
Chapter 4

Democracy and

Legitimacy

Objectives

By the end of this lesson you should be able to describe:

1. legitimacy and democracy
2. three traditional sources of legitimacy
3. why is legitimacy hard to maintain in a democratic society with a capitalist economy
4. five different models of democracy in practice today



Legitimacy

It creates political order because most people **believe** it is the right system.

- When there is obligation, the state has authority to demand **obedience**.

Why do citizens **obey** the leaders of a country or the system of rule?

What kind of thinking convinces people to obey a government? In other words, how to create legitimacy?

Max Weber

Said legitimacy comes from three sources.

In other words, people obey a leader or political system -
for three 3 reasons

- traditional authority
- charismatic authority
- legal rational authority



(1) Traditional Authority

We should obey because it has always been that way:

- it's our tradition, our history
- ancestors believed it, so we should accept it as *right* as well

This type of legitimacy is common in countries with *hereditary* power.

- Saudi Arabia - monarchy with absolute power
- North Korea - family dynasty



(2) Charismatic Authority

We should obey because of the person's personality:

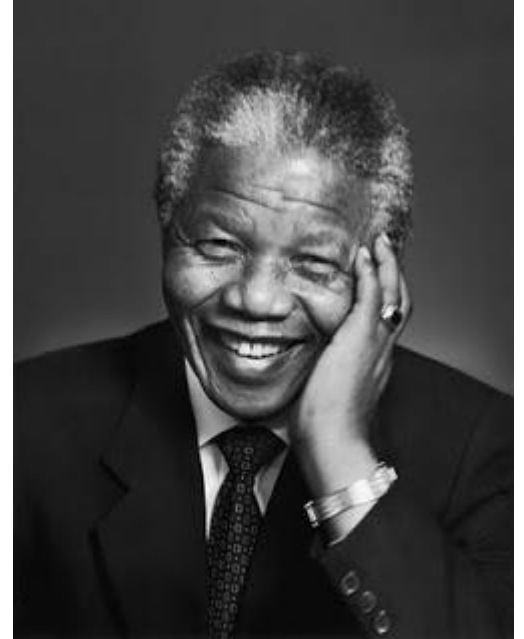
- strong ability to appear likeable or as a hero
- excellent speaking skills
- sometimes called *the cult of personality*
- not based on a system of rules and therefore has no limits
- hard to continue after death - though it continues with monarchy

Nelson Mandela

anti apartheid fighter, 27 years in prison

first black president of South Africa

Nobel Peace Prize, 1993



(2) Charismatic Authority



Martin Luther King, Jr

[“I have a dream.”](#)

250,000 people at Washington speech

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

(3) Legal Rational Authority

Legitimacy is based on belief in a set of rules or laws.

- rules create limits on power
 - often use constitution as basis for laws
 - creates large bureaucracy
 - common in most democratic countries
-

(3) Legal Rational Authority

Les Miserables

- Inspector Javert says “Right or wrong. The law is the law and it must be obeyed to the letter.”
- In the end, he can’t believe that idea anymore and kills himself.
- So, we ask, why should we obey the law?



Democracies Promote Legitimation

Three ways.

1. Consent. Participation in the process says people agree to be governed (e.g. voting and membership in action groups).
 2. Non violent conflict resolution. Conflict resolved peacefully builds trust in the government system.
 3. Feedback system. The people can change laws and policies by changing the representatives during elections. The system contains a process for adapting.
-

Challenges to Legitimation

Today, Marxists see a crisis in legitimation and capitalism.

- Modern liberalism is a system that legitimizes unfair class power in capitalism through democratic process, political parties, social welfare.

Here is the problem:

- Capitalism - does not need democracy to make a profit.
- Democracy - a system of political and social rights, which leads to more laws, less market freedom, more taxation and a bigger state.
- At some point, needs of capitalism will clash with needs of a democratic society.

All three aspects of promoting legitimacy - consent, nonviolent conflict resolution and feedback - help support and maintain legitimacy in society with inherent conflicts

Challenges to Legitimation

The logical end is a difficult choice:

- democratic society can't have an economic system based on private profit **and** social welfare rights
- in the end, the choice will be less freedom/social stability or economic collapse
- maintaining legitimacy will be impossible

Are western industrial societies starting to approach this end of legitimacy?

Example: US 2008 Financial Crisis

Banks and investment companies made bad investments

- US government: gave bailout money or face global disaster
- 2010, 10% of homes with a mortgage had [bank foreclosure](#), (5 million)
- US government spent [\\$7.7 trillion](#) to help banks and other companies.
- political crises in Europe
- bankruptcy of a country - Iceland

Did this economic crisis create a legitimacy crisis in the US?

What is Democracy?

Lots of different ideas and definitions.

- Generally has *consent* between the population and the state.
- Used so often - it has little meaning
- *cracy* means *power* or *rule*
- *demos* means *people*

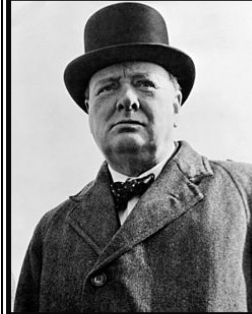


OF THE PEOPLE

Democracy for whom?

Most adults have the right to participate in government - but not always the case.

- ancient Greece had democracy but only free men over 20 could participate
- the vast majority of the population - women and slaves - were excluded
- 1948 women got right to vote in South Korea but does that mean women were fully able to participate in a free government?



It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried.

(Winston Churchill)

izquotes.com

How should democracy rule?

Direct Democracy - ancient Greek model

- workable if women stay at home and slaves do all the work - allow men to be free to debate politics and participate in government

Representative Democracy

- citizens vote for candidates who make decisions that affect their lives
- voting process is competitive and punitive



DEMOCRACY IN PRACTICE

Five different views about how democracy works today.

1. Pluralist
 2. Elitist
 3. Corporatist
 4. New Right
 5. Marxist
-

1. Pluralist

Many groups in society competing for influence.

- each has a voice in deciding government policies
- a favorite model for people for Americans who like to quote the Founding Fathers
- this system requires (a) power spread out over many groups, (b) a system that responds to people (c) access to government

Some observers say these conditions no longer exist in US. Power is concentrated and rules are manipulated to minimize access without money or knowledge - lobby groups.



2. Elitist

Power is concentrated in the hands of a few groups (plutocracy). These people are able to make laws in their interests.

- elites from big business, military and politics
- not a single group of people but instead various competing interests
- elections are about choosing which elite will run the country
- democracy is rule by politicians

YOU SIMPLY DON'T HAVE THE INTELLIGENCE
TO UNDERSTAND THE ISSUES SO LET ME DO
THAT FOR YOU..

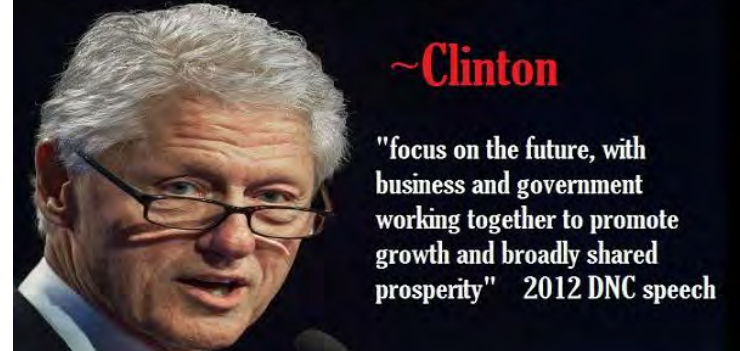


Obama is [criticized](#) for his connections with Wall Street bankers and the influence they have on US economic policies.

3. Corporatism

Government policy is created by three groups: business, workers and bureaucrats.

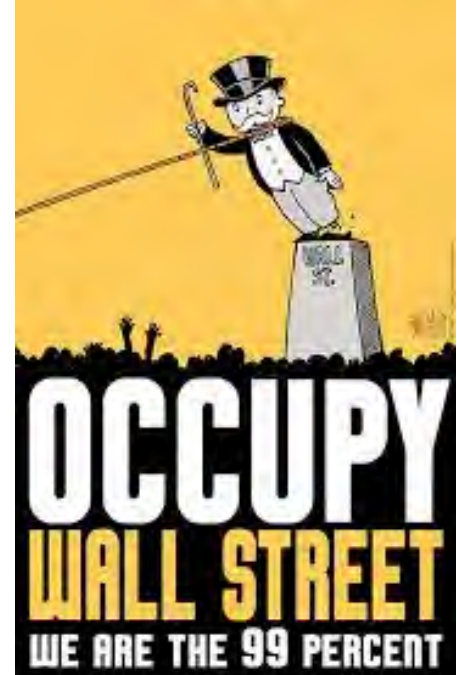
- used in post WW2 era with the belief state intervention in the economy was required
- merged business and government interests
- some say this is good way to bring all interests into government policy
- others say it's bad for democracy because interest groups have lots of power



4. New Right View

Conservatives don't trust democracy (or corporatism) because special interest groups might gain influence and power.

- special interests that favor social program can easily gain power, such as minimum wage law, social welfare, social health care
- fear **democratic overload** - special interest groups demand private benefits; state expansion because politicians need to over-promise to get elected
- these factors cause high taxation, more state spending that increases deficits and debt



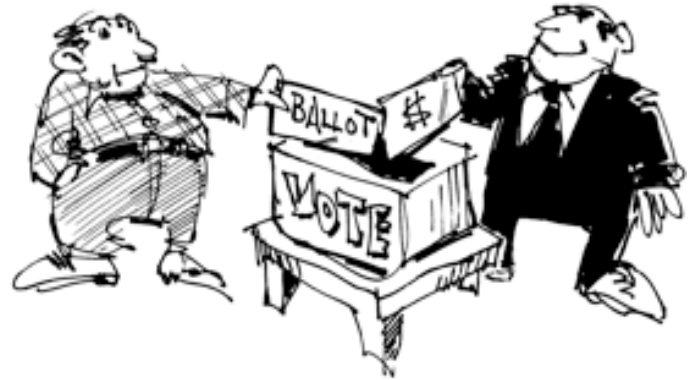
5. Marxist View

All power is unequally distributed. Moderate Marxists use the electoral system to reform the system, not cause a revolution.

- pluralism is impossible because power is based on class, which is based on the economic system.

See a conflict between democracy and capitalism

- liberal democracy promises political equality
- capitalism always brings social inequality



CONCLUSION

By now you should be able to define and describe:

1. legitimacy and democracy
 2. three traditional sources of legitimacy
 3. why is legitimacy hard to maintain in a democratic society with a capitalist economy
 4. five different models of democracy in practice today
-

Chapter 4 Vocabulary

- democracy direct democracy representative democracy
 - legitimacy revolution reform
 - crisis political equality social inequality
 - consent government overload
 - legal rational authority charismatic authority
 - traditional authority
-