

**Charismatic Leadership and Democratization:  
A Weberian Perspective**

By Michael Bernhard  
Associate Professor of Political Science

The Pennsylvania State University

Program on Central and Eastern Europe Working Paper Series #43

**Abstract**

Given the history of charismatic dictatorship in this century, charismatic leaders have been seen as threats to democracy. At the same time, periods of accelerated political change, such as the period of post-Communist democratization in Eastern and Central Europe, also give rise to charismatic leaders. This paper establishes the conditions under which charismatic leaders are compatible with democracy. Using a framework drawn from Max Weber's sociological writings, the paper argues that charismatic leadership is only compatible with democracy when charisma is routinized in a rational-legal direction. In that routinization, however, rational-legal procedures (the rule-boundedness of power) must predominate over charismatic elements (the arbitrary and personal exercise of power). When this balance is reversed the result will be dictatorship. This discussion highlights the fact that both modern dictatorship and democracy legitimate themselves by a combination of charismatic and rational elements. It then considers whether Weber's theory can help us to understand the impact of the charismatic leadership on post-communist democratization by considering the experience of Havel in the Czech Republic, Walesa in Poland, and Yeltsin in Russia. It concludes with a discussion of charisma and its role in both democracy and dictatorship in the contemporary era. It finds that the similarity in the way in which modern democracy and dictatorship are legitimated augurs better for the viability of authoritarian regimes than the many recent accounts predicting a diminished prospect for dictatorship in the current era might suggest.



## CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP AND DEMOCRATIZATION: A WEBERIAN PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>

Michael Bernhard  
Associate Professor of Political Science  
The Pennsylvania State University

### Introduction

In at least three cases of democratization in Eastern and Central Europe, charismatic leaders have played an important role in overthrowing the old regime and in shaping the pattern of new institutions. In addition to Lech Wałęsa in Poland, Václav Havel of the Czech (and formerly Slovak) Republic, and Boris Yeltsin of Russia, can be classified as charismatic leaders with little controversy. While there are other charismatic leaders in the region, most of them are in countries that experienced authoritarian regime change (e.g. Milosević in Serbia and Tuđman in Croatia), and thus fall outside the topic of this paper.

Yeltsin's emergence as the dominant figure in Russia, after successfully leading efforts to thwart the attempted hard-line coup d'etat in August 1991, mark him, like Wałęsa as a heroic leader who emerged in the heat of a pivotal struggle. No particular heroic act, like Wałęsa's leadership of the strike at the Lenin Shipyard in 1980 or Yeltsin's resistance, catapulted Havel to the center of politics in his country. The acknowledgment of Havel by the crowds during the Velvet Revolution of 1989 was based on his long record of principled resistance to the repressive normalization pursued by the Husák regime in the aftermath of the Prague Spring. Havel thus differs from Yeltsin and Wałęsa in that his appeal is that of a

morally exemplary figure, rather than that of a hero in a time of struggle.

Despite their pivotal roles in the demise of the communist regimes in their countries and their leadership during key phases of the democratization process, none of these leaders has been fully successful in translating their visions for their respective countries into reality. In two years time Yeltsin found himself engaged in a destructive struggle with the legislature which was only resolved by force. Under the new Russian "superpresidential" constitution, power is so concentrated in an executive that is highly insulated from parliament, that the democratic nature of Russian institutions can be treated as an open question.

Havel's political fortunes have also been rocky since his ascension to the *Hrad* on December 29, 1989 and his address to the nation on New Year's Day 1990. The Czechoslovak presidency was a weak office and he was unable to prevent the dissolution of the federation. While Havel was subsequently elected President of the Czech Republic (the head of state), the Prime Minister (the head of government) holds the more powerful office. Havel has struck a solid moral pose similar to that which his friend von Weizsäcker struck in Germany. There is however no doubt that Prime Minister Václav Klaus has had much more influence in shaping the Czech Republic.

As for Wałęsa, his push to assume the presidency in 1990 should be acknowledged as the proximate cause for the end of the limits on democracy posed by the Roundtable Agreement (Bernhard, 1996). It is also clear that a range of ambitions and considerations beyond a commitment to democracy also played a role in his actions (Kurski 1991, 1992). Yet success under routine conditions, if it is defined as effectively exercising power and maintaining it, has eluded Lech Wałęsa. Since his replacement by Alexander Kwasniewski, he has retained a

prominent political profile, but was not the moving force behind the recent success of Solidarity camp in the recent parliamentary elections.

In the Polish context the combination of charismatic leadership and regime change is nothing new. It was also a central factor in the birth and death of Poland's short-lived interwar democracy. Piłsudski's role was decisive in the reconstitution of the Polish state and its rebirth as a democracy in the period from 1918-22. The interwar constitution was purposefully shaped by the right without a strong independent executive or a predominant figure in the military in order to diminish his power. This in combination with the fragmentation of the party system and nagging socioeconomic problems (economic reconstruction and integration, deficits and inflation, land reform, minority issues) made the new Polish parliamentary system ineffective, and thus prepared the way for Piłsudski's coup d'etat in 1926.

Despite the seeming importance of charismatic leadership in many cases of democratization (or in the breakdown of democracy for that matter), the main schools of thought offering explanations for the emergence of democracy fail to consider "idiosyncratic, case-specific" phenomena like the role of leaders.<sup>2</sup> Yet given the record in Poland and Eastern and Central Europe, it would seem that to fully appreciate the processes involved in and the chances of success for democratization in the region, we need to have a more systematic understanding of the potential role of charismatic leadership. The greatest contribution to our understanding of charisma as a social force has been the work of Max Weber. His sociological writings on charisma will serve as the point of departure for this paper.<sup>3</sup> After surveying Weber's analysis of charisma, this contribution will access what his writings tell us about the relationship between charisma and democracy. It will turn then to the question of the impact

of the charismatic leadership of Lech Wałęsa, Václav Havel, and Boris Yeltsin on post-communist political developments in their countries. It will conclude with a discussion of charisma and its role in both democracy and dictatorship in the contemporary era.

### **What is Charisma?**

Charismatic domination is one of three ideal-typical forms (along with traditional and rational-legal) that Weber developed to understand legitimate domination. In his sociology ideal types are analytic constructs which accentuate various characteristics of "more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena." They are precise and unambiguously-defined abstractions derived from real phenomena, i.e. not descriptions, which in turn can be compared to reality to understand the mechanisms at play in a given situation (Weber 1949 :89-92, 1978 :20-1). Thus charismatic, traditional, or rational-legal legitimate domination hardly, if ever, exist in pure form. They are useful standards which can be compared and contrasted to reality in order to understand which of these elements are at work in systems of legitimate domination.

Weber defines charisma as follows (1978 :241-2):

The term "charisma" will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them

the individual concerned is treated as a "leader." [...] How the quality in question would be ultimately judged from any ethical, aesthetic, or other such point of view is naturally entirely indifferent for purposes of definition. What is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his "followers" or "disciples."

Charismatic leaders share an intense personal bond with a following that believes in their extraordinary qualities. Because of this they have a powerful say in the shape of the social formations over which they preside. Weber attributes the power to "reveal" or "ordain" "normative patterns" and/or "order" to them (Weber 1978 :215-6).

Weber also specifies three important accompanying characteristics of charisma. The first two explain why he attributed such transformational power to leaders who possess charisma and the third points to the limitations of power based on it. First, charismatic domination is a response to unusual circumstances. Second, as a response to such conditions, it is revolutionary in nature. Third, it is inherently unstable. In this last regard, it does not matter whether charismatic leadership is successful. Whether a leader is victorious or vanquished, charisma itself is relatively short-lived.

Weber (1978 :1121) describes the origins of charismatic domination:

Charismatic rulership in the typical sense described above always results from unusual, especially political or economic situations, or from extraordinary psychic, particularly religious states, or from both together. It arises from

collective excitement produced by extraordinary events and from surrender to heroism of any kind.

Thus, it is not the personality of a ruler in itself which gives rise to charismatic domination. The nature of the situation in which charismatic rulership arises, one of fundamental distress in the existing state of affairs, sets the stage for a potentially charismatic figure to emerge.

Charisma responds to the unusual circumstances that have called it into being by destroying existing norms and transforming old values. Weber calls it "the great revolutionary force" of periods of traditional rule. It is not the only force in Weber's sociology that is subversive of tradition; "instrumental rationality" (Zweckrationalität), which underlies rational-legal domination, also is revolutionary with regard to tradition. However, charisma and rationality undermine tradition in different ways. Charisma works directly on the individual to change his/her orientation internally. It replaces traditional rules and norms with a new faith (Weber 1978 :245 & 1115-6).

Instrumental rationality, on the other hand, revolutionizes human existence "by altering the situations of life and hence its problems, finally in this way changing men's attitudes toward them..." It changes the conditions of life and humans are forced to adapt to them. Corresponding beliefs follow only in time. With respect to the external environment, charisma's ability to revolutionize "from within," in contrast, seeks to alter "material and social conditions to revolutionary will." Because of this difference, charisma is not only revolutionary with respect to tradition, but can be disruptive of rational-legal rule as well (Weber 1978 :245 & 1116-7).



For Weber all "Charismatic authority is naturally unstable" (1978 :245 & 1114). This is not only because its exceptional character requires ongoing proof. Even if charismatic authority proves itself for a period of time and successfully alters the conditions that called it into existence, it faces inescapable pressure that strips it of its revolutionary impetus. Weber calls this "the routinization of charisma." Thus even a successful charismatic leader will rule for only a short time on the basis of charisma in its pure form.

First, let us consider why charisma has this burden of proof and why this makes it inherently unstable. The exceptional qualities that inspire belief in a charismatic leader are seen by followers as a "gift" [often divinely bestowed in pre-modern cases] (Weber 1978 :1112). The gift has a specific purpose -- to right the troubles, distress, or crisis which led to a leader's emergence -- a "mission" (Weber 1978 :1117). The gift and the mission are inescapably and continually in tension with each other in charismatic domination. The gift exists in order to fulfill the mission, and failure to do so undermines its credulity. Weber points out that this saddles charismatic leadership with a demanding performance criterion: "If proof and success elude the leader for long, if he appears deserted by his god or his magical or heroic powers, above all, if his leadership fails to benefit his followers, it is likely that his charismatic authority will disappear" (1978 :242). Failure to fulfill the mission has the direct effect of undermining belief in the leader's gift, and in turn, destroys the power of charisma.

But further, even charisma that fulfills its mission, according to Weber, is doomed from the outset: "Every charisma is on the road from a turbulently emotional life that knows no economic rationality to a slow death by suffocation under the weight of material interests: every hour of its existence brings it nearer to this end" (1978 :1120). In its earliest and purest

phases, charisma eschews material concerns beyond those necessary to support the mission, e.g. "booty" for bands of heroic warriors. With success, comes a yearning for normal life and a desire among members of the charismatic community (e.g. staff, disciples, party workers) to realize their material interests (Weber 1978 :245-6 & 1121).

With this transformation, charismatic authority becomes institutionalized and routinized. In this process it moves in the direction of the other two bases of legitimate domination; it becomes traditionalized, rationalized, or some combination of the two. Thus, charismatic domination exists in a nearly pure form only "in statu nascendi." With routinization, charisma comes to be "fused with them [mb--institutions and routines] in the most diverse forms so that it becomes a mere component of a concrete historical structure." Charisma's remnants become imbedded in the institutions and practices of a new order. Charismatic domination only persists in those aspects of the new order which can be analytically traced back to their charismatic roots<sup>4</sup> (Weber 1978 :246 & 1121).

### **Can Charismatic Leadership Lead to Democracy?**

A great deal of the literature on charisma treats it as an antidemocratic force.<sup>5</sup> Intellectually, this is understandable as a response to the rise of numerous destructive modern dictatorships, often on a charismatic basis, since World War I.<sup>6</sup> Many recent studies tend to stress the authoritarian side of charisma by discussing dictators and cult figures such as Hitler, the Reverend Moon, the Ayatollah Khomeini, Mussolini, Charles Manson, Jim Jones, and Sukharno (Lindholm 1990, Willner 1984, Glassman and Swatos 1986).<sup>7</sup>

For Weber, however, charisma does not necessarily have dictatorial ramifications.

Gerth and Mills even go so far as to argue that charisma "serves... as a metaphysical vehicle of man's freedom in history" for Weber (1946 :72). The question of whether charisma will have democratic or dictatorial ramifications though is a question of how charisma is routinized. Traditional domination will be the likely result if charisma is enshrined as the basis of a new revealed truth. This is no basis for modern mass democracy. However, if charisma is routinized in a rational-legal direction, the issue is much less clear cut. Rationalized charisma as Weber understands it holds out the prospect for modern democracy. The decisive factor is the way in which the rational and charismatic combine in the post-revolutionary system of domination.

In his discussion of the routinization of charisma, Weber uses a number of modern examples, including both dictatorships and democracies. In discussing Napoleon, for instance, Weber talks of how his rise to power showed it was possible "for the strictest type of bureaucracy to issue directly from a charismatic movement..." (1978 :263). Leninist parties also showed a marked proclivity toward post-revolutionary bureaucratization. This combination of charismatic appeal and bureaucratic administration is typical of many forms of modern dictatorship. Jowitt (1983) has shown that Soviet-type bureaucracies can become neo-traditional when they hold power for extended periods.

While charismatic leadership often produces non-democratic forms of government, Weber argues that charisma potentially has democratic ramifications (1978 :267):

The basically authoritarian principle of charismatic legitimation may be subject to an anti-authoritarian interpretation, for the validity of charismatic authority

rests entirely on the recognition by the ruled, on "proof" before their eyes. To be sure, this recognition of a charismatically qualified, and hence legitimate, person is treated as a duty. But when the charismatic organization undergoes progressive rationalization, it is readily possible that, instead of recognition being treated as a consequence of legitimacy, it is treated as the basis of legitimacy: democratic legitimacy.

For this to occur the recognition that followers bestow upon leaders must be stripped of its magical or exemplary character. With this, the "proof" that a leader must demonstrate takes on a new significance. Instead of it being incumbent on followers or disciples to recognize the charismatic quality of a leader and submit to his or her domination, leaders must secure the approval of the ruled in order to exercise domination. In this way the proof that charisma demands may be rationalized into the formal reflective consent that underlies legitimacy in democratic regimes.

Mass approval in itself does not automatically translate into democracy. Dictatorship may be even more popular than representative democracy. As a basis for legitimate domination mass approval does not necessarily entail formal institutions designed to regularly elect leaders on the basis of full and free suffrage or any of the other minimal conditions for representative democracy. Weber discusses charismatic leaders who seek democratic legitimacy yet who do not rule democratically when he introduces the concept of plebiscitary leadership as a transitional form from pure charismatic to democratic legitimacy. He notes that "it is always present where the chief feels himself to be acting on behalf of the masses and

is indeed recognized by them." Such plebiscitary ratification of domination does not meet criteria of fair suffrage, and voting often takes place after leaders have taken power by force.

Weber (1978 :267) notes:

Regardless of how its real value as an expression of the popular will may be regarded, the plebiscite has been the specific means of deriving the legitimacy of authority from the confidence of the ruled, even though the voluntary nature of such confidence is only formal or fictitious.

Plebiscitary leadership is thus a form of dictatorship that "hides behind legitimacy that is formally derived from the will of the governed." Weber mentions revolutionary dictators like Cromwell, the leaders of the French revolution, and the two Napoleons as modern examples (1978 :268).

For democracy to exist, clearly something more than the popular acclamation of a dictator is necessary. Greater routinization in a rational-legal direction must take place. Weber speaks of how plebiscitary leadership can ultimately develop into modern democracy (1978 :1127):

Acclamation by the ruled may develop into a regular electoral system, with standardized suffrage, direct or indirect election, majority or proportional method, electoral classes and districts. It is a long way to such a system. As far as the election of the supreme ruler is concerned, only the United States

went all the way -- and there, of course, the nominating campaign within each of the two parties is one of the most important parts of the election business. Elsewhere at most the parliamentary representatives are elected, who in turn determine the choice of the prime minister and his colleagues. The development from acclamation of the charismatic leader to popular election occurred at the most diverse cultural stages, and every advance toward a rational, emotionally detached consideration of the process could not help but to facilitate this transformation.

Thus for Weber, legitimate democratic domination does not exist as an ideal type in itself. It contains at least a mixture of both rational-legal and charismatic elements.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, modern forms of dictatorship also rely heavily on charismatic elements in order to legitimate themselves. However, the degree to which representative democracy relies on rational-legal procedures is much greater.<sup>9</sup> The decisive factor distinguishing it from plebiscitary dictatorship is the fact that elections have become regularized and routinized, and thus competitively elect, not just ratify, rulers. The understanding that modern dictatorship also seeks to establish democratic legitimacy, is born out by and helps to explain the mania with which dictators stage plebiscites with ridiculously high rates of turnout and approval.

[Figure One about here, filename: figure.1]

The arguments on the instability of charismatic domination and its ramifications for

regime type presented in the two sections above are summarized in figure one. Should charismatic leadership fail to fulfill the mission, the gift will come to be questioned by the following and it will begin to fall away. Fulfillment of the mission leads to routinization. The directions depicted in the figure are simplifications in that many real forms of domination (including democracy) sometimes combine elements from all three ideal-types. Traditionalization leads to traditional forms of rule (patrimonialism, hierocracy, sultanism, caudillismo, cacicismo etc.).

Rationalization on the other hand can lead to a number of different outcomes. When charismatic elements (the arbitrary and personal exercise of power) predominate over institutionalized rational-legal procedures (the rule-boundedness of power) the result is plebiscitary rule, one of the bases of modern dictatorship. When the opposite is true (when rational-legal elements predominate over the charismatic), Weber argues that the potential for democracy exists. However, there seem to be a number of other elements that must come into play for democracy to result. This situation might be better described as the basis for rule of law, of which democracy is only one variant. In cases where competition excludes part of the population (competitive oligarchy or "racial" democracy) or formal democracy is constrained by tutelary powers, institutional defects, or other restrictions ("limited" democracy, *democradura*) less than fully democratic forms of rule of law are possible. Thus democracy is but one form of rule where the rational-legal predominates over the charismatic. Finally, both plebiscitary rule and non-democratic forms of rule of law can, given the right circumstances, develop into forms of neo-traditional rule.

## **Charisma and Democratization in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Russia**

This section will consider the problems posed by charismatic leadership for democratization, specifically what it means for charisma to be routinized in rational-legal direction. It will then assess whether this is happening in the Czech, Polish, and Russian cases. This consideration of these three cases is meant to serve as a preliminary test of the utility of Weber's theory of charisma in understanding contemporary democratization.

Democratization necessitates a transformation of the power of charismatic leaders. First this power must be subjected to rational-legal constraints. Second, the bonds of the charismatic community must be transformed into the reflective consent that underpins democracy.

First, democracy subjects the power of charismatic leaders to the constraints of rational-legal rule. In democracy charisma's moment of greatest potency is during elections. Mobilizing supporters to the polls is when charisma has its greatest impact in democratic politics.<sup>10</sup> Once elected to power a charismatic leader faces the same constraints that any other official in a rational-legal system faces. There are well-specified rules and regulations that elected officials, even those elected to the supreme office, must obey.

Second, democracy changes the nature of the relationship between a charismatic leader and his/her followers. By standing for office in competitive elections he/she transforms his/her charisma into popularity in pursuit of the support necessary to rule in a mass polity. This transformation brings a purposeful acceleration of the process whereby the onus of proof in the charismatic bond is rationalized into the formal reflective consent that democracy demands. This negates the obligation of obedience that falls on followers. It is rationalized



into the regular periodic consent of the governed produced in competitive democratic elections.

Further, the pursuit of an office which must be won and periodically renewed by the vote means that leaders must not only be concerned with the loyalty of his/her followers, but of the broader electoral public, which does not share the bond of the charismatic community. This opening up of leadership to popular ratification by all citizens and not just by a charismatic following is a necessary part of institutionalizing a mass democratic system. The leader comes to be evaluated on the basis of performance in power under routine circumstances by the whole of the electorate. It is at this juncture that material interests of followers and other constituencies, as well as other mundane concerns come into play.

The understanding that democratization necessitates a transformation of the power of charismatic leaders sheds light on the roles that Wałęsa, Yeltsin, and Havel have played in leading their respective nations since the fall of communism. Havel in many ways is the least problematic case. By choosing occupy an office, the Czech Presidency, which has little executive power, he has removed himself from the struggle for power. He instead has made his mark by using this office to morally exhort his countrymen to act with decency.

The real source of power in the Czech system is the Prime Ministership. Had Havel desired political power he would have had to have followed the path that Václav Klaus took, taking hold of as much of Civic Forum as possible, turning it into a party, and leading it to victory in general elections. Havel curiously has maintained the basis of his charismatic power, an outsider's moral perspective on politics, by holding a position with little power of office. He has eschewed the partisanship of party, in order to try to be the country's moral compass. This moral perspective has far less power to mobilize than it did in November 1989.

Yeltsin has taken a much different path. His pursuit of power has proved to be problematic for democracy. Differences soon emerged between Yeltsin and the parliament of the Russian Federation, the body which elected him to the Russian presidency and served as his base of power in resisting the hardline coup d'etat in 1991. After suppressing and dissolving the parliament in 1993, Yeltsin promoted and won a superpresidential constitution. While the new parliament was elected in fully competitive conditions (something which the previous parliament was not), the executive, the directly-elected president and the government responsible to him, has extensive autonomy from the parliament. In this way Yeltsin has largely insulated his power from anything but direct plebiscitary ratification. He has opted for power over democracy, and this means that the charismatic element in his power has not been fully constrained by rational-legal elements, making it problematic to say that Russia is democratic. If this tendency is not reversed, Russia will most likely become a plebiscitary dictatorship or a non-democratic form of rule of law.

Wałęsa was as interested in maintaining his power as Yeltsin, yet lost it. Wałęsa's climb to power in 1990 placed him in a presidential office which was constructed to reassure the Soviets as the Polish Communists attempted to salvage something of their power through reform in 1989. When these arrangements were fully democratized by elections in 1990 and 1991, Wałęsa was but one dyarch in a semi-presidential system in which he often found himself sharing power, more often than not, with prime ministers (e.g. Olszewski, Pawlak, and Oleksy) with whom he had an adversarial relationship.

Ultimately Wałęsa found himself in an office where his power was constrained and his popularity plummeted. Despite his continual attempts to establish precedents for expanding

the scope of his power and his strong opposition to governmental policies with which he did not agree, he passed the ultimate test of a democratic charismatic leader. When his charisma failed him in electoral competition, he left office.

What is most puzzling about Wałęsa and Yeltsin as leaders interested in directly exercising political power is their conspicuous failure to attempt to organize political parties to support their ambitions. As Weber pointed out in an essay written in a conspicuously political moment, the party is the best vehicle for political leaders to pursue power in a democracy (1946 :102-3 & 113). While some say this reticence is logical when "party" has been so discredited by long years of party-state rule, this has not stopped large numbers of Yeltsin's and Wałęsa's national compatriots from voting for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation or the Social-democracy of the Republic of Poland. Rather, both Yeltsin and Wałęsa have tried to portray themselves as defenders of national interest above the narrow interests of parties and politicians. This strategy is a pipe dream. It is impossible to pursue and exercise power and not be partisan. The only way to be above politics is to relinquish direct political power in the way that Havel has.

### **Conclusion: Democracy, Dictatorship, and Charismatic Legitimation**

While it has been established above that charismatic leadership can be compatible with democratic rule, it is by no means incompatible with dictatorship either. It also has been shown that democracy is legitimized with constant recourse to electoral procedures which entrap the principle of charismatic affirmation within a rational-legal framework (though in practice almost all democracies also incorporate traditional elements as well). Democracy

cannot legitimize itself without this charismatic element.

One rather unexpected result of this investigation is the finding that many forms of modern authoritarianism, notably plebiscitary rule, also legitimize themselves by a combination of charisma and rational-legal procedures. The difference is the degree to which charismatic power has been effectively subordinated to rational-legal controls. This insight pertains directly to the debate on the questions of authoritarian viability and the alternatives to democracy in the contemporary age.

Beginning with Fukuyama (1989) a large number of observers have either discounted the viability of non-liberal-democratic systems (Plattner 1991, Nyong'o 1992, Krauze 1992) or noted the growing difficulties in legitimating authoritarianism (Pye 1990, Huntington 1991). While Fukuyama (1995) has qualified his position and others have pointed out serious problems with it (Schmitter 1995; Melzer, Weinberger and Zinman 1995), Weber's insights on the legitimation of democratic and plebiscitary authoritarian systems elucidate a neglected aspect of this debate.

The position that there are no alternatives to liberal-democracy or that authoritarian systems cannot legitimate themselves boil down to the same argument -- only liberal-democracy can legitimate itself in the present era. Yet this reconsideration of Weber's theory of charisma reminds us that many forms of modern authoritarianism and democracy legitimate themselves in similar fashions -- through a combination of charismatic appeals and rational-legal procedures. While there may no longer be a modern alternative model to the combination of liberal-democracy and capitalism, authoritarian leaders can utilize any number of issues -- nationalism, order, substantive justice, tradition, economic necessity, national security -- to

justify the abrogation of formal democracy while claiming that this is in the interest, or for the common good of the people. Any number of recent cases of authoritarian development can be cited -- Albania, Algeria, Belarus, Croatia, Nigeria, Peru, or Serbia to name but a few. Such rationalizations for authoritarian rule are made in the guise of popular will. Even when dictators demonstrate their popularity by plebiscitary means, they do not rule democratically because of the absence of rational-legal constraints on their power. It does not matter that there is no ideology that poses a global alternative to liberal-democracy. Future authoritarian regimes will justify and legitimize themselves in the guise of democracy.

## NOTES

1 . The author wishes to thank Paula Golombek, Jan Kubik, Nancy Love, Krzysztof Jasiewicz, Jens Drews, Kurt von Mettenheim, Lawrence Scaff, and Mel Kohn for comments on earlier drafts of this paper, as well as Brian Smith for his help in the preparation of figure one. All responsibility for errors or omissions remain those of the author.

2 . Modernization theory sees democracy as product (or a correlate) of the broader socioeconomic process of modernization (i.a. Lipset 1959, 1993; Bollen 1979; Huntington 1984). Comparative historical sociology explains regime type (including democracy) as a product of the political struggles articulated by economic development and the evolution of social structure (Luebbert 1991; Moore 1966; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992). Political cultural explanations attempt to pinpoint how the values and attitudes of the public contribute to the persistence or demise of democracy (Almond and Verba 1963, Putnam et al. 1993). Studies of democratic transition and consolidation pinpoint key actors and junctures in the process whereby authoritarian regimes are replaced by democracy (Rustow 1970, O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, Przeworski 1991, Linz and Stepan 1996). Among the many authors cited above, only Moore makes any acknowledgment that leaders can play a critical role in the process, when he argues that "England's progress toward democracy" was in part attributable to "moderate and intelligent statesmen" (:39).

3 . Charisma also is an important concept in Weber's later political writings which addressed the problems posed by the collapse of Wilhelmine Germany. In the debates over the political structure of Weimar Germany, Weber often posed the figure of the charismatic party politician as part of the solution to the political and leadership crisis of a recently defeated and democratic Germany, still striving to play the role of great power. Weber's acute and realistic assessment of charismatic leadership in his earlier sociological writings which point out the exceptional, volatile, and difficult nature of charismatic rule (see below), make it difficult to understand how he saw this as an unproblematic solution to Germany's postwar political dilemmas. For this reason, this paper will concentrate on Weber's sociological writings. For an excellent account of Weber's later political writings on charisma, and their social and political context, see Mommsen (1984), particularly chapters 9 and 10.

4 . Weber (1978) discusses many of these forms in his chapters on "Charisma and its Transformation" and "Political and Hierocratic Domination." These include charismatic acclamation, democratic suffrage, lineage charisma, "clan states," primogeniture, office charisma, as well as various forms of hierocratic domination.

5 . S.N. Eisenstadt (1968:xxiii) points out a number of socio-psychological studies that look at receptivity to charisma as pathological and authoritarian.

6 . See Chirot (1996) for an outstanding account of the varieties of modern dictatorship in the twentieth century.

7 . Willner (1984) is a partial exception to this tendency in her treatment of both Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Mohandas K. Ghandi.

8 . It should not be precluded that there may be traditional elements as well. Long-standing democracies seem to "traditionalize" aspects of rule. Lawrence Scaff has suggested to me that "constitutionalism" in the United States seems to fit this pattern. Similarly, modern dictatorships often incorporate elements of traditional belief in their construction of rule. Tucker (1987) makes a strong case for this in his discussion of Stalinism.

9 . When Weber pays attention to the conduct of modern politics, he suggests that the most important charismatic elements in democratic systems reside in the party system, party leadership, and the perpetual campaigns of parties to mobilize voters (1946 :103).

10 . Of course though there are moments when leaders attempt to go over the heads of other leaders or officials "directly to the people" to create pressure in support of their aims.

## REFERENCES

- Almond, Gabriel and Sydney Verba  
1963 The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Bernhard, Michael  
1996 "Semi-Presidentialism, Charismatic Authority, and Democratic Institution-Building in Poland," Presidential Institutions and Democratic Politics: Comparative and Regional Perspectives, Kurt von Mettenheim, ed. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bollen, Kenneth A.  
1979 "Political Democracy and the Timing of Development," American Sociological Review 44:572-87.
- Chiot, Daniel  
1996 Modern Tyrants. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Eisenstadt, S.N.  
1968 "Introduction," in Max Weber, On Charisma and Institution Building. Edited and introduced by S.N. Eisenstadt. Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press.
- Fukuyama, Francis  
1995 "The Primacy of Culture," Journal of Democracy 6:7-14.  
1989 "The End of History?" The National Interest Summer:3-18.
- Gerth, H.H. and C. Wright Mills, trans. and eds.  
1946 "Introduction: The Man and His Work," in From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Glassman, Ronald M. and William H. Swatos, eds.  
1986 Charisma, History, and Social Structure. Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press.
- Huntington, Samuel B.  
1991 The Third Wave, Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century. Norman, Oklahoma University Press.  
1984 "Will More Countries Become Democratic?" Political Science Quarterly 99:192-218.



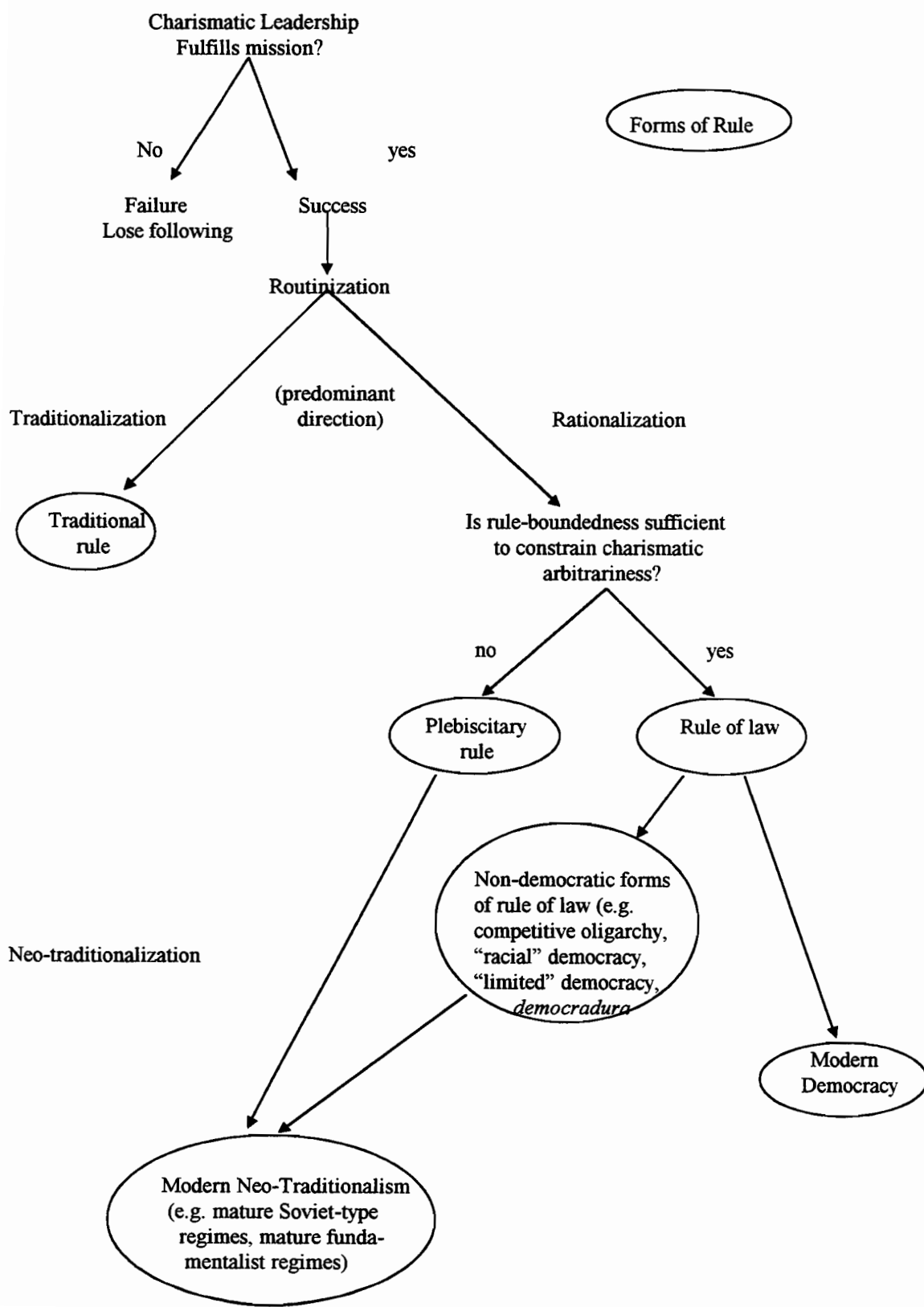
- Jowitt, Kenneth  
1983 "Soviet Neo-traditionalism: the Political Corruption of a Leninist Regime," Soviet Studies. XXXV:275-297.
- Krauze, Enrique  
1992 "Old Paradigms and New Openings in Latin America," Journal of Democracy 3:15-24.
- Kurski, Jarosław  
1992 "Wódz -- przedostatni rozdział," Gazeta Wyborcza (April 22):8-13.  
1991 Wódz. Warsaw, Pomost.
- Lindholm, Charles  
1990 Charisma. Cambridge, Basil Blackwell.
- Linz, Juan J. and Alfred Stepan  
1996 Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin  
1993 "The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited," American Sociological Review 59:1-22.  
1959 "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," American Political Science Review 53:69-105.
- Luebbert, Gregory M.  
1991 Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy. New York-Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Melzer, Arthur M., Jerry Weinberger, and M. Richard Zinman, eds.  
1995 History and the Idea of Progress. Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- Mommsen, Wolfgang J.  
1984 Max Weber and German Politics. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Moore, Barrington  
1966 The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy. Boston, Beacon.
- Nyong'o, Peter Anyang'  
1992 "Africa: The Failure of One-Party Rule," Journal of Democracy 3:90-96.

- O'Donnell, Guillermo and Philippe C. Schmitter  
 1986 "Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies," in O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds. Transitions from Authoritarian Rule. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Plattner, Marc F.  
 1991 "The Democratic Moment," Journal of Democracy 2:34-46.
- Przeworski, Adam  
 1991 Democracy and the Market. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Putnam, Robert D. with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti  
 1993 Making Democracy Work, Civic Tradition in Modern Italy. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Pye, Lucian W.  
 1990 "Political Science and the Crisis of Authoritarianism," American Political Science Review 84:3-19.
- Rueschemeyer, Dietrich, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens  
 1992 Capitalist Development and Democracy. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Rustow, Dankwart  
 1970 "Transitions to Democracy," Comparative Politics 2:337-63.
- Schmitter, Phillippe C.  
 1994 "Dangers and Dilemmas of Democracy," Journal of Democracy 5:57-74.
- Tucker, Robert  
 1987 "Stalinism as Revolution from Above," in Political Culture and Leadership in Soviet Russia. New York, Norton.
- Weber, Max  
 1978 Economy and Society. Berkeley, University of California Press.  
 1949 "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," The Methodology of the Social Sciences. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch, eds. and trans. New York, The Free Press.  
 1946 "Politics as a Vocation," in From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, trans. and eds. New York: Oxford University Press.

Willner, Ruth Ann  
1984

The Spellbinders. New Haven, Yale University Press.

**Figure One: The Evolution of Charismatic Domination and Its Ramifications for Regime-Type**



## The Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies

The Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies is an interdisciplinary program organized within the Harvard Faculty of Arts and Sciences and designed to promote the study of Europe. The Center's governing committees represent the major social science departments at Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Since its establishment in 1969, the Center has tried to orient students towards questions that have been neglected both about past developments in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European societies and about the present. The Center's approach is comparative and interdisciplinary, with a strong emphasis on the historical and cultural sources which shape a country's political and economic policies and social structures. Major interests of Center members include elements common to industrial societies: the role of the state in the political economy of each country, political behavior, social movements, parties and elections, trade unions, intellectuals, labor markets and the crisis of industrialization, science policy, and the interconnections between a country's culture and politics.

For a complete list of Center publications (Working Paper Series, Program for the Study of Germany and Europe Working Paper Series, Program on Central and Eastern Europe Working Paper Series, and *French Politics and Society*, a quarterly journal) please contact the Publications Department, 27 Kirkland St, Cambridge MA 02138. Additional copies can be purchased for \$5.00 each. A monthly calendar of events at the Center is also available at no cost.

