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From Traditional Authority to Network Power: An Empirical Analysis of the Transformation of Political Power

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Abstract: The recent serious structural changes in the international political system allow for a classical interpretation to re-understand the concept of political power. As you know, strong political power was explained by state institutions, hierarchical management mechanisms, and financial structures. However, the current digitalisation, globalisation, and the rise of social networks have transformed this concept. Today, political power is increasingly shaped by network-based relationships, non-state actors, and information flows. The purpose of this study is to empirically clarify the transformation of political power from a hierarchical model to a network power model. Mixed methods were used in the analysis. In other words, based on qualitative methods, theoretical literature, theories of political power and conceptual models of structural unity were compiled. The quantitative method was used to index political power networks and reflect the results of existing empirical studies. The results of the study show that this political power is monopolised by media

platforms, civil society actors, transnational networks and digital communication tools. Such a transformation has a serious impact on the concept of state sovereignty, political legitimacy, and governance mechanisms. This study provides a new empirical and theoretical perspective on the transformation of political power. The article aims to contribute to existing discussions in political science.

Keywords: Political power, political power transformation, network society, globalisation, digital politics.

Introduction

One of the most fundamental and controversial concepts in politics is political power (Lukes, 2005). As you know, in classical political science literature, power is mainly explained within the framework of state institutions, political leadership and legal-normative mechanisms (Weber, 1978). In discussions of political power, Max Weber's forms of legitimate power, Thomas Hobbes' concept of sovereignty, and Robert Dahl's empirical approaches to power relations have always played a key role. The theories of these scholars explain power mainly as a hierarchical, centralised, and state-oriented phenomenon (Weber, 1978; Dahl, 1957).

The structural changes taking place in the global political environment in the 21st century have revealed the shortcomings of classical explanatory models (Keohane & Nye, 2012). Factors such as globalisation processes, the rapid development of IT, and the transformation of social networks into a means of political mobilisation have led to the emergence of new forms of political power (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). In this sense, political power is no longer explained only by the resources controlled by state actors (Nye, 2011). It is also determined by information flows, network relations and informal mechanisms of influence (Van Dijk, 2020)

Today, in political processes, individuals, non-governmental organisations, media platforms and transnational networks, along with states, can significantly influence the formation of political decisions. Such factors, in turn, prevent the centralisation of political power and result in its multilevel nature (Rhodes, 2017). Manuel Castells's famous concept of the network society is one of the main theoretical frameworks explaining this change (Castells, 2010). Castells notes in his theory that power in modern societies is located in information networks. Here, access to networks becomes the main source of political influence.

The study aims to systematically and comprehensively analyse the transition from the traditional model of power to the network power model. The study explains the changing nature of political power using empirical evidence and theoretical approaches.

Research Problem

One of the most important issues in modern political science literature is the adequate explanation of the changing nature of political power (Nye, 2011). Traditional political science

theories have mainly explained power in a state-centred, hierarchical framework (Dahl, 1957; Weber, 1978). Although in this view, power is evaluated as a resource exercised through formal authorities, legal legitimacy, and administrative control, recent political processes have revealed the limited explanatory power of this model.

It should be noted that in modern political conditions, political influence and decision-making processes are not limited to state institutions alone. Today, new forms of political power have emerged. Here, it would be correct to mention public opinion formed through social media platforms, transnational activities of non-governmental organisations, global information networks, and the indirect influence of economic actors on political processes (Papacharissi, 2015). The classical concept of political power cannot fully explain the newly emerged forms of power.

In this sense, the main scientific problem of the study is to determine the mechanisms by which political power transitions from a hierarchical structure to a network-based structure. In addition, it is necessary to clarify how this transformation affects the concepts of political governance, legitimacy and sovereignty. In many existing studies, this process is often explained only theoretically or within a limited empirical framework (Bennett & Checkel, 2015). For this reason, there is a need for studies that explain the transformation of political power in a systematic, multi-method way.

As a research problem for this analysis, we can examine the empirical foundations and theoretical consequences of the transformation of political power from traditional forms of authority to network power.

Research Focus

The study focuses on the structural and functional transformation of political power. The study focuses on the transition of political power from a centralised, hierarchical, and state-oriented model to a multilevel, network-based model. Within this focus, political power is analysed as a system of relationships formed between various actors.

The study pays special attention to the following aspects of political power:

- 1) Integration of ICT into political influence mechanisms
- 2) The impact of network relations on political decision-making processes
- 3) The increasing role of non-state actors such as the media, civil society, and transnational networks in political power
- 4) The impact of network-based influence mechanisms on the formation of political legitimacy

Note that the study here is not limited to a specific region or state. On the contrary, a generalised analytical model based on global political trends is presented. This approach allows us to explain the transformation of political power using common empirical examples.

Research Aim and Questions

As for the study's main objective, we can say that the analysis of the transformation of political power from the traditional model to the network power model, from both empirical and theoretical

perspectives, is its main focus. The study reveals the changing content, structure, and mechanisms of implementation of the concept of political power. The article aims to contribute to the discourse of modern political science.

The study has the following objectives:

- 1) Comparative analysis of classical and modern theories of political power
- 2) Determining the possibilities of application of the phenomenon of network power in political science
- 3) Clarifying the empirical indicators of the changing nature of political power
- 4) Explaining the impact of this transformation on political governance

In accordance with the main objectives of the article, these research questions have been formulated:

- 1) What limitations do classical political power models have in clarifying modern political power relations?
- 2) What theoretical advantages does the phenomenon of network power offer for determining the transformation of political power?
- 3) Through what empirical indicators does political power acquire a network character in new political systems?
- 4) How can the influence of non-state actors and information networks, such as the media, civil society, and transnational networks, on political decision-making processes be measured?
- 5) How does the transition of political power to a network-based form change the mechanisms of political governance?

The above questions allow us to systematically examine the transformation of political power, both theoretically and empirically. These questions justify the study's mixed-methods design.

Literature review / Theoretical Overview

The concept of political power we have mentioned has always been one of the most basic categories of social and political theory. In traditional approaches, power has been explained in terms of coercion, obedience, and legitimacy. According to this view, power is the ability of one actor to influence another's behaviour. Max Weber explained political power in his theories as the ability of an actor to have his will accepted within a social relationship, despite resistance. According to Weber, power is built on legitimacy. This legitimacy manifests itself in traditional, charismatic and legal-rational forms (Weber, 1978).

According to Weber's approach, political power is institutional and hierarchical. In this model, power is mainly concentrated in state structures. Political decisions are implemented from the top down. Thomas Hobbes' concept of sovereignty is also similar to Weber's classification. According to Hobbes, political power expresses the essence of centralised power. The philosopher notes that social order can only be ensured by a strong, centralised sovereign.

In the 1950s, Robert Dahl proposed a more empirical approach to political power. Dahl, speaking of power, said: "Power is the ability of A to make B do something that he would not normally do" (Dahl, 1957). His classification focuses on the measurable and observable aspects of political power. However, it still analyses power mainly within the framework of open decision-making processes and formal institutions.

If we summarise the characteristics of classical theories, we will see that political power in these theories is perceived as a centralised, state-oriented and hierarchical relationship. It should be noted that classical theories remain limited in explaining informal influence mechanisms, information power and network-based effects.

The shortcomings of classical power theories have led to the emergence of alternative approaches since the 1960s. New classifications explain power not only as explicit coercion and decision-making. Here, power is also understood as a process carried out through structural and discursive mechanisms.

Steven Lukes has put forward a "three-dimensional" model of power. According to the author, power is manifested not only in decision-making but also in agenda-setting and the formation of ideological frameworks (Lukes, 2005). His classification draws attention to the invisible and indirect forms of power.

Michel Foucault proposed the concept of "discursive power". His theory explains how political power is produced through knowledge and discourse. According to Foucault, power is not only repressive, but also productive (Foucault, 1980). Political power shapes the norms, identities and behaviours of society. That is, power is not a centralised structure. Foucault notes that it is a network of relations spread across different levels of society (Foucault, 1991).

All approaches emphasise the decentralised and multilayered nature of political power. They create a theoretical basis for the transition to the concept of network power.

In the 21st century, globalisation plays a significant role in transforming political power. Economic integration resulting from globalisation, the rise of transnational corporations, and the increasing influence of international organisations has significantly reduced states' traditional sovereign capabilities today (Farrel & Newman, 2019). In this sense, the concept of political power in the 21st century can no longer be explained solely by the powers of nation-states. Global markets, financial flows, and technological networks have a significant impact on states' decision-making capabilities, which is why political power is multi-level and multi-actor. This factor, in turn, accelerates the transition of political power to a network-based form.

There are several modern theoretical frameworks that explain the transformation of political power. One of them is Manuel Castells' concept of the "network society". Castells notes that the main structural form of modern societies is networks. Therefore, power is formed within these networks. Networks are the main mechanisms that control information flows and determine access to resources (Kitchin, 2014). The author evaluates political power as "power over flows" (Castells, 2010). According to his theory, "political influence" is determined by the networks through which resources

and information are distributed and by the speed at which they are distributed (Kitchin, 2014). Access to networks becomes the main determinant of political power.

When discussing the concept of network power, it should be noted that it emphasises the decentralised, dynamic, and relational nature of political power. In this model, power is not concentrated in one centre. On the contrary, power is distributed among various actors. Media platforms, social networks and digital communication tools act as the main carriers of this power (Bennett & Livingston, 2018).

One of the most important problems in the concept of network power today is the empirical measurement of network power. It should be noted that traditional power measurements are based on voting behaviour, legal powers, formal decision-making, and related factors. As for network power, it is based more on indirect influence, information flow and connection intensity, so it requires different measurement tools (Halfner-Burton, Kahler & Montgomery, 2009). Here, too, factors such as media impact indicators, network analysis, digital activity measures, and social influence indices come to the fore (Castells, 2009).

Although existing political theories provide a rich framework for explaining the transformation of political power, there remain several gaps. The research conducted combines classical and modern power theories and presents an integrative theoretical model that explains the transformation of political power.

Research Methodology

General Background

The analysis aims to analyse the transformation of political power both theoretically and empirically. This, in turn, requires a complex approach from a methodological perspective. Investigating a multidimensional and dynamic concept such as “political power” with a single method cannot yield complete results. For this reason, mixed methods were used in the article. The mixed-methods approach integrates qualitative and quantitative methods. This enables a more in-depth, multidisciplinary analysis of the research object. The methodological approach aims to substantiate the transition of political power from traditional hierarchical structures to network-based ones, supported by both conceptual and empirical evidence.

The mixed-methods approach was chosen in the article for the following reasons: First, political power does not consist solely of measurable empirical indicators. It also has discursive, institutional, and structural elements, and qualitative methods are very important for explaining them. Since the concept of network power is built on relationships, influence mechanisms, and information flows, measuring these processes empirically also requires quantitative methods. Note that social network analysis, indices, and statistical indicators are used at this stage. In this study, a qualitative analysis was first conducted, followed by support from quantitative indicators.

Research Design

The analysis was conducted through these stages:

- 1) Defining the theoretical and conceptual framework
- 2) Collecting qualitative data
- 3) Identifying and analysing quantitative indicators
- 4) Integrating results

The form above allows us to explain the transformation of political power from structural and functional perspectives.

Participants / Sample

This analysis is not limited to a specific geographical region. For this reason, the sample was selected at the global level. The sample covers the following main categories:

1. Existing empirical data on state actors

2. Secondary data sources on media institutions, civil society organisations, transnational networks (Non-State actors)

3. Statistical indicators used in existing empirical studies

In the qualitative part, academic sources, political reports and documents of international organisations were analysed. As for the quantitative phase, we can say that existing indices measuring political influence, media diffusion, and network intensity were used effectively.

Instrument and Procedures

In the qualitative phase, 3 main tools were used:

- * Discourse analysis
- * Conceptual comparative analysis
- * Systematic review of theoretical texts

Here, traditional and modern interpretations of political power were compared.

In the quantitative phase, 3 main indicators were used to measure the network nature of "political power":

- * Media influence indices
- * Digital activity indicators
- * Statistical data measuring the intensity of network connections

The indicators mentioned were obtained from various empirical studies and analysed comparatively.

Data Analysis

The study analysed qualitative data using thematic analysis, which identified key concepts, recurring themes, and discursive structures. As a result, the main categories that define the transformation of political power were formed. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods. The relationships between indicators were compared. Then, the empirical characteristics of network power were determined. In general, it was interpreted through the integration of qualitative and quantitative stages.

Results

This section presents the main results of qualitative and quantitative analyses conducted within the mixed-method framework. The results are organised according to the research questions. The aim is to demonstrate, empirically, the transformation of political power from the traditional model to the network power model.

The qualitative analysis of the study shows that the traditional model of political power has the following main empirical features: the centralisation of power in state institutions, decision-making mechanisms based on formal powers, and hierarchical management structures. Limitations of political influence by legal and normative mechanisms. The empirical analysis shows that, in this model, political power is primarily exercised through legislative bodies, executive bodies, and legal institutions. The decision-making process is carried out through institutional channels. Here, the influence of informal actors is limited. At the same time, the comparison of quantitative indicators fully supports this result. Traditional state power is measured by legal powers, administrative capabilities, and resource control, but these indicators do not take into account the role of network relations and information flows.

One of the main findings of the study is that political power is increasingly becoming network-based. Qualitative analysis shows that in modern political processes, empirical indicators such as the speed and scope of information flows, visibility in media and social networks, the intensity of connections between non-state actors, and access to transnational networks come to the fore.

Quantitative analysis found that digital activity indicators and media influence indices used to measure political influence show a weak correlation with traditional state power indicators. This, in turn, reveals that political power is formed through alternative channels. Empirical results show that although actors with high network power lack formal authority, they can significantly influence the formation of public opinion and the determination of the political agenda.

As the results show, non-state actors play an increasingly important role in political power relations. Qualitative data analysis highlights groups of actors, including media outlets and digital platforms, civil society organisations, transnational interest groups, and expert and intellectual networks (Slaughter, 2017). These actors do not have formal political authority. However, they

influence political processes through the production and dissemination of information. Quantitative indicators show that as these actors' network centrality increases, their political influence rises.

The empirical results clearly reveal that power is distributed among actors in the network power model, whereas in the traditional power model, it is concentrated among central actors. The analysis shows that political decision-making has become a multi-level process in which more and more actors participate. Quantitative indicators show that political influence is not concentrated in a single centre but rather spread through multiple points of contact.

The study clearly reveals that the concept of political legitimacy has also transformed today. That is, while in the classical model, legitimacy was mainly provided by legal and institutional mechanisms, in the network power model, legitimacy is formed through public support, visibility, and discursive influence. Network-based actors gain legitimacy through public acceptance and communicative effectiveness rather than formal procedures. The mixed-method approach reveals that qualitative and quantitative findings complement each other. Qualitative analysis explains the content of the transformation of political power. Quantitative analysis reveals the empirical indicators of this transformation. This integration in itself shows that the transition of political power from the classical authority model to the network power model is empirically justified.

Discussion

The study's empirical results reveal that the concept of political power differs widely from the form presented in traditional theoretical frameworks (Castells, 2013; Chadwick, 2017). The results obtained refute the claim that political power is formed only through formal institutions and legal authorities. It also states that it is formed through network relations, information flows and discursive influence mechanisms (Karpf, 2016). In this part of the study, the results are interpreted in the context of previous theoretical approaches. At the same time, the answers to the research questions are discussed.

The article's empirical results show that the approaches of the classical theorists Max Weber and Robert Dahl to political power have limitations in explaining modern political processes. That is, Weber's legitimate forms of authority can explain the institutional and normative foundations of political power. However, his theory does not adequately cover network-based political influence. The study reveals that legitimacy is no longer formed only by legal-rational mechanisms, but also by public opinion and communicative effectiveness (Nye, 2004).

It should be noted that Dahl's approach to empirical measurement of power focuses on open decision-making processes. Therefore, he does not take into account indirect mechanisms of influence in his approach. The results of the article emphasise that contemporary political power is often formed before or outside of explicit decision-making (Margetts, John, Hale & Yasseri, 2018).

The analysis empirically supports Steven Lukes and Michel Foucault's approaches to the structural and discursive dimensions of power: political power manifests itself not only in the moment of decision-making but also in the definition of the political agenda and in the formation of dominant

discourses. Discursive influence mechanisms have been particularly strengthened through media and digital platforms (Tucker, Theocharis, Roberts, & Barbera, 2018). In this sense, power is not a centralised structure (Zuboff, 2019). It has become a distributed network of relations. In such views, Foucault's theses on the decentralised nature of power are reinforced.

One of the main theoretical contributions of this article is the empirical assessment of the concept of network power. For example, Manuel Castells's theory of "network society" argues that political power is built on information flows. The study's results show that this approach aligns with empirical reality. In the network power model, political influence depends on the actor's position in the network. The actor's formal status does not play a significant role here. Empirical research reveals that actors with high network centrality are more effective at shaping the political agenda, emphasising the relational rather than structural nature of power (Barbera, 2015).

The research confirms the increasing role of non-state actors (media, civil society) in political power (Chadwick, 2017). In traditional state-centred approaches, these actors were considered secondary. Empirical research shows that their opportunities for political influence have increased significantly (Schradie, 2019). Media platforms and civil society actors influence the formation of political decisions through indirect mechanisms. This, in turn, results in political power becoming decentralised and multi-actor (Gillespie, 2018).

This article also reveals the changes in the concept of political legitimacy. Traditional legitimacy was built on legal procedures and electoral mechanisms. In the network power model of legitimacy, legitimacy is formed on public support and communicative effectiveness (Powell & DiMaggio, 2012). This change creates new challenges in political governance (Helbing, 2017; Powell & DiMaggio, 2012). The formation of legitimacy through informal mechanisms also makes issues of political stability and accountability relevant (Helbing, Frey, Gigerenzer, Hafen, Hanger, Hofstetter, Hoven, Zincari & Zwitter, 2017).

As a result of the discussion, the following general answers to the research questions were formulated. First, traditional models of power no longer struggle to explain contemporary political power relations. Second, the concept of "network power" today provides a more appropriate analytical framework for explaining the transformation of political power. Then, political power can increasingly be assessed through network-based empirical indicators. Fourth, non-state actors have an indirect, if not direct, but effective impact on political decision-making processes. Finally, the concept of political legitimacy is being reshaped through network-based communicative processes.

Conclusions and Implications

The article systematically analyses the transformation of the concept of political power in modern times, both empirically and theoretically. The facts obtained reveal that political power is no longer limited to state institutions and formal mechanisms. In other words, political influence is increasingly shaped by network relations, information flows, and informal mechanisms.

One of the results of the research is the strengthening of the trend toward the decentralisation of political power. In the traditional model of power, power is mainly concentrated in hierarchical structures. On the contrary, in the network power model, power is distributed among various actors. This, in turn, leads to a more multi-actor and more complex nature of political decision-making processes.

The theoretical contribution of the research is to propose an integrative analytical framework that explains the transformation of political power. Traditional theories of power have several limitations in explaining modern political realities. This study fills this gap. The study presents the concept of network power as a functional analytical tool for political science.

From a practical perspective, the study has important implications for political governance and policymaking. The increasing importance of networking and communicative influence for political decision-makers has significantly increased their development of new governance strategies today. Classical administrative mechanisms are not sufficient in themselves to ensure political influence.

The transformation of the concept of political legitimacy also raises various questions from the perspective of democratic governance. Legitimacy is increasingly formed through informal and communicative mechanisms. This requires reconsidering the mechanisms of political responsibility and accountability.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study analyses the transformation of political power at a global and generalised level. The article suggests several directions for future research. First, empirical studies conducted in specific regional or national contexts can more clearly reveal how the network power model manifests itself in different political systems.

Second, future research can use better quantitative methods to measure network power. Empirical studies based on social media analysis, "big data", as well as digital footprints, can reveal new dimensions of political power.

Third, the normative consequences of the changing nature of political power need to be examined from a broader perspective. The impact of network-based power on democratic legitimacy, political participation, and equality requires special attention (Wendt, 2015).

Finally, applying a mixed-methods approach can help clarify the complex nature of political power from a broader perspective.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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