

Positional power and political influence in the Federal Republic of Germany

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Abstract. Methods of elite identification measure different aspects of power in societies. The relationship between the positional and the decisional methods was studied empirically, using data from a 1981 West German elite survey. In this survey, respondents determined through the positional method were asked to name their interaction partners for (political) issues in which they were actively involved. The results show that incumbency of an elite position is a crucial precondition for becoming politically influential. Only a small number of legislators, journalists, and academics who did not hold an elite position were mentioned as key influentials. The same data were also used to determine the denser part of the West German elite network which was made up of 559 core decision-makers. The sector composition of this elite circle underlines the intermediating role of political leaders and senior civil servants.

1. Introduction

Every empirical study of power and elites faces two important problems. The first is how power can be measured in a social system. The second is whether it is justified to assume the existence of a central core elite, a power elite, in complex industrial societies. Empirical studies of elites have used different methods to operationalize the power of individuals. Three principal methods to identify the powerful in a social system are customarily distinguished: the reputational, the decisional, and the positional method. The controversy over the validity of these methods has for the most part been considered a methodological question. In fact, however, it is of considerable theoretical relevance. Each of these methods measures different aspects of power. Thus, none of them can be considered as methodologically superior. The choice of the appropriate method depends instead on the research question at hand. In the following, a theoretical framework will be presented that shows how these three methods are interrelated. In a next step, the empirical relationship between two of these methods will be analyzed, namely between the positional and the decisional method.

In recent years, network analyses of elite interactions have been increasingly used to study elite structures. Most of these studies have analyzed in-

terlocking directorates and local elites. The few studies of national elites have for the most part been limited to sectoral elites or to the decision-making in specific national issue areas (e.g. Laumann et al. 1985). So far, only two network studies have been published that attempted to answer the second question stated above, namely whether there exists an overarching network of national elites linking decision-makers of different issue areas. These were studies of U.S. and Australian national elites (Moore 1979, Higley et al. 1979, Higley and Moore 1981), both of which found a central circle of core elites, thus answering the question affirmatively.

In 1981, the same method was applied to study the West German national elite network. The West German study goes beyond its predecessors in two respects:

- its elite sample was much larger;
 - the study included respondents from a more broadly defined elite universe.
- It provides therefore an ideal data base to study the two questions raised above.

2. Dimensions of power

2.1. *Power and influence on strategic decisions*

Any empirical study of power and influence requires a theoretical as well as an operational definition of these two related but distinct concepts. In a rather general way, both concepts can be defined interchangeably as the ability to influence the outcomes of collective decisions in a social system (cf. Nagel 1976). However, the two concepts take on different meanings if we also take into account the resources on which this influence is based. There is widespread agreement that it is the availability of sanctions that distinguishes the two (cf. Lasswell and Kaplan 1950: 76, Parsons 1969a: 361, Parsons 1969b: 421). Influence can therefore be redefined as the ability to achieve desired results without resorting to sanctions.

Once power and influence are conceptualized this way, it is possible to resort to well-established methods of investigating power structures empirically by studying elites. The definition of elites as persons with influence on important political decisions is widely shared in the academic community. To make it even more appropriate for studying the more durable aspects of power structures, it is often further assumed that this influence is exerted on a regular basis and not limited to single decisions (Lasswell and Kaplan 1950: 201, Scheuch 1973: 1028, Putnam 1976: 6, Higley et al. 1979: 3).

2.2. *Methods of elite identification*

The following brief discussion of the three methods of elite identification will focus on the major differences between them regarding the implicit concept of power each of them tries to measure.

The *reputational method* relies on experts who are asked to identify the powerful in a social system. The method's validity rests therefore entirely on the perceptions of the experts chosen – perceptions which are necessarily subjective. Moreover, the experts' knowledge about the power structure is always limited to a small range of important decision-making arenas. The method therefore produces the best results if used to identify powerful persons in a limited setting that is directly observable to the experts. This is generally the case if elites are chosen as "experts", which has become increasingly common in recent years (e.g. Pappi 1984, Moore 1979, Higley et al. 1979).

The *decisional method* measures political influence directly as active participation in political decision-making. This method has the advantage of using a behaviourally derived measure of influence and suffers less from the drawbacks of subjectivity. On the other hand, the necessarily small range of issues that can be studied empirically to determine participants in political decision-making makes it problematic to generalize the findings to the entire power structure. Moreover, this method ignores non-decisions as well as indirect forms of political influence. Pappi and Melbeck have therefore concluded that it runs the risk of disregarding the structural, durable side of power (1984: 580).

The *positional method*, finally, starts out from the assumption that power in complex societies rests on resources associated with formal positions of authority in political institutions as well as private organizations. It considers therefore the holders of key positions in such organizations as belonging to the elite. For theoretical as well as pragmatic reasons, the positional method has become the one commonly used to study national elites. It provides an expedient way to identify a sample of position-holders in important organizations through recourse to readily available handbook type of information. Moreover, there is general agreement that in modern societies this method will miss only a very small number of powerful persons, since power as a rule depends on the control over organizational power resources. So long as the universe of elite positions is defined broadly and not restricted to political elites in a narrow sense, this approach yields an inclusive sample of persons who can be assumed to play important roles in a society.

2.3. *A classification of the three methods of elite identification*

Fig. 1 shows that the three methods of elite identification differ with respect to two basic dimensions of power:

- The extent to which they take into account only formal power resources

Participation in Political Decision-Making		
Power Resources	Direct Participation	Direct Participation and Indirect Influence

Formal Resources	Codified Rules of Political Decision-Making	Positional Method

Formal and Informal Resources	Decisional Method	Reputational Method

Fig. 1. Classification of the methods of elite identification.

associated with leadership positions in important organizations or rather use a broader concept of power and influence that allows for other (informal) influence resources as well.

- The extent to which their focus is limited to participation in political decision-making or also takes into account indirect influence on important political decisions. The latter includes, for instance, the mobilization of public opinion on behalf of a political issue, or decisions in the private sector with political ramifications, such as wage settlements, investment decisions, etc.

It is obvious that the codified rules of political decision-making – on which legal studies of power almost exclusively rely – imply the most restrictive concept of power. The decisional as well as the positional method each extend this concept on one of the two dimensions, but not on the other. The reputational method, finally, measures power and influence in the broadest sense. Once we conceptualize the three methods this way, it makes sense to study how they are interrelated. The following analysis will show to what extent organizational power resources – measured by the positional method – are transformed into political influence – measured as participation in political decision-making by the decisional method.

Incumbents of leadership positions in large organizations control power resources that are relevant both for decision-making within the organization and for inter-organizational bargaining. While we can assume that intra-organizational decision-making is normally resolved by authoritative decisions of the formal leaders of an organization (Pappi 1984: 79), no such hierarchical relationship exists among autonomous organizations participating in inter-organizational decisions. This is particularly true for political decisions. Even though the final authority to decide political matters rests within political decision-making bodies, these are not hierarchically superior to other powerful public and private organizations that also try to influence those decisions.

Political decisions are therefore typically compromises rather than the product of authoritative fiat. Informal relations play an important role in political decision-making, and strategic location in a network of communication may itself become a resource giving influence to individuals who do not otherwise control many power resources. At the same time, different power resources may neutralize each other.

Measuring political influence empirically as participation in political decision-making has the additional advantage of solving a major problem of the positional method, namely the specification of boundaries for a positionally defined elite population, i.e. to determine the overall size of an elite population. The method itself does not provide criteria for specifying such boundaries for an elite. This is due to the lack of an a priori criterion that would allow the researcher to compare the power resources of different positions, organizations, and sectors. The multidimensional nature of power resources in a modern society precludes the availability of a simple, quantitative, and unidimensional yardstick. Power resources can be directly compared only within organizations that have formal hierarchies of power, even though systematic deviations from the formal structure do frequently occur even in that setting. In some sectors it is also possible to determine the relative power of different organizations according to a single, quantitative criterion, e.g. by comparing the turnover of business companies, the circulation of print media, or the number of members of trade unions. However, it is not possible to compare the power of different types of organizations, subsectors, or sectors in a general way – e.g. the power of the press to the power of television, or the power of the national political executive to the power of the mass media.

The other two methods of elite identification alleviate this problem by specifying a uniform criterion for elite membership. The reputational method leaves the decision to the experts: elite membership is determined by the number of nominations an individual has received as being powerful. The decisional method in turn uses involvement in political decision-making. To solve the boundary specification problem, it is therefore necessary to supplement the positional method by one of the other two methods.

3. Sociometric nominations of positional elites in West Germany

In the following, the formal decision-making authority associated with a leadership position will be considered as an indicator of power. Political influence will be measured as the attempt to realize preferences by active participation in political decision-making. Since participants in political decision-making, i.e. political influentials, may or may not have the resources of a leadership position at their disposal, the results should provide important

insights into the relevance of different power resources for political influence. Conversely, it is of considerable interest to learn to what extent positionally defined elites actually use their power resources to influence strategic decisions. This can be determined either by decision-making studies or by asking position-holders about their activities. Being nominated as influential by other elite members is another crucial indicator of political influence. In the following, the latter measure will be used to study the relationship between positional power and political influence.

3.1. The data base: the West German elite study 1981

The sociometric nominations analyzed here are taken from a national elite survey carried out in 1981 in the Federal Republic of Germany.¹ The study started out by delineating a universe of 3,580 elite positions. All major sectors and organizations were represented according to their presumed relevance. In a next step, the names of the holders of these positions were determined. Due to multiple position-holding this number was smaller and encompassed only 3,164 persons (cf. Hoffmann-Lange 1985: 74ff.). 1,744 of these position-holders could actually be interviewed. The response rate of 55.1% can be considered satisfactory for an elite study, especially since it was unbiased. The refusal rate among senior position-holders was not significantly higher than among lower-level position-holders in the sample. Nor was the numerical representation of the various sectors in the sample (sector composition) significantly affected (cf. Hoffmann-Lange 1987: 36–39).

A major objective of this elite survey was to study interaction patterns within the West German elite. This was achieved by asking the respondents for sociometric nominations which resulted in a sociometrically-delineated elite roster. The questions were made as closely comparable as possible to those used in the two previous network studies of national elites. Respondents were first asked to indicate the issue on which they had been most active during the last year. After having described the nature of this issue in some detail, they were further asked to name their most important interaction partners in the context of this issue.

This question can be regarded as measuring political influence. Since its focus was on issues of more than intra-organizational relevance, most respondents named political issues. The question format elicited nominations of interaction partners who can be assumed to have tried to influence the respondents or whom the respondent himself had tried to influence. Since the respondents were not restricted to naming only persons from a predefined list, interaction partners who did not belong to the positional elite sample could be nominated. However, since the respondents were asked to name only their most important interaction partners, the number of nominated persons was presumably much smaller than the actual number of interaction partners.² The

approach can therefore be considered as a hybrid form of the decisional and the reputational method.

The idiosyncratic choice of the issue for which nominations were made cannot be regarded as a disadvantage even though it makes it impossible to trace interaction networks for single issues. It can even be considered as a distinct advantage of this method that the issues named by the respondents covered the entire range of relevant decision-making matters in which the elites were involved during the interview period. Thus, what was lost in issue-specific content, was gained in generality, i.e. inclusiveness of the issue universe.

3.2. The distribution of nominations for sample members and other persons

Altogether, the respondents made 11,457 nominations, an average of 6.6 interactions partners per respondent. Among the 4,762 nominated interaction partners, only 1,358 (28.5%) were sample members and 3,404 were other person. This shows that the universe of political influentials differs considerably from the positionally defined elite sample. 70% of the nominated persons, however, can be regarded as specialists since they received only one nomination. If we take the number of received nominations into account, it becomes apparent that among the influentials who received more than one nomination, sample members play a more important role (59.8%). Moreover, an even larger share of the nominations went to members of the so-called "top

Table 1. Distribution of nominations.

Distribution of nominations for all persons registered											
	Total number of nominations		Total persons registered		Persons without nominations			Interaction partners nominated			
	n	% ¹	n	% ¹	n	% ²	% ¹	n	% ²	% ¹	\bar{X} ³
Members of top sample	5194	45.3	904	13.8	312	34.5	17.3	592	65.5	12.4	5.7
Other sample members	1915	16.7	2260	34.4	1494	66.1	82.7	766	33.9	16.1	0.8
Total sample	7109	62.0	3164	48.2	1806	57.1	100.0	1358	42.9	28.5	2.2
Other persons	4348	38.0	3404	51.8	-	-	-	3404	100.0	71.5	1.3
Total	11457	100.0	6568	100.0	1806	27.5	100.0	4762	72.5	100.0	1.7

¹ Column percentages based on column totals; ² Row percentages based on row totals; ³ Average number of nominations received.

sample". This includes only the holders of the most senior positions in each sector such as ministers, presidents of big pressure groups, chairmen of the boards of business corporations, chief editors of newspapers, etc. This group of 904 people encompasses 28.6% of the entire elite sample and 12.4% of all interaction partners, but received nearly one half of all nominations (45.3%). The results support therefore the assumption of a high concentration of political influence among the top position-holders in the Federal Republic.

3.3. The involvement of different organizations in political decision-making

The number of nominations a person has received can be used as a rather straightforward indicator of involvement in political decision-making. Given the fact that only 42.9% of all sample members were named as influentials, it seems interesting to analyze group differences among the sample members. This allows the determination of organizations whose representatives are more or less involved in political decision-making. Table 1 shows that nearly half of all nominations were given to members of the top sample as compared to only 16.7% for other positional elites. Similarly, in all sectors the proportion of the top sample members with nominations is much higher (Table 2). This effect is less pronounced among politicians and leaders of business corpora-

Table 2. Sample members with nominations by sector.

Sector	Total sample		Sample members with nominations		Top sample		Top sample members with nominations	
	n		n	%	n		n	%
Politics ¹	452		369	81.6	246		237	96.3
Civil service ²	471		255	54.1	82		55	67.1
Business	688		223	32.4	242		114	47.1
Business associations	295		99	33.6	61		38	62.3
Trade unions	155		82	52.9	33		29	87.9
Mass media	354		116	32.8	88		50	56.8
Academic	179		81	45.3	46		30	65.2
Military	172		16	9.3	27		8	29.6
Cultural elites	180		35	19.4	43		12	27.9
Other ³	218		82	37.6	36		19	52.8
<i>Total</i>	3,164		1,358	42.9	904		592	65.5

¹ Including five West German chairmen of committees of the European Parliament; ² Including twelve West German representatives in top positions of the administration of the European Community; ³ Representatives of churches, local governments, judiciary, professional associations, consumers' associations, and persons who lost their elite position shortly before or during the field work of the study.

tions, but particularly striking in the pressure groups, mass media, and the academic sector.³

The difference between the two positional subsamples is also apparent in the average number of received nominations (Table 3). The concentration of nominations on members of the top sample supports the assumption that the nominations can be considered as a measure of reputation for political influence rather than simply indicating involvement in political decision-making. This becomes particularly clear when we look at the political sector. Even though all members of the political elite are by definition active in political decision-making, the holders of political top positions attracted the lion's share of the nominations that were given to politicians. Another reason for the concentration of nominations on top position-holders is that the great majority (77.7%) of the nominations is *intersectoral* rather than *intrasectoral*, as can be seen in Table 4. It seems plausible that contacts to other organizations should be directed primarily to the formal leaders of those organizations. This is due to the greater visibility of these leaders in public as well as to their presumed greater power. They are therefore the major recipients of influence attempts by leaders of other organizations. Table 4 reveals that politics is the most important sector, receiving 41.5% of all nominations. The figures in Table 4 deviate, however, from those in Table 3 in that they are not based on people, but on nominations. The data indicate that we have to distinguish between the *importance of a sector* as a target of influence attempts and the *importance of the individuals in a sector*, as measured by the average number of nominations.

Table 3. Average number of nominations by sector.

Sector	Top sample ¹ (n = 904)	Other sample members ¹ (n = 2260)	Total sample ¹ (n = 3164)	Other persons (n = 3404)	Total ² (n = 4762)
Politics	13.8	2.2	8.5	1.7	5.3
Civil service	4.8	1.3	1.9	1.2	2.0
Business	1.8	0.5	1.0	1.1	1.8
Business associations	3.9	0.5	1.2	1.2	1.8
Trade unions	9.5	1.4	3.1	1.3	3.1
Mass media	2.2	0.5	0.9	1.3	1.6
Academic	2.9	0.7	1.3	1.3	1.6
Military	0.7	0.1	0.2	1.3	1.5
Cultural elites	0.3	0.2	0.3	1.1	1.2
Other	1.6	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.3
<i>Total</i>	5.7	0.8	2.2	1.3	2.4

¹ Means for sample based on all sample members; ² Based on persons with nominations only.

Table 4. Intersectoral and Intrasectoral Links. (percentages based on row totals).

Nominating sector	Nominations received										Total nominations given	
	Politics	Civil service	Business	Business associations	Trade unions	Mass media	Academic	Military	Cultural elites	Other		
Politics	n	939	163	100	96	131	134	84	5	8	189	1849
	%	50.8	8.8	5.4	5.2	7.1	7.2	4.5	0.3	0.4	10.2	16.1
Civil service	n	597	417	64	86	76	83	104	4	2	156	1589
	%	37.6	26.2	4.0	5.4	4.8	5.2	6.5	0.3	0.1	9.8	13.9
Business	n	614	238	360	123	151	103	82	4	5	92	1772
	%	34.7	13.4	20.3	6.9	8.5	5.8	4.6	0.2	0.3	5.2	15.5
Business associations	n	463	177	136	156	62	75	86	1	2	74	1232
	%	37.6	14.4	11.0	12.7	5.0	6.1	7.0	0.1	0.2	6.0	10.8
Trade unions	n	384	94	103	57	72	52	26	0	1	45	834
	%	46.0	11.3	12.4	6.8	8.6	6.2	3.1	0.0	0.1	5.4	7.3
Mass media	n	721	89	99	39	64	178	72	3	18	133	1416
	%	50.9	6.3	7.0	2.8	4.5	12.6	5.1	0.2	1.3	9.4	12.4
Academic	n	327	178	107	44	27	48	176	1	4	58	970
	%	33.7	18.4	11.0	4.5	2.8	4.9	18.1	0.1	0.4	6.0	8.5

Military	n	92	19	10	9	2	25	10	20	1	31	219
	%	42.0	8.7	4.6	4.1	0.9	11.4	4.6	9.1	0.5	14.2	1.9
Cultural elites	n	119	26	21	4	16	99	49	1	98	86	519
	%	22.9	5.0	4.0	0.8	3.1	19.1	9.4	0.2	18.9	16.6	4.5
Other	n	504	113	59	28	48	79	74	4	6	142	1057
	%	47.7	10.7	5.6	2.6	4.5	7.5	7.0	0.4	0.6	13.4	9.2
Total nominations received	n	4760	1514	1059	642	649	876	763	43	145	1006	11457
	%	41.5	13.2	9.2	5.2	5.7	7.6	6.7	0.4	1.3	8.8	100.0
Popularity ratio¹		2.58	0.95	0.59	0.52	0.78	0.61	0.79	0.21	0.29	1.96	-

¹ popularity ratio = $\frac{\text{percentage of nominations received (\% column total)}}{\text{percentage of nominations given (\% row total)}}$

This can be done by comparing the values in the last row of Table 4 to those in the last column of Table 3. The civil service for instance received the second largest number of nominations (13.2%) even though the average number of nominations per person in this sector is only 2.0. The 1,514 nominations for this sector went to 773 different people. In the highly centralized trade unions, the 649 nominations were instead concentrated on only 209 individuals. The dispersion of the nominations for a sector depends thus on the degree of internal differentiation of that sector.

The military and cultural sectors rank lowest on both dimensions while politics ranks highest. The importance of the political sector is not surprising considering that final decision-making authority for most of the issues mentioned by the respondents rests with the political institutions. The political sector is therefore central in a threefold sense:

- It received the highest share of nominations (Table 4);
- Most of the holders of political leadership positions were named as being politically influential at least once (Table 2);
- Political leaders received the highest average number of nominations per person (Table 3).

3.4. Political influentials outside the positionally defined elite universe

While the foregoing analysis showed to what extent power resources connected with formal leadership positions are transformed into political influence, it is also of interest to look at those individuals who received nominations without occupying such leadership positions. As was said before, the great majority of these people were nominated only once and can be regarded as specialists. 573 of them, however, received two or more nominations and are of more general relevance as political influentials.

Two reasons may account for the fact that these persons were not members of the positionally defined elite sample: shortcomings of the sampling design or systematic divergences between positional power and political influence. Shortcomings of the sampling design may in turn take three different forms: omission of important sectors, organizations, or positions. The analysis of the positions and organizational affiliations of these 573 influentials can reveal which of these reasons played a role in our study.

The first step was to look at those who did not belong to any major sector of the positional sample and had been assigned to the "Other" category. This was the case for only 45 of 573. 15 of these 45 belonged to minor sectors already included in the sample, namely churches, the judiciary, and professional associations. Another 14 represented small voluntary associations, seven were ordinary citizens (e.g. lawyers, doctors), and nine were foreigners. This confirms that no important sector had been overlooked by the original sampling procedure.

528 of the 573 influentials outside the sample held positions in one of the sectors already included in the sample. 30 were former holders of elite positions. Another 31 represented organizations not included in the sample because they were too small to match the selection criteria. The others were holders of less senior positions in organizations already represented in the sample. Among them, four categories are worth mentioning: 139 members of the Bundestag or state parliaments; 51 higher civil servants in federal and state ministries; 75 journalists, some of them nationally prominent reporters and commentators; and finally, 74 university professors.

These results illustrate clearly that political influence in the Federal Republic is not exclusively reserved to holders of top leadership positions, even though the opportunity to be politically influential increases with seniority of position. They confirm that positional power and political influence have to be considered as distinct phenomena.

4. Elite integration in the Federal Republic of Germany

The sociometric links among position-holders and their links to persons outside the original positional sample can also be used to study the network of interactions at the apex of West Germany society. The existence of such a network, in which the various sectors of society are represented, indicates that all sectors participate in national political decision-making. It is therefore a crucial indicator of elite integration. In analyzing this network, we followed closely the approach taken by Moore and Higley in their analyses of American and Australian elites (Moore 1979, Higley et al. 1979, Higley and Moore 1981). This rests on theoretical considerations suggested by Kadushin (1968) and a method developed by Alba (1973). The nominations of interaction partners are treated as links connecting elite members (respondents as well as non-respondents). The total network of these links is input to a network analysis that searches for regions of higher density, i.e. for cliques of face-to-face groups (maximal complete subgraphs) and social circles which are defined as highly overlapping cliques.

The validity of this approach for studying power structure has been questioned, mainly for three reasons: for using a relational as compared to a structural model of network analysis, for interpreting network centrality as an indicator of power, and for treating links symmetrically. Because of their theoretical importance, the implications of each of these decisions have to be discussed in some detail.

4.1. *The analysis procedure*⁴

Input to the analysis programme⁵ is the matrix of links between persons. Nominations are treated as binary and symmetric, i.e. as existent or non-existent, and as reciprocal. The input data include all persons who:

- are themselves respondents and are linked to at least two other persons, either because they have nominated interaction partners or have received nominations;
- are not respondents but have received at least two nominations and can therefore serve as a link between two respondents.⁶

The network analysis provides thus a "correction" of the positional method by including people who are political influentials without formally holding an elite position. On the other hand, those with less than two links to others are treated as isolates and omitted from further analysis, even if they belong to the original sample.

Within the network of links among persons, the analysis procedure first searches for maximally complete subgraphs, i.e., cliques of face-to-face groups. In a second step, cliques that differ by not more than one member are aggregated to social circles. In a third step, finally, circles that overlap to a specified degree are further aggregated. The overlap criterion used in our analysis as well as in the two previous studies of U.S. and Australian elites was two-thirds.

The final result of the analysis are social circles made up of overlapping cliques, as well as cliques that could not be aggregated to circles because they were relatively isolated and did not satisfy the overlap criterion. A typical result of the procedure when applied to elite data is the emergence of one relatively large circle. Its size as well as its multi-sectoral composition distinguish this circle from the other groups in the network. In her analysis of the American elite network, Moore has called it the "*central circle*".

Pappi has argued that the central circle is a result of the approach taken, because "the merging of links, irrespective of discussion topics, into one large network wipes away all issue-specific contours and identifies a core region of persons active in several issue areas. This is of no disadvantage for the procedure, because mediating between different issue publics is one of the principal functions of the integrative core of an elite system". (Pappi 1984: 85). The emergence of a central circle has to be considered as a substantive analysis result rather than being merely a methodological artifact. The central circle constitutes an overarching influence network linking people active in different issue areas. Its existence shows that decision-making on national issues is not disjointed, but that these decision-making processes are connected through overlapping sets of participants. The network data used for the analysis even underestimate the actual density of the network since they are based on

nominations made for one issue per person only, while we can assume that in fact each elite member is involved in several issues at the same time.

4.2. Relational vs. structural models of network analysis

Network analysis offers two basic types of models, relational models and structural models. While relational models look for regions of higher density (cohesion) in the overall network, structural models divide the members of a network into subsets of structurally equivalent positions, i.e. blocks of persons with similar relations to others (cf. Burt 1978).

Kadushin's concept of social circles is a relational model, based on direct as well as indirect links among circle members. Social circles display three basic characteristics: they are informal, interstitial, and invisible (Kadushin 1979: 129f.). This implies also that they are open-ended and have no formal hierarchical structure (Kadushin 1968: 692f.). The concept also assumes that the integration of the members of a social circle is mainly brought about by indirect relations. According to Kadushin (1968) and (Granovetter 1982: 122) indirect ties are important means to facilitate communication within a larger network. The concept of social circles is particularly suited for studying national elites in complex societies. The large number of issues that have to be settled by political decision-making requires a differentiated, flexible, and open-ended⁷, yet sufficiently well integrated, elite. While the existence of elite integration as such does not necessarily guarantee a high degree of coordination between different decisions⁸, it nevertheless facilitates the information flow between different decision-making arenas and provides therefore a crucial precondition for coordination.

In his discussion of the relative merits of relational as compared to structural models, Burt has argued that only the latter are capable of distinguishing between different types of actors. In his view, they can detect cohesive subgroups in a larger network, but also "sycophants" and "brokers" which tend to be ignored by relational models. "Sycophants" are persons who name prestigious others but whose choices are not reciprocated while "brokers" link different subgroups within the larger network. Both are characterized by having no direct relations to actors in the same position, but similar relations to those in other positions (Burt 1978: 197).

However, Burt's conclusion that subgroups based on cohesion are just a subset of subgroups based on structural equivalence (1978: 198) is incorrect. In fact, structural models do not systematically search for cohesive subgroups (Moore 1979:680, Alba 1982: 66). Instead, both models measure different features of a network, and the choice between them depends entirely on the theoretical problem at stake. For studying elite integration, relational models seem more appropriate. They allow the researcher to determine the degree of

overall integration of an elite as well as the existence of a core elite defined as the denser part of the overall elite network. However, to what extent is Burt's argument correct that relational models are incapable of detecting different types of structural positions such as brokers and sycophants? With respect to the broker position, his conclusion seems unwarranted. In a model emphasizing the importance of weak ties, brokers perform an important role in connecting different subgroups of the network. They can therefore be easily detected by looking for those persons in a clique or circle who have more outgroup relations.

Unfortunately, Burt is correct with respect to the inability of relational models to detect sycophants. These models are vulnerable insofar as unimportant persons can artificially increase their network centrality by name-dropping. To minimize this effect, it is therefore advisable to include in the analysis only the nominations of those respondents who themselves satisfy a criterion of network centrality, e.g. have received a minimal number of nominations.

4.3. Network centrality as a measure of political influence

Many authors have argued that power lies in the ability to realize one's interests and is therefore analytically distinct from centrality in a communication network (e.g. Cook 1982: 185ff.). Instead, they have preferred to conceptualize power in terms of interest, control, and dependency. In this vein, Pappi (1984: 91ff.) found that centrality in a communication network and the number of nominations for power reputation were only moderately associated in the local elite he was studying. While power reputation was concentrated among a small number of individuals, the communication network was much larger. He concluded therefore that the existence of an inclusive elite circle based on interaction nominations does not preclude the simultaneous existence of a power elite. Pappi's argument for the existence of a power elite is problematic, however, since it is exclusively based on power reputation. The power elite he has detected proves only that the respondents i.e. the members of the local elite he studied, shared a perception of whom they considered to be powerful in their community. This confirms previous empirical studies that have consistently shown that the reputational method tends to find a power elite while the decisional method usually results in a more pluralist structure (cf. Putnam 1976: 78, Moore undated: 18).

Finding a power elite based on reputational nominations reflects therefore primarily the social psychological regularity that power perceptions tend to be skewed in the direction of a high degree of power centralization. This cannot, however, be considered as a stringent argument against the validity of network centrality as a measure of political influence. It confirms at best that power and

influence are two distinct though related concepts. There exists no a priori criterion to decide which of the two is a more adequate tool for determining who has an impact on political decisions in a social system.

One obvious way to settle this question empirically is to look at the decision-making output of a system and see whether this reflects the preferences of a power elite whose members were defined by power reputation or rather those of a more inclusive elite circle of political influentials. However, in their local elite study, Pappi and Kappelhoff did not find significant attitudinal differences between these two groups. A power elite is thus not necessarily characterized by different preferences or a greater attitudinal homogeneity, as power elite theorists have often assumed: "The outstanding characteristic of the power elite in this system is solely its power and not the uniformity of its interests" (Pappi and Kappelhoff 1984: 105). That means that it may be impossible to determine empirically whose preferences were ultimately responsible for a decision.

One theoretical argument against the claim that power reputation is superior as a measure of political influence to participation in a communication network of political decision-makers, lies in its one-dimensional conceptualization of power. It assumes the existence of a single power hierarchy. The previous discussion of the positional approach has shown that power in a differentiated society rests on various resources that are not amenable to a simple rank order. Accordingly, the model of elite circles conceptualizes political influence as access to a decision-making arena. Since this access is not open to everyone, the model is not oblivious to the hierarchical aspect of power. In fact, it is not inconsistent with the assumption that positional power resources play a crucial role in political decision-making. It takes into account, however, that among the participants in political decision-making, there exists no simple hierarchical relationship. Instead, it assumes that decisions are reached by communication and bargaining rather than authoritative decision-making.

4.4. Symmetric vs. asymmetric treatment of links

The decision to treat links symmetrically discounts the fact that it may make a difference if a person is the initiator or rather the addressee of an interaction. In his analysis, Pappi expected that peripheral members would be more often initiators while the members of the integrative core, i.e. the incumbents of positions of (political) authority, would be the main addressees of communication. The reasoning behind this was that "peripheral members have interests which they try to realize through contacts with the integrative core" (Pappi 1984: 85). The data did not corroborate this assumption, however. Instead, the integrative core was the main target as well as the major source of influence

attempts (Pappi 1984: 87). The status of initiator or addressee of communication is obviously not systematically related to political influence.

Our data require a symmetric interpretation of links for pragmatic as well as theoretical reasons. First, this allows the inclusion of non-respondents into the analysis. These may be holders of elite positions who refused to be interviewed as well as persons who have been named as important interaction partners without holding an elite position. Furthermore, the very method by which nominations were elicited during the interviews enforces a symmetric treatment of the nominations. One has to recall that respondents made nominations only for the one issue on which they had been most active during the last year. Since one can presume that elite persons are normally simultaneously active on more than one issue, they often received nominations in more than one issue context. Thus, while the nominations made by respondents were restricted to one sphere of activity, the received nominations show how several spheres of activity were linked by involving the same individuals. There is no a priori reason to assume that these nominations would not have been reciprocated if issue-specific questions had been used.

4.5. The West German elite network⁹

The West German elite network was analyzed by using the procedure described above. It was decided, however, to utilize only the nominations of those respondents who had themselves received at least one nomination. This was done partly because the German sample was rather large and the matrix of nominations for the entire sample could have posed technical problems of data processing, but also out of theoretical reasons. Given the possibility that respondents could have artificially increased their own centrality in the network by name-dropping (cf. Higley et al. 1979: 259, Pappi 1984: 93), this criterion ensured that a respondent had been named as important in at least one issue context. The probability of respondents to be included in the network was thus lowered and made more comparable to that of non-respondents who needed at least two nominations.¹⁰ Table 1 shows that 1,358 members of the positional elite in our study fulfilled this criterion, 780 of whom were also respondents.

After eliminating isolates, the network analyzed included 1,230 persons, 79.6% of whom were sample members (not necessarily respondents)¹¹; 20.4% were additional interaction partners (cf. Table 5). This network had a density of 0.005, i.e. 0.5% of all possible links between individuals in the network were in fact present. The analysis revealed 1,253 cliques, i.e. maximal complete subgraphs. This number was reduced to 43 by aggregating highly overlapping cliques to circles. As in the previous analyses of American and Australian elites, nearly all of these were rather small, with the exception of one large central circle of 559 persons. The density of the central circle was higher than that of the network at large, with 1.7% of all possible links actually present.

Table 5. Membership in sample, network, and central circle.

	Total		\bar{X}^1	Sample members			\bar{X}	Other persons			\bar{X}	Members of top sample			\bar{X}
	n	%		n	% ²	%		n	% ²	%		n	% ²	%	
Total persons registered	6568	100.0	1.7	3164	48.2	100.0	2.2	3404	51.8	100.0	1.3	904	13.8	100.0	5.7
Not in network	5338	81.3	0.8	2185	40.9	69.1	0.3	3153	59.1	92.6	1.1	413	7.7	45.7	0.4
Network	1230	18.7	6.0	979	79.6	30.9	6.7	251	20.4	7.4	3.1	491	39.3	54.3	10.2
Central circle	559	8.5	9.0	495	88.6	15.6	9.7	64	11.4	1.9	3.9	296	53.0	32.7	13.7

¹ Average number of nominations received; ² Row percentages.

Compared to the U.S. and Australian central circles, the West German one is at the same time larger and less dense. This is primarily due to the larger size of the initial network. A previous analysis of a subset of the West German network – comparable in its size to those studied in the other two countries – had instead revealed a central circle closely similar in size and density to those found in America and Australia. This can be seen in Table 6 (cf. also Hoffmann-Lange and Wolf 1984). Since the analysis of the smaller network was based on the nominations made by members of the top sample only, we can interpret the differences between the two analyses of West German elite networks as indicating that elite integration is higher among the holders of top positions than among a broader, more inclusive elite stratum. This interpretation is also supported by the distribution of nominations: incumbents of top positions not only received more nominations, they also nominated one another more frequently: 53.3% of the nominations of members of the top sample as compared to 45.3% of all nominations went to top sample members. The same effect can be seen in Table 5. Members of the top sample, while accounting for only 13.8% of all persons registered as either position-holders or interaction partners, have a share of 39.3% in the network and even of 53.0% in the central circle. Network centrality is strongly related to seniority of position.

4.6. The sector composition of the central circle

The incompleteness of the matrix¹² requires a cautious interpretation of the

Table 6. The US, Australian and West German elite networks.

	USA ¹	Australia ¹	West-Germany I ²	West-Germany II
<i>Sample:</i>				
n	545	370	492 ³	780 ⁴
<i>Network:</i>				
n	876	746	799	1230
Density in %	0.7	1.1	0.9	0.5
Cliques (maximal complete subgraphs)	442	1132	739	1253
Aggregated subgraphs	32	11	22	43
<i>Central circle:</i>				
n	227	418	340	559
Density in %	3.8	2.6	2.7	1.7

¹ Figures reported in Moore 1979: 680f.; Higley et al. 1979: 241ff.; Moore et al. 1980: 19f; ² Figures reported in Hoffmann-Lange/Wolf 1984: 49f; ³ 469 interviewed holders of top positions plus 23 other respondents who had received at least 3 nominations by top respondents; ⁴ All respondents who had received at least one nomination.

Table 7. Sector composition of sample, network, and central circle.

Sector	Sample		Other persons ¹		Network		Sample members in network		Other persons in network		Central circle		Sample members in central circle		Other persons in central circle		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Politics	SPD	199	6.3	221	6.5	172	14.0	143	14.6	29	11.6	90	16.1	83	16.8	7	10.9
	CDU/CSU	208	6.6	216	6.3	168	13.7	137	14.0	31	12.4	84	15.0	73	14.7	11	17.2
	FDP	45	1.4	61	1.8	59	4.8	43	4.4	16	6.4	34	6.1	29	5.9	5	7.8
Politics total ¹		452	14.3	535	15.7	403	32.8	323	33.0	80	31.9	209	37.4	185	37.4	24	37.5
Civil service		471	14.9	518	15.2	209	17.0	173	17.7	36	14.3	76	13.6	68	13.7	8	12.5
Business		688	21.7	353	10.4	138	11.2	126	12.9	12	4.8	66	11.8	64	12.9	2	3.1
Business associations		295	9.3	251	7.4	98	8.0	78	8.0	20	8.0	41	7.3	38	7.7	3	4.7
Trade unions		155	4.9	127	3.7	88	7.2	69	7.0	19	7.6	44	7.9	38	7.7	6	9.4
Mass media		354	11.2	421	12.4	107	8.7	80	8.2	27	10.8	46	8.2	39	7.9	7	10.9
Academic		179	5.7	410	12.0	96	7.8	64	6.5	32	12.7	46	8.2	37	7.5	9	14.1
Military		172	5.4	12	0.4	6	0.5	5	0.5	1	0.4	1	0.2	1	0.2	0	0.0
Culture		180	5.7	88	2.6	12	1.0	11	1.1	1	0.4	3	0.5	3	0.6	0	0.0
Other ²		218	6.9	689	20.2	73	5.9	50	5.1	23	9.2	27	4.8	22	4.4	5	7.8
Total		3164	100.0	3404	100.0	1230	100.1	979	100.0	251	100.1	559	99.9	495	100.0	64	100.0

¹ Including non-sample politicians with other party affiliation or whose party affiliation could not be ascertained; ² Including foreigners nominated; ³ Among these were 167 (4.9%) foreigners who were assigned to the "Other" category. There were also 37(1.1%) politicians of other parties (mainly the Greens) or whose party could not be ascertained. These were assigned to the sector "Politics total".

results with respect to the individuals in the central circle. At the same time, we can be much more confident as far as the sector composition of the central circle is concerned: first, the sector composition of the respondents on whose nominations the network analysis was based did not differ systematically from that of the original sample of position-holders; and secondly, a considerable proportion of the nominations were intersectoral rather than intrasectoral (77.7%). The latter ensures that intersectorally important persons are included in the network regardless of the sector composition of the respondents whose nominations were used for analysis. A comparison of the sector composition of the central circle with that of the original positional sample reveals to what degree representatives of the different sectors are integrated in a national decision-making network (Table 7). The major result is the increased importance of the political sector which accounts for nearly 40% of all central circle members. More than half of the circle's membership is made up of political-administrative personnel. This dominance is easily explained by the fact that these sectors are by definition involved in political decision-making. To a certain extent this is also true for business associations and trade unions. These pressure groups are, with around eight percent each, nearly equally represented in the central circle. The higher degree of organizational centralization of the trade unions, which was responsible for their smaller share in the positional elite sample, is thus compensated by a higher representation ratio of their leaders in the central circle.

The shares of business corporations and the mass media are smaller in the central circle than in the positional sample. They are nevertheless higher than a textbook interpretation of the roles of these sectors would presume. The same is true for the academic sector whose representation in the central circle is even higher than in the sample. The military and the cultural sectors, finally, are the only sample groups not integrated in the decision-making core of the West German elite.

The sector compositions of the West German, American, and Australian central circles are strikingly similar. In all three countries, about half of the circle members belong to the political-administrative sectors. The relation between the political and the civil service components differ, however, according to the different role the permanent civil service plays in these countries. In the United States, most positions in the political executive are occupied by political appointees. Hence, only 5.7% of the central circle members are civil servants. The proportion of civil servants is instead 13.6% in West Germany and even 18.4% in Australia (Higley and Moore 1981: 591).

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the sociometric nominations of West German elite respondents has shown to what extent positional resources are transformed into political influence. In contrast to positional power, membership in a network of informal influence relations indicates that a person participates in the decision-making on political issues. In West Germany, this network includes members of all major sectors except for military and cultural elites. Political, civil service, and business elites figure most prominently in the network. Leaders of business corporations, mass media, and academic elites are in fact much more involved than one would expect, given their role definitions which give them important social power resources but not much formal competence in political decision-making.

Given the ever-present desire to know who the powerful in a country are, one is tempted to consider the members of the central circle as the West German "power elite". This is partly justified since it includes the persons who formed the central core of political decision-makers during the time of the elite survey. Some qualifications have to be made, however. The central circle is not invariant over time. Its membership changes with the ever-changing political agenda. Moreover, since most circle members are incumbents of formal leadership positions, their membership depends primarily on their being representatives of organizations rather than on their personal qualities. It is very likely that most of them will be replaced by their successors as soon as they move out of their positions. One can therefore assume that the central circle in West Germany today is made up of different individuals than the one we found in 1981.

Secondly, the criterion used to determine the boundaries of the central circle is not the only conceivable one. Other, equally plausible criteria could be used which would lead to smaller or larger central circles. Furthermore, circle membership was determined by using data on activity in political decision-making. It is therefore limited to participants in political decision-making and does not include persons with only indirect influence on political decisions. Last but not least, the incompleteness of the interview data can be assumed to have had some impact on the results.

These reservations do not invalidate the approach but require some caution concerning the interpretation of the results. This is particularly crucial with respect to the individual circle members even though confidence in the sector composition of the circle is justified.

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Notes

1. The study was carried out by a research team at the University of Mannheim. Principal investigators were Rudolf Wildenmann, Max Kaase, and the author. It was supported by a grant of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. GETAS, Bremen, did the major part of the field work. ZUMA, Mannheim, provided help in the preliminary stage of questionnaire construction as well as in the preparation of the data-sets.
A machine-readable codebook of the survey data was produced by the Zentralarchiv, Cologne (ZA No. 1139): Rudolf Wildenmann, Max Kaase, Ursula Hoffmann-Lange, Albrecht Kutteroff, Gunter Wolf, Führungsschicht in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1981. Mannheim: Universität Mannheim 1982.
2. For a similar argumentation see also Moore (1977: 46ff.).
3. For interpreting the nominations for sample members in the academic and cultural sectors, a note of caution seems warranted. The positional approach implies that these sectors are represented by persons other than readers might expect. The academic elite in the study is not made up of distinguished scholars, nor is the cultural sector represented by well-known authors, movie directors, or painters. Instead, the academic sector includes the administrative heads of universities, research institutions and academic associations. In the cultural sector, the persons in charge of culture and entertainment in the media were selected. Thus, not the producers of knowledge and art, but rather the administrators of these two sectors belong to the positionally defined elite sample.
4. The following description is based on Alba (1973), Moore (1979), and Higley et al. (1979).
5. The program COMPLT developed by Richard Alba was used for performing the network analysis.
6. These non-respondents included members of the positionally defined elite sample who could not be interviewed as well as additional persons who were not sample members.
7. This is not to deny that the assumption of a closed elite system may be appropriate for elites of less differentiated social systems, as for instance for the middle-sized community studied by Pappi and his associates. Cf. Pappi and Kappelhoff (1984: 100, 115).
8. Marsden (1982: 206) has argued that indirect transfers of resources "occur on an entirely idiosyncratic basis. They take place only because two dyadic exchanges happen to have one party in common. The indirect exchanges are not based on the relative interests of the peripheral actors in one another, but instead on the relative interests governing their dyadic transactions with the intermediary".
9. The network analysis was carried out by Gunter Wolf, to whom I am greatly indebted, not only for sharing the results, but also for many discussions from which I have learned a great deal about the theory and methods of network analysis.
10. The same criterion has been used by Pappi and Melbeck (1984: 564) who have argued that only those members of the positional elite can be considered as a member of an elite system who were designated as influential by at least one other elite member.
11. One has always to bear in mind that the distinction made here is not between respondents and non-respondents, but between sample members and additional interaction partners.
12. The matrix is incomplete because it does not include links among non-respondents (cf. Higley

et al. 1979: 259, Pappi 1984: 84). This is the inevitable consequence of using interview data which always have a less than perfect response rate, but also of the open-endedness of the procedure that calls for the inclusion of non-respondents. Its main effect is that respondents have an artificially increased chance to belong to the denser part of the network. We tried to counteract this effect by requiring respondents to have received at least one nomination.

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