

## Max Weber's Three Types of Authority

**Authority** refers to accepted power—that is, power that people agree to follow. People listen to authority figures because they feel that these individuals are worthy of respect. Generally speaking, people perceive the objectives and demands of an authority figure as reasonable and beneficial, or true.

Not all authority figures are police officers, elected officials or government authorities. Besides formal offices, authority can arise from tradition and personal qualities. Economist and sociologist Max Weber realized this when he examined individual action as it relates to authority, as well as large-scale structures of authority and how they relate to a society's economy. Based on this work, Weber developed a classification system for authority. His three types of authority are traditional authority, charismatic authority and legal-rational authority (Weber 1922).

**Weber** defines authority as legitimate forms of domination, that is, forms of domination which followers or subordinates consider to be legitimate. Legitimate does not necessarily imply any sense of rationality, right, or natural justice. Rather, domination is legitimate when the subordinate accept, obey, and consider domination to be desirable, or at least bearable and not worth challenging. It is not so much the actions of the dominant that create this, but rather the willingness of those who subordinate to believe in the legitimacy of the claims of the dominant.

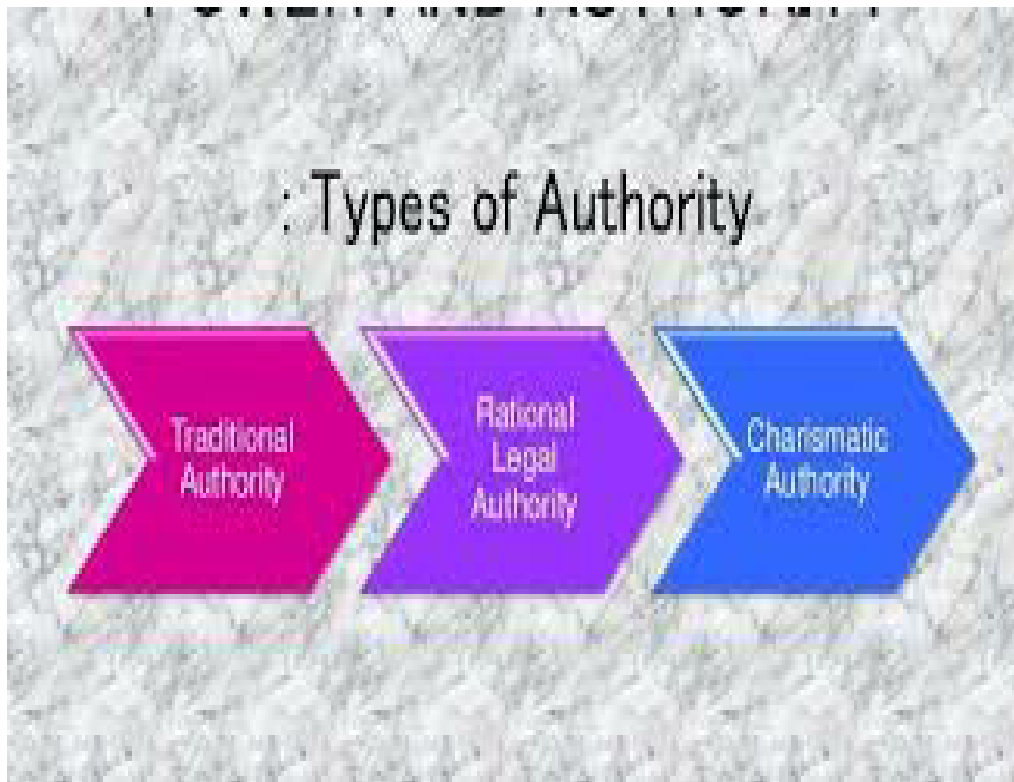
# Max Weber- Power & Authority

- Rational-Legal
- Charismatic
- Traditional Authority



The philosopher and sociologist [Max Weber](#) discerns the three types of authorities- [Traditional](#), [Legal-Rational](#), and [Charismatic](#); each of which correspond to a form of leadership that operate in a contemporary society. The one thing which is common in all the three authorities is “legitimacy.” A legitimate authority is justified by both the ruler and the ruled. Let’s discuss all the three authorities, given by Max Weber:

## : Types of Authority



## Types of Authority

**Authority** - accepted power, power that people agree to follow.  
Police officer, deputy, etc.

Not all authority figures elected officials or government authorities.  
**Authority can arise from tradition and personal qualities**

**Weber's Three Types of Authority** Max Weber identified and explained three distinct types of authority:

Traditional	Charismatic	Legal-Rational
Legitimized by long-standing custom	Based on a leader's personal qualities	Authority resides in the office, not the person
Historic personality	Dynamic personality	Bureaucratic officials
Patriarchy (traditional positions of authority)	Napoleon, Jesus Christ, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr.	U.S. presidency and Congress Modern British Parliament



## *Traditional Authority*

# Hereditary monarchy



**Traditional authority** can be defined as the power legitimized by respect for long-established cultural patterns. It comes from unwritten rules that are maintained over time. Leaders in traditional authority are people who depend on an established order or tradition. This leader is a dominant personality and the existing order in the society entrusts him the mandate to rule. Traditional leadership is reflective of everyday conduct and routine. People respect traditional authority because "It has always been that way."

The right of the king to rule is never open to any kind of questions. People following a ruler doing so in the erstwhile have bestowed the society with continuity and order. It's not just the tradition but also the stability of social order that is accepted. In a political system established on the basis of traditional authority, ancient customs legitimize authority.

**Examples-**: Hereditary monarchies, Roman Catholic Church, Tibetan Buddhism, etc.

### *Drawbacks of Traditional Authority:*

- Traditional authority is based on some dominant power.
- According to Max Weber, all forms of authorities exhibit some kind of domination.
- A traditional leader might exploit or rely on prevailing practices.
- A traditional authority may suffer from the lack of moral regularity in the creation of legal standards.



**Charismatic authority** can be defined as the power legitimized by exceptional, unusual, and extraordinary personal abilities which inspire devotion and obedience. Weber identified this extraordinary attribute as 'Charisma' whereas Robert Bierstadt called it leadership and not an authority at all.

Charismatic leaders are seen as people who are inspired by God or by lofty unsocial principles. The charisma of these leaders is enough and adequate to inspire their followers and make their authority seem legitimate.

While emphasizing the importance of tradition, Weber never

proclaimed that traditions are absolute. He only specified that the tradition is a rule and not an exception, but there are exceptions also. Weber used the phrase Charismatic authority to refer to such an expression. According to Max Weber, Charismatic authority believes in the personal and effectual devotion of the follower. It encompasses the power of speech and mind and the display of heroism.

It is important to note that in charismatic authority, the leader is believed to be magical by employing various tactics. The leader designs an army of true devotees to obtain perpetual support from the people.

**Examples-** History equips us with a list of classical examples of such leaders like Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi, Napoleon, Hitler, Mao, Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, Winston Churchill, and many more.

## *Drawbacks of Charismatic Authority*

- Charismatic authority is inherently unstable and mostly short lived.
- A charismatic leader holds a mission to unite his people amidst differences and adversities to attain an insurmountable goal.
- It has no rules or traditions to guide or monitors conduct; as it is based on the unique characteristics of an individual.



**Legal authority** can be defined as a bureaucratic authority, where power is legitimized by legally enacted rules and regulations such as governments. This form of authority is the one that is grounded and clearly defines laws with explicit procedures that define the obligations and rights. This is largely respected due to the competence and legitimacy that laws and procedures bestow upon the people in the authoritative position.

Contemporary societies depend on this form of authority; as the complexities require the emergence of bureaucracy that embodies systematization and order. Authoritarians can exercise power only within the legally defined boundaries.

According to Weber, "Legal authority rests in the enactment and its pure type is best represented by bureaucracy". The basic idea is that laws can be changed and enacted by formally correct procedures. The governing body here is either appointed or elected.

**Examples-** Elected Governments, Police, Courts, etc.

## *Drawbacks of Legal-Rational Authority*

- Legal-Rational authority manifests the power of bureaucracy over individuals.
- Bureaucracy may not be able to completely address the concerns or problems of everyone.
- Modern societies depend on legal-rational authority to figure out a common ground to achieve consensus, but consensus based on agreements lack flexibility which embodies the dominance of bureaucratic mentality for which the government services are often accused.

## *CONCLUSION*

Max Webber created the most common typology of authority. Each type of authority is legitimate since it involves both explicit and implicit consent of the governed. A clear hierarchy leads to an efficient organization, comprising of a legitimate and strong relationship between the followers and leaders.

Weber viewed the future as one where rational-legal types of authority would become more dominant. While a charismatic leader or movement might emerge, the dominant tendency was for organizations to become more routinized, rational and bureaucratic. It is in this sense that legal authority can be

interpreted. In modern societies, authority is in large part exercised on the basis of bureaucracies.

### Sources:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/144078336600200101?journalCode=josa>

<http://danawilliams2.tripod.com/authority.html>

<https://studiousguy.com/max-webers-three-types-of-authority/>

<https://www.slideshare.net/chandra1020/webers-theory-of-authority>

### References

*Giddens, Anthony, Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971.*

*Grabb, Edward G., Theories of Social Inequality: Classical and Contemporary Perspectives, second edition, Toronto, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1990.*

*Hadden, Richard W., Sociological Theory: An Introduction to the Classical Tradition, Peterborough, Broadview Press, 1997.*

*Ritzer, George, Sociological Theory, third edition, New York, McGraw-Hill.*

*Weber, Max, Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology, New York, Bedminster Press, 1968.*





