Just as there are various sources of power, so too can authority be built on a range of foundations. Almost 100 years ago, Weber distinguished three ways of validating political power: by tradition (the accepted way of doing things), by charisma (intense commitment to the leader and his message) and by appeal to legal–rational norms (based on the rule-governed powers of an office, rather than a person). Despite its antiquity, this classification remains useful, even though today legal–rational authority is pre-eminent in stable liberal democracies.

**Legitimacy** builds on, but is broader than, authority. Where authority inheres in a specific role, such as that of a judge, legitimacy is an attribute of the system of government as a whole. When a regime is widely accepted by those subject to it, we describe it as legitimate. Thus, we speak of the authority of an official but the legitimacy of a regime.

Although the word 'legitimacy' comes from the Latin *legitimare*, meaning to declare lawful, legitimacy is much more than mere legality. Legality is a technical matter. It denotes whether a rule was made correctly, following regular procedures. By contrast, legitimacy is a more political concept. It refers to whether people accept the authority of the political system.

Legality is a topic for lawyers; political scientists are more interested in issues of legitimacy: how a regime gains, retains and sometime loses public faith in its right to rule. As Weber suggested, a political system’s legitimacy may rest on tradition, a charismatic leader, or conformity to law. But broader influences are also at work. A flourishing economy, international success and a popular governing party will boost the legitimacy of the political system, even though legitimacy is more than any of these things. In fact, one way of thinking about legitimacy is as the credit a political system has built up from its past successes, a reserve that can be drawn down in bad times. In any event, public opinion – not a law court – is the test of legitimacy. And it is legitimacy, rather than force alone, which provides the most stable foundation for rule.

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**The state, sovereignty and citizenship**

The *state* is now the dominant principle of political organization on the world’s landmass. There are, of course, some intriguing exceptions (Wilde, 2007). These include territories still under colonial control (e.g. Britain’s Gibraltar), or voluntarily subject to partial external authority (e.g. Puerto Rico is affiliated to the United States), or granted substantial autonomy within a larger state (e.g. Hong Kong within China).

The *state* is a political community formed by a territorial population subject to one government.

Leaving such anomalies aside, the world is parcelled up into separate states which, through mutual recognition and interaction, form the international system (Figure 1.1). These units are the main focus of this book, and for this reason we devote Chapter 2 to conceptions of the state’s evolution and significance. Here, we focus on the concept itself.

The state is a unique institution, standing above all other organizations in society. It alone claims not only the capacity, but also the right to employ force. As Weber noted, the exclusive feature of the state is precisely this integration of force with authority: ‘a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory’ (quoted in Gerth and Mills, 1948, p. 78). When the state’s