

CONSENSUS AND DISSENT
AMONG ELITES IN GERMANY AND
ARGENTINA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE
PLURALIST AND ELITIST THEORIES

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I examine the theories of the structure and operation of national elites as presented by Suzanne Keller in *Beyond the Ruling Class* and C. Wright Mills in *The Power Elite*. I attempt to clarify the theories of both authors and to verify empirically specific propositions inferred from them by referring to case studies of the Argentine and German national elites. The theory proposed by Mills affirms that society is governed by cohesive groups of elites which share beliefs, attitudes, and values. The pluralist theory of Keller maintains that several competitive groups of elites participate in the decision-making processes of society. Many authors suggest that a pluralist structure of elites may fortify democratic regimes, since it establishes control over the most powerful groups of elites and contributes to the legitimization of opposing factions. In an article entitled "Power Elite or Veto Groups?" published in *Class, Status, and Power*, William Kornhauser claims that a pluralist structure of elites results in great competition among them, thereby assuring that no one group benefits regularly from the existing system of decision-making. An elitist structure of elites, however, may favor the most powerful groups of elites, particularly those characterized by the greatest degree of cohesion.

The theoretical propositions formulated by Mills in *The Power Elite* may be summarized as follows:

1. High levels of industrialization and technology produce centralization throughout society, but more specifically in government and in the economy.
2. With the centralization of society, the impact of each institutional sphere on the others, and the frequency of interaction between them, increases.
3. Each institutional sphere becomes dependent upon the others, especially with regard to the economy, the military, political parties, and government.
4. The high level personnel of each institutional sphere become interchangeable.
5. National decisions are prepared in a coordinated fashion by the leaders of highest level in the most important institutional spheres.
6. As a direct consequence of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, the elites share values, beliefs, and attitudes. Therefore, there is a high degree of consensus among them.

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Listed below are the principal points of the theory as proposed by Keller:

1. A high degree of industrialization and technology increases the division of labor at all levels of society, including the elites.
2. The division of labor intensifies the specialization of the elites and the diversification of their roles.
3. The specialization of the elites causes each group to become autonomous, and prevents the interchange of roles.
4. As a direct result of 1, 2, and 3, the elites develop diverse values and attitudes. General dissent arises among them.

The theories of Mills and Keller may be considered in terms of industrial development. According to Mills, the elites of societies with low degrees of industrialization are united and cohesive; those of societies with intermediate levels of industrialization are not consensual and, in fact, may be rather competitive; and finally, the elites of societies with high degrees of industrialization are united and consensual. The pluralist theory of Keller is linear and embraces both non-industrialized societies in which the elites act as a unified group, and highly industrialized societies in which there is general dissent among the elites.

I selected Argentina and Germany for my study of these theories since there are clear and marked differences in their levels of industrial development. Germany is among the most highly industrialized nations of the world, while Argentina enjoys an intermediate degree of industrialization. The Argentine elite may not constitute a directing force within society due to its lack of common values and norms. Ralph Dahrendorf, in his book *Society and Democracy in Germany*, demonstrates that, although the German elites are recruited from varying social and economic backgrounds, they generally agree on matters which concern the government of the nation.

The elitist and pluralist theories provide the basis for deducing specific propositions referring to the elites of Germany and Argentina which can be tested empirically. Several are listed below:

Predictions Deduced from Elitist Theory

1. Germany is a highly industrialized country, while Argentina is not.
2. A high degree of industrialization is conducive to consensus among the elites

Therefore, German elites are more consensual than Argentine elites.

Predictions Deduced from Pluralist Theory

1. Germany is a highly industrialized country, while Argentina is not.
2. A high degree of industrialization is conducive to dissent among the elites.

Therefore, the German elites are more discordant than the Argentine elites.

THE DATA BASE AND PROOF OF THE PROPOSED PROPOSITIONS

The data about Germany were obtained from interviews undertaken by Karl W. Deutsch in 1964. Deutsch and his associates interviewed 173 members of the German elite, including politicians, directors of private enterprise, military men,

leaders in the field of mass communications, high administrative officials, spokesmen from labor unions, and outstanding leaders from other professions. The content of the interviews consisted of problems related to international politics (especially European unity and arms control) and to the internal politics of Germany itself. The data relevant to Argentina were derived from a survey of members of the national elite interviewed in Buenos Aires from April to June of 1972. This sampling, conducted on the basis of occupational criteria, includes fourteen officials from the offices of public administration of the government (general or national directors), fourteen directors of private enterprises, seven members of the board of directors of the "Confederación General Económica" (CGE), seven directors of the board of "Acción para la Coordinación de Instituciones Empresariales Libres" (ACIEL), seven generals, twelve politicians (three members of the board of directors of each of the following political parties: Partido Justicialista, Nueva Fuerza, Unión Cívica Radical, and the Movimiento de Integración y Desarrollo), eight labor leaders (members of the executive council of the "Confederación General del Trabajo"), and two officials from the daily newspapers of Buenos Aires.

The propositions inferred from the theories of Mills and Keller about the structure of national elites were tested by measuring the degree of attitudinal fragmentation or dissent with regard to problems and political conflicts generated in Germany and Argentina. The basis of comparison was the position adopted by the respective elites in the face of major problems and conflicts. It is necessary to emphasize that the use of one particular problem in both nations would not have been appropriate, since any given question may be of great significance in one country but not in another, as occurs in Argentina and Germany with regard to problems such as Perón, European unity, or super-nationality. Therefore, although the inquiries undertaken were not designed conjunctly, I believe that it is possible to employ them in this study.

I have relied upon the index of fragmentation suggested by Rae and Taylor in *The Analysis of Political Cleavages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) to measure the degree of discordance among the German and Argentine elites. This index ranges from 0.0 to 1.0. The 1.0 value indicates a total fragmentation in relation to the item under study, describing a situation in which no two individuals agree on the issue under consideration. Each individual forms an independent group. The 0.0 value represents the complete absence of fragmentation—absolute consensus. All individuals belong to one group. All this means is that agreement or consensus is inversely related to fragmentation or dissent; the greater the fragmentation, the less the agreement and vice versa. Rae and Taylor interpret the index of fragmentation as "the proportion of individuals divided by a conflict or problem" (p. 29).

The problems or conflicts utilized in the study of the German national elites were: Support for the foreign policy of the government, Nazism, the reunification of the two Germanies, super-national politics and types of foreign policy. In his book, Deutsch specifically accents the importance of each one of these political problems in Germany at the time of the study. It is necessary to point out that the majority of the problems considered involve international politics, directly or indirectly (for example, the reunification of Germany). National elites may be more consensual in regard to this type of problem than in regard to exclusively internal problems. Therefore, it must be admitted that whatever fragmentation is dis-

played by the German elites may be somewhat underestimated due to this factor.

To identify conflicts or problems from the realm of Argentine politics, I depended upon the analysis of articles published in local newspapers of the national capital. I assumed that the majority of problems was perceived by the various means of mass communication. Two ideologically opposed newspapers of extensive circulation (over 100,000) were employed as data sources for the analysis of newspaper content: *Crónica*, which has a populist orientation; and *La Prensa*, with a conservative orientation. The time span considered extended from January to December of 1971. The problems discovered through this analysis include: The role of the government in the economy and the economic crisis (*La Prensa*), the role of the military in Argentine politics (*La Prensa* and *Crónica*), Perón (*Crónica*), and Lanusse (*La Prensa* and *Crónica*).

Since the index of fragmentation developed by Rae and Taylor varies as a function of a specific number of categories, the responses of German and Argentine elites were grouped into three categories: In favor, indifferent, against. Certain problems represented beliefs (Nazism in Germany and the economic crisis in Argentina) and not evaluative attitudes. Even these cases, however, were grouped into the previously defined categories.

The perception of conflicts was also used to compare the degree of frag-

Fragmentation (Dissent) among the German and Argentine Elites with regard to National Conflicts and Problems

| <i>Problems and Conflicts</i> | <i>Index of Fragmentation</i> |
|---|-------------------------------|
| <i>Germany</i> | |
| 1. Support for the foreign policy of the government | 0.34 |
| 2. Nazism | 0.17 |
| 3. Reunification of the two Germanies | 0.18 |
| 4. Super-nationality | 0.10 |
| 5. Independent external policy | 0.19 |
| Average degree of fragmentation in Germany | 0.19 |
| <i>Argentina</i> | |
| 1. Role of the government in the economy | 0.65 |
| 2. Economic crisis | 0.59 |
| 3. Attitude toward the military | 0.67 |
| 4. Attitude toward Perón | 0.57 |
| 5. Attitude toward Lanusse | 0.64 |
| Average degree of fragmentation in Argentina | 0.62 |
| <i>Perception of Conflicts</i> | |
| Germany | 0.36 |
| Argentina | 0.72 |

mentation among the German and the Argentine elites. One question was common to the inquiry of both elites: What do you consider the most important problem which your country faces at present? The data presented by Deutsch on this question were grouped into categories allowing their codification with the data from the inquest of the Argentine elite. These refer to political conflicts, social and economic conflicts, ideological conflicts, and moral conflicts.

The results, shown in the Table, indicate the degree of fragmentation in relation to the two types of answers obtained from the elites in Germany and Argentina (Problems and Conflicts, and the Perception of Conflicts). The German and Argentine elites appear to differ markedly in the degree of fragmentation. The German exhibit less fragmentation than the Argentine: Fragmentation average among the German elites for the five problems under study was 0.19, while the Argentine average was 0.62. It is interesting to note that the degree of fragmentation among the elites of both nations reveals only a limited variation. The range of fragmentation in Germany extends from 0.10 to 0.34, with a standard deviation of 0.09. In Argentina the range extends from 0.57 to 0.67, with a standard variation of 0.04. The perception of national conflicts follows a similar pattern. The Argentine elites demonstrate greater fragmentation than the German elites, in fact, they reveal twice the degree of fragmentation (0.72 and 0.36 respectively).

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the obvious limitation of comparing data obtained from two investigations undertaken with different designs (in which the composition of the test sample and the criteria for the selection of national conflicts or problems differ) the results provide adequate evidence tending to confirm the proposition that, as a consequence of one important structural characteristic—i.e., a high level of industrialization—the German elites are more cohesive than the Argentine. Thus, the data seem to validate the elitist theory of Mills and to disprove the pluralist theory of Keller. As a result of the high degree of industrialization, the elites become interdependent, sharing common experiences and interests. This, in turn, provokes participation in the same economic, social, and political contexts, thereby producing the formation of common attitudes and values. It is possible to conclude that highly industrialized societies develop cultures of highly structured elites, which result in homogeneous socializing influences and displace possible heterogeneous elements which might be potential products of the ever-expanding specialization in industrial societies.

This study offers partial evidence to support the assertion that the relationship between industrialization and consensus among the elites is curvilinear. Societies with low degrees of industrialization show highly unified elites. Greater developments toward industrialization have a considerable impact upon the previous structure of the elites, contributing elements of specialization, modernization, and innovation, which cause a fragmentation in the structure. Intermediate levels of industrialization, therefore, provoke the sharpest degree of differentiation in the structure of the elites, competition, and general discordance. Finally, high levels of industrialization encourage consensus among the elites primarily through mutual interdependence.

From the data presented it is possible to demonstrate that a pluralist structure of elites is not necessarily related to a democratic political regime. In con-

tradition to Kornhauser and other authors, Argentina is an example of a country with a pluralist structure of elites and a political regime which reveals an un-democratic tradition. It may be thought that beyond a certain critical point the dissent among the elites in regard to national politics and political conflicts may impede the implementation of democratic institutions. A high degree of conflict among the elites may debilitate the legitimacy of the regulations of democratic conduct. Discussion and compromise under such conditions would be very difficult and might even produce a rejection of democratic procedures by those groups of elites which might lose systematically under established norms in the decision-making process and which might endure a continual deprivation of their social and political status.