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# **Convergence Theory Revisited: Kafkaesque Global Bureaucracies of Our Times with an Example of a Tool for Measuring whether Approaches to Accountability are Real or Sham**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This article briefly re-examines the theories and hypotheses about the comparative trajectories of industrial administrative bureaucratic systems through the end of the Cold War (convergence, diffusion, co-dependency, and other kinds of social evolution), reviews system comparisons and measures that are available to test these theories of evolution and change, offers a form of evidence that anthropologists and social scientists can collect to test processes in these complex social systems in ways that other social scientists are unable (or unwilling) to test, and offers an example of an indicator that can objectively standardize such data and that can be used to test the quality of oversight and accountability of the systems of the administrative state. The piece then offers some speculations – a short cultural critique as a result of observations – about whether human societies are caught in inflexible bureaucratic systems that are unable to plan for the future and that will continue to crash and re-emerge in the same forms, along with some suggestions for creating a more desirable human future.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the world as some of us used to know it, before globalization and the ‘harmonization’ of the world’s economic, legal and political systems into a single formula to promote global trade and ‘security’,

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there was rather heated speculation and debate about whether the existing competition among the world's industrial systems and the emerging global coalitions that followed would itself result in a greater 'humanization' and accountability of those systems (in aggregate and in the optimal form; whether the 'best' system could get better and the worst improve; or its opposite, whether the coalition and individual components would degrade to the lowest common denominator), and how the processes could work.

Much of that important but mostly forgotten debate was about cultural processes of 'convergence' and 'diffusion' and competitive 'social evolution' in models offered by economists and political scientists. The question was whether the world's industrial systems were 'converging' into a single type with common forms of economic enterprises and political administrative bureaucracies as well as common social systems and relations integrated with them (Dimock 1951; Galbraith 1967; Bell 1971; Kerr 1983). If systems were not 'converging' and if one side 'won' the 'Cold War', there was a question of how quickly the benefits of 'democratic control' (assuming 'our' side 'won' but described in parallel on the other side) would spread through a process of cultural 'diffusion' (Rogers 1983) and whether transformation along a supposed path to 'progress' would continue to take place. Skeptics, taking a 'Third World' perspective from bottom-up, argued that it was false to compare individual industrial systems and their internal democratic accountability based on the experiences of a small number of leading systems (countries) in the First World, since each country/culture was, in fact, a part of a larger control system of 'dependency' and 'underdevelopment' (Frank 1972; Wallerstein 1979) that already included all the other countries/cultures. They argued that the democratic protections found within First World countries/cultures would never diffuse democracy downward in ways that would protect minority individual and community interests and overall accountability but that globalization would, instead, result in the imposition of new industrial systems of bureaucratic control that would enable the center to more effectively dominate the resources and peoples of the 'periphery' everywhere.

Meanwhile, some sociologists suggested that the mechanisms of technological change would, themselves, lead to more democratic forms of political and social institutions. They offered an early version of the argument that the 'Internet' and other communications

technologies would create pluralistic sources of information and public control over the centers of power rather than that it would lead to centralized control of information or surveillance of diverse users. They suggested that humans might also choose new types of participatory systems using the advantages of technology that would promote pluralism instead of decentralization. Their belief was that human choice could pattern the social and political world rather than the economic and productive relations would determine systems of power and control. They believed that decentralization of productivity would also imply a decentralization of political power and greater accountability. In their view, the transition to a 'post-industrial society' of smaller scale production (an earlier view of what is now called 'information age technology') would force social changes that would independently increase the value of individual human beings as economic and as political actors, thus promoting political rights (Toffler 1980). They suggested looking not at the competition between systems or their internal evolution and mutual influences. They argued that human beings were learning a lesson from failures of administrative bureaucratic and autocratic states in the twentieth century and would also act to establish greater participatory and democratic controls over public and private bureaucracies to ensure their responsiveness and flexibility (Arendt 1951; Bell 1972; Roszak 1978).

Though there have not been any rigorous tests of these theories in the past 20 years other than, perhaps, plenty of speculation and competing measures as to whether or not the end of the Cold War ushered in greater 'democratization' as the Soviet empire collapsed, or less, with globalization (perhaps, that itself is a piece of evidence as to where we are in the 'information age'), we now may be ready to test some of those theories on the basis of recent historical data and to take the stock of where industrial systems are headed. Twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Russian Empire and now with the emergence of the 'new Europe', the strengthening of global institutions like the World Trade Organization, and the emergence of others in various regions, there would seem to be enough time to either draw conclusions or to reshape the questions.

Of course, it would be impossible to test all of these theories here in a short article. The convergence theory models suggested that there would be specific adaptive changes in economic institutions, political bureaucracies, social organization that served indus-

trialization (role of the individual and family structure as well as educational systems) and political systems and rights. To test the theories fully here, we would have to have measures and tests for all of these areas, which would be a major undertaking. (Indeed, there is now a recent spurt of articles on Chinese business management testing convergence and 'cross-vergence' [Warner and Nanherts 2012; Warner 2003] and on political forms in an industrial China [Jacques 2009].) We would also have to consider different time frames and more cases to separate out processes like globalization and the end of Cold War competition from competition and internal change. We would have to clarify the specific mechanisms at work in cultural adaptation and evolution (whether they were driven by competition and learning and what that means in terms of time frame and pathways of change, by the technology of production, or by influence and diffusion). And, we would have to separate out other social processes that are independent of industrial society, like the processes of empire and relations between cultures, in general. Indeed, several processes may be at work at once, with convergence just one factor.

What we can do here, in the space of one article, is to examine the theories in a specific area like the organization of political administrative bureaucracies in industrial states to provide a window into what occurred, with important implications for human rights and dignity. We can create a clear and objective measure for past data and for future change in examining bureaucratic accountability. And we can use it for some tentative conclusions on social evolution and change in industrial societies over the past 20 plus years.

In examining political bureaucracy and trying to measure its forms in this area of public accountability that was of concern to convergency theorists, political scientists and administration experts have, themselves, continued discussions that have dated back to the 1940s over the dynamics of accountability and bureaucratic discretion (a debate between Herman Finer, representing the position of minorities, and Carl Friedrich, representing bureaucratic authority of the State and the majority ethnicity ethic) (Jackson 2009). In entering these debates, political scientists have presented case studies of whistle-blowing and offered suggestions for types of citizen participation with government (O'Leary 2005; Vigoda 2002) or have been joined by anthropologists looking at some of the international projects that have sought to 'democratize' countries

being absorbed by globalization including those of Poland, the former Soviet Union, and elsewhere (Sperling 2009; Wedel 1998; Lempert 1995). Yet, little measurement has emerged of the overall cultural processes that have been occurring and the theoretical implications for measuring cultural change in urban societies.

Industrialization continues to raise alarming concerns about human dignity and the human future that social science can examine. In using these models to test what has happened over the past 20 plus years, what some of the early evidence suggests is that rather than 'progress' in the form of transfer and continued development of accountability, the 'best' systems that were apparently victorious and that offered mechanisms for accountability to minority groups and minority citizen interests, may have become more like the systems they replaced, even without competitive pressure. Individuals in Europe and the USA, though now working for the knowledge economy and even in more independent workplaces, may now have less ability to influence or protect minority individual and minority community interests within human systems. We may be converging towards a single system, but there is a real question of which direction the diffusion is occurring, why, and how. Answers to these fundamental questions about cultural change in industrial technological systems cannot only provide some insight into the possibility of human 'progress' among industrial societies (measured in terms of responsiveness to individual human needs and desire for participation, oversight, and equity that we largely consider to be universal 'goods'), but can also offer some suggestions on whether such progress is possible and how to achieve it, if it is.

We are confronted with a new set of puzzles. If the USA and Europe have 'won' the Cold War and their 'democratic' institutions are deemed to be superior, how is it that the 'non-democratic' mechanisms of the losing side could suddenly become the victorious norm? Is this what has really happened in the past generation? If so, what kind of model of convergence, or diffusion, or evolution of human systems explains what is going on?

These earlier theories were largely offered by political scientists, economists and sociologists who were trying to understand the fundamental nature of cultural systems and culture change in ways that crossed disciplines and moved back to a more holistic approach to social sciences. In fact, it may be this approach, in-

cluding elements of social anthropology, politics and economics, as well as more qualitative and interactive (participant-observation) methodologies, that can answer some of these questions today.

My field experience as a participant observer over the past 30 years, in the Soviet Union and now former Soviet countries, Eastern Europe, the United States, China, Viet Nam, and industrializing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (in fact, in some 65 countries, half of those on paid or research projects with governmental and non-governmental bureaucratic systems), has offered me a set of data for looking qualitatively and over time at these processes and for raising questions about what is happening in the interactions on all sides (Duncan 1995). It may be this kind of unusual data, collected in atypical ways (multiple observations over several years in different systems) that may also change how we do social science in order to answer such questions.

The purpose of this article is to briefly re-examine the theories and hypotheses about what would happen to industrial administrative bureaucratic systems through the end of the Cold War, to look at the kinds of comparisons and measures that are available to test the theories of evolution and change, to offer one form of evidence and comparisons that anthropologists and social scientists can collect to ‘study up’ and test one particular feature of these complex social systems (that of bureaucratic accountability) in ways that other social scientists are unable (or unwilling) to test, and to try to strip those measures of systemic biases so that data can be objectively standardized using a sample tool. The research tool presented here measures relationships and incentives as a way to determine quality of accountability and oversight of the administrative state. The piece then offers some speculations – a short cultural critique as a result of observations – along with some suggestions for creating a more desirable human future through the use of some standards.

### **THEORY AND HYPOTHESES**

Moving forward in raising questions about evolution and change of industrial systems (including the economic-productive systems and the social and political institutions and bureaucracies that accompany them) requires taking stock both of what we know about industrialization and the processes of political and social control that develop with it, and what we do not know and need to test. In fact,

what we know is still very little and is mostly historical interpretation from early social scientists. At the same time, we have a number of interesting theories, posed not only by social scientists but by observers in some of the great literature of the twentieth century.

**The Context: How Different Bureaucracies and Political Systems Evolve. What We Know**

In observing the industrial revolution, early social scientists generally suggested that this development would follow a natural path common to industrializing societies, resulting in a common division of labor (Durkheim 1893), or a ‘rationalization’ of human activities in a standard set of organizational patterns and controls (Weber 1947), or that it would continue along a longer growth path in which human interaction with these ‘alienating’ and elite controlled systems would lead to an evolution in their form (Marx and Engels 1848). There was little belief that a diversity of industrial forms would result. There was also a difference of opinion on whether the technology that observers agreed was turning human beings into appendages of the productive machine with little real control of it as ‘alienated’ creatures (Marx and Engels 1868) or ‘organization’ people (Whyte 1986) or robotic pathological creatures that one sociologist termed ‘robopaths’ (Yablonsky 1972) could be controlled.

The industrialization of Soviet Russia in an authoritarian form, and the emergence of industrial bureaucracies in Asia (Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, Korea, and now mainland China) in ways that differed from American and Western European forms of bureaucratic oversight and control of both public and private bureaucracies, began to challenge the idea of a common form of political oversight and expression of rights within bureaucracies.

At least this small part of the puzzle has apparently been solved, though not widely cited. One breakthrough using techniques of political anthropology in the early 1990s, demonstrated that forms of political and social oversight and control even in the USA and Russia, could still easily be traced back to factors of material culture – climate, land, and materials – that set pre-conditions for even industrial technology (Lempert 1993, 1995). In cold climates, the Russian model of social and political organization was one of ‘industrial igloos’ with centralized and communal living and

decision making in order to minimize overall risk while protecting common resources, in contrast to the independent household and household business that could promote a system of social contract in the warmer climates, better soils and lower risk environments of the USA and Western Europe. Rather than individuals choosing ideologies, the causal arrow started with material conditions patterning political and social institutions. This approach has now entered the popular literature in a cross between human geography and anthropology (Diamond 2005).

At the same time, ethnographic observation was that industrialization had also altered the influence of material conditions on production and the democratic ideals of 'social contract' that had promoted political oversight and individual freedoms in the USA were becoming an artifact of earlier conditions that were disappearing. Since political structures directly reflected the concentration of economic productive power and the sources of coercion that backed it up (in earlier times, individual weapons and local militia to protect one's land; now advanced technologies of weaponry requiring high investments and under control of small groups), one prediction was that the global system that would emerge would reflect that concentration of power, regardless of which culture held it and regardless of whether more people were involved in 'post-industrial', independent, 'information age' technologies. While political economists and social economists argued that rights followed distribution of wealth, the view of a political anthropologist was that the deeper structure of the system patterning the distribution of wealth was dependent on the key economic productive units and on the units of coercion (Lempert 1995). Their size and centralized control would inevitably frustrate any attempts at public oversight or moves towards greater political and social equality, despite the hope or belief that human choice could change the pattern. Earlier anthropologists made similar observations on the central control of key water and transport infrastructure in early state formation and how it had patterned the political and social hierarchies of those eras (Harris 1977).

What was still not explained was why some cultures still made different choices in the same environments, whether all industrializing societies actually fit the theory (*e.g.*, Sweden, China, and Japan), and whether causality really worked only in one direction in human

systems (environment and technology patterning the systems) or whether learning and planning could alter the choice of technologies and political-social control systems.

### **The Theories and Visions of Evolution and Change of Industrial Systems: Visions of ‘Progress’ and End of Progress**

Given experiences and advances in the past twenty years, we can now take some different conceptions of how social processes work and combine them with earlier theories about convergence and diffusion to come up with a set of hypotheses to test where industrial societies (now the majority of humans on our planet) are headed. To make it easier to think about, we can use two cultural references to reframe the issue and to focus on quality of human existence and human aspirations; those of Kafka and Orwell. Do we live in Franz Kafka's world where human social forms are converging and ‘locked’, like his metaphorical ‘Castle’ of uncontrollable bureaucracy, or do we live in George Orwell's world where humans still believe they can choose different patterns and where there is still some interaction and diffusion?

*If we live in Kafka's World of the Social ‘Lock’ (the Castle), social choices are pre-determined and they are the ‘worst’ choice.* The fact that Franz Kafka's descriptions of Czech and European bureaucracies in the 1920s as that of a ‘Castle’ or locked place (Kafka 1922) are now so universally read (recently translated in Viet Nam) and admired, suggests that uncontrollable bureaucracies are a universal human phenomenon, emerging everywhere in the same ruthless form. Though it may be that human beings actually like or can be adapted to live in such systems and are preparing for a future in which they live an almost robotic existence, there is a competing belief that the essence of human nature as a part of nature, naturophilic and ‘free’, is also a universal human good and that human beings would rationally choose something else but that we cannot; that something in our being drives us to what we even see as a dark and bleak vision (for some) of our existence. The social science theory that encapsulates Kafka's view is:

**1. Technological societies mechanistically converge to a single form of political and social administrative control, driven by technology:** Leading convergence theorists (cited above) believed that industrial technology and the ability of a small group to gain control of economic and military technology (if not the neces-

sity of a small group to manage and run it) was driving industrial societies to a single norm. Those applying the theory in comparing the USA and Soviet Russia back in the 1960s used common terms to describe commonalities like the 'Red Executive' (Granick 1960), or 'USSR Incorporated' (Meyer 1961). Since these two competing industrial empires were already similar, with the only real political pluralism being bureaucratic competition among large institutional structures and elites controlling them, it seemed only a matter of time before they would become mirror images or join each other.

*If we live in Orwell's World (Negative Utopian)*: An equally popular description of the evolution of modern systems was offered by George Orwell in his parable, *Animal Farm* (Orwell 1946) as well as in other works like *1984* (Orwell 1948). Orwell also described a convergence, but the one resulting not simply from a technological imperative that made other forms of social organization impossible, but rather from the inability of popular movements to implement and institutionalize real reforms towards either political or economic equality. Instead, the result he envisioned was ultimate absorption of alternative systems into the model of the corporatist 'administrative state' (Dimock 1951) or 'new industrial state' (Galbraith 1967). Anthropologists have even used his model to describe the absorption of the Russian empire into the 'New World Order' (Lempert 1995) with the suggestion that Orwell's negative utopian totalitarian state may be the form that the global order will take because of the ability of elites for increasing their powers in such a system. The two social science processes of diffusion-convergence that could be said to be Orwellian type 'nightmares' (for some) are:

**2. Competition between industrial systems ends in a fusion, where the system of the victor transforms weaker (dependent) systems, but where this global system, facing no competition, and having no long-term perspective, becomes authoritarian in a two-way diffusion of forms.** The description of globalization that Orwell presents in *Animal Farm* is one where economically successful Western industrial countries defeat less successful 'developing' countries that sought more participatory democratic alternatives. The result is a unified, hierarchical control system with the leaders of both the previously stronger and previously weaker systems ultimately toasting each other and sharing experiences on the best forms of social control over their workers/citizens. Social

scientists describe this as a form of dependency theory (Frank 1972; Wallerstein 1979) and have confirmed Orwell's prediction in studies of the transformation of the former Soviet Union, Viet Nam, China, and other countries now absorbed into the global economy (Lempert 1995). However, the academic models do not take the additional step that Orwell suggests, of leaders of different industrial societies sharing ideas on how they can each best reinforce their controls over their populations. Though Orwell's story brings us to the present day (60+ years after his prediction) with the fusion of systems through globalization, the implication is that the victorious system is only more successful economically and in the short run. The resulting order is not an equitable or free society that people would choose given the chance to consider and design other possibilities. Political economists would call this a 'weak equilibrium' and not an optimal one. This does not necessarily mean that other forms are not possible or that paths to achieve them have been pre-empted (though it may). One description of the sharing of control strategies that is occurring has been an attempt at 'harmony' of approaches and the suppression of individualism as a means of creating 'harmony' (Nader 1990).

**3. Competition between industrial systems ends in a partial fusion, where different parts of the merged system remain locked in perpetual military competition and fear on which they remain co-dependent and that promotes authoritarian controls in different parts, with efficient forms of authoritarian control diffusing between different parts.** The description that Orwell presents in *1984*, two years after *Animal Farm*, of an industrial, authoritarian world in which there is perpetual warfare between trading partners in a kind of managed global control system, is also one in which there is a diffusion of forms of control between countries and where industrial countries are distinguishable only by name. This negative utopia is also an 'equilibrium' and also a weak one that individuals would not choose as an optimal world, and also leaves open the suggestion that other forms may be possible (though they may not be). Social scientists in the 1960s and 1970s described this as the 'permanent war economy' (Melman 1974) that is now apparently becoming the permanent resource war economy of structured competition among shifting global industrial powers (with China rising as a world power, and the European community forming as a bloc), and in which perpet-

ual enemies are necessary to maintain internal controls among the 'power elites' in each country who control the major military, economic, and political/educational/information institutions (Mills 1956). Influence and diffusion works in different directions and the leaders of the system are co-dependent on more authoritarian weaker industrial countries to justify their suppression of democratic accountability and participatory mechanisms. A recent corollary of this theory is the idea of 'blowback'; that mechanisms used to control other, weaker cultures in the periphery of the empire would ultimately come to be used in the center itself and characterize the main culture (McCoy 2009; Johnson 2000). Others suggest that 'internal enemies' ('terrorist organizations') take the place of state enemies when states converge into a global system.

What these negative utopian theories of industrialization suggest is that industrial societies have a natural tendency to become rigid, self-protective, and unaccountable. The concentration of institutional power in military and productive technology inevitably corrupts and prevents any attempts at real oversight. By doing so, that also condemns these systems to collapse because they are unable to respond to changing environmental conditions (*e.g.*, peak oil, global warming) or social conditions (overpopulation, over-consumption). They lead to collapse and then resume as before. That leaves another theory to test.

*If we live in the world Orwell hopes for (Positive Utopian), where human intellect and planning achieve long-term best solutions:* While globalism may or may not be inevitable, that still does not answer the question of whether the victorious form of globalism could retain and expand the protections and oversight existing in 'democratic' countries prior to the collapse of Soviet Russia, or whether the ultimate system would look more like a hybrid, or even ultimately become like Soviet Russia itself on a larger scale. Anthropologists today seem to have convinced themselves that human beings can imagine and then create any type of society and that culture starts in the mind and then patterns the material world; a reversal of almost all of the previous assumptions and observations of social science. Their belief, subject to testing, is that:

**4. Learning and social evolution occurs, with diffusion of forms of flexible and responsive/accountable oversight from the 'best' systems to systems that are failures as a way of learning from failure and assuring a long-term optimal sustainable**

**industrial systems.** Given the visible suffering caused in authoritarian bureaucratic industrial systems as a result of their inability to make long-term plans or to assess long-term needs (in fact, the reason for being they gave as their justification, as different from 'market oriented' 'democratic' systems that would respond only to short-term needs and destabilize themselves), the theory of social evolution and learning suggests that new forms of industrial societies should now emerge that are able to make long-term plans and that are accountable to the full range of human needs in a way that balances long-term and short-term goals. From Marx to Toffler, there have been theories of social evolution and progress in 'dialectical' response to failures, showing evidence of learning (Marx and Engels 1868; Toffler 1980).

How do we test these four theories in a uni-dimensional world? We look at the internal processes in multiple countries at different points in the global system and over time.

### **KINDS OF COMPARISONS THAT CAN TEST THE THEORIES**

Though the question about social change in urban industrial cultures is really an anthropological question, anthropologists and other social scientists have shied away from studying it. But we do have data and methodologies in anthropology that can be used to answer these questions.

Why have we yet to do this work? Today the majority of humans live in urban environments, making us an 'urban' species of several (or one emerging?) types of urban-industrial cultures. Yet, anthropologists have tended to focus on rural-non-industrial cultures rather than practicing what Laura Nader refers to as 'studying up'; viewing industrial societies as cultures demanding holistic study, with methods and theories that incorporated and complemented those of other social sciences (Nader 1982). In almost the same way that the anthropological data base Human Relations Area Files promoted comparisons of kinship patterns over dozens of human cultures and the extraction of some basic principles,<sup>1</sup> we can look at as many cases for industrial cultures and their governance/administrative systems to try to draw conclusions about which patterns are chosen and how they came about. To do this requires that anthropology go back to systematic comparisons, in place of just producing isolated ethnographies, if we are to draw conclu-

sions on overall principles and mechanisms that have universal application.

In fact, the study of diffusion, convergence, dependency, and inter-dependency, and of control and oversight systems and relations in industrial societies lends itself particularly well to anthropological approaches. The theories presented above can be tested by the same kinds of comparative, qualitative and systematized approaches that anthropologists have used for interpretations and uncovering other kinds of patterns.

Since addressing issues of control mechanisms and participation is a relatively new area for social anthropologists, we need to consider the kinds of comparisons that are possible, the data that is available, and the ways that it can be collected. That will require both serendipitous use of qualitative observations by anthropologists and by other social science colleagues as well as planned study.

Here, I suggest how some serendipitous data collection using anthropological methods as a participant observer can be transformed into systematic findings.

In work to structure bureaucratic control mechanisms in countries seeking to 'develop', funded by countries that consider themselves 'developed', for example, I have found myself being requested by international agencies to promote devices of 'accountability' or 'anti-corruption' or 'public control' or 'democratization' that actually recreate the very same control mechanisms that were used by 'authoritarian' states to create the illusion of public accountability in the past, but to do so now under a foreign label. After multiple experiences in several countries, this offers a kind of participant observation data that is standard in the field of anthropology and that can be applied to the understanding of transitions in various countries.

In experience taking disputes before Ombudspersons and internal investigators (Inspectors General, Hot Lines, Anti-Fraud units, *etc.*) and before various international and national bodies for sometimes similar claims, I have also been able to compile a set of participant observation experiences on how organizations respond to similar claims and what the key factors are within those systems that effect the outcomes. These activities are public and fully open to public reporting in full compliance with both the ethics protocols of anthropological reporting as well as public reporting consistent with democratic processes and protections of domestic and interna-

tional laws. Such data can be used freely in reporting on public officials while protecting the privacy of individual citizens making claims and serving as informants about the processes.

In Moldova, for example, the United Nations has worked vigorously to establish 'ombudsperson' offices and 'hotlines' that are almost exact duplicates of the 'People's Control Commissions' (N.K.K., the 'Narodniy Kontrol Kommissi') and 'Workers' Peasant Inspections', (RabKrIn, the 'Raboche-Krestianskie Inspektsii'), that I observed 20 years ago in field work in the Soviet Union. Then, they were described in the West as mechanisms that were forms of State oppression and control. Now, they are described as forms of the Western accountability and democracy (!). Indeed, even in their original incarnations, these mechanisms ironically were copied by Lenin from Western ideas and placed into the Soviet Union as models of people's 'democracy' (Lenin 1923) and were largely criticized in the West as being examples of bureaucratic authoritarianism. These institutions were easily corrupted by authorities and turned against citizens because they were internal government agencies, subject to government supervision, paid by government funds, and with little real public oversight or involvement.

Several bureaucratic 'control' or 'oversight' mechanisms have similarly 'diffused' between countries at different times and have both been transformed within their new (and original) contexts. They have been described as either 'democratic' or 'authoritarian' based on the observers' perspective as much or more so than on the objective outcomes. Examining these processes offers some data as to the processes of convergence and diffusion.

In similar reversals, within international institutions largely supported by the Western countries, and within the USA itself as well as international organizations largely funded by the United States and Europe, procedures that were once considered Soviet and authoritarian are also being adopted, sometimes under almost the same names (such as the Department of 'Homeland Security' in the USA on the model of the 'Committee for State Security' [Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti], *i.e.* the KGB). In some cases, new laws and bureaucracies in Western countries are replacing or overriding what previously were direct forms of public oversight through courts and legal challenges before juries, through public

citizen investigation commissions, and wide ranging civilian press and civil society information access that has largely been curtailed or eroded. Objective measurements can document both the movements away from established democratic participatory procedures and where such approaches were previously found (*e.g.*, whether procedures in the USA and Western Europe are becoming more like those of the Soviet Union as well as whether procedures in Russia and the Newly Independent States are becoming more like those previously in the USA, as well as which ones and their results).

There are problems in taking bits of systems out of context, but by taking the whole function and look at the system – such as anti-corruption; bureaucratic oversight – one can compare some features of evolution of industrial states to see which directions they are moving. While political scientists and lawyers focus on the written or paper forms of laws, constitutions, and organizational names, the advantage that anthropologists have is that they can analyze the actual relationships in context and isolate the very factors that underlie ‘exchange relationships’, power, and outcomes. The overall ethos of the system requires a broader examination (Foucault 1977).

Not only did Lenin copy several types of ‘democratic’ mechanisms and import them to the Soviet Union from the USA – ideas of jury system, tribunals, party caucus and selection, indirect elections (President and Senate) – but the Russian legal system itself bore the terminology and imprint of the French (and earlier, the Roman) legal systems. Systems of university hiring and control on both sides of the iron curtain evolved from similar histories in the Catholic Church and bore very similar imprints (Russians called their university departments, ‘kafedra’ or ‘cathedrals’). Thus, social science needs to look deeper and at the overall context.

Comparisons are important not only between the former line of ‘First’ and ‘Second’ world or of ‘West’ and ‘East’ but also among former colonial empires where similar systems were and are being diffused (with the Philippines and USA having the same Presidential model of government and same legal systems, as one example). In some cases, the absence or elimination of one or more features on one side transforms a ‘democratic’ system into an oligarchy or military dictatorship, and/or one of nepotistic clans.

Particularly interesting phenomena for anthropologists to investigate now are not only how the facades of citizen controls are being adapted in international organizations and developing cultures without any of the deep structure to make them work (sham Parliaments or legal systems that only symbolically represent excluded publics who have no financial resources, skills, or 'real' military power to make a difference, or where these institutions themselves control no resources or coercive power and are subservient to it), but also how the 'democratization' of Western institutions has brought in people trained in authoritarian states to run formerly democratic institutions. It may be that in the rush to place Eastern European lawyers, government leaders, and administrators in the European Commission or in Eastern European foundations (such as the Soros Foundation) or to allow for foreign non-governmental organizations to be locally managed in places like Southeast Asia or China, authoritarian ideologies have now diffused backwards throughout these systems.

### **METHODS**

To enter bureaucracies and study them effectively as social scientists may require special training that combines a social science discipline with a second professional discipline such as law, business administration, or public administration, and may also require several years of experiences with a variety of systems. The era of single ethnographies may be over when it comes to studying industrial systems since one cannot simply enter a bureaucracy as a participant observer and expect to be able to make effective comparisons of multiple systems. But, social science can also conduct studies by testing responses of systems, by throwing challenges at them from the outside and measuring how they react.

This article, below, presents the participatory observation data collected from several systems (the data reported here is on claims brought before organizations, though the author has also worked on projects to structure systems in many countries, not listed in this paper) over many years. It demonstrates how that diverse data can be standardized for comparisons. This anthropological approach may be more effective than the simple selection of case studies or theoretical argument used in other disciplines (O'Leary 2005; Jackson 2009).

The key to drawing inferences is then presented in an additional section. This article offers a new research tool to dissect how institutions operate; separating their actions into the key characteristics that reveal whom the institutions are protecting and how their ultimate decisions reflect those pressures/incentives. While other social science fields have drawn from observations (*e.g.*, Sperling 2009) and while anthropology itself uses case studies in single ethnographic, cultural contexts (Wedel 1998; Lempert 1995), only a tool that can standardize such cases can allow for larger comparisons and for the drawing of larger conclusions. This is an inductive and iterative process that looks backwards from experience, draws out the data, and then codifies it. Such is the social science of contemporary observations of the historical processes that are ongoing before us.

Presented below is an extract of such data, and then – a codification of findings that makes the results clear (in the form of a tool that codifies the data).

### **DATA**

The two tables below briefly summarize a data set of information on how two oversight sub-systems (that of an internal ‘Ombudsperson’ and that of internal legal ‘Anti-Fraud’ ‘Inspector’ with ‘Hot-Line’ investigators) routinely found in a variety of contemporary bureaucracies, actually respond to a set of overlapping and similar problems. Though the data here was not the result of an experimental design to present similar problems over time to a set of institutions to understand how they react and how oversight is changing in these institutions and countries, it is possible to use a record of historical data to construct what is much the same as a forward-run social experiment. The goal of this data presentation is to test a recurrent problem in public oversight – that of administrative agency falsification and thwarting of public transparency of reports exposing failures and mismanagement, including the inability of these administrative agencies to follow their own regulations for protecting diverse opinions and the public. (The full data set is available from the author.)

Note that three items (starred) appear in two tables since they were taken both to an Ombudsperson and to an Anti-Fraud Investigative Unit in the same agency. One issue was before two different agencies, the implementing agent (ILO) and the donor (U.S. Department of Labor).

**Ombudsperson**

<i>Or- gani- zation</i>	<i>Problem, Year</i>	<i>Response of System</i>	<i>Other Available Re- courses and Re- sponse</i>	<i>How Problem was or was not Resolved</i>
1	2	3	4	5
Uni- versity Ph.D. Pro- gram	Suppression of views (Pressures on career), 1989	Inaction: Blame the Victim (‘You should have chosen a school where they agree with your views’)	Advisor and Class- mates offered defense and support (political pressure)	Stale- mated
World Bank*	Country Pres- sure to ap- prove kick- backs, falsifi- cation of loans as condition of payment, 1997	Inaction; Blacklist- ing?	U.S. Federal Courts; U.S. Government agencies (Treasury Department; FBI); Congress had legal responsibility but did nothing. Press claimed interest but never produced stories; Information circulated on Internet; Government Ac- countability Project promoted the issue to change legislation	A new law was passed but the U.S. govern- ment has yet to en- force it to solve the problem
Interna- tional La- bour Organi- zation (ILO) **	Censorship of ‘independent’ evaluation report, sup- pression of findings, dis- continuation after draft report submit- ted, 2005	Inaction; Blacklist- ing?	[U.S. Department of Labor, the donor agency. See chart below.]	Violations continue

1	2	3	4	5
United Nations	Violation of internal UN regulations and codes of conduct resulting in breach of employment contract, 2009	Lengthy Delay and burdensome requests (harassment?); Inaction	Hiring of attorney to announce intent to commence lawsuit; U.S. Ambassador to U.N. Congressperson	? [To be seen]

### Anti-Fraud Unit/Hotline/Inspector General

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Problem, Year</i>	<i>Response of System</i>	<i>Other Available Recourses and Response</i>	<i>How Problem was or was not Resolved</i>
1	2	3	4	5
U.S. Agency for International Development	Censorship of 'independent' evaluation report, reversal and suppression of findings to promote legal abuses, design of system to use private contracting firms at double the cost to evade public transparency and professional protections in the 'private' sector	Threats to complainant ('We learned to fight in the gutters and will use those tactics on you'); Inaction	Hiring of attorney to announce intent to commence lawsuit against the private consulting firm; Design and publication in several journals of professional ethics code to protect professionalism even with transfer of work to private sector	Payment received but Violations continue and the system remains unchanged; Anyone using the published ethics codes is routinely screened out of employment
World Bank*	Country Pressure to approve kickbacks, falsification of loans as condition of payment, 1997	Investigate the complainant instead of the wrongdoers and create pressure to agree to the legal violations	[See above chart]	Violations continue

1	2	3	4	5
U.S. Department of Labor**	Censorship of 'independent' evaluation report, suppression of findings, discontinuation after draft report submitted, 2005	Justify the legal violations	[See above chart, for the implementing agency, the ILO]	Violations continue
U.N. Development Programme	Multiple examples of violations of U.N. regulations, international laws and waste on project design and implementation in several countries, 2005–2008	Inaction	Discussions with previous U.N. Administrator for Advice; Letter to the Assistant U.N. Administrator; U.S. Ambassador to U.N.; Published articles explaining problems and designing new standards and oversight mechanisms	Violations continue
European Commission***	Censorship of 'independent' evaluation report, reversal and suppression of findings to promote legal abuses, design of system to use private contracting firms at double the cost to evade public transparency and professional protections in the 'private' sector, 2007–2009	Justify the legal violations	European Parliament; European Board of Auditors; Member Governments turned a deaf ear; Small response of the press	Violations continue

**A TOOL TO CODIFY THE OBSERVATIONS:  
THE INDICATOR TO REVEAL AND CODIFY  
UNOBTRUSIVE CONTROL SYSTEMS  
OF BUREAUCRATIC OVERSIGHT**

Given the difficulty of taking observations from multiple organizational and cultural contexts and trying to draw conclusions about how a variety of systems are changing over time (whether they are converging, mutually influencing each other, or diffusing cultural forms in one direction), it is important to try to capture the qualities of how a sub-system works (the exchange relationships and behaviors that occur within that system) in as simple and ‘objective’ a way as possible.

Below is a set of eight questions in three categories that are designed to ‘score’ bureaucratic sub-systems on their tendency to either protect bureaucrats (the ‘State’) or to protect the interests of public victims/complainants/professionals and the overall public. The purpose of these questions is to try to place cases on a spectrum that can distinguish whether they achieve their stated objective of effective public oversight (earning most of the eight points) or whether they actually do the opposite and act as an ‘unobtrusive’ control mechanism of the bureaucracy itself; designed to fail, to frustrate claimants and to deter oversight, while creating the illusion that they exist to protect the public.

Though there may be more than eight questions or three dimensions, after analyzing the above data set I have identified three different categories of relationships and behaviors that help to scale the observations: whether the right resources can be drawn in for the objective of the oversight (a full investigation of the problem), whether the interests of the public or victims is really the priority or whether the incentive system places other interests first, and whether real structural reforms can actually occur. The evidence of how this works to actually create a spectrum of scoring, is shown in the next section. The scoring scale looks like this.

*Scale:*

6.5 – 8 points	Effective Participatory Public Oversight
3.5 – 6 points	Partial Oversight
0 – 3 points	Unobtrusive Control Mechanism Designed to Achieve the Reverse of its Claim

Note that the indicator is not an absolute scale. Like most indicators, answers to each question would also need to be ‘calibrated’ to assure that different observers make the exact same determinations. These questions do not determine how ‘democratic’ a system is on a particular scale or whether a country is more or less ‘democratic’. Such comparisons have proven to be culturally loaded and ineffective. That requires a much larger project and more measures. What the indicator does, is start identifying the sub-systems that are part of that determination and that ultimately need to be evaluated as both a list and in terms of the overall interaction to achieve measurable results.

The questions and categories are as follows.

**I. Adequacy and Flexibility of Resources to Match the Investigative Need.**

**Question 1.** *Allocation of Resources.* The amount of resources allocated for the investigation is directly related to the harm (including the aggregate of similar types of harms), though some kind of contingency fee for the investigators or salary determined by the costs of the harm, rather than part of a competition for a set pool of resources with funds prioritized among competing cases.

Scoring: Yes – 1  
Debatable – 0.5  
No – 0

**Question 2.** *Professional Selection: Competence.* The victim/complainant can choose the level of professional skill required for the investigation and can be assured that the investigator will possess that competence (legal, financial, etc.).

Scoring: Yes – 1  
Debatable – 0.5  
No – 0

**Question 3.** *Aggregation of Claims to Protect Multiple Victims.* Investigation of harms is not limited to individual requests, but each call for an investigation triggers a review of multiple potential victims and beneficiaries whose claims can all be aggregated as a class.

Scoring: Yes – 1  
Debatable – 0.5  
No – 0

**II. Control of and Biases/Incentives in the Investigation:  
Whether the Interests of the Public and Victims are the Priority.**

**Question 4.** *Standard of Pay.* The salary and hiring of investigator/advocates is related to the success they have in outcomes that protect the beneficiaries, rather than simply on time or set salary or other discretion.

Scoring: Yes – 1  
Debatable – 0.5  
No – 0

**Question 5.** *Salary Source.* Either the victims, from funds derived from the benefits they get from the service, or a group of representative citizens judging each case (a jury) determine the compensation for the investigator/advocate, rather than the agency or government, itself, whose actions are those being monitored.

Scoring: Yes – 1  
Debatable – 0.5  
No – 0

**Question 6.** *Workplace/Site of Investigator and Conditions.* The investigators do not have offices in the organizations they are investigating so as not to share facilities with those over whom they have oversight, nor are they part of the same union, nor share any other commonalities.

Scoring: Yes – 1  
Debatable – 0.5  
No – 0

**III. Impact and System Change: Whether the System is Designed to Promote Structural Change or to Suppress It.**

**Question 7.** *Independent Legal Actions or other alternatives are Available and Not Hindered.* The investigation does not replace or delay independent private legal actions taken before courts and decided by neutral groups of citizens rather than by government selected judges following government determined rules or is not hin-

dered by other procedures. It is simply an additional option for the victim to choose that does not in any way prejudice other investigations and challenges.

Scoring: Yes – 1  
 Debatable – 0.5  
 No – 0

**Question 8.** *Linkage to Systemic Changes.* The result of each investigation is directly linked to a procedure for systemic changes in rules and regulations to prevent the overall type of harm from occurring, rather than limited to individual claims that can recur and must be investigated again.

Scoring: Yes – 1  
 Debatable – 0.5  
 No – 0

**How Some Organizations and Mechanisms Do.** The table below shows the distribution of scores on several kinds of subsystems over time, from best to worst. Some of the mechanisms that score well are actually now ‘extinct’ cultural forms that existed historically in our lifetimes but that have now begun to disappear. (For a longer description of some of these mechanisms, see Lempert 1994 and the larger literature on law and accountability.) This demonstrates that the indicator and the table can serve as an effective tool for showing trends in transference and disappearance of cultural forms in the area of bureaucratic oversight and public accountability.

<i>Classification</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Where it is Found</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	2	3	4
<b>Effective Participatory Public Oversight</b>	Private Attorney General, Jury Nullification, Class Actions, Contingency Fees	<b>Extinct</b> system: Found in 1960s in California and some other states, though limited, devolving into system below	7.0–8.0 points (link to overall legal changes are debatable)
	Grand Jury Citizen Investigative Panel	<b>Extinct:</b> eighteenth century in some New England communities	6.5 points (public decides here not the individual victim)

1	2	3	4
<b><i>Partial Oversight</i></b>	Contemporary Class Action and Civil Suit Mechanisms on Government Failures, existing in parallel with other mechanisms, below	USA in several states but continues to be eroded by governmental interference in public choice	4.5–5.5 points
<b><i>Unobtrusive Control Mechanism Designed to Achieve the Reverse of its Claim (Essentially acts to protect the most powerful wrongdoers)</i></b>	Anti-Corruption Commission Standing Alone as part of the government prosecution system (that can override any private lawsuits if such mechanisms exist)	Universal (Governments and International Organizations) – Being diffused from Western countries as a form of ‘democratic accountability’	1.0–1.5 points (half or full points on question 3 and maybe 6)
	Hot-line	Universal: Being diffused from Western countries as a form of ‘democratic accountability’	1.0–2.5 points (Questions 3, 7 and maybe 6); higher points in countries where class action suits (still) exist
	Inspector General in an agency	Universal: Being diffused from Western countries as a form of ‘democratic accountability’	1.5 points (Full point on Question 7, maybe on 3)
	Administrative Courts	Universal: Being diffused from Western countries as a new way to quickly resolve disputes but not to investigate or change misadministration or corruption	1.5 points – essentially an internal government mechanisms to resolve individual cases

1	2	3	4
	Ombudsperson	Universal: Being diffused from Western countries as a form of 'democratic empowerment'	0 points
	People's Control Commission/ RabKrIn	Former Soviet Union (equivalent of Inspector General and now being resurrected under new names)	0 points

The indicator is not perfect because it cannot measure entire societies or cultures at once, but starts with institutions within them that may not be representative of the whole. This reflects a common concern of all anthropological data: whether a micro-cosm under study is actually reflective of the entire culture around it and in what way. In a complex society like the USA, for example, there is still a wide variation in which states use the different mechanisms above as well as which apply to the national government and to international agencies under which the country operates. Some mechanisms may exist widely (like class actions in the USA) but now they are limited to only certain harms. This measure is only a start at looking at the overall system. But, like all anthropological measures, one starts with a sub-system or micro-cosm as a way to start to sample the cultural whole.

The findings generated by this table are fascinating in themselves for what they say about changes over time and in certain countries. Starting at the top and moving downward, it is clear that the strong public control systems that existed in the West as recently as the Cold War are now extinct or becoming extinct as cultural forms. That is a rapid and probably unexpected finding for many observers. At the same time, starting at the bottom and moving upwards reveals that the authoritarian mechanisms of 'peoples' control' in Soviet Russia is becoming a universal form but under different names, in international organizations and in many developing countries whether or not they were part of the Soviet Russian Empire or former (current?) Western colonies. Authoritarian controls found in Soviet Russia (where the State/bureaucracy acts to

protect itself, limiting investigations of misconduct to inequalities among colleagues in the form of embezzlement, rather than violations of its own regulations or abuses of the public trust, and where it prepares harassment against any public complainants) are now diffusing into international organizations and countries everywhere.

### CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

There is no fully clear answer to the questions posed in the 1960s and 1970s about convergence or diffusion among different industrial systems, and this article addresses only one focus area, that of political administrative bureaucracies, rather than both economic and political institutions and their social contexts, but there are some indications that systems previously accountable are now much more like the authoritarian, non-transparent bureaucratic systems that they used to criticize. Depending on how much change one perceives in industrializing cultures like Russia, China, Kazakhstan, and Viet Nam, one might come to a different conclusion about whether we live in Kafka's world or in Orwell's one. What the data does suggest, however, is that we are not moving away from their dark visions of negative utopia but are probably accelerating towards them. Globalism is undermining democratic controls and there are many potential explanations.

What we are not seeing is any indication that there are processes underway where human beings are learning from the collapse of authoritarian state systems to assure that industrial cultures began to plan and assure their flexibility to change. Many observations suggest the opposite.

What we are seeing may be the 'end' of human 'progress'. It looks like we live in Orwell's permanent war economy (the third of the four explanatory theories presented in this article); with data confirming the darker fears of human nature offered by some twentieth-century authors and warnings. Despite 'victory', the democratic protections of First World systems have rapidly eroded.

Though social scientists like to believe that we can consciously shape or change culture or reality, it looks like our technologies and material environments control us and lock in our choices, even to the extent of trapping us in systems that will continually collapse and that appear to thwart our (stated) underlying aspirations for

human freedom and development (that apparently are only illusions about who we are as a species).

Though this article does not examine whether it is the specific technology and environment of industrial production that is creating these controls, a natural process of empire and colonial relations that occurs independently of industrialization and technology, or some combination of these elements, we are still confronted with these results and their implications for beliefs of and desires for human freedom and dignity.

Anthropology of the 'other' can attempt to be neutral and non-invasive, but when we deal with our own modern societies, there is no barrier to social science as a tool to action. As scholars, we have a responsibility to protect the vulnerable societies we study while also intervening as educators to lead our own societies to improve. That is our role in our society. The question that is not yet answered is whether we actually have any role at all or any real power in changing anything in industrial cultures or empires, and if so, how the mechanisms work and can be effected. Perhaps, we do but are patterned not to act. A pessimistic conclusion from the data above, given the large amounts of energy from scholars in the 1960s and 1970s to promote a different kind of industrial culture, is that human choice and our role as scholars may be irrelevant in shifting what seems to be a set pattern.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Human Relations Area Files, Carol and Melvin Embers, [www.yale.edu/hraf](http://www.yale.edu/hraf)

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