

A field manual for the cradle of civilization: theory of leadership & lessons of Iraq
by Roger Myerson, *J. of Conflict Resolution* 53.3:470-482 (2009).
<http://home.uchicago.edu/~rmyerson/research/xenonts2024.pdf>

How are the fundamental institutions of a democratic society established?
Frustrations and failures of recent missions for democratic state-building.

L. Paul Bremer, *My Year in Iraq* (2006).

U.S. Army, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (2007).

David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare* (1964).

James Dobbins et al., *The Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building* (2007).

Ashraf Ghani & Clare Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States* (2008).

Rufus Phillips III, *Why Vietnam Matters* (2008).

Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* (360 BC).

My Autocrat's credibility problem & foundations of constitutional state (2008).

Reputational-leadership theory of the state:

Leadership depends on reputation for reliable patronage.

Cultivating democratic leadership.

Maintaining constitutional constraints on powerful leaders.

U.S. Army & Marine Corps, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual FM 3-24 (2007)*.

Military operations with political follow-up to establish and expand areas of control (spreading oil spots).

Supporters facing risk of attack must expect a profitable relationship.

"Winning hearts & minds" = "local service is well paid & protected" (appendix A26-30).

Promote security and effective governance to establish legitimate rule, with professionalism, avoiding corruption and favoritism.

But will state officials maintain professionalism if their leaders do not reward it?

The host government's political leaders seem airbrushed out of the Field Manual, except to say that state-builders must demand effective performance from them.

Bremer's (2006) theory of democracy: primacy of constitution, professionalization of security forces. *"I've got three 'red lines': We must leave behind a professional uncorrupt police force, attentive to human rights; we must not have an army involved in internal affairs, and no militia; we should pass sovereignty to an Iraqi government elected on the basis of a constitution."*

Bremer's "no elections before a constitution" was challenged by Ayatollah al-Sistani.

Which comes first, constitutional laws or elected leaders?

Xenophon and American history support Sistani.

Galula's (1964) summary of counterinsurgency warfare: *"(Re)build a political machine from the population upward."* And *"political machines are built on patronage."*

Leadership is vital in insurgency: Bin Laden started as reliable paymaster for fighters.

Xenophon, Education of Cyrus (c. 360 BCE), edited excerpt from book 1, chapter 3:

When at dinner with his daughter and [her son] Cyrus, Astyages [King of Media] wished the boy to dine as pleasantly as possible. He thus put before him fancy side dishes and all sorts of sauces and meats.

Astyages said, "Does it not seem to you that this dinner is much finer than among the Persians?"

To this Cyrus answered, "No, grandfather, for the road to satisfaction is much more simple and direct among us [Persians] than among you [Medes]."

Astyages said, "Feast at least upon these meats, so that you may go home a vigorous youth."

Cyrus said, "Are you giving me all this meat, grandfather, to use however I want?"

"Yes, my child, by Zeus I am," he said.

Then Cyrus, taking the meat, distributed it to his grandfather's servants and said to each, "This is for you, because you teach me to ride with enthusiasm; for you, because you gave me a javelin; for you, because you serve my grandfather nobly; for you, because you honor my mother."

He proceeded like this until he had distributed all the meat that he received.

(Cyrus later usurped the throne of Media.)

Cyrus established the Persian Empire on **one essential quality of leadership: gratitude**, a reputation for reliably & generously rewarding good service.

Reputational equilibrium: Cyrus got benefits of power as long as he acted according to this reputation.

Did he really love "justice," or the benefits of this reputation?

(Justice in rewarding soldiers for valor, not justice for peasants whom they pillage; not honesty but loyal service in testimony to king Cyaxares [book 5, chapter 5].)

Kreps Milgrom Roberts Wilson 1982 on large impact of small-probability types.

Nobody wants to work for a leader whom nobody else supports (& so cannot win), so leadership depends on recognition in a coordination game with multiple equilibria, can depend on culture & tradition by the **focal-point effect** (Schelling 1960).

(Cyrus was initially recognized as head of Persian auxiliary unit in Median army.)

But supporters must also have confidence of leader's rewarding them after winning.

Thesis: Political organizations are established by recognized leaders who maintain reputations for reliably rewarding good service among a group of supporters.

My *Autocrat's credibility problem & foundations of the constitutional state* (APSR '08) focused on a leader's need for supporters (captains) to help him compete for power in establishing his state.

A leader's promises would be doubted if nothing could constrain him to fulfill past promises when his rivals have been defeated. (Moral hazard at the top.)

But in a contest for supreme national power, who can constrain the winner?

The captains & governors who enable him to take power & wield it can jointly do so.

A strong competitive leader needs some central council or court where his promises to supporters can be credibly enforced.

Supporters can constitute such a council when they share group identity and norms so that, if he cheated any one of them, then he would lose the trust of all.

Courtiers judge their leader as they serve him, and justification for any promotion or punishment of high officials always a primary concern in the leader's council.

Main result: In negotiation-proof equilibria of sequential contests for power, a contender cannot recruit supporters without a council where they can depose him.

As early as 1500 BCE, the Hittite king Telipinu saw the need to earn the confidence of other powerful members of the royal family by empowering a state council to judge his treatment of them (*Telipinu proclamation*).

Constitutional constraints are not just a recent invention of modern democracies. In any political system, to recruit the support that is needed to win power and to wield it, a leader must be credibly constrained to keep his promises to his supporters. They need a forum for communicating grievances against their leader, and they need a sense of group identity so that they would all react if any one of them were cheated. Participation in council may be required, as well as support in battle ("aid & counsel").

The patterns of behavior that a leader must maintain to keep his supporters' trust may be regarded as an informal *personal constitution* for the leader. This personal constitution requires the leader to appropriately reward supporters, but other forms of behavior may also be required (e.g.: norms against impiety).

A leader may fear to violate a formal constitution when his political relationships were developed in its context, so that violating it would shock his supporters.

Thus, constitutional democracy may be based on supporters' fragile trust of their leader. But a new constitution cannot make leaders violate their prior personal constitutions (e.g.: tribal favoritism, protection for those who attacked opponents).

Cultivating democratic leadership for a new democratic state

Democratic competition should limit political profits (corruption),
but it can fail if nobody has a reputation for good governance.

Successful democracy requires leaders with reputations for respecting democratic norms
and for using power to serve the public (not just to reward key supporters).

Political decentralization creates more opportunities to build such good reputations.

Responsible autonomous local leaders who exceed expectations can rise to higher office.

(My Federalism & incentives for success of democracy, QJPS 2006.)

Building infrastructure may be less important than increasing the national supply of
leaders whom people can trust with public funds, by distributing substantial
responsibilities & resources to locally accountable local leaders.

But incumbent national leaders may prefer centralization, to avoid such competition.

Ghani & Lockhart (*Fixing Failed States*, 2008) argued that state-building should
establish an effective government that is accountable to citizens.

But they did not ask whether democratic accountability could be effective with all
authority centralized under one elected leader (Ghani in Afghanistan 2014-2021).

*At start of Cyropaedia, Xenophon expressed interest in the establishment of any kind
of regime: democracy, monarchy, or oligarchy;* then he focused on a monarchy.

In his analysis of autocratic leadership, we can find insights also for democracies.

How can a nation's most powerful leaders be prevented from violating the norms of constitutional democracy?

Our answer: Constitutional constraints can be binding on a powerful leader when his violating them could cause key supporters to doubt whether they can still trust him. This effect is sharpened by a faction's incentive to coordinate behind a single leader. When a leader's scandalous behavior has alienated many in the faction, it can coalesce behind another leader who stands for similar policies but is not so tainted.

Such factional discipline works best when leaders have personal records of complying with democratic norms as they rose through lower offices in their political careers, so that any violation of these norms would be a shocking change of behavior.

Thus, older democracies can become more resilient.

Still, it may be dangerous to elect a supreme leader who has no prior record of exercising public power responsibly within democratic constitutional norms.

This factional enforcement of constitutional norms depends on intra-party politics.

It can fail if a major political party would support the re-election of a "strong leader" who blatantly violated essential constitutional constraints.

When it fails, can other checks & balances prevent a supreme leader's abuse of power?

Political bodies will lack consensus to impeach if the leader's party still supports him, and courts that can punish the nation's chief executive would not remain nonpolitical.

References:

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