

POWER STRUCTURES

Social science research indicates that power actors do not operate independently of one another but rather communicate among themselves. There are **patterns of interaction** among a community's power actors. These interrelationships are known as "power structures."

Kinds of Power Structures

During the past 30 years, in many types of communities, studies aimed at understanding power structures, their compositions and behaviors. Researchers agree that in most communities, there is an identifiable power structure — that is, a network of power actors who communicate with each other and seem to cooperate in community decision making.

One group of studies conducted by Powers and his associates focused on power structures in midwestern rural communities and small cities. They classified power structures into four kinds:

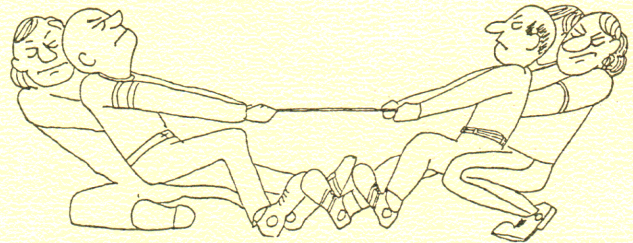
- **One-Person** power structures — A single individual makes all the community's decisions. (Such communities were rare.)



- **Tightly-Knit-Group** power structures — A small group of power actors, with common interests and high interaction, controlling decisions. (Such situations were also relatively rare.)



- **Split Community** power structures — Usually two opposing, tightly-knit groups or individuals who vie for dominance comprise this kind of arrangement. (Again, an uncommon situation.)



- **Power Pool** power structures — A loosely-knit group of power actors who know each other but rarely act in concert and who do not all participate in every decision. (Most communities belonged in this group.)



John B. Mitchell of Ohio State University and Sheldon G. Lowry of Michigan State University reviewed many power structure studies and developed the following set of categories:

- **Pyramidal** power structures — These structures consist of a small number of power actors with significant social power concentrated at the top of a pyramid; these could be one family, one industry, a single organization, or a tightly knit group of individuals.

