

The three dimensions of power

[Politics](#)



The paper "The Three Dimensions of Power" is an excellent example of a literature review on politics. Various theories are available that describe just how this positioning for power, and the resultant influence/working of the power when finally achieved, work. This paper will focus on Stephen Lukes' Three Dimensions of Power, using the various elements to evaluate how other authors analyze power. The article chosen for evaluation here is Jane Meyer's men of zeal, which is part of a larger book that describes the nuances of power and relations in and around the Bush administration especially during the years of war. Understanding the Lukes three dimensions should start with a definition of power in Lukes' words. He gives a generic explanation, saying that power is when an entity A exercises control over another (B) in a way that is contrary to B's interests (Lukes, 2005). This is basically the context in which most political and policy decisions are made, at various levels. It is important to note that such power can be held even in situations where it is not exercised. It is also not necessarily a negative thing and can be exercised for the good of the people involved or affected. The Lukes theory identifies three facets of power; power through decision-making, power through agenda setting and power through domination (Lukes, 2005). The first facet of power through decision making is the typical competitive policy debate, where power brokers are visible and the actors are aware of their interests and how they are being compromised. The second facet of power is exercised through the limitation of the scope of what is up for political debate or consideration. This is done mostly through the creation of social and political value systems and institutional practices. This is a further step than the first concept of power, where the true power lies in the non-decision-making. The third dimension is <https://assignbuster.com/the-three-dimensions-of-power/>

even deeper, where people are subject to domination and agree to that domination (Dowding, 2006). It is where an actor influences others through the management or shaping of their preferences, with actors basically made to adopt perspectives that are not in their best interests (Lukes, 2005). The analysis provided by Culley and Angelique (2011) makes the three dimensions of power clearer and introduces the issue of how these three dimensions are collaborative in nature (Culley & Angelique, 2011). In their conception of power, the three dimensions are not necessarily attributed to Lukes. The first dimension, which is perhaps the most popular view of power, was first introduced by Dahl (1969) and is described as the use of bargaining resources to influence others. These bargaining resources are often superior and sought after, like money, jobs or political influence (Dahl, 1969).

Bachrach and Baratz (1962) introduced the second dimension, describing it as the ability to control participation in and the nature of debates in key political decision-making processes (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962). Lukes' third dimension is then described, explained as power by the use of myths, truths, and ideology to shape desires, thoughts, and interests (Dowding, 2006). It is important to understand *Men of Zeal* as a book section rather than as a stand-alone article when evaluating it. It is part of a critically acclaimed account given by Jane Mayer aptly named *The Dark Side*. In general, the book expertly describes the events after the September 11th bombings, a horrifying even in its own right. It is after this that the government and various proxies engaged in various covert actions and operations in order to enable the president to have the kind of leeway that the constitution and Congress would typically not be able to give him, his legal team and his party. Looking at the men of zeal from the three dimensions of power

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perspective, it is clear how and when the various dimensions of power work together. The book section starts by describing the typical political power negotiations that happened in Congress. It details an account of how the president had sought various 'freedoms' to say the least, which would ideally give him a blank cheque in the war on terror. The situation between the Democratic House Majority Leader Tom Daschle and the Senate Minority Leader was very tense. The majority leader describes how the authorization for a war against the perpetrators of the attacks on the US was already in motion, the language already written and a vote pending. In the last minute, the president asked for an expansion of his authorities, something that was alarming and subsequently rejected heavily by Congress during the vote (Meyer, 2008). This is the classic first dimension of power, with known actors. It is the typical policy debate, with actors having full knowledge of their interests and compromise. This was, unfortunately, only the first step. Over the course of the article, there is evidence of the second and third dimensions of power, and how they then work together as three dimensions to give power to the president to proceed with his plan. For instance, the office of legal counsel, the president's legal team, described here as intensely partisan and having a rather wide scope, was hatching a plan that would secretly grant the president power, bypassing the typical checks, balances, and processes provided for in the constitution. Meyer describes how the president's team went about preparing memos in secret, keeping them from the public and from Congress for at least three years in a bid to dismiss the idea of congress limiting the powers of the president and how he could conduct warfare. These are memos that reportedly disregarded or made moot years of checks and laws, dating all the way back to the Vietnam

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War (pg. 46). All of this was done in secret, with the Democratic house majority leader left thinking they had fended off the president and his demands, only to be surprised by various secret moves. This is the classic definition of the second dimension of power, where power lies in the non-decision making. The third dimension comes in through the rhetoric in this period. Straight from the wording of the speeches he gave to arguments by his lawyers and officials in the press, the trend was telling. There was the use of terms like ‘ erring on the side of being too aggressive’, Americans being urged to expect not one battle but a huge campaign. Conclusively, the article is the perfect illustration of how the three dimensions of power work together to give people power. This period was one of the most significant in the history of the US, especially with regards to presidential power and war. The president’s office used every weapon of political power to sway the public opinion and push the war on terror.