

SOME PRINCIPLES OF POLITICS

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1. Introduction

POLITICAL SCIENCE IS THE STUDY of human beings engaged in politics—that is, the pursuit, exercise, and influencing of the coercive powers of the state and of those who are subject to them. A state is an entity whose directors, the rulers or magistrates,¹ claim, in the name of a nation or people or a set of principles or ideas, their right to tax, conscript, wage war, and engage in diplomacy with other states; to license, regulate, require, or prohibit various categories of activities or conduct, including commerce, foreign and domestic; to judge disputes between individuals or associations or between them and the state itself; and to punish those who do not abide by its decrees with measures that may, depending on the nature of the regime, range from fines to physical or emotional pain, imprisonment, uncompensated labor, or even death. In short, as Bertrand de Jouvenel puts it, the essence of the state is command.² These powers excite the ambition of a segment of the most spirited members of any population. They may be motivated by some mixture of patriotism, altruism, vision of a good society, and passion for

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¹ I will use all three terms interchangeably.

² Bertrand de Jouvenel, *On Power: Its Nature and the History of Its Growth* (Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1981), p. 96. By "Power," de Jouvenel meant "the totality of the components of the government" (p. 386). It is what in this article I call "the state."

honor or fame, or, alternatively, the desire to dominate or even less worthy feelings, such as patronage, nepotism, thirst for revenge, resentment, envy, hatred, sadism, getting rich from state contracts or using privileged information to guide one's own investments or acquisitions (the equivalent of "insider trading"), and the like.³ Government, the collection of offices⁴ occupied by anywhere from a handful to a few hundred decision makers located in the country's capital, is the controlling center of the state, its commanding height.⁵ Those who capture it, as well as those who seek to displace and replace them by electoral or violent means, and those (the lobbyists) who, on behalf of groups large and small, look to influence it with various inducements, constitute the political class. The rest, however much or little their voices and votes are taken into consideration in the making of public policy, are the ruled.

Unlike economists, it is unusual for political scientists to examine the first principles of their discipline.⁶ Perhaps political scientists have a

³ De Jouvenel writes of the dual nature of egotism. Egotism is a force that nurtures the rulers' love of power and inspires them to identify the people as an extension of their own selves and of public office as their own property. This drives the expansion of the state into every nook and cranny of society through the provision of public services "under cover of the hopes aroused by its displays of the altruistic side of its nature." Absent better motives, a "healthy egoism" protects the rulers from committing self-destructive blunders. On the other hand, without the egotism necessary to uphold their authority, the government would become enervated, imbecilic; self-denying rulers would be easy prey for men of less tender feelings. De Jouvenel, *On Power*, pp. 120–125.

⁴ In some cases the effective center of power may actually reside in the "office" of a ruling party that itself controls the institutions of the state, as was the case in Stalin's Russia. See Richard Overly, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia* (W.W. Norton & Company; Reprint Edition, 2006).

⁵ Throughout, I use the terms "government" and "state" interchangeably. The context should suffice to alert the reader when I mean to refer to the total array of institutions (army, bureaucracy, tax collector, etc.), and when to the government, which constitutes its controlling mechanism. As I shall make clear in the discussion of regimes, the government may be in the hands of an all-powerful executive or a ruling party that aspires to rule indefinitely, or its powers divided or shared among semi-autonomous offices, including an executive, a legislature, a judiciary, and subordinate provincial and local units in which two or more political parties or coalitions are represented and take turns at governing in response to election results.

⁶ A simple contrast illustrates the claim: in a Google search, or at Amazon.com, compare the number of titles bearing the phrase "elements of politics" or "principles of politics" with those that include "elements of economics" or "principles of economics."

conviction that such principles do not exist, so that the attempt is bound to fail, or believe that they do exist but there is no reliable means to discover or verify them, so that the effort will be mired in endless controversy from the outset, with no clear conclusion. I submit that this aversion to digging into the roots of politics shortchanges the discipline and leaves students with no firm foundation upon which to erect their understanding of government with the findings of more specialized, narrowly focused research. My purpose in this article is to make a small contribution toward remedying this situation by calling to mind a few fundamentals about government that all students of politics should know. To that end, I draw on classical, modern, and contemporary scholarship, my own empirical analysis of 700 elections in fifty democracies and of more than a dozen dictatorships of various ideological casts, and the history of the two cases with which I am most familiar, the United States and Cuba. Also, following Tullock, I use a few examples or anecdotes from other countries, not as evidence, but to elucidate a theoretical point.⁷ A caveat, however, is in order. I make no claim that the list of “laws”⁸ of politics here presented is exhaustive, or that it subsumes all aspects of the state. As will become evident, I limit the analysis primarily to the internal dynamics of state formation and the operations of two ideal types, democracy and dictatorship, and omit discussion of international relations or foreign policy, with one exception, developed below.

2. Preliminaries

As the social-contract theorists Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau understood, to inquire into the nature of politics one needs to start at an analytical beginning, with what they called the state of nature, with anarchy. Since he came first, and in a sense the latter two can be said to have attempted to refute or modify his thesis, I will attribute this insight to Hobbes. However, anarchy need not be thought of as a condition without government, a pre-political situation. After all, students of international relations assert, correctly, that states deal with each other in an anarchical world. So anarchy does not describe only a condition where private persons or associations lack a sovereign. Any two or more social units that deal with each other without being accountable to a common superior are in a state of anarchy vis-à-vis each other. This describes a situation where two or more

⁷ As Gordon Tullock does in *Autocracy* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1987), p. xi.

⁸ I write “laws” in deference to readers who doubt that political science can aspire to anything stronger than general tendencies or regularities falling far short of the status of scientific laws.

political entities struggle for sovereignty, one of which may be an established state or empire and the other a revolutionary or separatist group. Thus, we do not have to imagine how government emerged out of the state of nature in prehistoric times. We can do better simply by observing circumstances, of which there are many examples, of separatist wars or revolutions.

Another insight comes from Machiavelli. In *The Prince*, he showed how a man can rise from private station, even from humble or obscure beginnings, to make himself founder or master of a state. In so doing, he laid bare the very nature of government. The perspective I adopt here applies these Hobbesian and Machiavellian insights to uncover basic principles of politics—namely, elements, compounds, and “laws” governing their behavior. However, this article is not a discourse on any of these theorists’ writings. Also, throughout this analysis, in support of arguments or empirical assertions, I make references to previous literature on political theory and history in which authors of some renown (Bertrand de Jouvenel, Alexis de Tocqueville, Thomas Jefferson, Harold Lasswell, and Karl Wittfogel, as well as the aforementioned theorists and others) have made similar claims, grounding them in the study of history, or their own contemporary observations or actual political experience. I assume that those constitute robust (if not necessarily dispositive) support for my own affirmations. Finally, it is the prerogative of an author to use the terms that denote the concepts he has in mind, provided they are clearly defined and used consistently throughout the analysis. I make use of that privilege. That said, I proceed to define any key terms not already mentioned, and to lay out basic assumptions and boundaries to this inquiry.

For a setting, assume that a population settled over a more or less geographically demarcated territory has crossed a certain threshold of social, cultural, and economic integration, in the process acquiring sufficiently distinct features to entice a group or groups among them to attempt to establish an independent state, either *de novo* or by carving it from an existing state or empire, and that such an attempt is met with a favorable reception from at least a minority of the target population willing to lend it no less than the minimum support necessary to carry on the enterprise for some time.⁹ Following “The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United

⁹ Alternatively, assume that a state is already in place but governed or misgoverned in such a way that a certain group or groups decide to overthrow the regime and their efforts meet with enough support on the part of at least a sector of the population that is dissatisfied or disgruntled enough that it sustains the revolutionary groups for a period of time.

States of America,” I call a population ripe for that sort of undertaking “the people.”¹⁰

As in the formation of the United States, Cuba, or Estonia,¹¹ to pick a few examples, “the people” is pictured by intellectuals (philosophers, historians, artists, composers, poets, novelists, publicists). The people harden in struggles for an independent existence under their own state—struggles launched by small groups that swell into a large movement as the conflict wears on, even escalating into violent clashes in the streets or the field of battle and concluding either with success or failure, provisional or permanent.¹² Once victorious, the revolutionaries establish a state or regime with much fanfare, enacting a constitution, or fundamental law, and associated symbols that are more likely to endure the more they resonate with the local history and culture. Using the powers of government, generations of statesmen seek to consolidate and develop a fledgling or inchoate people into

¹⁰ “When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for *one people* to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation” (emphasis added). Another name for the same social entity is “nationality” or “nation.” I prefer “the people” because that is the word used in an actual historical case of great, if not universal, import, and because it is a word repeatedly used in democratic discourse. But a concept such as “the people” (or “the nation”), like all ideas about a collective, can easily be romanticized. It must be used with caution, for a “people” (or “nation”) is not, as totalitarians would have it, of one mind, thinking and speaking in unison, and is, rather, spoken *of* or *in its name* by those seeking political power. Ackerman, critically examining the preamble of the US Constitution, uses it without illusions. Bruce A. Ackerman, “The Storr Lectures: Discovering the Constitution,” *Yale Law Journal*, 93, 6, 1984, pp. 1017–18. Finally, I use “people” and “society” interchangeably to denote a social body distinct from the state, even as they exist in a symbiotic relationship and partially overlap.

¹¹ Toivo U. Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, updated 2nd edition (Hoover Institution Press, 2001), ch. 5. This chapter discusses the “national awakening” of the Estonians in the second half of the nineteenth century and the attempts of the Russian Empire to counter it.

¹² The first successful movement for Estonian independence involved fighting against the Russian and German Empires; the second movement triumphed without bloodshed (*ibid.*). See also Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (Westview Press, 1993).

a nation-state of citizens.¹³ As de Jouvenel put it, “there was no such thing as a nation until various separate elements had lived long together under the same Power.”¹⁴

To govern is to rule—that is, to make decisions that are binding on members of a group or association, the ruled. Everyone is expected to obey, and whoever disobeys risks a penalty. Many social (i.e., nonstate) bodies make decisions that are compulsory for their members. To belong, an individual must conform to its rules, norms, or conventions, or be subject to a sanction of some kind: ostracism, as in the case of nonconforming Amish; exclusion from, for example, some of the sacraments in the Catholic Church; or even violence, such as that practiced by Muslim fathers or brothers against girls who defy certain religious or cultural prohibitions, or in Judaism at the time of Christ, when an adulteress was liable to be stoned to death. Incipient revolutionary movements do the same.¹⁵ In the case of an embryonic state.

¹³ See the chapters “The Legislator” and “The People” in J. J. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, translated and edited by Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987). See also John Jay, *Federalist 2*.

¹⁴ De Jouvenel, *On Power*, p. 98. De Jouvenel did not seem to recognize the difference between a “nation” (or “people,” as I call it here) and a nation-state. There are nations without states. By one account, from 1890 to 1990 almost 100 “nonstate nations” declared independence, but without success. See James Minahan, *Nations without States: A Historical Dictionary of Contemporary National Movements* (Wesport, Conn: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996), pp. 645–649.

¹⁵ In the prelude to the American Revolution, stamp-tax collectors were burned in effigy and threatened with worse if they did not resign their commissions. In response to the Townshend Acts, Boston merchants (along with those of New York City and Philadelphia) adopted a nonimportation policy, proscribing a range of British goods. To bring the pressure of the community on the “noncompliers,” their names were publicized: “The December 11 [1779] issue of the Boston Gazette advised its readers not to purchase from [here follow seven names] or risk being considered ‘Enemies to their Country.’” Ostracism, broken windows, defaced signs, threats to tar and feather, and even assaults were used to intimidate noncompliers and those who dealt with them into falling in line or closing shop and leaving the city. Richard Archer, *As if an Enemy’s Country: The British Occupation of Boston and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 164, 167 ff., 211–12. When, following the Tea Party, the British retaliated by closing the Port of Boston and landing 3,000 troops, the first Continental Congress agreed on a general nonimportation policy, and local associations and militias were formed to enforce it. In Fairfax County, Virginia, “local leaders decided to levy a three-shilling poll tax” to defray the cost of ammunition: “The residents had little choice but to pay this ‘voluntary’ tax: the local sheriff, among others, would collect the money, and laggards would be

one that exists within at least the nominal territorial jurisdiction and in violent conflict with another, as the United States was under the unratified Articles of Confederation during its war for independence,¹⁶ the penalties for noncompliance can be quite severe, up to and including institutionalized violence—such as confiscation of property, arrest, exile, imprisonment, or death.¹⁷

stigmatized on a special list” (Ron Chernow, *Washington: A Life* [New York: Penguin Press, 2010], pp. 138, 166, 174–75). As the Revolutionary War dragged on, Loyalists or Tories were terrorized, run out of town or confined, and had their properties confiscated (Jerome J. Nadelhaft, *The Disorders of War: The Revolution in South Carolina* [University of Maine at Orono Press, 1981]). See also Ruma Chopra, *Unnatural Rebellion: Loyalists in New York City during the Revolution* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011), and Holger Hook, *Scars of Independence. America’s Violent Birth* (New York: Crown, 2017), especially ch. 1, “Tory Hunting” and ch. 12, “Returning Losers.” Also see R. Lamb, *Journal of Occurrences during the Late American War from Its Commencement to the Year 1783* (Dublin: Wilkinson & Courtney, 1809). Lamb was an Irishman who fought with the British in several theaters of the American revolutionary war, was captured, and twice escaped confinement. For a novelistic version of Lamb’s story, see Robert Graves, *Sergeant Lamb of the Ninth. Proceed, Sergeant Lamb*, edited by Caroline Zilboorg (Manchester, England: Carcanet, 1999).

¹⁶ Similar gestating states are found in areas controlled by rebel groups. If the revolution is successful, the incipient state fuses with the existing one, remaking it in its own image.

¹⁷ That pirates, warlords, and urban criminal gangs make similar claims on their members and employ at least a few roughly equivalent structures and methods, and that some governments are analogous to criminal enterprises writ large, are facts to which we will return in due course. As a treatise on international law put it, “Most acts of war which become piratical through being done without due authority are acts of war when done under the authority of the state” (William Edward Hall, *A Treatise on International Law* [Oxford University Press, 1924], p. 311, quoted in Janice E. Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns: State-Building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe* [Princeton University Press, 1994], p. 22). See also Frank Sherry, *Raiders and Rebels: The Golden Age of Piracy* (New York: Hearst Marine Books, 1986), especially ch. 7, “On the Account: A Pirate’s Life” and ch. 11, “Republic of Rogues”; Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Government and Civilian Life during War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Paul Jackson, “Warlords as Alternative Forms of Governance,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 14, 2 (2003), pp. 131–50; David Skarbek, “Governance and Prison Gangs,” *American Political Science Review*, 105, 4, November 2011, pp. 702–16; and Harold Lasswell, *Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1936), p. 106.

The state is an enduring complex of institutions within which the rulers, exercising its coercive powers allegedly in the name of “the people,” claim to represent them both in the sense of visualizing or picturing them and speaking and acting in their name. By way of criticizing the organic theory of power, de Jouvenel offers a similar conjecture about the thinking of the magistrates:

Many of the individuals in a society [so goes the leadership’s view] do not yet behave as the members of a whole [people, state], from not knowing that they are *members* rather than *individuals*. This whole, however, fulfils itself as such to the extent that its conscious members [those whom Gouverneur Morris called “men of sense and spirit”—see below] lead the rest on to behave and think in the way that is required to enable the whole to fulfil itself as such. And for that reason the conscious members both can and must push and pull the unconscious.¹⁸

[And] those *only* who have attained to this knowledge [that of perceiving people and state, and their good] are steering society towards its fulfillment. In them is all guidance and leadership; the general will coincides with their will *only*; theirs is the general will.¹⁹

The national or central government, or government, for short, refers to the controlling organ of the state. Those who occupy it, the rulers or “ins,” and those who strive to replace them by fair means or foul, the “outs,” seek to exercise sovereignty over every living and nonliving thing found within the area of the state’s presumed jurisdiction. Sovereignty is ultimate authority, the claim to exercise an exclusive, absolute, non-appealable right to rule—that is, to legislate, tax, conscript, adjudicate, punish, wage war, and negotiate with other states.²⁰ The bid for power may be accepted, even if implicitly, by most of the population, or contested by a rival organization that wrestles with it for control.²¹ However, some may not acknowledge any particular person’s claim to exercise sovereignty, a stand that is likely to invite a means of persuasion that is not limited to words.

Along these lines, it bears remembering that during the American Revolution the colonists were far from unanimous, rendering the conflict something like a civil war. According to one estimate, some 20,000 colonists took up arms on the British side, and an even larger number offered passive resistance to the rebels: refusing to pay taxes, accept a debased currency, or

¹⁸ De Jouvenel, *On Power*, pp. 51–52. Italics in original.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50. Italics in original.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.

²¹ Ackerman, “The Storr Lectures,” pp. 1019–20.

sell supplies to the Continental Army; evading militia duty; or deserting. Partisan warfare between loyalist and patriot militias, especially in the South, cost many lives and involved much plundering and torching of property. After the conclusion of the war, some 60,000 people emigrated, a larger percentage than fled France after its revolution.²² To be sure, tens of thousands were guillotined or murdered during the Terror, while nothing like that took place in America. Moreover, “resistance to *the* Revolution was not always a function of loyalism, but was often a manifestation of adherence to a *different* kind of revolution—or at the very least to a different conception of social, economic, and political relations than that envisioned by the Revolution’s leadership.”²³ Whoever they are, the people’s presumed representatives attempt to make good on their claim by establishing or assuming control of a gestating state, aiming at domestic supremacy within a designated territory and to a “separate and equal station among the powers of the earth” (i.e., to international recognition) as “The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America” puts it.²⁴

The most important guarantee of sovereignty is recognition by other states.²⁵ Accordingly, one of the first things a secessionist group aims at is international recognition as a state or belligerent. Thus the Americans’

²² Maya Jasanoff, “The Other Side of Revolution: Loyalists in the British Empire,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 65, 2 (2008), pp. 205–32; Paul H. Smith, “The American Loyalists: Notes on Their Organization and Numerical Strength,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 25, 2, (1968), pp. 259–77.

²³ Michael A. McDonnell, “Resistance to the Revolution,” ch. 43 in Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, eds., *A Companion to the American Revolution* (Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 342. Emphasis in original.

²⁴ As in the United States and Cuba, in many cases sovereignty had to be wrested from an empire by force. In the meantime, recognition of the fledgling state by most established powers was withheld until victory was obtained.

²⁵ Thomson argues that “sovereignty that is produced and reproduced by the collectivity of state rulers is the outcome of ongoing interactions between states in which the practically derived norms of sovereignty emerge. As such, sovereignty should be treated... as an institution that empowers states vis-à-vis people.” In this conception, sovereign states constitute an exclusive global club, membership in which depends on a number of factors, especially the acceptance of certain norms and obligations to other states. Thus, existing states bestow or deny legitimacy to a gestating or newly born state and to those who claim to represent it. “Statesmen authorize the state as the legitimate deployer of violence within a geographically bounded political space with the expectation that the state will control violence within that space” (Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns*, pp. 5, 17).

desperate bids for recognition from France, Spain, Holland, Prussia, and Russia and a like effort on the part of Cuban patriots in their wars of independence from Spain. Still another example from the latter case is provided by the members of the 1901 Cuban Constitutional Convention. Resisting the incorporation of what came to be known as the Platt Amendment into their constitution, in a meeting in Washington with Secretary of War Elihu Root one of them “pointed out” that the amendment “could be interpreted to mean that Cuba was subject to the suzerainty of the United States,” something that would make it “difficult to obtain recognition as a member of the international community.” Root countered “that the United States intended to recognize Cuba as a fully sovereign and independent nation first, an act which could not but aid Cuba in obtaining full recognition internationally as a sovereign power.”²⁶

The purposes of the people and of the government of the day are various, and may or may not coincide, depending on the latter’s representativeness. Citizens want three categories of things from government: security of life and possessions, an environment that is conducive to their prosperity, which may well include, at least for a certain proportion of them, drawing more in benefits from the state than they pay in taxes and other requisitions,²⁷ and endorsement of their views of right and wrong, of morality and justice, their ways of life, their religion—in short, of their culture. Of course, at any one time in any society there usually are competing visions of morality and justice, as well as lifestyles that differ, if not on fundamentals, at least at the margins.²⁸ At a minimum, however, all states and governments are concerned with the survival and prosperity of their members.²⁹ As Lasswell

²⁶ James H. Hitchman, *Leonard Wood and Cuban Independence. 1898–1902* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971, p. 152).

²⁷ John C. Calhoun asserts that in its exercise of the state’s fiscal powers (taxing and spending), the government divides the community into net taxpayers and net tax consumers. It goes without saying that the regulatory powers have a similar effect, that of benefitting some more than others, or doing less harm to some than to others (John C. Calhoun, “A Disquisition on Government” [1851], in H. Lee Cheek Jr., ed., *John C. Calhoun: Selected Writings and Speeches* [Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2003], p. 13).

²⁸ As Aristotle taught long ago, a state is a plurality. Madison concurred; in *Federalist* 49, he noted that in normal times (let alone revolutionary ones) there is an “ordinary diversity of opinions on great national questions.”

²⁹ Note that this is a descriptive, not a normative, statement. I am only advancing the proposition that the overwhelming proportion of humanity wishes to survive and prosper, in whatever way they conceive it. Of course, most human beings have additional ends in view. Moreover, ancient philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, and some

puts it, “Plainly an elite is subject to domestic attack when it fails to coincide with prosperity.”³⁰ However, the rulers’ conception of who is included as bona fide members of the people may be quite restrictive, and, in fact, large minorities of the population may be fated for expulsion or extinction by reason of their race, nationality, ethnicity, or “class,” and even members of the regime whom the autocrat suspects of disloyalty may join them by being purged.³¹ Regarding morality and justice, a government may seek to reconcile or strike a balance among competing conceptions, to choose one to enforce, or to impose its very own idiosyncratic notions on the people, as totalitarian regimes are wont to do.³² The same goes for the dominant culture: the rulers may wage war on it, as they did in National Socialist Germany and Soviet Russia, or hold it in contempt, as at least part of the cosmopolitan elites of the Western world appear to regard the “traditionalists” among them.³³ What these elites and the political class more generally want from the state is more or less what the ruled want, only the former are much better positioned to

moderns, such as Rousseau, taught that the state should prioritize promoting the virtue of their members. (See Plato’s *Republic*, Aristotle’s *Politics*, and Rousseau’s *Social Contract*.) Ironically, in this view they were joined by totalitarian regimes such as Hitler’s Germany, Stalin’s Russia, and Castro’s Cuba, although their ideas of virtue were not quite what those philosophers had in mind. In any case, their schemes to fashion a “New Man” foundered on the shoals of human nature.

³⁰ Harold Lasswell, *Who Gets What, When, How*, p. 76. This observation holds true across all regimes, although an elite’s vulnerability to the loss of power in the face of economic downturns is more pronounced in democracies than dictatorships. See Adam Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950–1990* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³¹ In his 1956 speech denouncing Stalin’s crimes, Khrushchev condemned his predecessor’s “glaring abuses of socialist legality, which resulted in the death of innocent people. It became apparent that many party, Soviet and economic activists who in 1937–1938 were branded as ‘enemies’ were actually never enemies, spies, wreckers, etc., but were always honest communists.” See “Great Speeches of the 20th Century: The Cult of the Individual—part 2,” *The Guardian*. Last accessed 19 Jun 2017. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2007/apr/26/greatspeeches6>.

³² Overy, *The Dictators*, ch. 7, “The Moral Universe of Dictatorship” and ch. 9, “Cultural Revolutions.”

³³ A partial explanation of the vote for Trump in the 2016 American presidential election may lie in the fact that many of his supporters felt not only aggrieved economically but culturally as well, their ways of life denigrated by party “elites,” bureaucrats, and the “mainstream media” complex.

further their interests and gain endorsement of their views from the state, as it is they who influence or chart its course.

3. The Elements

A fledgling, or gestating, state, such as the United States of America of 1776–83 or the Cuban “Republic in Arms” of 1868–78, consists of five indispensable elements: leadership, party, ideology, force, and money. This is the core. Around it are built an incipient bureaucracy and representative and judicial or quasi-judicial bodies of some sort. If the revolutionaries are triumphant, the party, alone or in a coalition with other groups, affirms the independence of the state or establishes a new or reformed regime. Here I examine these elements. Although I devote a section to each, they are woven throughout the entire discussion, as one can hardly treat one without involving one or more of the others. I take up regimes in the next section.

Leadership may be singular or plural. The norm is plural. That is, even though a single man may dominate,³⁴ normally he surrounds himself with an inner circle or council whom he consults before making important decisions, and they may well demand that he do or refrain from doing some things to continue to support him. That does not mean that all members of the leadership are more or less on equal terms. They usually are not, and there is jockeying for prominence within the “vanguard.” The leader himself may not be completely secure in his position and need to protect himself from an ambitious member of the council, a peer, or a nominal subordinate. Thus, parallel with the struggle for power against the enemy is a competition for rank within the leadership group, including even bids to replace the top leader or *primus inter pares* on the part of a rival.³⁵ In the early years of the American Revolution, for example, George Washington was challenged, albeit indirectly, by Horatio Gates and Charles Lee in the army and by a faction of the Continental Congress, the alleged “Conway Cabal,” among others.³⁶ In due course Washington fended off the threat in Congress,³⁷ and

³⁴ Political leaders are not exclusively male, but females are rare enough—and practically nonexistent as leaders of revolutions or independent movements—to justify the use of the masculine pronoun throughout.

³⁵ This is a recurrent theme in Tullock, *Autocracy*.

³⁶ Ron Chernow, *Washington* pp. 316–21; Louis Clinton Hatch, *The Administration of the American Revolutionary Army* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971), pp. 24–34.

³⁷ As Chernow puts it, “The so-called Conway Cabal taught people that Washington was tough and crafty in defending his terrain and that they tangled with him at their peril. Henceforth anyone who underestimated George Washington lived to regret the error. His

Lee and Gates discredited themselves in battle, leaving the field to Washington.³⁸ But wrangling over rank by generals serving under him, both American and foreign, was a persistent bane.³⁹

In Cuba, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes pre-emptively seized the leadership of the independence movement on October 10, 1868, with his *Grito de Yara*, proclaiming himself captain general of the Cuban Republic. But his leadership soon came under challenge by Ignacio Agramonte, among others. Forced to choose between the presidency and the command of the armed forces, Céspedes chose the former, and for most of the next five years was locked in a struggle with the assembly, a contest that ended with his dismissal. Prohibited from going abroad and denied sufficient protection, he lost his life in an ambush by Spanish forces.⁴⁰ In this and two other attempts at independence, Cuba lacked a George Washington. None of the men who made a bid for supreme leadership, either political or military, attained it, and the most worthy were killed in battle: Ignacio Agramonte himself, José Martí, Antonio Maceo.⁴¹ Lacking a Washington, every attempt at constructing an independent Cuban state was hobbled from the start.⁴²

skillful treatment of the ‘cabal’ silenced his harshest critics, leaving him in unquestioned command of the Continental Army” (Chernow, *Washington*, p. 321).

³⁸ In Burnett’s colorful language, “General Lee would dash furiously across the stage a few times, then disappear in the wings, where, for a brief space, he would furnish some annoying thunder, but little lighting; General Gates would strut a stellar part for a longer period but in due time he would stumble through a trap door, and so vanish from the military scene” (Edmund Cody Burnett, *The Continental Congress* [Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1975], originally published by MacMillan Company, 1941, p. 78).

³⁹ Hatch, *American Revolutionary Army*, pp. 45–70.

⁴⁰ Enrique Ros, *Carlos Manuel de Céspedes: De Yara a San Lorenzo. La Lealtad y la Perfidia* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 2010).

⁴¹ Calixto García survived a suicide attempt when he was about to be captured by Spanish forces. Following the Spanish-American War, he died in Washington during negotiations with the United States over Cuban independence. The last worthy, General Máximo Gómez, a Dominican by birth, sided with the Americans during the occupation. This prompted the Cuban Assembly in its last gasp to censure him, an act that backfired when public opinion rallied to his side. However, he refused the presidency, retired to his village, and died three years after Cuba became an independent state.

⁴² This deficiency was pervasive in most of Latin America. The most famous of the self-appointed leaders of independence (Simón Bolívar, José de San Martín, Agustín Iturbide, Francisco Morazán, Antonio José de Sucre) ended up exiling themselves, assassinated, or executed by firing squad.

Again, for the purpose of simplicity, I speak of leadership in the singular. Those most successful at attracting followers into the revolutionary organization, which I designate by the generic term “the party,” have that elusive quality that goes by the name of charisma, a magnetism emanating from their eyes, bearing, and voice, display of strategic and tactical acumen, facility with words, written or spoken, and that set of attributes that Machiavelli subsumed under the term *virtù*. A revolutionary leader acquires a reputation by overcoming danger, by earning his spurs in battle or in some political struggle that may cost him beatings, wounds, torture, jail, or exile.⁴³ His followers are molded and hierarchically arranged in an organization, the party, which is geared for war, be it military or political.

The war is fought with a combination of words and violence. Taking up the former first, Lasswell puts it well:

The object of revolution, like war, is to attain coercive predominance over the enemy as a means of working one’s will with him. Revolutionary propaganda selects symbols which are calculated to detach the affections of the masses from the existing symbols of authority, to attach these affections to challenging symbols, and to direct hostilities toward existing symbols of authority. This is infinitely more complex than the psychological problem of war propaganda, since in war the destructive energies of the community are drained along familiar channels.⁴⁴

The party and its constituency may be represented as a series of partly concentric and partly overlapping circles that vary in size and distance from the leader. Again, every leader has an “inner circle” or “vanguard” that shares power or to whom he delegates power—that is, the authority and resources to make decisions, command their own subordinates, and rule a subconstituency—and rewards. They include the top civilian and, if a revolutionary or independence-seeking party, its military or paramilitary personnel. The degree of sharing or delegation of power, and extent of rewards, depends on the structure and composition of the leadership.⁴⁵

⁴³ De Jouvenel writes of the “double character” of kingship: the *dux*, or warrior leader, and *rex*, an office of religious or magical character. The “kingly Power” “is at once the symbol of the community, its mystical core, its cohesive force, its sustaining virtue [i.e., the *rex*]. But it is also [the *dux*], ambition for itself, the exploitation of society, the will to power, the use of the national resources for purposes of prestige and adventure.” *On Power*, p. 84.

⁴⁴ Lasswell, *Who Gets What, When, How*, p. 46.

⁴⁵ An example from the practice of pirates sheds light on this. In 1693, the plunder from a treasure-laden ship of the great mogul of India boarded in the Indian Ocean was

Beyond the inner circle comes the next layer of the party, the “middle management,” representatives sent abroad, and so on down to the rank and file. Beyond the organization’s membership there are multiple constituencies, some smaller and more influential, such as wealthy contributors, people with international contacts or special skills, and others, larger but less and less influential, ultimately extending to those whom the leader publicly claims to be representing, supporters and sympathizers of the party and the people beyond.

What the constituency wants from the leadership varies greatly, and depends in large part on their relative place within the party or the people. Those closest to the leader hanker after a share of authority and power, not excluding the top rank, recognition, honor, or glory (sought after as end in itself, but which also has potential as a marketable asset, opening doors to opportunities to profit from various shades of legitimacy or legality), and booty. At the other end, farthest away from the leader, among ordinary people, the desire is for protection, opportunities for state employment or profits from supplying its needs after the victory, simple justice, affirmation of their lifestyles and beliefs, being left alone to pursue happiness by their own lights, or simply “not [being] oppressed,” as Machiavelli says. There are, of course, adventurers, soldiers of fortune, still others who seek opportunities to avenge private vendettas, and even criminal elements who attach themselves to the movement.⁴⁶ The booty consists of, first, shares in the stream of revenues and other goods acquired by the government or the party (houses, lands, enterprises of all kinds, personal valuables, art collections, etc.) through confiscating the properties of members of the enemy organization or donations from supporters and, second, plum appointments, control over public buildings and positions of authority, and patronage from a new government, should the revolution or the war for independence succeed.

divided thus: “After setting aside the backer’s shares, [Capt. Thomas] Tew doled out one share for each ordinary seaman, one share for the captain, and one and a half shares each for the quartermaster and surgeon.” In another instance, apprentice seamen were awarded about half a sailor’s share. Frank Sherry, *Raiders and Rebels: The Golden Age of Piracy* (New York: Hearst Marine Books, 1986), pp. 29, 79. Compared to the division of the spoils in successful revolutionary armies, the distribution of the loot among pirates was equitable indeed.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Rosalie Schwartz, *Lawless Liberators: Political Banditry and Cuban Independence* (Duke University Press Books, 1989), and Harry M. Ward, *Between the Lines: Banditti of the American Revolution* (Praeger, 2002).

To speak of the constituency of the leader raises the question of accountability. For if the leader claims to be seeking or exercising power on behalf of others, primarily for their benefit, not his, then those others—for whom he purportedly works, whose welfare is supposedly the aim of his legislation, to whom he makes demands, and on whom he imposes burdens, some at great risk to life and fortune, and prohibitions, some very onerous—naturally have some expectation to be heard and to decide for themselves whether the aims of the leader are congruent with their own, and whether the price exacted for that service in terms of emoluments, privileges, deference, and other rewards is appropriate or excessive. Again, this raises the question of regime, to be taken up later.

Ideology is perhaps the one defining element that differentiates revolutionary leaders and their parties from pirates and gangsters or criminal syndicates, since both exist outside the law, extract at least some of their money at the point of a gun, and challenge the state's claim to the exclusive use of force to enforce its edicts. By ideology I mean a more or less coherent set of ideas, beliefs, images—in short, a worldview about the people and state that serves the political purpose of a party or a regime: to describe, explain, and evaluate the condition of society, past and present; to justify the state, government, and ruling party's exercise of power; and to guide the making of public policy so as to realize the party's vision of the good society and state. It may be summarized in one document or several. Prime examples are "The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America" (1776) and the "Manifesto of the Communist Party" (1848).⁴⁷ Triumphant revolutionaries may be guided by a theory according to which, on the one hand, "the laws of nature and of nature's God" endow individuals with "inalienable rights" that governments are established to protect and, on the other hand, that "it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government" designed to do just that. Or, by contrast, the revolutionaries may follow a theory that rejects "eternal truths," "all religion," "and all morality," and vests "political supremacy" in the "proletariat," which, under the tutelage of a communist party, shall implement a program, however provisional, "to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class." The two paths cannot but result in very different regimes.

⁴⁷ Avalon Project at Yale Law School, *Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*. Available, respectively, at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/declare.asp and http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/mantwo.asp.

Again, the ideology carries a vision of a good or better society where the people, or at least the larger or superior part of it as the leader conceives it, will enjoy the good or better life. The leader's vision of the extent of his constituency may vary greatly, from the most expansive, which would include all who live under the territory included in the claim to sovereignty—that is, all subject to the state—to progressively narrower ones based on citizenry, religion, race, class, or even membership or militancy in the leader's party.⁴⁸

Paradoxically, some ideologies make great temporal demands on the members of the party and the people, offering rewards in history or in heaven for their sacrifices, including in the extreme their immolation in service to the cause. Martyrdom is an attractive reward for some people. National socialism, communism, fascism, Islamism, and less extreme (or, if you will, more noble) varieties of “isms,” such as patriotism or religious faith, have harnessed this human need to sacrifice for a larger cause that burns brightly in the heart of some. States recognize and honor those who sacrifice or immolate their lives in their defense. “Mort pour la France” is the epitaph on many tombs in Parisian cemeteries where soldiers and other patriots are buried. At Arlington Cemetery, the ceremonial laying of the wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on state occasions (e.g., Memorial Day) by the president of the United States or his designee is another instance of the same.

Force is the fourth element. As Brookhiser starkly puts it, “The state begins in violence.”⁴⁹ Consider what Gouverneur Morris, assistant superintendent of finance in the Continental Congress during the American Revolution, wrote to his friend, the future first chief justice of the United States Supreme Court, John Jay, in 1782: “You and I my Friend know by experience that when a *few Men of Sense and Spirit* get together and declare that they are the Authority such few as are of a different Opinion may easily be convinced of their mistake by that powerful Argument the Halter.”⁵⁰ A more forceful assertion of the same principle can be drawn from the third and last

⁴⁸ What I remember as a “Pepper and Salt” cartoon published in the *Wall Street Journal* not long ago perfectly illustrates the last possibility. It shows a politician behind a podium giving a speech. In the background are his supporters. He says something like this: “And when I say the people, I mean those standing behind me.”

⁴⁹ Richard Brookhiser, *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington* (New York: Free Press), p. 17.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Charles Rappleye, *Robert Morris. Financier of the American Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), p. 334. (Emphasis added. All capitals and omitted commas in the original).

war of Cuban independence from Spain, where it was common for rebel military commanders to demand regular payments from anyone thought to be able to afford them in order, as a letter received by one of them said, “to guarantee your interests, for otherwise we will consider your properties to be those of the enemy and we will proceed to destroy them?”⁵¹ The similarity to a protection racket is obvious enough.

In the fact that he resorts to violence to accomplish his ends, the leader of a revolutionary party is like the pirate or the gangster. And, in fact, many a political leader is little better than that, however much he clothes his criminality and that of the members of his party with fine words and flowery phrases about law and justice.⁵² Others are even worse than pirates or gangsters because, whether driven by a dystopian vision or simply their own disordered desires for power or cruel and vicious nature, they kill and destroy on a grander scale than any buccaneer or mafia don. Politics is about influencing and controlling the state, a ruling power, and ultimately this reduces to the exercise of force, without which its claim to sovereignty would be laughable.⁵³ This is not to say that all government boils down to coercion,

⁵¹ Quoted in Francisco Pérez Guzmán, *Radiografía del Ejército Libertador, 1895–1898* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2005), p. 175. A similar practice was enacted by Fidel Castro’s 26th of July movement. Owners of sugar mills and other large enterprises were assessed a “revolutionary tax” and threatened with the destruction of their estates if they did not comply.

⁵² As Locke put it, “where an appeal to the law, and constituted judges, lies open, but the remedy is denied by a manifest perverting of justice, and a barefaced wresting of the laws to protect or indemnify the violence or injuries of some men, or party of men, there it is hard to imagine any thing but a state of war: for wherever violence is used, and injury done, though by hands appointed to administer justice, it is still violence and injury, however coloured with the name, pretences, or forms of law” (John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Project Gutenberg e-book 7370, 2010, sect. 20). Douglas W. Payne, “Life in Castro’s Mafia State,” *Society*, January/February 1996, pp. 39–47. According to two constitutional lawyers, Venezuela is presently under the rule of an “outlaw state” such as what Locke had in mind, one where “the armed forces are politicized [i.e., in the pocket of the ruling party], the electoral tribunal is intent on thwarting political participation [by the opposition], and the judiciary is hell-bent on deciding political disputes in favor of the Government” (quoted in Juan Antonio Muller, “Como Combatir la Dictadura,” *Patilla*, February 14, 2017; my translation).

⁵³ Consider Gouverneur Morris again. In the aforementioned letter to John Jay, he expressed the hope that the veiled threat of mutiny of the American Army at Newburgh for lack of pay and other broken promises would result in the Continental Congress finally acquiring independent taxation powers: “I am glad to see things in their present

pure and simple. Far from it. The rationale for using force, its targets, the means and rules by which it is administered, and the degree to which it is subject to accounting by special bodies and the public at large make all the difference between a tyrannical and despotic dictatorship and a relatively benign democracy, as will be made clear in a later section. However, the revolutionary leader must acquire a body of men capable of waging war and physically subduing or eliminating defectors from his own ranks, applying a scorched-earth policy to prevent resources from falling into the hands of the enemy, and performing these tasks at the risk of their own life and limb.

The application of force starts within the leader's own party. Physical punishments, including the death penalty, are administered to deserters or traitors, double agents, mutineers, and those who commit unauthorized crimes, such as theft, plunder, rape, or murder.⁵⁴ Beyond his own party, as well as in battle, force is used against evaders of the draft for military service and requisitions for supplies or taxes, as well as against enemy spies, informants, or traitors—a label attached not only to party turncoats but to members of the people who refuse to accept the revolutionary party's claim to sovereignty, preferring to be ruled by or simply do business with representatives of foreign states, a colonial power, or an occupying force, as in France, 1940–44, when the country was partly or wholly under German rule. There the Liberation included murder, summary executions, and kangaroo trials followed by executions of collaborationists after a guilty verdict pronounced by “judges”—members of the Resistance who only days earlier had engaged in fire fights with the Pétainist militias whom they then condemned to death.⁵⁵ Again the exercise of violence and other questionable

train,’ he wrote. ‘It must terminate in giving to Government that power without which Government is just a name’” (Rappleye, *Robert Morris*, p. 333).

⁵⁴ As well as fines and imprisonment, the Continental Army administered flogging and death by hanging or firing squad. By one estimate, Washington approved slightly under one hundred executions. This total does not include those carried out summarily, or in the Southern theater, by separate commands, or by militias. Be it noted that stealing army cattle was a capital offense. For maximum effect on soldiers and civilians alike, on Washington's orders executions were carried out in a public place. See Harry M. Ward, *George Washington's Enforcers: Policing the Continental Army* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), pp. 183–96.

⁵⁵ Between D-Day and the surrender of the German garrison in Paris—that is, between early June and late August alone—some 4,000 presumed collaborationists “were summarily executed.” In total, “an extra-judicial purge... claimed 7,000 to 8,000 victims,” and something like 150,000 Frenchmen were dealt lesser punishments (Philippe Burrin, *France under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise*, translated from the French by Janet

methods needs an ideology that justifies the spilling of blood and other ghastly acts on behalf of a larger or nobler cause.

Last is money, shorthand for resources of all kinds. Money is required to reward the party's membership, purchase war materiel and other supplies, pay the troops, bribe members of the enemy, manufacture and distribute propaganda, seek recognition abroad, and so on. Money is acquired by assessing taxes, borrowing, selling bonds, requisitioning supplies in exchange for promissory notes pledging future payment, seizing property from enemies or neutrals, making appeals for voluntary contributions, and, in many cases, outright criminality, such as extortion, kidnapping for ransom, blackmail, bank robberies, embezzlement, larceny, or smuggling. A small but not insignificant percentage of wealthy people, especially heirs of great fortunes, are susceptible to appeals from revolutionaries. Even communism has been found to appeal to such people. Patriotism has a more general appeal. Money begets more money, as a portion of the revenues are invested in additional collection efforts. In this regard, revolutions share some aspects with business and some with crime. Also, they allow those in leadership positions to extort significant resources from which they can, if they choose, and most probably do choose, to skim off a certain proportion for their own benefit, even to become wealthy. Similarly, there were pirates who, after a successful run preying on merchant ships, retired from their "profession" and used their earnings to purchase landed estates and join respectable society.

Life is short, and a leader's legacy depends on institutions within which his successors will carry on his legacy. Institutions will constrain the leader, however, so many of them resist building them until it is too late. Again, the most successful leaders do lay down institutional bases.⁵⁶ Such a leader's successors make sure he lives on in the popular imagination, turning him into a sort of god, enshrining him in myths and marble. In death the leader becomes something of a magic lamp that his political heirs rub in the hope that it will generate a genie-like power that will win them popular approval.

Lloyd [New York: New Press, 1995], pp. 453, 459). See also Herbert R. Lottman, *The Purge* (New York: Morrow, 1986).

⁵⁶ As George Washington did. Not only did he preside over the Constitutional Convention, in his two terms as president he laid down institutional foundations and precedents for executive power. Chernow, *Washington*; Fergus M. Bordewich, *The First Congress: How James Madison, George Washington, and a Group of Extraordinary Men Invented the Government* (Simon & Schuster, 2016); Leonard D. White, *The Federalists: A Study in Administrative History* (New York, Macmillan Company, 1948).

His name is invoked and image projected in ceremonial occasions, his life and deeds turned to legends taught to schoolchildren.

4. The Compounds

The political elements combine into a compound, a regime. The leader fills the office of chief executive or head of state. A few of his inner circle seize control of the military, the police, the tax-collection agency, and administrative departments. Others take seats in a legislative body, the successor to the leadership council, or the judiciary. Other veterans of the struggle are appointed to posts in regional governments, embassies, other public offices, and so on.⁵⁷ Whether the victorious party seeks to monopolize all power and suppress all voices but its own or, by contrast, takes only a share of the power (even if initially it is the largest share), separates the judiciary from the executive, gives the press a free rein, and assumes the risk of being ousted from office in a free election, determines the type of regime that will ensue, a democracy or a dictatorship.

A regime describes the distribution of power among the organizations and personnel that comprise the state, as well as the rules, formal or informal, by which it is acquired and the ideology and symbols that distinguish a particular state and people from all others. Those who control the government and those who influence them from within (whether elected or appointed) or without the state, or even the country, wield various amounts of political power. Power is measured by the degree to which the rulers and those who seek to influence them are able to execute their designs.

All regimes share certain characteristics by which states are ruled.⁵⁸ Suffice it to say that the vital organs of any regime consist of an executive that at the very least directs the coercive arms—the military, the police, the jails, and prisons—foreign relations, and the civil administration, including the taxing or resource-extracting agencies; a law- or rule-making body (a legislature or council); a judiciary, which may exercise power autonomously, as in democracies, or be subordinate to the executive, as in autocracies; and,

⁵⁷ By my own rough count, about a third of the total number of signatories of the Declaration of Independence and Constitutional Convention delegates served in some capacity in the new federal and state governments, and several of the more prominent ones in more than one office—for example, president, member of congress, cabinet secretary, judge, diplomat, customs collector, or governor.

⁵⁸ See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 18, 23–25, Project Gutenberg, released October 11, 2009, last updated January 25, 2013.

in many if not most cases, representative institutions of some kind,⁵⁹ which may be coterminous or overlap with the legislature, however narrow or exclusive the constituency, even if it includes only members of the ruling party, factions within the ruling group, or influential bureaucratic, military, social, and economic interests. All governments seek to maintain internal order through property rights for the people and jurisdictions for subordinate units of government (however defined or constrained) and by adjudicating disputes among the ruled, as well as punishing acts that fall within the realm of what the regime declares to be criminality and, on the other hand, honoring exceptional service to the state with titles, medals, and other signs of recognition, usually bestowed with pomp and ceremony.

Observable differences in the acquisition, distribution, and uses of political power among regimes categorize them into two broad classes, democracies on the one hand and autocracies or dictatorships on the other, along with their subtypes. They differ in fundamental ways, including, *inter alia*, the representativeness of their institutions and hence of their decisions, degree of accountability for those decisions,⁶⁰ leadership quality⁶¹ and mode of selection, frequency of personnel change in the principal offices governing the state and its corollary, the length of tenure in the exercise of power, the degree of concentration of political power, ways of mobilizing support and dealing with the opposition on the part of those in charge of the government, and, finally, the degree to which their power is egotistical as opposed to social—that is, the extent to which power is used primarily for the benefit of the rulers or of the ruled, in the forms of services rendered.⁶²

⁵⁹ Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, “Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats,” *Comparative Political Studies*, 2007, 40, 11, pp. 1279–1301.

⁶⁰ The degree of accountability of rulers to the ruled (or relation of agents to principals, in the more benign euphemistic language of contemporary political science) depends on a number of conditions, including the distance that separates the two along several dimensions (e.g., physical, temporal, cognitive), but competitive elections, if not sufficient to ensure accountability, are a necessary one. See Craig T. Borowiak, “Accountability Debates: The Federalists, The Anti-Federalists, and Democratic Deficits,” *Journal of Politics*, 69, 4, 2007, pp. 998–1014, and J. S. Maloy, “Intermediate Conditions of Democratic Accountability: A Response to Electoral Skepticism,” *Politics and Governance*, 3, 2, 2015, pp. 76–89.

⁶¹ Timothy Besley and Marta Reynal-Querol, “Do Democracies Select More Educated Leaders?” *American Political Science Review*, 2011, 105, 3, pp. 552–66.

⁶² De Jouvenel, *On Power*, pp. 107–18.

As Plato recognized, the means used by rulers to control the ruled are reduced to two: persuasion and force.⁶³ These are combined in different proportions in democracies and dictatorships, the former placing greater emphasis on persuasion and the latter on coercion. Persuasion is carried out by means of symbols—words, arguments, sounds, ideas, references to historic figures and events, and images of people, events, landscapes, and buildings—that together work on the minds and hearts of the population, on their thoughts and passions, molding new generations into members (or subjects) of the state. As Lasswell put it, “any elite defends and asserts itself in the name of symbols of the common destiny.”⁶⁴

The messages may be designed in good faith to appeal to reason with logic and evidence, and to positive passions of love, charity, conciliation, good will, fellow feeling, and the like.⁶⁵ Alternatively, the messages may aim at dulling the mind with incessant hammering of simplistic and deceiving slogans, and to stir the worst emotions of the human heart, such as hatred, envy, wrath, revenge, contempt, and fear.⁶⁶ These are the rhetorical weapons of demagogic or totalitarian dictators such as Adolf Hitler or Fidel Castro.⁶⁷ In either case, “the ruling elite elicit[s] loyalty, blood, and taxes from the

⁶³ Plato, *The Laws*, Project Gutenberg, translated by Benjamin Jowett, book IV.

⁶⁴ Lasswell, *Who Gets What, When, How*, p. 29. On symbols commonly used in the United States at the time he wrote, see pp. 34–35.

⁶⁵ A classic example is Thomas Jefferson’s first inaugural address, when after the bitterly contested 1780 election he famously declared, “We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists.”

⁶⁶ In his autobiography, President Coolidge recognized the damage that a demagogic president could inflict on the United States. He wrote: “It would be exceedingly easy to set the country all by the ears and foment hatreds and jealousies, which, by destroying faith and confidence, would help nobody and harm everybody. The end would be the destruction of all progress” (*The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge*, Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, [1929] 2004), p. 184. While it may very well be true that such a political tactic in the long run “would help [almost] nobody,” in the short run it certainly could. In a dictatorship, that short run can extend for quite some time: Fidel Castro and his brother Raúl can testify to that.

⁶⁷ On Fidel Castro, see my “Totalitarianism in the Tropics: Cuba’s ‘Padilla Case’ Revisited,” *Cuban Affairs Quarterly*, 2012, 7, 3. A revised and expanded version is available through SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2136252>. And see “Fidel Castro: A Machiavellian Prince?” National Endowment for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies (Coral Gables, Florida, 1999). A somewhat different version is available through SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2623731>.

populace with... combinations of vowels and consonants.”⁶⁸ But the “vowels and consonants” are not sufficient. That is where coercion comes in.⁶⁹

Coercion, the application of which in dictatorships is not confined to the criminal class, as it largely is in democracies, almost always involves physical acts of force or threats thereof (arrests, jails, prisons, forced-labor camps, torture chambers, executions, and so on). But also there are nonphysical, subtle variants, selectively directed at individuals of a certain standing in society, involving their livelihood or reputation. In a dictatorship, once all opposition has been crushed and the population has been sufficiently cowed into submission, pervasive fear or simple prudence makes the active exercise of force less necessary—the threat of it looming in the background is enough to render all but a tiny minority of the ruled passive, apathetic, obedient, even complicit.⁷⁰

Given the opportunity to communicate without being contradicted, rulers would carry on interminable monologues in which they portrayed themselves and the government they control as beneficent, faithful representatives and selfless servants of people and state, completely and tirelessly⁷¹ devoted to its sovereignty, security, and prosperity, or even its grandeur and magnificence. At the same time, they would paint as dark a picture of their rivals for office and of real or invented enemies as their imagination could concoct, a combination of a foreign power and fifth columnists within. Naturally, the rulers of an autocracy can give much freer rein to these tendencies than those of a democracy. Witness the dehumanization of political dissenters in Hitler’s Germany, Stalin’s Russia, or

⁶⁸ Lasswell, *Who Gets What, When, How*, p. 156.

⁶⁹ As Hobbes memorably put it, “Covenants being but words, and breath, have no force to oblige, contain, constrain, or protect any man, but what it has from the publique Sword” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*; spelling in the original).

⁷⁰ That the National Socialists and the Communists respectively ruled Germany and Russia with the “complicity” of a large minority, a plurality, or even a majority of the population is a recurrent theme in Overy, *The Dictators*.

⁷¹ A typical expression was voiced by Donald J. Trump: in his inaugural address, he pledged to “fight for you with every breath in my body and I will never, ever let you down.” Washington, DC, January 20, 2017.

Castro's Cuba.⁷² The reason is that a dictator has fewer restraints on the use of coercion, in terms both of quantity and of kind, and of the ends to which it is put—namely, to exile, imprison, or execute rivals for office or anyone who dares to raise a voice in contradiction or opposition to his dictates or control.

In a democracy, where the regime is divided into overlapping branches of government or units of government, an opposition is relatively free to criticize the incumbents, a more or less free press watches over the rulers and even wages campaigns against them or their policies, and a quasi-independent judiciary oversees the administration of coercion, abuses are less frequent and, when found out, more likely to be corrected and the culprits penalized in some way. This is reinforced by a culture of restraint on the part of all or nearly all important members of the political class. Still, even in a democracy it is not unknown for office holders or would-be rulers to find ways of besmirching the reputations of and doing economic or financial damage to their opponents and critics, not excluding those within their own party.⁷³ That said, in democracies members of the ruling elite normally achieve positions of power by moving up the ladder of representative institutions by winning competitive elections.⁷⁴

⁷² For example, in the 1937 purge the executed members of the Supreme Military Council of the Soviet Union, all highly decorated marshals, generals, or admirals, as well as being charged with treason, were denounced as “mad dogs,” “criminal scum of humanity,” and “stinking vermin.” Alexander Barmine, *One Who Survived: The Life Story of a Russian under the Soviets* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1945), p. 5.

⁷³ As Schlesinger puts it, in pursuit of their party's nomination for office, “rival aspirants can use many resources to discourage their competitors. They can use the outright threat of sanctions, economic, social, or political. The aspirant whose supporters control such sanctions is in a strong position to discourage others” (Joseph A. Schlesinger, *Political Parties and the Winning of Office* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994], p. 155).

⁷⁴ For a study of the successful pursuit of power within the political opportunity structure in the United States, see, Joseph A. Schlesinger, *Ambition and Politics: Political Careers in the United States* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1966).

5. Primary “Laws” of Politics⁷⁵

As Aristotle said, the state is a plurality. Therefore, claims on the part of a self-appointed group, be it a party, a movement, a military junta, or a revolutionary vanguard, to be its sole and exclusive representative on the grounds that they stand for “the whole people” and hence are entitled to monopolize power are fraudulent.⁷⁶ Again, the claim to representativeness is contestable from within the territorial control of the government or carried on by exiles from without. Those who control the state at any one time, the incumbents, invariably face opposition from actual or potential competitors. If the regime is one where the representativeness of the incumbents is regularly tested by a widely accepted method, such as elections that are more or less free of impediments thrown up by a ruling party or the institutions under its control, the opposition operates openly, seeking public support and voicing criticism of the government (or even the regime) on a continuous basis. In such a system, which today goes by the name of democracy, the population is exposed to competing visions of the state, competing interpretations of current conditions or diagnoses, and competing policy proposals on the part of parties who for a combination of self-interested and public-spirited reasons wish to retain or acquire control of the government. In very short order, this tends to result in the electorate splitting into two more or less equal parts,⁷⁷ those who support and those who oppose the incumbents, with a more or less substantial minority that abstains for various reasons or is indifferent to the result. In my own analysis of 700 elections in fifty democracies from around the world, I find that on average, win or lose, incumbents take 41 percent of the vote. When they win, their support

⁷⁵ Again, I write “laws” in deference to readers who remain skeptical that there are such things in politics. Skeptics may think of them as “regularities” that do not amount to scientific laws.

⁷⁶ Such an “organic” conception of the state was shared by National Socialists and Communists alike. See Overy, *The Dictators*.

⁷⁷ In *A Disquisition on Government*, John C. Calhoun deduced from “the right of suffrage” that “a struggle will take place between the various interests to obtain a majority” and, “once formed, the community will be divided into two great parties—a major and a minor—between which there will be incessant struggles on the one side to retain, and on the other to obtain the majority—and, thereby, the control of the government and the advantages it confers... The advantages of possessing the control of the powers of the government, and, thereby, of its honours and emoluments, are, of themselves, exclusive of all other considerations, ample to divide even a [relatively homogenous] community into two great hostile parties” (Calhoun, *Disquisition*, p. 10; punctuation in the original).

averages 46 percent. Their mean maximum vote is 52 percent. Fewer than 10 percent reach 55 percent, and a mere 3 percent manage to draw more than 60 percent. I call this phenomenon “the law of offsetting political forces.”⁷⁸ It is the first of three laws of incumbency.

The division between two major parties or coalitions is not static, but seesaws this way or that, sometimes in favor of the incumbents, at other times against them. But the very exercise of power results in a loss of support, a phenomenon that has been labeled “the cost of government.”⁷⁹ I call it “the law of shrinking support or growing opposition.”⁸⁰ In my own study, which includes old and new democracies, many outside of Europe, I estimate this “cost” to average 4.4 percent per term, with institutional and cultural variation around this mean, lower in the developed democracies and larger in Latin America and the new, post-communist democracies of Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. This second law of political incumbency is “one of the few obvious regularities observed in political science.”⁸¹ The explanation may lie in some combination of an unavoidable statistical relation, the regression toward the mean,⁸² an accumulation of policy errors, underestimation of the opposition’s strength, obstinacy on the part of an administration that persists in pushing a policy disliked by the voters, disappointment on the part of the party’s supporters, a desire on the part of the electorate for something new, or a combination of all these.⁸³ This

⁷⁸ Similarly, in a study of congressional lobbying, Baumgartner and his co-authors found that the vast majority of their sample of policy disputes in Congress involved only two offsetting sides: one that challenges and one that supports the status quo. Frank R. Baumgartner et al., *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why* (University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁷⁹ Peter Nannestad and Martin Paldam, “The Cost of Ruling. A Foundation Stone for Two Theories,” University of Aarhus Department of Economics working paper no. 1999–9, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=165709.

⁸⁰ Alfred G. Cuzán, “Five Laws of Politics,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 48, 3, 2015, p. 416.

⁸¹ Ian Budge et al., *Organizing Democratic Choice: Party Representation over Time* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 255.

⁸² Marc Lange, “Really Statistical Explanations and Genetic Drift,” *Philosophy of Science*, 2013, 80, 2, pp. 170–71. Martin Paldam, “The Distribution of Election Results and the Two Explanations of the Cost of Ruling,” *European Journal of Political Economy*, 1986, 2, 1, pp. 5–24.

⁸³ For another, partially overlapping set of explanations for the phenomenon, see Budge et al., *Organizing Democratic Choice*. See also Martin Paldam and Peter Skott, “A Rational-Voter Explanation of the Cost of Ruling,” *Public Choice*, 1995, 83, pp. 159–72.

phenomenon may be likened to the process of aging. Differences in the longevity of administrations may depend at least partially on factors analogous to those of the human body: the inherited good will of a party brand may correspond to a person's genes, and avoiding corruption, waste, and pigheadedness in policy or personnel to "healthy living."

The combined effect of these two "laws" constrains the length of time any one party remains in control of the state. On average, incumbents serve two consecutive terms in office lasting about eight years. As a result, in a democracy government or parts thereof change hands periodically, in an irregular pattern.⁸⁴ This amounts to a third law of incumbency, "the law of political alternation." It is as if an equilibrium-seeking natural balance between support and opposition to the in-party operates in democracies, forcing a change of government on average once per decade. Thus, there are no permanent incumbents and, hence, no rigidly stratified division between rulers and ruled. Parties occupy the government only temporarily; they are more like tenants than owners of power.

If, however, the incumbents by force or fraud suppress opposition, blocking alternation in office in order to perpetuate their control of government, establishing something like a ruling oligarchy, such as the Castro dynasty has done in Cuba, the ironic result is that the longer they remain as rulers the smaller the share of the vote that their party, headed by themselves or their successors, will receive the moment a competitive election is held. Such was the fate of all communist parties in the former Soviet Empire as well as others around the world, most of which performed so badly at the polls that they either disappeared from the political stage or transformed themselves into social democrats, nationalists, or something else with varying degrees of electoral success.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ A classic article demonstrating this pattern in the United States is by Donald Stokes and Gudmund Iverson, "On the Existence of Forces Restoring Party Competition," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1962, 26, pp. 159–71.

⁸⁵ Cuzán, "Five Laws of Politics," p. 417. See, also, Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Decay and Breakdown of Communist One-Party Systems," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1999, 2, pp. 323–43. On "communist successor parties," see, e.g., John Ishiyama and András Bozóki, "Adaptation and Change: Characterizing the Survival Strategies of the Communist Successor Parties," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 2001, 17, 3, pp. 32-51; Anna Grzymala-Busse, "Authoritarian Determinants of Democratic Party Competition. The Communist Successor Parties in East Central Europe," *Party Politics*, 2006, 12, 3, pp. 415-437. Whether a formerly communist ruling party that remakes itself with a different leadership, name, and program, and starts behaving like a normal

6. Secondary “Laws” of Politics

The executive, usually occupied or dominated by a single individual, is the strongest organ of government, even in democracies, so it is the object of the most spirited struggles, be they waged by ballots or bullets.⁸⁶ Also, in both democracies and dictatorships there is a dual tendency on the part of many of those wielding political power. On the one hand, pressured by lobbyists or on their own initiative, the directors seek to expand the scope of the state—that is, to enlarge the number and extent of activities that the government undertakes in the presumed interest of the people or in conformity with a ruling ideology, thus encroaching on, weakening, subordinating, or even abolishing other forms of association.⁸⁷ On the other hand, they strive to centralize the regime. Some do so on principle, thinking that subordinate levels of government are incompetent, corrupt, oppressive or unable properly to manage or combat a problem that spills over larger areas. Others promote it under the conceit that they can simplify and rearrange what is a variegated complexity of self-directed, interacting units (individuals, associations, parts of the state) amounting to a system that no one can fully comprehend, let alone manipulate at will.⁸⁸ Still others simply aim at promoting discrete goals

parliamentary party can be said to have survived or, instead, to have mutated into something else entirely is at least debatable. I am inclined to the latter view.

⁸⁶ This contradicts one of James Madison’s asseverations, in *Federalist* 51, that in a republic “the legislature necessarily predominates.” Once elected to Congress under the new Constitution, he was to find out differently.

⁸⁷ It appears that Machiavelli detected this tendency in what he called “republics”—that is, free (sovereign) states or cities: “the end of the republic is to enervate and to weaken all other bodies so as to increase its own body” (Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, translated by Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996], II.2, p. 133). This may be the outcome of a republic’s leveling of the social structure, the downside of which is that it does away with powerful checks on the expansion of the state. On the war that the state wages on what he calls “social authorities,” often at the behest of the people who wish to free themselves from the “petty tyrannies” exercised by “the paternal or the ecclesiastical” authorities, see de Jouvanel, *On Power*, pp. 129–30. For a remedy, de Tocqueville pointed to a system of strong local government, of townships. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, book 1, ch. 5, Project Gutenberg e-book 815.

⁸⁸ Adam Smith had caustic words for “the man of system,” who “is apt to be very wise in his own conceit; and is often so enamoured with the supposed beauty of his own ideal plan of government, that he cannot suffer the smallest deviation from any part of it. He goes on to establish it completely and in all its parts, without any regard either to the great interests, or to the strong prejudices which may oppose it. He seems to imagine that

without an overall design in mind. I call these tendencies “the law of widening scope”⁸⁹ and “the law of hierarchical centralization,”⁹⁰ respectively. Both tendencies, especially the latter, are stronger, if not altogether irresistible, in dictatorships. The joint operation of these two laws generates another: “the law of concentration of political power.”⁹¹ Absent institutional dikes, “there ensues a growth of Power to which there is no limit.”⁹² Thus, “in the modern regime... [t]hose who are the state reserve to themselves alone the right to talk in the name of the nation; an interest of the nation as distinct from the interest of the state has no existence for them... [T]he nation has been delivered over to Power.”⁹³ This power reaches its maximum in a totalitarian regime.⁹⁴

he can arrange the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess board. He does not consider that the pieces upon the chess-board have no other principle of motion besides that which the hand impresses upon them; but that, in the great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own, altogether different from that which the legislature might chuse to impress upon it” (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [Library of Economics and Liberty], VI.II.42; spelling in the original). See de Jouvenel’s similar critique of “the speculative man” (*On Power*, pp. 131–35).

⁸⁹ In *Federalist* 48, Madison averred “that power is of an encroaching nature, and that it ought to be effectually restrained from passing the limits assigned to it.” Among the American colonists rebelling against British rule, this belief in the “trespassing nature of power” was widespread. For the colorful metaphors with which they expressed it, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 56–57.

⁹⁰ On the tendency of government to centralize, see Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, p. 68. See also Alfred G. Cuzán, “Political Profit: Taxing and Spending in the Hierarchical State,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, July 1981, 40, 3, pp. 265–75. De Jouvenel cites Benjamin Constant’s observation that “unlimited legislative authority” “inevitably [tends] to pass from the whole to the majority, and from the majority into the hands of a few men, often into the hand of one” (*On Power*, p. 305).

⁹¹ Wittfogel called it the “cumulative tendency of unchecked power.” Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 106.

⁹² De Jouvenel, *On Power*, p. 119.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 152–53.

⁹⁴ Marx theorized that capital has a tendency to concentrate in a few hands. He should have focused his gaze on political power instead. It is in regimes that paid him fealty that the law of concentration of political power reached its upper limits, as in Stalin’s Russia. See Overy, *The Dictators*.

That high-spirited and ambitious persons wielding political power over an entire people see it as their duty as much as their advantage to widen or deepen the scope of their reach and to grasp with their own hands as many of the strings directing policy as they can get away with should not surprise anybody.⁹⁵ It would simply follow naturally from a combination of an eagerness to serve the public in a caretaking fashion and a desire to dominate and impose their own vision of the good society on the rest of the country.⁹⁶

To speak of political laws is not to say that their force cannot be opposed, any more than the law of gravity makes it impossible to launch a spacecraft into orbit. Just as with sufficient thrust a rocket can be propelled outside the Earth's gravitational field, so appropriate institutional devices and cultural resilience can thwart the operation of these secondary political laws or, at least, slow their development or temporarily reverse the trend and mitigate their effects. A strong civil society,⁹⁷ combined with a federal structure and an ideology of individualism and localism to go with it, may well resist encroachment on the part of the central government for a long time. This is why I call these three laws "secondary." They are forces the magnitude and impact of which are contingent on three sets of things: the energy and abilities of the office holders, which ebb and flow with the times, personalities, and party of the incumbents; the institutional and cultural obstacles, not least the diffusion and the allegiance of the people to

⁹⁵ De Jouvenel puts it this way: "[A]mbitious wills, drawn by the lure of Power, expend unceasingly their energies in its behalf that they may bind society in an ever tighter grip and extract from it more of its resources" (*On Power*, p. 157).

⁹⁶ De Jouvenel astutely observes that "all the greatest political mistakes stem from defective appraisals of the common good—mistakes from which egoism, had it been called into consultation, would have warned Power off" (*ibid.*, p. 124). This calls to mind Adam Smith's remark that "by pursuing his own interest [the merchant] frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good. It is an affectation, indeed, not very common among merchants, and very few words need be employed in dissuading them from it." Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Project Gutenberg [1776] 2009 e-book 3300. But if such pretension is largely absent among businessmen, it is all too common among those who seek or attain a measure of political power and the "speculative men" or "men of system" who inspire or applaud their efforts.

⁹⁷ James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), ch. 3.

individualist or antistatist ideas, which are placed in their path;⁹⁸ and the opportunities presented by crises (war, recessions or depressions, insurrections, revolutions, etc.) that either shatter the state machinery, to be reconstructed at a later time,⁹⁹ or sweep aside barriers to the exercise of political power. Just as hard rock is eroded by the incessant action of an ocean or river, so the social bulwarks against state expansion, “the social and religious forces which hold the state in check,”¹⁰⁰ are weakened by repeated attempts to increase its scope.

7. Challenges to Political Science¹⁰¹

Plato and Aristotle considered good only those regimes in which the rulers ruled for the benefit of the ruled, not of themselves. But, however well-meaning the rulers are, it is very difficult for them to discern what is, in fact, the good of the people unless they are in close contact with them, and even then they will hear contrary messages amidst a great deal of noise. Furthermore, disagreements among individuals and groups about what ends to pursue, to what extent, or by what means only grow the more the state attempts to do.¹⁰²

In any case, as Rousseau observed, it is most difficult to align the interests of those who comprise the state with those of the people. The state

⁹⁸ In a critique of “positive law,” de Jouvenel observes that “in the nineteenth century it is on the whole true to say that the separation, though inevitably provisional, of the executive and the legislature, and above all *the individualist ideas which were everywhere in vogue*, acted as a safeguard against the possible consequences of an extreme application of the idea of legislative omnipotence. The truth is that *the various declarations of rights played the part of a natural law set above the laws*” (*On Power*, pp. 305–6; emphasis added).

⁹⁹ From his study of the French and Russian Revolutions, de Jouvenel pronounced a “law of revolutions”—to wit, “that they tend always to Power by changing its agents and resuscitating its spirit” (*ibid.*, p. 235). Thus, a revolution may be analogous to an earthquake that destroys an old structure, to be followed by its replacement by a stronger edifice. The process of renewal took much less time in France and in Russia compared to the United States, perhaps because in the latter a new state was born at a time and place where the ideas of Locke, Smith, and Montesquieu were still very much in vogue, so the revolutionaries had limited aims in mind, whereas in France and Russia the revolution upended an ancient state and the revolutionaries were what Adam Smith had called “men of system,” burning with ideas about remaking society from top to bottom.

¹⁰⁰ De Jouvenel, *On Power*, p. 237.

¹⁰¹ By “challenge” I mean a difficult job that hopefully will stimulate effort to do it.

¹⁰² F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 67–68.

tends to separate itself from society, to become autonomous in the pursuit of its own corporate interests. For their part, the magistrates, those who exercise some of the powers of government singly or jointly, tend to prioritize their own partisan or even private interests.¹⁰³ For the most ambitious rulers, the emoluments of office, the means to make themselves rich, the opportunity to steer the state in the direction of their visions of the good society, the possibility of accomplishing glorious deeds, realistic or fantastic, to leave a mark on the history books, and the sheer pleasure of ruling combine in various proportions to make them want to wield political power indefinitely, to expand its reach, and to deed it to their blood or political heirs at retirement or death.

In all regimes, but especially in dictatorships, the security the rulers seek is that of their own control of the government. To them, domestic tranquility means submissive obedience to their dictates.¹⁰⁴ This is not to deny that even in autocracies a benevolent ruler may on occasion arise.¹⁰⁵ But such occasions are more than offset by multiple cases of cruel and rapacious ones, or even a madman now and then (in the political, not necessarily the clinical sense). Political arrangements have to be judged in terms of averages, not exceptions.¹⁰⁶

Thus, how to design constitutional arrangements to keep the state within bounds and the government from straying away from the people is a challenging task for political science. Insights from analogous problems in economics may help. At least since Adam Smith, economists have argued that competition among firms in markets tends to operate as an “invisible

¹⁰³ Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, pp. 51–53. For evidence that presidents generally promote their own partisan or ideological goals, not the “public interest,” or even that of the median voter, see B. Dan Wood, *The Myth of Presidential Representation* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁰⁴ Emblematic of this tendency are two cases, one from Cuba, another from France. In the former, billboards adorned with Fidel Castro’s image and emblazoned with the slogan “*Comandante en Jefe: Ordene!*” (“Commander-in-chief: give us the order!”) dotted the country. Another example comes from occupied France during World War II. On November 19, 1942, in a radio speech announcing a reshuffle of his government, then head of state of Vichy France, General Philippe Pétain, said, “I remain your guide. *You have only one duty: to obey. You have only one government: the one that I have empowered to govern. You have only one country: the one that I embody, France*” (quoted in Burrin, *France under the Germans*, p. 165; emphasis added).

¹⁰⁵ Brazil’s Dom Pedro II comes to mind.

¹⁰⁶ Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development*.

hand,” guiding self-interested producers intent only on maximizing their own profits toward satisfying the wants of consumers. In a democracy, an analogous process results in public policy aligning with the preferences of the median voter. As parties take turns at governing, each seeking to advance its own partisan interests or vision of the good society, policy shifts to the right or the left in response to elections. These shifts in policy cross the median voter position from one or the other direction. In the long run, the changes tend to cancel out, so that the long-term average of the policy lies somewhere in the vicinity of the median voter position. This happens not because any party intended it, but as a systemic outcome of alternation in office.¹⁰⁷ Thus, contrary to Plato’s *Republic*, Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, or Machiavelli’s *Prince*, but consistent with the reasoning of *The Federalist Papers*, then, political competition is more likely to align the interests of rulers and ruled than any monopoly of power. Just as economists study markets and devise rules for channeling competition along welfare-enhancing lines, so political scientists can and should do the same for competition in democracies. This competition must operate not only between parties and candidates in the election season, but between units of governments within and, as in federalism, between levels. This would require coordinating mechanisms that do not depend on commands from the center.¹⁰⁸ Prices perform this function in the market,¹⁰⁹ but no obvious single candidate comes to mind for politics.

This raises a conundrum. In well-established states, markets are regulated by laws on property, contracts, penalties against fraud, and so on. But in no state, not even in democracies, are the rulers regulated by anyone other than themselves. As Madison put it in *Federalist* 51, “In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.” But how is a government to “control itself”? Or, in the ancient version, *quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* True, elections exert some sort of control on the part of the electorate, but these are infrequent and their message is often ambiguous, subject to different interpretations, with incumbents and opposition alike each able to claim at least partial vindication for their platforms. The political

¹⁰⁷ Budge et al., *Organizing for Democratic Choice*.

¹⁰⁸ For an early, now-classic proposal along these lines, see Charles M. Tiebout, “A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures,” *Journal of Political Economy*, 1956, 64, 5, pp. 416–24.

¹⁰⁹ F.A. Hayek, “The Use of Knowledge in Society.”

class, then, is left to operate in a sort of political anarchy.¹¹⁰ Thus, how conflicts within *this* anarchy can be constrained within reasonable bounds—that is, without falling into civil war—is the second great challenge for political science.

8. Summary and Discussion

In this article I have advanced a set of principles of politics. These consist of key concepts (the people, the state, sovereignty, government, political class), assumptions about what the people want and what office seekers want, the powers of government, five elements of politics (leader, party, ideology, money, force), two fundamental compounds (democracies, dictatorships), what the compounds have in common and where they differ, and a set of “laws” of politics, three primary laws of political incumbency, and three secondary laws of power concentration. The primary laws are characteristic of democracy and, fortunately, benign. The secondary laws, however, are not (or at least not necessarily, as it depends on the perspective of the evaluator), but it is possible to mitigate, slow down, or block their operation with appropriate institutional features. The difficulty of the task is made manifest by the fact that the United States, designed as a federal government of limited, delegated powers divided across three branches and two levels of government, in time burst out of its original constitutional bounds, growing into the present-day Leviathan with very few restrictions on the scope of its operations and dominated by an imperial presidency. American political development represents yet another instance of what de Jouvenel observed in history: “the picture of a concentration of forces growing to the hand of a single person, called the state, which disposes, as it goes, of ever ampler resources, claims over the community ever wider rights, and tolerates less and less any authority existing outside itself.”¹¹¹

Having summarized and drawn out implications from the foregoing analyses, all that remains for me to do in this article is to deal with several objections that have been leveled at this work to date.¹¹² One is that this study is limited to the internal dynamics of the state and domestic operations of regimes and does not address or merely touches on (as in the discussion of sovereignty in the early parts) the state as an actor in an anarchic international

¹¹⁰ This may well constitute a fourth primary law of politics, “the law of irreducible anarchy.” Alfred G. Cuzán, “Revisiting ‘Do We Ever Really Get Out of Anarchy?’” *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 22 (2010), pp. 3–21.

¹¹¹ De Jouvenel, *On Power*, p. 236.

¹¹² By an anonymous reviewer, to whom I am grateful for raising them.

environment. But I make no claim to have laid out a complete description of the state in all its ramifications and doings, only to have identified a few fundamentals about government and politics that all students should know or at least be taught. I have no illusions about having exhausted the list of political laws or of their manifestations in every field of operations. The structure is admittedly partial, incomplete.¹¹³ In that light, I invite readers to do two things: one, to test how much what has been constructed can withstand stress on logical or empirical grounds; and two, to inquire to what extent the “laws” advanced here may be extended or supplemented with others in order to examine the external relations of states.

Another objection has to do with the sparse theoretical development of the six “laws” presented here. It is charged that the “laws” lack a complete explanation of the causal mechanisms that drive them. That is true. But, I submit, the same indictment also could have been lodged against the laws of economics in the early years (or Newton’s laws of gravity, for that matter). It took well over a century before the micro-level foundations of the laws of supply and demand were well understood. Besides, physicists have not always waited to announce the operation of laws until they could be satisfactorily explained.¹¹⁴ At first scientists may lack a complete explanation for a law, or the initial explanation may be partial or wrong. Similarly, observations about what regularly happens in politics may be intuited to be manifestations of laws, such as the six “laws” presented here, even if their respective groundings in human decisions and conduct are sketchy or thin theoretically. As with the natural sciences, their truth may be recognized long before many scholars, sometimes after bitter disagreements, reach a consensus about at least their proximate, if not their ultimate, causes.

Also, some may raise eyebrows about the policy implications of the analysis, arguing that it is not the job of political scientists, qua scientists, to engage in “value judgments,” let alone engage in political engineering. My response would be to ask, “Why is that?” Political science is not like astronomy or archaeology, but, as Plato and Aristotle understood, it is more like medicine—that is, a practical science, although I prefer the analogy to engineering.¹¹⁵ True, an unstated assumption of this analysis is that the

¹¹³ As would, say, an article on microeconomics that contrasts the operations of a competitive market with a monopolistic or oligopolistic one without reference to international trade.

¹¹⁴ Richard P. Feynman, *Six Easy Pieces: Essentials of Physics Explained by Its Most Brilliant Teacher* (Pasadena: California Institute of Technology, 1995).

¹¹⁵ Calhoun suggestively compares constitutions to machines (“Disquisition,” p. 44).

unimpeded operations of the “secondary laws” of politics propelling the concentration of power result in an undesirable outcome: an overweening state, on the one hand, and an enfeebled society, on the other. Those who share this concern about the operations of the secondary “laws” would want to investigate ways in which these processes may be blocked, or at least diffused or diverted into multiple channels so that their forces spend themselves in many directions without concentrating political power at the center of the state.

But concurrence with this normative judgment is independent of the recognition of all six “laws” of politics presented here. With Aristotle, one may regard the state as the highest community and citizenship as the fulfillment of man’s political nature, for it transcends divisions of kin, tribe, ethnicity, race, or religion, rendering all equal under the same flag. Furthermore, they may view the central government as inherently superior in quality—competence, wisdom—not only to subordinate governments but to all other subsidiary institutions with narrower, not to say narrow-minded or selfish, perspectives of the good society, and thus would wish either to do nothing, letting nature run its course, or, in Leninist fashion, to investigate how the process could be accelerated. Thus, one may reject the notion that the concentration of power in the national government is on balance detrimental while still acknowledging that it takes place, with power accreting over time as if driven by a law of politics.

However, those of that mind may want to consider something that is beyond the scope of this article but worthy of future investigation. From their own point of view, there may well be undesirable feedback from an enervated society to the absorptive state. One would think that a strong state requires a vibrant, dynamic society to supply it with manpower, revenues, technological and managerial innovations, and so on. But the more a state extracts from society, the less is left for its renewal, and the more it does and commands, the more contracted is the sphere for independent enterprise and individual initiative to adapt to a changing environment. True, some or even most of the extracted revenues and manpower may be returned to society in the form of cash payments or services, but there will be a loss of value in the process caused by inefficiencies, waste, corruption, less desirable or lower-

quality goods, and the like.¹¹⁶ If all this is true, then the upshot would be a decline of both society *and* state.¹¹⁷

To conclude: as I see it, political science has two dimensions. One is the theoretical study of politics as a field characterized by natural laws, among which are included the six “laws” presented here. The other is as a practical science, like engineering, which applies knowledge of these natural laws in the design of institutions in order to obtain desired outcomes. If this conception is valid, then political science can and should produce practical applications for reforming the state in a manner that will more effectively restrain its tendency to take all of society unto itself, as I think is warranted—or, alternatively, to give that process a push, as those with a dissenting perspective would want. To that end, an agenda for further research would include inquiries about (1) the universality of the “laws” presented here; (2) the aforementioned hypothesized feedback loop running from an expanding state to a debilitated society and back to a weakened state, and (3) institutional designs for dissipating the concentration of political power (or nudging it, as those who see value in it would want). Regarding the latter project, a good place to start would be to consider alternative arrangements for checking the numerical majority in the electoral arena¹¹⁸ (or for giving it full rein).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ See, e.g., the depressing list of federal policy failures in Peter H. Schuck, *Why Government Fails So Often, and How It Can Do Better* (Princeton University Press, 2014).

¹¹⁷ De Jouvenel seems to be aware of this relationship. He writes “of a Power which has become, *with its every growth, more enervated* by the strife of factions” (*On Power*, p. 307; emphasis added). For his part, Calhoun argues the same point, but from the opposite direction. Among communities where circumstances are nearly equal, he averred, those in which liberty enjoys the largest sphere are those where the physical and moral strength of the community is greatest, so that “when the occasion requires it, will without compulsion, and from their very nature, unite and put forth the entire force of the community in the most efficient manner.” The allusion to “the occasion,” I take it, refers to a time when the state needs to marshal the resources of the community for some great enterprise, such as war. See “Disquisition,” p. 36.

¹¹⁸ On this point, see Calhoun, “Disquisition.”

¹¹⁹ It is suggestive that in the United States the party that since Woodrow Wilson’s presidency has been most enthusiastic about enlarging the scope of the federal government regularly inveighs against the Electoral College, especially when, as in 2000 and 2016, its candidate captured a plurality of the popular vote but came up short in the electoral count.

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