World War II began, Yugoslavia was unprepared. It could not remain neutral so the king joined the Axis powers, Germany and Italy. However, the Yugoslavian people rebelled, overthrew the king, and—under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito and the Partisans—established a socialist government.

As a socialist nation, Yugoslavia had some unique features. Fiercely independent, neither the people nor the leaders accepted control from outside, and they developed their own form of government that suited their needs. The “republic” was organized in such a way that local communities had a say; planning was done from the grassroots up—local workers, the community, the region, the republic, and the federal-state levels. Each level voted on members to a body representing their constituency. Control was more decentralized than in many other socialist countries, thereby reflecting the needs of the varying regions and ethnic groups.

The workers had a great deal of control over industrial decisions rather than control coming from the bureaucratic central government. Individual workers participated in “self-management” through representative committees called “worker councils” and through votes of all workers on key policy issues. Worker councils selected management specialists but also had the right to approve policies and to fire the specialists. In fact, this structure was reflective of the way Marxist philosophers envisioned the actual socialistic system working (Hagopian 1984). Trade unions also represented the workers’ perspectives. The nation was an interesting blend of socialism and democracy—a democracy that did not accept market economy ideas.

Within each community and region, there were “communities of self-interest,” which concerned themselves with housing, public transportation, cultural life, education, physical and mental health, and research and development. Each of these “communities” had representatives from workers in the service area, the users of the service, and those who pay for the service, usually the worker councils.

Because of the high degree of involvement in decision making at each level, as much as 20 percent of the population was involved in some elected office or position at any given time. The Yugoslavian system was known as a “deputational democracy” because those elected were deputized to represent their constituency and its feelings. This differs from a representational democracy such as the United States, where individuals elected may represent their own views, the will of the constituency that elected them, or the views of elites who helped them get elected.

In the twentieth century, Yugoslavia experienced several political forms: autonomous ethnic groups in various regions of the country, each with its own form of government; constitutional monarchy; absolute dictatorship; and a form of socialism. With the breakup of the Soviet bloc and reorganization of Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia was among the nation-states that dissolved into several smaller nations; Croatia, Slovenia, and Macedonia declared independence in 1991, followed by Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992. Serbia and Montenegro remain as part of the Republic of Yugoslavia (World Almanac Education Group 2003).

Most countries go through evolutions in their political systems, often dependent on the economic and political environment of the systems that surround them, as well as on their own level of development. The former Yugoslavia is but one example.

What are the chances that the United States or another powerful nation-state will be successful in attempts to create democracies elsewhere? The odds are probably not good, according to a number of political analysts. Other foreign powers can do little to alter the social structure and cultural traditions of another society, and as indicated, these structures are key to the development of democracy. Some new fledgling democracies are copying what they see in other democracies without substantial

change (Diamond 1992). If the imposed system is premature or incompatible with the society’s level of development and other institutional structures, authoritarian dictatorship rather than democracy may emerge as the traditional authority structure breaks down. Some African and Latin American countries have experienced these breakdowns. However, the United States and other developed societies do have influence over political and economic development through foreign aid, trade, treaties, multinational corporations, and

other means. Promoting democracy means offering moral, political, financial, and diplomatic support to efforts to replace authoritarian regimes (Diamond 1992).

Political systems periodically face threats from internal sources, such as disaffected citizens, the military, and interest groups vying for power, or from external sources, such as other nations wanting land

or resources. Sometimes the power struggles erupt into violence. The following section discusses how war, terrorism, and rebellion challenge existing systems.

Global Conflict: Violence on the Global Scene

Once upon a time, gallant knights in shining armor went forth to battle with good luck tokens from their ladies and the cause of their religion or their king to spur them on. They seldom died in these battles, and the daily life of the society went on as usual. By contrast, since the invention of modern weaponry, no one, however innocent, has

been safe from death and destruction in war. Now that countries have developed weapons that can destroy civilizations, near annihilation of societies is a real threat. A malfunctioning computer, a miscalculation, a deranged person, a misunderstanding between hostile factions, or a terrorist attack could kill millions of people.

War is armed conflict occurring within, between, or among societies or

groups, or “organized mass violence” (Nolan 2002). It is a frequent but not inevitable condition of human existence. Many countries are now engaged in wars that are debilitating and detrimental to their economies and morale. Some of these wars (India and Pakistan, Northern Ireland) have lasted for years; others have been short and decisive, like the Gulf War with Iraq (Ground Zero Minnesota 1995).

Sociology in Your Social World

Costs of War

What Would \$87 Billion Buy?

The following is taken from an article by liberal commentator Michael Moore, director of films such as *Bowling for Columbine* and *Roger and Me*.

To get some perspective, here are some real-life comparisons about what \$87 billion means:

\$87 billion is more than the combined total of all state budget deficits in the United States.

The Bush administration proposed absolutely zero funds to help states deal with these deficits, despite the fact that their tax cuts drove down state revenues [Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities]

\$87 billion is enough to pay the 3.3 million people who have lost jobs under George W. Bush \$26,363 each!

The unemployment benefits extension passed by Congress at the beginning of this year provides zero benefits to “workers who exhausted their regular state unemployment benefits and cannot find work.” All told, two-thirds of unemployed workers have exhausted their benefits. [Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities]

\$87 billion is more than DOUBLE the total amount the government spends on Homeland Security.

The U.S. spends about \$36 billion on homeland security. Yet, Senator Warren Rudman (R-NH) wrote “America will fall approximately \$98.4 billion short of meeting critical emergency responder needs” for homeland security without a funding increase. [Source: Council on Foreign Relations]

\$87 billion is 87 times the amount the federal government spends on after-school programs.

George W. Bush proposed a budget that reduces the \$1 billion for after-school programs to \$600 million—cutting off about 475,000 children from the program. [Source: The Republican-dominated House Appropriations Committee]

\$87 billion is more than 10 times what the government spends on ALL environmental protection.

The Bush administration requested just \$7.6 billion for the entire Environmental Protection Agency. This included a 32 percent cut to water quality grants, a 6 percent reduction in enforcement staff, and a 50 percent cut to land acquisition and conservation. [Source: Natural Resources Defense Council]

Yours,

Michael Moore

Source: www.michaelmoore.com; moorelist@aol.com.

Why Do Nations Go to War?

Sometimes leaders use moral, religious, or political ideology to legitimize war; for instance, some Moslems believe that holy wars, or jihads, are blessed by God. A similar idea has been held by Christians, who call such wars “crusades.” Some countries fight wars to gain independence; this was the case for many countries dominated by colonial powers. Sometimes countries claim that others are violating their border or threatening their beliefs and customs. Sometimes they need resources such as oil controlled by another country. The desire for more land due to

population pressures is also a reason for war. In addition, war can distract citizens from other problems in their country (Wright 1987). Yet there are cultures where war is virtually unknown. Groups, often isolated, live in peace and cooperation, with little competition for land and resources.

Biologists, psychologists, and sociologists have made many attempts to explain reasons for war. Evolutionary psychologists and sociobiologists argue that humans have an “aggressive instinct” that can lead to war; some other psychologists

point out that frustration and fear can lead to aggression. However, most sociologists argue that war is a product of societies, created by societies, and learned in societies.

Two familiar sociological theories attempt to explain why wars occur. *Functional theorists* think underlying social problems cause disruptions to the system, including war, terrorism, and revolution. If all parts of the system were working

effectively, they contend that these problems would not occur. Agents of social control and a smooth-running system would prevent disruptions. Some functionalists argue that war brings a population together for a cause or enables it to gain resources or control aggressors, resulting in certain functional consequences.

Conflict theorists see war, terrorism, and revolution as the outcome of oppression by the ruling elite and an attempt to overthrow that oppression. Many businesses profit from wars because their manufacturing power is put to full use. In fact, more money is spent on war than on prevention of disease, illiteracy, hunger and other human problems. Citizens from the lower classes join the military, fight, and die in disproportionate numbers, while business organizations make profits off war. Conflicts

are sometimes started by those who feel deprived due to social inequalities in or between societies. Often these perceived inequities lead to wars such as the conflicts between the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, where those tribes compete for power, and in Northern Ireland, where Catholics feel Protestants have come to control the land Catholics once called their own.

On the other hand, leaders of a country may welcome and even instigate war because they feel it is in the country's self-interest. If a country is at war, people often show their support and patriotism for the country. Failure to support a leader, however incompetent, is easily labeled as a lack of patriotism. Often war can help a president or prime minister to have increased popularity and to be reelected to office.

A number of factors increase the likelihood of war. The following have been compiled from various studies:

(1) *Political and moral reasons*: Countries may have political or moral reasons for becoming involved in war. For instance, a stated objective of the Gulf War between the United States and Iraq in 1991 was to liberate Kuwait from the ruling family (moral reasons) and to open shipping lines and free oil resources (political and economic reasons). The stated objective of the Iraqi war of 2003 was to eliminate the threat of weapons of mass destruction (political and economic reasons), to eliminate the dictator, and to reduce the threat of terrorism (political and moral reasons). Some war critics and proponents

claim that control of the oil resources was a major factor in the decision to go to war (economic reason).

(2) *Threats become real*: Relations between regions and countries may reach high degrees of tension so that the threat of war becomes real, as in the cases of the ethnic conflicts in former Yugoslavia and the tribal and clan conflicts in Sudan and Rwanda.

(3) *Contacts between countries*: Countries are more likely to get into wars if they have contact through trading and alliances than if they have little contact. Disputes over resources or territory often arise as a result of contact and can lead to war.

(4) *Political beliefs*: Nations that stress citizens' rights and freedoms seldom fight each other, but dictatorships fight against other dictatorships and against countries with rights and freedoms. European democracies have established alliances and trading agreements, whereas tensions are present between the dictatorship of North Korea and surrounding countries.

Some nations are more war prone than others, and one cannot tell simply by paying attention to the rhetoric about war and peace. Americans—including U.S. politicians—give much vocal support to peace, but in the 230 years since the colonies declared

independence, the country has been at war 190 of those years. Indeed, during the entire twentieth century, there were only 6 years when the United States was not engaged in some sort of military action around the world (Brandon 2005; Noguera and Cohen 2006).

Case studies also indicate the crucial importance of the personalities of leaders in starting and resolving conflicts. However, the most important single precipitating factor in the outbreak of war is misperception—misinterpretation of the leader's image or a faulty view of the adversary's character, intentions, capabilities, or power (Stoesinger 1993).

The message is that war is not a natural or "biological" necessity but is in large part a result of leaderships' perceptions and decisions. Like incest, slavery, and cannibalism—which at times were thought to be instinctual but have come to be understood as aberrations—some sociologists believe that war can be "unlearned" (Stoesinger 1993).

How Can Nations Avoid War?

Deterrence is one approach to avoiding war. Some government officials argue that if a nation is militarily strong, no one will dare attack it. They can "negotiate from strength." Believers in this approach employ one of two strategies: to become superior to others or to maintain a balance with other militaristic nations. However, evidence from ongoing statistical analyses of militarization concludes that neither type of deterrence has been effective in reducing the chance of war. The more militarized a country becomes, the more likely the country is to enter into war. Continual buildup of weapons increases mistrust and

raises the potential for misunderstandings, mistakes, or disaster. Furthermore, military personnel often have a vested interest in war—since that is what the military is trained to do and what proves its competence. Business interests may also profit from supporting war.

Deterrence is extremely expensive. As countries develop their military power, the spiral toward bigger, more sophisticated, and expensive technological weaponry such as nuclear weapons in North Korea and the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in the United States continues. Countries of the world spend billions of dollars to develop military power, usually at the expense of social programs such as education and health care. For instance, in recent years, 16 percent of the U.S. budget was spent on the military (U.S. Executive Office 2001). This percentage is increasing with the War on Terrorism. Building of weapons does provide jobs and is profitable for companies, giving rise to what is often called the "military-industrial complex"; however, spending for weapons widens the gap between rich and poor countries and diverts money from social causes at home and abroad (Ayers 2006).

The United States used cold war tensions and deterrence theories after World War II as a rationale for maintaining its military strength and escalating the arms race. Suspicion and fear kept the military strong both in the United States and other countries. After the breakup of the Soviet Union and reduction in cold war tensions, the U.S. expenditures for the military began to drop, but current war efforts are increasing that budget. Current stockpiles of U.S. weapons, 12,500 of them long- and short-range nuclear weapons, are enough to annihilate the human race many times over (Council for a Livable World 1998). There are an estimated 20,000 nuclear weapons in the world, owned by China, France, Great

Britain, India, Israel, Pakistan, and the Russian Federation.

Negotiation is a second approach to avoiding war and attempting to resolve underlying conflicts. For example, diplomacy and treaties have set limits on nuclear weapons and their use. In the 1990s, the superpowers made major efforts to move into a new peaceful era. Peace talks were held in the Middle East, Cambodia, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia and Bosnia, Ireland, and other countries threatened by tensions and war. United Nations leaders were often involved in diplomatic attempts to resolve conflicts. The inherent problem, however, is that negotiation means a partial win—and a partial loss—for each side. Each gives a little and each gets a little. Both sides tend to want a win-lose resolution—with the other side losing, of course. The problem is that commitment to a win-lose perspective can lead to a lose-lose situation: neither side *really* winning.

Some citizens are not satisfied leaving peacekeeping efforts to their government leaders. Strong grassroots peace movements in Europe, the Middle East, the United States, South Africa, and other countries are aimed at lessening tensions and conflicts. The widespread demonstrations in many European and American cities by individuals opposed to the Iraqi war are one such example.

Many peace groups have educational programs. The horrors depicted in the Hiroshima Peace Museum (in Japan); the TV special *The Day After* concerning a nuclear explosion; the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.; the Anne Frank Museum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands; and the Korean and Vietnam Memorials in Washington, D.C., all help educate the public and politicians about the effects of war. Interestingly, most war memorials in the United States are not “weeping mothers” as they are in Europe, stressing the pathos

and agony of war. Rather, U.S. war memorials typically glorify the war and lionize the heroes who fought in those wars. This type of socialization does not make people want to avoid war. However, the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., sends a different message about the sorrows of war; peace advocates and veterans of the war often stand and weep together in front of that memorial.

Scholars draw several conclusions from studies of war in the past century: no nation that began a major war in this century emerged a clear winner; in the nuclear age, war between nuclear powers could be suicidal; a victor’s peace plan is seldom lasting. Those peace settlements that are negotiated on the basis of equality are much more permanent and durable. War is often stimulated by inequitable distribution of resources; therefore, peace that is lasting also requires attention to at least semi-equitable distribution of resources.

In the long run, people around the world have to want peace, yet many leaders and citizens hold bitter hatreds against their neighbors. Obviously, this is not a climate for peace. As long as there are intolerance, inequality, discrimination, hunger, and poverty in the world, the roots of violence are present. The world is a complex interdependent system. When the linkages between peoples are based on power, inequality, and exploitation, then war, terrorism, and violence will not disappear from the globe.

Terrorism

On September 11, 2001, three commercial airplanes became the missiles of terrorists, two crashing into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and one into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., killing more than 3,025 people from 68 nations and injuring countless others. Ongoing terrorist attacks

by Palestinian suicide bombers in Israel; by militants setting off bombs in London, Madrid, and Mumbai (Bombay), India; and by disaffected persons in Iraq that killed more civilian, military, and political personnel than during the 2003 Iraqi war illustrate continued frustration of those who are alienated. These are examples of terrorist incidents in a long string of violent, sophisticated, bloody terrorist acts. What was behind these killings of innocent people?

Terrorism refers to “the use of indiscriminate violence to cause mass fear and panic, intimidate a population, and advance one’s political goals, whatever they may be” (Nolan 2002). This usually refers to acts of violence by private nonstate groups to advance revolutionary political goals. State terrorism is government use of terror. Terrorists are found at all points on the political continuum and represent anarchists, nationalists, religious fundamentalists, and members of ethnic groups. In 2000, there were 423 terrorist acts around the world that killed 405 people and injured 791. Almost half of these acts were against the United States (U.S. Department of State 2002).

What makes terrorism effective? Terrorists strike randomly and change tactics so that governments have no clear or effective way of dealing with them. This unpredictability causes public confidence in the ability of government to deal with crises to waver. Terrorists seldom attack targets in oligarchic or dictatorial societies because these countries ignore their demands despite the risk to innocent civilians and hostages’ lives.

Why Do Terrorists Commit Hostile Acts?

In our anger against terrorists, we sometimes fail to look at the question of *why* they commit these atrocities. Who are the terrorists, and what have they to gain? Without understanding the underlying

causes of terrorism, we can do little to prevent it. Therefore, let us try to understand what motivates terrorists and what they gain by acts of terrorism.

Your terrorist may be someone else’s freedom fighter! In other words, terrorism is in the eye of the beholder. Terrorists are willing to die to support their groups’ cause. Few terrorists act alone. They are members of groups that are highly committed to a cause—religious, political, or both. *Class, ethnic, racial, or religious discrimination* lies at the roots of terrorism. In Northern Ireland, Protestant and Catholic children learn to hate their “enemies” and grow up experiencing violence and terrorism as a way of life. Those who have lost their lives in the struggle are often seen as heroes. Those committing terrorist acts often feel they are the victims of more powerful forces, and sometimes they see the only weapon they have to fight back is the ultimate sacrifice—their lives. Consider the following case:

Ahmad is a Palestinian. All his life, his family has been on the move, forced to work for others for hardly a living wage, controlled by rules made up by other people—ones that are usually hostile to Palestinians. When he was very young, his family’s home was taken away and the residents of his town scattered to other locations. Ahmad has grown up in an environment hostile to the “enemies” who dislocated his family, put some in jail, and separated him from friends and relatives.

Ahmad sees little future for himself or his people, little hope for education or a career of his choosing; he feels he has nothing to lose by joining a resistance organization to fight for “justice.” This organization cannot be publicly known because it is surrounded by potential enemies. Its members keep their identities secret. They cannot mount an army to fight their stronger enemies, so they rely on

terrorist tactics to bring recognition to their cause, punish those they see as oppressors, and feel they are doing something about their plight.

Ahmad puts the “greater good” of his religious and political beliefs and groups above his individual well-being. When he agrees to commit a terrorist act, he truly believes it is right, the only way he can strike back and bring attention to the suffering of his people. If killed, he will be praised and become a martyr within his group.

Religious and political beliefs lead some terrorists to commit violent acts. Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols were charged with bombing the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Research on their backgrounds shows connections to paramilitary, antigovernment militia groups, many of which opposed government intervention in private lives. These *patriot groups* are antigovernment (despite fanatic pro-Americanism) and white supremacist. Most of these patriot paramilitary groups consider themselves to be devoutly Christian, and they believe their acts are justified by their religion and their “good intentions.” They are scattered throughout the United States.

Structural explanations help explain when conditions are right for terrorism. Terrorism and war are unlikely to exist unless there is conflict and strife within and between societal systems. Ahmad learned his attitudes, hatreds, and stereotypes from his family and friends and through the media. These beliefs were reinforced by his religious beliefs and schools. Political leaders also can manipulate public opinion toward anger and violence.

When alienated individuals or groups are ready for war or terrorism and group members are sympathetic toward action, action is what the group is likely to have.

Terrorists seldom act alone but are usually members of a disaffected group.

Conflict theory explanations of terrorism lie in the unequal distribution of world resources and the oppression of groups in the social world. Americans make up only 5 percent of the total world population, yet the United States consumed 26 percent of world energy resources in 2000 (Ad Hoc Committee. 2000), 30 percent more than it produced (World Almanac Education Group 2001). Wealthy countries such as Germany, Japan, and the United States have considerable economic influence over peripheral nations because poor countries are dependent on the income and employment from these core countries. Citizens of poor countries work for multinational corporations, often for very low wages, and then the profits are returned to wealthy countries, helping to perpetuate their elite status. It is one contributing factor in perpetuating “the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer” syndrome. As conflict theorists explain, this inequity leads to hostilities and sometimes terrorism against the more powerful country.

The attack on the New York City World Trade Center was carried out as part of a conspiracy to terrorize and punish Americans. September 11 was a symbolic date for Palestinians, the date when Britain declared control of Palestine at the beginning of the chain of events that led to the land being given to Jews to establish Israel. Moreover, the Camp David Accords that established Israel’s right to exist in the Middle East was signed on September 11, 1979. This date was one that had powerful symbolic meaning to the people who were displaced from Palestine, just as the date has new and powerful meaning today for Americans.

Reactions to terrorism range from demands for immediate retaliation to teach the terrorists a lesson to frustration with

feelings of lack of power and control. People disagree over whether governments should negotiate with the terrorists and give in to their demands or hold firm by not negotiating, risking the lives of innocent victims. Terrorism, then, is the means by

SO WHAT?

Although other institutions and social processes may be avenues to power—the ability to influence the decisions about how society is run—the most direct source of power is the political system. Perhaps that is why it is the most contested of the institutions and the first venue for those interested in changing aspects of the society. Still, as in all institutions, change is difficult since those who have privilege and power want to hang on to it.

There is no one right way to organize a political system, for each structure has

which the powerless can attempt to gain some power, often through hijackings, bombings, suicides, kidnappings, and political assassinations, and receive attention to their cause.

shortcomings. However, some systems do a better job of distributing power, ensuring accountability, and providing checks on abuses of power. Even democracy comes in many forms and structures. If you want to live in a society where you have a voice, get involved in the political systems and stay well informed about the policies that your government is considering or has recently enacted. Healthy political systems need diverse voices and critics—regardless of which party is currently in power—to create vigorous societies.

CONTRIBUTING TO YOUR SOCIAL WORLD

Local Level: Work for a candidate: Get involved in a local election working for a candidate for Congress, mayor, judge, or sheriff—or volunteer at the Board of Elections to work at the polls on election day.

At the Organizational or Institutional Level: Work for a political party of your choice: parties need volunteers, and there are many jobs that can be done for your national party, from phone work to campaigning to clerical work. Consider an internship with a member of your state/provincial legislature or with the governor's office.

At the National and Global Levels: Consider an internship with a member of Congress or Parliament. You could also contact the United Nations about internships if your interests are more international/global.

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