

## Sources of Political Legitimacy Essay

For this assignment, you will need to research each of the six core countries and determine whether a country has high or low legitimacy. For more information about the different categories that make up the sources of legitimacy and factors that encourage legitimacy, review the Sovereignty, Authority and Power powerpoint and read the "Sources of Political Legitimacy" below.

In your essay, you should analyze the six core countries in terms of how each show:

- Legitimacy by results
- Legitimacy by habit
- Legitimacy by historical, religious, ethnic identity
- Legitimacy by procedures
- Legitimacy by fear
- Legitimacy by belief system

Through your research, you may find that certain categories stand out more so than others, or some categories do not apply at all. However, you should be able to find evidence for each core country and make a determination of the legitimacy that country experiences. Place in the "Legitimacy Essay" drop box when you are complete.

### Sources of Political Legitimacy

All governments need legitimacy to survive. But how do governments attain authority? What makes citizens obey or feel loyal toward their governments? Scholars have answered these questions by concluding that political legitimacy comes from several sources:

- **Tradition:** The government has authority because its citizens have a long tradition of giving it authority and respect. This source mostly comes into play with governments that have been around for a long time.
- **Habit:** Most people are raised to obey the laws, and they thereby acquire the habit of obeying. Citizens give their government legitimacy and authority because that is what they have always done.
- **History:** People remember great deeds and events in the country's history, and they obey the government out of a sense of historical pride.
- **Religion:** In some places, obedience to the government is seen as a religious obligation.  
*Example: Iran is a constitutional Islamic republic. Some of its governing bodies are elected, whereas others are put into place for religious reasons.*
- **Ethnic identity:** Countries composed of exclusively one ethnic group or whose regime is strongly connected to one ethnic group can inspire obedience through ethnic identity. Members of that ethnic group respect the government because of its link to their ethnicity.  
*Example: Saddam Hussein's Sunni regime in Iraq once inspired a great deal of loyalty in Sunni Arabs.*

- **Results:** If a government succeeds in some way—for instance, through a military victory or a thriving economy—citizens may feel loyalty because of that success.

Legitimacy is a major component in ensuring a government's survival and endowing it with authority. Without legitimacy and without power derived from one source or another, the government will inevitably fail. Six countries--the People's Republic of China, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Russian Federation, United Mexican States, Islamic Republic of Iran, and Federal Republic of Nigeria--can be examined to determine from what sources legitimacy and power are commonly or uncommonly derived. Sources include tradition, habit, history, religion, ethnic identity, and results.

The People's Republic of China is the first 'case study'. The People's Republic of China is a unique country of many apparent contradictions, yet it functions as one of the world's great powers. In the PRC, the government is ruled by the Communist Party of China in a one-party system. Legitimacy for the government comes from many sources; the long and complex history of China gives many wells from which the Communist Party may draw legitimacy. For one, there is tradition; while the current government of China under the Communist regime may have only existed since its establishment in 1949, the nation of China has existed for centuries upon centuries, and as such, the Chinese people are apt to obey a government that draws on the traditions of Chinese governance. As the government is able to do so, it may model itself after governments of old, thereby earning respect and loyalty from those who value tradition. Habit also plays a role into giving the government legitimacy, as--save for the anachronism that was the Republic of China--the Chinese people have historically lived under more authoritarian regimes, be they monarchies, Empires, warlords, or the Communist government. This plays into the legitimacy derived from History; as many know, the Chinese nation has a long and proud history, and the accomplishments of the past Dynasties are sought to be recreated by the Communist government, the return of 'the Middle Kingdom' being something people in China would support out of pride. Religion does not work to give the government legitimacy in China, only challenging it in the form of Uyghur Muslims, for example. It is not just the religion of the Uyghurs that set them apart, but also their ethnicity; most Chinese are Han Chinese, and this common bond helps give the government legitimacy. Further and most important in giving the Chinese government of today legitimacy are results; the economic prosperity that the People's Republic of China is currently experiencing, relative to its past, are seen as a great accomplishment by the people, so any oppression by the Communist government can safely be waved away in the face of foreign money flowing into the country. If that is not enough, fear of reprisal by the government curtails any attempts at revolution.

The United Kingdom, as a case study, is far different from the People's Republic of China in how it derives authority, though there are arguable similarities. First to examine is how the government derives legitimacy from tradition; the British monarchy (and to a lesser extent, Parliament) has existed for centuries in a relatively continuous fashion, despite devolution of some powers from the Monarch to a Parliament. Having had such a longstanding government gives it legitimacy in that British citizenry continue to recognize it as the proper authority to obey and be loyal to, as that has simply been the case for centuries. Habit also plays a role in the United Kingdom's legitimacy. Much like China, the United Kingdom has a long and proud history from which the government of the country may draw legitimacy. The People are proud of their heritage, of being the world's largest Empire, of being one of the victors of the Second World War; these things that can instill pride give the British government legitimacy.

Religion was previously a common bond many Britons shared, but it does not play too significantly into the legitimacy of the government, issues with Muslim immigrants aside. The same can be said of Ethnic Identity and its role in legitimacy. Results are an important source of legitimacy for the British government, as important as elections, for if the elected representatives are truly legitimate, must they not be able to achieve the aims promised to the people?

The Russian Federation's history began in 1991, but the Russian nation's history goes back far longer; it is a long history of authoritarian government and a supportive-until-they're-not citizenry. Tradition plays some role in the current government, but given its youth and dissimilarity to the previous regime, legitimacy by tradition can be hard to come by' carrying on the ideals of the Soviet Union that remained ingrained in and supported by the people may lead to some traditional legitimacy. Habit is arguably a very major source of legitimacy for the Russian government; from Peter the Great up through Brezhnev, the Russian people were governed by authoritarian regimes, and it stands to reason that, having been nurtured by a culture characterized by the presence of such regimes, the Russian people of today obey, are loyal to, and support the authoritarian Putin regime out of habit. The Russian people are also a proud people, and the history of achievement by the Russian Empire and Soviet Union in certain arenas gives the Russian Federation opportunity to set goals that the people will support the government in achieving. Russia is a diverse country, and ethnic identity definitely plays a role, but more so in identifying against certain groups (e.g. the Chechen War) than deriving a common unity for the government. Many also fear the Russian Federation, particularly in the world of the press and the opposition; the legacy of 'mysterious disappearances' left by the Soviet Union scares many from voicing condemnation of the current government, thereby preventing it from losing legitimacy. The Results of the Putin administration have been construed as admirable by many Russians, seeing GDP grow by leaps and bounds for several years, peaking at \$2 trillion before sanctions and falling oil prices brought it down; it is definite that the government of Russia has derived legitimacy from pointing to the good results of its policies.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is unique in the modern world because of how its government continues to derive authority from religious dogma, much unlike the other great powers of the globe. Iran's current regime was instituted following the 1979 Revolution, and so there is little to be said of tradition. There is some to be said for habit and history, as the current Islamic government points to the history of the proud Persian Empires and the Islamic Caliphates that have risen and fallen in the region in order to garner support and fealty from the people. Persian culture and history serve as sources of legitimacy in this way. Most important for the modern government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is drawing legitimacy from religion; the government is a theocracy that is made legitimate because the Supreme Leader is a representative of Allah on Earth; the Shi'ite Islamic clerics are held in high esteem in the government, and any who would dare to oppose the government oppose the will of Allah. Therefore, the people are forced to recognize the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a legitimate authority. Going back to the identity of many Iranians as Persians, the Islamic Republic of Iran's government draws legitimacy from the common ethnic and religious identities of its civilians, those being Persian and Shi'ite Islam for the majority of people. Being that it is a Persian government organized by Islamic doctrine, it must be legitimate. Results do not factor in as greatly into the legitimacy of the government in Iran, but it can be claimed by the government that positive results of their policies can be seen in Iran's growing geopolitical strength and influence in the region.

Mexico has a shorter history than these other countries, but it is nonetheless riddled with violence and chaos. The current government of Mexico is organized by the 1917 Constitution, and the government, until not too long ago, was dominated for a long time by the PRI, or Institutional Revolutionary Party. The government, during that time, derived legitimacy from the ideals of the revolution and the alleged positive results to be reaped by a recognizing a legitimate, revolutionary government. Words were enough to sway many of the Mexican people for a long time, and the people were united in the belief of an end to corruption and a more prosperous future, thereby giving in to recognizing the government's legitimacy. Mexico's government has also derived legitimacy from its elections, ostensibly democratic, though results have been challenged in the past. Fear of a return to worse chaos than what exists now encourages many to work with the system as it is.

Finally, there is the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is here that ethnicity plays one of the biggest roles in determining the legitimacy of the country's government. Nigeria is a very young country in the grand scheme of things, and it has struggled to maintain legitimacy. Citizens currently have a high distrust of the government. Challenges to the legitimacy of the Nigerian government arise from the contradictions of the past and the competing ethnic and religious groups in the country; Yoruba-Igbo division, Muslim-Christian division, and other competitions have led to divisiveness that harms the legitimacy of the government. The northern part of the country has garnered legitimacy for its regional governments through religion and support of Islam, but the rest of the country must rely on what little legitimacy may be had for the Federal government through elections, economic results (re: petroleum exports), and the strength of the military. Fear of harm by the military or corrupt officials keeps many in line and respecting the legitimacy of the Federal government to the extent that they must.

Legitimacy is drawn from many sources by governments around the world, and it is the lifeblood by which they are allowed to remain in existence. Without legitimacy, what recourse do governments have to maintain control except by force? Without legitimacy, how may a government operate in the international community, conduct trade, conduct foreign policy? It is important for governments to earn legitimacy, and the sources for that legitimacy (ethnicity, religion, habit, tradition, belief, history, fear, results, elections) are equally important.