

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2022 · 10 marks

Comment on the Bases of Power.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 Bases = what power-holders control to shape behaviour → power is more than force
R2 Bases run visible → near-invisible → power rests on a widening set of supports

Body flow

Three basic bases: force / influence / authority → forms: coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, referent → individual base: **Dahl** ("A over B") + **Weber** (will despite resistance) = power over → structural bases: **Marx** (economic class controls state) → feminist (patriarchy, exclusion of women) → **Foucault** (institutions, knowledge, surveillance, normalisation → ideology/discourse = least visible base)

Counter-view

Arendt: "acting in concert" → collective, enabling base from civic participation, against power-as-domination

Conclusion routes

R1 Power rests on structure, knowledge and consent, not force alone
R2 Bases widen from coercion (visible) to ideology (invisible) → power is far broader than force

The bases of power are the resources a power holder controls in order to influence or manipulate the behaviour of others. They show that power rests on far more than force alone, drawing on a widening set of supports that run from the visible to the almost invisible.

At the simplest level, three basic bases operate: force, influence & authority. These take shape as coercive, reward, legitimate, expert and referent power. Force commands through threat, reward & legitimacy secure willing compliance & expertise and personal standing work through persuasion.

Robert Dahl held that "A has power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something which B would not otherwise do," while Max Weber saw power as the ability to realise one's will despite resistance. Both treat power as the domination of one person over another.

Later theorists located the deeper bases in structures. Karl Marx traced power to economic class, where the dominant class controls the state. Michel Foucault dispersed it across institutions, knowledge, surveillance & normalisation, where control over ideology & discourse becomes its least visible base.

Against this, Hannah Arendt treated power as "acting in concert" a collective and enabling base that arises from civic participation. Power, then, rests not on force alone but on structure, knowledge and consent.