

# Legitimacy

Legitimacy refers to an actor or an action being commonly considered acceptable (*from within and without*) and provides the fundamental basis or rationale for all forms of governance and other ways of exercising power over others. The most accepted contemporary source of legitimacy in a state is some form of democracy or constitutionalism whereby the governed have a defined and periodical opportunity to choose who they wish to exercise power over them. Other sources of legitimacy are suggested in states in which such an opportunity does not exist. Within any proposed overall framework of legitimacy, individual actions by a state can be considered more or less legitimate. Other actors of global politics and their actions can also be evaluated from the perspective of legitimacy.

## Legitimacy of state power

*Max Weber, Three types of legitimate rule* – considers 3 types of legitimate authority:

- **Traditional authority** is legitimated by the sanctity of tradition. The ability and right to rule is passed down, often through heredity. It does not change overtime, does not facilitate social change, tends to be irrational and inconsistent, and perpetuates the status quo. Traditional authority is typically embodied in feudalism or patrimonialism. It also occurs in many autocracies and theocracies. Traditional legitimacy derives from societal custom and habit that emphasize the history of the authority of tradition. Traditionalists understand this form of rule as historically accepted, hence its continuity, because it is the way society has always been.
- **Charismatic authority** is found in a leader whose mission and vision inspire others. It is based upon the perceived extraordinary characteristics of an individual. Weber saw a charismatic leader as the head of a new social movement, and one instilled with divine or supernatural powers, such as a religious prophet. Charismatic legitimacy derives from the ideas and personal charisma of the leader, a person whose authoritative persona charms and psychologically dominates the people of the society to agreement with the government's régime and rule. A charismatic government usually features weak political and administrative institutions, because they derive authority from the persona of the leader, and usually disappear without the leader in power. However, if the charismatic leader has a successor, a government derived from charismatic legitimacy might continue.
- **Legal-rational authority** is empowered by a formalistic belief in the content of the law (legal) or natural law (rationality). Obedience is not given to a specific individual leader - whether traditional or charismatic - but a set of uniform principles. Weber thought the best example of legal-rational authority was a bureaucracy (political or economic). This form of authority is frequently found in the modern state, city governments, private and public corporations, and various voluntary associations.