

Hard and Soft, Finance and Marketing

Written by Dylan Kissane

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DYLAN KISSANE, FEB 5 2013

This week in POL 210 my students have two classes which I have devoted to the notion of power. The first allows them to examine so-called 'hard power' and the second gives them a chance to investigate and discuss the notion of 'soft power'. On top of the classes I've asked all students to read five articles on various aspects of power, including a piece on the EU from *Foreign Policy* back in 2004 with the wonderful title, 'The Metrosexual Superpower'. I'm hopeful that between the classes and the reading, the students will be able to talk confidently about what power is, how it is deployed, and the ends to which it can be put to work in politics.

I've been reading, researching, writing, and teaching about the concept of power for more than a decade now. It's a topic in IR that has always fascinated me, particularly attempts to quantify power in international politics. I got serious about power back in 2005 when I worked on Charles Doran's power cycle theory, a great piece of Cold War quantitative social science which sought to explain conflict with reference to the relative power of states. I would later publish a series of articles where I used power cycle theory to predict systemic change in the Asia-Pacific and prescribe a foreign policy shift for the Australian government (a prescription that seems unlikely to ever be filled, to my ongoing sadness). I took things a little more 'meta' back in 2008 when I gave a paper at the WISC conference in Ljubljana discussing means of measuring power in international politics and, since then, I've kept in contact with others interested in measuring international power via an online discussion group called *PowerMetrics*.

When teaching a sometimes abstract concept like power to business students, it helps to have a quantitative metric. Many business students like numbers, there is something more real to them about a figure on a page than something less quantifiable like 'influence' or 'stature'. I use power cycle theory as a basis for discussion, demonstrating how it can be applied to global systems and how the rise and fall of powers can help explain international conflict. This is usually enough to get students thinking about hard power and making the link between power in IR and events in the international system; however, when it comes to soft power, it is always a little bit more difficult.

The concept of soft power is not hard to pick up or to discuss – these are smart students, even if not IR majors – but the lack of a quantifiable aspect is problematic for some students. My experience has been that marketing majors tend to understand the promise of soft power a little bit more easily than the finance majors. My hypothesis is that marketing majors are more open to the idea that ideas and cultural products might have an effect on international relations because they are focussed on making similar connections between product and person in their professional lives. The numbers driven finance majors, on the other hand, while open to the impact of soft power on politics, tend to avoid the softer side of power in their discussions, returning instead to discussions of hard power, and elements of national power they can put a number on.

The experience of teaching international power to business students reminds me that not only are business majors different to IR majors, there are also significant differences amongst the business majors when they are in the politics classroom. With one session on hard power and another session on soft power, I hope to deliver something of interest this week to all students and draw them a little bit deeper into the fascinating world of IR.

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Dylan Kissane is Professor of International Politics at CEFAM in Lyon, France. Read more of e-IR's blog *Political*

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About the author:

Dylan Kissane is Professor of International Politics at CEFAM in Lyon, France. He is the curator of The Ivory Tower blog on E-IR.