

Max weber's legitimacy domination on religious extremism



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Max Weber, a German sociologist, theorize three pure types of legitimate domination in his "The Types of Legitimate Domination" in 1914. Weber emphasizes that there has to be a legitimacy, conformity to obedience, for every domination. People voluntary comply to follow the commands of the authority. He argues "people obey authority when they view it as legitimate" (Calhoun et. al, 208) which Weber divided into three different grounds: rational, traditional, and charismatic. Each one differs from another in terms of belief, obedience, and authorities. For every legitimacy is an idea or notion that motivates individuals to conform to a certain authority. These ideas, value, and culture are the fundamental motivation for human actions. Weber includes the notion of religion as an influencing factor of people's valuable belief that motivates them to voluntary complying to an authority. However, the religious belief of people becomes critical reasons for issues today. Religious Extremism is a major social, political, and economic issue of today that reflects Weber's writings on rationality, authority, and domination. Religious extremism is often substituted to the terms terrorism and fundamentalism. When "extremism" is used, it generally defines the violence attached to the religious fundamentalism. According to the *Oxford Living Dictionary*, an extremist is a "a person who holds extreme political or religious views, especially one who advocates illegal, violent, or other extreme action." Religious extremist promotes their religion and any individual who deny compliance encounter violent consequences. They are willing to commit any crimes, even murder, just for their religious ideologies. All other believers excluding themselves are seen enemies. Such extremes, unfortunately, still exists as social, political, and economic issue. Today,

there are news regarding religious extremism around the country. Terrorism is still an issue all over the world with continuous attacks and threats. Even after more than a decade, the fear of terrorist attacks known caused by extremists in the 9/11 still embedded in the society showing the intensity of extremism. Weber's indication of religion as fundamental importance that motivates people's actions reflects today's religious extremists. These individuals are driven by their religious belief to the point violence are committed in the name of their faith. Weber used Protestantism as an example of connection of religion and economic institution. He argues " a particular form of ascetic Protestantism fostered a " spirit" of modern capitalism, marked by a ceaseless obligation to earn money and to reinvest for profit" (Calhoun et. al, 208). All the monetary gain by the religious groups is an economic benefit. Religion may not be ideologically link to economy but in reality, they are. The question lies on what makes the followers of religious extremism obedient on such violent authority.

In Max Weber's writings on legitimacy domination, the key is legitimacy. People are not forced to comply but rather given the reasons to obey. In *The Types of Legitimate Domination (1914)*, Weber defines domination as " the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons" (Weber, 256). People are not controlled by power. Thus, followers of religion extremism are not created by force. But instead they voluntary comply. As Weber emphasized, there are different types of motives which in the religious extremist's case is the interest of ideal motives. The rulers in religious extremist authority seek for political power over their territory to advocate and enforce their religious beliefs. The

followers, on the other hand, obey because of their ideal motives. They simply give their obedience because they believe in on the leaders' advocacy and their religion. This makes religious extremism a charismatic domination.

In a charismatic domination, the devotion of people is to the charismatic of an individuals. There is an exceptional quality, often superhuman quality, that attracts people into following them. Weber indicates charismatic domination rest " on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him (charismatic authority)" (Weber, 257). The " charisma" of the individual makes them extraordinary and exceptional which makes the people devoted to them. Religious leaders attract people into their extremist group based on their " connection to God." These leaders often try to perform miracles and superhuman activities to prove their holiness. It is the main reason why cults are the same as religious fundamentalists. But once these extraordinary qualities perish, then the devotion and obedience to the leaders also disappear. Weber emphasizes that " 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. This is the genuine meaning of the divine right of kings" (Weber, 261). The moment the extraordinary quality fail and so is the charismatic authority because the people obey these leaders for their extraordinary abilities. Thus, the moment religious extremist leaders fail their followers will lose hope and devotion to them which is why religious fundamentalist takes extreme

actions to protect their authority to the point of inhumane violence.

Charismatic domination has the subjects, the people who obey the charismatic leaders, are called "followers" or "disciples" showing its religious roots. Individuals in holy books, such as the Bible and Quran, describe the followers of their creator as disciples. In addition, charismatic domination has "no hierarchy... no appropriation of official powers on the basis of social privileges...and no such thing as a salary or a benefice" (Weber, 261). The followers of religious extremism do not receive benefits from the authority. They give their obedience because of the feeling that it is their duty. However, this is the part where religious extremists do not completely correspond to Weber's charismatic denomination because there are social privileges on the higher ups in the extremist groups. Religious extremism holds qualities majority as a charismatic domination and authority.

But the issue of religious extremism also falls into the traditional ground because countries that deals with religious extremists have history of age-old rules and traditions. They are embedded with the traditional religious belief that people should follow the holy book they believe in at all cost since that has been the way it is for years. In traditional authority, "obedience is owed not to enacted rules but to the person who occupies a position of authority by tradition or who has been chosen for it by the traditional master" (Weber 259). The people give their personal loyalty to the individual ruling them. And this person of the chief is also bound by the age-old traditions. They are bound to the traditions yet the person of the chief can do anything as he pleases with his personal pleasures (Webster 260). The

position of the social class all depends on the leader's personal choices and decisions. In religious extremist groups, members of religious sanctuaries are often picked by the superior personally which reflects the traditional authority. They were not voted by the followers. It is mainly based on personal connections and reasons. Also, Weber argues that in traditional authority " legal decisions as " finding of the law" (*Rechtsfindung*) can refer only to documents of tradition, namely to precedents and earlier decisions" (Weber 260) which means the system of law they follow is based on the traditional documents. It reflects the same situation with the religious extremists whom depends on the religious holy book as the " law" since it is the word of their creator. It lists and discuss the right and wrongs, the virtue and the sins in which all the people must follow.

Weber's writings on legitimacy authority and domination assists express that religious extremism is not rational authority and domination. The obedience of following such idea is not rational at all. It is a one-sided mind who only choose to believe on their faith that cause them to ignore the negative effects of their extremists which is the violence. All the qualities of a rational authority do not correspond to the religious extremism at all. In rational authority, the leader has to be chosen by the people through democracy voting. Religious extremist groups do not conduct democracy; the voices of the people are not heard by the extremist leaders. In rational dominance, " it is held that the members of the organization, insofar as they obey a person in authority, do not owe this obedience to him as an individual, but to the impersonal order" (Weber 258). The people's obedience is to the system, rules, and impersonal order unlike the other two types of domination. And

these administrative system is durable while religious extremists are not durable at all. In fact, religious extremists are destructible because of their extreme violence that the world get involves in their actions and violence. For instance, according to the *Global Policy*, the War on Terror consists of numerous military operations to hinder and fight any terrorism support, threats, and attacks.

Thus, Max Weber's theories and expectations are still significant in today's world as it demonstrates the different type of legitimacy domination and the reasons for voluntary compliance. Many social, political, and economic issues, such as the continuous violent religious extremism, has qualities that define the authority and domination as rational, traditional, and charismatic. Today, most authority are rational but the world still hold on to the traditional and charismatic grounds. The system in the United States of America and other countries is mainly rational authority compacted with traditional and charismatic values. As an example, the rational domination individuals vote for the leader of the country, the President. The traditional domination in this situation is that the President appoint members in some part of the government such as the Cabinets and nominate federal judges. The charismatic domination would be the President's "charismatic quality" that makes the people vote for him or her. It may not be superhuman quality but it is a quality that initiate for the President to be elected. Weber divided the three pure types of legitimate domination. And as the world evolves with new ideas and perspective, there would be no longer strict pure type of legitimate domination but rather a combination of two or all.

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