Evaluate the factors that affect the legitimacy of political systems essay

Before I can evaluate the factors that affect legitimacy , I need to define legitimacy. Legitimacy has been defined in a number of different ways, Max Weber defined it as " a belief in the right to rule", others see legitimacy as " the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate and proper ones for the society. " The basic idea is that without a legitimate government a country cannot effectively and then the government and people suffer. Something becomes legitimate when one approves of it. In a positive sense, legitimacy gets greater attention in political science.

For example, an institution is perceived as legitimate, if approval for that institution is general among those people subject to its authority. Legitimacy can also link in with political power and authority. Power is the ability, to get things done either to enforce your own will, in the case of a dictator, or to enforce the will of a political group or over others. A person can have legitimacy but no actual power, they could have a perfectly legitimate government but have no overall majority of power, making them useless. A political group could also have power and authority, achieved through nothing but brute force, the Nazi Party for example, removing all the legitimacy from their system.

How can legitimacy be achieved? For a country to have a legitimate government the views of the people need to be reflected and the people need to have a say in how their country is run. There are a number of political factors that can affect legitimacy, elections need to take place in order to get a government elected, in most cases elections are conducted fairly and represent the true views of the people, giving legitimacy. However

this is not always the case, sometimes in elections corruption can take place, in Zimbabwe, President Robert Mugabe has been accused on a number of occasions of rigging elections to ensure victory. This obviously is beneficial to Mugabe as it keeps him in power, however it undermines the political system and takes all the legitimacy away. Power is achieved but by unfair methods, and the public will not be happy and uprising could quickly develop.

Another problem with elections and legitimacy is the electoral system itself. In the UK we use the first past the post system, by which the party that gets the most of the votes gets the most of the seats in Parliament. In theory this works, the people get want they want, if the majority of the people want a Labour government then they get it, giving legitimacy. This theory does not however work if only a small percent of the population turn out to vote or if the majority win is out numbered by other parties, for example if Labour got 42% majority win, they would technically have the majority of votes as a single party, however 58% of the voters voted against them. So there is a legitimacy crisis as a government is now in power but in a country in which more people are opposed to them than in favour. Another political factor that could affect legitimacy is policies.

Good policies can get people elected, in times of hardship a changed in policy can help to elect in the hope that change and stability can be achieved, for example Barack Obama and his " Yes We Can" campaign in the 2008 American Presidency elections, Obama promised change for the American people after the trauma suffered through the Iraq War etc and managed to secure the Presidency with a majority vote and increasing the legitimacy or the government, as the public is getting to voice their opinions

and have the chance to try and change how their country is being run. Just as policies can increase legitimacy they too can decrease legitimacy. If a government cannot provide the basics for their people then the legitimacy inevitably is lessened. If people cannot rely their government to give them a decent lifestyle then their trust in that government has no grounds to exist.

In Northern Ireland recently there has been problems with polices, especially education policies. Minister for Education Caitriona Ruane faced opposition for her support for abolition of the Eleven Plus examination, she got the Eleven Plus abolished stating in was unfair and put too much pressure on children. However she did not put any replacement in to effect and the people of Northern Ireland felt hard done and worried for their children's future. Northern Ireland for the most part has a decent and stable government, but this one slip up in education policy but a distrust in minds of its people affecting the governments legitimacy.

Religion and Race can also be a huge factor in affecting legitimacy. With a religious or racial divide discrimination is always a likely possibility. If one of the two sides manages to get majority power then they can do what they like and take advantage of their opponents to the benefit of themselves. Things such as discrimination in Northern Ireland during the troubles were Catholics were discriminated against in areas such as housing, employment etc or on Nazi Germany with the holocaust against the Jews and other opponents of the Nazis. They were executed and used as slaves for years, this is an awful example of legitimacy gone wrong. Religious problems in a country leading to genocide, powerful and effective government with the wrong intentions, due to power hunger and corruption.

There are many factors that affect the legitimacy of a political system, the major being inability to keep the peace and security in a country. If peace cannot be kept by a government then anarchy breaks out and corruption and downfall follows. Its other factors however that combine together to determine on whether or not the peace can be kept. Factors like democracy, a functioning economy, accountability and religious and racial stability that influence the decisions made by governments and it's these decisions that either make or brake a government and its legitimacy.