

# Power and Politics

## Worksheet 4.1: Competing Views on the Distribution of Power

Classify each of the following statements into one of the following four categories:

Marxism

Power elite

Pluralism

Elite theory

1. Economic and political power is diffused throughout society among a range of competing interest groups and representative political parties, and all members of society have some power.  
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2. The state is class-based, defending the long-term interests of the dominant economic class.  
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3. Competing political parties and interest groups, free speech and elections mean decision makers are accountable to the electorate and therefore have to respond to and represent the wishes of a 'majority of minorities'. No single group can monopolize power, as any attempt to do so will be met by countervailing power. \_\_\_\_\_
4. The main political parties are not representative and have much in common. A consensus is manufactured through the dissemination of the dominant ideology. \_\_\_\_\_
5. There is unequal opportunity to influence decisions in an unequal society.  
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6. The ideals of justice, democracy and equality of political influence are an illusion so long as society remains unequal. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Power is inevitably concentrated in the hands of a few, because some have innate abilities and talents making them natural leaders and power holders, but these are open to people from a wide range of backgrounds and this means these power holders can represent the interests of various social groups giving the majority some power in society. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Those who hold the top positions in business corporations, government, and the military are the ones who really hold power, even in a so-called democracy. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Those at the top of organizations are able to monopolize information and power, making true democracy difficult. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Who says organization says oligarchy. \_\_\_\_\_

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11. Pressure groups and new social movements constantly defend and promote the rights of individuals and challenge power holders. \_\_\_\_\_
12. There is a concentration of economic and political power in the hands of a ruling class, whose power is based on ownership of the means of production. \_\_\_\_\_
13. The similarity of social background and interests, and the interchange and overlapping of personnel among power-holders creates a single ruling minority. \_\_\_\_\_
14. Elites lack internal cohesion; their power is situational and non-cumulative. Studies of decision making show there is no dominant elite which consistently gets its own way but power is spread between a wide number of competing elites, interest groups, etc., each of whose power is limited to particular issues. \_\_\_\_\_
15. Dominant elites are integrated and cohesive, and form a ruling class. They are united by a network of interlocking personal and institutional links, kinship and friendship ties and shared upper-class and educational backgrounds. Power is cumulative: economic power gives political power. \_\_\_\_\_
16. Studies of decision making ignore issues of non-decision making and the power of the dominant class to ignore/suppress all but the safest decisions, such that only 'safe' decisions reach the stage of public discussion. \_\_\_\_\_
17. The dominant class has the power to manufacture a consensus and set the agenda of public discussion. \_\_\_\_\_
18. The role of the state in the 'mixed economy' and the separation of ownership and control of industry reduce the power of private ownership and shows there is no concentration of economic power. There is therefore no dominant economic class. \_\_\_\_\_
19. The separation of ownership and control is a myth: ownership of wealth is still highly concentrated in the hands of a propertied upper class. Top managers/directors are major shareholders and still motivated by profit. There is therefore still a concentration of economic power in the hands of a dominant economic class. State intervention merely aims to protect the long-term interests of this dominant economic class. \_\_\_\_\_
20. The state is a neutral arbiter, compromising and balancing between competing interests.  
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