

A. Sources of power

If political power is not intrinsic to the power-holder, it follows that it must have outside sources. In fact, political power appears to emerge from the interaction of all or several of the following sources:

1. Authority The extent and intensity of the ruler's authority among the subjects is a crucial factor affecting the ruler's power.

Authority may be defined as the “. . . right to command and direct, to be heard or obeyed by others,”¹⁰ voluntarily accepted by the people and therefore existing without the imposition of sanctions. The possessor of authority may not actually be superior; it is enough that he be perceived and accepted as superior. While not identical with power, authority is nevertheless clearly a main source of power.

2. Human resources A ruler's power is affected by the number of persons who obey him, cooperate with him, or provide him with special assistance, as well as by the proportion of such persons in the general population, and the extent and forms of their organizations.

3. Skills and knowledge The ruler's power is also affected by the skills, knowledge and abilities of such persons, and the relation of their skills, knowledge and abilities to his needs.

4. Intangible factors Psychological and ideological factors, such as habits and attitudes toward obedience and submission, and the presence or absence of a common faith, ideology, or sense of mission, all affect the power of the ruler in relation to the people.

5. Material resources The degree to which the ruler controls property, natural resources, financial resources, the economic system, means of communication and transportation helps to determine the limits of his power.

6. Sanctions The final source of a ruler's power is the type and extent of sanctions at his disposal, both for use against his own subjects and in conflicts with other rulers.

As John Austin wrote, sanctions are “an enforcement of obedience,”¹¹ used by rulers against their subjects to supplement voluntary acceptance of their authority and to increase the degree of obedience to their commands. They may be violent or not; they may be intended as punishment or as deterrence. Citizens may sometimes apply sanctions against their governments or against each other (these will be discussed below). Still other sanctions may be applied by governments against other governments and may take a variety of forms, such as the breaking of diplomatic relations, economic embargoes, military invasions and bombings. Violent domestic sanctions, such as imprisonment or execution, are commonly intended to punish disobedience, not to achieve the objective of the original command, except insofar as such sanctions may inhibit future disobedience by other persons. Other violent sanctions sometimes, and most nonviolent sanctions usually, are intended to achieve the original objective; this is often the case in conventional war, strikes, political noncooperation and boycotts. Sanctions are usually a key element in domestic and international politics. It is always a matter of the degree to which some or all of these sources of power are present; only rarely, if ever, are all of them completely available to a ruler or completely absent. But their availability is subject to constant variation, which brings about an increase or decrease in the ruler's power. Baron de Montesquieu observed that “those who govern have a power which, in some measure, has need of fresh vigor every day . . .”¹² To the degree that the sources of power are available without limitation, the ruler's power is unlimited. However, the opposite is also true: to the degree that the availability of these sources is limited, the ruler's political power is also limited.¹³