

PLURALISM

- *Power as influence, exercised by a plurality of different groups within society (multiple centers of power).*
- *Dahl suggests groups with multiple channels of access to power, wide distribution of a range of power resources, broad consensus within society, latent groups and no united power elite.*

Definition of Power:

“A’ exercises power over ‘B’ to the extent that he (or she) changes ‘B’s’ actions or predispositions in some way”.

Key theorists:

Robert Dahl *Who Governs?* (1961) examined the exercising of power in New Haven, Connecticut and found no one power elite and the importance of groups → US as a ‘polyarchy’ or a ‘pluralist democracy’

- Assumptions:
 - **Behaviouralism**: behaviour can be trained & observed (ie, voting patterns)
 - Influence: power as influence
- Findings:
 - No one power elite rules
 - Power is non-cumulative and not always connected

Definitions:

- **Behaviouralism**: Assumes that people’s actions demonstrate their preferences and beliefs. i.e. studying voting patterns can tell us directly about influence and power.

Methodology:

- *Who Governs?* Concentrates on a **micro (small-scale)** approach in which through surveys and studying voting patterns, Dahl attempted to measure power.
- Pluralism focusses on **quantitative** methodology and is sceptical of the qualitative ‘big picture’ approach of elitism.
 - **Dahl’s Test for elitism**
 1. The hypothetical ruling (power) elite is a well-defined group;
 2. Fair sample of cases involving key decisions in which the preferences of the hypothetical ruling elite run counter to those of any other likely group
 3. In such cases, the preference of the elite regularly prevails.

Key Tenets of Pluralism

1. Resources are widely distributed

- different resources are available. Almost all have some .
- 2. People can form groups to exercise power**
 - Agency → people can choose to form or not form groups. In doing so they can utilise collective influence and 'voting power'
- 3. There are multiple channels of access/opportunities to participate in political processes**
- 4. Groups can draw upon a range of power resources**
 - Voting power
 - Media
- 5. There can be elites, but they diverge:**
 - No one power elite.
 - Elites are in different areas.
 - Ideological dimension – rejects US democracy as inherently elitist.
- 6. There is a broad consensus amongst people:**
 - Disagreements exist, but the areas of consensus tend to override these disagreements.

Neo-Pluralism

- Shift from formal to informal arrangements.
- Focus on networks.
- Less focus on elections:
 - Participation via other methods.
 - Role of partisan politics?
 - Business is important.

Issues for Australian Context:

- Multiple channels of access will differ for Australia, given our fused executive-legislature, the lack of strong judicial review here and the [Washminster vs Westminster](#) system.
- [Separation of power](#): Legislature (parliament), Judiciary (courts, namely the High Court), Executive (government) → Australia only has a partial separation of power, the US has full.
- Another major issues is whether corporations and business are now more powerful than they were in 1950s US – this has led to revisions through [neo-pluralism](#).

Critiques:

- Normatively, pluralism tends to [defend](#) American [democracy](#) (Dahl admits flaws in what he calls 'polyarchy', but is fundamentally defending the system in place) and the status quo. It is conservative in nature.
- [Methodologically](#), focussing only on power through votes in institutions [ignores the second and third faces of power](#) as well as non-institutional aspects of power (e.g. in terms of race, gender, class).

- There are questions (raised by RCT and opponents of pluralism) about whether groups themselves allow a 'democratic' exercising of power.
- Was Dahl looking at the wrong locations of power? (***RELATES TO AGENDA SETTING***)
- **Schattschneider** → idea that interest groups could organise some issues into politics and other issues not.