

## FIVE EMPIRICAL LAWS OF POLITICS

Alfred G. Cuzán<sup>1</sup>

A somewhat different version of pp. 18-21 appeared as “The Law of Shrinking Support: Implications for Cuba,” in *Cuban Affairs*, 2014, 9, 3. Much of the remainder, in abridged form, appears in *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 2015 (July) 48, 3, pp 415-419. under the title, “Five Laws of Politics.” The data file has been expanded since that article was accepted for publication and some errors corrected, so the estimates in table 2 are slightly different from the published version. All data are or will be available at my pubs page, <http://uwf.edu/cassh/departments/government/our-faculty/faculty-profiles/acuzan/cpubs/> I will welcome and acknowledge correction of any errors that may remain.

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## **Abstract**

Political scientists tend to shy away from claiming that there are laws of politics. This diffidence is unwarranted. Here, I present five empirical laws of politics.

By a “law” of politics I mean an empirical regularity that is invariant, or almost invariant, that is descriptive of intrinsic properties of politics, democracy, and the state. The laws, four spanning democracies and autocracies, and one setting a boundary between the two regime types, are drawn from data on 455 elections in 27 democracies, 15 from the Ibero-America (Latin America plus Spain and Portugal), and most of the rest from North America, Europe, and the Pacific Rim (the OECD countries), plus 112 ritualistic “elections” and referendums in 15 dictatorships.

**Law #1. The law of minority rule.** All governments are minority governments. This is a given in dictatorships, but even in democracies parties capture or retain the presidency or the parliament with the votes of a minority of the “selectorate” (registered or eligible voters). In democracies, average turnout is about 75% and the mean incumbent share of the vote is around 40%. Therefore, the average “winning coalition” averages 30%.

**Law #2. The law of incumbent advantage.** In democracies, on average incumbents are reelected more than half the time.

**Law #3. The law of shrinking support.** On average, incumbents lose between 3 and 8 percent points per term, the former representing the “cost of governing” in the OECD region, the latter in Ibero-America. Their illusions of unanimity and perpetual power notwithstanding, dictatorships are not exempt from this law, as

evidence drawn from transition elections in autocracies from several continents, cultures, and region of the world attest. Formerly ruling parties crashed, their share of the vote plummeting from the 90-99% they used to claim in single party "elections" to as low as the single digits or low teens.

***Law #4. The law of 60 percent.*** In democracies, it is rare for incumbents to win more than 60 percent of the vote, and it never happens twice within the same spell in office. The average maximum incumbent share of the vote across all democracies is 53%, the one variable on which there is no difference between regions. This law serves as a boundary separating all democracies from most dictatorships.

***Law #5. The law of alternation or shared power.*** In democracies, control of the government alternates between political parties or coalitions of parties. This is because no party is capable to encompassing the totality of the values and interests of any society.

As well as presenting the data that demonstrate these patterns, I place these laws in the context of related scholarly literature, and offer possible explanations for the laws in light of it.

## FIVE EMPIRICAL LAWS OF POLITICS

Alfred G. Cuzán

Political scientists tend to shy away from claiming that there are laws of politics.<sup>2</sup> This diffidence is unwarranted. There are laws of politics that span across all regimes, democracies and dictatorships alike. Here, drawing on the behavior of 27 democracies and 14 dictatorships, I present five such laws. First, though, I explain what I mean by a law of politics, define democracy and dictatorship, and say a few words about the data.

By a “law” of politics I mean an empirical regularity that is invariant, or almost invariant, that is descriptive of intrinsic properties of politics, democracy, and the state. My purpose in using the term “law,” then, is to put forth something like first principles, fundamentals or starting points in the macro-level study of government and politics, focusing on elections as indicators of the relationship between government and citizens or subjects.

Democracy I define as a regime or system of government in which members of the legislature and the executive, the policy-making arms of the state, are chosen by a

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<sup>2</sup> For an exception, see Rein Taagepera & Matthew Soberg Shugart, *Seats and Votes. The Effects and Determinants of Electoral Systems* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press), 1989. There the authors speak of such things as “the inverse square law of coalition durability” (p. 101) and “the cube root law of assembly sizes” (p. 173). See, also, Craig Leonard Brians, “Three General Laws of Politics and Government in America (with Apologies to Sir Isaac Newton),” *PS: Politics and Political Science*, 47, 1, 125-130.

broad electorate from among competing political parties or candidates who are free to take their message to the public by whatever means available. This necessarily requires a political climate characterized by freedom of speech, press and assembly, and a procedure for honestly counting votes that is acceptable to the competing parties and the public. A presidential democracy is one where the executive is independently elected; a parliamentary democracy is one where the executive, a cabinet headed by a prime minister, is selected by and normally from within the legislature.

By contrast, any regime where free competition among parties to fill the legislature and executive is absent is a dictatorship or autocracy, of which there are many types.<sup>3</sup> Some consist of rule by the military, with or without an official political party as an adjunct (Brazil, 1964-1988; Indonesia, 1971-1997; Chile, 1973-1989). Others take the form of a dominant or sole political party (Mexico 1930s-1980s; the USSR, 1920-1990s). Some are personalist or “monarchical,”<sup>4</sup> where a dominant personality

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara Geddes, “What do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1999, 2, pp. 115-144; Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, “Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 2014 (June), 12, 2, 313-341; Erica Frantz and Natasha Ezrow, *The Politics of Dictatorship. Institutions and Outcomes in Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> I use the term to signify something like one-man rule. This was the early European understanding of the term, and one that is followed in Eric Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution. Monarchy and the American Founding* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 8.

towers over the state, sometimes filling the office of president or prime minister (Cuba's Fidel Castro, 1959-2008; Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, 1956-1970), and other times without always occupying a formal position as chief executive or head of state (the Dominican Rafael Trujillo, various years, 1938-1961). A number of single party or military dictatorships may be described as oligarchical, consisting of a group of more or less equal partners who take turns at wielding executive power (Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI by its Spanish initials; the military regime that ruled Brazil between the 1960s and 1980s). The one common denominator among all dictatorships is that competition among political parties to fill the policy-making offices of the state is either absent or highly restricted, so that at best a domesticated "opposition" is allowed to win a few seats in a rubber-stamp assembly that does the bidding of an executive chosen in a non-democratic process.<sup>5</sup> In the limit, the dictator aims at lifetime tenure, and the top ranks of the dictatorship aspire at perpetual power that can be passed on to their heirs, natural or political. Hitler's "1,000 year Reich" was only one of the more fantastic expressions of this inordinate ambition.

Regarding the data, they consist in 455 elections in 27 democracies, 15 from Ibero-America (Latin America plus Spain and Portugal) and most of the rest from North America, Europe, and the Pacific Rim (the OECD countries), plus more than 100 ritualistic "elections" and referendums in 15 dictatorships.<sup>6</sup> They include regimes in

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<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Gandhi and Ellen Lust-Okar, "Elections under Authoritarianism," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2009, 12, pp. 403-422.

<sup>6</sup> In case of doubt whether a regime should be classified as one or the other, I consulted the Polity IV and Freedom House ratings and classifications.

large and small countries that cut across different times, cultures, and ideological cast. Thus, there is a good chance that the set is broadly representative, although more cases need to be added, especially of parliamentary democracies where mutations of parties and permutations of multi-party coalitions make it difficult for a non-specialist to make sense of certain election outcomes.

All data were obtained from Wikipedia.<sup>7</sup> The initial election in each democracy depends on context. I picked the earliest election for which there was voting data, the electorate was comparatively inclusive (e.g., universal male suffrage), and the outcome was relatively straightforward. In all Ibero-American cases but Chile, the start date was the first election that marked the birth of its most recent democratic regime. In parliamentary democracies the prime minister's party is generally treated as the incumbent, and it is this share of the vote that is usually used. In some cases, where a coalition of small parties managed to stick together for more than one election, as in Sweden, the coalition total was entered. A few elections were omitted from the calculations because they resulted in hung parliaments. There are a few cases of missing data, e.g., no information on turnout rate in several Indian elections. Other perplexities are present. Examples: In some parliamentary elections, it was not possible to figure

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<sup>7</sup> There may be readers who wonder about the accuracy of election results in Wikipedia. Some assurance may be taken from a study that concluded that in the case of American state elections "A statistical analysis based on Wikipedia's reported election results would return essentially the same results as an analysis relying on official data." Adam R. Brown, "Wikipedia as a Data Source for Political Scientists: Accuracy and Completeness of Coverage," *PS: Politics and Political Science*, 2011, 44, 2, 339-343.

out just what percent of the vote to attribute to small parties that were members of a large coalition that broke up or disintegrated even before the election.<sup>8</sup> In those instances, the incumbent vote, though not the outcome, was omitted. Similarly, there were cases where the incumbent had been elected as an Independent and constitutionally could not succeed himself, so that it was impossible to calculate a term loss (e.g., Chile, 1952 and 1958, Portugal, 1991). Note, as well, that when an election followed the adoption of a new constitution or electoral law in a former dictatorship, as in Cuba in 1940 or Spain in 1977, incumbency was regarded as vacant.

In sum, as is usually the case, there is a certain amount of “noise” or “dross” (for lack of a better word) in the data. Others may well filter it out a little differently than I did. I make no claim that the data set from which the values in tables 1-3 were calculated is completely free of errors. However, given the large number of elections, my guess is that whatever errors remain are not biased in any direction, and thus cancel each other out, although needless to say, I welcome corrections. Neither do I think that the estimated parameters are exact, and no doubt a larger data set will produce some adjustments. All that said, I turn to the laws.

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<sup>8</sup> India was a particularly difficult case to figure out after the Indian National Congress lost its dominance. In the 1990s, a multitude of parties, some of them short-lived, ephemeral alliances, hung parliaments, etc., made it very difficult to calculate the percent of the vote that one should attribute to a party or coalition. I did my best to get it right, but I assume some errors remain, and I hope other scholars well-versed about that country’s politics will correct.

**Law #1. The law of minority rule.** All governments are minority governments.<sup>9</sup>

Few would doubt that this generalization applies to dictatorships, where a single or dominant party or organization controlled by a dictator or a small oligarchy uses force and fraud to control the state. But the rule also applies to democracies, as shown in tables 1 and 2. The average turnout is around three-fourths of the electorate, while the mean percent vote going to the governing party, the incumbents, is in the low forties.<sup>10</sup>

These facts mean two things: first, typically more than half of those who show up at the polls—the selectorate—cast their ballots for a party other than the governing party; second, those who do back the incumbents—the winning coalition—amount to

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<sup>9</sup> In this context, the phrase “minority government” is to be understood differently from the way it is used in the study of parliamentary democracies, where it refers to parties or coalitions of parties that form a “government,” that is, the executive, a prime minister and his cabinet, even though they control less than a majority of seats in parliament. Arend Lijphart, “Back to Democratic Basics: Who Really Practices Majority Rule?” In Axel Hadenius (Ed.), *Democracy’s Victory and Crisis*. Nobel Symposium No. 93 (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 149-150.

<sup>10</sup> Incidentally, turnout may refer to votes cast as the percent of those registered or of the voting age population. It is not always clear what number the Wikipedia reports. Sometimes it shows both, as in Chile in 1970, in which case I used the higher value.

about a third of the electorate.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, normally the incumbents occupy the highest offices of the state owing to the votes of a minority of the electorate, even if that minority almost always amounts to a plurality. These patterns hold across cultural regions or government type, variables which in this study are almost perfectly coterminous: all Latin American democracies are presidential, while parliamentary democracies populate everywhere else except in the United States, and France and Portugal, the latter two being mixed regimes.

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Tables 1 and 2 about here

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I hasten to clarify that I do not mean to suggest that voters who stay home on Election Day, and citizens who never cast a ballot, do so because they oppose the incumbents. They may have a variety of reasons for remaining away from the polls. Moreover, as well as individual characteristics, there are structural or institutional factors associated with abstentionism.<sup>12</sup> All I aim to do is to point to an incontrovertible

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<sup>11</sup> The terms “selectorate” and “winning coalition” are borrowed from Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alistair Smith, “Domestic Explanations of International Relations,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2012, 15, 161-181.

<sup>12</sup> In this paper, turnout is taken as a given. For the mix of individual and structural or institutional variables that has been shown to account for variations in this variable, see Timothy J. Feddersen and Wolfgang Pesendorfer, “Abstention in Elections with Asymmetric Information and Diverse Preferences,” *The American Political Science Review*, 1999, 93, 2, pp. 381-398; Arianna Degan and Antonio Merlo, “A Structural

generalization: all parties are elected or reelected with the votes of a minority of those eligible or registered to vote. Again, on average those comprising the winning coalition amount to only one-third of the electorate.

**Law #2. The law of incumbent advantage.** In democracies, incumbents are returned to office more often than not.

Depending on whether one takes the pooled mean or the average of the within country means, across all democracies incumbents win reelection between 55% and 60% of the time, as shown in Table 2. This is because the opposition can be badly divided; or because in parliamentary governments there is a certain disproportionality between seats and votes, and votes are wasted on parties that win no seats;<sup>13</sup> or because the plurality winner strikes deals with minority parties and independents on a case by case basis, or forms a “minority government” (in the parliamentary sense) for a brief period.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the electorate may be somewhat biased in favor of the “devil” they

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Model of Turnout and Voting in Multiple Elections,” *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 2011, 9,2, pp. 209-245; and Jocelyn Evans and Gilles Ivaldi, “Deriving a Forecast Model for European Election Turnout,” *Political Research Quarterly*, 2012, 65, 4, pp. 855-867.

<sup>13</sup> In the 2015 election in the United Kingdom, 37% of the national vote for the Tories netted them a majority of the parliamentary seats.

<sup>14</sup> On measurement problems posed by parliamentary systems, see Lijphart, “Back to Democratic Basics,” pp. 149-152.

know.<sup>15</sup> However, there is substantial variation between Ibero-America and the OECD regions—as well as within Ibero-America itself. In the OECD countries, the incumbents are returned to office two-thirds of the time; in Ibero-America just under half the time, although Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Portugal (presidential) and Spain boast reelection rates comparable to those of the OECD.

To point out that democracies are characterized by minority governments ruled by parties that enjoy an electoral advantage over their competitors is not meant to belittle or to de-legitimize them.<sup>16</sup> That incumbents lose elections at least one third of the time—and in some places a lot more frequently than that—means that over the long run roughly two thirds of the electorate sees its preferred party or candidate win.

***Law #3. The law of shrinking support or growing opposition.*** Or, as Nannestad and Paldam put it, “It costs votes to rule.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Douglas A. Hibbs, “Bread and Peace voting in U.S. presidential elections,” *Public Choice*, 2000, 104, p. 174.

<sup>16</sup> This seems to have been Lenin’s objective when he wrote, “Democracy for an insignificant minority, democracy for the rich--that is the democracy of capitalist society. . . . Marx grasped this essence of capitalist democracy splendidly when, in analyzing the experience of the Commune, he said that the oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class shall represent and repress them in parliament!” Vladimir Lenin, [\*The State and Revolution\*](#). [\*The Economic Basis for the Withering Away of the State\*](#).

<sup>17</sup> Peter Nannestad and Martin Paldam, “The Cost of Ruling. A Foundation Stone for Two Theories,” University of Aarhus Department of Economics Working Paper No.

Note in Table 2 that on average incumbents lose between 4 and 6 percentage points of their share of the vote per term, although again there is variation across cultural regions. Consistent with the lower rate of reelection in Ibero-America, the average loss of support in that region is about three times as large as in the OECD countries. In the latter, the average loss is 2.5-2.7 points. This estimate is very close to those of Nannestad and Paldam's (2.25) and Budge et al.'s (2.33), respectively calculated over post-World War II elections in a dozen and half European countries, plus the United States and, in the former's case, Japan.<sup>18</sup> It is little wonder, then, that Nannestad and Paldam call this phenomenon a "solid stone," something that is "remarkably constant" in established democracies operating under normal conditions. Yet, paradoxically, "It is generally not well known how robust the fact actually is."<sup>19</sup>

Be it noted that I found their article (and was called attention to Budge et al.'s book), only after I had made most of the calculations displayed in Tables 1 and 2. (Since then, I have continued to add data.) Thus, although their findings were reported earlier, I obtained approximately the same results independently, in ignorance of their prior discovery. That very similar estimates of the "cost of ruling" obtained with sets of OECD

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1999-9. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=165709> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.165709>, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 4; Ian Budge, Hans Keman, Michael D. McDonald, and Paul Pennings, *Organizing Democratic Choice. Party Representation Over Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 276.

<sup>19</sup> Nannestad and Paldam, "The Cost of Ruling," pp. 3, 21.

elections varying in number and period in which elections were held may well strengthen the discipline's confidence in the "law of shrinking support."

The loss of support is not uniform across an incumbent's spell in office. In fact, in some cases support for the governing party or coalition goes up, even substantially, during their first term, especially if they were first ushered into office a time when the party system fractured, or during an economic or political crisis. Such was the case of Franklin D. Roosevelt's record-breaking 1936 re-election victory. The phenomenon may also arise when a new democracy is going through a period of electoral sorting and party consolidation. For example, in the first decade of Germany's post-war republic, Konrad Adenauer's CDU/CSU saw its share of the vote rise from one election to the next, peaking at 50 percent in 1957, a showing unmatched by it or any other party in that country since. Also, one observes small upticks in support in other elections within the party's or coalition's spell in office, but these are offset by larger losses in subsequent elections. Sooner or later the dam breaks and the proverbial "rascals" are swept out.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes, following a corruption scandal or an internal party crisis, the incumbents suffer a humiliating defeat. Occasionally, the debacle is of such magnitude that the party's "brand" is tarnished beyond repair, so that its remnants are left with the choice of renaming the party, joining others or founding a new one. Such was the case of

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<sup>20</sup> The effects of this law are far-reaching, at least in the United States. Recently, Larry Sabato showed that all post-World War II eight-year presidencies have taken a heavy toll on their party's representation in congress, governorships, and statehouses. Larry Sabato, "What a Drag. Why a Party May Well be Better Off Losing the White House." *Sabato's Crystal Ball* (University of Virginia: Center for Politics), December 4, 2014.

Brazil's National Reconstruction Party, which imploded when the president who had won election under its banner was impeached and removed from office on corruption charges. (He was later acquitted of criminal wrongdoing in the courts). This fate may well be shared by the Social Christian Unity Party of Costa Rica, whose 2010 presidential candidate eked out a mere 4% of the vote in the wake of a corruption scandal.

*Law #3 in dictatorships.* There is no reason to believe that dictatorships are exempted from this law, notwithstanding their ambitions for perpetual power. Thus it happens that in some cases, as with the Wizard of Oz, the little dog of a demonstration that was not quashed in time starts the process of pulling the curtain of propaganda behind which the dictator and his clique manufacture images of unanimity, exposing the regime's true level of support and causing the regime unceremoniously to collapse.<sup>21</sup> The demise of the Soviet Union and its Central and East European satellites are cases in point. Except in Romania, the dictatorships were not violently overthrown; rather, they deflated, all energy having drained away bit by bit until there was nothing left.

Several other cases from different continents offer quantitative support for the applicability of the law of shrinking support in dictatorships. Between 1934, when Lázaro Cárdenas claimed victory in the presidential election with 98 percent of the vote, and 2000, when the ruling party candidate lost the election, Mexico was ruled by the dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Its rule was termed a "perfect

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<sup>21</sup> Jan Masaryk reputedly observed that "Dictators are rulers who always look good until the last ten minutes'." Quoted in Frantz and Ezrow, *Politics of Dictatorships*, who themselves were citing a secondary source.

dictatorship” by Mario Vargas Llosa, the Peruvian Nobel Prize winner in literature.<sup>22</sup>

Through 1982, the party attributed to itself almost 90 percent of the vote in presidential elections (see Table 3). In 1988, as a result of an internal struggle, a faction led by Cuáhtemoc Cárdenas, the former president’s son, broke away and then, with the support of other parties, pursued an independent bid. This scission reduced the PRI showing that year to an official 51%. This amounted to a reduction of 47 points from 1934. Dividing that value by the nine intervening six-year presidential terms yields an average loss of 5.2 points per term, about the same as in Spain today. The PRI managed to hold on to the presidency that term and the next, albeit with shrinking shares of the vote, until it was voted out in 2000 with only 36%. Basing the calculation on that year’s figure yields a slightly higher average point loss per term (5.6).

In Chile, General Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship sought to demonstrate popular support with three referenda or plebiscites in the space of a decade, but with decreasing success. In 1978, five years after the military coup against the government of elected president Salvador Allende, a “national consultation” was held for the purpose of asking the citizenry to endorse Pinochet’s “defense of the dignity of Chile” against “international aggression,” and to “reaffirm the legitimacy of the government of the Republic exclusively to direct the institutionalization process in the country.” Seventy nine percent of the more than five million citizens who turned out voted in the

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<sup>22</sup> *The Guardian*, [June 24, 2012](#); *Wall Street Journal*, [October 8, 2010](#).

affirmative.<sup>23</sup> Two years later, only 66% out of six million endorsed a new constitution drafted by his government, a drop of 13 points from the “consultation.” Finally, when in 1988 Pinochet made bid for another eight years in *La Moneda*, the presidential palace, only 44% out of seven million voted in favor, a decrease of another 22 points. Assuming that the period between the first and the third referendum is roughly equivalent of two five-year terms, the loss of support amounts to a decline of 17.5 points per term. This is a large decrease, but hardly unique. Democracies in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, India, Japan, Portugal, Spain, and the United States all have had at least one disastrous defeat for the incumbents where their share of the vote fell by more than 15 points in a single three- or four-year term.

Indonesia supplies the third case. In 1971 General Suharto, running under the Golkar banner, declared victory in the presidential election with 63%. His last reelection was in 1997, when he claimed 75%. In the face of demonstrations and riots sparked by an economic crisis, corruption, and the killing of a handful of university demonstrators, he resigned the following year. In 1999, the former ruling party polled second in the legislative election, at 22%. Subtracting this last figure from the previous year’s showing yields a reduction of 41 points, or about 8 points per term, in line with the contemporary democracies of Brazil and Chile (see Table 1).

Botswana offers yet another example. Despite the “free” rating by Freedom House, Przeworski et al. classify it as a dictatorship because the incumbent party has yet

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<sup>23</sup> The procedure did not allow campaigning, and the ballots left no doubt how patriots should vote: the “yes” was represented by the country’s flag and the “no” by a black box <http://eleccion.atspace.com/Plebiscito1978.htm>.

to lose an election and turn power over to an opposition.<sup>24</sup> In 1965, the Behuanaland Democratic Party emerged from the first post-colonial election with 80%. Since then, a couple of upticks aside, this showing has steadily shrunk, to 47% in 2014, the year of the most recent election. The average loss per term is 3.3 points, in line with Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

*Implications of Law #3 for Cuba.* The Castro dynasty (Fidel and Raul) continuously has ruled Cuba for 56 years. In recent “elections,” each claimed to have won around 99% of the vote in his “National Assembly” district. This is as valid a measure of their support as similar claims in the Soviet Union and its communist satellites less than a decade before their demise.

To estimate the share of the vote that the Cuban Communist Party would receive in a free election, I proceed as follows. For the sake of argument, assume that if in early 1959 the “revolutionary government,” instead of banning political parties, had called the equivalent of a snap election, Fidel Castro would have swept the field, taking 90% of the vote.<sup>25</sup> Suppose, further, that the long tenure of the Castro dynasty amounts to the

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<sup>24</sup> Przeworski, Adam, Michael E. Alvarez, Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi.

*Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World 1950-1990* (Cambridge, MA: University Press, 2000), p. 23.

<sup>25</sup> According to López-Fresquet, Secretary of the Treasury during the first year of “the Revolution,” in a February 1959 public opinion survey 92 percent of respondents “thought the work of the government was ‘perfectly satisfactory.’” In that same poll 95 percent “approved of all the work done by the rebel army. At that time, Castro did not belong to the government [that is, he was neither president nor a member of the

equivalent of ten consecutive terms, and that the dictatorship's loss of support per term equals the Ibero-American average, which is around eight points. This results in an estimated current support for the dictatorship in the single digits or low teens, about what the Polish, Hungarian, and Czechoslovakian communist parties obtained when voters were free to choose in competitive or semi-competitive elections.

In sum, having ruled Cuba continuously for more than half a century, in all probability the Castro dynasty has exhausted the reservoir of popular support it once enjoyed. The regime will continue to stay afloat only as long as the population remains passive, which was the case most of the time in much of communist-dominated Europe.<sup>26</sup> But as contemporary history shows, such a condition can change suddenly, without warning. A seemingly small disturbance can snowball into a cascade of

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cabinet] but was head of the army.” However, by the end of June, in “the last survey of public opinion [that] was published,” support for the government, now headed by Fidel Castro as “Prime Minister,” had slipped to 78 percent. (Rufo López-Fresquet, *My 14 months with Castro*. Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1966, pp. 56, 88.) We can surmise that by that time, with an opposition free to organize and mount a vigorous campaign, support for Castro would have decreased further, even if most probably he would have come out on top on Election Day. However, whether his “coattails” would have carried enough legislative candidates from his “movement” to take control of both houses of congress is more open to doubt.

<sup>26</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, “The Decay and Breakdown of Communist One-Party Systems,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1999, p. 331.

uncontrollable events that culminates in the collapse of a regime.<sup>27</sup> The catalyst could originate from within, as in a fracturing of the ruling oligarchy, as it happened with the defection of Boris Yeltsin in the Soviet Union and Cuahtémoc Cárdenas in Mexico; or from without, say the overthrow of the Chavista regime in Venezuela.<sup>28</sup> Two questions

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<sup>27</sup> Henry E. Hale, “Regime Change Cascades: What We Have Learned from the 1848 Revolutions to the 2011 Arab Uprisings,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2013, 16: 331-353.

<sup>28</sup> A parallel with East Germany, the former “German Democratic Republic,” is suggestive. Robert Havemann, an award-winning professor of chemistry and once member of the GDR’s “People’s Chamber,” was expelled from the communist party when in a lecture he questioned the official ideology of the regime and gave an interview to a West German newspaper. More than a decade before the Berlin Wall was toppled, an event he did not live long enough to see, he predicted the regime’s demise. “While under house arrest in 1978, Havemann nonetheless commented with enormous prescience on the future of his country. . . . [H]e predicted the downfall of the SED [Socialist Unity Party] state, against all indications within the global political reality of the time or the majority view of intellectuals in the West: ‘I do not intend leaving the GDR, where every day I observe the regime losing all its support. Indeed, it has already lost it. All we really need now is some external impetus or event to send the whole Politburo packing.’” Quoted in Manfred Wilke, “Wiesler’s Turn to Dissidence and the History behind the Film,” Chapter Two in Paul Cooke (Ed.), *The Lives of Others” and Contemporary German Film. A Companion* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2013), p. 50.

remain: the timing of the dictatorship's demise, which is unpredictable, and how it will die, with a bang, as in Romania, or with a whimper, as in Poland.<sup>29</sup>

**Law #4. The law of 60%.** In democracies, it is rare for the incumbents to win more than 60% of the votes cast, and it *never* happens more than once within the same spell in office.

Generally, incumbents in a parliamentary system win no more than 50%; in a presidential system, 60% is the normal limit (in the first round of voting, if there is more than one). In only a handful of genuine cases in three democracies did the incumbents exceed this maximum: Barbados, 65% (1999), Colombia, 62% (2006), and the United States, 61% (1936, 1964, 1972). In all, these exceptions amount to 1.1% of all elections. In fact, the average maximum incumbent share of the vote across all democracies is

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<sup>29</sup> Apropos the second question, Kalyvas has a pertinent observation: “popular action was least important to the process of [regime] breakdown where the discourse of civil society was most developed (Poland and Hungary), whereas revolutionary upheavals took place where civil society was weaker (East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Romania)” (Kalyvas, “Decay and Breakdown,” p. 331; citations omitted). If the relation between the strength of civil society and regime transition in Europe is part of a general pattern, then given the prostration of civil society in Cuba one can anticipate that the end of the Castroite regime will be rather turbulent.

53.5% (s.d= 5.9), the one variable where there is no difference between cultural regions.<sup>30</sup>

Two apparent exceptions merit comment. One is the 1991 Portuguese presidential election. That year Mario Soares, an authentic democratic hero who had resisted dictatorships of the Right and the Left, and who had twice served as prime minister, won reelection with 70% of the vote. Portugal has a mixed regime, with a president that exercises limited executive powers and a strong prime minister in charge of the government. In his bid for reelection, Soares had the backing not only of his Socialist Party, but also of the principal right of center party, the PSD, and its prime minister, Anibal Cavaco Silva, in control of parliament. Without major party opposition, Soares easily trounced three minor party candidates, winning, one might say, almost by acclamation. The very next year, with Soares ineligible to run for a third consecutive term, and with the PSD fielding its own candidate, his party's successor share of the vote shrank to 54%.<sup>31</sup> The other apparent exception took place in the Dominican Republic in 1974, when Joaquín Balaguer was reelected with 85% in an election boycotted by the opposition. Indeed, the artificiality of Balaguer's victory was exposed at the very next

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<sup>30</sup> However, consistent with the less successful incumbent performance at the polls in Ibero-America, the average minimum country average there is two percentage points lower than in the OECD.

<sup>31</sup> In a footnote to his exceptional political career, in the 2006 presidential election Soares placed third, at 14%; the winner was the PSD candidate Cavaco Silva, the very man and party that had enabled Soares to score such a record margin a decade and a half earlier.

election, when he was ousted with only 43%.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the inflated percentages in these two cases are accounted for by opposition abstention, one amicable, the other not.

This analysis suggests that the democratic credentials of any regime in which the incumbents claim to have received more than a few points in excess of 60% in any one election is suspect, and highly so if more than once within the same spell in office. Such claims need careful scrutiny before they can be accepted as a genuine democratic outcome. As the aforementioned Portuguese case illustrates, there may very well be an innocent explanation, but this has to be demonstrated. In sum, it is as if this law serves as a boundary separating *all* democracies from *most* dictatorships.<sup>33</sup>

*“Elections” under dictatorships.* Table 3 displays the percent of the vote in “elections” held under fourteen dictatorships from around the world at different times. Some of these dictatorships were totalitarians of the communist, fascist, or national socialist type, others were not. Among them are represented different cultures and regions. Yet they share one thing in common: what Friedrich and Brzezinski called a

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<sup>32</sup> A very similar turn of events took place in Nicaragua. In the 1984 presidential election boycotted by the main opposition coalition, the ruling Sandinistas claimed to have received 67 percent of the vote. Six years later, they were ousted, having received only 41 percent.

<sup>33</sup> I say most because not all dictatorships exert such complete control over the electorate or the election process as to be able routinely to manufacture overwhelming victories at the polls, e.g., Robert Mugabe’s Zimbabwe.

“passion for unanimity.”<sup>34</sup> On average, turnout and the share of the vote claimed by the ruling parties in political rituals that in most cases were acclamations-cum-referendums on the candidacy of one man or a party list is around 90%.<sup>35</sup> The Castro brothers claimed to have received 99% in their respective assembly districts. Nasser boasted unanimous support for his candidacy. So did Rafael Trujillo for himself or his puppet in the Dominican Republic. Communist regimes in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Poland commanded nearly universal turnout and massive electoral endorsement for their “candidates” even as late as the mid-1980s, less than a decade before they faded from the scene.

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Table 3 about here

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Yet, in almost every case, the moment when a real election was held all the ruling parties crashed, and most disappeared from the political stage.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the most significant, world-shaking example is that of the 1989 parliamentary election in Poland. Following negotiations between the dictatorship and the Solidarity movement, the

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<sup>34</sup> Friedrich, Carl J. and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski. 1956/1963, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (New York, NY: Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, 1963), p. 82.

<sup>35</sup> In “Elections under Authoritarianism,” Gandhi and Lust-Okar observe that “rulers in dominant-party states are particularly likely to use all means possible to encourage high turnout and support for the ruling party . . . .” (p. 413).

<sup>36</sup> Kalyvas observes that whenever formerly ruling parties in dictatorships face competition, “their performance is usually dismal” (“Decay and Breakdown,” p. 325).

regime held a relatively free, if limited election. The “Solidarity Citizens’ Committee” was allowed to compete for one-third of the mandates for the Sejm, or lower house of parliament, and for all seats in the Senate. The results were devastating for the “Polish United Workers’ Party,” as the communists called themselves. Solidarity swept all but 10 of the 261 Sejm slots up for grabs and all but one in the Senate. Thus, “In the first free voting . . . support for the Communists was shown to lie somewhere between three and four percent.”<sup>37</sup> The outcome not only signaled the demise of the Polish dictatorship, it sent shock waves throughout the Soviet empire. In the next two years, one after another of the European communist regimes went bust, including the USSR itself.

Whether these dictatorships actually believed that they commanded universal electoral support is an interesting question. My guess is that they did not, that combined with censorship or outright direct control of the press and other means of communication, harassment or suppression of assemblies and organizations other than those officially sponsored, co-opting, exiling, jailing, or executing opponents, sowing spies and informers throughout the population, uprooting communities and scattering their members away from their homes, and in the bloodiest cases engaging in terror, mass murder and genocide, dictatorships stage shows of unanimity to intimidate the population, to render it dispirited, atomized, despairing of any hope of ever breaking free of the shackles of political oppression.<sup>38</sup> However, it is possible that the rulers of

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<sup>37</sup> Norman Davies, *God’s Playground. A History of Poland. Volume II. 1795 to the Present* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 503.

<sup>38</sup> Christian Davenport, “State Repression and Political Order,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2007, 10, 1-23, surveys the literature on repression.

dictatorships would experience serious cognitive dissonance if they had to acknowledge that their regimes are rejected by a large majority of the electorate. So perhaps they *have* to believe it to justify the ruthlessness to themselves.

To date, among the dictatorships displayed in Table 3, only two formerly official parties remained electorally viable after the door to competition was flung wide open. One is Mexico's PRI, which after two consecutive defeats recovered the presidency in 2012, when its candidate won with 39% in a three-way race. The other is Paraguay's Colorado Party; following poor showings in 2003 and 2008, in 2013 its candidate won the presidential election with 49%, 10 points more than its closest rival.<sup>39</sup>

**Law #5. *The law of alternation or shared power.*** In democracies, political parties or coalitions periodically take turns at governing.

This law is the consequence of the previous two. It is rooted in the very nature of the state and the very nature of democracy. Dictatorial illusions of unanimity notwithstanding, the fact is that the state is, as Aristotle taught long ago, a plurality.<sup>40</sup> The “organic’ common will,” be it of a nation, Volk, class or revolution, is a “fiction.”<sup>41</sup> The moment an electorate is free to choose among candidates and parties espousing a variety of programs, personalities, and styles of governing “the germs of a multicentered

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<sup>39</sup> Freedom House rankings for both Paraguay and Mexico is a 3, or “partly free,” whereas Polity IV Country Report assigns both regimes an 8, which qualifies them to be designated as a democracy.

<sup>40</sup> B. Jowett, *The Politics of Aristotle*, Volume I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), p. 28.

<sup>41</sup> Hans Kelsen, *The Essence and Value of Democracy*, Edited by Nadia Urbinati and Carlo Invernizzi Accetti (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013), p. 33.

society”<sup>42</sup> are released and multiply. Thus, the “will of society emerges from competing parties”<sup>43</sup> whose principal object, apart from ruling *per se*, is to win sufficient votes or seats in elections, legislatures, and judicial bodies to steer government policy in the direction desired by its cadre and supporters.<sup>44</sup> Once in office, the law of growing opposition kicks in, inexorably eroding the size of the incumbents’ coalition and, sooner or later, reducing it to minority status. Now another party or coalition gets a chance to pursue its vision of the state for a time until it, too, is overwhelmed by opposition and another change of government ensues. On average, in the democracies incumbent parties serve 2 consecutive terms in spells lasting 9 years.<sup>45</sup> Thus, in the long run, different combinations of fractions of the electorate take turns at being included in a

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<sup>42</sup> Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism* (Yale University Press, 1957), p. 430.

<sup>43</sup> Kelsen, *Essence and Value of Democracy*, p. 33.

<sup>44</sup> There probably is an intrinsic value to ruling over and beyond the perks of office, the expected rise in future income attributable to one’s experience in government, and the chance to contribute to the shaping of state, economy and society according to one’s vision of the good.

<sup>45</sup> The longest spell in office, 44 years, occurred in Sweden, where the Social Democrats governed continuously from 1932 to 1976. Even they had to share power or govern with the support or sufferance of small parties, because they won an absolute majority of seats in only two out of thirteen elections during that period.

winning coalition,<sup>46</sup> with the result that policy zigs and zags incrementally, periodically crossing the center of the voter distribution from left to right and back again,<sup>47</sup> and the state is governed with a minimum of political coercion. Moreover, governing parties in a democracy usually pursue moderate policies.<sup>48</sup> That, along with the revisions in policy resulting from alternation in office, safeguards the ship of state from tipping over to one or the other extreme of the left-right spectrum.<sup>49</sup>

### ***Discussion.***

I have presented evidence attesting to what I believe amount to five laws of politics.<sup>50</sup> They do not strike me as controversial. Indeed, once stated, they seem

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<sup>46</sup> This democratic characteristic conforms in a rough way to Aristotle's formula of citizens taking turns at ruling. Aristotle, *The Politics*, 79. See, also, Adam Przeworski, "Self-Government in Our Time," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2009: 12: 71-92.

<sup>47</sup> Budge et al., *Organizing Democratic Choice*, p. 253.

<sup>48</sup> Michael D. McDonald and Ian Budge, *Elections, Parties, and Democracy: Conferring the Median Mandate* (Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 171-180. When a party or coalition, over-interpreting its mandate, disregards this rule of prudence, as in Spain in the 1930s, the result is civil war or military coup. See, e.g., Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: University Press, 2012), and Pío Moa, *El Derrumbe de la Segunda República y la Guerra Civil* (Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> Ian Budge, Hans Keman, Michael D. McDonald, and Paul Pennings, *Organizing Democratic Choice. Party Representation Over Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> I do not mean to suggest that these five exhaust the list.

elemental. All governments, certainly dictatorships but also democracies, can count on the votes of only a minority of the electorate, even if in democracies that minority represents a plurality that is much larger than the combination that supports a dictatorship. That incumbents enjoy an advantage over opposition parties and candidates, probably derived at least in part from their exploitation of state resources for partisan gain, should come as no surprise. That, notwithstanding this advantage, on average incumbents lose support from term to term, save some exceptions, usually early in their tenure in office that are offset in subsequent elections, is “one of the few obvious regularities observed in political science.”<sup>51</sup> Finally, the results of transition elections in the former Soviet empire and elsewhere make it plain that the unanimity that dictators project domestically and internationally is a mirage. In a democracy, it almost never happens that an incumbent party wins more than a few points over 60%, and it never happens twice within the same spell in office. The conclusion is inescapable: the state is a plurality. No organic conception of the political community captures its essence, for it is subject to what might be called “the law of partials.”

To describe these laws is not to explain them. One in particular is highly puzzling.<sup>52</sup> Why is it that the incumbents lose support while in office?<sup>53</sup> Is it on account

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<sup>51</sup> Budge et al., *Organizing Democratic Choice*, p. 255.

<sup>52</sup> That political science proceeds by investigating puzzles is a theme in Robert O. Keohane, “Political Science as a Vocation.” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 42, 2, pp. 359-363.

<sup>53</sup> Budge et al., *Organizing Democratic Choice*, pp. 275-277, offers another set of explanations partially overlapping with those proposed herein. See, also, Sean Trende,

of an accumulation of errors in policy or administration that tarnish their reputation for competence? Is it a matter of over-interpreting their mandate, as Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson suggest?<sup>54</sup> Do they run out of luck, so that a string of negative shocks depresses their popularity below a point of no return?<sup>55</sup> Perhaps corruption, or the appearance of corruption, has something to do with it. Corruption and abuses of power do come up in accounts of incumbent electoral setbacks. Do they become arrogant over time, taking their supporters for granted and underestimating the opposition? Or is it a combination of all these? An alternative explanatory source focuses on the opposition parties.

Perhaps, after several losses, they learn to fine-tune their message, or to seek, find, and activate new fractions of the electorate, or learn how to cooperate in attacking the incumbents and to agree on a plan for dividing the spoils of office and the parceling of responsibilities for and reorientation of policy. Finally, the answer may lie with the electorate itself. Demographic changes aside, it could be that erstwhile supporters of the incumbents become disappointed and stay home;<sup>56</sup> others become energized against

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*The Lost Majority: Why the Future of Government is Up for Grabs—and Who Will Take It* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> Robert S. Erikson, Michael B. MacKuen, and James A. Stimson, *The Macro Polity* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 367.

<sup>55</sup> Torun Dewan and David P. Myatt, “Dynamic Government Performance: Honeymoons and Crises of Confidence,” *American Political Science Review*, 2012, 106, 1, p. 135.

<sup>56</sup> As McDonald and Budge put it, “a commonly observed phenomenon of democratic politics [is that of] the unbounded enthusiasm of activists after an election followed by

them either because their interests or values are being threatened or because they resent being governed at all; and still others, not strongly committed to any party, may just search for something new—that is, newness in itself becomes a value to those voters.

Here is another puzzle: why is it that on average incumbents do worse at the polls in Ibero-America than in the OECD democracies? Is it because all but Portugal and Spain are presidential democracies? It is probable that presidential regimes may allow the electorate to focus its dissatisfaction or alienation more clearly against a particular person or party. Could part of the answer lie in the lower quality of governance in the region—more corruption, less observance of the rule of law, lower effectiveness—compared to that of the OECD, as World Bank Indicators suggest?<sup>57</sup> Perhaps the relative youth of democracy has something to do with it.<sup>58</sup> However, although not quite as young, democracy in Germany and Japan is of relatively recent vintage compared to others in the OECD, yet incumbents there experience modest loss rates per term, whereas Costa Rica, which is of the same age, averages a much higher loss per term than these two. Or maybe the electorates and politicians of Ibero-America are more prone to political volatility or extremism, with the latter making demagogic promises of easy solutions to problems of long standing and the former too quick to reject them when, as must inevitably happen, their unrealistic expectations are disappointed. It could well be

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disillusion with ‘their’ government in a year or two on. . . .” *Elections, Parties, and Democracy*, p. 180.

<sup>57</sup> See World Bank. [World Wide Governance Indicators, 2013](#).

<sup>58</sup> According to Nannesdad and Paldam, “For newly established democracies it may take half a dozen elections for the party-system to stabilize.” *The Cost of Ruling*, p. 3.

that at least part of the answer lies in cultural differences in what used to be called “national character” after all.<sup>59</sup>

### ***Conclusion.***

If, upon reflection, these laws appear almost natural, describing properties and patterns baked into the very nature of politics, democracy, and the state, the question then becomes, why are they not professed in every course of political science?

Economists have no inhibitions about proclaiming economic principles or laws. Even the natural sciences have not been shy about announcing the operation of laws before they were fully understood.<sup>60</sup> Why should political scientists not be as confident in professing laws of politics? I submit that we as a discipline have been too diffident, too hesitant about professing what we know about our subject.

Be that as it may, I conclude with the hope that, in true Popperian fashion, others will take up the challenge to falsify these laws. Time will tell, as more cases are added to those analyzed here, whether the enlarged data set will be found to yield the basic

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<sup>59</sup> For a recent study arguing that region is a relevant variable in comparative politics, see Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, “Why Regions of the World Are Important: Regional Specificities and Region-Wide Diffusion of Democracy,” Ch. 8 in Gerardo L. Munck, Ed., *Regimes and Democracy in Latin America* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>60</sup> Richard P. Feynman, *Six Easy Pieces. Essentials of Physics Explained by Its Most Brilliant Teacher* (California Institute of Technology, 1995).

patterns, strengthening confidence in these laws, or show them to be spurious.<sup>61</sup> My guess is that the former outcome will be the result, although the estimated parameters may well undergo some adjustment.

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<sup>61</sup> Christian Davenport, “State Repression and Political Order,” avers that in our discipline “*very few relationships withstand close scrutiny*” (p. 8; emphasis added).

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**Table 1. Elections in democracies, by country and region**  
**(Unless otherwise noted, the number is a percent.)**

Country	Years	Elections	Turnout	Winning Coalition (a)	Incumbent Vote (b)	Incumbent Point loss/term	Incumbent Wins
OECD: North America/Europe/Japan/Antipodes (9 democracies, 278 elections, 10 country-averages)							
Australia	1901-2013	44	89	39	43	-3.3	70
Canada	1872-2014	40	71	29	41	-2.7	67
France (legislative)	1958-2012	14	71	20	28	-3.3	46
France (presidential)	1965-2012	9	80	26	32	-1.8	63
Germany	1949-2013	18	83	35	42	-0.2	76
						-2.0 (c)	
Japan	1949-2014	24	69	30	43	-2.8	83
New Zealand	1914-2014	33	86	36	41	-3.1	67
Sweden	1932-2014	25	83	36	43	-1.9	72
United Kingdom	1922-2015	25	74	30	40	-3.1	50
United States	1828-2012	47	63	31	49	-3.1	57
Population outliers (3 democracies, 37 elections, 3 country averages)							
Barbados	1951-2013	14	68	34	50	-2.2	62
Belize	1984-2012	7	76	35	46	-9.2	33
India	1951-2014	16	59	22	38	-4.2	50
Iberoamerica: Spain and Latin America (15 democracies, 137 elections, 17 country averages)							
Argentina	1983-2011	7	81	36	44	-5	50
Brazil	1989-2014	7	82	30	37	-10.0	67
Chile	1938-1970	7	84	32	39	-14.6	33
Chile	1989-2013	6	84	35	41	-8.8	60
Colombia	1974-2014	11	47	19	43	-6.8	60
Costa Rica	1953-2014	16	75	30	39	-11.1	27
Cuba	1940-1948	3	76	36	46	-11	50

Dom. Republic	1966-2012	13	73	29	40(d)	-7.7(d)	58
El Salvador	1984-2014	7	58	28	48	-2.2	67
Mexico	1988-2012	5	63	25	40	-8.0	50
Panama	1994-2014	5	76	20	33	-11	25
Paraguay	1993-2013	5	70	29	41	-2.8	50
Portugal (legislative)	1976-2011	13	70	26	37	-4.6	42
Portugal (presidential)	1976-2011	8	59	23	41(e)	-12.7(e)	80
Spain	1977-2011	11	74	26	36	-5.7	60
Uruguay	1984-2014	7	90	31	35	-7.0	33
Venezuela	1958-1993	8	88	32	36	-9.4	29

*Notes:*

In democracies that include a runoff, whether for president or, as in France, for the National Assembly, the vote entered is that of the first or only round.

(a) The “winning coalition” is the percent of the electorate that voted for the governing party, the incumbents.

(b) In this article, the terms “incumbents” and “governing party” are used interchangeably.

(c) In 1953 and 2013, incumbent Christian Democrats received a bump of 14 and 8 points, respectively, from their previous showing. These were unusual elections. Not only were they the first reelection of the party in the current spell in office, the former was held in the immediate post-World War II period, when the party system was being configured, and the latter occurred as the party system recovered from the fracturing that took place in the previous election. Accordingly, the median incumbent loss may well be a more valid measure in Germany’s case, so it is shown in parentheses along with the mean.

(d) Balaguer’s 1974 reelection excluded. See text.

(e) Soares’s 1991 reelection excluded. See text.

**Table 2. Election Results in Democracies. Descriptive Statistics, Total and by Region (Unless otherwise noted, the number is a percent.)**

A. Complete set: 27 democracies, 455 elections (a)

	Turnout	Winning coalition	Incumbent vote (g)	Incumbent point loss/term	Incumbent Wins (e)	Terms/spell (i)
Average of within country means (s.d.)	74.1 (10.1)	29.6 (5.3)	40.4 (4.9)	-5.9 (3.8)	55 (15)	2.2 (1.0)/ 9.4 (3.7)
Pooled data Mean (s.d.)	74.8 (12.9)	30.9 (9.3)	41.6 (9.9) 65 (h) 53.2	-4.2 (8.5)	59 (49)	2.2 (1.8)/ 8.6 (6.3)
Maximum value	97	54.2(f)	(5.7) 4 (h)	-43(d)	83	13/44
Minimum value	34	2.6	23.1 (10.2)	20(d)	25	1/1

B. OECD region: North America/Europe/Japan/Antipodes: 9 democracies, 279 elections (b)

Average of within country means (s.d.)	78.5 (6.9)	30.9 (5.5)	39.6 (5.5)	-2.5 (0.9)	66 (11)	3.1 (1.1)/ 11.1 (3.4)
Pooled data Mean (s.d.)	76.7 (12.4)	32.3 (8.5)	42.1 (8.8) 61 (h)	-2.7 (6.9)	65 (48)	2.7 (2.2)/ 9.6 (7.3)
Maximum value	96	52.1 (f)	53	-29(d)	83	13/44

			(4.8)			
			16 (h)			
			23.3			
Minimum value	48.9	8.2	(8.2)	18(d)	46	1/1

**Table 2. Election Results in Democracies. Descriptive Statistics, Total and by Region (continued)**

C. Ibero-America: Latin America, Portugal, Spain. 15 democracies, 139 elections (c)

	Turnout	Winning coalition	Incumbent vote (g)	Incumbent point loss/term	Incumbent Wins (e)	Terms/spell (i)
Average of within country means (s.d.)	73.5 (10.9)	28.9 (4.5)	39.7 (3.9)	-8.1 (3.4)	49 (15)	1.8 (0.7)/8.6 (3.7)
Pooled data Mean (s.d.)	73.2 (13.5)	28.6 (10.1)	39.6 (11.9)	-7.8 (10.7)	48 (49)	1.6 (0.9)/7.0 (4.1)
Maximum value	97	52.8	62 (h) 52.7 (5.5)	-43 (d)	80	4/20
Minimum value	34	2.6	21.4 (11.3)	20 (d)	25	1/2

Notes:

In presidential democracies that include a runoff, as well as in French legislative elections, the vote entered is that of the first or only round.

(a) All democracies listed in B and C plus India (1951-2014), Barbados (1951-2013), and Belize (1984-2012).

(b) Australia (1901-2013), Canada (1872-2011), France (presidential, 1965-2012), France (legislative, 1958-2012), Germany (1949-2013),

Japan (1958-2012), New Zealand (1914-2011), Sweden (1932-2014), United Kingdom (1922-2010), United States (1828-2012).

- (c) Argentina (1983-2011), Brazil (1989-2014), Chile (1938-1970), Chile (1989-2013), Colombia (1974-2014), Costa Rica (1953-2014), Cuba (1940-1948), Dominican Republic (1966-2012), Mexico (1988-2012), Portugal (parliamentary, 1976-2011), Portugal (presidential, 1986-2011), Spain (1976-2011), Uruguay (1984-2014), Venezuela (1958-1993).
- (d) Typically, the incumbent loses votes from one election to the next but sometimes it gains votes. The maximum value refers to the largest loss in one election, the minimum stands for the largest gain. I.e., the minimum loss is the maximum gain.
- (e) This variable is scored 1 if incumbent party retained presidency or premiership, 0 otherwise.
- (f) In only two elections, one each in Chile (1933) and New Zealand (1938) did this variable exceed 50 percent.
- (g) Presidential elections in Portugal (1991) and Dominican Republic (1974) excluded. See text.
- (h) Depending on the row, the first value is the highest or lowest election year value; below that is the average maximum average value across countries, or the average minimum average value across countries.
- (i) Terms stands for the number of consecutive terms by the same party or coalition and spell for continuous years in office by the same party or coalition.

**Table 3. The dictatorial “passion for unanimity”**

Country	Years	Incumbent	Office	Turnout	% of the vote
Brazil	1964-1985	Military /ARENA Party	Presidency		86
Cuba	1993-2013	Castro's Communist Party	National Assembly	97	96
Czechoslovakia	1948-1986	Communist “National Front”	Parliament	98	98
Dom. Rep.	1930-1957	Trujillo's Dominican Party	Presidency		99
Egypt	1956-2005	Nasser, Sadat, Mubarak	Presidency	82	96
Germany	1933-1938(a)	Hitler's NSADP	Reichstag	98	97
Indonesia	1971-1997	Suharto's Golkar	Legislature		67
Italy	1929-1934	Mussolini's Fascist Party	Chamber of Deputies	93	99
Mexico	1934-1982	PRI Party	Presidency	68	87
Nicaragua	1950-1974	Somozas' PLN	Presidency		83
Paraguay	1954-1988	Stroessner's Colorado Party	Presidency	82	90
Poland	1947-1984	Communist Party	Parliament	94	98
Portugal	1934-1973	Salazar's National Union	National Assembly	72	99
USSR	1937-1984	Communist Party	Soviet of the Union	100	99.6
Average of within country means				89	92
S.D.				11.4	8.9
Average across countries, all elections				90	94
S.D.				14.2	10.2

N=112 “elections”

*Notes:*

(a) There were two elections in 1933, one in March and another in November 1933. In March, Hitler was already Chancellor, and despite “massive suppression, especially against Communist and Social Democratic politicians,” the National Socialists won only 44 percent (Wikipedia). Turnout was 89 percent, so the percent of the electorate voting for

Hitler's party was only 39 percent. In November, Hitler having assumed dictatorial powers and banned all opposition parties, his party won 92 percent and turnout was 95 percent. Only the second 1933 election is included in the calculation.