

Contrasting Unitary and Federal Systems

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ABSTRACT. The modern age of statism at most divided polities into unitary or federal states. In doing so it obscured the three models of the origin and development of the polity: hierarchic, organic, and covenantal, with the first two leading to unitary states and the third to federal polities. All three models produce institutions, are informed by political cultures, and lead to political behavior characteristic, and at times even singular, to each. This article explores some of the institutional, cultural, and behavioral consequences of each of the three models and compares them.

Modern political science is grounded in the study of the state, conceived ideally as a unitary, centralized, homogeneous, self-sufficient, and politically sovereign polity encompassing a single nation, a territory, and a unitary government. This modern conception of statehood was either derived from or found its original expression in the Westphalian system, based on the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, that put *finis* to the Thirty Years' War in western Europe and, through it, the wars of religion that had plagued that continent since the Protestant Reformation some 130 years earlier. Under the Westphalian system, Europe was to be organized on the basis of such states all striving to achieve those ideal goals. Sovereignty was viewed as vested in the state and indivisible. During the next 300 years this state system spread throughout the world as Europeans settled new territories that in turn became independent states or colonized older societies that acquired statehood through decolonization. At the same time, the leading states in the state system, and in principle all of them, moved from absolutist rule to some definition of republican or democratic rule.

It may be said that the Westphalian state system represented a major paradigm shift in Europe and the world from medieval arrangements which emphasized diverse and overlapping political arrangements of a very different kind, which rested on states, guilds, ethno-religious communities, family-ruled territories, and various forms of communal self-government, loosely or tightly connected through a corporatist system of power-sharing and allocation of authority. Political science knows

the European version of this system best, but similar arrangements were found in Asia as well. In Africa and the western hemisphere, an equivalent system based on tribal structures, sometimes with imperial overlays, functioned in much the same way.

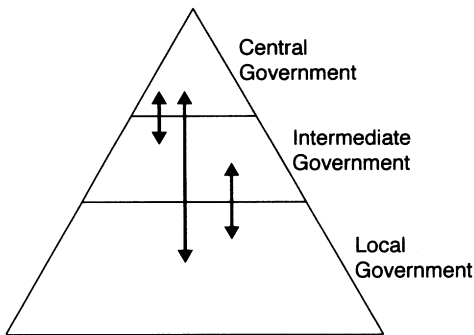
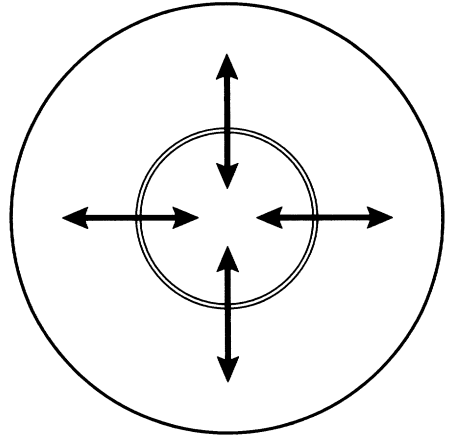
The modern state became dominant in concept as well as a reality, in the western world at least, so much so that other forms of political organization were either ignored or denigrated. It was not until after World War II that political scientists and, more particularly, political anthropologists began to rediscover the political dimensions of non-state polities, curiously enough beginning with the world's surviving tribes, where political institutions often remained undifferentiated from other social institutions (Mair, 1962). By that time, the modern state itself was beginning to undergo a serious transformation, most states having failed to achieve their aspirations to self-sufficiency, homogeneity, or political sovereignty as originally conceived. The necessities of the world market made every state, even the United States, economically dependent on others in significant ways. The persistence of ethnic and religious minorities prevented the emergence of the expected homogeneous nation-state, even where there were deliberate efforts at genocide and ethnic "cleansing". Nuclear weapons eliminated the essence of political sovereignty, that is, the ability to decide unilaterally whether or not to go to war.

Indeed, World War II initiated a paradigm shift similar to that which had taken place in Europe 300 years earlier, this time from statism to federalism; that is to say, from the centralized nation-state to increased power-sharing among states, increasingly on a constitutionalized basis, if not for purposes of comprehensive union, then for the achievement of functional unions or federal arrangements for specific tasks that are beyond the capabilities of any single state. The world is still in the earliest stages of this paradigm shift, but it is already obvious to those who study the matter, whether from the perspective of international relations or from the perspective of domestic government and politics.

Three Original Models of the Polity

This paradigm shift permits, one might even say demands, us to return to a broader and deeper understanding of polity-building, not only on the basis of the hierarchical and organic models favored in a statist age, but also on the basis of the covenantal model that lies at the roots of federalism and which was so often dismissed as a good model during the modern epoch. All political scientific or political philosophic theories of the origins of the polity and polity-building, in the last analysis, suggest that polities are either founded by force and organized as hierarchies, developed by accident as centers with peripheries, or constructed through reflection and choice as noncentralized matrices. True, each model is a classic expression of an ideal type. In real polities, the three may be somewhat mixed but, in fact, every polity is constituted on the basis of one or another, which remains dominant in its form of government if and until a fundamental reconstitution takes place (Elazar, 1991).

The pyramid is the classic expression of the hierarchical model, with organizational authority and power distributed among levels of government linked through a chain of command. Having its origin in some form of conquest, the use of force, a possibility in all polities, is strongly implied in its constitution. Thus it is the military model par excellence. It goes without saying that, in the hierarchical model, the top level must be the most important and the place where decisions are made as to which level does what. Figure 1 graphically portrays that model.

FIGURE 1. *The Hierarchical Model.*FIGURE 2. *The Center-Periphery Model.*

The center-periphery model is one in which authority is concentrated in a single center which is more or less influenced by its periphery, depending upon the situation in which it finds itself. Such polities or organizations tend to develop organically, either around a center or by generating one over time in accordance with “the iron law of oligarchy” (Michel, 1966). Quite naturally, they tend to be oligarchic in character, with power in the hands of those who constitute the center. Power is either concentrated or dispersed according to decisions taken in the center which may or may not include significant representation from the peripheries. The center-periphery model is graphically portrayed in Figure 2.

The federal, or matrix, model reflects a polity compounded of arenas within arenas held together by common framing institutions and a shared communications network. Its origins are to be found in the deliberate coming together of equals to establish a mutually useful governmental framework within which all can function on an equal basis, usually defined by a pact. Consequently, it reflects the fundamental distribution of powers among multiple centers across the matrix, not the devolution of powers from a single center or down a pyramid. Each cell in the matrix represents an independent political actor and an arena for political action. Some cells are larger and some smaller and the powers assigned to each may reflect that difference, but none is “higher” or “lower” in importance than any other, unlike in an organizational pyramid where levels are distinguished as higher or lower as a matter of constitutional design. Figure 3 graphically portrays this form of governmental organization.

The matter was most felicitously summarized in the first essay in *The Federalist* (Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, 1961).

It has been frequently remarked that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.

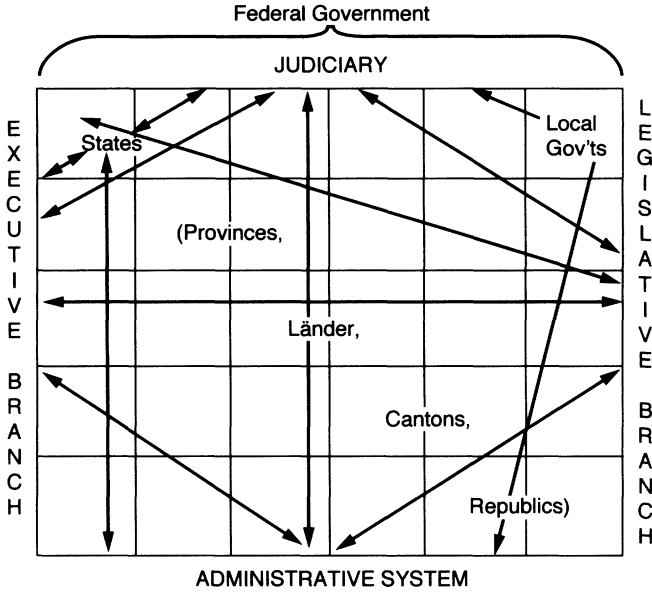


FIGURE 3. *The Federal or Matrix Model.*

Needless to say, each of these models carries with it both certain institutional arrangements and certain patterns of political culture which together have implications with regard to the organization, distribution, and exercise of power and authority (Table 1). The interorganizational relationships within each develop accordingly. At the same time, it is in the nature of politics that various groups, parties, and

TABLE 1. *Models of Foundings / Regimes.*

	Conquest	Organic	Covenant
Founding:	Force/Conquest	Accident	Reflection and Choice
Model:	Pyramid	Circle	Matrix
Structure:	Hierarchy	Center-periphery	Frame and Cells
Governance mechanisms (in rank order):	Administration—top down bureaucracy Politics—court	Politics—club, oligarchy Administration—center outward	Constitution—written Politics—open with factions Administration—divided
Apotheosis:	Army	Westminster system	Federal system
Excess:	Totalitarian dictatorship	Jacobin state	Anarchy
Most common form of revolution:	Coup d'état	Civil war among elites	Structural Resort to arms

interests give the system life. The interaction between them and the institutional framework and among them represents the substance of the political process.

Proceeding further, in hierarchic systems, administration of the pyramid on behalf of the ruler takes precedence in the organization of government. Needless to say, it is hierarchical administration, organized from the top down in a chain of command that rests on a professional bureaucracy, as Max Weber has described it. That is certainly the case in France, where the career civil service is even trained in special schools and is organized into various bureaucratic pyramids whose members hold their power regardless of what government is in power. Within the pyramid, access is closely controlled and must go through the chain of command (Hoffman, 1960; Aron, 1968).

In the organic model, politics takes precedence. It is the politics of oligarchy or oligarchies and it finds its expression through a "club" or network of "clubs." In the United Kingdom, when parliamentary government along this model was at its height, the British elite were literally members of a group of acceptable clubs reflecting different points of view cutting across the various formal oligarchies. The elites gathered in those clubs where informal political decisions were made. Failure to gain membership of an acceptable club was tantamount to being excluded from the leadership (Beer, 1969).

In the federal model, the constitution takes precedence. Because it is a polity based upon conscious design, the ends and organization of the polity must be rooted in a general agreement on the part of its founders, preferably written down so that all may have access to it and understand it precisely. Thus the constitution is the foundation document of any political matrix. The United States, indeed, was built on this idea of constitutionalism from its first settlement in the seventeenth century and certainly from the beginning of the United States itself (Lutz, 1988). The US Constitution remains the lodestone of the American polity and its interpretation underlies all aspects of American politics.

In a hierarchy, politics stands in second place to administration in the order of political life, but it is predominantly court politics; that is to say, the intrigues and maneuvers of those who are in or around the top of the pyramid or strive toward it. Again, France is a classic example, whether we look at the court of Louis XIV or the presidents of France in the Fifth Republic. The constitution is in third place, either a charter or, when more democratic, resembling a charter; that is to say, embodying the hierarchical principle, handed down from the top to regularize the distribution of power and its control in organic law. Thus, France has had numerous constitutions without altering its fundamentally hierarchical structure. Each constitution has simply provided the regime rules for the functioning of the hierarchy at a particular time.

In the organic model, administration follows politics and it is administration from the center outward. In other words, there is an administrative center just as there is a political center; indeed, the two mix and merge in the clubs. Again, the United Kingdom is an excellent example of this. In third place is the constitution which tends to rest on tradition rather than adoption of organic law after comprehensive design. In other words, when some practice becomes rooted in the system, it is formulated into ordinary law which is given constitutional status by general agreement in the minds of the center and the periphery both, because it has acquired the patina of tradition. This exactly describes the constitution of the United Kingdom, which is not a single document but a collection of documents going back to Magna Carta in 1215, each of which represents the expression of an accepted tradition after a period of conflict over the meaning of that tradition. Formally, those documents only have the status of ordinary legislation, but in fact

they have a constitutional status in the minds of parliament and public that prevents their easy alteration.

In the federal model, politics follows the constitution as the second most important element, with politics based upon the rules of the game laid down in the constitution. Because those who have framed the constitution are all substantially equal, it is an open politics. While bargaining exists in some way or for some in every regime, even the most authoritarian and centralized, the locus of effective bargaining depends on the nature of the polity. In hierarchies it is essentially bargaining in the court and in organic polities, bargaining within the center, while in covenantal polities bargaining is open by constitutional design. Hence it usually seems messy to the observer with no clear set of paths or cast of characters. Rather, factions develop and are replaced as situations change and either compete or cooperate with one another to secure their political aims. It seems like every issue demands a new coalition. Moreover, governmental reform in the first two usually involves an effort to make bargaining more open and less secret, so that the spectators, that is, the public, will know what is happening. In the last, reform comes when the feeling develops among the public that access and openness are being closed off and that they must be restored to the original constitutional design so that more of the public can participate in coalition-building.

Administration in covenantal polities comes last. It exists only because it is necessary to govern, not because it is considered to be especially deserving or the basis for political order. At that it is normally divided through the separation of powers and federalism with no easy chain of command and no way of being insulated from the politics which dominates the regime in the name of the constitution. This, indeed, is the US pattern (Ostrom, 1987).

The apotheosis of the hierarchical model is an army; that is to say, a military system organized along a chain of command with clear ranks and clear and unequal standing for different ranks. It is not surprising then that the most influential French leaders were Louis XIV, who established France's standing army and brought it to its greatest power in Europe prior to the French Revolution; Napoleon, who gained power through his military prowess and control of the army and who reorganized every aspect of French public life on a military basis; and de Gaulle, who gave France a role in its own liberation in World War II.

The apotheosis of the organic model is the Westminster parliamentary system, of which Britain is the most noted example and its parliament the mother of parliaments. In its pure form, the parliament occupies the center of the system. All else is in the periphery and the parliament itself operates like a club.

In the federal model, the apotheosis is a federal system where authority and power are established constitutionally by design and distributed among the various units in the federal system, with the distribution protected by the constitution and the politics and structure that flow from it. The United States remains the most prominent model of that kind of polity.

In a hierarchy, the excess is totalitarian dictatorship, aspiring to total control of all aspects of life from the top down throughout the pyramid. The excess in the organic model is the Jacobin state, one in which everything is centralized and the central elites make all critical decisions for everyone. In the federal model, the excess is anarchy, where there is too much diffusion of power, unable to coalesce into a functioning governing system.

Many partisans of the modern state, from Jean Bodin to Max Weber, saw it as a hierarchy, a power pyramid, whose pinnacle was the locus of sovereignty. Others,

from Edmund Burke to Edward Shills, saw the state as following a center-periphery model with power held by an elite at the center and all the rest in varying degrees on the periphery. For most modern states, these models were accurate enough, but those few polities that fell into the category of the third model were not recognized by most political scientists as reflecting a different model of their own, both in theory and often in practice. Rather than reflecting on their indigenous federal model, political scientists tried to force them into the procrustean bed of one or another of the first two. We need to step back and understand how each model has to be understood on its own terms with its own consequences.

Today, rather than trying to force either the unitary or the federal models of statehood or polity into a model more suited for the other, we can examine the political culture and institutions in unitary and federal systems each according to its own model and then compare models, thereby doing elemental justice to each form according to its own conceptions before attempting to compare them. The unitary continuum, whether based on the pyramid or the center-periphery model, emphasizes the neat and presumably more efficient organization of power. Lines within it are relatively clear-cut. With issues of centralization and decentralization, choices are relatively unambiguous because the levels or circles are relatively unambiguous. On the other hand, the federalist model is attuned to the dispersion and diffusion of power and hence is in principle easier for accommodating political cultural and related differences within the body politic.

Another way to describe the difference is to distinguish between the centralization-decentralization continuum and noncentralization. In both the hierarchical and organic models, it is appropriate to speak of centralization or decentralization. In the federal model there is no center; since the most comprehensive government frames the whole, there can be no center and, indeed, as we have found out through experience, there is often greater distance between the different facets of the frame than there is between the frame and its component cells, or between the corresponding facets. Not only that, but in order to function in this noncentralized or multicentered framework the parts must all interact with each other, with each independent enough to keep that interaction real and also prevent the development of a single comprehensive center.

If we accept that those states which from the perspective of the Westphalian system fall within either the hierarchical or the center-periphery models (which in the last analysis are closer to one another than not), contemporary polities can be viewed on either two or three continua. What is critical is to recognize that there are different continua and that comparisons of polities must be based on a recognition of that fact and a consideration of whether it does or does not apply under specific conditions. In the comparison between unitary and federal systems, we are dealing not only with different forms of polity but with different ideal types, each of which has its own integrity and emphases as well as its own weaknesses and deficiencies.

Unitary States: The Organization of Power

Unitary states were established to follow the Westphalian model, at most as modified by the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century or their animating principles. The key principle in unitary states is the efficient organization of power. Efficiency is defined as that which is designed to maximize control of the center over the peripheries or the top of the pyramid over lower levels, depending

on the degree of republican or democratic government involved. Let us take two examples of modern democratic states built along lines of the models sharing this continuum: the Republic of France and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

French Hierarchy

France was one of the earliest states to adopt the forms and aspirations of modern statehood. Because of its imperial origins, France is a good example of a democratic republic constructed on a hierarchical model. As the model would expect, France was built through conquest, or “force” in the words of *Federalist* No. 1, beginning over a thousand years ago when the Comte de Paris initiated the process of conquering the territory now France, beyond his Parisian domain. The conquests continued under his successors until France reached the territorial limits of its power in Europe, either by reaching natural barriers such as the Atlantic Ocean, the English Channel, and the Mediterranean sea; or by combinations of natural barriers and strong human resistance at the Pyrenees and the Spanish marches in the south and the mountainous areas of western Switzerland and Italy in the east and southeast, or human barriers as in the case of the Germans, who stopped French expansion and which led, in an area of tempting lowlands, to a military confrontation between the two nations that lasted a thousand years.

Within the area successfully conquered, successive French kings and governments struggled to impose religious, cultural, and linguistic unity to accompany hierarchical political rule. First came the development of a French national Catholic Church within the framework of universal Roman Catholic Christendom. When that was shattered by the Protestant Reformation, the French rulers managed through war and political maneuvering to eliminate the strong Huguenot movement in France within 150 years.

This pressure for centralization continued in the days of the absolutist kings in their struggle with the regionally-based nobility and then after the French Revolution. As perhaps the greatest of the absolute monarchs and the symbol of royal absolutism, Louis XIV cleverly centralized his control over the French elites by finding ways to attract the landed nobility to leave their estates located throughout France, which were the bases of their power, and to come and reside in Versailles as members of the court, where honors and emoluments depended on the king’s favor, that is, they were transformed into courtiers and detached from their real power bases. He also established new bureaucratic and military elites to reward others of talent, also centralized in his court.

The French revolutionary governments improved upon this royal structure, eliminating most local liberties and the institutions which sustained them, by dismantling the *ancien régime*. The revolutionaries claimed that in order to dismantle the *ancien régime* it was necessary to further centralize power in Paris to eliminate whatever existed of local liberties and to establish uniform arrangements throughout France. Napoleon carried this centralization to its ultimate end by introducing a new centralized law code, a centralized bureaucracy, a comprehensive territorial reorganization, and a centralization of religious life, all organized along military lines, all of which survived his rule.

Much of the nineteenth century was devoted to attempting to extirpate the remnants of localism in France, particularly local languages. This policy was pursued so completely that a law was enacted establishing a list of approved names

which parents could give their newly-born children, designed to prevent the use of names in local languages, and declaring that all names be in proper French. This law, slightly modified in recent years, remains in force. All of this was done in the name of liberty, equality, and fraternity, and accompanied the "democratization" of France along Jacobin lines. This democratization increased in the late nineteenth and the first years of the twentieth centuries.

After World War II, in Charles de Gaulle's Fifth Republic, democratization came to include a measure of decentralization, in principle devolving certain powers down the pyramid. The devolution, such as it was, was true to the pyramid model: what was given away by the top of the pyramid was what it decided to devolve, and what was retained was what it decided to retain. Consequently, as in all pyramids, the end result was less than advertised.

Over that long period, French political culture was either forged or strengthened (we cannot know which with any certainty) around this set of hierarchical expectations regarding rulers, ruled, and the institutions of the polity. This political culture was conjoined with a general culture emphasizing individual self-expression which some would see as bordering on anarchy, with the two linked through an overall cultural commitment to the visually esthetic and a political equivalent in the form of national grandeur and glory. This is manifested through the people considered exemplary French leaders, especially by the French themselves, among whom are Louis XIV, Napoleon, and de Gaulle, and can be verified by examining other leaders who tried to emulate them and failed and whose position in French history and thought is established accordingly, for example, Louis XVI, Louis Napoleon, and the French premier Paul Reynaud.

British Club Politics

The British experience can be seen as a classic expression of the organic model with its center and its periphery. When speaking of Britain, we must remember that England represents by far the lion's share of the United Kingdom. Hence, while variants in the model or other models may shape the relations between England and Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the offshore isles, they are far less important in accurately describing the system as a whole and its political culture and institutions, than that which prevails in England itself.

To begin with, Britain is a clear example of a polity that developed by what *Federalist* No. 1 refers to as "accident." England itself was unified primarily through dynastic intermarriages some 1500 years ago, some of which "took" politically and caused permanent political alterations, while others did not. Eight hundred years ago, after that process had been basically completed and reshaped by the Norman Conquest, and a congeries of elites had formed the center of the polity, the king and the powerful barons ratified that reality through Magna Carta.

Over the next 700 years, two developments occurred. Part of that reality was that the center remained tied to the peripheries because the Lords, and the country squires who became the power in the Commons, remained located principally on their estates where they had their power bases and served as county as well as national officials, assembling in London only from time to time as necessary. The vaunted English system of strong local government developed not out of constitutional principle but as a result of that very real political balance of power which was given expression in English constitutional traditions.

With the coming of the Industrial Revolution, the squires either began to spend more time in London or were replaced by representatives of other classes who were

located in the cities and settled in London full time, thus bringing about a separation between the center and the periphery. Not surprisingly, all of this was accompanied by increased centralization of power in parliament or more precisely in Westminster and Whitehall, and the diminution of the powers of local government. This was facilitated by the development of a social and political elite through Oxford and Cambridge and the public school system. While various ways and means were found to reestablish connections between center and periphery, the center was still the center. Parliament was supreme and the country's social elites ruled until the twentieth century, when meritocracy emerged to perpetuate the elite while facilitating entry into it.

In the last analysis, once the sociological barriers to centralization had disappeared, there were no further restraints of significance. Moreover, the parliamentary system had itself undergone centralization through the rise of political parties. The cabinet, put in power by a parliamentary majority and kept there so long as it had that majority, became the tail that wagged the parliamentary dog. What the cabinet wanted, its party supported so as to stay in power and not be faced with a loss of position or, even worse, new elections. By the 1970s it was a Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher that was riding roughshod over local liberties for political or programmatic advantage.

The result of these organic developments around elites was that British society took on a very strong class structure and British politics took on club-like characteristics. Politics was open exclusively, or at least only in significant ways, to those who were members of the club and who had the kind of interpersonal connections that come from active club membership. To get into the club one had to be born right or attend the right schools and then occupy the right positions in politics, the military, the church, and the public service. Thus, a political culture of clubs was joined with a very nonegalitarian, class-based, general culture to shape the English, and subsequently the British, polity and regime, with both elements anchored in a particularly venerated tradition.

The United States: The Federal Matrix of Democracy

The United States offers a good example of the different working of the federal model. As a "new world," from its first settlements, its politics were founded by mature adults coming together as equals (more or less) to organize themselves for religious and governmental purposes. By the time of the American Revolution, they had 170 years and hundreds if not thousands of examples of such self-organization in various forms. The United States Constitution of 1787 did not establish a central government. Rather, it established the federal government or, as it was then known, a general government, as a strong framing institution to embrace the existing state governments. The US constitution was deliberately incomplete, as Donald Lutz has pointed out, relying on the constitutions of the individual states to complete the structure of governing in the United States. The federal constitution confined itself to federal matters and constitutionalizing a new relationship with the states. For example, local matters are not mentioned in the federal constitution at all, having been left to state constitutions since the states are responsible for establishing and maintaining local governments within the federal system. The very shortness of the US constitution is testimony to this.

Until the Civil War and reconstruction, in practice the United States remained hardly more than a strong confederation, although decisions of the US Supreme

Court and various legislative and other precedents in governing laid the basis for a strong federal government to emerge. It was only with the adoption of the Civil War amendments that the United States became a complete federation by its own definition. Even so, the consolidating implications of the Civil War amendments were not fulfilled until a century later through a series of Supreme Court decisions and federal laws having to do with racial desegregation, human rights, and political equalization.

Moreover, while there have been periods of centralization and decentralization in American history as there have been in other polities, there has been more real movement in those periods because the constitutional and structural basis for power-sharing has remained intact. Even during periods of centralization, the centralization has never led to a concentration of power in the hands of some reified artificial "state" or in a state bureaucracy in Washington, but rather it has involved shifts between the territorial units on which constitutional noncentralization is based, what Samuel Beer has referred to as the "topocracy," to interest groups or communities of interests (Beer, 1978). Thus power has always remained spread throughout the matrix. The result is what Martin Landau has referred to as a cybernetic model of polity-building, many "chips" held together by circuitry so designed as to provide a variety of channels of communication on a fail-safe basis (Landau, 1973).

Power shifts in the United States can be modelled as changes in loadings in electronic circuits. These changes usually can be traced by identifying which positions are the most powerful in connection with particular functions. Thus, for example, it is not the US Secretary of Transportation who is the most powerful transportation official in the United States but the directors of the state departments of transportation in the biggest states such as California and Texas, or great cities such as New York City. Nor is the US Secretary of Education the most powerful school officer in the country. The most powerful positions are probably those of the superintendents of schools in major cities or even more so in the more affluent suburbs. These are just two examples. In the United States this is usually measurable by the size of the salary attached to a particular office, with state and local officials in those and similar fields receiving larger salaries than their federal counterparts.

Comparing the Three Models

We can summarize the three models and their impact by returning to Table 1. To take our three examples, France was established by conquest, what *Federalist* No. 1 calls "force"; the United Kingdom developed organically through what *Federalist* No. 1 refers to as "accident"; while the United States was established deliberately by conscious action of its constituents, what *Federalist* No. 1 refers to as "reflection and choice." In France, the result has been a power pyramid with power concentrated at the pinnacle, either in the hands of a king or a president. In a democratic age the pyramid has been democratized by having it headed by an elected president and supported by other elements of democracy, but it remains a hierarchy from top to bottom and the thinking which informs it is hierarchical. In those periods when France has tried parliamentary government without preserving the political hierarchy, governmental instability was endemic.

The United Kingdom is the center of a classic organic model with a center occupied by the elites and a periphery occupied by everyone else. Parliament or,

more accurately today, Westminster and Whitehall, constitute the heart of the center, just as in earlier times parliament consisted of the Sovereign, the Lords, and the Commons. The center is held together by a combination of those traditionally empowered and a functioning meritocracy, with institutions that enable the center to coopt those who seem to be appropriate to it. Once easily marked by the public schools and "Oxbridge," other institutions are now sources of recruitment for the meritocracy as part of the postwar democratization of the United Kingdom, but the rule remains. Democratization has also given the periphery a greater role in selecting segments of the center's decision-makers and determining who of the elites shall rule in what periods through the party system. But the role of those on the periphery is confined to making that choice. Politics is still a politics of clubs with parliament the club of clubs and the cabinet an even more exclusive club.

US institutions are built following the system of separation of powers and federalism, whereby the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government are first and foremost separated and must cooperate with one another in order to act. All are also permeable to some degree; that is to say, anyone from other branches, from other institutions, or from the public can find points of access to reach any point in any of the cells or branches of government. Not only that, but the American theory of representation makes senators and representatives delegates of their constituencies rather than Burkean virtual representatives, whose first obligation is generally to serve the interests of those constituencies or risk defeat at the polls (Grodzins, 1966).

Political Culture and Modernization

Historically, it is not surprising that prior institutions and the established political cultures were strongly influential in the choice of modernization models in modernizing polities. Thus absolutisms that tried to modernize in the nineteenth century explicitly chose the French model of governmental organization. Take the example of the Ottoman Empire and later Ataturk's Turkey (Shaw, 1976).

Similarly, the Westminster model has been adopted not only where the British were the colonizers or the colonial power but wherever there was a system of elites reflecting a model more broadly based—aristocratic or oligarchic—rather than a simple hierarchy. For example, the Nigerian native kingdoms were led by elites even in premodern times and now, under military government, Nigeria remains headed by an elite group rather than by a single strongman (Adamolekun, 1991).

Finally, wherever polities have been founded by design, they have followed the federal model, either formally as federal systems or through some constitutional model that attempts to guarantee the equality of all constituents. In the Middle Ages, Switzerland was born in that fashion as the Helvetic Confederation, with small self-governing localities forming small republics that over hundreds of years linked with each other to establish the Switzerland of today, with each constituting unit only grudgingly relinquishing power to the larger unit and only to the extent that they felt necessity demanded it (Elazar, 1993).

Political Institutions and Political Culture

These contrasting political institutions are in some important way linked to different political cultures. In examining their histories, it seems that preexisting political cultures influenced the choice of models and the institutions to operationalize

them. But the institutions, if they “take,” function to reenforce the political culture. Moreover, since the antecedents of both culture and institutions go back to “time immemorial,” that is, before recorded history, we cannot say much about cause and effect but must think of the two as functions of each other in some way for analytic purposes.

In the nineteenth century it was common to argue that one primordial form of political organization or another influenced all of humanity and that subsequent divergences arose from the different life experiences of different peoples with that primordial form. Based on the evidence we have or are likely to obtain, that is a very risky argument to try to make. What we can see from history is that all three models with their variations can be traced back to the earliest times for which there is evidence.

To all intents and purposes, each seems to have had either an independent origin or an origin in reaction to encountering the others. Reexamination of the historical records and, before them, the myths of the ancient world is quite revelatory in this respect (Speiser, 1967). For example, in the origins of western civilization, one can see hierarchical models deeply rooted in ancient Egypt since the beginning of recorded time. The study of Egyptian political history will reveal how hierarchy has maintained itself with hardly any interruptions until today. Moreover, those interruptions were invariably the result of outside conquests, whether the conquest of Egypt by the Hyksos nearly 4000 years ago or by the Hellenists at the time of Alexander 2300 years ago, and lasted almost as long as the foreign conquerors continued to rule.

Similarly, the organic model is clearly reflected in Mesopotamian history and myth. If the pharaoh is a god-king in Egypt sitting on top of a pyramid (an Egyptian specialty if not invention), Mesopotamian mythology portrays a roughly equal community of gods serving as the world’s elite who are themselves served by the humans worshipping them representing the world’s periphery, hence the imitative human institution in the assembly of notables. This model was carried over into Greece and Rome and the politics of all civilizations that followed the same center-periphery, oligarchic pattern in one form or another.

We also know that in various communities, urban and rural, in the Eastern Mediterranean region, tribes and cities emerged on a more egalitarian basis using the covenantal model for self-organization. This model is found in ancient Israel and to some extent in ancient Greece. (Greek historians discuss the origins of Greek cities in that manner although the Greek philosophers later rejected it for other models.) The Bible chronicles how Israel emerged out of Mesopotamian civilization. When Israel started experimenting with monotheism, it was patriarchal, only to discover that the idea of one God, sovereign and supreme, went best with the covenantal system through which His human subjects were linked to Him and to one another by pacts which, in the latter case at least, presumed a fundamental equality among partners (Elazar, 1995). Experiencing both Mesopotamia in its origins and Egypt in its historical development, Israel opted for neither model, but instead developed (according to the Bible) the third model which we now know existed in one variant or another in some sense in other early communities in the same region. Thus, each model developed along its own logic, but partly through encounters with other models. In fact, of course, there are no pure models, but the tendencies in each polity toward one or another normally are clear enough.

Recognizing the original character of all three of these models, one can examine the history and functioning of politics and political regimes from that perspective

that will help us understand the relationship between regimes, institutions, and cultures. Indeed, it may even be possible to develop a taxonomy of regimes and political organizations from earliest times to the present.

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