HYBRID AUTHORITY SYSTEMS AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY

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Abstract:

Western political science has long been preoccupied with the conceptualization of "ideal" typologies and, when applied to abstractions, these ideal types can be informative and provocative. In discourses on governance, two ideal types are generally acknowledged: autocracy (rule by force) and democracy (rule by compliance). In their practical application, these ideal types get messy. The messiness of governance in modern, complex societies was first attributed to some form of "hybridization," mixing autocratic and democratic institutions in "hybrid regimes." The treatment in this chapter steps away from the structures of governance to examine the dynamics of political authority. It is the practical applications of coercive and cooperative "patterns of authority" that specifically inform the *Polity* measures of regime rule. This study discusses the *Polity*-related research findings of the "Gurr School," the US Government's Political Instability Task Force, and Center for Systemic Peace to summarize the transient and transitional effects of "hybrid authority systems" and, especially, factionalism on political stability and sustainability in complex societal-systems.

INTRODUCTION

The author's plan for this contribution to the volume on state fragility is two-fold: one is to present a brief introduction to the societal-systems approach to political conflict analysis along with a debriefing of the author's twenty-one year commitment to the United States Government's Political Instability Task Force (PITF; originally known, until 2003, as the State Failure Task Force, SFTF) and the other is to detail the systemic "political process model" informed by the PITF "forecasting" initiative to map the general system dynamics of political instability. Until his death in November 2017, Ted Robert Gurr was generally acknowledged as the world's top authority on political conflict; he also served as this author's mentor and research partner since 1985. Gurr's macro-comparative "politimetric" research method (Gurr 1972) was designed in direct response to the "behavioral revolution" in computational, empirical research in political science and was founded on the core belief that there is a formal theoretical basis for both social order and political organization in human societies (e.g., Duvall and Gurr 1976, Lichbach and Gurr 1981). The "politimetric method" called for systematic, comparative research covering the entire universe of cases relevant to the issue of interest; this approach required the creation and collection of coded information that could be analyzed for patterned associations across key attributes of state actors interacting within and across societal systems. The Task Force was established "in response to a 1994 request from senior policymakers to design and carry out a study of the correlates of state failure" (Esty et al 1995, i). Gurr, in collaboration with eleven other senior academics, served as an original architect of the "Task Force's central objective…to use open-source data to develop statistical models that can help policymakers anticipate, avert, and react to the onset of acute political instability" (Goldstone et al 2003, 1). The ability to anticipate, or forecast, political instability presumes a common, formal structure that conditions and channels systemic political behaviors in predictable ways.

This author joined the Task Force research effort in August 1998 and remained a full-time, core consultant and subcontractor through February 2020 (full-time analysts numbered about six; most consultants were brought into the Task Force on an ad hoc basis for relatively short periods of time).[1] The Task Force is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency's Directorate of Intelligence and has continued its research efforts through the current writing in mid-2022.[2] Even though the Task Force has used only open-source information and its work has remained unclassified, the secretive culture of the US intelligence community has narrowly limited the dissemination of Task Force research efforts and findings. Although the Task Force submitted regular reports to the US Government detailing its work, the sole publication produced for public access was the 2010 report on its "Phase V" modeling effort, titled "A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability," published in the *American Journal of Political Science* (Goldstone et al 2010). The refinement of the global model was the core task and represented the culmination of fifteen years of concerted, collaborative efforts. The CIA direction and oversight created three parallel research tracks: one was secret and known only to those holding the proper security clearances, another was openly shared and discussed by Task Force members and remained unclassified, and a separate track fed into the societal-systems research approach of the "Gurr School."[3] The "Gurr School" published regular reports on its findings in the *Peace and Conflict* and *Global Report* serials and distributed research materials continuously on the Center for Systemic Peace public website.[4]

Of course, the current treatment cannot summarize the full breadth of the Task Force's systematic, applied research efforts. This treatment focuses on the role of "hybrid authority" in the political process resulting in state fragility, here understood as a form of "societal-system" vulnerability to disturbance, disruption, or breakdown. In the Task Force research, the conditions

and characteristics (independent variables) that were strongly and significantly associated with onsets of political instability events (dependent variable) could be understood as the principal parameters of a state's "fragility" (susceptibility to instability). The common link for nearly all Task Force statistical analyses, that is, the *lingua franca,* was the use of the *Polity* data on political regime authority characteristics and transitions to control for regime type in the computational modeling. Despite the fact that the Task Force collected and integrated all known state-level data resources in the "Merge" mega-dataset and tested all conceivable relationships between and among thousands of relevant variables using all known statistical methods, the candidate independent variables tended to fall into a few "baskets" or "clusters" of related variables, of which, only one variable drawn from each could be used in the global model at any time to minimize the confounding effects of autocorrelation. A large variety of model specifications were discussed at regular Task Force meetings with a preferred model emerging based on compatibility with established theory and communicability of meaning and practical implications to policymakers. The concerted effort to "drill down" in the data to gain better insight in key relationships also led to refinements in data resources and additional data collection efforts. Despite intensive and extensive research efforts and inclusion of the full analytic universe of cases (all independent countries with more than 500,000 total population in the most recent year - 167 countries in 2018 - and all years beginning with 1950 to 2018), the best-performing models remained relatively simple and parsimonious.

   We originally expected that no simple model could capture the processes associated with varied kinds of instability onsets. Rather, we expected that we would need different models for different kinds of political instability. Moreover, given the large number of variables that

had previously appeared as significant in the literature, we assumed that useful models would

have to be complex, incorporating not only many variables, but also their rates of change and

various interactions between them. To our surprise, these expectations proved wrong. Despite

testing many independent variables in many combinations and specifications, we have not

found greater predictive power than in the parsimonious model shown in [the reported four-

variable model]. (Goldstone et al 2010, 204)

The centrality of the Gurr-designed *Polity* data series to the Task Force modeling effort

was due partly to its practicality (*Polity* includes annual observations for all countries and all

years) and partly due to its empirically established validity and relevance to the study of regime

instability. The scalar POLITY index measure of regime authority ranges from "fully

institutionalized autocracy" to "fully institutionalized democracy" with the middling scalar

region containing "mixed authority" or "hybrid" regimes shown by prior research to be

associated with relatively high risk of regime instability. Apart from some qualitative

categorizations of regime types, there was no practical, alternative measure of regime authority

available at the time that was adaptable to the modeling efforts. *Polity* is ubiquitous in

quantitative research; it based upon well-specified, standardized coding guidelines applied

systematically to reported observations of political behaviors in the target countries; as such, it is

considered comparable across all cases and all times. Most importantly, Task Force scrutiny and

analyses have shown the *Polity* coding scheme accurately distinguishes autocratic and

democratic authority characteristics across all regimes and through time.[5]

The Task Force global model has been found to be over 80% accurate in forecasting

onsets of both civil wars and relatively nonviolent adverse regime changes (autocratic

backsliding[6]) with a two-year lead time, suggesting that there are common factors accounting for all major forms of political instability in all countries in all regions of the world (Goldstone et al 2010). Four general, system factors inform the Phase V global forecasting model:

- *Polity* regime characteristics (mode of central conflict management),

- infant mortality rate (general level of development),

- state-sanctioned ethnic group discrimination (identity group exclusion), and

- a geopolitical "neighborhood effect."

Different measures of the key variables proved interchangeable and, so, the reported model specification can be considered a representative accounting of the core determinants of state fragility in the world. The Task Force agreed to include the neighborhood effect in the Task Force global model to recognize the systemic nature of the political process.[7] The simplicity and commonality of the forecasting model specification strongly suggests a scientific and systemic basis for social order and disorder in human societies.

In many ways, the Task Force global forecasting models, by themselves, are little more than artifacts of the 25-year collaborative research effort. The real value of that effort lies in the research process itself, that is, the scientific mapping of the relationships among the wide variety of conditions and circumstances within which human societies forge and sustain their existence. While local conditions and circumstances distinguish social groups from other groups living under different conditions and circumstances, the commonality of group behavioral responses make successful, systemic conflict management both possible and sustainable. The specific intent for the remaining discussion, then, is to build upon one of the "most striking results" of the PITF global modeling effort: "the extraordinarily high relative risk of instability onsets in partial democracies with factionalism" (Goldstone et al 2010, 197). In examining the special role of

"factionalism" (commonly termed "polarization"), this chapter will discuss the findings of a third

parallel research tract to the Task Force effort: the macro-comparative, "societal-systems"

approach and, especially, a dynamic political process model developed by the Center for

Systemic Peace (CSP) and the "Gurr School" of political conflict research. The next section

discusses "societal-system analytics" and the mechanics of Gurr's "politimetric" research

method and the following section introduces a "political process model" incorporating the Task

Force research findings regarding the dynamics of hybrid regime authority, [polar] factionalism,

and societal-system breakdown.[8]

HYBRID AUTHORITY AND SOCIETAL-SYSTEMS ANALYTICS

The appropriateness of using a systems approach in the study of political behaviors is a

crucial innovation that has yet to be incorporated in mainstream political science in the United

States. In fact, this author was very actively dissuaded from using a systems approach in his

graduate studies and post-graduate research. The use of force (power) has been the most studied

dynamic in political relations and the analysis of power potential has remained the preoccupation

of most politicians, policymakers, and political scientists through the end of the Cold War. The

principles of sovereignty and national security that characterize the Westphalian state system of

the Western world led the state authorities to systematically suppress critical information on both

internal and external political behaviors in order to prioritize and maximize the power of states.

Mainstream academia generally presented the complex mechanics of the political process as

opaque (e.g., Easton's "black box") and pragmatic (e.g., Waltz's "anarchic interstate system"); in

opposition to that view, neo-Marxians presented theories of a collusive imperial political order

dominated by "great powers" (e.g., Wallerstein's "world systems"). Operating in the

background, Weberian "bureaucratic systems" were viewed as ensuring the central

administration necessary to create and preserve state power. The sovereign, or executive,

authority commanded applications of state power to produce political actions that enforced state

interests both internally and externally. By its nature, the sovereign state disciplines and compels

preferred behaviors through the threat and exercise of effective, central power as autocratic

(executive-directed and coercive) authority. Perhaps ironically, the generation and maintenance

of central (state) power in human societal complexes requires largely compliant societal

dynamics to create the capacity for political action that supports central authority. As Arendt

(1972) presciently observed, democratic (decentralized and cooperative) authority provides the

ultimate source of systemic power then wielded as violent autocratic authority, implying a

naturally "hybrid" structure for, and tension between, sources of autocratic and democratic

authority in complex, societal-systems.[9]

In its most fundamental sense, democratization is an advanced function of the

coordination of the political system and predicated on the free flow of information. Although

democratic authority has always been prominent in social organization, it only slowly gained

favor as a conflict management system at the state level over the past two centuries; democratic

authority systems finally achieved global preeminence with the end of the Cold War. Empirical

research prior to the end of the Second World War rarely rose above the level of the anecdotal;

societies were largely organized around idealized, symbolic narratives and material structures

inter-woven to create the fabric of "national identity" held together in rhetorical systems based

on shared values. As general circumstances change over time, rhetorical systems must adapt their

core narrative to incorporate these changes; failure to adapt to changed circumstances raises

system vulnerability to breakdowns in social cohesion and order as alternative narratives

mobilize challenges to the dominant identity and its allocation of authority. The articulation of

contending group identities creates tensions that weaken the system and increase the use of coercion, force, and violence within the system. The development of societal-system capabilities itself increases the plurality of organized groups and associated political perspectives. The democratization of the state can be understood to have been necessitated by the demands of administration in increasingly large, complex, and technologically advanced societal-systems incorporating multiple group identities. The advent of computers and the development of statistical analytic techniques made global data collection imperative; early on, most state-level data was heavily biased toward Western countries and data on non-Western countries was generally sparse and low quality. Given the multi-faceted interconnections and interactions among factors in social settings and the large and biased error terms in comparative measures, statistical assumptions of independence are routinely compromised in the analysis of complex societal-systems. Furthermore, as inter-group conflict behaviors are often strategic interactions, political action has an inherent element of unpredictability that makes stimulus-response scenarios probabilistic at best. As such, tests based on statistical "significance" can only produce suggestive or confirming findings; systems analysis must establish systematic and patterned results across the full systemic universe of analysis to increase confidence in research findings.

The author's partnership with Ted Gurr began in 1985 when he enrolled in Gurr's undergraduate course on "Political Violence and Revolution." In reviewing Gurr's opus of research it became clear that the foundational work in *Why Men Rebel* (1970), *Politimetrics* (1972), and *Patterns of Authority* (1975, with Eckstein) formed a solid basis toward developing a systems approach to the study of political conflict. The application of these perspectives in the design and analysis of the first *Polity* dataset (1984) would later serve as the prototype for the Task Force research (144 countries; 135 variables). The "societal-systems analytics" approach

was built on the "Gurr School" and, further, incorporated Muzafer Sherif's (1966) "common predicament" social-psychological and Kenneth Boulding's (1985) "world as a total system" peace economics perspectives; it was first proposed in a paper written to complete a year-long graduate seminar on civil and interstate conflict co-taught by Gurr and Manus Midlarsky in 1987. The key concept for this approach was the proposition stated in Eckstein and Gurr (1975) that the political "state" is a governance construct ("polity") common to all forms of "social identity groups." As such, "polities" are understood to be the building blocks for both societies and systems in a global, shared space.

Unfortunately, in the late 1980s, "societies" were largely uncharted spaces, whereas the interactions of states in the world system were well-documented in political science. In early 1988, Gurr tasked me to begin collecting information on "politically active" ethnic groups occupying the "societal spaces" in all countries of the world in what came to be known as the Minorities at Risk project (118 countries; 324 groups; 975 variables) (Gurr and Scarritt 1989, Gurr 1993 2000). Based on insights from that research, Marshall (1999) first used societal-system analytics to detail the structural dynamics of the "diffusion of insecurity" in six "protracted conflict region" sub-systems characterizing the global system during the Cold War period. The State Failure Task Force was established in 1994 with Gurr as the principal architect and, in 1998, Gurr invited the author to join the Task Force effort. Creating the Task Force's "Merge" database fueled the effort and eventually grew to contain over 3000 variables covering 167 countries over the period 1950-2018 (policy restrictions preclude the inclusion of data on the United States in Task Force analyses; for an application of the global model implications to the United States, see Walter 2022). As a direct result of this body of research, a 20-part, video lecture series detailing the formal theoretical underpinnings of societal-systems analytics was

produced by the author in two volumes: Structuration (Marshall 2014) and Problemation

(Marshall 2016).

The *Polity* data series provides the lynchpin connecting the myriad research and

modeling efforts of the Task Force over the two decade research effort; it also connects this

effort to the research done by independent quantitative modelers in academic settings. In many

ways, *Polity* has become the "master key" to unlocking the scientific precepts of a modern

political science. What is unique about the theoretical propositions made in *Patterns of Authority*

is that, rather than ideal types, democratic and autocratic authority are distinct forms and

applications of interactive authority that can be identified in varying mixtures in the authority

patterns of all "polities."[10] This conceptualization, rather than categorizing regimes as one type

or another, posits that all regimes are complexly unique and exercise some hybrid form of

authority with varying mixtures of practices that changes over time and in response to changing

circumstances. Both democratic and autocratic authority patterns are found in every societal-

system and can be gauged on "sliding scales" and combined in a single index to characterize the

prevailing quality of governance in any regime ranging from autocratic to democratic. Whereas

regimes that are scaled toward the opposite ends of the POLITY index scale can be considered

relatively "coherent" or "ideal" examples of autocratic or democratic authority regimes, regimes

whose combined authority characteristics fall in the middling reaches of the POLITY scale are

considered "mixed" or "incoherent" authority regimes, that is, mixing enforcement and

compliance measures to provide and ensure social order. Gurr originally termed these mixed

authority regimes, "anocratic" (Gurr 1974). Early research established an "inverted U-curve"

relationship between regime authority and political stability along the POLITY index scale:

mainly autocratic and mainly democratic regimes are seen as relatively stable or durable

(persisting over time without substantial change in the nature of their authority), whereas

anocratic regimes are seen to be volatile and short-lived. This original finding has been

reinforced consistently with further research and became the starting point for the Task Force

research efforts.

UNPACKING HYBRID REGIME AUTHORITY: THE POLITICAL PROCESS MODEL

Given my background and preferred methodology and considering the shortage of

opportunities for systems research in American academia, the recently established State Failure

Task Force provided a unique and well-supported research opportunity and a perfect fit for my

interests and systems approach.[11] The end of the Cold War in 1990 was not anticipated by

mainstream academics, policymakers, or intelligence analysts in the US. The sudden "fall of

communism" and "collapse of the Soviet Union" appeared to represent deep contradictions to

mainstream theories of both communism and anti-communism and suddenly deconstructed what

was seen as a stable Cold War order in world politics (Marshall 1999 shows that armed conflicts

increased steadily across the period, affecting mainly Third World countries). Having grown

comfortable with practical demarcations dividing the world into rival spheres of influence

(between "first" and "second" worlds) and spheres of rivalry (in the "third world"), the world's

lone surviving hegemon (the US) suddenly faced the opportunity, and responsibility, for

establishing and managing a singular world order now visibly replete with failed states and found

itself ill-prepared to fulfill that role. The mandate for establishing the State Failure Task Force

was, at once, a directive by senior policymakers in the US Government to the intelligence

community both to "think outside the box" and "cast a wide net" in building a practical

understanding of the problem of failed states and, in doing so, develop an improved institutional

capacity to anticipate such failures in the future.[12] The perceived stasis of the Cold War world

had suddenly given way to the burdensome dynamics of political change. Perhaps ironically, the

ability to anticipate the occurrence of a "state failure" rejects the notion that such failures are

random occurrences but, rather, are (more or less) predictable outcomes linked to identifiable

inputs (conditions or circumstances). Easton's "black box" would need to be unpacked and

charted in some reliable and "actionable" way.

A first step would involve a practical understanding and operationalization of the

problem condition wanting prediction (i.e., the "dependent variable"), that is, state failure. A

narrow definition was understood to include "all instances in which central state authority

collapses for several years." The narrow definition yielded too few cases for reliable analysis. A

broader definition would identify cases that posed a significant challenge to US foreign policy,

so, "the task force broadened the concept of state failure to include a wider range of civil

conflicts, political crises, and massive human rights violations that are typically associated with

state breakdown" (Esty et al 1995, 1). The agreed "problem set" includes four categories of

events: revolutionary wars (75), ethnic wars (92), adverse regime changes (serious autocratic

backsliding, 136), and political mass killings (45); the numbers in parentheses indicate the

numbers of events listed in the most recent version of the problem set (covering the period 1955-

2018). Eventually, the Task Force research determined that onsets of the fourth category of

problem events listed above, termed genocides and politicides, only occurred during ongoing

political instability events. As the Task Force chose to model on the problem of state failure

onsets and, further, consolidated multiple events that overlapped in duration or occurred within a

period of five years of one another (171 cases total), the dependent variable used for global

modeling purposes (i.e., the onset of a consolidated instability episode) begins with an onset of

civil warfare or adverse regime change. Research on the relationship between adverse regime change and civil war (ethnic or revolutionary) showed that an autocratic backsliding event would very often take place during an instability episode (except in extant autocratic regimes) and could occur prior to, simultaneous with, or following an onset of civil warfare; this suggests that state military authorities institute, or support, autocratic authority as a way to forestall the outbreak, respond to the onset, or manage the course of open civil warfare. An ongoing debate within the Task Force, was whether major regime changes away from "stable" autocratic authority should be considered political instability events. The US Government position was that democratic change should not be considered problematic and, instead, actively promoted in policy.

A general consensus informed a starting point for the Task Force modeling effort, that is, the very powerful relationship between violence and poverty. Some have referred to this elemental relationship as the "first law of political conflict." Systemic poverty presents a very limited number of options for coordinating and directing collective transactions, managing conflicts, or resisting core group directives; whereas force and the threat of violence are readily available and easily recognized options that can serve as powerful management tools under any circumstances. Any model designed to predict group behaviors would need to control for the actors' general level of societal-system development. The Task Force research documented a basic congruence among most imeasures of political economy, such as measures of GDP, educational attainment, transportation or communication infrastructure, or public services, meaning that such measures were largely interchangeable in model specifications, although each measure brought particular nuances or structural bias into the models. After careful consideration, the Task Force chose a measure of "infant mortality rate" as the favored measure of the regime's investment in societal-system development.

The political direction and regulation of group activities by a central authority is directly related to both the relative development of group capabilties and the nature of social conflict, both among group members and between groups. Classical European theories of the "state" as central authority for the "nation" group are predicated, first, on "sovereign" hegemony (unitary actor) in policymaking and, second, upon a "monopoly of the use of force" by state authorities in the management of conflicts. Sovereignty can be seen, in this way, as an elemental function of autocratic authority. Theories of democratic authority in the modern era first emerged in response to the perceived arbitrary and excessive uses of force by autocratic authorities. From this we can undertand that the elemental consensus of democratic authority is the **rejection of the use of force** in group relations, except as prescribed in legitimately conceived, articulated, and codified laws.[13] This conflict management distinction between autocratic authority as managing social conflict through essentially arbitrary enactment of coercive, enforcement actions by state officials and democratic authority as managing social conflict through essentially cooperative arrangements fostering voluntary compliance with codified laws informs the *Polity* measures of state authority.

As explained in the preceding discussion, the *Polity* dataset established itself as a core resource in the Task Force research and modeling efforts; *Polity* variables are included in the specifications of all reported Task Force models. Figure 1 plots the annual likelihood of PITF (non-consolidated) problem event onsets for each given value along the POLITY index scale; the chart illustrates the distinct "inverted-U" curve relationship between the POLITY index and the observed onset of problem events, covering the years 1955-2018.[14] Three basic types of political authority regimes are presented along the POLITY scale, ranging from -10 to +10; the POLITY index is constructed by subtracting the regime's autocratic authority (AUTOC) score from its

democratic authority (DEMOC) score (both are ten-point scales). Autocracies are considered to

span POLITY values from -10 (fully institutionalized monarchy) to -6 (less institutionalized

"personalistic" dictatorships) and democracies span values from +6 (less consolidated

democratic authority) to +10 (fully consolidated democratic regimes). Populating the gap

between Autocracy and Democracy, and spanning values from -5 to +5, are the hybrid or

"incoherent" authority regimes that have been termed Anocratic.[15] What is not shown are the

numbers of "country-years" for each value along the scale. The plot of the numbers of country-

years takes the opposite "U-shaped" curve with far greater numbers on the ends of the scale and

far fewer in the middle-range. Evidence suggests that modern regimes gravitate toward the two

relatively stable authority poles. Mixed authority regimes are relatively rare and anomalous

manifestations that appear to be a reflection of the complexity of societal-systems and the

difficulties of maintaining, altering, or reforming prevailing authority patterns. The numbers at

the far left (autocratic) end of the scale are attenuated in the current period as institutionalized

monarchies have become increasingly rare; contemporary autocracies have relatively

uninstitutionalized rules of succession and include military juntas, one-party states, or military-

backed personalistic dictatorships (cases peaking at -7 on the scale).

[Figure 1. *Polity5* Regime Authority and the Onset of Political Instability Events, 1955-2018]

Figure 1 presents five separate plots, corresponding to five distinct groupings of problem

events. It is interesting that each of the five plots show a similar shape in which the apex of each

curve occurs at a different value on the POLITY scale.[16] The three lesser plots show the annual

likelihoods of the three event components: democratic transitions (D), civil wars (ethnic or

revolutionary, C), and adverse regime changes (A). The larger curves in the figure show the two composite event plots (state failure, which combines the Task Force problem events: adverse regime change and civil war) and (political instability, which adds democratic transition events to the state failure events). The plotted annual likelihood values show that the more "coherent" authority patterns of mainly autocratic or democratic regimes are similarly, relatively stable as compared with the "incoherent" authority patterns of the middle-range anocratic regimes; regimes scoring towards the ends of the POLITY scale tend to persist about twice as long as the middling regimes (i.e., without experiencing a major regime change event). During the target period, institutionalized monarchies (-10) persisted without substantial change (i.e., 3-point or more change in POLITY score) about 30 years on average; the less-institutionalized autocracies (-9 to -6) lasted about 20 years; anocracies (on the whole) averaged less than ten years; and the less-consolidated democracies (+6 to +8) lasted less than 14 years. Anocracies are essentially, or inherently, transitory or transitional regimes, whether intentionally or unintentionally; few regimes with mixed authority patterns persist more than 20 years (*Bumiputra* Malaysia and Apartheid South Africa are among the longer term exceptions). The more-consolidated democratic regimes (+9 and +10) have proven the most durable, lasting over 40 years on average with +10 democracies lasting over 60 years without substantial change, on average.

As mentioned, the known vulnerability of hybrid regimes provided an important input for the Task Force instability modeling efforts. Over the years, Task Force analysts tried many different configurations and ongoing refinements of key model variables to increase the explanatory, and predictive, power of the model specifications. We were also expanding and refining the coding and data collection efforts to better fine tune the statistical analyses and better understand the systematic findings. With the Phase III effort of the Task Force, the results of the

research started pointing to a particular value of a *Polity* component indicator (PARCOMP=3) as having a very strong, antecedent association with the onset of instability events, especially with the onset of an adverse regime change and particularly in anocratic regimes. PARCOMP refers to the Competitiveness of Participation and the coded value "3" is identified as "factional: polities with parochial or ethnic-based political factions that regularly compete for political influence in order to promote particularist agendas and favor group members to the detriment of common, secular, or cross-cutting agendas" (Marshall et al 2018, 27). The *Polity* "factional" condition can also be referred to as "polarized." Social polarization is commonly referred to as a problem in narratives of social conflict.[17]

The level of Task Force interest in this particular *Polity*-coded condition intensified with the Phase V research effort. "One of the most striking results [of the Phase V research effort] is the extraordinarily high relative risk of instability onsets in partial democracies with factionalism" (Goldstone et al 2010, 197). I was tasked directly with what turned into a five-year effort in reexamining all "factional" cases during the Task Force study period (appearing in 110 countries, many having multiple episodes) and reporting on the identifying characteristics (such as identifying the factions involved, special interactive dynamics, and events marking the beginnings and endings of factional periods). The most important finding of this systematic reexamination was that the condition coded as factionalism could be accurately and reliably identified from open-source journalistic reports; the concept proved to be conceptually distinct and valid (all coded cases were confirmed; no non-coded cases were found). A second important finding was that the *Polity* dataset itself was a "rough-cut" in many respects and needed to be refined and vised to correct some inaccuracies and minor inconsistencies, especially with the specification of temporal parameters and pivotal events. The more pressure the Task Force

analyses placed on the input variables, the greater the effort that was needed to confirm, refine, and revise the data. The reexamination effort produced the *Polity5* version of the data (in progress) and a series of country chronologies identifying and detailing all changes in the regime codes over the contemporary period.[18]

What we discovered from looking at the beginnings of periods of factionalism was that the coded beginnings were not generally marking the beginning of the condition itself but, rather, its actual emergence into the open political discourse of the subject countries. It became clear that the condition we termed factionalism pre-dated the coded condition: the deep social divisions characterizing factionalism in recently reformed autocracies were found in countries with autocratic authority more generally. It appears that the ideal of the "nation-state" is a largely European and fictional construct; most countries spatially encompass and, so, are comprised of, multiple, contending social identity groups and, during early stages of development, these countries rely on autocratic authority (supported by one or more, relatively cohesive and militarized, social identity grouping) to forcefully suppress dissent in order to manage conflict among contending constituent groups.[19] We found that nearly all of the newly independent and lesser developed countries showed evidence of deep social divisions and that central authorities struggled to establish and maintain unity among constituent groups, especially when available resource and tactical options are severely limited. Contention among constituent groups is particularly problematic when those groups are territorially concentrated and even more so when those territorially based groups have enjoyed group autonomy prior to their political incorporation within the larger polity (often termed "sons of the soil') (Gurr 1993). The erosion and ultimate end of "colonialism" following the Second World War provides an "experimental treatment" in state-building: despite the fact that many former-colonial states were established

with some democratic institutions, within ten years of their official dates of independence nearly

all of these countries were governed by autocratic regimes (Marshall 2006).

Historically, we know that all modern states were originally governed by autocratic

regimes; the United States is the lone exception. The evidence leads to the conclusion that early

stages of societal-system development are characterized by polar factionalism and that

instrumental (autocratic) authority is considered necessary to establish and maintain central

authority in deeply divided societal-systems. In addition, states that attempt to reform their

authority practices, or which experience an effective erosion in their capacity to control conflict

through instrumental force, will experience an increase in public contention among constituent

groups in the former (potentially triggering an autocratic crackdown to maintain social order) or

a buildup in military confrontation and a crisis of autocracy ("CA" in figure 2) in the latter case.

The history of human development provides ample evidence that there is a natural equilibrium

point for autocratic authority centered on the condition of polar factionalism. We term this latent

form of [polar] factionalism, **developmental factionalism**. Factionalism becomes openly

problematic as autocratic regimes either attempt to reform by permitting opposition groups to act

more openly or fail to suppress oppositional activity due to a lessening of their instrumental

capabilities. We term this open form **transitional factionalism**. Very often, as opposition groups

have gained access to the public political system, the rising strength of opposition to the

governing regime is seen as a direct threat by regime authorities and triggers an autocratic

backlash as security forces are directed to move forcibly to repress opposition activities and

arrest leaders. As more countries have managed to transition to various forms of democratic

authority, we have found evidence that long-standing democratic regimes may also degenerate or

disintegrate into a form of **atrophic factionalism** as unresolved issues of contention accumulate

over time and aggrieved groups coalesce into opposing groups vying for control of the regime
and its instrumental capacities to channel advantages to one group and discount the interests and
aspirations of the other(s).[20]

The Political Process Model (figure 2) summarizes the important findings resulting from
the systematic reexamination of the condition of [polar] factionalism within the general context
of political competition as it is operationalized by the *Polity* coding scheme. Six distinct qualities
of political competition have been identified: **conventional politics** (characterized by effective
deliberations, negotiations, and allocations among competing group interests); **contentious
politics** (where conventional politics are ineffective in producing non-discriminatory outcomes),
issue factionalism (where contending groups fail to identify or implement common solutions
regarding one or more key issues of contention), **polar factionalism** (where groups polarize
according to complex, symbolic formulations of identity regarding a political impasse involving
multiple, linked issues), **militancy** (political impasse triggers mobilization of instrumental action
and strategies of contention between/among polarized identity groups), and **open warfare** or
fragmentation (armed conflict over control of or separation from the central authority system).
Democratic authority is favored under the conditions found toward the left end of the model; it
establishes an equilibrium in Conventional Politics (where social conflicts are effectively
managed in inclusive policies) and lapses into crisis ("CD") as unresolved issues of contention
accumulate and accentuate disintegrative social dynamics. Anocratic "incoherent" authority
patterns appear to accompany or result from crises in either democratic or autocratic authority
systems as societal-system authorities and other actors scramble to discover and implement
mechanisms by which central authority can be augmented and, so, move the societal-system
toward one of the more stable, equilibrium points.

Polar factionalism can be understood, then, as the "gateway" to autocracy, militancy, and open (civil) warfare. Task Force modeling efforts show that polar factionalism very strongly predicts both adverse regime change (reversion to autocratic rule) and the onset of civil warfare. "Polity fragmentation" can be understood to occur with the onset of open warfare as the warring groups distance themselves (socially and spatially) and refuse to accept the authority of the other. The white and black arrows in Figure 2 indicate the direction of authority changes: white arrows indicate greater autocratization and black arrows indicate greater democratization. What appears to drive the autocratization of central authority is the inability, or unwillingness, of political leadership to effectively manage or resolve social conflicts, especially as regards highly valued issues. The main driver for democratization is the need to integrate and incorporate the efforts of a greater proportion of constituents in the political process to ensure that stakeholders have the proper incentives to maintain the system over time, that is, to manage intensifying levels of system complexity. The Political Process Model is not a linear progression model but, rather, a conditional vacillation model with system breakdown at the right end and managed political and progressive stability at the opposite end. Democratic authority, then, should be understood as the product of successful societal integration and conflict management and finds its natural equilibrium in Conventional Politics. Democratic authority begins to break down when deliberation and negotiation practices fail to identify and implement collective solutions to common problems. The consolidation of democratic authority is signified by the construction and maintenance of structural resilience which, in turn, works to inhibit the degradation and vacillation of authority patterns in response to changing dynamics within societal-systems under duress. However, structural resilience does not appear to prevent system breakdown; it simply dampens the dynamics of social change and provides authorities more time, more options, and

greater resources to manage emerging conflicts and resolve issues of contention before these tensions escalate social divisions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The earth's human population remained limited for most of its history but has grown exponentially since the discovery and application of scientific methods about three hundred years ago. Reaching one billion about 1800, the world total may have reached eight billion at the time of this study. The human embrace of science has not only enabled a rapid rise in its total population but, also, a concomitant increase in its level of consumption and exploitation of its eco-system (Meadows et al 1972). We have entered the Age of Complexity where "simple" human societies are no longer managed by environmental constraints and must learn to accept responsibility for managing the impacts of human behavior on the global eco-system or face a Malthusian resolution to their "common predicament" (Sherif 1966). Each country's societal-system is regulated through local authority patterns associated with extant social structures and networks; a democratic authority system must be perceived as legitimate and sustained by its constituents in some symbiosis with its local environment and, so, cannot be imposed or implanted by "others." However, our research strongly supports both the positive and negative effects of "neighborhoods." Both autocracies and democracies are "comfortable" when situated among similar regimes, although democracies are more supportive of other democracies. The increasing complexity of human societal-systems favors democratic authority systems that can successfully integrate diverse social identities and effectively manage conflict dynamics.

Autocratic authority now may be best understood as a final resort "political safety net" holding the line between complexity and chaos.

The current global pandemic dramatically draws our attention to the good governance imperative. Using the *Polity* data in charting global trends in governance, the Center for Systemic Peace has shown that democratic authority has been ascendant almost continually since 1800; the only exception to this trend can be seen to begin during the Spanish Flu pandemic, when there were 23 democratic regimes, and fall dramatically during the Great Depression until there were only 8 at the onset of global warfare in 1939. The current study has examined the link between hybrid authority systems and state fragility, but we must also acknowledge that there is a critical link between hybrid authority and global fragility. What most clearly distinguishes the various stages presented in the Political Process Model (figure 2) is the **emotive content** of political discourse in the affected societal-system. Emotive content immerses issues of conflict in non-negotiable "ideals" of identity, principles, and values to the detriment of reasoned treatments and progressive supraordinate goals. The emotive content of political rhetoric and messaging contributes to, and even drives, the degradation of political and social relations. Democratic authority is necessarily based in rationality as cooperation and compliance require reciprocity and mutual benefit; emotionality stimulates political action by creating social divisions and the autocratic enforcement of political boundaries. Complexity is the source of societal-system fragility; gaining an understanding of the scientific, systemic basis of social order and how it works must inform effective conflict management for all polities. Societal cohesion, structured resilience, mutual respect, accountability, and due diligence provide the tools with which we can secure our sustainable future (Marshall 2014 2016, Marshall & Cole 2017).
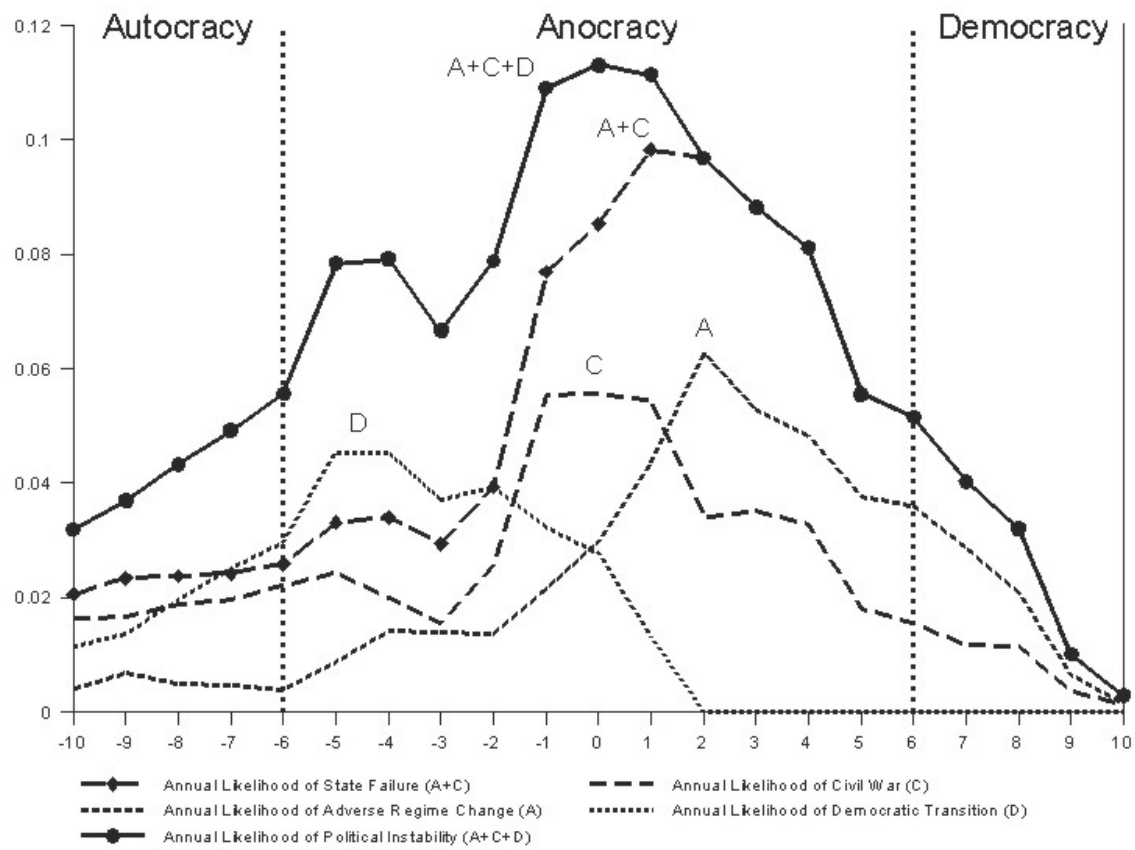
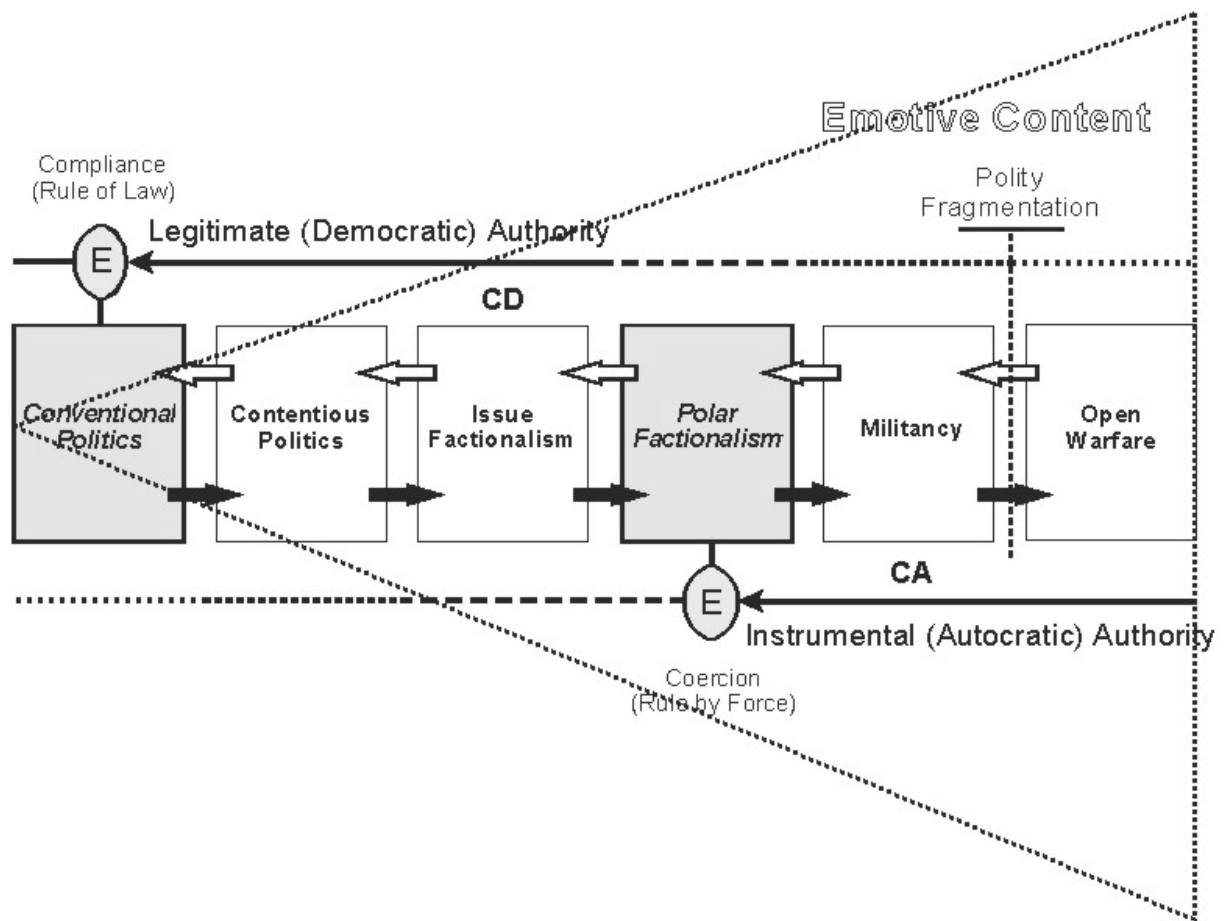*Figure 1. Regime Authority and the Onset of Political Instability Events, 1955-2018*

Figure 2. Political Process Model (Marshall and Cole 2014, 6)

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NOTES:

[1] Task Force subcontracts for producing key data deliverables (i.e., *Polity,* major episodes of political violence, PITF problem set, elite characteristics, leaders' years in office, coups, and ethnic group discrimination) and consulting fees paid over my nearly 21 years association totaled more than $4.5 million. Basically speaking, the Task Force bought nearly all my professional time.

[2] Standard disclaimer: the Task Force does not represent the view of the US Government, the US intelligence community, or the Central Intelligence Agency.

[3] Although strongly encouraged to do so, I refused to seek a security clearance in the conviction that secret knowledge is inherently autocratic practice and a serious impediment to the development of science.

[4] The *Peace and Conflict* (2001, 2003, and 2005) and *Global Report* (2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2014, and 2017) issues can be accessed from the Center for Systemic Peace at http://www.systemicpeace.org/cspvirtuallibrary.html.

[5] The relative strength of the *Polity* measures in the global model specification is largely due to the fact that it is far more dynamic, behavioral measure as compared with the other, largely structural (slow changing) variables in the model.

[6] The term "autocratic backsliding" refers to any decline in a regime's POLITY score. The Task Force designated a 6-point or more continuous decline in POLITY score as an "adverse regime change" (political instability) event.

[7] The Task Force, at one point, contracted an outside party to conduct a blind neural network analysis of the full global "Merge" dataset to identify the "most powerful predictors" of impending political instability. The top predictor variable was discovered to be the numeric country code! The country code groups countries by geographic region; the risk of political instability is shown to cluster in certain regional sub-systems.

[8] The full societal-systems analytic approach is explained in a two-volume series of video presentations (i.e., video book) produced by CSP, titled "Managing Complexity in Modern Societal-Systems: Structuration and Problemation" (Marshall 2014 2016).

[9] The term "societal-system" refers to the common configuration of modern, complex social systems incorporating the internal, structural dynamics of (plural) identity groups (societies) and the external interactions between/among identity groups (system).

[10] The term "polity" refers to the central organizing structure of any self-aware and self-actuating societal-system. Polities are most commonly equated with the "state" governance structures of independent countries but are theoretically contained in any "social identity group." To better distinguish these two forms of practical authority from classical notions of autocracy and democracy ideals, I emphasize the interactive nature of these two forms of authority: instrumental/coercive (autocratic) and sociational/cooperative (democratic) authority (Marshall 1999 2014 2016).

[11] The Task Force leadership only began discussing the need for a systems approach around 2017 and never fully embraced the societal-systems approach.

[12] I was told, unofficially, that the original directive had come from the office of then Vice President Al Gore; indeed, a major impetus within the Task Force was to detail the supposed links between environment factors and state failure.

[13] The rejection of force as an arbiter in political disputes necessitates the implementation of some mechanism(s) for formulating a political agenda and decision-making among multiple interests and sources of authority. Voting and similar electoral procedures can provide such pluralistic mechanisms when they are deemed fair and just.

[14] The plot in Figure 1 uses the POLITY2 variable, which assigns POLITY scale values to two categories of special regime conditions: "-88" transitional regimes where authority patterns are being changed incrementally by governmental fiat and "-77" interregnum regimes in which central authority has mostly collapsed and some form of anarchy prevails. The plots are smoothed by taking three-point averages for each value along the scale.

[15] The term "anocratic" was first used by Gurr (1974).

[16] Actually, the POLITY2 variable is used because it includes POLITY values for the coded special situations of "transition" (-88) and "interregnum" (-77).

[17] In describing the use of the term "factional" in the *Polity* scheme, I add the qualifier "polar" to acknowledge that the term is used to refer to a more advanced form of political factionalism where factional groups have coalesced by way of "unnatural alliances" leading to a bipolar confrontation between "state" and "anti-state" groupings. The "unnatural" factor in the alliances helps to explain why these alliances break down relativel quickly without the polarizing influence of the "other."

[18] The *Polity5* country chronologies are posted on the Center for Systemic Peace Web site at URL: www.systemicpeace.org/p5reports.html

[19] The idea of the "multi-nation state" is largely absent in Western political theory; "primordial identities" are expected to assimilate to a national identity over time through direct or indirect pressures for social cohesion as the source of "national power." The "national question" became a major issue of debate among policymakers in the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1917 and continued through its demise in 1991.

[20] Marshall (2017) identified ten cases of factionalism in advanced or long-standing democracies during the study period. Of these, four cases, Cyprus, France, Solomon Islands, and Venezuela, experienced a subsequent adverse regime change and three cases, India, Israel, and Sri Lanka, experienced civil warfare. The United States experienced serious political violence during its factionalism period in the late 1960s and came very close to having an adverse regime change event in early 2021; Belgium and the United Kingdom (both ongoing) have not experienced a political instability event as of the end of 2021.