Power as Harm Capacity: A Unified Mathematical Framework for Understanding Social Domination

Swapan Samanta

Independent Researcher, Indoriv Clinical Research Centre, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a unified theory of power grounded in a single, operationally precise concept: harm capacity. The central argument is not that power always causes harm, but that what defines power — across every domain of social life — is the latent, measurable capacity to impose irreversible consequences upon others, whether or not that capacity is ever exercised. A mother nurtures and loves her child; yet her authority rests on an asymmetry that is difficult to deny — she could, if she chose, cause the child irreparable harm. A prime minister governs with the best of intentions; yet his power is measurable precisely because he could, in principle, dismantle the very nation he leads. A commoner, however virtuous, possesses no such reach. This distinction — between the exercise of power and the mere possession of its latent form — is the conceptual heart of this framework.

By making this distinction explicit from the outset, the framework avoids the reductionism of equating power with harm. Harm capacity is a structural feature of social relationships, not a behavioral tendency. It can and does coexist with benevolence, care, cooperation, and love. What it cannot coexist with is powerlessness — because where the capacity to impose consequences is absent, so is power, whatever else remains.

The paper formalizes this insight mathematically through information-theoretic domain weighting and probabilistic harm capacity modeling, generating six testable hypotheses about institutional behavior, consciousness development, and social evolution. The implications challenge comfortable assumptions about democratic governance, benevolent authority, and the nature of liberation itself — not to provoke, but to provide a more honest foundation for understanding how social structures actually function.

Keywords: Power theory, harm capacity, mathematical sociology, latent coercive capacity, institutional analysis, social domination, consciousness integration, liberation dynamics

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This paper develops a unified theoretical framework for understanding social power across all domains of human organization — economic, political, spiritual, and interpersonal. Its scope is deliberately broad: the framework is intended to apply wherever authority, hierarchy, and compliance appear, from the household to the nation-state, from the classroom to the corporation, from the religious community to the democratic assembly. This breadth is not a weakness of the framework but its central ambition. Existing theories of power, rich as they are within their respective disciplines, tend to be domain-specific in their assumptions and vocabulary, making cross-domain comparison structurally difficult. The present paper attempts to provide the common foundation that such comparison requires.

The framework is analytical rather than normative in its primary orientation. It does not argue that power is always bad, that authority is always illegitimate, or that social life would be better without hierarchy. It argues that power is measurable, that its measurement requires a common metric, and that the most adequate such metric is latent harm capacity — the structural potential to impose irreversible consequences upon others. The ethical and political implications of this analysis are taken seriously and explored in later sections, but they follow from the framework rather than precede it.

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The paper draws on and engages with several distinct bodies of scholarship: the classical sociology of power in Weber, Dahl, and Lukes; Foucauldian analyses of power as productive and constitutive; mathematical sociology and network theory; information theory and probabilistic modeling; political philosophy, particularly in its treatment of democratic legitimacy and coercion; and the psychology and sociology of consciousness and institutional behavior. The integration of these traditions is deliberate. No single disciplinary lens has proven adequate to the phenomenon of power in its full scope; the present framework attempts a synthesis that respects the insights of each while transcending the limitations of all.

The scope is bounded in two important respects. First, the framework addresses structural power — power as a property of social positions and relationships — rather than micro-level influence, persuasion, or interpersonal affect. It is concerned with what is structurally possible, not with what is psychologically likely in any particular interaction. Second, while the paper presents six testable hypotheses and proposes specific methodologies for their investigation, the empirical testing itself lies beyond the scope of this theoretical contribution. The present paper establishes the framework and its logical implications; empirical validation is the work it calls for next.

Statement of Novelty

The novelty of this paper operates at three distinct levels: conceptual, methodological, and empirical.

Conceptually, the paper introduces harm capacity as a unified analytical primitive for the study of power — a concept distinct from existing formulations in several crucial respects. Unlike Weber's probabilistic account of will-against-resistance, the present framework does not require the assumption of conscious agency in the powerful actor: the infected infant, incapable of will or intention, demonstrates that harm capacity is a structural property of situations, not a psychological property of persons. Unlike Dahl's behavioral approach, the framework does not rest on counterfactual reasoning about what actors "would otherwise do"; it rests on measurable structural features of social positions. Unlike Foucauldian accounts, which tend to resist formal operationalization, the present framework is designed from the outset to be mathematically tractable and empirically testable. The concept of latent harm capacity — potential rather than actual, structural rather than behavioral, measurable rather than merely described — is, to the author's knowledge, without direct precedent in the existing literature.

Methodologically, the paper makes three original contributions. First, it proposes a probabilistic formalization of harm capacity that transforms power from a categorical attribution into a continuous, domain-specific probability distribution — enabling, for the first time, principled cross-domain comparison of power magnitudes. Second, it introduces two complementary approaches to the domain-weighting problem that has long obstructed quantitative power research: information-theoretic weighting based on entropy across harm distributions, and revealed-preference weighting based on observed protection investment. Third, it proposes a Liberation Coefficient — a formal measure of the gap between an actor's harm capacity and their actual harm exercise — as a quantitative basis for empirical research on restraint, ethics, and consciousness integration.

Empirically, the paper derives six specific, falsifiable hypotheses from the framework — each with a proposed measurement methodology and explicit prediction. This moves the discussion of power beyond the rich but untestable conceptual analyses that have characterized the field for decades, and opens the possibility of genuine empirical adjudication between competing theories of power. The Conversion-Validity Inverse Hypothesis and the Democratic Harm Parity Hypothesis are, in particular, novel empirical claims with no close antecedents in existing research.

Taken together, these contributions represent a qualitative advance over existing power theory: not a refinement of any single existing approach, but a synthesis that resolves longstanding measurement problems, enables cross-domain comparison, and generates a research programme capable of empirical development. Whether the framework ultimately survives empirical testing is a question the paper does not presume to answer. That it provides a sufficiently precise and original foundation for such testing to be attempted is the claim it does advance.

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Introduction: The Uncomfortable Architecture of Power

There is a thought that keeps returning, no matter how many times one tries to set it aside. Every time we encounter someone described as genuinely powerful — a chief executive, a head of state, a revered spiritual teacher — and we probe carefully what that power actually consists of, the same structure appears underneath. Strip away the language of leadership, authority, influence, and service, and what remains, in every case, is the capacity to impose harm. Not the act of harming — most powerful people never harm anyone deliberately — but the structural possibility of doing so. That latent capacity, and nothing else, is what power is.

This is the claim this paper sets out to defend. It is important to be precise about what it does and does not mean, because the claim is easily — and understandably — misread as cynical or reductive. The framework does not argue that powerful people intend harm, or that power is morally equivalent to harm, or that care, leadership, and benevolence are illusions. It argues something more structurally specific: that the measurable dimension of power, across all social domains, is the capacity to impose irreversible consequences upon others — their options, their resources, their identity, their place in the world — whether or not that capacity is exercised.

Consider the clearest possible illustration. A prime minister who governs wisely, humanely, and with genuine concern for his people is still, in a precise and measurable sense, more powerful than any private citizen — not because he harms more people, but because he could. He could, by act or omission, alter the conditions of life for millions. A farmer in a rural village, however virtuous and however beloved in his community, simply does not possess that structural reach. The difference between them is not moral; it is architectural. And it is that architecture — the latent capacity for consequential action — that this paper proposes to formalize as the basis of a unified theory of power.

This distinction — between latent capacity and actual harm — must be held clearly throughout what follows. Harm capacity, as used here, is not a description of anyone's intentions or behavior. It is a structural property of social positions and relationships, analogous to potential energy in physics: always present in the structure, rarely fully released, but defining the nature of the system regardless.

With that clarification in place, the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 examines why existing power theories, despite their considerable achievements, resist the quantification and cross-domain comparison that a mature science of power requires. Section 3 proposes a mathematical formalization of harm capacity that addresses these measurement problems. Section 4 explores the relationship between psychological integration and the compulsion to exercise power. Section 5 confronts the framework's most serious limitations honestly. Section 6 tests the framework across economic, political, and spiritual domains. Sections 7 through 9 present six testable hypotheses, discuss radical implications, and offer conclusions.

The Inadequacy of Current Power Theories

The Measurement Problem

Contemporary power theories have produced rich conceptual vocabularies but remain stubbornly resistant to measurement. The problem is not merely technical — it reflects a deeper ambiguity about what power actually is. When economists discuss market power, political scientists analyze state authority, and sociologists examine social influence, it is not always clear that they are studying the same phenomenon. The use of a single word across these domains may be less a discovery than a convenient habit.

Weber's foundational definition — power as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance" — has the virtue of precision but the defect of circularity. What enables an actor to overcome resistance? The definition gestures at the answer without providing it. Dahl's behavioral approach, which defines power as the ability to get others to do what they would not otherwise do, shifts the problem without resolving it: the counterfactual ("what B would otherwise do") is not empirically tractable. Network approaches have made genuine progress through centrality measures, but influence propagation through networks is not quite power in the sense that concerns us here. A well-connected person can spread information; that does not mean they can impose costs on those who refuse to receive it.

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The Asymmetry That Reveals the Structure

A simple thought experiment clarifies what is at stake. Imagine two leaders in otherwise identical organizations.

Leader A can only provide benefits — salary increases, promotions, recognition, opportunities — but cannot impose any costs. She cannot dismiss anyone, cannot demote, cannot exclude, cannot withhold.

Leader B can only impose costs — dismissal, demotion, exclusion, resource withdrawal — but cannot provide benefits directly.

Which leader maintains authority longer? The answer, consistent across organizational psychology, cultures, and historical contexts, is Leader B. The capacity to harm sustains compliance far longer and more reliably than the capacity to benefit. We comply with those who can hurt us; we merely cooperate — voluntarily, revocably, conditionally — with those who can only help us.

This asymmetry is not incidental. It reveals that harm capacity is the structural foundation of authority, while benefits are instrumental — means of managing relationships within a structure whose ultimate basis is coercive potential. This does not mean that generous, caring, or cooperative leaders are less genuine in their benevolence. It means that their benevolence operates within a structure whose ultimate foundation is the capacity they rarely or never exercise.

The Language of Power

Attend carefully to ordinary usage. When we describe a politician as "very powerful," we do not primarily mean that she creates great public goods, though she may. We mean that she can destroy careers, silence critics, reshape institutions. When we describe a pharmaceutical company as "powerful," we mean it can eliminate competitors, manipulate regulatory environments, and impose market conditions. When a nation is "powerful," we mean it can impose serious costs on others — through sanctions, military force, diplomatic isolation — not merely that it is generous.

Fear is the phenomenological signature of perceived harm capacity. We do not fear the powerless, regardless of their intentions. We attribute divine status to the snake not because of its benevolence but because of its capacity to kill. The moral framework we overlay on that capacity varies across cultures; the capacity itself does not.

The Infected Infant: Pure Harm Capacity

Consider the following case. An infant — helpless, without will, without intention, without agency of any kind — is accidentally infected with a lethal airborne pathogen. The infant has not changed morally. It cannot intend anything. It cannot consent to anything. It provides no additional benefits. Yet everyone now fears it and flees.

This case matters because it eliminates every alternative explanation of power simultaneously. It cannot be Weber's "probability of carrying out will" — the infant has no will. It cannot be benefit-based authority — the infant provides nothing. It cannot be intentional coercion — the infant has no intentions. It cannot be any form of voluntary relationship.

Only harm capacity — structural, unintentional, latent — explains what has changed. The infant can now kill. That is its power. Everything else we associate with power — consciousness, agency, institutional position, moral character — turns out to be secondary to this underlying structural fact.

A Mathematical Framework for Harm Capacity

Formalizing these intuitions mathematically serves two purposes. It forces precision in definitions that are commonly left vague, and it generates testable predictions that can validate or refute the framework empirically. The mathematics should be understood as a scaffolding for conceptual clarity, not as a claim to final quantitative precision. The empirical challenge of measuring harm capacity in practice is real and addressed directly in Section 5.

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Core Definitions

Harm Capacity $H_i \rightarrow_j^d$ represents actor i's latent ability to involuntarily reduce actor j's option-space in domain d — that is, to constrain the accessible futures available to j, regardless of whether i actually does so.

Using a probabilistic formulation:

$$H_i \rightarrow_j^d = E[\Delta O_j^d] \times P(success_i) \times P(access_{ij})$$

Where:

$E[\Delta O_j^d]$ = expected reduction in j's option-space in domain d

$P(success_i)$ = probability i can execute the intended harm

$P(access_{ij})$ = probability i can reach or affect j

This formulation transforms power from a static attribute into a dynamic probability distribution — one that can, in principle, be estimated from observable data about institutional capacity, resource control, and social proximity. Crucially, this is a measure of what could happen, not what does happen. A prime minister's harm capacity is high even when he is governing wisely and benevolently, because the structural possibility is always present.

Option-space O_j^d represents the set of accessible future states for actor j in domain d, weighted by preference and probability:

$$O_j^d = \Sigma_s P(state_s) \times Preference_j(state_s)$$

Harm, in this framework, occurs when this option-space contracts involuntarily — when j would pay real costs to prevent the reduction, given genuine choice and full information. The measure applies regardless of whether the contraction is intended by i, or even whether i is aware of it.

Aggregate Power Formulation

The total power of actor i across all domains and targets:

$$P_i = \Sigma_{j \in J} \Sigma d \in D\ w^d \times H_i \rightarrow_j^d$$

The domain weights w^d present a genuine empirical challenge, which this framework addresses through two complementary approaches rather than resolving definitively.

Information-Theoretic Weighting

Domains with higher entropy — greater unpredictability in harm patterns — receive higher weights:

$$w^d = -\Sigma_j\ p_j^d \log(p_j^d)$$

Where p_j^d represents the probability distribution of harm severity in domain d across population j. This approach weights domains by their variance rather than by subjective importance judgments, making it empirically tractable.

Revealed Preference Weighting

$$w^d = \Sigma_k\ Protection\ Investment_k^d\ /\ \Sigma d \Sigma_k\ Protection\ Investment_k^d$$

This measures how much individuals and societies actually invest in avoiding harms in each domain — security systems, insurance, legal protection, medical care, reputation management. The weights emerge from observed

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behavior rather than theoretical stipulation, grounding the framework in real human responses to perceived harm capacity.

Domain-Specific Power Functions

Economic Power:

$P_i^{econ} = \Sigma_j [\alpha \times \text{Resource Control}_i \times \text{Dependency}_{ji} + \beta \times \text{Exclusion Capacity}_{i \to j}]$

Economic power reduces to control over resources others need, multiplied by their dependency, plus the capacity to exclude people from economic participation entirely. A chief executive's power stems structurally from this combination — and it is worth noting that such executives typically exercise only a small fraction of this capacity in practice. Their restraint does not eliminate the capacity; it is what makes them, in the eyes of colleagues and subordinates, trustworthy holders of it.

Political Power:

$P_i^{pol} = \gamma \times \text{Violence Monopoly}_i \times \text{Institutional Position}_i + \delta \times \text{Coercive Apparatus}_i$

Political power rests on Weber's monopoly on legitimate violence. The word "legitimate" is important: it describes the social narrative that makes the violence acceptable, not the underlying structural reality, which remains coercive. A head of government who has never deployed military force still possesses the capacity to do so, and it is precisely this latent capacity that distinguishes their position from that of any private citizen.

Spiritual Power:

$P_i^{spirit} = \Sigma_{j \in \text{followers}} [\varepsilon \times \text{Meaning Dependency}_{ji} + \zeta \times \text{Identity Capture}_{ji} + \eta \times \text{Community Exclusion}_i]$

Spiritual authority creates meaning-dependency, identity-capture, and community exclusion capacity. The harm capacity of a spiritual teacher is rarely exercised; but its presence — the possibility of excommunication, of being cast out from one's community and sense of meaning — is precisely what sustains the structure of authority.

The Consciousness-Power Relationship

A consistent pattern emerges across contemplative traditions, clinical psychology, and sociological observation: as individuals develop greater psychological integration — a more settled, less reactive sense of self — their compulsion to exercise power over others tends to diminish. This observation, difficult to formalize with precision, is worth attempting mathematically because it generates testable predictions that the framework would otherwise leave implicit.

Consciousness Integration Dynamics

Define Consciousness Integration $C \in [0,1]$ where $C = 0$ represents complete psychological fragmentation and $C = 1$ represents complete integration — liberation from the anxious maintenance of a separate self. The relationship between integration and the compulsion to exercise power:

$P_{need}(C) = P_0 \times e^{-\lambda C}$

As consciousness integrates, the psychological compulsion to control others drops exponentially. At complete integration, this compulsion approaches zero — not because the person lacks capacity, but because they no longer need to exercise it. The capacity and the compulsion are structurally independent; the framework predicts that genuinely integrated individuals may retain enormous latent harm capacity while choosing, consistently and without effort, not to exercise it.

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Liberation Coefficient

$L = 1 - P_{exercised} / P_{capacity}$

This measures the gap between what someone could impose on others and what they actually do impose. High L indicates sustained restraint and possible genuine liberation — the kind of power that expresses itself precisely through its non-exercise. Low L indicates domination that uses available capacity.

This generates an empirically testable prediction: genuinely liberated individuals would demonstrate consistently high L values across contexts, without apparent effort or self-suppression. The liberation is visible not in the absence of capacity but in the absence of compulsion to use it.

Addressing Critical Limitations

The framework is ambitious. Ambitious frameworks carry proportionally serious risks of overreach, and intellectual honesty requires confronting these risks directly rather than papering over them.

The Consent Paradox

If people voluntarily join organizations or relationships, how can the resulting structure be described as involving domination? The resolution lies in recognizing that voluntariness exists on a spectrum rather than as a binary state.

$Autonomy_j = 1 - (Exit\ Costs + Information\ Asymmetry + Cognitive\ Constraints) / Total\ Available\ Resources$

True voluntariness requires low exit costs, high information quality, and cognitive freedom from duress and dependency. Most social relationships fall short of at least one of these criteria. The framework does not claim that every relationship is equally coercive — it provides a basis for measuring degrees of autonomy and distinguishing relationships accordingly.

The Love Problem: Parental Authority

The most humanly important challenge to the framework comes from the parent-child relationship. Calling loving parental care "domination" risks obscuring something morally crucial about the nature of that relationship. The framework addresses this through time-dependence.

$H_{parent \rightarrow child}(t) = H_0 \times e^{-\lambda t} \times 1/(1 + Autonomy_{child}(t))$

Parental harm capacity begins extremely high — reflecting the infant's complete dependence — and decays as the child develops autonomy. The ethical criterion this generates is both precise and humanly resonant: is the authority self-eliminating? Healthy parental power works systematically toward its own dissolution, actively building the child's capacity to not need it. This is what distinguishes it, structurally and morally, from institutional authority, which typically increases rather than decreases its own power over time.

The mother who loves her child deeply and cares for them without reservation nonetheless possesses, structurally, the capacity to harm. That capacity is the measure of her power. That she never exercises it — that she would sooner suffer herself than allow it to be exercised — is the measure of her love. The framework does not confuse these two things. It insists only that both are real.

The Reflexivity Challenge

Academic writing is itself an exercise of power. This paper, if influential, will generate citations, grant epistemic authority, and build institutional position. The framework predicts that scholars should be alert to this dynamic in their own work.

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A systematic reflexive audit is proposed: measuring citations, network centrality, funding influence, and the capacity for peer-review control; analyzing whether the work increases structural dependency; and calculating a liberation coefficient for academic activity. This is not merely a methodological precaution — it is a substantive application of the framework to itself, testable by the same standards as any other domain.

Testing The Framework Across Social Domains

Economic Domain: Corporate Power

Business literature emphasizes what chief executives create: value, innovation, strategic vision. The framework invites a complementary analysis of what they can destroy — and suggests that this latent destructive capacity is precisely what makes them powerful.

A Fortune 500 chief executive can, in principle: end thousands of careers through restructuring decisions; determine budget allocations affecting entire departments and supply chains; damage competitors through pricing, acquisition, and regulatory influence; shape policy environments through lobbying and institutional relationships. The exercise of these capacities varies enormously across individuals and organizations. The possession of them does not.

Testable Prediction: CEO compensation correlates more strongly with harm capacity metrics — layoff frequency, union suppression, competitor elimination — than with value creation metrics such as innovation, productivity growth, or employee wellbeing. The data required for this test are available in corporate filings and industry records.

Political Domain: Democracy as Distributed Harm Capacity

The framework suggests that democratic governance does not eliminate domination — it distributes harm capacity across the population through voting mechanisms. Democratic power distribution can be formalized as:

$$P_{democracy} = (1/N) \Sigma_{i=1}^{N} H_i \times V_i$$

Where H_i represents individual harm capacity and V_i represents voting weight. When democratic majorities vote to imprison people for victimless crimes, to exclude certain populations, to deploy military force, or to surveil citizens — they are exercising aggregated harm capacity. The fact that a majority consents to the exercise does not change its structural character, though it may change its moral character considerably.

This analysis does not argue against democracy. Distributed domination may be vastly preferable to concentrated domination, for reasons the framework itself can articulate. It does suggest that we should be honest about what democratic governance involves structurally, even when we endorse it morally.

Spiritual Domain: Institutional Teachers

This is the most uncomfortable application of the framework, and it warrants careful framing. The claim is not that spiritual teachers are hypocrites, or that their teachings lack value. The claim is that every major spiritual teacher with a significant institutional following demonstrates measurable power-accumulation patterns — and that the framework predicts this, independent of the teacher's character or intentions.

The patterns are consistent across traditions and individuals: hierarchical organization, in-group and out-group distinctions, resource concentration, exclusion mechanisms, dependency creation. These are not necessarily signs of bad faith. They may be structurally inevitable consequences of institutional organization itself. The framework formalizes the relationship:

$$P_{guru} = N_{followers} \times [\text{Meaning Dependency} + \text{Identity Capture} + \text{Community Exclusion}]$$

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The liberation coefficient predicts declining values as follower count increases — not because spiritual teachers are dishonest, but because institutional organization generates harm capacity structurally, regardless of the intentions of those within it.

One of the most The Conversion Imperative: Evidence Of Power Operations

revealing patterns across social domains is the universal pressure toward conversion and recruitment. Every major system — religious, political, economic, academic, lifestyle-based — invests substantial resources in expanding its membership. The framework offers an explanation of this pattern that is both simple and disturbing.

The Mathematical Argument

If truth-value were independent of the number of people who hold it, the derivative of truth with respect to believer count would be zero:

$\partial \text{Truth} / \partial N = 0$

But the derivative of system power with respect to follower count is consistently positive:

$\partial \text{System Power} / \partial N > 0$

This asymmetry reveals the actual motivation for conversion efforts. Systems recruit not because truth spreads naturally but because followers increase structural power.

The correlation is revealing: conversion intensity tracks competitive threat levels and power gains from numbers, and tracks inversely with empirical validity. Physics does not proselytize. Mathematics does not evangelize. Effective medicine does not require missionaries. The systems that invest most heavily in recruitment are precisely those whose claims are least amenable to independent verification.

$\text{Conversion Effort} = k \times (\text{Power Gains from Followers}) / (\text{Empirical Validity})$

This is not a claim that all recruitment is dishonest or that all converts are deceived. It is a structural prediction: systems with high power gains per follower and low empirical validity will invest most heavily in conversion, regardless of the intentions of the individuals within them.

Six Testable Hypotheses

The framework generates specific, falsifiable predictions. These are not illustrative examples but genuine empirical tests that could, in principle, refute the framework's core claims.

H1: The Power-Harm Correlation Hypothesis

Claim: Across all domains, measured social power correlates more strongly with harm capacity than with benefit-provision capacity.

Methodology: Sample Fortune 500 chief executives. Measure harm capacity metrics — layoff frequency, wage suppression, regulatory violations — and benefit metrics — innovation output, productivity growth, employee wellbeing. Prediction: $\rho(\text{Power, Harm}) > 0.7$; $\rho(\text{Power, Benefit}) < 0.3$. Apply parallel methodology to state leaders and spiritual teachers.

H2: The Benevolent Authority Impossibility Theorem

Claim: Authority structures that maintain compliance without harm capacity will lose authority within measurable timeframes, collapsing to voluntary cooperation baselines.

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Experimental design: Create matched organizational structures. Control group retains traditional punishment and exclusion capacity. Experimental group can only offer, suggest, and reward — cannot punish, exclude, or withhold. Measure compliance rates over twelve months. Prediction: control group maintains stable compliance at 80-90%; experimental group declines to voluntary cooperation baseline (20-40%) within three to six months.

H3: The Liberation-Power Inverse Relationship

Claim: Individuals with higher measured consciousness integration exhibit lower power-exercising behavior, controlling for power capacity.

Methodology: Measure consciousness integration using validated instruments — ego-dissolution scales, non-reactivity assessments, attachment reduction metrics — alongside power capacity and actual power exercise across contemplative practitioners, business leaders, and academics. Prediction: strong negative correlation ($\beta_1 < -0.6$) between integration and exercise, independent of capacity.

H4: The Guru Group Formation Hypothesis

Claim: Spiritual teachers forming organized followings will exhibit measurable power-accumulation behaviors within predictable timeframes.

Longitudinal methodology: Identify emerging spiritual teachers at early stages (fewer than twenty followers). Track over ten years: follower count, resource accumulation, hierarchical development, exclusion incidents, succession planning. Prediction: among teachers exceeding fifty followers, hierarchical structures emerge by year three and liberation coefficient L declines systematically as follower count increases.

H5: The Conversion-Validity Inverse Hypothesis

Claim: Conversion effort intensity correlates negatively with empirical validity and positively with competitive threat.

Cross-domain methodology: Sample one hundred or more systems from scientific, religious, political, health, and lifestyle domains. Measure conversion effort, empirical validity (replication rates, predictive accuracy), and competitive threat. Prediction: ρ (Effort, Validity) < -0.6; ρ (Effort, Threat) > 0.7.

H6: The Democratic Harm Parity Hypothesis

Claim: Democratic and authoritarian regimes employ comparable total harm capacity when normalized for internal dissent levels.

Comparative methodology: Sample forty matched pairs of democracies and autocracies, controlling for economic development, population size, and ethnic fractionalization. Measure harm deployment — incarceration rates, police violence, surveillance expenditure, protest suppression — alongside dissent levels. Prediction: no significant difference in harm deployment at equivalent dissent levels (democracy coefficient ≈ 0 in regression).

RADICAL IMPLICATIONS

The Ethics of Power

If power equals latent harm capacity, then "ethical power use" requires careful rethinking. The framework does not conclude that ethics is impossible — it concludes that the ethical dimension of power lies in restraint: in the consistently maintained gap between what one could impose and what one does impose. Three ethical orientations follow naturally from this analysis.

A minimalist ethics identifies the least harmful forms of necessary authority while working to reduce total harm capacity systematically. An abolitionist ethics works toward the dissolution of power structures and their

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replacement with genuinely voluntary association. A developmental ethics uses authority explicitly and temporarily to build the autonomy of those subject to it, making itself unnecessary — the model of healthy parenthood applied to institutions.

The framework is skeptical of claims to "ethical leadership" and "servant authority" that do not engage with the structural dimensions of harm capacity. Restraint is real and morally significant, but it operates within a structure whose ultimate foundation it does not eliminate.

Institutions as Power-Optimization Systems

All institutions, regardless of stated mission, appear to optimize for the maintenance and expansion of power capacity. This explains why institutions claiming purely altruistic purposes still exhibit hierarchical structures, resource concentration, resistance to power-sharing, and exclusion mechanisms for dissenters. The stated purpose and the structural function can diverge systematically — not because individuals are dishonest, but because institutional survival requires power maintenance regardless of mission.

This is not a counsel of despair. It is a diagnostic insight. Institutions that understand their own power dynamics can, in principle, design structures that work against this tendency — building in mechanisms for power dissolution, external accountability, and systematic self-limitation.

Liberation and Structural Invisibility

If consciousness integration eliminates the compulsion to exercise power, then genuinely liberated individuals would, the framework predicts, demonstrate consistently high liberation coefficients — and would leave no institutional trace. They would form no lasting organizations, gather no systematic following, accumulate no resources beyond immediate need, and care nothing for historical legacy.

This makes genuine liberation structurally invisible to history. The truly liberated leave no mark that institutional history can record, because they create no institutions. If this prediction is correct, every famous enlightened master has, by the very fact of their fame, demonstrated residual ego-fragmentation. The framework does not say this to diminish them. It says it to clarify what liberation, rigorously conceived, would actually look like.

CONCLUSION

This paper has proposed and defended a single, structurally precise claim: that power, across all domains of social life, is fundamentally the latent capacity to impose irreversible consequences upon others — their options, their resources, their identity, their world — whether or not that capacity is ever exercised.

This claim does not reduce power to harm. It distinguishes sharply between the capacity and its exercise, between the structural feature and the behavioral tendency, between what a person could do and what they choose to do. A parent who loves their child completely, a prime minister who governs with wisdom and compassion, a spiritual teacher who has genuinely transcended the need for recognition — all of them may possess substantial harm capacity that they never exercise. Their restraint is real and morally significant. The framework insists only that the capacity is also real, and that it is this capacity — not their goodness, which is not in question — that constitutes their power.

The mathematical formalization developed here addresses critical measurement problems through probabilistic modeling and information-theoretic domain weighting. It generates six testable hypotheses, each of which could in principle refute the framework's core claims. The predicted correlations — power with harm capacity rather than benefit provision, conversion intensity with empirical weakness, consciousness integration with power restraint — distinguish this framework from alternatives in ways that are empirically decidable.

The implications are serious. They suggest that much of what we call leadership involves structural domination even when it is exercised with genuine care. They suggest that democratic governance is distinguished from authoritarianism by legitimacy narratives and distribution mechanisms, not by the elimination of coercive

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capacity. They suggest that institutional spiritual authority generates power structures regardless of the character of those within them.

These are not comfortable conclusions. But they are offered not in cynicism — not as an argument that power is always bad or that ethics is always pretense — but as a more honest foundation for thinking about what ethical authority, genuine restraint, and structural liberation would actually require. The empirical tests proposed here will determine whether this foundation holds, or whether it needs to be rebuilt.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This framework emerged through decades of clinical practice, contemplative study, and institutional observation across medical, academic, corporate, and spiritual contexts. The mathematical formulations represent attempts to bring precision to concepts that are often left deliberately vague — not because vagueness serves understanding, but because it serves power.

The central distinction this paper seeks to establish — between harm capacity as latent structural potential and the actual exercise of harm — was developed in response to a natural concern that the framework reduces all power to malice or harm. It does not. It reduces all power to the structural capacity for consequential imposition, which coexists perfectly well with care, love, benevolence, and wisdom. What it cannot coexist with is powerlessness.

The framework should be judged by its empirical adequacy and logical coherence. If the predictions hold, we need to confront what they reveal about human social organization. If they fail, the framework should be abandoned or significantly revised. That is how it should be.