

**BOŻENA IWANOWSKA**

University of Economics and Human Sciences  
ORCID: 0000-0003-1331-2866  
b.iwanowska@vizja.pl

**JULITA MAJCZYK**

University of Warsaw  
ORCID: 0000-0003-4166-4981  
jmajczyk@wz.uw.edu.pl

## **CONCEPTIONS OF POWER LEGITIMACY: TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING OF FUNDAMENTALS**

### **A b s t r a c t**

This scholarly article examines the conceptual frameworks and various typologies of power legitimacy. It stands out as one of the seminal works in delving into the dichotomous perspectives on legitimization, delineating its distinct theories and typologies. Specifically, it sheds light on the array of techniques and strategies employed by governing bodies within distinct political systems to substantiate and justify their authority. Each theoretical approach to power legitimacy is contextualized within its historical milieu, supplemented by empirical examples. This methodical arrangement and synthesis of knowledge provide the reader with a profound comprehension of the intricate interplay between the discussed conceptions of legitimacy and the dynamic, evolving trends in political systems over time. The article primarily serves as an integrative synthesis, amalgamating insights predominantly drawn from earlier scholarly monographs, which have significantly influenced and informed the authors' perspectives and conclusions.

**K e y w o r d s:** power legitimacy, political systems, theoretical frameworks, historical contextualization, legitimization strategies, scholarly synthesis.

## INTRODUCTION

In literature we can find many various legitimizing conceptions which are, in general, divergent. According to Tadeusz Biernat,<sup>1</sup> the divergence between them results from two different approaches to legitimacy. One of them assumes that legitimacy can be created (built) by power in the same way as support. The second approach assumes that creating legitimacy takes place outside arguments put forward by the ruling. The analogy is also seen in management science, where the image of entities is constructed. This internal image designed by the company creates an interpretive framework that facilitates the members of the organization's environment to perceive the entity. The external one is the result of how the environment perceives the organization's employees.<sup>2</sup>

In accordance with the first position, the political system (power) is legitimate mainly by the practice of socioeconomic life. The satisfaction of wide circles of society of the achievements of power builds an internal social peace and system legitimacy. To Rotschild,<sup>3</sup> the political system is so autonomous that it can itself create its legitimacy by the flow of time or by the effectiveness of its decisions.

The stand that is in conformity with the second approach is represented in our age by Habermas, who claims that the State can avoid to some extent the problem of legal validity. It is aimed at the separation of expressive symbols (that evoke the common readiness of obedience) from the instrumental functions of management.<sup>4</sup> This is reached through a symbolic use of consultation, experts' opinions, swearing-in ceremonies and advertising techniques that apply manipulation as through stimulating feelings and motives they positively judge some contents and deprive others of values. Organizations frequently

<sup>1</sup> Tadeusz Biernat, *Legitymizacja władzy politycznej. Elementy teorii* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2000), p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> Jane E. Dutton, Janet M. Dukerich and Celia V. Harquail, 'Organizational Images and Member Identification', *Administrative Science Quarterly* 39: 2, 1994, pp. 239–63, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393235>; Charles Fombrun and Mark Shanley, 'What's in a Name? Reputation Building and Corporate Strategy', *Academy of Management Journal* 33: 2, 1990, pp. 233–58; Dennis A. Gioia, Majken Schultz and Kevin G. Corley, 'Organizational Identity, Image, and Adaptive Instability', *The Academy of Management Review* 25: 1, 2000, pp. 63–81, <https://doi.org/10.2307/259263>.

<sup>3</sup> J. Rotschild, 'Legitymacja polityczna we współczesnej Europie', in Michał Ankwicz, ed., *Władza i polityka. Wybór tekstów ze współczesnej politologii zachodniej* (Warsaw: In Plus, 1988), pp. 63–64.

<sup>4</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Teoria i praktyka* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1983), pp. 463–64.

can buy pragmatic legitimacy by giving tangible rewards to particular constituencies. In contrast, moral and cognitive legitimacy involve more extensive cultural norms, and side payments that violate these norms often cause the organization to lose credibility and coherence, sometimes even in the sight of the favored constituency, itself. Furthermore, organizations can frequently gain pragmatic and moral legitimacy by actively participating in cost-benefit appraisals and ethical judgments primarily through explicit public discussion, but cognitive legitimacy involves unspoken orienting assumptions, and passionate defenses of organizational endeavors often endanger the objectivity and exteriority of such taken-for-granted assumptions.<sup>5</sup>

The primary aim of the article is to identify and analyze the diverse conceptions and types of power legitimacy. It aims to provide a comprehensive overview of various theoretical frameworks and typologies as they have evolved. The article seeks to clarify and connect these conceptions of legitimacy to specific historical, political, and social contexts.

The article employs critical literature review<sup>6</sup> as its primary research method. It involves a detailed theoretical literature review of various theories and conceptions of legitimacy. The authors have synthesized and critically analyzed the ideas and arguments from a wide range of sources, including the works of political theorists like Max Weber, Biernat, Jürgen Habermas, and others, to construct a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

In the scholarly exposition, the article predominantly adopts perceptive and analytical approach rather than concentrating on the empirical testing of a predefined hypothesis. Nonetheless, it implicitly encompasses a research hypothesis formulated in the conventional academic paradigm. This hypothesis posits that the conceptions of the legitimacy of power are characterized by a marked diversity and are intrinsically influenced by a multitude of factors, including historical, cultural, and political dimensions. The hypothesis underscores the complexity and multifaceted nature of legitimacy, suggesting that its understanding and interpretation are contingent upon the specific context and milieu in which power is exercised and justified.

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<sup>5</sup> Mark C. Suchman, 'Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches', *The Academy of Management Review* 20: 3, 1995, pp. 571–610, <https://doi.org/10.2307/258788>.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Garrod, 'What Makes a Good Critical Literature Review Paper?', *Tourism and Hospitality* 4: 1, 2023, pp. 141–47, <https://doi.org/10.3390/tourhosp4010008>.

One should emphasize that the authors writing about the types of legitimacy do not often invoke specific theories or conceptions of legitimation or consider legitimacy in the contexts of typologies. They describe, for example, legitimizing efforts or techniques of the ruling, applied by the authority of a given political system, or factors creating legitimacy. Therefore in this subsection the types of legitimacy described in literature are not connected with specific conceptions of legitimacy.

## THE CONCEPTIONS AND TYPES OF POWER LEGITIMACY

1) **The traditional conception of legitimacy** determines criteria resulting from tradition. Fulfillment of these criteria is essential to obtain legitimacy. Legitimacy is received by the authorities if they are characterized by 'divine origin, divine calling, divine inspiration' or if the laws of nature, laws of history, human laws, long tradition are attributed to them.<sup>7</sup> This conception appeared, for example, in the theocratic theory of the feudal state, in which the justified rule was the will of God. Other theoretical models of society or states assumed compliance with power, seeking the guarantor of 'a social contract' (in Thomas Hobbes' or Jean-Jacques Rousseau's presentation).<sup>8</sup>

2) **The liberal-democratic conception of legitimacy.** It is included in the liberal theory of democracy (the consent theory). The authors of this conception, for example Alexis de Tocqueville, think that power is legal (legitimate) if it guarantees a conscious participation of citizens in socio-political life and gains an active support of citizens. The submissiveness or passive consent is not regarded as a source of legitimacy.

According to this conception, a source of power is a deliberate decision of citizens who reduce their freedom and admit the ruling the right to rule, recognizing their authority as legitimate. The citizens agree on the rule of the powerful when they have confidence in them, when they regard them as credible. A shared interest of both parties of the power relationship relies on it.

Along with the development of capitalism, the ideas of the traditional conception were rejected, especially by the bourgeois. Thus the ideas of free competition and even chance at amassing

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<sup>7</sup> Wojciech Sokół, *Legitymizacja systemów politycznych* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1997), p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

capital were initially the legitimizing formula of capitalism. Only with time the ideas of a parliamentary democracy, equal rights as well as universal suffrage have cleared the way for them. It was then when the ideology of liberalism was becoming equally common. This political movement proposed an alternative system based on the rule of law and on the constitution containing individual liberties. As far back as the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the liberals were against universal suffrage what was justified with the lack of appropriate sociopolitical knowledge and the lack of property, i.e. of economic independence. The above mentioned objections were connected with a known problem of buying voters' votes (after Mark Suchman,<sup>9</sup> that is pragmatic legitimacy).

Only in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there appeared a process of gradual approaching of democracy and liberalism till the final fusion of both these political trends.

Democracy has never been a typically uniform system. There existed various democratic doctrines that referred especially to the experience of the French Revolution and American experience. However, democratic institutions and procedures in liberal democracies proved to be effective at creating power legitimacy. The democratic formula of legitimacy with the reflection of individual types of legitimacy (for example, electoral one, participatory one) has become the basis for identifying democracy with capitalism.

3) **The Weberian conception of legitimation.** Its author, Weber,<sup>10</sup> stated that:

[T]he subjective meaning of a social relationship will be called an 'order' only if action is approximately or on the average oriented to certain determinate 'maxims' or rules. [...] An order which is at adhered to from motives of pure expediency is generally much less stable than one upheld on a purely customary basis through the fact that the corresponding behaviour has become habitual. The latter is much the most common type of subjective attitude. Bad even this type of order is in turn much less stable than an order which enjoys the prestige of being considered binding, or, as it may be expressed, of 'legitimacy'.

And also:

[T]he social order is rightful, if at least a part of society, and especially the very ruling elite, recognizes it as 'exemplary' and 'binding' [...], and other social

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<sup>9</sup> Suchman, 'Managing Legitimacy'.

<sup>10</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: The Free Press, 1964), pp. 124–25.

groups are not integrated by an alternative vision of social order, recognized as more 'exemplary' and 'binding'.<sup>11</sup>

It results from the above that social beliefs are an essential element of this conception. In his theory of legitimacy Weber<sup>12</sup> formulated three types of the legally binding (legitimized) authorities: traditional, charismatic, legal. The traditional authority is discussed above where the traditional conception of legitimacy is presented. The charismatic authority combines power and political leadership. A leader is characterized by such qualities as: self-confidence, ability to speak to large audiences, ability to present one's personality and ideas on television, ability to manage stress (not to get depressed, not to break down), being psychologically strong.<sup>13</sup>

One of Weber's followers develops the idea of charisma writing:

People submit themselves to such a leader because they submit themselves to the belief in the phenomena which confirm his extraordinary characteristics. They abandon established laws and submit themselves to a new order proclaimed then by the leader.<sup>14</sup>

According to Biernat,<sup>15</sup> Weber used the notions: ancestral charisma, inherited charisma, charisma of the office. That is, in the Weberian conception charisma was institutionalized and had reference to ancestral, monarchist and church institutions hallowed by an eternal tradition. The legal type of rule assumes universal convincing about the precedence of a legal system. Legal power is the one which is based on legal norms.

One should allude that Weber's theory had and still has a great impact on the development of the research on the legitimacy of power. His approach to the legitimation of power, expressed mainly from the point of view of its sources, became a point of departure for creating new conceptions and theories of legitimation.

<sup>11</sup> Wojciech Lamentowicz, 'Kulturowe aspekty legitymizacji monocentrycznych struktur politycznych', in Andrzej Rychard and Antoni Sulek, eds, *Legitymacja. Klasyczne teorie i polskie doświadczenia* (Warsaw: Polskie Towarzystwo Socjologiczne and Instytut Warszawski, 1988), pp. 77–79.

<sup>12</sup> Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays on Sociology*, eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

<sup>13</sup> Jerzy J. Wiatr, *Przywódstwo polityczne. Studium politologiczne* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo WSHE, 2008), pp. 81–84.

<sup>14</sup> Anna Wierzchowska, 'Konceptualizacja pojęcia legitymizacja', in Konstanty A. Wojtaszczyk, ed., *Legitymizacja procesów integracji europejskiej* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, 2006), pp. 37–38.

<sup>15</sup> Biernat, *Legitymizacja władzy politycznej*.

Weber's followers share a view according to which social beliefs constitute a basic component of a power relationship. It is noticed in the definitions of legitimacy (presented in subsection 1) the authors of which are, for example, Seymour Martin Lipset, Robert Dahl, and Habermas.

4) **The behavioral conception of legitimacy.** At its base there are interests in the stabilization of the political system as well as in the ways of obtaining legitimacy in all the sorts of political systems.<sup>16</sup> This conception puts emphasis on a physical and psychological attitude of society towards behaviour according to the expectations of power aimed at its legitimacy. Therefore amongst agents legitimizing power there are also chosen as justified: physical constraints, diverse forms of psychological manipulation and motivating with appropriate symbols. The behavioral conception allows for the legitimization through co-opting or it treats co-opting as a specific belief.<sup>17</sup>

It seems that the behavioral conception does not attract followers at present because understanding legitimacy in the contemporary world is based mainly on a positive attitude taking into account that society, granting legitimacy to the powerful, makes it according to own evaluations and beliefs of every citizen, without the participation of compulsion or violence.

5) **The conception of legitimization through non-Marxist historical materialism (by Leszek Nowak).** The author determines legitimacy as social credibility.<sup>18</sup> For citizens, a ratio of the number of power decisions accepted by citizens to a common number of decisions taken by authority is a measure of power credibility. The higher the ratio is, the higher level of power reliability is and all the more the citizen feels respectful to the authorities and their decisions.

The author claims that authority reaches legitimacy also on the plane of citizens' confidence in power. This confidence is dependent on the relation between the forces of the powerful and the forces of the subordinate. The author determines this relationship with the name of civil alienation meaning political autonomy, understood as the alienation (disintegration) from power. In society, a relation between the degree of power credibility and the height of civil alienation is

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<sup>16</sup> Sokół, *Legitymizacja systemów politycznych*, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>18</sup> Leszek Nowak, 'Przyczynek do krytyki liberalistycznej teorii władzy', in idem, *U podstaw teorii socjalizmu: Droga do socjalizmu. O konieczności socjalizmu w Rosji*, vol. 2 (Poznań: Nakom, 1991), pp. 279–92.

expressed by the level of power legitimacy. The legitimacy of power measured with the degree of its credibility is high in the state of a class peace when the authorities (being the organizer of social life) limit minimally civil autonomy. As state interference extends to new fields of social life, citizens' political autonomy is reduced and the height of civil alienation is increased what, as a result, leads to the fall of the level of legitimacy which achieves the lowest level in a revolutionary state.

Further increasing of the level of civil alienation contributes to the increase of power credibility, or its legitimacy which attains the highest level in a state of declassing. It happens so for two reasons: 1) elimination and victimization by the special services of citizens who are critical of the government and pose a potential threat to it, 2) concealing one's political beliefs and declaring others by people remaining at large.

From Nowak's line of argument it results such a conclusion that power which does not exceed its authority in the organization of social life, gains credibility, and consequently – legitimacy what means in practice that the democratic system easily obtains legitimacy. Paradoxically, it is also possible in a coercive (authoritarian, undemocratic) system.

**6) The system conception of legitimation (by David Easton).**

In this conception legitimation is treated as the effect of functioning of a political system. Legitimizing beliefs can be referred to different objects what influences strengthening or weakening bonds in a given political system. The author distinguishes three types of legitimation: ideological, strategic and personal. The ideological legitimation takes place when power is referred to values and principles on the basis of which the approval of the system takes place on the side of the ruled. This type of legitimation includes: 1) specifying purposes and principles of functioning of the system as they regulate relationships inside and outside the system; 2) determining ideals, purposes and principles of the system that are of help at the interpretation of the past, constitute the basis for the assessment of the present time and chart the directions of action in the future.

The structural legitimation consists in convincing that the structure character and system principles are valid, legal and law-abiding.

The degree of legitimacy obtained, for example, by political authority depends among others on the position held by them and norms on the basis of which



they reached this position, as well as to what degree their power is based on these norms in the functional meaning.<sup>19</sup>

The personal legitimation manifests itself in the personality of the authorities, their behaviour and in the manner of political action. In Easton's view, when the level of personal legitimacy is high, the authorities do not fall down, even if they infringe norms of the system. Moreover, the author claims that each of the types of legitimation mentioned above influences the remaining two. Thus legitimacy is subject to a permanent verification.

7) **The conception of the State's self-legitimation.** Its author, Niklas Luhmann, thinks that one should consider legitimation from the point of view of the power relation occurring between the legitimized subject (the ruling) and the legitimizing subject (the ruled). He negates the adequacy of the types of legitimacy presented in literature for a complicated social reality because it excludes the possibility of legitimizing the subject by itself, i.e. the self-legitimation. Luhmann claims that 'legitimation under modern conditions can only be self-legitimation'.<sup>20</sup> He justifies his position as follows:

[...] every system must overcome this threshold of impossibility being exposed to legitimization from outside. And if there are more than one legitimizing authority the system must alone choose by whom—or transferring it into the language of values: through what value—wants to be legitimized. Only one step from here to the statement that every legitimation is a self-legitimation, in addition, it must externalize itself.<sup>21</sup>

The author clarifies the problem of self-legitimation through social policy on the example of a social safety state. Such a state comes into existence as a result of increasing processes within a welfare state. Thus the social safety state becomes the subject of the highest level of legitimation for action that legitimizes the state.

8) **The conception of legitimation through convictions (by Seymour Martin Lipset).** Its subject is a belief which the author of the conception treats as the base of his definition of legitimation. He determines it as 'the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most

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<sup>19</sup> Sokół, *Legitymizacja systemów politycznych*, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *Political Theory in the Welfare State*, trans. John Bednarz Jr. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Idem, 'Samolegitymizacja państwa', trans. J. Górski, *Colloquia Communia* 41: 6, 1988, p. 158.

appropriate ones for the society'.<sup>22</sup> In such a presentation above all the way of solving essential problems which create divisions in society determines the level of the legitimation of a political system.

9) **The conception of legitimation through reflective action (by Włodzimierz Wesołowski)**. This conception is Weberian in its heart of hearts. Its basis is the existence of legitimizing belief associated with reflective action. This is the action which is determined by a legitimizing belief. It gives rise to behaviour orientated positively to power and power relationships. Unreflective behaviour is scarcely some knowledge that one must obey power, and reflective behaviour assumes rational embracing of the entirety of conditioning its action and its consequence.<sup>23</sup>

10) **The moral conception of legitimation (by Eiki Berg)**. The author claims that legitimized objects are, to some extent, accepted but not every approval creates legitimacy. Legitimacy is connected with people's opinions, rather than only with their behaviour which is based on another type of approval. Thus, legitimacy means that its causes have a moral character. According to Berg,<sup>24</sup> '[t]hat something is legitimate means that is morally accepted, regarded as morally acceptable (A morally accepts X = A regards X as morally acceptable)'. So Berg, levelling down legitimation to a moral acceptance, combines it with the values which form the basis for making power rightful (legally valid).

11) **The conception of legitimacy through economic efficiency (competence)**. According to Lipset, in short periods the lack of system efficiency can be compensated by a high level of legitimacy. In longer periods, in turn, effectiveness creates legitimacy and contributes to system stability. The effectiveness of long standing is tantamount to a constant economic development.<sup>25</sup>

Other authors also confirm the thesis that system effectiveness (its efficiency) contributes to its legitimacy. Among the representatives of this direction of thinking there are also Joseph Rotschild, Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell. To the first of them, legitimacy is

<sup>22</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man. The Social Bases of Politics* (New York: Anchor Books, 1963), p. 64.

<sup>23</sup> Włodzimierz Wesołowski, 'Weberowska koncepcja legitymizacji: Ograniczenia i kontynuacje', in *Legitymacja. Klasyczne teorie i polskie doświadczenia*, p. 42.

<sup>24</sup> Eiki Berg, 'The Meaning of Legitimacy', in Dag Anckar, Hannu Nurmi and Matti Wiberg, eds, *Rationality and Legitimacy. Essays on Political Theory* (Jyväskylä: Finnish Political Science Association and Gummerus Printing, 1988), p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *Homo politicus: Społeczne podstawy polityki* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1995), p. 82.

dependent on efficiency and the government should confirm public opinion in conviction that it is the natural order of things.<sup>26</sup> Almond and Powell<sup>27</sup> maintain that 'even in the most traditional societies there exist some expectations that are built in legitimacy norms and concern long-lasting system effectiveness'. Piotr Pacewicz<sup>28</sup> expresses a similar opinion. He claims that legitimacy is reached by political order on account of its effectiveness in satisfying social needs and efficiency in management.

In the literature on the subject attention is paid to the fact that economic efficiency (effectiveness) is often the most important legitimizing argument in undemocratic political regimes.<sup>29</sup>

**12) The attributive conception of legitimacy (by Tadeusz Biernat).** This type of legitimacy is connected with the recognition of the existence of political power as part of a social system.

The attributive character of legitimacy [...] is showed in situations when society (individual groups) 'give' power some features, attributes, i.e. they ascribe it features or perceive and recognize it. The most important, however, is the fact of the recognition of existing such a relationship that can be subject to 'strengthening'.<sup>30</sup>

The attributive legitimacy, through various kinds of strengthening and supplement, creates a diverse degree of power legitimacy, from a minimal level to a relatively high one.

The attributive approach to legitimacy refers to the charismatic conception of Weber. Biernat claims that there are some differences between the attributive perspective of legitimacy and Weber's charismatic one. These differences are presented by Edward Shils<sup>31</sup> who argues that he wanted to go outside the sources of charisma from Weber's point of view (monarchical, ecclesiastical, ancestral ones) and to reveal charisma in a wider perspective, in actions of secular institutions which are regarded as free from charisma.

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<sup>26</sup> Rotschild, 'Legitymacja polityczna we współczesnej Europie', pp. 63–64.

<sup>27</sup> Gabriel Almond and Bingham G. Powell, 'Legitymizacja systemu politycznego', in Michał Ankwicz, ed., *Władza i polityka. Wybór tekstów ze współczesnej politologii zachodniej* (Warsaw: InPlus, 1988), p. 56.

<sup>28</sup> Piotr Pacewicz, *Pomiędzy myślą a rzeczywistością. Rewolucja społeczna jako zjawisko psychologiczne* (Wrocław, Warsaw, Cracow, Gdańsk and Łódź: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1983).

<sup>29</sup> Jacek Tarkowski, *Socjologia świata polityki. Tom 1: Władza i społeczeństwo w systemie autorytarnym* (Warsaw: ISP PAN, 1994), p. 61.

<sup>30</sup> Biernat, *Legitymizacja władzy politycznej*, p. 159.

<sup>31</sup> Edward Shils, 'Charisma, Order, and Status', *American Sociological Review* 30: 2, 1965, p. 199.

The a. m. position—as Biernat<sup>32</sup> continues—widens the notion of charisma. All the signs of genius such as scientific discoveries, ethic proclamations, artistic work, political and organizational power and leadership are counted by Shils to charismatic categories. Such aspects of genius can be achieved through wisdom, self-discipline, artistic expression, of sound mind and body, confident effective action transforming reality. Thus Shils ‘makes us aware of the presence of charisma in the contemporary world and makes it evident’.<sup>33</sup>

Another reference in Shils’ consideration is the need of order. This need is felt by the people who feel lost in the world full of social problems. Those who make order express or symbolize the essence of a well-ordered field. That is why charismatic characteristics are attributed to them. Such phenomena are explained by certain associations—if the highest forces supervise natural order they make it in society as well. Therefore power is legitimate by charisma which is ascribed as an additional attribute.

There are two sources of charismatic power. The first one is a determined historical situation (a crisis situation) of a social group requiring extraordinary actions. The second source is the existence, in this group, of the belief in the interference of external forces which are independent of the human being.

**13) The constitutive conception of legitimation (by Biernat).** Treating power in terms of a relationship takes into consideration the behaviour of the subjects of a power relation. The criterion for distinguishing a constituting legitimacy is the relation of political subjects (the powerful ones and the subordinate ones) in which asymmetry appears.

Biernat<sup>34</sup> holds a view that the analysis of a relational character of power comprises three sectors of analysis. The first one refers to accessible limits of power. These limits are determined by the complexity of a power relationship and its reference to reality. The point is that social reactions to real actions of power are compared with the norms and rules set down by its fulfilled political functions. The second sector takes into account contrasting the experiences of power (resulting from real actions within a power relationship) with the idea of power whose basis is both normative (legal and customary) and ethical. So, power should have its justification also in a system of

<sup>32</sup> Biernat, *Legitymizacja władzy politycznej*, pp. 163–64.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

values. The third sector forms a level of becoming conscious as for the degree of co-operation constituting power.

According to the author of the conception:

[t]he essence of the constituting conception is a continuous shaping the contents of the existing power relation. In this meaning legitimacy constitutes this relation in a particular way. Every time power is 'defined' (in the form of reminding, confirming the definition) and confronted with an assumed goal.<sup>35</sup>

The author explains the thing as follows:

Power is legally valid not because (and more strictly speaking, not only because) it is based on a recognized and accepted basis but because in the application of power in a smaller or greater degree we can find the grounds and justification of the existence of that type of relation.<sup>36</sup>

The constitutive legitimation along with the attributive one contributes to the state of legally valid power that is continuously changing. It indicates that this type of legitimacy has the character of a process.

The constitutive legitimation comes down to taking a position 'on law determining the limits and functions of power'.<sup>37</sup> And the legitimizing belief in the legitimacy of legal norms concerning the actions of the subjects of a power relation builds power legitimacy 'through a test of lawfulness that takes place through the confrontation of behavior, within concrete actions, [...] with a normative legal standard'.<sup>38</sup>

14) **Organizational legitimacy (by Mark C. Suchman).** The assumption of the accuracy of actions, the adequate response of the leader in relation to the system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions constructed by social actors is called legitimacy. The level of recognition of the leader and his/her position in the organization's environment, among other things, affect the organizational legitimacy, i.e. the evaluation of its actions through the prism of accepted those selected norms and values inherent in social actors. Suchman identified three types of organizational legitimacy: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive.<sup>39</sup>

Pragmatic legitimacy is based on the self-interest calculation of the most immediate public of an organization. Socially constructed

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Suchman, 'Managing Legitimacy', pp. 577–84.

type of pragmatic legitimacy can be influence legitimacy. In this case, voters do not necessarily support an organization because they believe it offers a specific and favourable exchange, but because they believe that it responds to their larger interests.

Moral legitimacy reflects positive normative assessments of organizations and their activities. Normative legitimacy makes it possible to assess whether the organization realizes the stakeholders' worldview and whether it acts in accordance with the accepted norms and values inherent in social actors. The reputation-building process itself, however, is a long-term one, and the selected entity to which it applies is affected over a longer time horizon. According to the rationalist mythology of the modern order, organizations should be judged on their achievements and be regarded as consequential legitimacy. In addition to generating socially useful consequences, organizations can also obtain moral legitimacy by adopting techniques and processes accepted by society, termed as procedural legitimacy that is more significant in the absence of clear outcome measures. In terms of structural/category legitimacy, i.e. third type of moral legitimacy, audiences view organizations as valuable and worthy of support because of their structural characteristics, because they are located in a category of taxonomic categories favoured morally. The fourth type of moral legitimacy—personal legitimacy—lies in the charisma of individual organizational leaders. Thus, it is relatively temporary and arbitrary.

The image of a leader created on the basis of certain information, symbols and his/her actions, accepted or rejected by stakeholders who have decided on this acquiescence based on their own experience, is called the expansion of public support, or cognitive legitimacy. This involves either affirmative support for the organization or mere acceptance as necessary or inevitable of the organization. In this case two variants are particularly important: the legitimacy based on understanding and the legitimacy based on entitlement.

**15) The conception of multidimensional legitimation.** The authors, Henryk Domański and Andrzej Rychard, are of the opinion that legitimacy is often mixed with the acceptance of power (a political system). They illustrate this thesis with examples from the latest history of Poland. The government of Wojciech Jaruzelski

[...] enjoyed acceptance among a large part of the Polish society but it was not legitimate. Speaking in Weber's language—in the 1980s that government lost its claims to legal validity because they stopped to be in effect in the face

of economic inefficiency and non-ossification of the system. That is why we dealt with the crisis of legitimacy. These relations were shaped *vice versa* in the Polish Third Republic [...] Exceptionally low reputation in public opinion did not deprive them [the governments of the Polish Third Republic – B.I.] of the role of being legitimate representatives of the nation's will.<sup>40</sup>

It is about the Polish governments from the periods 1997–2001 and 2001–2005.

The scholars think that

[A] strong legitimacy is only when the conviction of the justice of rules is linked with a common approval of the methods of gaining them and the behavioural signs of acceptance—[...] the very acceptance would be an evidence of a weak legitimacy.<sup>41</sup>

The scholars argue further that legitimacy without acceptance is possible and that 'the very acceptance is not a sufficient condition of legitimacy'.<sup>42</sup> As a result, the authors perceive three dimensions of legitimacy: 1) the dimension of indications of power acceptance, 2) the dimension of the rules of gaining legitimacy, 3) the dimension of convictions.

In conclusion, one should notice that depending on the contents of legitimizing arguments different authors apply diverse criteria of differentiating the types of legitimation / legitimacy. Thus it is possible to find in literature some other types of legitimation / legitimacy like: legal (standard), historical, moral, sociological, participatory, and technocratic.

## EVALUATION AND THEORETICAL STANCE OF THE AUTHORS

The article provides a comprehensive panorama of legitimacy concepts, organized using specific criteria such as historical development, theoretical underpinnings, and practical implications. Each concept is illustrated with pertinent examples from political practice, offering a tangible understanding of how these theories manifest in real-world scenarios.

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<sup>40</sup> Henryk Domański and Andrzej Rychard, 'Wstęp: O naturze legitymizacji i jej kryzysów', in idem and Henryk Domański, eds, *Legitymizacja w Polsce. Nieustający kryzys w zmieniających się warunkach?* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2010), p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 8–9.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

**Traditional Conception.** This view, rooted in historical and divine principles, can be exemplified by monarchies that base their legitimacy on lineage and divine right. The British monarchy, for instance, historically claimed divine sanction for its rule.

**Liberal-Democratic Conception.** This conception, focusing on citizen participation and support, is exemplified by the functioning of modern democracies like the United States, ombudsman offices, where power legitimacy stems from free elections and the active engagement of citizens.

**Weberian Conception.** Weber's tripartite classification can be seen in various historical contexts. Traditional legitimacy is exemplified by tribal societies with hereditary leadership. Charismatic legitimacy is evident in transformative leaders like Nelson Mandela, while legal legitimacy is represented by contemporary democratic states governed by rule of law.

**Behavioral Conception.** This approach, emphasizing societal attitudes towards power, can be observed in totalitarian regimes where legitimacy is maintained through propaganda and psychological manipulation, as was the case in Nazi Germany.

**Non-Marxist Historical Materialism (Nowak).** This concept, focused on social credibility and citizen confidence, can be illustrated by the Scandinavian welfare states, where high levels of public trust in government correlate with policy decisions.

**System Conception (Easton).** Easton's framework can be applied to the European Union, where legitimacy is derived from a complex interplay of ideological, strategic, and personal factors across a supranational governance structure.

**State's Self-Legitimation (Luhmann).** An example of self-legitimation can be seen in autocratic regimes like North Korea, where the state seeks to legitimize itself through a narrative of self-reliance and nationalistic ideology. Can be found also in studies related to corporate social responsibility or business strategies in diverse political environments. Companies often develop strategies to operate effectively within the legal and political frameworks established by states, including those that engage in self-legitimation efforts.

**Legitimation through Convictions (Lipset).** This can be seen in democratic systems where the belief in the appropriateness of political institutions, like the United States Constitution, underpins their legitimacy.



***Legitimation through Reflective Action (Wesołowski).*** Reflective action is evident in social movements that challenge existing power structures based on a shared belief in social change, such as the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.

***Moral Conception (Berg).*** This is exemplified by ethically driven political movements or leaders who derive legitimacy from moral or ethical principles, such as Mahatma Gandhi's leadership in India's independence movement.

***Legitimacy through Economic Efficiency.*** The rapid economic development of countries like Singapore underlines this conception, where legitimacy is closely tied to economic progress and efficiency. Among companies known for their efforts in economic efficiency could be listed Tesla, Amazon, and Toyota.

***Attributive Conception (Biernat).*** This is evident in charismatic leaders who are attributed extraordinary qualities by their followers, like Fidel Castro in Cuba or Steve Jobs, the co-founder of Apple, whose vision and innovative approach to technology garnered a strong following among Apple employees and consumers.

In synthesizing these conceptions, this article authors' position aligns closely with the multidimensional approach proposed by Domański and Rychard. The essence of legitimacy, in the authors' view, cannot be confined to a singular dimension. Instead, it must be understood as a multifaceted construct that incorporates traditional, legal, charismatic, and democratic elements, among others. This perspective recognizes that legitimacy is a dynamic concept, shaped by an interplay of various factors including historical context, societal values, economic conditions, and political structures. It acknowledges that different societies and political systems may prioritize different aspects of legitimacy, and that legitimacy itself can evolve over time as these factors change.

Thus, the essence of legitimacy, as this study concludes, is best captured by a holistic approach that appreciates its inherent complexity and contextual variability.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article has meticulously charted the diverse terrain of power legitimacy conceptions, offering a nuanced analysis that weaves together various theoretical frameworks. The study substantiates the hypothesis that conceptions of power legitimacy are indeed multifaceted

and context-dependent, significantly influenced by a confluence of historical, cultural, and political factors. This exploration underscores the inherent complexity and multidimensionality of legitimacy, highlighting that its nuances are deeply embedded in the specific socio-political context in which power is exerted and validated.

In tracing the evolution of legitimacy conceptions, the article notes a transition from traditional views, anchored in historical and divine precepts, to contemporary perspectives emphasizing legal norms, democratic principles, and societal consent. This shift mirrors a broader transformation in socio-political thought, moving from hierarchical constructs to systems that are more participatory and inclusive. The integration of liberal-democratic ideals signifies a crucial shift in the understanding of legitimacy, evolving from a state of passive acceptance to one characterized by active citizen participation and engagement.

The article pays homage to Max Weber's seminal work, highlighting his tripartite categorization of legitimacy into traditional, charismatic, and legal forms. Weber's focus on the role of social beliefs in legitimizing authority remains pertinent in modern political contexts, attesting to the enduring impact of his theoretical contributions.

Additionally, the study delves into the less dominant but insightful conceptions of legitimacy, such as behavioral approaches and non-Marxist historical materialism. These perspectives shed light on the dynamic and fluid nature of legitimacy, illustrating how it is continuously shaped and reshaped by ongoing societal interactions and perceptions.

The increasing significance of organizational legitimacy in contemporary governance structures is also a focal point of this study. Drawing on the work of Suchman and others, the article illuminates the intricate interplay between individual and collective beliefs, organizational conduct, and societal values in the construction of legitimacy.

Moreover, the concept of multidimensional legitimacy, as proposed by Domański and Rychard, offers a pragmatic lens through which to comprehend legitimacy within complex societal frameworks. Their approach is particularly pertinent in the analysis of contemporary political systems, advocating for a comprehensive examination that incorporates various societal, political, and economic dimensions.

In synthesizing these diverse conceptions, the article underlines that legitimacy is not a singular, monolithic entity but rather a mosaic

composed of various ideologies and principles. Each facet contributes uniquely to the broader understanding of power dynamics. This rich tapestry of legitimacy conceptions, interwoven through historical evolution and theoretical discourse, opens new avenues for academic exploration and practical application. As the political landscape continues to evolve, the insights gleaned from this study will be invaluable in navigating the intricacies of power legitimacy across varied socio-political contexts.

In its comprehensive coverage, this study has identified and delineated fourteen distinct conceptions of power legitimacy. From traditional conceptions rooted in divine sanction and historical precedent, there has been a notable progression towards models founded on democratic processes and liberal values. These latter conceptions have coalesced into a dominant democratic-liberal trend, increasingly recognized for its efficacy in establishing power legitimacy. Other conceptions extend beyond these frameworks, acknowledging the significance of a ruler's charisma, legal norms, and the crucial balance in the power-society relationship. This balance is often gauged through societal support metrics, such as opinion polls, levels of civil alienation, social divisions, and economic efficiency indicators.

However, the article posits that it is impractical to assert the supremacy of any single legitimacy conception over others. Entities, particularly those in positions of power, must identify and align with legitimacy sources and mechanisms sanctioned by law, custom, economics, or even religious beliefs. This alignment must be contextual, in harmony with the entity's objectives, to ensure continued impactful interactions within their environment. This study, therefore, not only enhances our comprehension of legitimacy in its varied forms but also serves as a guiding framework for entities navigating the complex domain of power dynamics.

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