



Pluralist Democracy: Conflict and Consent

By Robert Dahl



About the Author

- Professor of Political Science at Yale University.
- Developed the pluralism theory in his book *Who Governs? (1961)*
- Wrote *Pluralist Democracy: Conflict & Consent* in 1967
- Disputes C. Wright Mills theory on the nature of Politics in the United States (Chp. 10 in T&C).



What is Pluralism?

- Assumes and accepts diversity.
- Assumes that there will be conflict as a result of the diversity.
- Conflict is a result of a free society.



Pluralistic Democracy: Conflict and Consent

- Dahl argues that the United States had a unique form of pluralism:
 - Focused on the Framers of the Constitution
 - How did the concept of pluralism affect the government structure?
 - How is conflict resolved in a pluralistic democracy?
 - How can people affect change in a pluralist society?



The Framers of the Constitution

- They were concerned with:
 - Majority groups dominating small minority groups
 - Factions
- Created a system that encourage cooperation.



American Pluralism

- Attempts to provide avenues to for people to address conflict.
- Power intentionally diffused.
- Constant negotiations will be necessary in order to make decisions.



How did the Framers address conflict?

Checks & Balances

- the principle of limited authority, the principle of balanced authority, and the principle of political pluralism
 - Legislative, Judicial, Executive Branch
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- Power to State and Local Government
 - Divert issues away from the Federal government
 - Citizens can air their grievances
 - Allows different groups to arrive at different solutions at different times



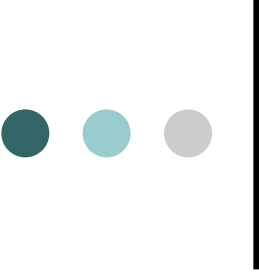
How is Conflict avoided?

- Americans agree on some fundamental issues
 - Democracy is a good idea
 - Constitution is a good idea
 - Despite conflicts, few end in war or severe and most people agree that the United States is a good place to live
- Consensus maintained by:
 - Tradition
 - Education
 - Media



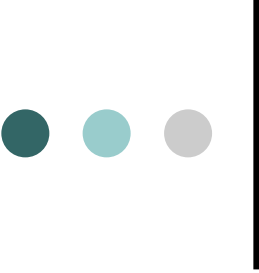
How are conflicts avoided?

- Conflicts result from:
 - Disagreement on how laws should be applied.
 - How laws/constitution should be interpreted.
- Conflict is heightened when people's way of life is threatened.



How is change implemented?

- In a Pluralist Democracy
 - People can have more access and influence at the local level
 - Special Interest Groups
 - Groups can pursue their own goals but
....



“To win national elections, even to win influence over national policies, every group must participate somehow in the politics of coalition building.”





The Comparative Study of Political Elites

By Robert D. Putnam





About the Author



- Robert D. Putnam is a Political Scientist and current Professor of Public Policy at Harvard University
- Well known for his research in civic engagement and social capital
- Putnam is the author or co-author of seven books and more than thirty articles published in ten languages



Power and the Elite

- Power and Influence

- Classical Elite Theory – General Principles

- Political Power is distributed unevenly

- Distribution of power can be conceived in dichotomous terms

- The Elite is unified and self-conscious

- The elite is essentially autonomous



Finding the Powerful

- Position Analysis – Assumes that the formal institutions of government provide a useful map of power relations
- Reputation Analysis – Used to find informal reputations of power by querying key individuals in the decision making process
- Event Analysis – Study how specific decisions are reached and noting who successfully initiates or vetoes a proposal



Social Origins of the Elite

- Independence Model – Low correlation between political status and socioeconomic status
- Agglutination Model – High correlation between political status and socioeconomic status

* Putman concludes the truth lies closer to the second model



Class, Education, and Power

- Social Origins -> Education -> Political Power
- Individuals from lower social origins -> lower accessibility to higher education -> working class -> underrepresented in politics
- Individuals from higher social origins -> ability to leverage resources -> higher accessibility to higher education -> increases political ambition, knowledge, skills, and confidence -> Elite



Recruitment and Selection

- Lineage and Family ties
- Institutional Channels
- Lateral Transfer
- Recruit -> Filter->Selection <- Gatekeepers
- Gatekeepers = Powerful Elite
 - Affiliations and Credentials
 - Skills – Hard and Soft
 - Loyalty and Political Reliability
 - Personal History



Motives and their Sources

- Childhood experiences (Early Exposure)
- Needs – Ego, Empathy, Power, Status, Wealth
- Game Politicians
- Gain Politicians
- Education



Integration and Transformation

- Recruitment patterns – Simultaneous and Sequential posts
- Elite Social Networks – Networks of personal communication, influence, and friendship

Elite Transformation

- Socio-economic factors – transition from an agricultural economy to industrial economy resulted in change of the ruling class
 - Technological Change -> Economic Change -> Social Change -> Elite Transformation
- Political Factors – Mass suffrage and Elections
- Revolutionaries
 - High Education + Low Social Status
 - Feel deprived and discriminated against by existing ruling class