

British prime minister

[People](#)



From the year 1905 to the year 2008, there are already 24 prime ministers who have ruled over as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (United Kingdom Prime Ministers 2008). As of the present times, the position is occupied by Gordon Brown. The power that is being held by the prime minister has been passed on from one hand over the next for the past 103 years. The source of power is an important factor in analyzing the role of the prime minister and the way through which a deeper understanding of how it is maintained can be seen.

The distinctiveness and the constant replacement of the prime minister over the course of their existence in the British government have to be related to the dynamics of power together with its source in order to explain why and how it is held by the people in position. This paper aims to draw a concept of power and identify whether there is an informal and formal side of power. This is done through a research using different literatures and also draws upon personal opinion in order to provide a critical position on the general topic of power.

This is followed by a discussion of the power that is exercised by the prime minister, more specifically that of the United Kingdom. The sources of power, according to the conventions, arrangements, and constitutional devices are also researched in order to relate this to how the power is earned and maintained. In order to do this, the experiences of the past prime ministers are studied and collected to form a historical overview of how the power to govern as a prime minister is taken and maintained. What is Power?

In understanding the concept of power, it is important to take note of its definition and the characteristics that are associated with it. Morgan (2006)

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defines it to be “ the medium through which conflicts of interest are ultimately resolved [and] influences who gets what, when, and how” (p. 166). In relation to this, it is seen that power occurs with the picture of social reality drawn by the members of a particular group and the need for the allocation of the scarce resources (Pfeffer & Salancik 2003).

There is a relation that can be seen from the two definitions wherein it could be derived that the person or the group which has the power defines the resources that are considered to be of limited amount. Along with the possession of power is the ability and influence for particular resources together with its allocation. In addition to this, the seat of power is defined by the individuals making up a group. Politically speaking, power is seen to be a means through which sharing occurs in the process of making decisions (Fahlbusch, Bromily, & Barrett 1999).

In the context of the government, the decision-making process means the formulation of the policies, which include government action or inaction. Further disparity is seen with the use of power as there are two faces seen for it. It is seen as an instrument through which peace and status quo can be achieved (Fahlbusch, Bromily, & Barrett 1999). On the other hand, it remains to be very susceptible to abuse that includes “ misuse, excess, and tyranny” (Fahlbusch, Bromily, & Barrett 1999: 311)

Two additional and related definitions of power is provided by Shortell and Kaluzny (1997) where it is seen that power is: 1) something that is used in order to change the course of action or behavior of another group or individual and 2) the influence that is exerted in order to force another person or group to do something that is in opposite to the original decision.

There are certain elements that can be clearly seen from these definitions of power. First, it is seen that it may or it may not transcend through a hierarchical structure and is not dependent on the way through which positions in the organization is patterned.

This is because the direction from which the power stems can be anywhere who can actually accomplish the two conditions mentioned above. However, it can be seen that there is, actually, a greater chance for those who occupy higher positions to have power and use it because of the capabilities and responsibilities that is attached to the position. Second, it is a means of initiating change. To a certain extent, it can be seen that change is often associated with leadership as the latter is associated with two characteristics which include being “masters of change” and “visionaries” (Fisher 1999: 138).

It can be related that since there is a sense of change in every leader, it can be seen that power is something that is used for the purpose of leading people into making several changes for a particular goal that is intended. It should be noted, still, that leadership is not the same as management and may or may not lie within the formal organizational structure. Third, power is sometimes associated with coercion and the use of force in order to achieve something.

Though this is oftentimes seen and accepted in negative terms, it should be considered that this is not the sole aspect of power. In fact, there are different types of power that is classified according to their sources and coercion is only one of the elements that can be seen from one or a few of these types. A discussion with regard to this is placed in the following <https://assignbuster.com/british-prime-minister/>

section. Sources of Power There are five general sources of power as presented by Cronkhite (2008). The classification includes reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power (Cronkhite 2008).

First, reward power exists where loyalty and cooperation is earned in exchange for something that is needed (Cronkhite 2008). Second, coercive power involves the ability to take away something that is considered to be of value when the behavior or action desired is not achieved (R. Denhardt, J. Denhardt, & Aristigueta 2001). Third, legitimate power, placed in simple terms, is considered to be the type of power which stems from the position that is being held wherein people are made to follow and act in consideration of the organizational structure, which indicates the position (Bob, I.

Asherman, S. Asherman, & Randall 2001). Fourth, referent power is the type wherein power is gained through association with a powerful group or persons (Timby & Smith 2007). It could be of the inherent power of the organization to which a particular person belongs that makes other people behave in a particular manner. Lastly, expert power is that which is derived from the “special knowledge, skill, or ability” that a particular individual possesses (Cottam, Uhler, Mastors, & Preston 2004).

The Role of the Prime Minister There are several roles that need to be fulfilled by the British Prime Minister being the national leader. The breadth of responsibilities include “constitutional and procedural, appointments to ministerial and other senior posts, conduct of Cabinet and parliamentary business, the organization and efficiency of government, the Budget and

other economic decisions, and special foreign and defense functions” (Mayne 1999: 26).

As can be discerned from the list of general roles taken by the Prime Minister, there are functions which are legislative and executive in nature. The Prime Minister’s presence and control is felt when it comes to policy formulation, which is in the decision-making process, and in policy implementation, which is the executive functions of the prime minister. For example, he or she has affairs to deal with in the decisions made but also has defense functions, which is under the executive branch of the government.

Another set of classification is also provided by Borthwick, Shell, and Williams (1995) wherein the Prime Minister is vested with responsibilities as the primary individual responsible for the operations of the government, the head of the party to which he or she belongs, and the leader of the whole nation. There are different specific tasks that need to be accomplished in consideration of the different interests of the people to whom the prime minister is accountable to.

It is also defined by Hayward and Menon (2003) that a seemingly prime ministerial government exists in Britain wherein the “ prime minister coordinates policy, resolves conflicts, and controls the main resources” (67). In the definition previously provided in an attempt to clarify the concept of power, it has been shown that the elements of power include possession of control in resources, an influence in the decision making process, and a voice in the resolution of conflict.

These are the three elements that could also be discerned from the functions and roles of the prime minister that are presented by Hayward and Menon (2003) and Mayne (1999). It can be concluded that the set of functions given here characterize the existence of power within the hands of the Prime Minister and the sources can be both formal and informal, as is followed in the definition of power in general. Where it all Comes From There are different sources of power that can be seen from the history of prime ministerial incumbency in Britain.

Through the intricate network of relations formed from the organizational hierarchy of the government, it can be seen that there are three general sources of power that includes the conventions, the constitutional devices, and the arrangements that are present in the British government. From personal characteristics also comes a consideration of whether or not a particular individual is given the power to serve as the Prime Minister.

There are four characteristics, which include: 1) the name and status in the society or an organization together with what an individual can do; 2) perceived affiliation with success in terms of politics; 3) acceptance of the public; and 4) a relatively high position in the “ party, parliamentary party, and government” (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 37). While these can not be considered as the direct sources of power, it serves as among the characteristics that are seen as bases whether power is given to an individual or not.

This is important because these are requirements or prerequisites that are seen to be the main characteristics of the people that are vested with the powers of the Prime Minister. Likewise, it can be seen that these bases for

the acquisition of power is not framed in the Constitution nor is it determined through the formal lines of government but are the shadow elements being considered in the selection process. However, it should also be noted that not everyone who fits these conditions become Prime Ministers.

This is because there are other forms of standards are present that limits only one individual to be considered rightful as the Prime Minister. To a certain extent, it can be said that the Prime Minister is considered to be an “elected monarch” and draws certain powers from the Royal Crown of the land (Borthwick, Shell, & Williams 1995). The approval and acceptance of the monarch has been an important factor in maintaining the power that is within the reach of the Prime Minister.

Over the years, the manner through which the monarch is selected has evolved in such a way that in the beginning, it is the personal affiliation of the person to the monarch that mattered but in the twentieth century, it became the credentials and appropriateness of the person that is considered by the monarch (Borthwick, Shell, & Williams 1995). While today’s monarch do not hold as much power and influence as those that existed in the past, they are still given the chance to voice out their concerns over the affairs of the government especially with the selection of the key leaders of the country.

It has been through traditional considerations and the influence that the monarch has that renders them to still be powerful for certain decisions made in the country. In addition to this, the Prime Minister is tasked to report to the monarch every week in consideration of the monarch’s possession of “the right to be consulted, the right to encourage and the right to warn”

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(Williams 1998: 165). There are still powers and rights that are given to the monarch that the Prime Minister could not ignore and should continuously take into account for the former could easily use its power against the Prime Minister.

In addition to this, it is argued by Harrison and Boyd (2006) “ that the major development strengthening PM power over the last century have been mainly political rather than constitutional (34-5). Politically speaking, the power of the Prime Minister is related to the party that wins in the House of Common, which is considered to be a source of power for the Prime Minister (Borthwick, Shell, & Williams 1995). The largest party wins in the House of Common and the person who serves as the leader of the said party is appointed as the Prime Minister with the approval of respective authorities in the land.

Just the same as the Prime Minister reports to the monarch, he or she is likewise responsible to the House in lieu of the need to maintain the power that is vested upon him or her. There are several expectations that need to be fulfilled as a Prime Minister that would continuously be within the shoulders of the incumbent. Moreover, another source of power for the Prime Minister is the assignment of being the First Lord of the Treasury where the two positions are often associated with one another (Goodnow 2005). The responsibilities of the said office give the Prime Minister another area from where his or her power could stem from.

Conclusion Power is considered to be the influence in the decision-making process, the control over the resources, and the force exerted over the behavior and actions of other people. In general, there are five sources of

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power that is categorized according to how power is attained and maintained. Placed in the context of the British government, power is considered in the roles of the Prime Minister. There are general roles that are fulfilled by the individual who is incumbent to the said position, which is being the head of the state, government, and the parliament.

The powers of the Prime Minister are also earned through the monarch and the positions assigned of him or her. There are different limitations to the extent of control exhibited by the monarchy today but it remains to be ingrained in the British society and it can still place several pressures on the Prime Minister and the power of the same. In addition to this, there are also personal characteristics that are held as important for the position. Indeed, the powers of the Prime Minister stem from different sources, which are both formal and informal.

The broad range from which power is sourced out is considered to be an implication of the need for a clear delineation of the powers and functions of the British Prime Minister. List of References Bob, P. , Asherman, I. , Aherman, S. , and Randall, J. (2001) *The Negotiation Sourcebook*. Amherst, MA: HRD Press. Borthwick, R. L. , Shell, D. , and Williams, R. (1995) *Churchill to Major: The British Prime Ministership Since 1945*. NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc. Cottam, M. , Uhler, B. , Mastors, E. and Preston, T. (2004) *Introduction to Political Psychology*.

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