

Power is "possessed by society as a whole" rather than by individuals, which means power levels can vary within a society; individuals and groups, do not necessarily become powerful at the expense of others.



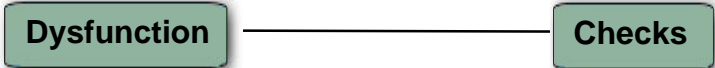
Power can expand like knowledge - for you to know more doesn't mean someone else has to know less...

By co-operating, everyone can gain a share of an expanding overall level of power. Just as levels of economic resources can expand (general living standards rise over time, for example), so too can power as a social resource. Co-operation, therefore, is a *structural imperative* if a society is to develop and progress.

Power involves the capacity to mobilise resources to achieve social goals. Societies and groups have collective goals (such as eradicating unemployment) and the more progress made towards these goals, the greater the levels of overall power that come into existence.

Example: Achieving educational qualifications confers power on individual students, but not necessarily at the expense of other students or teachers.

Power is distributed and exercised in the *general interests of society* as a whole, Although some groups will be more powerful than others, this is necessary (*functional*) because the achievement of *collective goals* requires organisation and leadership based on power.



If some groups become too powerful this can be **dysfunctional** if they pursue sectional interests at the expense of long-term social development and stability.

Structural checks and balances develop to the ability of individuals and groups to exercise power.

Example: A "free press" able and willing to draw public attention to abuses of power.



Overall levels of power in any society are relatively fixed ("constant"); increased power for an individual or group, therefore, must be at the expense of others (a "zero-sum" totality of power).

Societies consist of competing groups, none of whom wholly dominate all other groups. Political parties, for example, compete for control of the law-making process while the police and judiciary have a degree of *autonomy* over how laws are interpreted and applied. Judges may also rule on the legality of different laws. Societies consist of a *plurality* of groups with different levels of power and influence.

Societies consist of a range of different interest groups that ultimately pursue their own *sectional interests*. Groups compete for power and seek to advance their interests at the expense of other groups.

Interest groups contain individuals with characteristics that cut across categories like class, age, gender and ethnicity. **Robinson** (2001): "Class is a *horizontal cleavage*, while ethnicity is a *vertical cleavage* (there will be both workers and capitalists in ethnic groups)". Interest groups do not, therefore, need a common value system since they may be organised to achieve different goals. Stability within *pluralist* systems is generated through the role of the State (which acts as a broker between different sectional interests).



Different groups pursuing different interests...

