

The Three Types of Authority

According to Max Weber the sociologist, beliefs in a legitimacy of a political system go beyond philosophy and they contribute directly to the state system stability and authority.[1] All rulers have an explanation for their superiority, an explanation that is commonly accepted during a crisis can be questioned.[1]

Weber sees only three categories of legitimation strategies (which he calls "pure types") used to justify the right of rulers to rule:

Legal authority is based on a system of rules that is applied administratively and judicially in accordance with known principles. The persons who administer those rules are appointed or elected by legal procedures. Superiors are also subject to rules that limit their powers, separate their private lives from official duties and require written documentation.[1]



Module 1



Max Weber, Sociologist
(1864-1920)

Traditional authority is based on a system in which authority is legitimate because it "has always existed". People in power usually enjoy it because they have inherited it. Officials consist either of personal retainers (in a patrimonial regime) or of personal loyal allies, such as vassals or tributary lords (in a feudal regime). Their prerogatives are usually similar to those of the ruler above them, just reduced in scale, and they too are often selected based on inheritance.[2]



Charismatic authority is based on the charisma of the leader, who shows that he possesses the right to lead by virtue of magical powers, prophecies, heroism, etc. His followers respect his right to lead because of his unique qualities (his charisma), not because of any tradition or legal rules. Officials consist of those who have shown personal devotion to the ruler, and of those who possess their own charisma.[2]



WHERE ARE THE FOOTNOTE REFERENCES?