

# Can non-democratic regimes secure legitimacy

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Legitimacy is the belief that a leader or an institution has the right to govern. Max Weber, an acknowledged 19<sup>th</sup>-century social scientist invented a descriptive tool to comprehend how regimes obtained legitimacy. Three types were presented: traditional, legal-rational, and charismatic legitimacy. In a complex reality, this theory can only provide a basic understanding of different measures for regimes to acquire the consent of society to rule. Recognizing only three different types of legitimacy is insufficient. There are dozens of subgenres to Weber's initial theory, and each regime consists of several types of legitimacy types. However, the proportions of which type to draw on differs based on the cultural, economic, and historical context. This assignment will argue that; non-democratic regimes can secure legitimacy if the preponderance of the population believe they would be worse set in another system. In four supporting paragraphs, distinctive regimes, and their methods to winning their population over will be scrutinized. Furthermore, two opposing arguments that the legitimacy of a regime cannot be perpetual will be fended-off subsequently.

Legitimacy can be established through the performance of the government. By ensuring improved living conditions, lowering crime rates, reducing poverty, and thereby providing most of the population with the impression that their lives have changed for the better; one can receive the consent of being righteous. Most notably, this has been the case in recent decades in China (Zhu 2011). In the past few decades, China has experienced economic growth beyond comparison with any other nation in the world. Between 1978-2008 the annual growth in China's GDP was 9.59% compared to 1.9% in the U.S. (Wei and Hao 2010) and improved the living conditions for the main part of its population tremendously and created a swift reduction in poverty (Sen, 2006 p. 30). The support for Xi Jinping and the communistic regime is indisputable domestically (Cho, 2020), and why would the majority not see a government that has improved their lives in general as righteous? The Chinese people do not have the same sight upon the regime as the western world does, and the Chinese regime will remain legitimate in the eyes of their population if they prospectively provide prosperity and accomplish the goals of social security and economic growth.

A vindication to the continued success of the Chinese regime is secured through agenda-setting power. With the CCP regime operating for more than 70 years, they have not solitarily relied on economic performance, which would leave them fragile to economic repressions. Another aspect to consider is the ability to choose their own narrative; Even though a still-increasing number of the Chinese have achieved access to the internet they only get to experience a fraction of the internet

(Ferdinand et al., 2018 p.114). By surveilling online activity (Brady 2016) and banning western social media sites, the Chinese government can narrow the scope of opinions and secure that the people are unaware of events that is not in the regime's interest. A recent example of this phenomenon occurred when an NBA player displayed a shoe with illustrations supporting Tibet. Consequently, the operator pulled the Boston Celtic games from the broadcast (Zhong, 2021). Furthermore, the Chinese regime has a pattern of silencing political opponents or people who openly disputes regime's policies. Last year, the household example of this occurred when the founder of Alibaba, Jack Ma, disappeared for three months shortly after delivering a controversial speech criticizing China's financial system (Peach, 2021). By providing internet access for the people but not letting them see the bigger picture by means of censorship and surveillance, people might not know what they are missing out on and are genuinely grateful for their life improvements instead.

For an alternative method of securing legitimacy, one might look at Iran. Iran has successfully mixed subgenres of legitimacy; religious and nationalistic. An Islamic theocracy was established in Iran in 1979 and legitimized itself by its interpretation of the Quran. Understanding the spurs of the revolution is a complicated process - but extensive cooperation with both Israel and the U.S. had ignited a strong discontent in the population. The monarchy of that time could not provide jobs and favored Americans by providing them with immunity, e.g. Ayatollah Khomeini detected an opportunity for revolution and installed himself as the supreme religious leader with extensive capabilities such as overruling the parliament (Crane, 2008 p. xiv), which is a highly undemocratic feature. Furthermore, the Ayatollah has claimed the right to appoint the head of domestic news sources, where he can set the agenda to an anti-western (Cohen, 2015 p. 12) and nationalistic discourse, contributing to legitimizing the religious approach and, as a result; distancing the Iranian people from western ideas of society. As of 2008, around 89 percent of the Iranian population was Shi'ite Muslim(Crane, 2008 p.38); making it immensely homogenous religiously speaking, making the conditions for religious legitimacy advantageous. Having been exploited historically by both the Brits and the Americans for their oil, most Iranians may prefer autocracy based on religious and nationalistic legitimacy.

One of Max Weber's types of justification of a state is to be found in Russia. Putin has had the skill to build up a solid and masculine character with a working-class upbringing (Eksi & Wood, 2019,

p.2). Putin blasted onto the national scene in 1999 in the repercussions of a terrorist attack on government buildings. He symbolized a strong leader with aggressive rhetoric and a desire to rule with an iron hand, which gave him outstanding approval ratings (Loftus, 2019 p. 31). In the later years, Putin has successfully managed to tighten his grasp on power by nepotism, in other words; placing power and attractive opportunities in the hands of strategic allies and friends, explicitly by bestowing a close friend a lucrative construction deal ahead of the winter Olympics of 2014 for instance (Simon Shuster 2014). Moreover, Putin has created a hostile environment for political opponents by allegedly having opposition leader Navalny poisoned (The economist, 2021) and corporally harming critical journalists, severely challenging the free press (Loftus, 2019, p.37). One type of legitimacy usually does not come along singlehandedly, and this is not the case in Russia neither. Putin has legitimized a further centralization of power by lifting a large part of the Russians out of poverty, increasing the GDP, and socially manipulating the population with imperfect information

Relying on one form of legitimacy is almost without exception insufficient. For many years Venezuela used performative legitimacy to persuade its population to consent to the grasp on power by Hugo Chavez and later Nicolas Maduro. Venezuela has one of the largest natural resources of oil and the profit of the oil export was used to educate the population and reduce poverty. A mixture of eagerness to achieve economic accomplishments and creating international relations with other anti-American countries led to thoughtless economic policies and a lack of economic diversification. As an outcome the Venezuelan economy shattered when the oil prices dropped in 2013 and made the government unable to maintain the patron-client relationship with the citizens (Su et al. 2020). The faith of the Venezuelan government is now strictly in the hands of China (Corina Pons 2018), who exploit Venezuela for its strategic geographical position, securing previous loans and ability to deliver cheap oil. Venezuela relied strictly too much on constantly performing and did not guard itself against economic downfalls. If Venezuela had impeded the process of securing social stability and reaching economic growth to a more natural pace by stimulating other internal industries and had become less dependent on imports of essential goods; Maduro could perhaps still be considered legitimate today and enjoy the social support of the Venezuelan people. As Dahl said; “so long as the water is at a given level, political stability is maintained, if it falls below the required level, political legitimacy is endangered” (Jameson, 2021).

As previously mentioned, Max Weber had three different types of legitimacy: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal legitimacy. The successor of the sovereign is straightforwardly found in both the traditional and the rational-legal based legitimate system. Relying on charismatic legitimacy, on the other hand, has an obstacle; what to do when the charismatic leader chosen on the gift of grace deceases? Regimes can strategically try to implement routinization of charisma in society. In daily terms, this means to transform their legitimacy from being won over by charisma to tradition. An example of this phenomenon can be found in North Korea, where Kim-Jong-Un has successfully inherited the legacy from his father, who inherited it from his father, cult-of-personality figure Kim-Il-Sung (Yates, 2021 p. 8-12). Another example of smoothly transforming charismatic legitimacy into traditional legitimacy has been displayed in Cuba. It would only be appropriate to assume that when a charismatic leader demise, people would tend to be more responsive to new meanings and symbols. An explanation to the smooth transition in Cuba was Fidel Castro's ability to redistribute measures, which gave him credibility; an indicator of performative legitimacy (Hoffmann, 2009 p. 233). Furthermore, Raul Castro had been the right hand of Fidel Castro for plenty of years, and in case of the president's passing, the vice-president would be named his successor in accordance with the constitution; rational-legal legitimacy.

Establishing legitimacy can be done through many different methods. No regime examined in this assignment is purely based on one type of legitimacy but encompasses several types in various proportions depending on numerous factors such as economy, culture, and traditional context. China has mainly established its legitimacy by improving its citizens' living conditions and strategically controlling the media. Theocracy of Iran has legitimized itself through a more religious and nationalistic vision creating an 'us and them'-relationship with the western world. Putin initially received validation as a charismatic figure and provided economic growth by controlling the energy sector (Loftus, 2019 p.37) and rational-legal legitimacy by having elections. These elections are limited and are merely used to gain credibility externally and identify both support and opposition domestically (Gorokhovskaia 2019 p.977). This assignment is a simplistic overview of a more complex reality. To fully understand the process of the different regimes being portrayed legitimate, it would be crucial to scrutinize each regime's cultural, historical, and economic context. Moreover, much data would be based on assumptions because, that most regimes control the news flow, which practically means that the actual numbers for economic growth perhaps are not representative.

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