

## Analyse the relevance of Max Weber's types of authority.

19<sup>th</sup> century German sociologist, Weber, believed that the concept of authority was comprised of three branches: traditional, charismatic and rational-legal.

The first branch of authority was labelled by Weber as 'traditional authority'. This was based upon a belief in established customs and traditions. Those in authority expect obedience and loyalty on the grounds that established customs and traditions demand it. An example of this would be the constitutional monarchy of the United Kingdom. Within this system of government is the UK Constitution, which is based on written laws but also the acceptance of customs and traditions such as conventions. These are rules and norms of behaviour that are considered to be binding. For example, the monarch, by convention, must give their assent to Acts of Parliament. Only Queen Anne in 1707 refused to give assent to a parliamentary bill. This is significant as it shows that traditional authority is relevant today as the current British monarch, for instance, occupies a position that she inherited based on the traditional rules of succession for the monarchy. People adhere to traditional authority because they are invested in the past and feel obligated to perpetuate it. In this type of authority, a ruler typically has no real force to carry out his will or maintain his position but depends primarily on a group's respect.

Weber's second branch of authority is 'charismatic authority'. This type of authority depends on the special qualities of the leader. People are drawn to follow the leader because of the qualities they believe that he or she embodies. The appeal of a charismatic leader can be extraordinary, and can inspire followers to make unusual sacrifices or to persevere in the midst of great hardship and persecution. Charismatic leaders usually emerge in times of crisis and offer innovative or radical solutions. They may even offer a vision of a new world order. Hitler's rise to power in the post-war economic depression of Germany is an example. A more current example could be Donald Trump, who during the Presidential race in 2016, coined a clarion call of "Lock her up" and "Make America Great Again". Both of these campaign slogans (among others) were used with great effect to rally people behind his anti-Clinton message along with a commitment to improve the economic situation of millions of Americans mainly living and working in the so-called 'Rust-belt'. This shows that Weber's charismatic authority is relevant today and is a powerful political tool to gain support, loyalty and sometimes devotion. It could also be argued that in countries such as North Korea, charismatic authority is used in conjunction with traditional authority as the Kim dynasty: a three-generation lineage of North Korean leadership descended from the country's first leader, Kim Il-sung in the mid-1940s. By the 1980s, Kim developed a cult of personality closely tied to their state philosophy of *Juche*, which would later be passed on to his two successors: son Kim Jong-il and grandson Kim Jong-un. In this example, traditional authority is applied because the leaders demand

obedience and loyalty on the grounds of established customs and traditions, while charismatic authority is used to garner loyalty to the cult of personality.

The final branch of authority is 'rational-legal authority'. Rational-legal authority derives its powers from the system of bureaucracy and legality. This branch of authority depends on a formal set of rules which gives those who hold authority the right to direct and command others and to take decisions on their behalf. A democratic government can be said to exercise rational-legal authority because the electorate hands over power to it when they vote in an election. For example, for General Elections to the Westminster Parliament, the electorate may cast a vote for a political representative to make decisions on their behalf in the House of Commons. This is a form of representative democracy. States that use the rational-legal system are also entitled to use the legitimate use of force to ensure compliance. Most modern states use the rational-legal system of authority. An example of this would be the use of a police force and judicial system in the United Kingdom. In this example, the social norm is for citizens to accept and abide by a formal set of laws and they understand that if they do not there may be consequences if they are caught and brought to trial in a court of law where their fate will be decided by a judge/jury. Citizens largely accept and abide by laws and have little option but to accept judicial rulings, although there are occasions when this does not happen and therefore while rational legal authority exists in the United Kingdom there are pockets of society that may feel aggrieved and under-represented by the bureaucracy.