



POWER, SOCIETY, AND CHANGE: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamic interplay between power, society, and change as the fundamental triad of historical progression. Moving beyond a chronological retelling of events, the research investigates how institutional authority is consolidated, maintained, and eventually eroded by the forces of social friction. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Michel Foucault's capillary power and Eric Hobsbawm's dual revolutions, the analysis identifies power not as a static possession but as a fluid set of relations contingent upon social consent and economic control. The study first examines the mechanisms of power consolidation, such as institutional capture and ideological hegemony, which allow elites to frame their interests as universal truths. It then contrasts these mechanisms with the catalysts of erosion, specifically the "crises of legitimacy" that arise when the social contract is breached. Central to this transition is the role of social friction—the tension generated by marginalized groups and shifting economic realities—which acts as the primary engine for systemic transformation. By analyzing historical turning points, including the Industrial Revolution and the transition from feudalism to mercantilism, this research demonstrates that change is the inevitable outcome of a society outgrowing its existing power architecture. The study concludes that understanding these recurring patterns of friction and recalibration is essential for navigating modern institutional crises, suggesting that systemic change is a restorative process necessary for the establishment of new, more representative social equilibriums.

KEYWORDS: *Institutional Hegemon, Social Friction, Systemic Transformation, Legitimacy Crisis*

INTRODUCTION

The interplay between power, society, and change forms the essential triad of historical progression, where the past is viewed not as a static collection of dates but as a fluid chemical reaction between these three forces. As Michel Foucault argued, power is not a tangible trophy held by an elite few but a pervasive set of relations that defines how individuals and institutions interact at every level of civilization (Foucault, 1977). Historically, the architecture of this power has often been identified with the state, the military, or the church, yet modern analysis suggests that its most enduring strength lies in the control of ideology and economic resources. The transition from feudalism to mercantilism, for instance, was far more than a simple changing of the guard; it represented a fundamental shift in the means of production that allowed a rising merchant class to dismantle the long-held doctrine of the divine right of kings (Marx & Engels, 1848). While power often exerts itself from the top down, it is the horizontal framework of society—its shared myths, internal hierarchies, and divisions of class, race, and gender—that determines whether that power is sustained or resisted. Social historians have long contended that the true engine of history resides in the lived experiences of the marginalized, as it is within the gaps between institutional promises and social realities that collective identities and revolutionary movements are born (Zinn, 1980). When these societal expectations no longer align with the rigid structures enforced by those in authority, the resulting friction creates a "structural hole" that necessitates a reorganization of the social contract. Change, the final element of this triad, manifests as the inevitable rupture caused by these misalignments, appearing either as slow, evolutionary shifts in technology and environment or as sudden, violent revolutions. The Industrial Revolution serves as a primary example of how rapid

technological advancement can bypass traditional power structures to force a total recalibration of human life and labor (Hobsbawm, 1962). Ultimately, change is never an accidental occurrence; it is the predictable outcome of a society that has outgrown its current power architecture, proving that the study of history is, at its core, the study of how humanity navigates the tension between the world as it is and the world as it must become.

To understand the endurance of power, one must look beyond the visible symbols of the throne or the boardroom and examine the invisible "capillaries" through which influence flows. Foucault's assertion that power is co-extensive with the social body implies that every interaction—from the classroom to the factory floor—is a site of negotiation (Foucault, 1977). In the medieval period, the consolidation of power was justified through the "Great Chain of Being," a social and religious hierarchy that placed the monarch just below the divine. However, as trade routes expanded and the primitive accumulation of capital began, the economic reality started to grate against this static theological power. The shift toward mercantilism demonstrated that whoever controls the circulation of value ultimately controls the narrative of legitimacy (Marx & Engels, 1848). This transition reveals a recurring historical truth: power is most vulnerable not when it is challenged by a rival army, but when the economic and ideological justifications for its existence are rendered obsolete by new modes of production.

Society, however, is not merely a passive recipient of these power shifts; it is a complex organism capable of both profound inertia and sudden, explosive agency. The stability of any regime depends on "hegemony," or the silent consent of the



governed, achieved when the interests of the powerful are successfully framed as the interests of the collective. Yet, history is punctuated by moments when this consent is withdrawn. Howard Zinn emphasizes that the "people" are not a monolith but a collection of competing interests that occasionally find common ground in the face of systemic oppression (Zinn, 1980). In the lead-up to the great democratic revolutions of the 18th century, it was the social pressure from the "bottom up"—the disenfranchised peasants, the struggling artisans, and the enslaved—that provided the raw energy needed to topple ancient regimes. This suggests that while elites may design the "topography" of power, the "climate" of society determines whether those structures will stand or weather away.

The mechanism of change acts as the bridge between these two states of being. Change is often perceived as a disruption, but in historical terms, it is more accurately described as a correction. Eric Hobsbawm's analysis of the "dual revolution"—the political upheaval in France and the industrial upheaval in Britain—illustrates that change occurs when the old ways of organizing human life can no longer contain the pressures of new realities (Hobsbawm, 1962). The steam engine did not just change how goods were made; it rearranged the very fabric of family life, urban design, and global politics. By stripping the artisan of their tools and placing them in the factory, the Industrial Revolution created a new social class—the proletariat—which in turn demanded a new form of political representation. This feedback loop proves that change is a self-perpetuating cycle: power creates a system, society adapts to and eventually outgrows that system, and change arrives to forge a new one.

In conclusion, the history of human civilization is the history of the friction between the desire for order and the necessity of progress. Power provides the structure, society provides the substance, and change provides the movement. By viewing historical events through this tripartite lens, we see that the fall of empires or the success of social movements are not isolated incidents but parts of a continuous process of renegotiation. The lessons of the past suggest that no power structure is permanent if it loses its social utility, and no society is stagnant if it possesses the capacity for internal change. As we move further into an era defined by digital transformation and globalized crises, these historical patterns remain our most reliable guide for understanding how authority will be reclaimed and how the societies of the future will be rebuilt.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze the mechanisms of power consolidation and erosion.
2. To evaluate the role of social friction as a catalyst for systemic change.

THE MECHANISMS OF POWER CONSOLIDATION AND EROSION

The consolidation of power operates through a systematic transition from mere physical coercion to deep-seated structural and ideological control. Initially, an emergent power must achieve institutional capture, a process wherein independent bodies such as the judiciary, the press, and the civil service are

integrated into a loyalist framework that reinforces the central authority. As this architecture solidifies, the regime shifts toward establishing ideological hegemony, or what may be described as "soft power," by crafting cultural narratives that lead the citizenry to perceive the interests of the elite as their own. This is often underpinned by economic dependency, where, as Marx and Engels (1848) observed, control over the means of production allows the ruling class to dictate the social contract and render the population reliant on the state for survival. In the modern era, this is further augmented by technological surveillance, which creates a self-regulating society through the constant, invisible monitoring of dissent. However, this consolidated power is never permanent and begins to erode when a crisis of legitimacy emerges, typically triggered when the institution can no longer fulfill its basic promises of security or prosperity. This erosion is accelerated by elite fragmentation, where internal infighting among the ruling class creates structural vulnerabilities that external social movements can exploit. As alternative narratives break the state's monopoly on information, the "silent consent" of the governed is withdrawn, leading to social friction. The final stage of erosion occurs when collective action reaches a tipping point—often during a period of rapid technological or economic shift, as described by Hobsbawm (1962)—where the traditional tools of enforcement fail, and the old power structure is forced to give way to a new social reality.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL FRICTION AS A CATALYST FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Social friction serves as the primary engine of systemic change by exposing the irreconcilable gap between a society's evolving needs and its rigid, existing power structures. This friction typically manifests when the "social contract"—the unwritten agreement that the populace provides labor and taxes in exchange for security and opportunity—is violated by institutional stagnation or economic inequality. As Howard Zinn (1980) emphasizes, systemic change is rarely granted from above but is forced from the bottom up when the lived experiences of the marginalized create a critical mass of discontent. This tension acts as a catalyst by stripping away the "veneer of legitimacy" that allows a regime to function; once a significant portion of the population identifies their personal hardships as systemic failures rather than individual misfortunes, the friction transitions from passive resentment to organized collective action. This process is often accelerated by what Eric Hobsbawm (1962) identifies as "dual revolutions," where technological or economic shifts create new social classes—such as the industrial working class—that no longer fit into the old political boxes. These new groups create a pressure that the existing system cannot contain, eventually leading to a "structural break" where the old order must either reform fundamentally or face total collapse. Thus, social friction is not merely a sign of a failing system, but the necessary energy required to propel a society toward a new, more representative state of equilibrium.

CONCLUSION

The study of power, society, and change reveals that history is defined by a continuous process of structural renegotiation rather than a series of disconnected events. By analyzing the



mechanisms of power consolidation, it becomes evident that authority sustains itself not through force alone, but through the sophisticated integration of institutional capture and ideological hegemony. However, as this research has demonstrated, no power structure is immune to the corrosive effects of a legitimacy crisis. When the social contract is breached and the lived realities of the populace diverge from the narratives of the elite, social friction emerges as an unstoppable catalyst for transformation. This friction, while often viewed as a source of instability, is actually the essential energy required to break through stagnant governance and forge a more representative social order. The transition from feudalism to the industrial age serves as a historical blueprint for this cycle, showing that change is the inevitable result of a society outgrowing its current architecture. Ultimately, the triad of power, society, and change forms a self-correcting loop that ensures the evolution of human civilization. Understanding these patterns is critical for navigating contemporary crises, as it reminds us that systemic upheaval is often the precursor to a necessary and more equitable equilibrium. The lessons of the past remain clear: power is a temporary stewardship, and the enduring engine of history is the collective will of a society in pursuit of progress.

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