

**FROM CONGRUENCE TO CONSONANCE:  
A MAJORITARIAN RESTATEMENT  
OF ECKSTEIN'S STABILITY THEORY**

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**Abstract.** Harry Eckstein's long-standing (but ever-changing) hypothesis that a nation's political stability is a function of "congruence" between the "authority patterns" exhibited by the government and those displayed by nearly every sort of institution under that government's aegis involved a highly complex politico-psychological theory. As a result, it was quite difficult either to confirm or disconfirm. While there have been a number of suggested revisions that apparently simplify his thesis, they suffer either from vagueness or a failure to take democracy to be a system that requires an actual commitment to majoritarianism. In this paper a revision is offered that utilizes a small number of completely dichotomous variables that are easily subject to empirical tests. This revised theory (of "consonance" rather than congruence) is also explicitly majoritarian, enabling it to shed light on the essential nature of democratic regimes.

**Keywords:** *Authority Patterns; Political Stability; Harry Eckstein; Majoritarianism; Consonance vs Congruence of Governments and Subordinate Institutions*

*Introduction*

Harry Eckstein's theory that a nation's political stability is a function of the "congruence" between the "authority patterns" exhibited by the government and those displayed by nearly every sort of institution under that government's aegis was a very fluid thing. Eckstein's refinements, amplifications and attempted demonstrations (1961, 1966, 1969, 1971, 1973, 1979, 1980, 1997; Eckstein and Gurr, 1975) stretched across paper after paper, monograph after monograph, and book after book for most of his adult life. Not only are these papers, monographs and books strewn with hedges, caveats, exemptions, outlier exclusions and the like – some involving such difficult-to-measure psychological variables as levels of "strain" or "anomie" – but the hypothesis itself underwent a steady

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His opinions here should not be thought to reflect those of the Division or any other agency of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

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metamorphosis. Was the theory supposed to be restricted to democracies, or did it extend to authoritarian regimes? Was it to be understood as being limited to a provision of necessary conditions for political stability, or could it also predict imminent collapses? Are the internal arrangements of patterns *within* a particular non-governmental institution relevant to the overall incongruity exhibited by a regime? Eckstein's positions on all of these underwent steady metamorphosis during his distinguished career. Thus, it is not entirely surprising that, as one of Eckstein's former graduate students put it, the proposal may have been widely hailed, but it was even more widely ignored (Rogowski, 1998: 444).

Although Eckstein's brainchild involves a theory that that has been notoriously difficult to confirm, I do not intend to spend much time on its operational shortcomings. There are two main reasons for this. First, those flaws have already received detailed exposure in Barry (1970), Lijphart (1971), and Eckstein (1980) himself. Second, I come not to reinter Eckstein but to celebrate him and reformulate his theory, which I believe remains as important today as it was in the 1950s and 1960s when it first dawned on its creator. There seems to me an intuitive soundness to his insight that has been occluded by dependence on a mass of uncertain variables involving such arcane matters as British tendencies to secretiveness, Norwegian deference to experts, and even the tone of German cinema (1966). If my revisions result in a theory that is not as comprehensive or exciting as Eckstein's original, it may yet have the virtue of being considerably easier to test. In addition, my version both describes and relies on a majoritarianism that may shed some light not only on stability, but on the nature of democracy as well.

#### *From Congruence to a Majoritarian Version of Consonance*

As indicated above, with the maturation of Eckstein's theory came increasing complexity. But it was far from simple even in its first iteration. On his view, each non-governmental institution considered relevant to his analysis could be more or less congruent with each of the others, depending partly on the extent of the exemplification of each characteristic that makes up the congruence relation. That is, not only congruence, but every property on which it depends is taken to be continuous rather than dichotomous: each is subject to a greater or lower level of exemplification. In addition, "adjacency" began to matter: the "closer" an institution was said to be to the national government, the more important it would be to the assessment of congruence. Similarly, longer lasting isomorphisms were taken to be more significant than brief ones. Furthermore, stability, the apparently simple concept of the durability of a polity, morphed into *performance*, something intended to involve all manner of ostensible government virtues, including those Eckstein (1969) called *legitimacy*, *strife avoidance*, *output efficiency*, *permeation*, and *authenticity*. And Eckstein (1969) came to hold that where the practices *within* any single organization were more consonant or mutually reinforcing, those practices were to be given greater weight in congruence assessments. In a word, Eckstein's theory had blossomed from a list of conditions thought to be necessary if a democracy is to endure, into a comprehensive philosophy of political excellence.

There is no doubt that such an approach can illuminate many facets of political theory. But, as it is, at its heart, a theory about psychological strains (or “dissonances”) and their effects on society, it requires answering many quite difficult questions not only about basic causes and effects, but also about individual and social factors that are mitigating or intensifying. And, of course, like the aforementioned key congruence variables, *strain* and *anomie* are examples of properties that a person or group can have more or less of. It is thus undeniable that Ecksteinian waters are murky as well as deep. Surely, to the extent that one is willing to sacrifice depth and breadth for a yes/no stability-only hypothesis that is claimed to apply just to democracies, one is bound to have a much easier row to hoe.

Another key alteration here will be to take *consonance*, which Eckstein (1969) saw as a property *internal* to individual institutions and define it in such a way that it can be substituted – again in a simple yes/no form – for every one of his proposed *external* relations – items that might exemplify greater or less conformity among institutions. This change is not made solely in the interest of simplicity, however. As we are looking for characteristics of institutions that are conducive to democracy, it makes sense to designate items like Eckstein’s consonance-constituting elements of *legitimacy* (ability to command positive commitments) and *authenticity* (correspondence between actual practices and political cant) as essential variables.<sup>1</sup> For it seems clear that democracy necessarily involves both a group’s assessment of what its members actually want, and a subsequent attempt to give it to them. I therefore make congruence entirely a function of consonance – a reinforcing relationship – in a manner to be explained below.

This suggests yet another abridgment. Since, as Eckstein readily concedes (1969: 294), certain institutions (schools, churches, and families for example) are neither intended to be nor can reasonably be expected to be thoroughly democratic, we ought not to judge them “inauthentic” based on their use of authoritarian practices – or denounce them as hypocritical when they espouse egalitarianism in spite of not practicing it themselves. I handle this by simply removing most such organizations from consideration.

*I can now make a full list of my simplifying strategies:*

1. Constrain the sorts – and thus the number – of subsidiary institutions to be considered.
2. Restrict the relevant relationship between government and subsidiary entities to the presence or absence of consonance.
3. Restrict the polities to be investigated to (ostensible) democracies.
4. Abandon performance and return to stability (with respect to democratic characteristics) as the dependent variable to be explained, making no attempt (at least at present) to provide criteria or tests for *instability*, where the latter term suggests that a collapse is imminent.

<sup>1</sup> Eckstein (1971) defines “legitimacy” as “the extent to which a polity is regarded by its members as worthy of support”, a definition which seems to include authenticity as understood here.

5. Eliminate all considerations of adjacency.
6. Utilize dichotomous, rather than continuous, properties and relationships, defining such terms as “stability,” “democracy” and “consonance” so that they are clearly Yes/No characteristics that are relatively easy to identify.

### *Prior Proposals to Modify the Congruence Theory*

I am not the first person to offer a proposal for revising or updating Eckstein’s congruence theory of governmental stability. There have been a number of prior published attempts, some making minor tweaks and others proposing major overhauls. An example of the latter is Rogowski’s (1998) ambitious proposal, which focuses on human capital, education, and barriers to institutional exit. As his theory is intended to connect every step between economic development/deterioration and the creation and maintenance of liberal democracies, it certainly makes for a more comprehensive theory than my own. But I believe there are familiar reasons for denying that Rogowski’s exchange-based analysis of authority can function as a theory of democracy rather than of some other sort(s) of political development. It is not only that it relies on assumptions of rationality that are inconsistent with Eckstein’s (1980B, 1991) views regarding individual and social psychology. We may even assume *arguendo* that Rogowski’s rationalistic assumptions are true in spite of Eckstein’s opposition to them. The main problem is that, at a minimum, democracies would seem to have to reflect the view that when there are disputes, majorities are to win the day. If we insist that characteristic is essential, it becomes clear that Rogowski is not focusing on democracy at all, but is offering a developmental theory of something else entirely – perhaps “the march of freedom” or the commitment to individual liberty – whether or not those are accompanied by basic majoritarian principles.

Recall that Eckstein’s original hypothesis was entitled “A Theory of Stable Democracy” (1961, 1966). He was attempting to explain the durability of those governments in which “actions [are] taken in pursuit of shared political goals” (1966: 228). It is thus crucial that the relevant polities have democratic structures that are not mere facades. They must be characterized by policies that derive in significant part from majoritarian processes. There is no reason to suppose that the systems Rogowski is seeking to explain must share such characteristics. Moreover, there is nothing to prevent a majoritarian society with eminently fair electoral rules and practices from enacting severe restrictions on exit or entry, in spite of the fact that, according to Rogowski, such restrictions are the *sine qua non* of the *absence* of democracy.

Nevitte and Kanji (1999: 162) characterize Eckstein’s congruency thesis as the claim that “There are powerful reasons for expecting social, economic and political aspects of authority orientations to be closely connected.” And they add their faith that “Uncovering the structure, shape and congruence of authority patterns should go some distance towards explaining democratic stability” because “authority orientations nurtured in one domain tend to ‘spill over’ into others” (pp. 163-164). That is, they take the original congruence theory conditional:

*CT. If governmental stability, then congruence*

To imply an expectation of uniformity among authority patterns throughout a society. And when they look through the countries included in the 1981 and 1990 World Value Surveys, they find just such uniformity. They may not be entirely to blame for taking Eckstein to hold that congruence is also *sufficient* for stability, since, although he was sometimes quite explicit that it is not (1980: 1) he also said that “the stability of democracies varies with the degree of resemblance among governmental and nongovernmental authority patterns” (1969: 278). But it is still far from a straight shot from converting CT into a truth-functional-equivalency to any plausibility for the claim that we should generally expect authority patterns to be uniform throughout all institutions in every society, a position that makes disparities nearly inexplicable without exogenous influences. That expectations of uniformity (rather than of instability) are inconsistent with the very Weimar Republic disparities that were the original impetus for Eckstein’s theory is entirely missed by these authors. Furthermore, even if we were to stipulate that Germany at that time may be regarded as an outlying datum that may safely be ignored in a uniformity analysis, it remains quite clear that Eckstein never suggested anything remotely resembling the uniformity theory.

Welzel and Inglehart (2007: 297) take a position that may seem to be quite close to my own when they write “the fate of democracy depends on ordinary people’s intrinsic commitment to democratic principles,” but what they mean by both “commitment” and “democratic principles” is somewhat eccentric. When they of talk of the “beliefs” of ordinary people, it is clear that they don’t mean by “belief” what ordinary people generally do. Most will take a “commitment to democracy” to require, at a minimum, (i) the belief that, with respect to one’s national government, when there are differences of opinion, it is a good thing for a majority of all (adult) members to have the final say; (ii) a willingness to abide by the majority decision (when fairly arrived at) even if it conflicts with one’s own views; and (iii) the practicing of what one preaches on this front – i.e., generally utilizing democratic methods of governance in one’s own life. No doubt, many will want considerably more from their democracies than the majoritarianism entailed by (i)-(iii): there will be demands for freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion, for due process for those accused of crimes, for multiple parties, independent judiciaries, etc.<sup>2</sup> But surely at minimum one must expect (i) and (ii) from citizens of a democratic polity – and (iii) from those who can be said to be committed to it.

Welzel and Inglehart mean something very different from this. They intend commitment to connote *orientations* that they consider in one way or another to be conducive to democracy, such as tolerance, moderation, support for “existential autonomy,” meritocracy, libertarian-egalitarianism, “permissive existential conditions,” “open belief systems,” economic modernization, “meritocratic

<sup>2</sup> Lists may include many more than these desiderata. See, e.g., the Freedom House enumeration in Tilly (2007: 2) which contains no fewer than ten “political rights” and twelve “civil liberties” including free choice of marriage partners and freedom from dependency on union leaders.

markets,” equal opportunities, etc. Naturally, a list of that type will bring back concerns regarding fuzziness and untestability, but the main problem is more deeply seated. Perhaps because of their very amorphous concept of democracy, these authors simply deny that one can “draw aggregate level conclusions from individual-level findings” (p. 303) which is, on a more conventional view, precisely what democratic procedures are thought to do when votes are taken. So, I conclude that they mean not just a lot more by “democracy” than I do when I hold up my paltry (i) and (ii) to illustrate what is being sought by those committed to the idea, but also considerably less than “ordinary people” do.

Sheafer and Shenhav (2012) take another tack. Like Nevitte and Kanji, they envision a continuous relationship between stability and congruence: “The greater the congruence, the greater the stability.” (p. 232) But they maintain that Eckstein had too simple an understanding of incongruence. Based on the “Prospect Theory” of Kahneman and Tversky (1979), they claim that congruence and its effects should really be seen as a function of individuals getting more or less freedom than they desire: “[I]n countries where citizens receive less freedom than they would like, a greater incongruence between the values of the public and of political institutions correlates with greater instability. No doubt that finding is in accordance with the original congruence hypothesis. But in countries where citizens receive more freedom than they ask for, the correlation between incongruence and stability is reversed: an increase in the level of incongruence increases stability.”<sup>3</sup>

This assertion is not entirely implausible. Unfortunately, however, they follow Welzel and Inglehart in their views regarding what they take to be the limitations of desire-aggregation and in what they believe makes for various “levels of democracy” (pp. 238-239). Again, their non-belief-centric approach to the determination of a “reference point” regarding whether some group is demanding more or less democracy (pp. 237-238) seems to me to be inconsistent with majoritarianism. So, the above-noted fatal disparities with essential Ecksteinianism again seem present.

We may take the final slant on congruence that I shall discuss here to have begun with Przeworski, (1991)<sup>4</sup> It can also be seen in Diamond (1994) and Weingast (1997), and has been further developed in both Gates *et al.* (2006) and Knutsen and Nygard (2015). While there are, of course, differences between the particular adumbrations of these expositors, I believe that, taken together, this literature represents a single theory of government stability, one with carefully defined terms and methods, and one which has been supported by substantial empirical research. The conclusion of these studies is that, whether a polity is democratic or authoritarian, the more consistent the society is throughout, the more stable it will be. On this theory, half-blown arrangements should be expected to be more fragile than either full blown despotic regimes or thoroughgoing democracies. It is hard to deny that such an assertion seems very Ecksteinian.

<sup>3</sup> Sheafer and Shenhav, 2012, 233.

<sup>4</sup> Or perhaps even as far back as Gurr (1974).

It will be noted that the thesis – at least as put by Gates *et al.* (2006) – is put forth in terms of *consistency* rather than congruence. By “consistent” institutions they mean those that are “mutually reinforcing” and so “serve to perpetuate the regime” (p. 894). But what is the manner of this reinforcement, and how does it arise? Do groups or individuals reinforce democratic attitudes, as I suggest, by believing in them themselves and by acting in accordance with them in their own practices? Not necessarily. The single explicit assumption on which this consistency theory rests is that “a political executive’s primary incentive is to maximize his/her current and future power and authority” (Gates *et al.* 2006, 894). With that Downsian premise in hand, the Gates team as well as Knutsen and Nygard (2015) expect behaviours that are to a large extent in line with those of Rogowski that have been discussed above. Both the elite and subsidiary players will assess the costs and benefits of keeping themselves in (or obtaining) power through promotion or subversion of ostensibly democratic practices, and act accordingly. On such a view, the relevant variables seem to again involve exit barriers as well as the manner in which executive positions may be obtained (say by designation, recruitment, or vote).

Thus, this analysis relies on unspoken assumptions from both egoistic and rational choice quarters. Those in power accept – or even foster – democratic institutions only as a means to the end of retaining that power, and when the rulers calculate that “the costs of attempting to suppress their political opponents exceed the costs of tolerating them” (Diamond, 1994: 3) they may put on democratic trousers for show. Actual commitment to democracy is thus irrelevant; only the apparently democratic behaviours matter. I have criticized that approach above. But perhaps I was too quick to dismiss a behaviouristic definition of “democracy.” Was my objection really cogent? Why may we not let “democracies” simply refer to entities utilizing certain overt customs, and then simply try to discover what practices are likely to preserve those institutions?

The answer to this is that it is evidently pointless to try to implement provisions thought to promote the stability of institutions that we don’t actually value in themselves, unless we have good reason to believe that there is some special instrumental value to such intermediaries. Either democracies are those places in which fair voting procedures are there to allow citizens to get what they actually want, or they are places in which it is only the practices – however sham – that matter. If the latter, it is reasonable to suppose that the real goal must be something else: happiness perhaps, or personal security, or economic opportunity. At any rate, as democracy is to be understood here, it simply cannot be constituted by pretence only: it must reflect an authentic majoritarianism as its ultimate end.

Furthermore, in spite of the substantial evidence proffered in this literature, it should not be thought that confirmation of the consistency theory has been entirely smooth sailing. For example, Knutsen and Nygard write that, “[S]everal contributions highlight the stabilizing role of mixing particular autocratic and

democratic characteristics. The introduction of elections and legislatures, for instance, may stabilize nondemocracies because they enable co-optation of critical opposition groups...Gandhi, 2008). Partial democratization (e.g., through introducing multiparty elections or institutionalized military regimes) may also credibly signal the ruler will refrain from monopolizing and abusing power, thereby reducing incentives to overthrow the regime (Boix and Svolik, 2013; Magaloni, 2006; Myerson, 2008; Svolik, 2009, 2012)...For example, multiparty legislatures more likely appear present when regimes badly need cooperation with nonregime actors and when opposition forces are strong” (Gandhi, 2008; Gandhi and Przeworski, 2007)<sup>5</sup>.

Knutsen and Nygard conclude their review of these studies by conceding that “some arguments suggest that particular combinations of democratic and autocratic characteristics have stabilizing properties” (p. 658). And to deal with such apparent counterexamples to the consistency hypothesis, they are forced to retreat to a position according to which it is only *particular* mixes of democratic and authoritarian characteristics that are destabilizing.

The difference between the consistency approach and one that relies on such prosaic propositions as my (i)-(iii) above should be clear. While the latter is ingenuous with respect to the normal relationship between beliefs and actions and takes “group beliefs” to (at least generally) reflect and be reflected by the views of the majority of the group’s constituents, the consistency approach, because game-theoretic, does neither. That is, the consistency view reflects a sophisticated view of rational goal seeking, paired with what I take to be a rather primitively egoistic theory of human action.

It will likely be complained that the expression of my majoritarian sentiments should not be considered a serious objection to an economic theory of stability and that whatever may be validly deduced from the latter’s axioms will either be substantiated by empirical data or it will not. In addition, it may be argued that one ought not to be too sure that the more sophisticated, calculational view is insufficiently Ecksteinian, especially since Ted Gurr is claimed as one of its progenitors. While I am unsympathetic to both the egoistic and rationality assumptions relied upon by consistency theorists, I will not press these philosophical objections here except to repeat that there is no question that Eckstein had little use for the rational choice approach – even in Simon’s (1985) “bounded” version where maximizing became “satisficing.”<sup>6</sup> Of course, Eckstein – and Bertrand Russell (1917, 1955) before him – could simply have been wrong about this highly controversial matter. I will therefore merely rely on the point that, whatever may be the correct theory of human action, any legitimate theory of democracy must take sincere majoritarianism as an essential element and cannot designate an institution democratic wherein the majority only *seems* to rule.

<sup>5</sup> Knutsen and Nygard (2015: 658)

<sup>6</sup> Based to a significant extent on the psychological work of Norman Maier on “frustrated behavior,” Eckstein (1991) simply denied that most human activities are goal-oriented at all.



*Hypothesis, Definitions, Axioms, and Postulates*

I shall argue for the following thesis:

*For all democratic countries C and their governments G, G is unstable only if consonance does not universally obtain between G and each of the significant, politically active subsidiary organizations within C.*<sup>7</sup>

There are a lot of terms to flesh out here. What counts as a democracy and what counts as its government? Which subsidiary institutions are to be considered significant and politically active? And what, precisely, do “consonance” and “stability” mean? In considering my answers, it will be important to recognize that I make no claim that there are no other definitions that might be proposed as being closer either to common usage or to what Eckstein meant by those terms. I say only that they are at least closely related to ordinary usage and that the combination of them in the manner I shall propose produces a coherent, non-tautologous whole that accords with and illuminates Eckstein’s original thesis.

Let us start with “democracy.”

*Democratic Entity (or “Democracy”)* =df. *Any organization O that exemplifies all of the following characteristics: (i) There are regular (say, at least every five year) queries by, e.g., referendum, plebiscite or poll, fairly taken of all (equally-treated and counted) adult members of O to generally determine what the members of O want the government of O to provide in terms of officers, representatives, public policy, and approaches to administration; (ii) the policies sought by the majority pursuant to the practices indicated in (i) are, to the extent feasible, enacted and implemented by the government of O; and (iii) reactions to both election/poll results and the resulting actions taken by the government of O as well as to transfers of power/authority within O are peaceful, so long as these actions and transfers are generally believed to accurately reflect the fairly determined opinions of the majority of O.*<sup>8</sup>

I am aware that many political entities are considered democratic in spite of opposition to the idea that *all* matters of public policy may be settled by majority vote. In fact, what is commonly called “liberal democracy” is thought to be inconsistent with democratic interventions into matters thought to be “primary” or “basic.” If it is desired, this concern may be accommodated either by explication of the “generally” in the “generally determine” phrase, or by constraining the construal of “public policy approaches or approaches to administration.” More doctrinaire majoritarians will likely not worry so much about “the tyranny of the majority.”<sup>9</sup> I will not here go further into this area of long-standing controversy

<sup>7</sup> In other words, where a democratic polity exemplifies universal consonance, there will be (internal) political stability. Note that I do not offer sufficient conditions for instability, only necessary ones.

<sup>8</sup> I take any jurisdiction that fails of any of the three listed features to be a non-democracy, whatever other virtues it may exemplify. The first four Freedom House questions/requirements (Tilly, 2007: 2) seem intended to express the same general idea:

1. Is the head of state and/or head of government or other chief authority elected through free and fair elections?
2. Are the legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?
3. Are there fair electoral laws, equal campaigning opportunities, fair polling, and honest tabulations of ballots?
4. Are the voters able to endow their freely elected representatives with real power?

<sup>9</sup> I discuss this in Horn (2020 and 2021).

between “democrats” and “liberals” except to say that I neither dismiss as anti-democratic every political entity that believes some list of rights is sacrosanct (or subject to a supermajority for restriction) nor exclude every entity that fails to insist on inclusion of some particular enumeration of traditional “rights” from the ranks of liberality.

It can be seen that I make it sufficient for democracy that the entire adult population is asked what they want their government to do, that a majority of that (equally counted) populace is given the power to indicate what their government is to do, that those governments will make a sincere attempt to do what their electorates tell them to, and that those who are unsatisfied with this arrangement and its results do not respond with violence. There are, e.g., no requirements regarding the undeniable virtues of deliberation, minority representation, easy access to information, the independence of courts, or the existence of multiple parties. No doubt many will expect considerably more from a democracy, and I do not say that they are wrong to do so. But for our purposes here I hope such concerns may be handled by allowing that a polity which meets only these proposed requirements may be described as a “bad democracy” (or even an evil, tyrannical one).<sup>10</sup>

If I am briefer with respect to “national government” it is because I intend no deviation from customary usage on this front. First, it should be understood that the entire state or polity is being referred to, not any subordinate organization, like a local or regional legislative or administrative body. But as it is true that there may be any number of country-wide organizations that are “governed” and so contain their own “governments,” how can we distinguish the particular one that is meant in our hypothesis? (Dahl, 2000: 41) has written that when he uses the term “state” he means “a very special type of association that is distinguishable by the extent to which it can secure compliance with its rules, among all those over whom it claims jurisdiction, by its superior means of coercion.” That is, while many organizations issue rules (by-laws, edicts, decisions, interpretations, etc.) the governing body being referred to here is the single entity that has the capacity to enforce such rules or rulings throughout the entire jurisdiction. It must have ultimate police power – or at least such power as it has must exceed that of any other organization within its boundaries. There have been military establishments whose leaders have had little or no allegiance to the government of their states and would certainly not take orders from it. This is consistent with the existence of that government when the militia is, e.g., connected with a church, locality, or dissident organization. But it must at least be the case that the “official” national military entities follow the directions of their governments and that those entities are (as far as is known, at any rate) the most powerful assemblages in the land.<sup>11</sup> In other words, though X may be making the laws and

<sup>10</sup> Obviously, this is, for the most part at least, a procedural, rather than constitutional, substantive, or process-oriented take on the essence of democracy. Tilly, 2007: 7-23 is unsympathetic to approaches like mine that use dichotomous variables, but his goals, which involve determining what sort of institutions are “democratizing” or “de-democratizing,” are somewhat different.

<sup>11</sup> Cases of mutinous official military organs are discussed below.

wearing the robes and wigs, if Y has the most and biggest guns and does not bow to X, X cannot be considered the national government (or sovereign). Let us, then, summarize this Hobbesian understanding by saying that:

*“National government” = df. that association which not only issues rules, laws, edicts, etc. that reach all areas within a country’s borders, but which also has more capacity to enforce obedience to such pronouncements than any other organization within the jurisdiction.*

What are the subsidiary institutions that the thesis refers to? As indicated above, Eckstein took a very broad view of this matter. Political parties, families, bureaucracies, trade unions, schools, political subdivisions, religious organizations and more: his view was that all must be examined if we are to safely predict that a government will remain in place. Each authority pattern must be checked for such matters as how “elitist” it is, how transparent its activities, how collegial its top brass is, and so on. As already noted, I think that approach is wrong-headed, and not only for reasons of vagueness and complexity. Certain types of groups – schools, religious organizations, and families for example, really should not be operated democratically. Since they essentially involve specific ends that may well be inconsistent with the desires of their members, they should not be expected to exhibit democratic characteristics. Thus, no determinations about the ratio of pleasant fellows to authoritarian tyrants among school masters and university deans should detain us.

So, what subsidiary organizations *are* relevant to our thesis? Clearly, *political parties, pressure groups and some independent militias, or other “factions.”* They are all explicitly intended to produce specific governmental results either by lobbying, educating, funding, or threatening office-holders, candidates or other leaders in the current regime or by trying to replace them.<sup>12</sup> In addition, there are the governmental subdivisions: *subordinate state, province, canton, municipal, county or other local or regional governments.* Finally, there are the officers and soldiers of *the main military organs of the state*, for it is obvious that if those with the firepower to destroy democratic institutions have the desire to do so, a democracy cannot be safe. All and only such groups should be considered to be designated by “politically active” in our hypothesis.

Even this group must be whittled down, however. Political parties, militias, and pressure/lobbying groups cannot be thought to include every club with some view about governance, no matter how small, or our hypothesis will once again be untestable. Similarly, we would not want a prediction of stability in a large country to be disqualified solely by the existence of a single village of 100 residents, 51 of whom are anarchists. Thus, a “significance” constraint is necessary. As Eckstein (1971) pointed out with respect to incidents of civil disorder, effective agitation can be a function of a number of factors. There are the obvious ones of population and geographical extent, but there are also such items as fervour, organizational skills, and military capacity. Furthermore, it is not always

<sup>12</sup> These groups thus include trade unions, employer associations and business corporations only if they function as pressure groups.

clear how to count populations of organizations like political parties. Consider two famous 20<sup>th</sup> Century examples of highly effective but at least apparently small agitation groups: the Bolshevik Party in Russia and the Vietminh in Vietnam. In a country of about 126,000,000, the Bolsheviks are estimated to have had only about 25,000 members in 1917. But that party did receive about 10,000,000 votes (or about 8% of the Russian population) for its candidates for the Constituent Assembly that year.<sup>13</sup> Again, in 1950 United States intelligence reckoned the number of Vietminh members to be about 400,000,<sup>14</sup> less than 2% percent of their country's population at that time. So "membership" can be vague.

Obviously, any significance constraint must be largely arbitrary, but as we require clear signposts, let us say that any politically active group with in-country supporters *throughout the nation* – confirmed by membership rolls, supporting vote totals, or financial contributions of a minimum size, meets the "significance" floor for applicable subsidiary organizations. And let us set these minima as follows: for polities between 2,000,000 and 100,000,000, a size of at least 20,000 or 1% of the electorate, whichever is larger; for polities with a population of more than 100,000,000 a size of at least 1,000,000.<sup>15</sup> Let us also require that where the group (say a political subdivision or ethnic minority) is mostly restricted to specific areas comprising less than half of the country's (populated) geographical area, it must reach 2% or 40,000 members/supporters (or, 2,000,000). I thus limit the concept of "significance" to size and geographical reach, so that we may ignore such complicated factors as intensity of the hunger for change, potency of firepower, access to railways or ports, and organizational or technological capacity.

This takes us to "consonance." Eckstein was of several minds with respect to his own congruence relation. One could not expect *identity* of patterns, he warned. In fact, like some of the revisors discussed above, he sometimes claimed that too close a similarity among all the institutions could be a bad sign. As we have seen, such exceptions are problematic, particularly for a theory in which every sort of organization displaying some sort of hierarchical authority is deemed relevant. By utilizing a single, dichotomous relation, we again move in the direction of simplicity. I thus propose the following:

*A subsidiary organization O is consonant with its national governing body = df. (1) For non-military entities: (i) it is itself a democracy, and (ii) it provides no indications of non-support for the national government's exemplification of*

<sup>13</sup> Radkey, 1989. Including Mensheviks, their tally was about 11 million (p. 18).

<sup>14</sup> Including about 160,000 "regular troops" Condit (1988: 219).

<sup>15</sup> The 20,000-or-1% minimum is proposed to apply only to polities with populations greater than 2,000,000, because even that number will not work for tiny "countries" like The Vatican or Andorra. The point of the absolute 1,000,000 floor is that, without it, organizations the size of the ACLU (1.75 million members according to <https://www.aclu.org/about/aclu-history>, accessed 8/5/2018) or the Libertarian Party, whose candidate for president received about 1.3 million votes in 2012, would not qualify in a country the size of the U.S (about 325 million) because of the 1% floor. For reference, about 14 million Americans say they support the NRA. (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/07/05/among-gun-owners-nra-members-have-a-unique-set-of-views-and-experiences/>, accessed 8/5/2018).

*the characteristics that make it a democratic entity. (2) If it is a military entity, then it is supportive of the national government's exemplification the characteristics that make it democratic.*<sup>16</sup>

On this definition, while armies need not practice what they preach, other political organizations having pristine democratic practices will nevertheless fail of consonance if they advocate for the elimination of any of the essential democratic elements of their national governments.

It may be thought that "stability" has already been explained. But we have only provided sufficient conditions for it. Empirical usefulness requires marks of confirmed cases of stability or instability that we can use to test our hypothesis. Let us then clarify that:

*A democratic polity P is stable = df. P will not cease to be democratic ("collapse") from internal causes.*

That is, we make our hypothesis strictly inconsistent with the internal collapse of any democracy exhibiting universal consonance. We involve no probability hedges, so there can be no hiding behind some plea that, while there was indeed an internal collapse, it was nevertheless highly improbable.<sup>17</sup> It should not be thought, of course, that this definition implies that no country having a stable democracy at some time *t* can ever fall from internal causes subsequent to *t*. The hypothesis simply makes the claim that no democracy will collapse *while it exhibits universal consonance*.

With respect to axioms or assumptions, there is again ample incentive to simplify the Eckstein theory. Obviously, his claims to the effect that increases in "cognitive dissonance" (or "strain") must decrease political stability (even if not by the same quantity) ought not to be taken on faith. And the need for empirical justification is amplified when such initially plausible claims are accompanied by a number of complicated postulates of social psychology. We are told, for example, that while isomorphism in authority patterns is generally favourable to democratic stability, certain "balances in disparity patterns" (1966: 256-258) involving such apparently non-democratic elements as deference to technical experts or participation in imperial rituals may be *stability-enhancing*. I do not claim that any of these claims is false, only that they involve complicated propositions of psychology that cannot be safely assumed.

Of course, any restatement of a congruence theory must rely on *some* implicit or explicit assumptions regarding individual or social psychology: one can only hope they are more in the nature of fundamental axioms than Eckstein's seem to have been. It is, perhaps, not always possible to know all of the axioms on which a political theory depends, but I think it cannot be denied that my own revision relies on these:

<sup>16</sup> A "military entity" here refers only to official organs of the national government. As said, it is highly unusual and would be quite inefficient for such organizations to operate on any sort of democratic principles, so we do not require this for consonance with their national governments. Other militias are relevant to our assessments only to the extent that they are intimately associated with "significant, politically active organizations" – entities which *are* required to exemplify democratic mechanisms themselves to be consonant with democratic polities.

<sup>17</sup> Note again that no claim is made here that where a democracy is unstable, collapse is imminent.

1. For all persons P and states of affairs S, to the extent that S is attainable (or removable) by P, all else equal, S is more likely to obtain (or be removed) if P desires (or is averse to) S. (*Principle of Effectiveness of Desires*).

2. For all persons P, states of affairs S and times t, if P has no interest in S at t (i.e., no preference for or aversion to S's obtaining, continuance or removal) then, to the extent that S is in P's control at t and remains so subsequent to t, S's status as obtaining or not obtaining will continue subsequent to t. (*Principle of Inertia*)

3. The only appropriate way to ascertain the "view" of any group of individuals G toward any proposition P is to correctly aggregate the pro- and anti- attitudes toward P of all adults making up G via a fair survey. The attitude receiving the higher number of votes, counting each person's vote as equal to each other person's vote is to be taken as the group's view. (*Principle of Majoritarianism*)<sup>18</sup>

I take it that (1) and (2) are almost platitudinous, but obviously (3) is quite controversial, especially in light of a substantial literature regarding "intensity of preferences." Fortunately, there ought to be no concerns about my acceptance of it here, because if it is false and (1) and (2) are true, it should be expected that my thesis will be quickly disconfirmed. This is so because it reflects the position that a populace's commitment to democracy may be discerned through the exemplification or absence of consonance. If the majoritarian principle is false, there is little reason to expect universally consonant polities to be stable.

In addition to these definitions and axioms, to test our hypothesis we still need two rather arbitrary – but I hope plausible – postulates regarding temporal matters (propinquities and durations, specifically). First, while observers may accede to the suggestion of a meaningful failure of consonance with democratic polities where there are large parties fomenting fascist revolutions, they will likely reject any assertion that a *prior* failure of stability may be inferred in every case in which, e.g., the (ostensibly) official army or a large opposition party deposes its government. In fact, it would surely be cheating to make any such inference. Barry (1978: 52) makes a similar objection when he complains that Eckstein's theory "does not have a time dimension. That is to say, it does not follow the form of a 'natural experiment' by correlating changes in the dependent variable ('stable democracy') with changes in other variables (the alleged 'conditions' of it)." I believe this is a cogent objection and one that requires specific recognition in any theory of stability.

In a fascinating work referred to above, Eckstein (1991) distinguishes actions that reflect actual preferences of the actor (those that are "goal conscious") from behaviours that are better described as "impulsive." It makes good sense, I believe, to suppose that while the reflection of preferences is to be anticipated in behaviours,<sup>19</sup> it is important that we not be expected to correctly predict activities

<sup>18</sup> May's law and Arrow's Theorem require that only yes/no referenda may be used. Minority representation seems a critical public objective, and, incidentally, one which may be obtained by the use of some such methodology as the single non-transferable ballot without violating May or Arrow principles. See Goodin and List (2006). However, our minimalist majoritarian concept of democracy does not require it.

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the Principle of the Effectiveness of Desires requires it.

that are functions of impulse.<sup>20</sup> We need not suppose that there are no causes at all to such behaviours, that they are “random” in any metaphysical sense. But to the extent that their origins are unknown either to the executor or to observers, they should not function in determinations of consonance. Perhaps a canny observer will expect a marked change in behaviour resulting from a famine or unexpected windfall even when the affected party is unable to make any such predictions. But what is purely impulsive, on the other hand, is that which is, by definition, “out of the blue” and hence, unknowable by either agents or observers. Thus, if a state’s armed forces should, without much premeditation or malice aforethought depose their sovereign, it is clearly inappropriate for a congruence theorist of any stripe to claim that such polity could have been previously characterized as unstable.

Of course, when we use such terms as “without much premeditation.” we revert to the sort of fuzziness that doomed Eckstein’s original. It is true that setting a fixed temporal region as propinquities – and so disqualifying actions first emerging within that frame from consonance assessments – is, again, bound to be largely arbitrary. I believe, however, that such a move is preferable to leaving the matter to case-by-case judgment. Let us therefore say that, for purposes of determining whether a military organization is consonant with a democratic polity,

*In cases of collapses resulting from mutinous activities by some relevant organization(s), we may pronounce a failure of consonance with a democratic polity only in those instances in which we have evidence of failure of support for that polity by either its leaders or a majority of its membership where such failure has been found to have commenced at least six months prior to the initiation of mutinous activities.*

Such evidence may consist, for example, in published plans or letters from officers or other leaders. I believe such a requirement is responsive to the complaint that any internal coup may be counted as a *per se* disconfirmation of consonance that ought to have made collapse-prediction possible according to the theory.

Barry’s complaint regarding time dimension has other ramifications as well. According to our definitions, clubs, societies or religions are not relevant to consonance assessments if they are not functioning as pressure groups. So, the question may arise whether the existence of a religious sect or utopian society with a history of disinterest in government activities should count as a politically active organization if it suddenly begins lobbying (or shooting) legislators shortly before organizing a coup. Will such activities always be sufficient to disqualify a finding of consonance, and hence, a failure to meet our stability criteria? If so, it may again be objected that it has been made too easy to make a retrospective judgment of non-stability whenever there is a collapse. I therefore propose a six-month interval within which the initiation of treasonous activities

<sup>20</sup> The classic discussions of the distinction between impulses and desires are Russell (1917, 1955), which note that impulsive actions may seem no more than madness to observers. See also Eckstein’s (1980B) discussion of contingency versus inherency; Schulz (1992); and Simon (1985).

should be counted as impulsive acts and are therefore incompetent to turn a non-political organization into a pressure group. This, again, prevents spontaneous agitations from being treated as retrospective evidence of instability.

Interestingly, the Principle of Inertia requires temporality to cut in the other direction as well. Eckstein points this out in his discussion of transitions from non-democratic to democratic rule<sup>21</sup>: “How long is a transition anyway? I have heard it said that the transition to democracy is over when democratic institutions have been put in place. Clearly, this trivializes the idea of transition. A more extensive period must be involved; but how much more extensive?... [W]e can make a stab at specifying a minimal time period for accomplishing transition by calculating, as Gurr has (1974), the statistical chances of longer-term survival if a regime has lasted a specified period of time. In general, this seems to be something approaching a generation.”

Because of its minimization of the principle effectiveness of desires, I believe using “a generation” to reflect the influence of inertia is excessive. I will therefore suggest five years as being both necessary and sufficient for counting something as a functioning democracy.<sup>22</sup> There is no doubt that these limits are highly arbitrary, but I don’t think any particular durational choice ought to be summarily rejected, at least if it is not a blatant attempt to cook the results of empirical investigations.

### *Assessment*

That is the sum and substance of my reconstruction. Recall that my version of Eckstein’s congruence theory is simply that, as the terms are explained above:

*For all democratic countries C and their governments G, G is unstable only if consonance does not universally obtain between G and each of the significant, politically active subsidiary organizations within C.*

It is, I think, a fairly simple hypothesis. And, whether or not it is true, it is certainly not vacuous. What is my basis for that claim? Wouldn’t it be extremely odd to expect a collapse of a democratic polity in a country where all the major groups favour democracy and consider the polity legitimate? Actually, not at all. Even if we were to have required universal consonance with its government of every politically active organization no matter how small, it would still be the case that any of the following would have counted as a conclusive disconfirmation:

1. A collapse of democracy resulting from a coup by one or more arms of the central military organizations of the state that is “impulsive” or “not inherent” as explained above.

2. A collapse of democracy impulsively instigated principally by one or more hitherto apolitical religious groups and/or other associations.

<sup>21</sup> Eckstein (1997: 17).

<sup>22</sup> The distinction between three months for impulsiveness and five years for institution settling may still strike some as extreme, but the two durations are not intended to capture quite the same thing. It would be odd to suggest, for example, that backsliding within a five-year transition must reflect impulsiveness.



3. A collapse of democracy resulting from sheer lethargy, for example by failure to hold elections.<sup>23</sup>

Surely, we can imagine a democratic country with a large, fervent (but hitherto politically inactive) religious group that believes that everyone over 60 should be euthanized.<sup>24</sup> As we have exempted non-political religions from our consonance tests, this country might well be at risk if its majority finds euthanasia abhorrent – especially if members of the church happen to occupy leadership positions in the army.

I therefore contend that the theory is empirically disconfirmable. But is it plausible? It seems so to me, but I am neither a historian nor a social scientist. Eckstein himself concentrated most of his investigations on the Weimar Republic, on England, and on Norway in the 1960s. It is fairly clear that, based on his published observations, the first of these did not exhibit uniform consonance of the sort indicated herein, while the other two probably did. But what of other jurisdictions? If we look at the raft of collapses of democratic governments that occurred in the 1960s and 70s – including Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Greece, Guatemala, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, The Philippines, South Korea, and Uruguay – we will certainly find no shortage of (i) large political parties supporting fascism, communism, or other anti-democratic ideology; (ii) military organizations that, instead of demonstrating fealty to their ostensibly democratic governments, were clearly quite anxious to overthrow them; and (iii) external interference. These suggest that the theory proposed here may survive all of those collapses. But if there remains a single example of a collapse in a uniformly consonant country that was spearheaded either by an internal organization supported by less than 1% of the country's populace or by the impulsive activities of a large, hitherto consonant politically active organization, the hypothesis proposed herein would be immediately refuted.

I have insisted that the consonance theory must be easier to disconfirm than earlier iterations of congruence theories of stability. But I do not want to suggest that just because the definitions proposed here are minimalistic and describe dichotomous properties, no difficulties will arise in making determinations. I cannot deny that consonance assessments are likely to be tricky. Let us use the United States as an example. Suppose we agree with the impressive recent study by Gilens and Page (2014) according to which the U.S. is not a democracy, but base our conclusion on different premises. Instead of relying, as its authors do, on a substantive multivariate analysis involving the effects of the preferences of both “average citizens” and “elites” as expressed in about 1800 surveys on actual policy development, suppose our own assessment focuses exclusively on some

<sup>23</sup> I believe we should treat collapses resulting from famine or economic devastation from outside forces as we would invasions by foreign powers only if they result from events beyond the control of the government. If a financial breakdown producing democratic collapse is entirely the result of error, corruption or sloth, I have no problem with counting the instance as a disconfirmation of my consonance theory. This would provide a fourth way to disconfirm – even if there were no “significance” restraint and completely universal consonance had been required.

<sup>24</sup> See Trollope (1882).

single event to make our case, say, the Bush/Gore election or the issuance of the Citizens United decision. If we take the position that democracy *did* exist in the U.S., perhaps between the date of the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1964 and the date of the critical event we claim to be proof of its disappearance, it would make sense to ask if the alleged collapse should be counted as a disconfirmation of the consonance theory, or if there was a prior failure of consonance which would have made any prediction of continuing stability improper from that point on. It might be suggested by someone examining this matter that prior to the collapse there were examples of large pressure groups, like the National Rifle Association, that were actively advocating for policies that were known by these organizations to be opposed by a majority of U.S. citizens, so consonance was insufficient for stability. That suggestion would be off target. The existence of such a group could not save our hypothesis, since opposition to many positions the majority happens to hold is perfectly consistent with consonance according to our definition.

On the other hand, the theory *could* be saved by, e.g., the discovery of a long-standing plank in some major party's platform supporting the retention of the winner-take-all methodology for tabulating state Electoral College votes, because that stance *is* explicitly opposed to majority rule as described here. It can be seen, then, that even consonance assessments are not as simple as they may initially seem. In any case, if this theory is considered difficult to test, it surely compares favourably with those that required the grading of every existing societal institution on matters ranging from tolerance and existential autonomy to "meritocratic markets."

Let me close by anticipating another foreseeable line of objection to my revision of Eckstein's ideas. It is that it is uninteresting. I do not deny that while it is difficult – or even impossible – to determine the truth-value of any of Eckstein's own proposals, there were important, educative points to them. He was trying to provide advice to policy-makers that would help prevent another Nazi Germany from rising from the ashes of the next Weimar Republic. Families, schools, workplaces – all would therefore need to be investigated and perhaps reformed. Are there any valuable lessons that can be taken from my consonance hypothesis, supposing it does happen to be true?

This is not an easy question to answer. The idea, certainly, is to foster majoritarianism, since the theory claims that where it holds sway, democracies cannot die. But this is less straightforward than it may sound. Recall that a government may be approved as democratic according the consonance theory without being a very nice place. Democracy as defined here is largely a matter of commitment to majoritarianism and its non-violent implementation, so if the consonance theory is true, all that would seem to be necessary to achieve stability would be majority support for the strictly electoral mechanisms. Thus, given a reasonable level of confirmation, it might make sense to the leaders of some regime to attempt to stay in power by outlawing opposition parties or independent media outlets, or by taking more direct control over the official military apparatus. The problem with such strategies is that they are quite likely

to have precisely the opposite effect: they nearly always make the citizenry more hostile to their governments and so might be stability-reducing. This, of course; it is simply another way of putting the well-known difficulty of determining optimal paths when running a country (or school or family for that matter). Sadly, finding a golden mean between leniency and discipline – freedom and authority – is a matter that cannot be resolved solely by consulting a stability hypothesis, however intuitive and well-confirmed it might be.

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