
POLITICS AND POWER, A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON LEGITIMACY

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Abstract : We know from research into politics and power that these two variables are widely discussed as interrelated concepts. However, what remains poorly understood is that politics is not only interrelated with the concept of power, politics itself is about how power is exercised legitimately. This research aims to ascertain whether politics can be reduced to power and, if so, how can we define power. A literature study was deployed in order to answer these questions. The findings showed that politics could be reduced to power. However, power should be seen from the perspective of a legitimate capacity to act. This approach is compelling since it assures political legitimacy, the central issue in Western political discussion. Political legitimacy is obtained if the sovereign exercises power legitimately, and consequently, it creates people to trust the ruler's authority. People's trust is imperative to politics. A sovereign government can be legitimate if people trust her and believe in the sovereign's authority. Social contract theory is one of the most profound concepts in Western political thought and aligns well with the concept of power as a legitimate capacity to act. A social contract is a covenant by the people and the sovereign in which the people forfeit their powers and rights, recognise the sovereigns to employ power over them. Social contract constructs a government system and the political legitimacy of the sovereign government.

Keywords: legitimacy, politics, power

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INTRODUCTION

Politics, in essence, is the subject regarding government and how a consented authority is exercised. On the other hand, *politics* can also be defined as processes in which government meets a society's needs (Heywood 2013). Politics includes a policy of a government, its structure and its impacts on society. Hence, politics is concerning polity, a system of a social institution focused on the machinery of a government. Politics are exercised, executed, and practised in government institutions, political parties, legislative bodies, cabinets, etc. An institution such as families, education, community groups, business, non-government institutions cannot be regarded as political organisations;

instead, they can be considered non-political or outside politics. These institutions do not require the legitimacy principles as Leftwich (2004), and Rawls (2007) asserted. Besides, only when politics is restricted to enterprises such as government and political parties, this notion contains the legitimacy principles, which is the essence of politics since legitimacy secures government to exercise its right uprightly and then grants political obligations (Gilley 2006). A failure of a government or a state to act legitimately engenders illegitimate government (Easton, cited in Heywood 2013).

Therefore, to be more specific, politics is concerning governing and the essence of governing is something related to power (Van der Brug and Heemskerk 2017). There would be no government without power. Hence, politics concerns how power is exercised by a sovereign government (Von Haldenwang 2017). This paper argues that, in essence, politics can be equated as power. Power is the nucleus of politics (Van der Brug and Heemskerk 2017) and is shared and exercised throughout the sovereign government (Eijk 2018). However, be cautious; politics can be reduced to power if power is viewed as a legitimate capacity to act (Hindess 1996). Defining politics outside of this definition would not be said as a proper definition of politics since power necessitates a legitimate capacity to act, and only by viewing such definition, the discussion of politics can be interpreted adequately (Hindess 1996; Korsgaard 1997). The decision of President Trump on the ban of immigrants will be discussed to illustrate the concept of power as a legitimate capacity to act, and Cameron's act to issue the referendum of Brexit will be studied as a simple capacity to act.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The features of power

Power is the heart of political science, or it can also be designated power as the blood of political science. So, politics without power is nonsense (Van der Brug and Heemskerk 2017). Power can work either tangible or intangible; even most political scientists believe that power will work optimally in conditions that cannot be seen tangibly. In this section, the concept of power from various perspectives will be examined.

Hindess (1996) conceptualises power as a simple capacity and as a legal capacity. Power is a simple capacity to act identical to electrical dynamism and work quantitatively for the diverse end. However, power can also be viewed as domination (Gerschewski 2013; Kailitz 2013). In democratic governance, power should be adjusted under the public life's complexity (Gilley 2009; Hindess 1996).

According to Marx's analysis(1818–1883), politics holds that the state arises because of power. According to him, before the state existed, there was an ancient communist society. All means of production belong to the whole society. The existence of private property rights divides society into two opposing classes: the class of people who own

the means of production and those who do not. The first class does not feel safe with the advantages it has in the economic field. They need a forced organisation called the state to maintain the pattern of production that has given them a privileged position and to perpetuate ownership of the means of production (Heywood 2004). While Max Weber (1864-1920) defines power as making other people accept and do what they do not want to do.

Power has three meanings: ability, authority, and influence. Robert A. Dahl (1974: 407) suggests that power includes a broad category of human relations, for example, relationships that contain influence, authority, persuasion, encouragement, violence, pressure, and political power. Then in his work entitled "Modern Political Analysis", he stated that power is a kind of influence accompanied by encouragement in the form of sanctions for those who violate it. The two meanings of this term are inconsistent because of the first statement of power in general. After all, it includes all types of human relations accompanied by influence and sanctions. Dahl does not question this because the term "politics" includes the terms "control", "power", "authority", and "influence", which have meanings that are difficult to understand.

Steven Lukes (1941) describes the "three faces of power" theory, presented in *Power: A Radical View*. This theory formulates power in three ways: decision-making power, non-decision-making, and ideological power. Decision-making power is the most common of the three dimensions. This "face" analysis focuses on policy preferences translated through political action (Lukes 2005). Non-decision-making power is a decision that sets the agenda in a debate and makes specific issues unacceptable for discussion in "legitimate" public forums. Adding this face provides a two-dimensional view of power that allows for analysis of current and potential problems, broadening the research focus on conflicts that can be observed both overt and covert (Lukes 2005). Ideological power allows a person to influence people's desires and thoughts, even making them want things against their interests (for example, causing women to support patriarchal societies). Lukes offers this third dimension as an "overarching critique" of the behavioural focus of the first two dimensions, complementing and correcting the shortcomings of the previous view, which allows for analysis of latent and observable conflicts. Lukes claims that a full critique of power must include the subjective and "real" interests of those excluded from the political process (Lukes 2005).

Power, according to Foucault, is not understood in the context of ownership by an institutional group as a mechanism that ensures citizens' submission to the state. Power is not domination as power over others in a relationship that dominates or the powerful with the powerless. Power is not like the sovereignty of a state or legal institution that presupposes external domination or control over individuals or groups. Power must be understood as a form of power relation that is immanent in the space in which power

operates. Power must be perceived as something that perpetuates these power relations, forms a chain or system of those relations, or even isolates them from the rest of a power relation. Therefore, power is a strategy in which power relations are the effect (Foucault 1982). The issue of power is not a question of ownership in who controls whom or is powerful while others are powerless. The power is scattered, omnipresent, immanent in every social relationship. This is not because power can consolidate things under conditions of invisibility, but because power is always produced in every moment and every relation. Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere (Foucault 1980).

Politics and power: a critical perspective on legitimacy

In the introduction, it has been mentioned that the main argument of this study is that politics, in essence, can be reduced to power, and this section will try to substantiate this claim. Politics chiefly and formally work in a government context. Politics is concerning policies established by the legitimate authority of a government (Chambers and Carver 2008). Politics relate to how a government works and employs its power over the governed (Heywood 2013). Hence, following this notion, power is the capability of an actor to employ resources to control the behaviour of others in the context of government, state or public administration (Eijk 2018). However, politics denote an actor's capability to control other behaviour and how the actor functions uprightly. Likewise, politics is a system in which the circulation of power and authority is built (Eriksen 2015); therefore, exercising power is the very heart of politics (Van der Brug & Heemskerk 2017).

Various perspectives on the definition of politics have been proposed, such as Schmitt (cited in Eijk 2018) emphasises that politics concerns friends and foes. While Laver (cited in Eijk 2018) defines *politics* as a complex combination of cooperation and conflict, cooperation leads to genuine love, and conflict creates war. However, these two perspectives are too narrow in political analysis and political theory. Politics entails legitimacy to act of the sovereign government (Coicaud 2002). Legitimacy secures the right to govern, and the consent of the people grant the sovereign government to govern following the rule of law. By combining the notion of the right to govern and people's consent, politics can work appropriately within the society (Carnaghan 2010; Fraser 1974). Politics, in its very nature, involves how power is obtained and exercised. Following this definition, power is gained when people consent to the sovereign—the sovereign use its power to change or shape the behaviour of the citizens. Government leaders, politicians, judges, state officials, police and military officers can legitimately exercise their power to manage public life (Eijk 2018; Galston 2001).

So, why does power argued as the very essence of politics? Before answering this question, we should consider various perspectives on power. Power is a simple capacity to act (Hindess 1996). Another definition is that power can be viewed from a relational perspective, A successful in making B do something he/she would not otherwise do. In this definition, A employs power over B intentionally. Hence, power is seen as the capacity of an actor to impose or change the choices or behaviour of the other either wholly or partly (Van der Brug & Heemskerk 2017). Power can also be conceptualised as a result obtained in and through social relations (Barnett and Duval 2005). Under this definition, power comprises two aspects, the type of social relations and the specificity of social relations and further create the fourfold taxonomy of power. Firstly, compulsory power is viewed from the recipient's perspective. An actor is admitted to shaping or imposing others' circumstances or behaviour. Secondly, institutional power is an actor can impose or change others' behaviour through the rules assigned in a specific institution. Hence in this definition, power is seen from the view that an actor can control others' behaviour indirectly. Thirdly, structural power, power changes or shapes the fate and existence condition of an actor. Fourthly, productive power is understood from the perspective that the constitution arrives from social subjects with various social capacities within a discursive manner and knowledge system to create social capacities and identities and gain meaning (Barnett & Duval 2005).

This paper claims that discussing power from the perspective of a simple capacity to act or approach this concept from the view of the taxonomy of power does not meet the proper discussion of political concept and is rarely accepted in western political analysis. Here are some arguments why these approaches are not fit for proper political analysis. None of these approaches secures political legitimacy (see also Gerschewski 2013; Gilley 2006; 2009). As discussed in the introduction, political legitimacy is essential to politics and abandoning legitimacy would fail to obtain political authority. Consequently, the sovereign cannot distribute orders uprightly, and citizens would not be compelled to obey the sovereign and the rule of law. Consequently, chaos within a society would emerge (Dworkin 1986; Holbig and Gilley 2010). Besides, these approaches do not concern the consent of the people. People's consent has been the main discussion in political analysis and political theory (Marshall and Jagers 2013; Mazepus et al. 2016; Kluegel and Mason 2004; Raz 1995). For instance, David Cameron, a former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, announced a referendum to leave the affiliation of the UK with the European Union (EU). In this case, Mr Cameron employed his power as the sovereign government. However, the Britons cast their votes, and the result showed that the UK left the EU (Van der Brug & Heemskerk 2017). By applying the perspective of power as a simple capacity to act, it can be seen that Cameron was capable of proclaiming the referendum; however, this approach failed to explain why the Britons cast their votes

to oppose the expectation of Cameron. Instead, this theory is only able to explain why Cameron has the power to proclaim the referendum. In political analysis, the consent of the people and a legitimate capacity to act are imperative to understand how the sovereign and the governed relate one each other (Berdufi and Dushi 2015). In the case of the UK's referendum, the Britons also have a legitimate capacity to overthrow the sovereign government. Hence, viewing the power as a simple capacity to act has failed to explain the very essence of politics.

So, it is very reasonable to argue that to understand politics properly; one should see it from the light of a legitimate capacity to act. This perspective is the most compelling argument and has been entrenched in Western political analysis (Hindess 1996; Rigby and Fehér 1982; Rothschild 1977; Sandby-Thomas 2014; Scharpf 1988; 2003). Power exercised legitimately by the sovereign government would engender legitimate government (Dean 2011). Furthermore, the power exercised with the consent of the people to whom the power is applied can also be said as a legitimate government. People willingly grant their consent to the sovereign to impose power over them to create government legitimacy. In this perspective, persons or agents of the government can stipulate laws or commands that are hoped to be obliged by the people. A government is considered a legitimate government and a concentrated locus of political power only if they exercise their power uprightly, and by then, they are also capable of assigning laws or commands that require obligation from the people (Dean 2011; Sandby-Thomas 2014). This perspective generates valuable political life; the sovereign exercises legitimate power, and the people are compelled to oblige to the commands and laws assigned by the sovereign and hence the harmonious political life can be achieved and maintained.

Politics is how the sovereigns exercise their power uprightly. To govern uprightly is the very essence of politics (Coicaud 2002). To govern uprightly means that the sovereign exercise its power legitimately (Hindess 1996; Rigby and Fehér 1982; Rothschild 1977; Sandby-Thomas 2014; Scharpf 1988; 2003). In political analysis, justifying power is the fundamental aspect in discussing legitimacy (Hindess 1996). If power is viewed from the perspective of legitimate capacity to act and politics is seen as how to govern uprightly, then these two elements generate people's political obligation, which is also essential to political analysis (Bensman 1979; Coicaud 2002; Rigby and Fehér 1982).

Legitimacy and consent are the two fundamental aspects of creating the political authority of a government. The legitimacy of political authority relies on whether the transfer of power is executed rightly or violates the principles of legitimacy (Locke, cited in Rawls 2007). The basis of the proper transfer of power is the people's consent. Similarly, Locke (1823) argued that people should not be demanded to subordinate political authority if their consent is not considered. However, people's consent is not

sufficient for the legitimacy of political authority because the political authority that obviates natural law would create illegitimate government (Dalton et al., 2007; Evers 1977; Simmons 2001). Hence, to be a legitimate sovereign, a government should consider the force of the natural law. If the political authority fails to protect the consent of the people or neglects the boundaries of the natural law, then it indeed ends the legitimacy of its political authority, and consequently, there would be no obligation of the governed to obey the rules or commands (Barker 1985; Di Palma 1991; Hobbes 1651; 2010; Pitkin 1964; Riley 1976).

Moreover, if political authority exercises power legitimately, people will trust their authority. People's trust is a precondition to politics. A sovereign government can be said to be a legitimate government if people trust her and believe in the sovereign's authority (Weber 1964). Further, Weber emphasised that legitimacy is fundamental to social science and trust in a particular social order creates social orderliness (Weber 1964). Trust in the sovereign is also considered more enduring than the pursuance of self-interest, which is also essential in maintaining social orderliness (Danny 2013). Political legitimacy is achieved if the sovereign uses its political power properly (Green 1988). Political legitimacy necessitates the rightfulness to govern by political regimes conferred by the people to the political regimes established in the common good or collective advantage (Gilley, cited in Mazepus 2017). Political legitimacy is also viewed from the social contract theory. The social contract is the basis of political legitimacy; people consent to a contract or an agreement that asserts a sovereign who can assure the protection of people and the people confer their rights to the sovereign (Hobbes 1651; Hobbes, cited in Korsgaard 1997; Hoffmann 2011; Paz-Fuch 2011). If there is no sovereign, the people may create one in a covenant manner (Hobbes 1651). Furthermore, political legitimacy can be established if the sovereign or the ruler protects the rights of the people (Korsgaard 1997; Riley 1976; Rogers 2003).

Social contract theory is one of the most profound concepts in Western politics (Curley 1994; Rousseau 1762). Social contract emphasises that a free will of the people justifies political legitimacy (Hobbes, cited in Curley 1994). People are responsible for using their free will either to confer the right to the sovereign government or to renounce it through voluntary behaviour. For Hobbes, free will is a moral decision to generate responsibilities. Apart from free will, social contract theory also explains how the power is gained, exercised, retained and renounced in a sovereign (Berdufi and Dushi 2015; Makarkin and Oppenheimer 2011; Sokolowski 2011). A social contract is a covenant by the people to overlook their powers and rights, recognise the sovereigns to employ their power over the people without any barricades. Hence in Hobbes's analysis, the sovereign is an absolute power; a regime and the governed are established based on the people's free will to forfeit their rights and confer them to the sovereign (Curley 1994; Machan

1983). Hobbes' perspective on power aligns well with the concept of power as a legitimate capacity to act and has been the central issue in political theory (Nyamaka 2011).

Further, social contract theory has also been considered the most fundamental concept to impacting and changing modern society. It shapes the political configuration and has become the foundation for establishing society or community (Berdufi and Dushi 2015; Stanila 1998; Weber 2011). Besides, it also constructs a government system and the political legitimacy of the sovereign government (Stanila 1998). A sovereign government constitutes a social contract over the people who have agreed to establish a community (Locke, cited in Berdufi & Dushi 2015). A sovereign government is legitimate and upright if the people approve it, trust it. Hence, the sovereign obtains its power if only people confer the right and power to the sovereign government (Hoffmann 2011; Hobbes 1651; Paz-Fuch 2011). In other words, it is the people who have the power, and the sovereign assumes the power because the people voluntarily give it to the sovereign. In this case, people forfeit and limit their power and rights and subjugate the sovereign to have a more substantial guarantee of their rights. Whenever the sovereign neglects to exercise its power and responsibilities, the people can question the sovereign and replace it with a new sovereign ruler that they believe would assure and secure the rights of the people (Berdufi and Dushi 2015; Hobbes 1651). There is a difference between Hobbes and Locke in viewing power; for Hobbes, the sovereign is absolute power, while the sovereign is not absolute for Locke. Locke emphasises that the power can be revoked from the sovereign. So, the concept of Locke on power and sovereign government aligns well with the concept of power as a legitimate capacity to act. For Locke, the sovereign's power is obtained through the people who confer the power and rights to the ruler. Hence the power can be withdrawn from the sovereigns if they rule arbitrarily or fail to assure the rights of the people (Hoffmann 2011; Paz-Fuch 2011). Both Locke perspectives and the concept of capacity to act are emphasising the legitimate capacity to act. In this case, when the sovereign exercise its power arbitrarily, the people have also a legitimate capacity to impeach the ruler (Berdufi and Dushi 2015). This notion is also illustrated in the case of Cameron, who had been overthrown by the Britons' vote to leave the UK (Brexit).

Here we also discuss an example of power as the legitimate capacity to act in the case of President Donald Trump had signed an executive decree to ban immigrants. His decision to issue this policy has been considered one of the most significant impacts on American foreign policy and national security. To impose his presidential decree, Trump recruited the anti-immigrant staff (Shipoli 2018), and he understands that his policy could hurt many Americans who do not support the immigrant ban and potentially impact the economy of America. However, the American constitution and American people give the office for Trump and enable him to issue a presidential decree and make him legitimately

hire even the most anti-immigrant staff to help him apply the anti-immigrant policy. By using the concept of power as a legitimate capacity to act, President Trump's action or the decision, in this case, can be assumed as a legitimate political authority. Trump exercised his power over the American people since that power is given to him by the constitution and the American people to protect and secure a peaceful nation over the American people. However, if Trump behaves violently and arbitrarily, the American people can impeach him via the constitutional mechanism. Trump claimed that his anti-immigration policy was to protect America from the invasion of immigrants (Shipoli 2018). Hence, this particular case adequately illustrates that politics is how power is exercised legitimately.

Political scientists can provide a compelling and adequate political analysis if power is viewed as a legitimate capacity to act (Danny 2013; Franck 2006). If sovereign governments use their power legitimately to correct and judge the citizens' behaviour, people will obey them allegiantly. People oblige or subdue to the commands and the laws if they see that the sovereign create fair laws and institutions. People's obedience and behavioural change are essential to political analysis, and these could be achieved if the sovereigns exercise their power legitimately (Franck 2006; Hoffmann 2011).

CONCLUSION

Politics is concerning polity, how a sovereign government exercise its power. Politics necessitates legitimacy to create political authority. To govern uprightly is the very essence of politics and means that the sovereign exercise its power legitimately. This paper concludes that power is the very essence of politics. In other words, politics can be reduced to power. However, power should be seen from the perspective of a legitimate capacity to act. This approach is compelling since it secures political legitimacy, the central issue in Western political thought. Political legitimacy is achieved if the sovereign exercises power legitimately, and consequently, it creates people to trust the ruler's authority. People's trust is a precondition to politics. A sovereign government can be a legitimate government if people trust her and believe in the sovereign's authority. Political legitimacy is also viewed from the social contract theory. The social contract is the basis of political legitimacy; people consent to a contract or an agreement that asserts a sovereign who can protect people and confer their rights to the sovereign. In other words, it is the people who have the power, and the sovereign assumes the power because the people voluntarily give it to the sovereign. In this case, people forfeit and limit their power and rights and subjugate the sovereign to have a more substantial guarantee of their rights. Whenever the sovereign neglects to exercise its power and responsibilities, the people can question the sovereign and replace it with a new sovereign ruler that they believe would assure and secure the rights of the people.

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