

## 1.8 Political Legitimacy

Describe the sources of political legitimacy for different types of regimes among course countries. Complete the chart below and give an example of the current leadership of each state.

States require legitimacy to maintain rule over a population. States attempt to give direction to people in all sorts of ways, and compel them to do things they may not otherwise do. What allows the state to do this is the perception of the public that the state has legitimacy, which means that the people accept the right of the state to rule over them. Max Weber identified three types of legitimacy that states have possessed historically.

### TRADITIONAL LEGITIMACY

- The legitimate political rulers acquired their status and power through old traditions that are simply being maintained for consistency and predictability in the present. This is exemplified by the tradition of hereditary monarchies wielding political power across much of the world hundreds of years ago. Leadership was a product of birth simply because that was the way it always was. Often times, traditional legitimacy was justified through religious lore or legend, claiming that one individual or family had been chosen by God, or that a sword was given to a great conqueror by the Lady of the Lake.
- Examples of rule by traditional legitimacy in our studies will include England before and through its gradual transition into a democratic state, imperial czarist Russia, dynastic China, and Iran before 1979.

### CHARISMATIC LEGITIMACY

- It is also referred to as a personality cult, exists when a single individual so captures the loyalty and attention of the people that the individual leader alone now serves as the basis of the legitimacy of the state. This is often the case in the aftermath of a revolution in which a leader gains a reputation as a great hero of the people and rides the wave of popular support up to the point of exercising complete political power. Charismatic legitimacy is often fostered through manipulating a leader's public image to portray him as the embodiment of all that is good in the nation.
- Examples of charismatic legitimacy in this class will include Stalin's totalitarian Russia, Maoist China, and Ayatollah Khomeini's rule in Iran after the Islamic Revolution.

### RATIONAL-LEGAL LEGITIMACY

- It exists in a state where formal understood legal practices and rules of the political game determine who wields political power and when. Leaders exercise power under the terms of the political rules, usually defined in a constitution. Even unpopular leaders continue to rule and exercise political power when they are still serving a defined term of office. The legal rules of the regime - rather than moment-by-moment preferences of the public and those in power - determine how power is acquired and used.
- In our countries of study, Britain has a long tradition of rational-legal legitimacy rooted in its unwritten constitution, while the other five states are in a variety of places along the continuum trying to develop rational-legal processes.

Place the **remaining five states** along the rational-legal legitimacy continuum and **give a reason for each**.

