

**ESSAYS ON CULTURAL-INSTITUTIONAL CONGRUENCE IN POLITICS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE
FRENCH AND GERMAN NATIONAL CONTEXTS**

WILLIAM HEASTON

INTRODUCTION

Stability is a fundamental concern for every society and, therefore, a significant concept across social science disciplines. From a political science perspective, traditional analyses of stability often revolve around regime classification and the effectiveness of the various governmental structures comprising varying regime types. A proper analysis of regime stability is a complex undertaking given the multifaceted underpinnings of political systems; however, such examination is feasible and meaningful through the usage of a theoretic approach that accommodates the many intricacies of regimes in a holistic evaluation of stability. Congruence theory provides the necessary theoretical lens in this regard.

Fundamentally, congruence theory seeks to understand the interplay between culture and institutions within the political environment. The theory posits that the political culture and political institutions within a given national context must be compatible in order to ensure long-term political stability. Utilizing this overarching theoretical framework, one can more deeply understand the numerous interplaying factors on which stability hinges in a particular national context. This information can then be used to conduct cross-national comparisons of different cultural-institutional environments.

The structure of the paper is as follows. This introductory section will conclude with components concerning the perceptions of culture and institutions widely found in the social science and, in particular, political science literatures. The mutual importance of both political culture and political institutions in the composition of congruence theory necessitates these overviews. The following section will provide an overview of congruence theory, including its roots, structure, major contributors, scholarly development, and practical applications. Forming the bulk of the paper, the two proceeding sections will utilize congruence theory to analyze the

specific cultural-institutional environments of France and Germany and their implications for political stability. The paper concludes with an evaluation of congruence theory as an effective analytical approach, citing subject matter from the country analyses for support.

Concerning Political Culture

Admittedly, culture is a very broad term that has been explored in great detail across a variety of academic disciplines. The breadth of this term has enabled the usage of conceptual frameworks and approaches from anthropology, sociology, psychology, and history to advance cultural theory.¹ This multidisciplinary relevance has produced a wide array of descriptions used to define culture. Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, an English cultural anthropologist, provided a groundbreaking definition of culture when he stated, “Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”² Geert Hofstede, a Dutch social psychologist and business scholar, defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.”³ Hofstede’s definition emphasizes the variability of culture across different environments, an important approach that lends itself well to comparative political analysis.

The preceding definitions of culture provide a necessary foundation, but these generalities must be further refined to construct a political culture definition specifically suited for a political science research undertaking. One of the seminal works on political culture is

¹ Gabriel Almond & Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 13.

² Edward Burnett Tylor, *The Origins of Culture*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958), 1.

³ Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations across Nations*, 2nd ed., (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 9.

undoubtedly Almond and Verba's *Civic Culture* (1963), which provides a sophisticated definition of political culture as "specifically political orientations—attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system."⁴ For organizational purposes, one may classify these orientations into levels of political culture. The *system level* involves citizens' orientations toward the political community and values comprising the political system; the *process level* involves citizens' expectations of how politics should function and how individuals should participate in the political process; and the *policy level* pertains to citizens' expectations of the government.⁵

Almond and Verba described three distinct political cultures—participatory, subject, and parochial—that differed in the extent to which people believed in and practiced an active engagement with the political system. In this survey-based study, *participants* pertained to those who believed strongly in their potential to influence political outcomes; *subjects* pertained to those interested in politics but felt disconnected in some way from the political system; and *parochials* pertained to those lacking in political knowledge and, as a consequence, felt completely disengaged with the political system and did not desire to participate.⁶ Almond and Verba argued that no single classification of the aforementioned political cultures existed in isolation, supporting instead the notion of a *civic culture*. This "mixed political culture" is much more representative of the many cultural intricacies within national contexts, in which "the active citizen maintains his traditional, nonpolitical ties, as well as his more passive political role as a

⁴ Almond and Verba, 13.

⁵ Gabriel Almond et al., "Democratic Political Culture and Political Action," in *European Politics Today*, 4th ed., ed. Gabriel Almond et al., (Longman, 2010), 24-5.

⁶ Lowell Barrington, *Comparative Politics: Structures and Choices*, 2nd ed., (Wadsworth Publishing, 2012), 74.

subject.”⁷ Almond and Verba’s study sought the right mix of political cultures necessary to produce a civic culture deemed most conducive to democratic stability. This emphasis on political culture’s role in regime stability plays a significant role in the structure and application of congruence theory.

For the purposes of clarity and additional emphasis, the definition of political culture used throughout this paper is as follows: *the underlying set of values and orientations held by a given population concerning their political system and influencing their political interpretations.*

Concerning Political Institutions

Similar to the concept of culture, the study of institutions has spanned many disciplines and produced various institutional theoretic perspectives. Regardless of disciplinary inclination, all scholars fundamentally recognize institutions as societies’ “rules of the game.” One can broadly interpret “game” to mean the human experience within a particular social context. Douglass North, widely-renowned for his eminent work in institutional economics, formally defined institutions as “humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction.”⁸ North emphasized that institutions could be informally accepted just as they are formally devised, holding conventions, codes of conduct, and norms of behavior in the same standing as formal legal constraints. Above all, he stressed the primary role of institutions as a means “to reduce uncertainty [by] establishing a stable...structure to human interaction.”⁹ The sociologist Richard Scott further stressed this notion and provided a broader perspective on institutions in the process

⁷ Almond and Verba, 474.

⁸ Douglass North, *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.

⁹ Ibid, 6.

by labeling them “social structures...composed of cultured-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that...provide stability and meaning to social life.”¹⁰ The pivotal role played by a multitude of institutions in upholding a generally stable social environment is essential to the composition of congruence theory.

Given the broad nature of institutions as an academic area of inquiry, it is important to note the particular institutional perspective used in this paper. This perspective provides a relatively narrow understanding of institutions specifically designed for a political science disciplinary approach. While the basic role and principles of institutions largely remain, such an approach allows for the identification and comprehension of political institutions. One scholarly definition emphasizes the narrow nature of political institutions as “collections of interrelated rules and routines that define appropriate actions in terms of relations between roles and situations.”¹¹ The authors of this definition, James March and Johan Olsen, particularly stressed the roles of institutions as rules, procedures, and governance structures to a narrower extent than various sociological scholars.¹² Such an interpretation contributes to the uniqueness of political institutions as a classification. Indeed, political institutions are especially unique in that they “reach outward” and attempt to constrain the behavior of people who do not necessarily participate in the institutions themselves.¹³ It is in such a fashion that political institutions exert overarching authority in their particular national contexts.

¹⁰ W. Richard Scott, *Institutions and Organizations*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), 48.

¹¹ James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life," *The American Political Science Review* 78, no. 3 (1984): 160.

¹² Thomas Koelble, "The New Institutionalism in Political Science and Sociology," *Comparative Politics* 27, no. 2 (1995): 234.

¹³ Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, "Beyond the Iconography of Order: Notes for a 'New Institutionalism'," in *The Dynamics of American Politics: Approaches and Interpretations*, ed. Larry Dodd and Calvin Wilson, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 325.

For greater emphasis, it is worth explicating the definition of political institutions used throughout this paper. Political institutions are *the set of rules or purposive organizations designed to establish, influence, and enforce constraints on human behavior across society*. In accordance with March and Olsen's relatively narrow and formal perspective of political institutions and for the sake of manageability, this paper will limit its analysis of political institutions to the "governing bodies and organizations" comprising the political system (e.g. executives, legislatures, the political party environment, etc.).¹⁴ Together, these institutions can be generally referred to as the politico-institutional environment, constituting the structural foundation of the political system.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE CONGRUENCE PRINCIPLE

The conception of congruence theory was firmly rooted in the increased prominence of studies in political culture in the mid-twentieth century. Indeed, works such as Almond and Verba's *Civic Culture* gave increased attention to the role of underlying political attitudes and value systems in the stability of political regimes. One can view congruence as a theory of legitimacy and stability whereby "political attitudes that are supportive of the particular regime in power (regime-conducive attitudes) are most important."¹⁵ In other words, the various attitudes and perceptions constituting the political culture in a given country must be compatible with the governance structures and political institutions in that country. This compatibility ensures a given population's expectations and perceptions of their political system are met, which legitimates the authority of governance structures and ultimately ensures a fairly stable

¹⁴ A similar approach is used in Barrington, 130.

¹⁵ Bruce Gilley, "The Determinants of State Legitimacy: Results for 72 Countries," *International Political Science Review* 27, no. 1 (2006): 50.

socio-political environment. Harry Eckstein, the foremost congruence theorist, believed congruence to be a potentially invaluable answer to the major question of his time: “How does one explain stability and instability...in democratic governments?”¹⁶ This question is just as relevant today as it was then, justifying the usage of the theoretical lens of congruence in contemporary political analysis.

Eckstein based his construction of congruence theory on two fundamental propositions: (1) high governmental performance requires a high degree of congruence among governmental authority patterns and specified nongovernmental authority patterns; (2) even though a combination of high congruence and low governmental performance can occur, the level of congruence and level of performance should be strongly associated.¹⁷ In essence, Eckstein’s first point illustrates the main principle of congruence theory—the politico-institutional environment (i.e. the regime and its supporting institutions) must be compatible with the underlying political attitudes and norms of a given society to ensure stability. Eckstein’s second point expands on his first, stating that a “strong association,” or frequently positive relationship, exists between the level of cultural-institutional congruence and a regime’s stability and efficiency, or performance. In other words, high levels of stability cannot exist without similarly high levels of congruence, and low levels of stability often exist with low levels of congruence. Above all, Eckstein stressed congruence as “a necessary condition for very high support [or stability]” to exist.¹⁸ Thus, cultural-institutional congruence is deemed the foremost determinant of stability in the country analyses within this paper.

¹⁶ Harry Eckstein, *The Natural History of Congruence Theory*, Monograph Series in World Affairs, vol. 18, (Denver, CO: Graduate School of International Studies, University of Denver, 1980), 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 1.

¹⁸ Harry Eckstein, *Support for Regimes: Theories and Tests*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Center of International Studies, 1979), 17.

Since Eckstein's initial contribution, various scholars have utilized and expanded upon congruence theory in the political science literature. Collectively, these works have validated the importance of cultural-institutional congruence to regime stability. Inglehart (1990) illustrated the necessity of congruence in his study of twenty-two nations, concluding, "Cultural factors have an important bearing on the durability of democracy, which results from a complex interplay of economic, cultural, and institutional factors. To neglect any of these components may compromise its survival."¹⁹ Dalton and Shin (2006) expanded the scope of congruence theory in their analysis of Pacific Rim countries to include: (1) congruence of social and political values; (2) congruence of social and market values; (3) congruence of political and economic values; and (4) congruence between citizen values and institutional structures.²⁰ The fourth type of congruence represents Eckstein's initial perspective on congruence and the perspective used throughout this paper. This perspective serves as the basis of another recent development in the congruence theory literature—a democratic congruence theory model. This demand-and-supply model posits that democratic regimes become stable when "levels of citizen demand and institutional supply for democracy are in equilibrium."²¹ In this economics-based framework, underlying political beliefs and values have a direct effect on citizens' demand for democracy; therefore, the political culture component must be congruent with the political institutional environment to ensure a state of equilibrium in the "market" for democracy used in this model.

¹⁹ Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 65.

²⁰ Russell Dalton and Doh Chull Shin, "Citizens, Democracy, and Markets," in *Citizens, Democracy, and Markets around the Pacific Rim: Congruence Theory and Political Culture*, ed. Russell Dalton and Doh Chull Shin, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6-10.

²¹ Lingling Qi and Doh Chull Shin, "How Mass Political Attitudes Affect Democratization: Exploring the Facilitating Role Critical Democrats Play in the Process," *International Political Science Review* 32, no. 3 (2011): 246.

Congruence theory provides a well-directed, logically-constructed analytical framework. This theoretic approach allows for the identification of the major cultural and institutional characteristics of various countries' political environments. Most importantly, the recognition of these characteristics allows for an evaluation of the cultural-institutional relationship and its implications for stability. The usefulness of a congruence theoretic approach will now be demonstrated through overviews of France and Germany's cultural-institutional environments.

FRENCH SEMI-PRESIDENTIALISM: INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION AND HYBRIDITY IN A COMPLEX POLITICO-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

The unique themes constituting French political culture have engendered a similarly unique political regime in the form of democratic semi-presidentialism. This hybrid system arose, in part, out of the need for the French political-institutional environment to adhere to the various complexities and idiosyncrasies of political culture. The stability of the French semi-presidential system, due largely to its overall compatibility with French political culture, clearly validates the notion that socio-political stability is best achieved in an environment of politico-cultural and politico-institutional symbiosis.

The compatibility of a state's political culture and political institutions is of paramount importance to the long-term sustainability of a state. Essentially, "a stable political system requires a political culture that is congruent with the style of government."²² In order for the institutions constituting a particular political regime to efficiently function, then, it logically follows that these institutions must garner popular legitimacy by representing and upholding the deeply-embedded political values and beliefs of the population. Indeed, according to Almond,

²² Almond et al., 23.

“If the people share the values of the political system, then it is more likely that they and the system can function more effectively.”²³ It is interesting to observe that such compatibility between French political culture and French political institutions, and the resulting efficiency and stability, is best served in the uniqueness and hybridity of the semi-presidential regime. In order to understand how French political values necessitated the formation of such a unique political system, one must first identify the major components of French political culture.

At its foundation, French political culture is rooted deeply in the historical link between past and present values. Major components of French political culture include high expectations of government involvement in society, distrust of governmental authority, strong executive leadership, and the everlasting importance of revolutionary principles. While these components seemingly contradict each other on numerous levels, it is important to note all components are deeply rooted in French historical tradition. High expectations of government involvement are historically based in “a passion for equality,” in which “the French accommodate themselves rather easily to bureaucratic rule [because] administrative rulings supposedly treat all situations with the same yardstick.”²⁴ Distrust of governmental authority and the importance of revolutionary principles all harken back to the French Revolution of 1789, in which the ideals of liberty and individualism ultimately overwhelmed absolutist monarchical rule. These ideals, however, did not fully extinguish authoritarian tradition in the early nineteenth century. Rather, the successes of the Napoleonic era, such as the implementation of the Napoleonic Code and the preservation and expansion of revolutionary ideals, only did more to solidify the appeal of strong executive leadership in the political value system.

²³ Almond, et al., 23.

²⁴ Martin Schain, "Politics in France," in *European Politics Today*, 4th ed, ed. Gabriel Almond et al., (Longman, 2010), 136-7.

Admittedly, the major components of French political culture somewhat contradict each other's basic tenets. The mutual "craving for [authority]" and distrust of government appear to be two values at complete opposite ends of the politico-cultural values spectrum.²⁵ Furthermore, the desire for strong executive leadership appears to contradict the very nature of liberal revolutionary ideals passionately espoused by the French since the late-eighteenth century. These seemingly inconsistent values have resulted in the formulation of a unique political culture in France, which broadly "reflects an attempt to compromise on the core values of authority, equality, liberty, and security."²⁶ The alignment of the political institutional system with such a diverse political culture requires a unique governance structure, which can effectively uphold and cater to all facets of France's political culture. As previously stated, the current semi-presidential system best meets these criteria.

Semi-presidentialism allows France to maintain socio-political stability by representing the various values comprising political culture, such as the desire for strong executive authority. Pure parliamentarianism resulted in an unstable political system prior to the formation of the Fifth Republic in 1958. On average, the Third and Fourth Republic governments only lasted an average of eight months.²⁷ To ensure greater stability and adherence to the strong executive leadership component of political culture, the current constitution allows for the direct election of a president for a fixed five-year term. For many political scientists, the presence of an executive with "quite considerable powers" is considered an essential component to a properly-defined

²⁵ Schain, 136-7.

²⁶ Barrington, 67.

²⁷ Barrington, 169.

semi-presidential regime.²⁸ Thus, while the president is designed to be above party politics as a representative of national unity, the president wields significant political powers. Chief among these are the abilities to dissolve parliament and call new elections, submit important legislation to the electorate via referendum if agreed upon by parliament, and call for supreme emergency powers.²⁹ It should be noted, however, that these emergency power have been rarely used, and even the substantial powers of the president have “waxed and waned” during periods of cohabitation.³⁰

In addition to a powerful presidency, the advantages of a parliamentary system are still present in that the prime minister manages the day-to-day operations of the government and policymaking is efficient and representative of the popular majority. Prior to the Fifth Republic, the multiparty system’s high levels of diverse representation splintered parliament and ultimately resulted in the constant toppling of governments. This institutional problem was unacceptable given the high expectations of government involvement instilled in French political culture. As such, the shift in the balance of power from the legislature to the executive ensured a stronger, more durable government and the eradication of instability. Given the presence of a more stable governmental system, policymaking is much more efficient than it had been prior to the construction of semi-presidentialism.

At the same time, distrust of government is a vital component of political culture that seems to be contradicted by the implementation of a powerful president with a still-influential prime minister. However, this potential pitfall is counteracted by a variety of institutional

²⁸ Maurice Duverger, "A New Political System Model: Semi-Presidential Government," *European Journal of Political Research* 8, no. 2 (1980): 166.

²⁹ Schain, 133.

³⁰ Jenny S. Martinez, "Inherent Executive Power: A Comparative Perspective," *Yale Law Journal* 115, no. 9 (2006): 2488.

constraints imposed on executive authority within the semi-presidential system. First, the president is constitutionally incapable of dismissing the prime minister, meaning “the president is often politically pressured to resort to more democratic means of conflict resolution, instead of running the country solely from the office of the president.”³¹ This is especially important in instances of cohabitation, in which the prime minister and president belong to opposing political parties. Second, an unpopular prime minister may be removed from office through a parliamentary vote of censure, ensuring “responsiveness to the will of an unhappy electorate” and the opportunity to quickly constrain the overreach of executive authority.³² Third, democratic elections and popular demonstrations serve as mechanisms to hold the president and members of parliament accountable. The people of France believe strongly in their right to induce change, a tradition that has been ingrained in their political culture since the French Revolution.

As exemplified by the French semi-presidential system, stability is best achieved when the political culture of a given population is compatible with the political institutions governing that population. Prior to the Fifth Republic, the French used a pure parliamentary system that did not fully correspond with all aspects of its political culture. Namely, the absence of a powerful executive leader and the inability to formulate significant policies due to constant governmental instability were key features that did not conform to this political culture. Since the establishment of a hybridized semi-presidential system, all the major components of political culture are conveyed within French political institutions: a strong executive, headed by a powerful president, reflects the desire for strong leadership; high expectations of government

³¹ Kimberly A. McQuire, “President-Prime Minister Relations, Party Systems, and Democratic Stability in Semipresidential Regimes: Comparing the French and Russian Models,” *Texas International Law Journal*, no. 47 (2012): 451.

³² Barrington, 169.

involvement are met by more efficient policymaking due to the stability of the semi-presidential system; and the distrust of government is reflected in the many institutional measures available to citizens and elected officials to limit excess government power. While the semi-presidential system is not perfect, it is clearly the best option for France given its compatibility with the diverse aspects of French political culture.

THE LEGITIMATION OF DEMOCRACY IN GERMANY: THE CASE OF POLITICO-CULTURAL MODIFICATION

Democracy is a relatively new phenomenon in Germany. The long historical tradition of authoritarianism, from the monarchical rule of the Kaisers to the extreme case of Adolf Hitler's totalitarianism, certainly dwarfs the twentieth century implementation of democracy. Indeed, democracy initially faltered when the Weimar Republic was overrun by the popularly-supported Nazi Party in 1933. Following World War II, democracy functioned solely in the Federal Republic, the western entity of a divided Germany, until reunification in 1990. Thus, democracy has only existed in contemporary Germany for little over two decades.

Despite the previous failings of democratic experimentation and the youthfulness of the current democratic system, Germany has enjoyed immense politico-economic success. Currently, Germany is a well-established regional and global power. This success could not have been possible without politico-cultural modifications conducive to democratic consolidation. These modifications, themselves made possible by a variety of political socialization modifications, have best served to legitimize and strengthen a democratic regime that has overseen the maintenance of stability and promotion of continued growth.

Up until the early post-World War II years, German political culture was not conducive to the establishment of democracy. "Under the Kaiser the government expected people to be

subjects, not active participants in the political process.” Furthermore, “the polarization, fragmentation, and outright violence of the Weimar Republic taught people to avoid politics.”³³ From a congruence theoretic perspective, one can conclude that the instability and fall of Weimar resulted from an instance of cultural-institutional incongruence—the politico-cultural aspects of the German populace, formulated primarily through a tradition of authoritarianism, did not match the newly-implemented democratic institutional structures of the day. Indeed, “the experiments with democratic participation in the late nineteenth century and in the Weimar period never developed a participant political culture necessary to sustain those democratic institutions and give them force and legitimacy.”³⁴ Weimar merely installed “a democratic constitution...upon an unchanged non-democratic base.”³⁵ Due largely to such incompatibility, Germany’s experiment with democracy in the early twentieth century was doomed from the outset.

Even after World War II, “Germans were politically detached, accepting of authority, and intolerant in their political views.”³⁶ In addition, intense nationalism had been a vital component of German political culture. As evidenced by Nazi fervor in the 1930s and 1940s, intense national pride served to galvanize and unify the German population. Following the fall of the Third Reich, however, the implementation of a new democratic institutional framework in West Germany necessitated modifications to this traditional German political culture.

³³ Russell Dalton, "Politics in Germany," in *European Politics Today*, 4th ed, ed. Gabriel Almond et al., (Longman, 2010), 193.

³⁴ Almond and Verba, 38.

³⁵ Sidney Verba, "Germany: The Remaking of Political Culture," in *Political Culture and Political Development*, ed. Lucian W. Pye and Sidney Verba, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 161.

³⁶ Dalton, 193.

Politico-cultural modifications were made possible by a variety of modifications to political socialization, which is the process by which attitudes regarding politics are created and perpetuated. Due to the importance of political culture transformation in the evolution of a stable democratic institutional environment in Germany, it is only logical that the underlying transformations in political socialization were also of utmost importance to the development of stability. The following will explore various ways in which the sources of political culture have been modified in order to create a more democratically-conducive environment.

First, it is important to note that repeated and defining events can indeed change political culture. It is possible the sheer brutality and unhindered totalitarianism of Adolf Hitler, culminating in the butchering of millions of people, aided in the dissolution of a German political culture once blindly accepting of authority. The German people's acceptance of blame and overwhelming shame for Hitler's atrocities was a defining moment in German history. Germans began to associate nationalism, once a vital component of their political culture, with the infamous fanaticism of Nazism. Indeed, "emotionalism and excessive nationalism [are] seen as a source of weakness, not strength" in contemporary Germany.³⁷

During the early postwar era, many Germans viewed the government more as an "economic...service agency rather than as a guarantor of freedom."³⁸ Demonstrating the effects of repetition on politico-cultural transformation, "decades of economic success accompanied the reestablishment of democracy, [which] undid many of the negative beliefs about democracy."³⁹ This economic success, then, served to legitimize the democratic system during its infancy.

³⁷ Russell Dalton and Stephen Weldon, "Germans Divided? Political Culture in a United Germany," *German Politics* 19, no. 1 (2010): 10.

³⁸ Verba, 141.

³⁹ Barrington, 68.

Conversely, the absence of economic prosperity undoubtedly contributed to the fall of both the Weimar Republic and communist East Germany. In effect, the “smoothly functioning political system...changed public perceptions [over time]” towards a more positive view of democracy.⁴⁰

Modifications to German political socialization are most evident in three areas: familial relationships, education, and mass media dissemination. It is common knowledge that “basic values acquired during childhood often persist into adulthood.”⁴¹ Due to the rise of a new generation of parents, which grew up under the democratic system, it is more likely that democratic norms will be transmitted to future generations and further solidified. Additionally, the decline of the traditional paternalistic family structure has undermined authoritarian values at the household level, promoting the consolidation of democratic ideals and attitudes.⁴² In order to address the public’s “uncertain...commitment to democracy, the [German] government undertook a massive political reeducation program” during the post-war years.⁴³ This “reeducation” primarily consisted of the formal instruction of democratic principles and the functions of new democratic institutions in an attempt to “explain parliamentary democracy to a society emerging from dictatorship and to defend the new constitutional system.”⁴⁴ Finally, the decentralization of the mass media in order to promote liberal ideals clearly contributed to the cultivation of democracy. All these modifications to political socialization have provided new avenues through which aspects of a democratically-conducive political culture can be emphasized and transferred over generations.

⁴⁰ Dalton, 193.

⁴¹ Ibid, 197.

⁴² Verba, 156.

⁴³ Dalton, 193.

⁴⁴ Dieter K. Buse, “The ‘Going’ of the Third Reich: Recivilizing Germans through Political Education,” *German Politics and Society* 26, no. 86 (2008): 35.

Since the latter half of the twentieth century, the transformation of German political culture has done much to promote the newly-established democratic regime. Following World War II, “political leaders constructed a system that formalized democratic procedures. Citizen participation was encouraged and expected [and] policymaking became open.”⁴⁵ Eventually, due to the aforementioned influence of socialization, the “rules of democratic politics—majority rule, minority rights, individual liberties, and pluralistic debate”—began to gradually conform to citizens’ political expectations.⁴⁶ This growing commitment to democratic principles, a factor that was not present during the failed Weimar Republic era, undoubtedly ensured the survival of Germany’s relatively new democratic institutions and the stability of its socio-political environment.

Despite the evolution of a more democratic political culture, some aspects of the pre-democracy political culture have lingered. Chief among them are tendencies towards political detachment and the preference of security over liberty. Almond and Verba characterized this detachment as “almost cynical” and an attempt to “balance,” or counteract, the high levels of political involvement found during the infamous Weimar and Nazi periods.⁴⁷ One can understand the importance of security to German political culture in two ways. First, this preference of security over liberty is deeply-embedded in a history of authoritarianism from the Kaisers to Hitler. Second, the ease with which Nazi extremists overthrew the democratic regime in 1933 is still fresh in the minds of many Germans today. Together, political detachment and security-consciousness constitute a “conservatism [that] is reflected in the lack of intensity of

⁴⁵ Dalton, 195.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Almond and Verba, 429.

German attitudes toward politics.”⁴⁸ Interestingly, these traditional aspects of political culture have not hindered the establishment and stability of democracy in Germany. Rather, they have been especially accounted for in Germany’s institutional structure.

While German political culture has become gradually compatible with the democratic institutional environment, the stability of the regime is largely due to the ability of these institutions to also incorporate preexisting political orientations into its structure per the principle of congruence. For example, while the chancellor wields considerable power, he/she cannot dissolve the legislature and call for new elections. By the same token, parliament cannot remove the chancellor with a traditional vote of no confidence; rather, a *constructive* vote of no confidence is required. This special provision ensures the legislature must agree on a successor before the removal of the chancellor.⁴⁹ In each case, the long-entrenched political orientations in favor of security and strong authority are clearly accommodated within a still-democratic institutional framework. This reality bodes well for the continuation of cultural-institutional stability.

Germany has prospered immensely under its current democratic regime. Although relatively young, Germany exemplifies a mature democratic system. The maturity of this system is a significant reason for the country’s current stability and status in the world order. The development of such a stable democratic system would not have been possible without necessary modifications to political culture. These modifications instilled an acceptance of democratic principles and norms, although the democratic institutional structure still necessarily caters to some political orientations that predate the formulation of the current democratic system. Due to their conformity with the democratic institutional environment, it is apparent that political

⁴⁸ Verba, 138.

⁴⁹ Dalton, 192.

culture and political socialization modifications are primary reasons for Germany's current stability and success.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The preceding analyses of France and Germany conveyed the importance of cultural-institutional congruence in the achievement and maintenance of stability within a nation-state. In the case of France, a complex political culture consisting of seemingly contradictory features has been accommodated by an institutional hybrid in the form of semi-presidentialism. Specifically, the high expectations of government, distrust of government authority, preference for strong executive leadership, and emphasis on historically-entrenched revolutionary principles all represent politico-cultural features that are compatible with politico-institutional phenomena such as a strong executive, various constitutional constraints on executive authority, and various avenues available for both formal and informal political participation. Congruence, then, is a prime reason for the stability achieved under the Fifth Republic.

In the case of Germany, the evolution of a democratic political culture and the accommodation of pre-democracy features of political culture have resulted in cultural-institutional congruence and, as a result, stability. At the system level, Germans view their parliamentary democracy more as a mechanism for ensuring economic efficiency than as a promoter of liberal democratic principles. Decades of economic prosperity in West Germany following World War II served to legitimize democracy, promoting congruence between democratic institutions and the political expectations of the people. In addition to an increase in liberal democratic ideals due to the effects of political socialization, security-consciousness and political detachment are all features of German political culture accommodated by features

within the democratic institutional structure, such as the presence of a strong executive and clear constitutional limitations on executive and legislative action.

Using congruence theory, one can attribute the socio-political stability currently enjoyed in both countries to the existence of compatibility between political culture and political institutions. This stability exists despite the youthfulness of congruence in both France and Germany. The semi-presidential system in France was conceived in 1958 following the formation of the Fifth Republic, and the contemporary democratic institutions found in Germany were first constructed following World War II. Unlike France, Germany also faced the recent challenges of legitimizing a democratic system that had previously experienced failure during the Weimar period, and reincorporating a previously-communist eastern Germany following reunification. As a result, cultural-institutional congruence has only existed in a unified Germany for a little over twenty years, and democratic methods of political socialization have had relatively less time to firmly affect eastern Germany. Indeed, survey data from 2008 indicates only one-third of eastern German students believed the West German political system to be better during the Cold War era.⁵⁰ Still, unification has proven relatively smooth, and the ability of Germany's democratic political system to conform to the political orientations and attitudes of a unified populace is a significant reason for the country's stability and prosperity today.

Congruence theory provides a consistent formula for achieving stability across different national contexts. As evidenced by the country analyses, France and Germany contain different political cultures and different political institutions. This is necessary and expected, given the uniqueness of each country's respective socio-political environment; however, both countries are stable despite their differences. Congruence theory provides the necessary, universal explanation

⁵⁰ Anonymous, "East German History Continues to Arouse Controversy," *The Economist*, Oct. 23, 2008.

for this outcome. The behavior and structure of institutions in a given polity must be compatible with the political attitudes and expectations held by a given population; otherwise, instability will ensue. France and Germany are excellent examples of this fact. The inefficiency of the Third and Fourth Republic periods in France was incompatible with the French people's high expectations of the government, thereby resulting in instability. The incompatibility of a rigid, inefficient democratic system with German political attitudes fostered over generations of authoritarianism led to the destabilization and inevitable failure of the Weimar Republic.

Congruence theory administers a vital analytical framework to contemporary politics. Studies in congruence were initially conducted for the sole purpose of understanding features conducive to democratic stability. This understanding of congruence, however, has broadened in recent years. As demonstrated by this paper, France and Germany may be democracies, but they are not the exact same form of democracy. Despite their dissimilarities, the stability of both is similarly rooted in cultural-institutional congruence. The congruence principle is applicable to nondemocratic regime types as well. Just as democratic institutions must be compatible with a given population's political orientations, so too must authoritarian political institutions match an authoritarian political culture for the sake of long-term stability.

Cultural-institutional congruence provides a valid explanation for the survival and collapse of regimes. While it is not without its limitations, a congruence theoretic perspective provides a firm basis for understanding the interconnectedness between political culture and institutions and their effects on stability. Studies dedicated to a deeper understanding of regime stability and its necessary elements will undoubtedly constitute a significant portion of the political science literature going forward. These future analyses would do well to utilize and expand upon the insights and principles of congruence theory.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Almond, Gabriel, Russell Dalton, G. Bingham Powell, Jr., and Kaare Strom. "Democratic Political Culture and Political Action." In *European Politics Today*, 4th ed, edited by Gabriel Almond, Russell Dalton, G. Bingham Powell, Jr., and Kaare Strom, 22-41: Longman, 2010.
- Almond, Gabriel, and Sidney Verba. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963.
- Anonymous. "East German History Continues to Arouse Controversy." *The Economist*, Oct. 23, 2008.
- Barrington, Lowell. *Comparative Politics: Structures and Choices*. 2nd ed.: Wadsworth Publishing, 2012.
- Buse, Dieter K. "The 'Going' of the Third Reich: Recivilizing Germans through Political Education." *German Politics and Society* 26, no. 1 (2008): 29-56.
- Dalton, Russell. "Politics in Germany." In *European Politics Today*, 4th ed, edited by Gabriel Almond, Russell Dalton, Jr. G. Bingham Powell and Kaare Strom, 178-229: Longman, 2010.
- Dalton, Russell, and Doh Chull Shin. "Citizens, Democracy, and Markets." In *Citizens, Democracy, and Markets around the Pacific Rim: Congruence Theory and Political Culture*, edited by Russell Dalton and Doh Chull Shin. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Dalton, Russell, and Stephen Weldon. "Germans Divided? Political Culture in a United Germany." *German Politics* 19, no. 1 (2010): 9-23.
- Duverger, Maurice. "A New Political System Model: Semi-Presidential Government." *European Journal of Political Research* 8, no. 2 (1980): 165-87.
- Eckstein, Harry. *The Natural History of Congruence Theory*. Monograph Series in World Affairs. vol. 18, Denver, CO: Graduate School of International Studies, University of Denver, 1980.
- . *Support for Regimes: Theories and Tests*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Center of International Studies, 1979.
- Gilley, Bruce. "The Determinants of State Legitimacy: Results for 72 Countries." *International Political Science Review* 27, no. 1 (2006): 47-71.
- Hofstede, Geert. *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations across Nations*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001.

- Inglehart, Ronald. *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Koelble, Thomas A. "The New Institutionalism in Political Science and Sociology." *Comparative Politics* 27, no. 2 (1995): 231-43.
- March, James G., and Johan P. Olsen. "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life." *The American Political Science Review* 78, no. 3 (1984): 734-49.
- Martinez, Jenny S. "Inherent Executive Power: A Comparative Perspective." *Yale Law Journal* 115, no. 9 (2006): 2480-511.
- McQuire, Kimberly A. "President-Prime Minister Relations, Party Systems, and Democratic Stability in Semipresidential Regimes: Comparing the French and Russian Models." *Texas International Law Journal* 47, no. 3 (2012): 427-54.
- North, Douglass. *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Orren, Karen, and Stephen Skowronek. "Beyond the Iconography of Order: Notes for a 'New Institutionalism'." In *The Dynamics of American Politics: Approaches and Interpretations*, edited by Larry Dodd and Calvin Wilson. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994.
- Qi, Lingling, and Doh Chull Shin. "How Mass Political Attitudes Affect Democratization: Exploring the Facilitating Role Critical Democrats Play in the Process." *International Political Science Review* 32, no. 3 (2011): 245-62.
- Schain, Martin. "Politics in France." In *European Politics Today*, 4th ed, edited by Gabriel Almond, Russell Dalton, Jr. G. Bingham Powell and Kaare Strom, 129-77: Longman, 2010.
- Scott, W. Richard. *Institutions and Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995.
- Tylor, Edward Burnett. *The Origins of Culture*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958.
- Verba, Sidney. "Germany: The Remaking of Political Culture." In *Political Culture and Political Development*, edited by Lucian W. Pye and Sidney Verba. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965.