

## Max Weber'in Siyasi Teorisine Göre Karizmatik Liderlerin Özellikleri

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### Öz

Bu makalede, Max Weber'in karizmatik liderlik konusundaki argümanlarını ve bunların modern siyaset üzerindeki etkileri tartışılacaktır. Weber'in "Siyaset, sert tahtaları yavaş ve güçlü bir şekilde delmek anlamına gelir" iddiası, etkili siyasi liderlik için gerekli nitelikleri vurguladığı belirtilecek ve teorisinin özünü kapsadığı savunulacaktır. Makalede, Weber'in İsa Mesih gibi tarihi örnekleri kendi bağlamlarında incelenerek karizmatik liderliğin çok yönlü doğası ele alınacaktır. Weber karizmatik liderlerin özellikleri arasında tutku, sorumluluk, muhakeme ve öngörünün altını çizer ve bunlar arasındaki etkileşimi vurgular. Makalede, Weber'in idealleri ile çağdaş siyasi figürler arasında Barack Obama ve Recep Tayyip Erdoğan arasındaki benzerliklere işaret edilecek ve karizmatik liderliğin etik boyutlarına değinilecek, ahlaki inanç ile Machiavelli pragmatizmi arasındaki ince çizgi sorgulanacaktır. Liderlerin bireysel özelliklerinin ötesine de geçilerek sosyo-politik unsurlar ele alınacaktır. Karizmatik otorite ile kurumsal güç arasındaki gerilim ele alınacak ve örnekler aracılığıyla, karizmatik bir liderin hükümet sistemini ya zayıflatabileceğini ya da güçlendirebileceği tartışılacaktır. Eleştirel analiz yoluyla, makalede Weber'in savunduğu lider merkezli yaklaşım ile hükümet yapılarının arasındaki ikilik sorgulanacaktır. Karizmatik bir liderin oluşturduğu çoğunlukçu eğilimler ve güç boşluğu tartışılacaktır.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Etik, Karizmatik Liderlik, Kurumsal Güç, Max Weber, Siyasal Teori

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## **The Characteristics of Charismatic Leaders Based on Max Weber's Political Theory**

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses Max Weber's arguments on charismatic leadership and its implications for modern politics. Weber's assertion that "Politics means a slow, powerful drilling through hard boards" encapsulates the essence of his theory, emphasizing the qualities required for effective political leadership. Through Weber's examination of historical examples such as Jesus Christ, alongside his own contextual experiences, the paper explores the multifaceted nature of charismatic leadership. It also argues that Weber's framework defines the characteristics of a charismatic leader, highlighting the interplay between passion, responsibility, judgment, and foresight. Drawing parallels between Weber's ideals and contemporary political figures like Barack Obama and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the paper assesses the enduring relevance of his theories in understanding leadership dynamics. It further touches upon the ethical dimensions of charismatic leadership, probing the fine line between moral conviction and Machiavellian pragmatism. While charismatic leaders possess the ability to inspire and mobilize masses, their moral compass and ultimate goals shape the trajectory of their leadership. The discourse extends beyond individual leaders to scrutinize the broader socio-political landscape, examining the tension between charismatic authority and institutional power. Through examples, the paper shows how a charismatic leader can either undermine or strengthen a governmental system. Through critical analysis, the paper questions the dichotomy between the leader-centric approach advocated by Weber and the collective agency of governmental structures. In a postmodern world where most of the nations are governed through democracy, the majoritarian tendencies and the power vacuum a charismatic leader makes will be discussed.

### **Keywords**

Charismatic Leadership, Ethics, Institutional Power, Max Weber, Political Theory

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## GİRİŞ

Weber's work shines a light on four areas: (1) sociology of religion, (2) political sociology, (3) objectivity, and (4) political affairs and leadership. Before discussing these, one first needs to acknowledge the context in which he was writing and his experiences. Max Weber was born into an upper-middle-class family in Erfurt, Prussia as the eldest child of seven siblings in 1864 (Hanke, 2019). He was born during the age of the Industrial Revolution and thus grew up in a rapidly changing world order. Furthermore, his father's involvement in the parliament introduced him to politics at a young age (Eliaeson, 2016). In 1882, he started his studies in Roman and German legal history (Eliaeson, 2016). His studies got cut off with a year-long military service in Alsace (Eliaeson, 2016). Two years later, he traveled to Italy accompanying his father where he got to experience a different kind of political system (Eliaeson, 2016). He later attended the Evangelical-Social Congress with his mother where he was influenced by the Protestant pastors, which later developed into his book *Protestant Ethics and Spirit of Capitalism* (Eliaeson, 2016). Later in 1894, he was appointed as a professor in economics and finance at the University of Freiburg (Eliaeson, 2016). At that time, he was close to being a candidate for the Reichstag but he declined it since he had recently been appointed as a professor (Eliaeson, 2016). In 1898, his health issues started surfacing and he consulted a psychiatrist on his nervous exhaustion, who diagnosed him with neurasthenia (Hanke, 2019). He was later given a leave of absence from teaching (Hanke, 2019). He traveled to Italy, Switzerland, Rome, Amsterdam, and the USA (Hanke, 2019). He was influenced by the USA's political system, on which he later wrote extensively, mostly agreeing with Tocqueville's insights as well.

Later, Weber began learning Russian to follow the events and wrote "extensively on pre-revolutionary situations in Tsarist Russia" (Hanke, 2019, p. 16). However, he is most famous for his writings during and after WWI. As a man involved in politics during WWI, he got first-hand experience with inoperative governmental systems and poor decisions made by leaders. He served in the military for one year (1914-15) where he worked as the captain with responsibilities for Baden military hospitals (Hanke, 2019). He often criticized Bismarck's policies and the decision to enter the war (Hanke, 2019). In 1915, just a year after the war broke out, Weber published "Bismarck's Foreign Policy and the Present", which was the first of the many "highly critical" essays on Bismarck and the government system (Hanke, 2019). From 1917 to 1919, his critical thoughts reached their peak when he delivered his notable lecture "Politics as a Vocation" and his famous speech, after the Munich Revolution in Germany (Eliaeson, 2016). In the post-WWI treaties, he was an advisor to the German peace delegation, where he accepted the Treaty of Versailles but opposed the war guilt clause (Hanke, 2019). He believed that Bismarck's government was illegitimate and left the *parliament utterly without power* (Lassman, & Speirs, 1994 p. 140) for a number of reasons. The most important one that he highlighted is that he believed the government became a conservative where there was a patronized relationship (Hanke, 2019). Moreover, he also believed that Bismarck abused democratic procedures and failed to modernize the institutions (Hanke, 2019). Weber highly criticized the power vacuum that Bismarck created after leaving the government, paving the way for Kaiser Wilhelm II who he believed was also a bad leader (Eliaeson, 2016). Furthermore, he also believed that society was in an "iron cage" where we were imprisoned in a system that is purely technological with over-bureaucratization (Weber, 1992). What he was referring to was the technocrats at the time such as the positivist method of thinkers like Henri de Saint-Simon and Bismarck's

policies (Eliaeson, 2016). One can also infer that his view on industrialization and fast-growing technology views align with Karl Marx's. Overall, the time frame in which he lived was one where politicians were the most important factors in politics; starting wars and signing peace treaties which in Germany's case greatly harmed the society and the country. It is important to consider his theories in this context to understand what he refers to.

Max Weber's quote "Politics means a slow, powerful drilling through hard boards" refers to how a politician should act and be when going into politics. In his lecture *Politics as a Vocation*, he clearly outlines the meaning behind this quote. To understand this quote, we first need to tackle what "Vocation" really means. The German word for "Vocation" is "Beruf", referring to his belief that a politician should not tackle politics as a profession, but rather as a vocation, where they feel a "call" for it (Derman, 2012, p.183). He believes that there is a need for inner charisma and calling in order to be a successful politician (Derman, 2012). By "slowly drilling" he is referring to slowly and carefully rising to the top because there will be people and events that stand in your way if one has "sterile excitement" (Weber, p. 2) He also adds the term "powerful" because if the person does not have "passion" and resilience needed, he will have an "inner collapse" and fall into the "mortal sins" of the political world, which he says are a lack of realism and responsibility, and vanity (Weber p. 2) Additionally, he symbolizes politics with "hard boards" because he believes that "Politics is a struggle," an idea he borrowed from Nietzsche. This struggle refers to the struggle of ideas of different people and ideologies. These different ideas and ideologies are hard to win over like "drilling through a hard board." Thus, the politician should remain resilient and learn how to, as Lydon B. Johnson puts it, win the hearts and minds of the people to rise to the top. Moreover, he believes that modern politics is like a machine that has a soul and a spirit, meaning that being objective is not enough, and you need to win people's spirits, which can be accomplished by only a charismatic leader.

Weber believes that this is a hard job not suited for everyone. He states that a person who can do this successfully would rise as a charismatic leader. He explains charismatic authority as a definition as such "Charismatic authority rests on the effectual and personal devotion of the follower to the lord and his gifts or grace (charisma). They comprise especially magical abilities, revelations of heroism, power of the mind, and speech. The eternally new, the non-routine, the unheard of, and the emotional rapture from it are sources of personal devotion. The purest types are the rule of the prophet, the warrior hero, and the great demagogue. The person in command is typically the leader; he is obeyed by the disciple." (Weber, 1958, p. 6) As one can infer from this quote, Weber is referring to a charismatic leader as a superhuman, supernatural, and messianic figure beyond politics in the eyes of the common people. He further adds that a charismatic leader should be able to see the future and have insight in order to make the right decisions. What's more, this person should be more than a trained politician, but someone who is born with these qualities and someone who was born to do politics as a vocation: he has a calling. In addition to this, Weber believes that a charismatic leader should be brought up with experiencing the realities of society in order to be resilient enough to endure in politics and relate to common people (unlike aristocrats). He gives an example of how a journalist can be a politician because he has seen the true society and experienced what the common people have lived. He elaborates on his point more

in detail in *Politics as a Vocation*. He mentions that three qualities must be present: passion, a sense of responsibility, and judgment (Gerth & Mills, 1946). He defines passion as “for a realistic cause” and genuine (Weber, p. 2). It can be inferred that he does not find romanticism a good trait for a politician, opposing Rousseau and Nietzsche. Furthermore, he comments that passion is nothing if it isn't combined with a sense of responsibility (Gerth & Mills, 1946). He mentions that this needs the physiological quality of judgment. He believes that there have to be things that bring “inner calm and composure” before allowing something to affect one's actions. In other words, there needs to be “detachment” from the world and people (Gerth & Mills, 1946). If a politician cannot get detached from these thoughts, he will fall into the “mortal sins” of politics. This sin is vanity where no man can be free of it, which makes you lack realism and responsibility. Hence, the main problem a politician has to overcome is how to have “hot passion and cool judgment” at the same time (Weber p. 2). He talks extensively on the role of ethics and morality in politics and politicians as well. Weber believes that politics should be moral but if it is too moral it will lead to utopia and romanticism, which is dangerous and can be despotic. Therefore, he states that there should be ethics of responsibility and conviction (Gerth & Mills, 1946). Responsibility should be concerned with being guided to what is possible W

A charismatic leader comes once in a lifetime, but there are certainly examples of such leaders. An example that Max Weber extensively mentions in his book *Economy and Society* is Jesus Christ. According to the Gospels, Christ had a troublesome childhood and was brought into a chaotic society, Judea, which was lying on the margins of the Roman Empire (McCulloh, 2005). Historical evidence indicates that this could not be true (McCulloh, 2005). His birth was later mentioned as one filled with miracles and magical events. It is said that from the age of 12, his knowledge surprised the doctors (as in wise men) he encountered in Jerusalem (McCulloh, 2005). Whichever story is true, one can conclude that by looking at the two cases they both fit into Weber's idea of charismatic leadership. While the troublesome childhood description fits into Weber's theory that a leader should be brought up with the realities of society, miraculous birth fits into the natural ‘calling’ of a leader. As shown in the quote above, Christ was able to attract people from different faiths and places as his disciples before his death, and even more after his death, showing the influential and inspiring quality of a charismatic leader. In addition, Christ is granted the gift of prophecy where he can tell the future, such as he did in the Last Supper (McCulloh, 2005). This directly fits into Weber's definition. Through the Gospels, the New Testament, and the Old Testament, we are told that Christ's “faith was rarely shaken.” (McCulloh, 2005) McCulloh adds to this by stating that “His devotion to his mission is presented as absolute. Schooled in scriptures, it seems that he knows precisely what he has to do... He must be willing to die for his mission.” (McCulloh, 2005, p. 9-10) This devotion (passion in Weber's words) and insight into what he has to do furnishes him with the true qualities of a charismatic leader. One can see that Christ truly slowly and powerfully drilled through hard boards and died for his cause which did in fact leave mankind under his influence.

As a more contemporary example, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk can also be seen as an example of a charismatic leader. Zubeyde gave birth to several children but only Mustafa and his sister Makbule survived (Volkan 1985). His father died only when he was seven years old and this brought economic hardships to their family

(Volkan, 1985). Some people like to romanticize this story and derive that this was “God’s plan” and there was a reason that he stayed alive. While these are just conspiracy theories, his childhood which was filled with hardships fits into Weber’s charismatic leader description. Mustafa Kemal later joined the military school, from which he graduated successfully and spent most of his time in military campaigns. (Volkan, 1985). He was involved in politics from a very young age because of the context in which he was brought up, and the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Weiker gives examples of why Atatürk was able to rise to power and become a charismatic leader. He mentions that he had an unusually strong personality and people with him during important events such as Rauf Orbay, Fethi Okyar, and Adnan Adıvar also agreed (Weiker, 1982). Also, his “hot passion and cool judgment” was evident throughout his life. He fought for his beliefs and a better Turkish society (a moral goal) which he successfully achieved. Even his death decree did not stop him from achieving his goals. He remained resilient when events were not unfolding as he wanted, just like Weber emphasizes. Also, he was a general, which was an important concept for the cultural context of Turkish society at the time (Weiker, 1982). While some may argue that Weber believed that people in the military should not become leaders, this can be counted as an exception for the Turkish case. This is because his rise to fame after the Gallipoli War and his strong stance filled the position that the Turkish culture had missed since the Ottoman classical age (Weiker, 1982). Through this view of Gazi Mustafa Kemal, people saw him as a superhuman and a national hero, as Weber mentions as well. Furthermore, he was able to see the future. This was evident when Turkey signed the armistice of Moudros, The British forces were using the armistice for their benefit (Bayur, 1988). While these were happening, Mustafa Kemal said that “Bugüne kadar olduğu tarzda mukabelede devam edildiği takdirde bugün Payas-Kilis hattına (çizgisine) kadar olan araziyi isteyen İngilizler’in yarım Toros’a kadar olan Kilikya mıntakasının (bölgesinin) ve daha sonra Konya - İzmir hattının (çizgisinin ve demir yolunun) lüzum-u işgali tekâlifinin yekdiğerini velyedeceği (birbiri ardından geleceği) ve binnetice ordumuzun kendileri tarafından sevk ve idaresi ve hattâ heyet-i vükelây-ı Osmanîye’nin Britanya Hükümeti tarafından lüzum-u intihabı (seçilmesi) karşısında kalmak müsteb’at (olanaksız) değildir [If the response continues in the manner it has up until now, it is not unlikely that the British, who currently desire the land up to the Payas-Kilis line, will tomorrow demand the occupation of the Cilicia region up to the Taurus Mountains and subsequently the Konya-Izmir line (both the line and the railway). Ultimately, it is not improbable that our army will be managed and directed by them, and that even the selection of the Ottoman Council of Ministers will be dictated by the British Government].” (Bayur, 1988). This later became true, showing evidence of his insights and farsightedness. Moreover, Atatürk was not afraid to use violence when needed where the ends justified the means (Bayur, 1988). This can be seen in the Sheikh Said rebellion where the Turkish government under Atatürk sentenced him and the people involved to death. Another example can be seen in Menemen, where a similar event took place and the same measures were taken (Aysal, 2009). In order to protect laicism, secularism, and democracy (ends), violence had to be used (means) and he proved successful just like Weber and Machiavelli argue.

The debate on whether charismatic leaders are needed or people should be cautious about them has long historical roots. However, most of the debates evolve around the same key principles. The merits of charismatic leaders are that they challenge norms and the status quo by fostering critical thinking in followers, inspire hope and change even after they pass away, and foster a strong

government. When the leader comes to power during a revolutionary time or fosters change in society, they challenge the status quo thus bringing forth new values to the society (Spencer, 1973). Whether these new values are imposed by the leader or wanted by the people is another question left to be answered. However, considering a charismatic leader can only stay in power by responding to the people's needs and staying popular, these new values created should answer the people's needs and agitations. For example, Jesus brought "hope, redemption, salvation, or nirvana" to the people who needed a reason and inspiration to live and find meaning (Spencer, 1973). This inspiration and change did not stay in Jesus's lifetime but continued to inspire people decades after, which reaches to this day. The same point can be applied to contemporary leaders such as Napoleon or Mustafa Kemal as well. Their speeches, lives, books, and thoughts continue to inspire thousands. Napoleon's military tactics and speeches are still used by politicians and Mustafa Kemal's speeches are brought up in almost every political turmoil in Turkey. Such a charismatic leader can also foster a strong, centralized government by concentrating the power on him as the President or the Prime Minister of the modern political system (Szelenyi, 2024). By eliminating some checks and balances if not all, the legislative body will be able to pass legislation and laws with ease, responding to disputes or conflicts in a timely manner. As Linz (1990) also argues, in most governmental systems the checks and balances and organs create a gridlock enabling the government to act in a timely manner (Linz, 1990). Furthermore, since the charismatic leader was able to create a *gemeinschaft* (community) with a sense of belonging and enthusiasm, winning well over a majority in Presidential elections or through the vote of confidence will be no issue (Szelenyi, 2024). This promises the parliament and other legislative organs to have a pro-leader stance thus creating a strong central government.

A strong central government can also be considered as a peril of charismatic leadership along with other reasons. As Weber (1953) also argues in his several works discussing Bismarck, such a leadership style creates an oppressive regime that fails to meet society's needs and a power vacuum after the leader is gone. Thus, this can lead to an authoritarian, fascist, or communist rule as can be seen in the most extreme cases. Furthermore, as Lord Acton (1887) wrote, which later became to be known as a law of politics, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This can also be the case for the charismatic leader as well. As there will be no mechanisms to control his power (checks and balances), what he does with the power is also hard to determine. Considering a perfect charismatic leader as Weber describes, who has hot passion and cool judgment and does not fall into the mortal sins of politics, can we guarantee that he won't abuse his power or that his personality won't change once in power? As sociology and other sciences tell us repeatedly, we cannot. This is the main problem with a charismatic leadership model. Furthermore, this type of leadership will more often than not deteriorate once the person cannot fulfill their promises (Szelenyi, 2024). To give an example, in the USA's rational-legal system, a few charismatic leaders emerged such as John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther, and Barack Obama (Szelenyi, 2024). Their charisma and charm helped them get elected in a first-past-the-post system (Szelenyi, 2024). However, once their term started and they could not fulfill all their promises, their charismatic rule disappeared, and their rational-legal leadership through a popularly elected democratic governmental system (Szelenyi, 2024). This shows that charismatic leadership is inherently unstable (Szelenyi, 2024). Once the masses cannot be pleased or appealed to, the charismatic leadership also deteriorates which could also create a power



vacuum. Hence, the duality of the merits and perils can be seen. Another peril arises from the very nature of a charismatic leader; it is not an ordinary person who possesses supernatural characteristics. How can charismatic leadership be routinized then? It can't (Szelenyi, 2024). Charisma is not hereditary (Szelenyi, 2024). Therefore, the next person to govern whether it is a democratic system or not will probably not have such traits. For example, when Kim Jung-Un passes his throne to his son, there is no guarantee that he will be able to carry the same order, thus leading to instability. Instability is not only dangerous for politics but also for the economy (Szelenyi, 2024). Such an unstable system that is only ruled by charisma can be dangerous for many different aspects of a country. Lastly, another question yet to be answered is "How can charismatic leadership as Weber describes be incorporated in a rational-legal world?" While different approaches to this were found such as Secular Charisma or rational charisma, none of such theories fully satisfy the conditions Weber listed for charisma. Therefore, one can argue that charismatic leadership as Weber described it is hard or impossible to implement in a rational-legal postmodern society.

In conclusion, Max Weber's quote "Politics means a slow, powerful drilling through hard boards" can be viewed as explaining the qualities needed in a good politician and a charismatic leader. Max Weber has influenced politics as we know it today. He is considered one of the founders of realist thought and sparked many debates after his demise. His views and theories on charismatic leaders remain a subject of debate to this day. While some argue that Weber places too much emphasis on the leader rather than the power of the government and parliament, some argue that he is correct in his theories. However, it is evident that his books, especially *Politics as a Vocation*, are still relevant for leaders today. One can analyze Barack Obama and Recep Tayyip Erdogan according to Weber's theories. Nevertheless, one would soon reach the conclusion that a charismatic leader does not necessarily mean a good one, as Max Weber also cautions. Once risen to power, it is in human nature to want to remain on top for socioeconomic and psychological reasons. For example, Erdogan can be categorized as a charismatic leader. It can be seen that Erdogan has made Turkey to be a despotic country with an "authoritarian democracy". The same concept can be applied to Ayatollah Khomeini, he was able to influence the masses, but at what cost? Hence, a leader's morality, goals, ambitions, and personality traits play a key role in the type of leader they will end up being. A leader can either donate their savings to the Turkish government and her treasury or take the money from the treasury and tax money to build himself a palace.

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