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ELITE SETTLEMENTS

ABSTRACT

Following the classical elite theorists' injunction to study variations in elite structure, we examine the elite settlement as a major, yet largely overlooked, form of political change. Elite settlements consist of broad compromises among previously warring elite factions, resulting in political stability and thus providing a necessary precondition for representative democracy. To identify the common features of elite settlements, we draw upon four historic cases: England in 1688-1689, Sweden in 1809, Colombia in 1957-1958, and Venezuela in 1958. We conclude by arguing for the extraction of elite settlements from their current embeddedness in such concepts as "bourgeois revolutions" and "democratic transitions," and we advocate greater attention to the elite paradigm in efforts to explain macropolitical outcomes.

ELITE SETTLEMENTS

Understanding how nations become politically stable and democratic is a central goal of political sociology and a matter of obvious concern to policymakers around the world. Current scholarly opinion on the subject differs markedly from the once-dominant "modernization" perspective, which saw stable democracy as a happy by-product of social, economic, and cultural development. Many scholars now see the establishment and maintenance of democratic institutions as decidedly political acts. These scholars divide broadly into two camps: adherents of the class or Marxian paradigm, and those working within the elite or managerial paradigm (Alford and Friedland 1985). The currently more influential class paradigm, despite many intricate nuances, essentially interprets stable democracy as established and maintained by the bourgeoisie, primarily for the bourgeoisie. This paradigm has customarily explained the exercise of bourgeois power through the democratic state in terms of basic economic processes. Responding to the limitations of such economic determinism, however, a number of Marxian scholars have recently stressed the "relative autonomy" of political actors, typically aggregated as "the state."

This latter trend has brought Marxian theorists closer to the elite paradigm's core contention about the

independence and centrality of explicitly political actors, or elites. But how does the elite paradigm explain the origins of stable democracy? We submit that readers will be hard-pressed to formulate an answer that reflects any consensus on this question among scholars working within the elite paradigm. Although a good deal of valuable work on the relationship between elites and democracy has been done (for useful overviews see Putnam 1976, pp.129-32; Peeler 1985, pp. 4-41), hardly anyone has located this work explicitly within the elite paradigm. Consequently, the paradigm has not been elaborated in this direction and, not surprisingly, research on the role of elites in the origins of democracy has not been especially cumulative.

Working explicitly within the elite paradigm, we hope to attack this problem by drawing on pertinent literature and on an examination of the origins of stable democracy in several countries to develop the concept of "elite settlements" as one route to stable democracy. Elite settlements are relatively rare events in which warring national elite factions suddenly and deliberately reorganize their relations by negotiating compromises on their most basic disagreements. Elite settlements have two main consequences: they create patterns of open but peaceful competition, based on the "norm of restrained partisanship" (Manley 1965; Di Palma 1973), among all major elite factions; and they transform unstable political regimes, in

which irregular seizures of government executive power by force are frequent or widely expected occurrences, into stable regimes, in which forcible power seizures no longer occur and are not widely expected. These changes in elite behavior and regime operation pave the way for, though they do not guarantee, the emergence of democratic politics.

In many ways, elite settlements are as consequential as social revolutions, yet they have not been systematically studied as a discrete class of events. There is some relevant literature, however, that stresses the importance of elite unification or "accommodation" in transitions to democracy (e.g., Rustow 1970; Levine 1978; Wilde 1978; Linz 1978; Karl 1981; Huntington 1984; Peeler 1985). We intend to build on this literature by focusing on elite settlements as one especially important mode of elite unification, thereby shifting attention from the establishment of democratic institutions to the empirically distinct, causally prior, circumstances and actions of elites. First, we want to locate the concept of an elite settlement within a broader set of concepts and assumptions about how elite structures vary and with what consequences for major political outcomes. Second, we want to draw on four especially dramatic and seminal elite settlements--England in 1688-1689, Sweden in 1809, and Colombia and Venezuela in the late 1950s--to specify their common features. Third, we want to discuss certain implications that the focus on elite

settlements has for theories of political change.

ELITES, POLITICAL STABILITY AND DEMOCRACY

The concept of elite settlements comprises an extension and modification of classical elite theory as developed by Mosca (1939) and Pareto (1935). At the heart of the theory was the contention of elite variability. That is, that elite structure and behavior vary significantly among societies and within them over time; that these variations occur independently of social, economic, and cultural forces; and that elite variations have important determinate effects for the character of political regimes. As Mosca put it (1939, p.51), "The varying structure of ruling classes has a preponderant importance in determining the political type, and also the level of civilization, of the different peoples." Pareto (1935, esp. paras. 2274-77) was similarly concerned with specifying variations among elites according to the mix of nonlogical "sentiments" that ostensibly guide their thinking and behavior, and he tied such variations to different kinds of political regimes. But neither theorist got far in developing the contention of elite variability, and certainly neither focused on elite settlements as one of the most important instances of it. The variability contention, therefore, constitutes the point of departure for examining elite settlements, but in most other respects one must start anew.

First, to what does the elite concept itself refer? In line with prevailing definitions of elites (Burton and Higley 1987), we avoid assumptions about their talents, moral qualities, degrees of consciousness and cohesion, or other properties. Elites are simply people who are able, through their positions in powerful organizations, to affect national political outcomes individually, regularly, and seriously. Elites thus constitute a nation's top leadership in all sectors--politics, government, business, trade unions, the military, the media, religion, the intellectual--including both "establishment" and "counterelite" factions. A national elite can be said to encompass "all those persons capable, if they wish, of making substantial political trouble for high officials (i.e., other elite persons who happen to be incumbents of authoritative positions) without being promptly repressed" (Field and Higley 1973, p. 8).

Although the subject of elite variation merits much more careful examination than it has received, there is loose scholarly agreement that national elite structures take three basic forms in the modern world. By "structure" we mean the amalgam of attitudes, values, and interpersonal relations among factions making up the elite. One form or type of elite structure, variously labeled "divided" (Beck and Malloy 1964), "competitive" (Putnam 1976), or "disunified" (Field and Higley 1985), is characterized by

ruthless, often violent, interelite conflicts. Elite factions deeply distrust each other, interpersonal relations do not extend across factional lines, and factions do not cooperate to contain societal divisions or to avoid political crises. A second type, termed "totalitarian" (Dahrendorf 1969), "monocratic" (Fleron 1969), or "ideologically unified" (Field and Higley 1985), is characterized by the outward appearance of nearly complete unity in that all elite factions publicly profess the same ideology and publicly support the same major policies. Moreover, all or nearly all elite persons are members of the same party or movement and their interpersonal relations are sharply centralized in this party or movement. The third type of elite structure, called "pluralistic" (Fleron 1969), "competitive-coalescent" (Putnam 1976), or "consensually unified" (Field and Higley 1985), displays substantial, but much less than monolithic, unity. Elite factions regularly take opposing ideological and policy stances in public, but they consistently refrain from pushing their disagreements to the point of violent conflict. Although they inveigh against each other on policy questions, they apparently share a tacit commitment to abide by common codes of political conduct centering on the norm of restrained partisanship, and there is an extensive web of interpersonal relationships that encompasses all factions and provides satisfactory access to key decisionmakers (Higley and Moore,

1981).

There is also loose scholarly agreement that each of these major forms of elite structure is closely associated with a distinctive type of political regime. Thus, divided or disunified elites operate unstable regimes in which coups, uprisings, revolutions, and other forcible seizures of government power occur frequently or are widely expected. Although representative democratic politics may be practiced intermittently in such unstable regimes, it usually breaks down in the face of a political crisis. Totalitarian or ideologically unified elites, on the other hand, operate stable, politically unrepresentative regimes in which overt coups or other forcible power seizures do not occur, and public conflicts of interest and opinion are consistently repressed in favor of some official ideology. Though institutional functioning may be formally democratic, elections and other representative processes are not seriously competitive or determinative of government personnel and policies. Finally, pluralistic or consensually unified elites operate stable, politically representative regimes in which the incumbency of top government positions passes peacefully among different persons and factions according to representative principles and processes, most notably periodic, competitive, and binding elections. However, the precise degree of political representation differs according to the extent of regional,

ethnic, religious, or other subnational conflicts, the (non)existence of external threats, and the extent of economic prosperity or other facilitative conditions. Thus two of the three elite types--the ideologically unified and the consensually unified--are associated with stable regimes. But only regimes operated by a consensually unified elite involve important degrees of sustained representative democratic politics.

Insofar as these associations between elite type and regime type appear to be widespread both in history and the contemporary world (Field and Higley 1980, 1985), one can say that a consensually unified elite is a precondition for, but not a guarantee of, stable democratic politics. The origins of this type of national elite are therefore highly relevant to assessing the likelihood of democratic transitions: Without a basic change to a consensually unified elite there can be no lasting transition from an unstable and, at best, only intermittently democratic regime, or from a stable but politically unrepresentative regime, to a stable regime in which the sustained practice of representative democracy is a real possibility. In what circumstances, then, do consensually unified elites originate?

Except where a country has been defeated in international warfare (e.g., Germany, Italy, and Austria in World War II), no ideologically unified elite has ever been

transformed into a consensually unified elite. The effects of international warfare aside, ideologically unified elites and the stable, unrepresentative regimes they operate appear to be reliably self-perpetuating (e.g., Bialer 1980). So the origins of consensually unified elites and stable, representative regimes must be sought in other circumstances. Colonial experience is the most obvious and most widely discussed of these (Rustow 1970; Huntington 1984). Consensually unified elites have most frequently originated in the habituation of major elite factions to open but peaceful competition while their society is still a colony or territorial dependency. By operating representative political institutions under some form of "home rule," or by keeping a large and complex independence movement intact politically, or both, national elites in a significant minority of former colonies emerged as consensually unified upon attaining independence. An early example is the elites of Holland and certain other Dutch provinces when they emerged from Spanish domination toward the end of the sixteenth century. Other examples are the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Ireland, India, and Malaysia, all former colonies of Britain, as well as, from the French colonial empire, Tunisia, the Ivory Coast, and possibly Senegal. More or less immediately after these countries became independent, the existence of consensually unified elites operating stable political

regimes permitted important degrees of sustained representative democratic politics.

A second, less frequent, origin of this elite type appears to involve the gradual attenuation of radical, antisystem stances among one or more major factions in a disunified national elite. Over a period of two or three decades, more specifically, radical elite factions discover there is nothing approaching majority support for their programs and no real chance of taking power forcibly. As in the cases of the once-radical Social Democratic elite factions in Denmark and Norway earlier in this century, and of the until recently intransigent Communist and Socialist elite factions in Italy, France, and Japan, doctrines and programs that hamper the mobilization of electoral majorities are progressively abandoned and replaced by promises to defend existing political institutions and to abide by existing rules of the political game. With this moderation of radical left factions, right-wing factions "relax," feeling increasingly certain that their basic interests are no longer threatened. In such cases, the national elite gradually becomes consensually unified so that, where representative democratic politics was at best a precarious tradition, it becomes a secure one.

Neither of these two origins of elite consensus and unity, and thus routes to democratic politics, appears likely or even possible in many contemporary countries,

however. The dismantling of colonial empires after World War II, which in most instances left the former colonies in the hands of disunified elites, has essentially ended prospects for the colonial-experience origin. And the other origin, involving a gradual attenuation of elite radicalism, apparently depends on a society achieving a level of organizational and economic complexity sufficient to discredit radical egalitarian alternatives in the minds of a majority of voters--obviously not a current or foreseeable condition in most non-Western countries. So unless elite consensus and unity originate in still another way, political stability and sustained democratic politics will not extend much beyond their present locations in the world. Much, therefore, depends on elite settlements, the third origin of consensually unified elites, in societies with disunified elites and unstable regimes.

COMMON FEATURES OF ELITE SETTLEMENTS

We think elite settlements have occurred in four, and perhaps in half a dozen or more, countries during the modern period. A number of settlements were also attempted but failed, for example, the efforts of Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish elites to construct broad coalitions or to take turns in government office during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and similar efforts by Uruguayan, Colombian, and Peruvian elites during the first part of this

century. Such failed elite settlements deserve closer scrutiny, but here we focus on four clearly successful settlements: England in 1688-89, Sweden in 1809, Colombia in 1957-58, and Venezuela in 1958. We examined the relevant historical and social scientific literature on these countries in considerable detail, and what we learned constitutes the basis of the following discussion.¹ A less detailed examination of the relevant literature on Mexico in the late 1920s and early 1930s (e.g., Purcell and Purcell 1980; Tardanico 1982), Costa Rica in 1948 (e.g., Montealegre 1983; Peeler 1985), Austria before 1955 (e.g., Steiner 1972; Stiefbold 1974), and Spain in the late 1970s (e.g., Maravall 1982; Gunther 1985; Gunther et al. 1986) turned up indications of possible elite settlements that warrant further investigation.

Let us first consider the gross historical circumstances that motivate disunified elites to enter into settlements. These appear to be of two basic kinds. One is the recent elite experience of costly, but also essentially inconclusive, conflict. Precisely because no single faction has been a clear "winner," and all factions have more nearly been "losers," elites are disposed to compromise if at all possible. The recent experience of civil war, which entailed considerable elite fratricide but had no clear victor, in England during the 1640s and in Colombia after 1948 exemplifies this kind of circumstance. Bloodied but

not wholly bowed, English Tories and Whigs and Colombian Conservatives and Liberals had, for the moment at least, no stomach for more fighting (Schwoerer 1981; Wilde 1978). Moreover, the unleashing of leveling social revolutionary tendencies in both civil wars made the two national elites keenly aware that continued conflict could ultimately cost them their tenure. Whereas no clear civil war preceded the elite settlements in Sweden and Venezuela, national elites in both countries had experienced several decades of intense but inconclusive struggles for factional ascendancy, struggles that were accompanied by indications of the potential for leveling tendencies to take control: a peasant uprising and march on Stockholm during the ongoing struggle between the two major elite factions, the "Hats" and the "Caps," in 1743; and, in Venezuela, mass protests against the dictatorship of Marcos Perez Jimenez during 1956-1957, combined with an increasingly mobilized working class and peasantry.

The second kind of circumstance that disposes elites to seek a settlement is the occurrence of a major crisis, which serves as a catalyst for elite action. Such crises appear usually to center on the incumbent head of state and are the culmination of his or her policy failures, power abuses, and demonstrated personal weaknesses, made manifest by a particular action or event that brings elite discontent to the boil. In England the crisis was the news that King

James II would have a Catholic heir, a development that climaxed bitter resistance on the part of the predominantly Protestant elite to James's aggressively pro-Catholic policies and that occurred in the context of growing elite alarm about the possibility of an alliance between the Catholic kings of England and France. In Sweden the crisis involved the loss of Finland to Russia in 1808, impending Russian and Danish-French invasions of Sweden proper, and economic disarray, all of which were viewed by elites as outcomes of King Gustav IV Adolf's ill-considered policies and personal failings (Brown 1895). The crises in Colombia and Venezuela were sharp economic downturns punctuated by efforts of the military dictators Rojas Pinilla and Perez Jimenez, respectively, to extend their tenures. In Colombia the crisis surrounding Rojas was made particularly intense by continuing civil strife. In each of the four cases, in short, a crisis partly brought about and made intolerable by the incumbent head of state's blunders and ambitions motivated elites not only to remove him and to exclude the clique closely associated with him, but, more important, to transform the system that produced him.

Once such circumstances motivate elites to seek a settlement, the ensuing process has several common features. One is speed. It appears that elite settlements are accomplished quickly or not at all. Triggered by a serious political crisis that threatens renewed elite warfare,

settlements involve intensive efforts to find a way out. Fear of the consequences of not doing so loosens the fixed positions and principles of various factions and disposes them to consider concessions that in other circumstances they would not countenance. In none of the cases under discussion did a settlement take much longer than a year. The coming together of Tory and Whig factions in England began in earnest during the first half of 1688 with a conspiracy among key Tory and Whig leaders and the Dutch stadholder, Prince William of Orange, to unseat King James II. The key components of the settlement were agreed to by the major factions less than a year later, in February 1689. The Swedish settlement was even more rapid, involving a similar elite conspiracy against the king during the winter of 1808-1809, followed by the drafting and acceptance of a new constitution during May and June 1809. In Colombia the overthrow of Rojas Pinilla was orchestrated by a coalition of Liberal and Conservative party leaders between July 1956 and the following May. The constitutional components of the Colombian settlement were negotiated by the same coalition from July to October 1957, and overwhelmingly approved in a plebiscite two months later. The Venezuelan settlement got under way with a meeting of the heads of the three major parties and two business leaders in New York City in December 1957; the settlement agreements were finalized exactly a year later.

This is not to suggest that an elite settlement becomes complete and secure in such a short time; rather, creation of its essential components is accomplished rapidly. One must distinguish between the initial, basic settlement and its subsequent implementation. In each of the cases being considered, for example, the new rules of the political game embodied in the settlement faced dangerous challengers: the Jacobites, who wanted to return the Stuarts to the English throne, the attempt to organize a royalist countercoup in Sweden in 1810, coup attempts by supporters of the ousted Rojas Pinilla in Colombia, a leftist guerrilla insurgency in Venezuela during the early 1960s. Extending over several years, possibly a generation, the sudden and deliberate elite cooperation that makes a settlement possible in the first place must be sustained to thwart such challenges if a settlement is to be fully consolidated.

A second feature of the settlement process is face-to-face, partially secret, negotiations among the paramount leaders of the major elite factions. It is there that, through a combination of skill, desperation, and accident, impasses are broken and crucial compromises are struck. Such meetings must number in the scores, even hundreds, in each case, for a settlement not only requires negotiating compromises between major factions but also within them. Indeed, in the cases under discussion one gets the sense of an almost continuous round of secret meetings and

consultations.

The settlement process in England originated in 1687 with secret meetings among a small group of key Tory and Whig leaders and a Dutch adviser to Prince William. These meetings gave rise to William's invasion in November 1688, and they produced the broad outlines of the new political system he helped establish. Further meetings among the principal actors generated the decision to hold a special Parliamentary Convention to address the issues still in conflict: Who would be king, or queen? What would be the line of succession? What would be the relative powers of the monarchy and parliament? What would be the nation's religious posture? This three-week Convention, itself a flurry of secret meetings, produced the Declaration of Rights, the formal expression of the elite settlement, which William and Mary accepted at their coronation on February 13, 1689. In Sweden, two weeks of intensive, secret deliberations among a fifteen-man committee, plus its pivotal secretary Hans Jarta, produced the concessions and draft constitution that were then ratified in three more weeks of discussion by the four Estates of nobles, clergy, merchants, and free farmers. One of the earliest important meetings in the Colombian settlement occurred in Spain in July 1956 between just two people: Laureano Gomez, the exiled former president and still leader of a major faction of the Conservative party, and Alberto Lleras, a former

president and leader of the Liberal party. The two met again in Spain in July 1957, signing the Pact of Stiges, which set the framework for a succession of talks within and between party factions from July to October 1957. The result was the National Front platform for constitutional reform, which was overwhelmingly approved in the December 1957 plebiscite. The broad outlines of the Venezuelan settlement were shaped in the previously mentioned New York City meeting in December 1957 among three party heads and two business leaders, and the written expressions of the settlement--the Pact of Punto Fijo and the "Statement of Principles and Minimum Program of Government"--were fashioned in meetings at the home of a party leader, Rafael Caldera of COPEI, during the fall of 1958.

Such formal, written agreements constitute another common feature of elite settlements. Written agreements commit elite factions publicly to the concessions and guarantees they have made. In all four of the present cases, the most immediately visible manifestation of an elite settlement was one or more "constitutional" documents: a Declaration of Rights and then a Bill of Rights in England; a new constitution as such in Sweden; a fourteen-point National Front Agreement, which was incorporated into the constitution in Colombia; the Pact of Punto Fijo and the "Statement of Principles and Minimum Program of Government," which were incorporated into the Venezuelan constitution in

1961.

But formal agreements and constitutions by themselves hardly suffice to produce the common elite acceptance of a new code of political conduct, which is the most fundamental and lasting consequence of an elite settlement. Behind such agreements there must be a great deal of forbearance and conciliatory behavior among the most central elite actors. By their nature, historical records contain few indications of these subtle retreats from intransigence and enmity, but several important examples can be discerned in each of the settlements we are discussing.

English legal experts at the time generally agreed that the Declaration of Rights, acceded to verbally by William when he and Mary were crowned, was not legally binding. As king, William could have ignored the restrictions imposed on his authority. Yet he honored them and acquiesced to further restrictions added in late 1689. Very importantly, he also distributed offices among his supporters to achieve a balance between Tories and Whigs (Jones 1972, pp. 31-2). Continuing to act in the spirit of the settlement, William accepted additional restrictions during his reign: annual parliamentary sessions became the norm even though not required by law, and the House of Commons gradually assumed a significant role in foreign policy, despite this being the crown's prerogative. Similarly in Sweden, the interim king regent, Karl XIII, uncle of the deposed Gustav IV Adolf,

refused to support efforts to organize a royalist counter coup in 1810, thereby giving leaders of the 1809 settlement vital time to consolidate the new regime. And the crown prince, Bernadotte, who had been recruited from France to become Sweden's new king, agreed to delay his ascendance to the throne for a full eight years so as to ensure a gradual and peaceful transition from the old order to the new one. In Colombia, the pressing question of whether the Liberal-Conservative coalition--which had agreed to a fifty-fifty split of all government offices for sixteen years--should have a Conservative or a Liberal as its first presidential candidate was resolved through informal agreements among the factions just ten days before the 1958 election. In Venezuela, almost three years passed before the terms of the elite settlement were given legal status in the constitution. But though not legally bound to do so, Romulo Betancourt, the new president, immediately evidenced his commitment to power sharing by appointing members of the two major opposition parties to his cabinet, and he moved in other ways to create a climate favorable to those parties.

Another notable feature of the settlement process is the predominance of experienced political leaders; "new men" play only peripheral roles. In England, the instigators of Prince William's invasion, the members of the parliamentary rights committees, and William and his advisors were all veterans of many previous conflicts. In Sweden, Hans Jarta

and the members of the fifteen-man constitutional committee had been politically active for several decades. In Colombia, the leading negotiators of the settlement, Laureano Gomez and Alberto Lleras, were both former presidents; they and most other principal actors had been involved in the failed effort to form a Liberal-Conservative coalition a decade earlier. In Venezuela, the central negotiators of the settlement were the AD, COPEI, and URD party leaders, each with at least twenty years of political experience.

Political experience probably facilitated the settlements in several ways. Through past experience these leaders had developed power and prestige, which were essential resources as they attempted to persuade others to accept their plans. Also, these individuals had deep knowledge of the issues and of how their political systems worked; they knew what had to be done and how to go about doing it. In addition, past experience allowed for political learning (Levine 1978, p. 103): after suffering from previous conflicts, elites who were once intransigent could more clearly see the value of compromise.

In addition to these common processual features of speed, face-to-face negotiations, formal agreements, informal forbearance, and experienced leadership, do elite settlements share some more clearly structural feature? It is probably significant that at the time English, Swedish,

