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Łukasz Perlikowski (2023). *Teoretyczne podstawy badania stabilności politycznej*. **Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, pp. 193**

Political stability has always been one of the central yet most elusive categories in political science. For centuries – from Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics* to Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Machiavelli's *Discourses* – thinkers have struggled to define what it means for a political order to endure. In the twentieth century, systems theorists such as David Easton and Niklas Luhmann tried to model stability in terms of inputs, outputs, and feedback loops. Yet the basic tension remains: is stability a mere absence of change or a positive capacity to channel change without collapse? Łukasz Perlikowski's *Teoretyczne podstawy badania stabilności politycznej* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2023) offers one of the most sustained attempts to resolve this tension. The book reconstructs the theoretical bases for studying political stability and proposes a new conceptual architecture that treats stability not as a fixed outcome but as a dynamic potential embedded in structures and processes. Perlikowski's stated purpose is "to produce a study that brings a new view of the structure of reality" while explicitly declining to treat stability as a value in itself (pp. 10–13). This review argues that the book makes a major conceptual contribution by reframing stability as both phenomenon and potential, though its high level of theoretical abstraction limits its immediate empirical uptake. Nevertheless, it offers a powerful analytical toolkit for political theorists and comparativists alike.

At the heart of Perlikowski's book is the claim that stability must be approached in two complementary ways: as an observable phenomenon and as a latent potential (pp. 92–93). This distinction, developed at length in Chapter III, reorients the study of stability from static indicators toward dynamic capacities. Stability as a phenomenon refers to the visible endurance of structures, institutions, or regimes; stability as potential points to their capacity to absorb change without collapsing. Perlikowski argues that without

this dual framing, research risks mistaking temporary equilibrium for systemic resilience. In his words, "political stability as a phenomenon and as a potential" is the key to understanding how systems can be both ordered and adaptable (pp. 93–100).

To operationalize this idea, Perlikowski turns to systems theory as a method of analyzing political life. He explicitly frames the book as an application of "system method" with necessary updates to handle contemporary problems (pp. 10–11, 63–78). The political system is not a static whole but a structure of flows and feedback loops in which decisions are continuously made and revised. Stability, in this sense, emerges not from immobility but from ongoing processes of adjustment, learning, and boundary maintenance. Perlikowski's emphasis on structure as "the game board with its rules" (p. 11) underscores that stability arises from contextual configurations rather than metaphysical essences.

A pivotal innovation in the book is the development of a "matrix of stability" (pp. 12–14, 133–148). By crossing the subjects (who stabilize) and the objects (what is stabilized), Perlikowski generates nine distinct models of political stability. These configurations allow researchers to distinguish, for example, between the stability of a community stabilized by its own members and the stability of governmental organs stabilized by external actors. This matrix offers a more fine-grained picture than traditional models, enabling analysis of how different actors, institutions, and arenas interact to produce – or undermine – stability. Perlikowski argues that

by specifying both the stabilizing subject and the stabilized object, scholars can better identify mechanisms of change and persistence across political systems.

Perlikowski also devotes significant attention to the processes of "stabilization" in decision-making. Chapter IV shows how decisions themselves can function as stabilizing or destabilizing forces depending on their scope, timing, and institutional context (pp. 109–130). This emphasis on process complements the earlier focus on structure, showing that stability is not only a property of arrangements but also of practices. Decisions, policies, and procedural innovations can all act as stabilizing interventions, but they can also create new points of fragility. By moving from a purely structural to a processual lens, Perlikowski provides a richer model of how stability is enacted in real time.

Perhaps the most striking argument in the book is the articulation of the "paradox of political stability" (pp. 151–171). Perlikowski writes that "[t]he more stability we want, the more power we must use to obtain it. The more power is used, the larger the area requiring stability becomes" (pp. 151–152, 179). In other words, efforts to stabilize a system expand the scope and intensity of power, which in turn creates new areas of instability requiring further intervention. This paradox transforms stability from a straightforward goal into a self-referential process: the more one pursues it, the more elusive it becomes. Perlikowski treats this not as an anomaly but as an intrinsic feature of political systems, one that any adequate theory of stability must confront.

The book's strengths are considerable. Above all, Perlikowski succeeds in providing a clear and original conceptual framework. The distinction between stability as a phenomenon and stability as a potential (pp. 92–93) clarifies long-standing ambiguities in the field. His metaphor of structure as a "game board" (p. 11) is effective in communicating complex theoretical ideas in accessible terms. The matrix of stability (pp. 12–14, 133–148) represents a significant advance over one-dimensional approaches, allowing scholars to differentiate between diverse configurations of stabilizing actors and objects. And the paradox of stability (pp. 151–171) adds a dynamic, even dialectical element to the study of stability, inviting new empirical research into how efforts to stabilize may generate countervailing forces.

Another strength is the book's integration of classical, modern, and contemporary perspectives within a single coherent argument. Plato's search for the just order, Aristotle's treatment of regimes, Machiavelli's counsel on political necessity, and Hobbes's focus on sovereign power all hover in the background of Perlikowski's account, though he weaves them into his own theoretical matrix rather than citing them as authorities. This historical sweep allows him to show how stability has been theorized across different intellectual contexts and how his matrix builds on, but also departs from, these traditions.

The book also benefits from its attention to methodology. Perlikowski emphasizes that his use of systems theory is not a rigid template but an adaptable framework (pp. 63–78). He links structural analysis to scenario methods, noting the importance of "scenario method" in exploring potential futures and testing resilience (pp. 100–107, 109–113). This methodological pluralism enhances the book's utility for researchers interested in combining theoretical and empirical approaches.

Yet despite these strengths, this book also faces some limitations. The most significant is its high level of theoretical abstraction. Large portions of the book are devoted to definitional refinement, ontological distinctions, and structural mapping. While these are valuable for conceptual clarity, they make it difficult for empirically oriented scholars to see how to apply the model to concrete cases. For example, the matrix of stability (pp. 12–14, 133–148) is presented as a conceptual device but without coding schemes or indicators that would allow systematic comparative research. Similarly, the discussion of potentiality versus probability (pp. 92–93) is illuminating but lacks operational guidance.

Another limitation is the tension between Perlikowski's analytical stance and the implicit normativity of his findings. Although he explicitly disavows a normative approach (pp. 10–13, 17), the paradox of stability (pp. 151–171) functions as a cautionary narrative about the expansion of power. Readers may thus infer a normative critique of stabilization even if none is intended. This ambiguity does not diminish the book's analytical value but does complicate its interpretation.

A further limitation is the book's relative neglect of non-Western or non-traditional political systems. Perlikowski presents his

matrix and paradox as universally applicable, but the examples and theoretical touchstones are drawn primarily from systems familiar to European and Anglo-American political science. Without testing the framework against other types of regimes, it remains unclear whether the same mechanisms operate globally. To be fair, Perlikowski presents his book as laying theoretical foundations rather than as a comprehensive empirical study, so this omission is understandable. Still, future work could extend his approach to a broader range of contexts.

Finally, while Perlikowski acknowledges contemporary phenomena such as networks and digital transformations (pp. 63–66, 109–113), these are not fully integrated into the model. The rise of platform governance, transnational movements, and algorithmic decision-making poses new challenges to traditional notions of stability. By extending his framework to incorporate these developments, Perlikowski could make it even more relevant to current political realities.

Despite these limitations, Perlikowski's book offers fertile ground for future research. The matrix of stability could be applied to a wide variety of regimes, from consolidated democracies to hybrid and authoritarian systems, to test its robustness. The paradox of stability invites empirical investigation into how states manage the tension between stabilization and power expansion. Scenario methods, briefly discussed in the book (pp. 100–107, 109–113), could be developed into full-fledged foresight tools for policy and governance. Digital politics, network governance, and transnational movements

could be incorporated as new variables of stability, potentially revealing different dynamics than those observed in hierarchical state systems. Finally, future work could clarify the boundary between explanation and evaluation by explicitly distinguishing between stability as a descriptive property and stability as a political good. Such clarifications would help avoid conflating analytic findings with normative judgments – a tension Perlikowski acknowledges but does not fully resolve (pp. 10–13, 17).

Taken together, Perlikowski's arguments form a compelling case for rethinking political stability as a multidimensional, processual phenomenon. By distinguishing stability as a phenomenon from stability as a potential, developing the matrix of stability, and articulating the paradox of stability, he provides political science with a fresh conceptual vocabulary. His synthesis of systems theory, decision-making analysis, and structural thinking also reanimates classical debates about order, power, and legitimacy. At the same time, the book's abstraction and primarily Western orientation limit its accessibility to practitioners and empiricists. Without clearer operational guidelines, the matrix risks remaining a purely theoretical artifact. Yet these weaknesses do not diminish the achievement: Perlikowski has produced a framework that can serve as a foundation for future empirical and comparative research.

For political theorists, the book provides a sophisticated conceptual toolkit; for comparativists, it sketches a research program waiting to be filled in with data.

In this sense, Perlikowski's book resembles the foundational works of systems theory – a dense but generative text whose impact will likely unfold over time. Perlikowski's contribution is to show that stability is not a static state to be measured at a point in time but a dynamic potential that shapes and is shaped by political action. This insight, once operationalized, could transform how scholars and practitioners approach issues from constitutional design to crisis management.

In conclusion, *Teoretyczne podstawy badania stabilności politycznej* is an ambitious and original contribution that deepens theoretical understanding of one of political science's core concepts. By reframing stability as both phenomenon and potential, by introducing a matrix of stability that captures the interaction of subjects and objects, and by articulating a paradox that links stabilization with power expansion, Perlikowski provides a powerful new lens on political life. Future work extending his methodological applicability and empirical reach could make this book a standard reference on political stability for years to come. Even in its current form, it stands as one of the most rigorous theoretical treatments of stability available, offering scholars a foundation from which to explore the complexities of order, change, and resilience in political systems.