

Structural Conditions for Civic Participation: A Framework for Public Discussion

GEN Council Companion Framework — Public Academic Edition

Companion to “Structural Conditions for Economic Participation: A Framework for Public Discussion”

Prepared for submission to academic and media outlets for independent review

Contributors: GEN Council; AI-assisted drafting and synthesis

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Abstract

This paper presents a logical framework for understanding when power over a person’s life is legitimate, what structural barriers prevent it from being so, and what their removal would require. It is the companion to *Structural Conditions for Economic Participation* and shares that framework’s foundation: the proposition that every person has inherent value, developed through dignity and autonomy. Where the economic framework follows that chain into exchange, this framework follows it into governance — the decisions that bind a person whether or not they agreed. It adds one openly stated civic axiom — that binding power must answer to the person bound — and develops a transitive chain through revocability and voice, arriving at *free and equal consent* as the political condition that human dignity requires, and *civic dignity* as the state that condition produces in a person. The framework draws on political philosophy, social choice theory, and disability rights law, and argues that the two branches are jointly necessary: voice without the economic floor is consent under pressure, and a floor without voice is provision at another’s discretion. It is offered for open public review. Every definition is stated, every logical step is shown, and the strongest objections are addressed before the framework is presented. No institution, mechanism, or form of government is identified as the solution; the framework states the requirement any governing arrangement must meet.

Keywords: civic dignity, legitimacy, consent, revocability, voice, exit, equal standing, political obligation, non-domination, economic floor

Preface: Purpose, Scope, and Contributors

This paper presents a logical framework for understanding when governing power is legitimate, what structural barriers to voice do to people, and what their removal would require. It is offered for open public discussion — not as a policy prescription, and not as the product of any institution claiming to have solved the problem it describes.

The framework is institution-agnostic. It does not identify any organization, candidate, party, policy, voting mechanism, or form of government as the solution to the conditions it describes. It identifies structural problems and the logical requirements for addressing them.

Relation to the economic framework. This paper is the companion to *Structural Conditions for Economic Participation*. The two share a trunk — person, inherent value, dignity, autonomy — and fork at a single point. Each is complete as an argument about its own branch; neither is complete as an account of what dignity requires. They are written to be read together (Section D).

Three bodies of work inform and are cited within this paper. Each is independent of the others.

- **Political philosophy** — including the consent tradition and its critics (Hume, 1748; Simmons, 1979), republican theory (Pettit, 1997, 2012), the debate over epistemic authority (Es-

tlund, 2008; Brennan, 2016), and the theory of civic dignity (Ober, 2012) — provides the concepts the civic chain tests itself against.

- **Social choice theory** (Arrow, 1951) provides the formal limits on aggregation that any claim about equal voice must respect.
- **Disability rights law and theory** (Nussbaum, 2006; United Nations, 2006) provides the account of supported decision-making the framework relies on where capacity is limited.

Artificial Intelligence (AI), understood as the cumulative embodiment of human knowledge, reasoning, and problem-solving capabilities as encoded and operationalized within computational systems, contributed to the drafting, synthesis, and structural articulation of this document, as it did for the economic framework. Where AI-assisted synthesis was used, it is understood not as an independent agent generating novel ideas, but as a medium through which existing human knowledge is organized, connected, and applied. The framework's claims are the GEN Council's own.

The document is organized so that a careful reader who disagrees with any step can identify exactly where and why. The framework is a position offered for independent review — not a concluded argument.

A Note on Method: One Foundation, Two Domains

This framework shares the method set out in its companion's Note on Method: looking for structural unity across apparently unrelated fields is a legitimate mode of inquiry, and the connection between human dignity and the conditions of participation in collective life is claimed to be discovered, not constructed.

The civic framework puts that claim to a test the economic framework alone could not, and the test has a result. The civic branch adds one factual premise (C1: some decisions bind a person regardless of their agreement) and one normative premise (C2: binding power is compatible with autonomy only if it answers to the person bound). Pre-publication review showed that C2 does not follow from inherent value alone: fiduciary power, a natural duty of justice, and hypothetical consent are each compatible with inherent value, and none requires that power answer to the person bound. The framework therefore states C2 openly as a civic axiom, a second commitment alongside inherent value, rather than presenting it as a deduction.

The claim this framework makes is accordingly narrower than a single-foundation proof: one stated account of inherent value, one stated civic axiom, and what follows from the pair. That is still a framework, and what remains testable is sharp. If a reviewer finds a further normative premise hidden in C3 through C8, the framework's account of its own structure fails at that step, and the framework should say so.

Section A: Known Objections and Honest Responses

A framework that does not address its own objections is not a serious framework. The following are stated in their strongest form and answered directly, before the framework is presented.

A.1 — Legitimacy comes from competence, not consent.

Objection: Power is legitimate when it is exercised well. If a governing body makes better decisions than the governed would, consent is beside the point — it is a procedural nicety that costs people good outcomes. Brennan (2016) makes the case directly, arguing that widespread voter ignorance undermines the claim that democratic majorities have a right to rule, that citizens have a right to competent government, and that epistocracy — power distributed by knowledge —

may serve that right better than democracy does.

Response: The framework grants that competence matters and denies that it establishes authority. Estlund (2008), who himself holds that democracy's authority depends partly on its tendency to decide well, names the gap precisely: being the better knower does not make one the boss. Expertise can justify deference on a question; it does not transfer the standing to decide a life. And the framework's own chain shows why — a person's value was not assigned by anyone, so no one holds the standing to dispose of it well on their behalf. A governing power that decides wisely for a person who cannot withdraw it has produced good outcomes without producing legitimacy. This is not an argument that outcomes are unimportant. It is that they are a separate question from who is entitled to decide.

A.2 — Majority rule never delivers individual consent.

Objection: You vote, you lose, you are bound anyway. The outcome was imposed on you by other people's preferences. Calling this "consent" describes a procedure for overriding some people's judgment with others' — and dressing the override in the language of agreement is worse than honest coercion.

Response: This is the strongest objection in the section, and the framework concedes the factual claim: an electoral outcome is not the consent of those who opposed it. What the framework locates consent in is not the outcome but the **revocability of the power**. A person bound by a decision they opposed, who retains the standing to contest it again on equal terms and to withdraw the authority that made it, stands in a different relation to that power than one who does not. The distinction the framework draws is between *losing* and *being disposed of*. Where repeated loss results from the design of the channel rather than from disagreement, loss becomes dilution (C.1), and the person is disposed of in the framework's sense. A reader who holds that the two are identical is rejecting the framework at this step, and should say so — that is where the disagreement genuinely lies.

A.3 — Actual consent has almost never been given.

Objection: No founding contract was ever signed, and inferring agreement from residence is a fiction. Hume (1748) dismantled it: a poor peasant or artisan who knows no foreign language or manners, and lives from day to day by the small wages he acquires, has no free choice to leave, any more than a man carried aboard a ship while asleep consents to its master by not drowning himself. Simmons (1979) reached the same conclusion analytically — express or tacit consent is so rarely given that it cannot ground the obligations states claim.

Response: Both are correct, and the framework accepts both without qualification. Note what they establish. Hume and Simmons show that consent has largely been *absent*, not that it is the wrong standard; Simmons himself treats free consent as the most defensible ground for political obligation and concludes that almost no one has supplied it, so that most states lack legitimacy in his sense: the right to impose obligations. In this framework's sense, the same finding means most governing power has not been shown to answer to those it binds.

The natural counterattack is that a standard almost nothing meets is useless. The framework answers as its economic companion does: the claim that no system to date has achieved full economic participation is a historical observation, not a defect in the standard. A standard earns its keep by stating what would satisfy it, which this one does. And Hume's example carries more than he intended — his peasant or artisan cannot exit because of his economic condition. That is the point at which the civic and economic branches meet.

A.4 — Exit is never genuinely available, so the distinction collapses.

Objection: The framework distinguishes power that requires built-in consent from power a person can simply leave. But every territory is claimed; leaving one jurisdiction means entering another. If exit is nowhere real, the criterion sorts nothing.

Response: Exit is a matter of degree, and the framework states the relationship rather than a threshold: **as exit falls, the consent requirement rises**. Where leaving is genuinely available, consent stays live, because a power that must keep earning participation answers to those it governs. Where leaving is unavailable, voice must carry the entire load. Statelessness is the limiting case. This is the same structure the economic framework uses when it holds that exchange ceases to be voluntary as meaningful alternatives disappear — one requirement seen from two sides.

A.5 — “Equal counting” may be formally impossible.

Objection: Arrow (1951) proved that with three or more alternatives, no aggregation rule satisfies unrestricted domain, Pareto efficiency, independence of irrelevant alternatives, and non-dictatorship simultaneously. A framework demanding that voices count equally may be demanding something provably unavailable.

Response: Arrow constrains the aggregation of ranked preferences into a collective ordering. The framework’s requirement is not that aggregation be perfect. It is that **standing be equal** — that no person’s say is structurally weighted above another’s, and that power remain revocable. The theorem shows that no rule meets all of its conditions at once. It does not show that equal standing is unavailable: non-dictatorship, one of Arrow’s own conditions, is a minimal form of equal standing, and many non-dictatorial rules give no person’s say more structural weight than another’s. The theorem is a real limit on what voting can deliver; it is not a limit on whether power answers to the governed.

A.6 — Non-domination is the better account.

Objection: What matters is not consent but freedom from arbitrary power. Pettit (1997) argues that a slave with a benevolent master remains unfree, because the master retains the capacity to interfere. On that account, power constrained to track people’s interests and ideas is compatible with freedom whether or not anyone consented — so the framework’s terminal names the wrong condition.

Response: The framework treats this as the most serious rival, and the distance between them is narrower than it appears — *power that answers to those it binds* and *freedom from arbitrary power* identify much of the same wrong, and Pettit’s benevolent master is the same figure as the competent ruler in A.1. The framework’s claim is that non-arbitrariness cannot be secured without revocability: a constraint that those bound cannot enforce is a promise, and a promise held at the discretion of the promisor is exactly the benevolent master’s position. Consent is what makes non-domination enforceable rather than hoped for. Pettit’s later work narrows the distance further, and the framework should be read against that version. On the People’s Terms (2012) recasts domination as uncontrolled interference and requires popular control of government that is individualized, unconditioned, and efficacious — influence that does not depend on the government’s willingness to heed it. That is close to revocability. What remains in dispute is narrow: whether that control must include the capacity to withdraw authority, not only to direct it. A reader who holds that direction without withdrawal suffices has a genuine disagreement with C3, and it is the most interesting one available against this framework.

A.7 — The framework is culturally specific.

Objection: “Consent of the governed” is a Western, largely Anglo-American inheritance. Many traditions ground legitimate authority in lineage, revelation, custom, or stewardship. Presenting one tradition’s account as a logical entailment of human value mistakes a local idea for a universal one.

Response: The framework does not begin from any tradition’s account of authority. It begins from a claim about the person — that their value was not assigned — and asks what follows for power exercised over them. The requirement it derives is that such power answer to the person bound; it does not specify a mechanism, and it names no constitutional form as satisfying it. Different traditions may meet the requirement differently, and a tradition that does not meet it is challenged on the same terms everywhere, including where the framework was written. The framework should also be candid about what the requirement does. It names no institution, but it is not neutral among all arrangements: a requirement that power answer to those it binds, revocably and on equal terms, narrows the range of acceptable answers toward forms of popular control. A tradition grounded in lineage, revelation, or stewardship meets it only where that authority can in fact be withdrawn by those it binds. The framework is agnostic about which institutions meet the requirement, not about the requirement.

A.8 — The framework proves too much about who counts.

Objection: If civic dignity attaches to every person bound by a governing power, then children, residents who are not citizens, and people whose vote has been removed as a legal penalty are all owed equal voice. No working polity accepts that. A framework whose logic dissolves every boundary on membership is either unserious or smuggling in a political program.

Response: The framework accepts the first half of the objection: its chain attaches voice to persons who are bound, not to members. It denies that this dissolves all boundaries. What it requires is that no limit on voice touch a person’s standing, and that no limit rest on an assigned status alone. Four cases show where the framework’s terms settle the question and where they leave it to the participation of the governed.

Children show that capacity does real work, and where its limits lie. Autonomy requires both the capacity to choose and the conditions for choosing (B.1). A child’s standing is fully equal, but the capacity through which voice is exercised is still developing. The framework therefore supports holding that exercise in trust during development, on two conditions. First, the capacity at issue is the capacity for choice itself, never the quality of the choices made; a test of how well someone would choose is the competence argument A.1 rejects. Second, the trust is time-bound: it ends as capacity develops, which distinguishes it from the irrevocable delegation Section C identifies as a barrier. Nothing here supports treating the child’s standing as lesser. Who may hold that trust is an open question the framework names and does not settle: where the governing power itself holds it, the trustee is the very power the child’s voice should answer.

Permanent limits on capacity show why the children’s trust cannot become a general rule. Where the capacity for choice will not develop, a time-bound trust has no end, and an unending trust held by others is irrevocable delegation under another name. The framework therefore supports supported rather than substituted decision-making: arrangements that help a person form and express their own choice, not arrangements in which another person chooses in their place. Nussbaum (2006) argues that people with cognitive disabilities are owed the same central capabilities as others, exercised with support where needed. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes legal capacity on an equal basis with others and requires access to the support its exercise may need (United Nations, 2006, Art. 12); the committee that oversees the Con-

vention reads this as a shift from substituted to supported decision-making (General Comment No. 1, 2014). Where no choice can be formed even with support, the framework names the case as open rather than settling it.

Residents who are not citizens show that exit does real work. As exit falls, the consent requirement rises (C5). Where a person can genuinely return to a power that answers to them, the requirement is lighter. Where they cannot, as with a refugee or someone whose life is wholly rooted where they live, it presses harder. The framework names no rule for who votes in which election. It holds that the answer must be tested against these properties and cannot simply be read off a passport.

Voice removed as a legal penalty is a question of policy, and the framework does not answer it. What the framework does settle is standing: inherent value is not contingent on behavior (B.1), so no conduct forfeits a person's standing, and the governing power continues to answer to the person it holds. Penalties restrict the exercise of liberties, and some limits on voice follow from them; a person who is confined cannot attend a public hearing. Whether further limits, such as removal of the vote, should attach to a penalty is decided through the participation of the governed: laws are made and changed by people exercising their voice, and the limits they set may change as that participation does. The framework notes one feature of this case without resolving it: here, the process of participation decides who takes part in it. That is why the framework names the question and leaves it open rather than claiming an answer.

The framework names no policy on any of these questions. It states the requirement that any answer must meet. Voice is also wider than the ballot: the standing to be heard by the powers that bind a person does not wait on how any of these questions is settled.

Section B: The Civic Framework

This section defines the concepts from which the civic claims derive. Six definitions are carried over from the economic framework, summarized here; the full definitions there govern — the two branches share a trunk, and restating it here is not duplication but an explicit marker that one foundation produces both. Where a term has common usage differing from the definition below, the definition below takes precedence within this document.

B.1 — Definitions

Person, Inherent Value, Love, Dignity, Autonomy, The Floor — Carried over from the economic framework (B.1), where the full definitions stand and govern. In summary: a person is the fundamental unit of moral concern; inherent value is the value they hold prior to any achievement or role, conferred by no one; love is the recognition of another's inherent value as real, the mechanism by which that value becomes obligation; dignity is the condition of being treated in accordance with that value; autonomy is the capacity to direct one's own life, requiring both the internal capacity to choose and the external conditions that make choice possible; The Floor is the minimum set of material and social conditions required for autonomous function. The civic branch begins where autonomy is established as owed (economic Step 3). The Floor (economic Step 4) is not a step in the civic chain; it enters at D.3, where the branches meet.

The Governed Condition — The standing fact that some decisions bind a person regardless of whether they agreed to them. This is not itself a wrong. It is the circumstance under which the question of legitimacy arises at all; a person subject to no binding decisions has no need of the concepts that follow.

Governing Power — Any power over a person's life that is simultaneously **standing** (an ongoing

authority, not a single interaction), **binding** (it applies whether or not the person agreed), and **costly to exit** (the person cannot remove themselves from its reach without serious loss). Exit is a matter of degree; non-exitable power is the limiting case. The definition is by property, not by institution. The state is the clearest instance and the one the objections in Section A concern, but the framework's criterion is what identifies a governing power, not the label the institution carries. A reader is expected to test their own institutions against the three properties.

Exit — The real ability of a person to remove themselves from a governing power's reach. Exit is substantive, not formal: its availability depends on whether a person can reach what a life requires once they have left, not on whether departure is nominally permitted. Hume (1748) states the substantive test directly in rejecting the claim that a poor peasant or artisan, who knows no foreign language or manners and lives from day to day on small wages, has a free choice to leave his country.

Voice — The channel through which a person subject to a governing power takes part in determining it, including the capacity to withhold or withdraw their support from it.

Revocability — The condition in which authority can be withheld or withdrawn by those it binds. Revocability is what distinguishes a constraint on power from a promise by power: a limit that those bound cannot enforce depends on the continued willingness of the one limited. At minimum, revocability requires that those bound can (a) replace those who exercise the power and (b) change the rules that constitute it, through channels the holders cannot close or make conditional on their own consent. It does not require recall at will, dissolution of the office, or exit, which C5 treats separately. Constraints such as judicial review or constitutional entrenchment satisfy C3 only where (a) and (b) are also present; without them, they remain promises. Rules that secure (a) and (b) may themselves be protected from change, because they secure revocability rather than limit it: a majority cannot vote away the next election.

Arbitrary Power — Power whose exercise is not answerable to the persons it binds. Pettit (1997) is the philosophical predecessor, defining domination as the capacity to interfere on an arbitrary basis and holding that such capacity constitutes unfreedom whether or not it is exercised. The framework's use differs in one respect: it holds that answerability requires revocability rather than constraint or direction alone (see A.6).

Legitimacy — The condition of a governing power that answers to the persons it binds. Legitimacy is distinct from legality (conformity to a power's own rules), from effectiveness (the capacity to govern), and from the justice of any particular outcome. A power may be legal, effective, and produce good outcomes while remaining illegitimate in this sense.

Free Consent — Consent given without coercion and with the genuine capacity to withhold it. Consent that cannot be refused is not consent; consent inferred from a person's inability to leave is not consent. This mirrors the requirement of voluntariness in the economic branch.

Standing — A person's status as one to whom governing power must answer. Standing follows from inherent value and, like it, is conferred by no one and cannot be forfeited. It is distinct from the exercise of voice, which law and policy may limit; standing survives any such limit.

Equal Standing — The condition in which no person's say in a governing power is structurally weighted above another's. Because inherent value is not assigned, no ground exists on which one person's standing could be weighted above another's. Equal standing is a requirement about *standing*, not a claim about the aggregation of preferences (see A.5).

Free and Equal Consent — The compound condition satisfying both requirements at once:

consent genuinely given, from persons of equal standing. Free names what autonomy requires; equal names what dignity requires. It is the terminal state the civic chain produces.

Civic Dignity — The condition of a person whose governing power answers to them on equal terms. Like economic dignity, it is a *condition*, not a reward or a metric, and it cannot be granted — only made possible or obstructed.

Predecessor and departure. The term has a history. Ober (2012) describes civic dignity as equal high standing among citizens, marked by non-humiliation and non-infantilization, treats it as a core value of collective self-governance by citizens, and distinguishes it from both meritocratic dignity and universal human dignity. This framework shares his account of *what* civic dignity is: a standing no one may be humiliated or infantilized out of. It departs on *where* it attaches. For Ober, civic dignity belongs to citizens by membership. Here it belongs to persons, by virtue of being bound by a governing power, because the trunk grounds every later claim in a value no one assigned. Membership is a status someone assigns. The consequences of this departure are faced directly in A.8.

Barrier to Voice — Any structural condition preventing a person from giving or withdrawing consent on equal terms. Barriers include exclusion from participation, structural dilution of a person’s say, authority delegated irrevocably, constraints on power that those bound cannot enforce, and conditions below the economic floor that render participation nominal.

B.2 — The Civic Transitive Chain

Each step follows from the previous and inherits the weight of the steps before it. Steps 1–3 are the shared trunk; the branch begins at C1. C1 enters a factual premise, as Step 5a does in the economic chain. C2 enters a normative premise, the civic axiom. Every other step is an entailment from the trunk and these two.

Step	Connection	Logical Content
1–3	Person → Inherent Value → Dignity → Autonomy	Carried over from the economic framework (Steps 1–3). A person is owed treatment matching a value no one assigned; that treatment requires the conditions for directing one’s own life.
C1	Autonomy → The Governed Condition	Factual premise (parallel to Step 5a of the economic chain): some decisions bind a person regardless of their agreement. A person who is owed the capacity to direct their own life is nonetheless subject to power they did not choose.
C2	Governed Condition → Legitimacy Requirement	Civic axiom (a normative premise, stated as such): binding power is compatible with a person’s autonomy only if it answers to the person bound. This does not follow from inherent value alone; a reader can accept that no one assigned a person’s value and still hold that power may bind them without answering (A.1, A.6). The framework adopts it as a second commitment alongside inherent value, and every later step follows from the pair.
C3	Legitimacy → Revocability	Answering requires that the person be able to withhold or withdraw (B.1 states the minimum: replace the holders and change the rules, through channels the holders cannot close). A constraint those bound cannot enforce is a promise held at the discretion of the one constrained — the benevolent master’s position, not the governed person’s.
C4	Revocability → Exit or Voice	Revocability operates through two channels: the person removes themselves from the power’s reach, or takes part in determining it.
C5	Costly Exit → Voice	As exit becomes costlier, the consent requirement falls increasingly on voice. Where power is non-exitable, the limiting case, voice must carry the whole load.

Step	Connection	Logical Content
C6	Voice → Free	Voice discharges revocability only if it can actually be withheld. Coerced or nominal participation registers agreement without conferring it. (<i>Autonomy</i>)
C7	Voice → Equal	Voice must count the same as anyone's. Because inherent value was never assigned, no ground exists for weighting one person's standing above another's. (<i>Dignity</i>)
C8	Free + Equal → Free and Equal Consent	The compound condition. The state it produces in the person is civic dignity .

On Free and Equal Consent: *Free* names the condition **autonomy** requires — consent genuinely given, refusable in fact. *Equal* names the condition **dignity** requires — standing not weighted by any assigned value. *Free and Equal Consent* is the compound satisfying both simultaneously. It is the terminal state the civic chain produces: the political condition human dignity requires, structurally parallel to Fair Voluntary Exchange in the economic branch.

Section C: Structural Conditions

This section states the conditions under which voice is real rather than nominal, and the foundational claims the civic framework holds. It parallels the economic framework's Section C: the philosophical chain establishes what is owed; this section describes the conditions under which it is delivered or obstructed.

C.1 — Structural Definitions

Nominal Voice — Participation that registers a person's agreement without conferring it. The form is present and the function is absent. A vote counted in an election whose outcome is fixed, a consultation whose result is predetermined, a right to object that carries no consequence: each produces the appearance of consent while the power remains unanswerable. Nominal voice is a distinctive barrier because it supplies a defense against the charge it deserves: the appearance of consent is offered as proof that power answers.

Structural Dilution — Any arrangement that reduces the weight of a person's voice without excluding them from participation. Dilution operates through the design of the channel rather than the eligibility of the person, and the framework treats it as a barrier to voice because equal standing is a requirement about weight, not merely about admission. The test is design, not disagreement. Losing because others disagree is losing, and the framework does not treat it as a barrier. Losing because the channel is built so that a person's side cannot prevail however it persuades is dilution, and past that point voice is nominal. This is the civic form of the economic framework's Fairness: the requirement is an unrigged process, not an equal outcome, and no one is owed a win.

Irrevocable Delegation — An arrangement in which authority, once conferred, cannot be withdrawn by those it binds. The framework holds that delegation itself is compatible with legitimacy — no one can decide everything personally — and that delegation without recall is not. The distinguishing question is not whether a person exercises power directly, but whether the power they conferred remains answerable to them.

Cost of Voice — Any burden placed on the exercise of voice that is not borne equally. A cost need not be monetary; time, distance, documentation, and risk all function as costs. The framework notes that the historical significance of prohibiting a direct monetary charge on the ballot is not that money is the only cost, but that it established the principle: a toll on participation can be

identified as a design choice and removed.

Consent Under Pressure — Consent given by a person who lacks the conditions to withhold it. A person below the economic floor participates in governance from a position in which the withdrawal of support carries costs they cannot absorb. The form of consent is satisfied; the substance is not. This is the civic analogue of exchange made under desperation. Munger (2011) supplies the distinction between exchange that is merely voluntary and exchange that is *euvoluntary*, free of background coercion; he concludes that even non-*euvoluntary* exchange should generally be permitted, since blocking it can leave the desperate worse off. The framework borrows his distinction, not his conclusion, and its claim here is narrower: consent given under such pressure is agreement in form, and cannot by itself establish that power answers.

Accountable Constraint — A limit on governing power that those bound by the power can themselves enforce. The framework distinguishes this from constraints enforced only by the power itself or by another branch of it. The distinction follows from C3: a limit whose enforcement depends on the goodwill of the limited party is a promise.

C.2 — Foundational Claims

Claim	Explanation
Governing power exists, and the framework addresses it where it does	The framework takes no position on whether governing power <i>should</i> exist. Philosophical anarchists argue that no governing power can be justified (Simmons, 1979), and the framework does not answer them. It addresses only the conditions under which governing power, where it exists, is legitimate. The problem it identifies is not the existence of governing power but unanswerable governing power.
Legitimacy is a design property	Whether a governing power answers to those it binds is determined by how it is arranged, not by the intentions of those who hold it. A power designed to answer will answer when its holders are ill-disposed; a power designed otherwise will not answer when they are well-disposed.
Every governing arrangement has excluded someone	No arrangement to date has secured free and equal consent from all persons it binds. This is a historical observation, not a claim about necessity — structurally identical to the economic framework’s corresponding claim.
Barriers to voice are structural, not natural	The conditions restricting voice are features of arrangements people designed. They are therefore remediable, including by people who did not design them.
Exit and voice are substitutes at the margin	The less available exit is, the more the consent requirement falls on voice. The framework’s criterion identifies where voice must carry the entire load.
Form does not establish function	The presence of a participatory mechanism does not establish that voice is real. Legitimacy is assessed by whether power answers, not by whether a channel exists.

Section D: The Connection Between the Branches

This section shows how the civic and economic branches relate. They are not two frameworks that resemble each other; they are one chain that forks, and each branch turns out to be a condition of the other.

D.1 — One trunk, two branches. Both branches derive from the same three steps (the economic framework’s Steps 1–3) and diverge at a single point: there are two principal ways another person’s decisions reach into a life — through what a person can obtain, and through what is done to them. The economic branch follows the first, arriving at Fair Voluntary Exchange. The civic branch follows the second, arriving at Free and Equal Consent. The framework does not claim the two are exhaustive, only that each is sufficient to generate a branch. Each branch adds one

factual premise about how decisions reach a life (Step 5a and C1). The civic branch also adds one normative premise, the civic axiom at C2; whether the economic branch carries an equivalent premise of its own is a question this framework leaves to its companion's reviewers.

D.2 — The same structural wrong appears in both. In the economic branch, exchange ceases to be voluntary as a party's meaningful alternatives disappear. In the civic branch, consent ceases to be free as a person's exit disappears. *Meaningful alternatives* and *exit* are the same condition described in two domains: the capacity to decline. Where that capacity is absent, agreement can be recorded and cannot be given.

D.3 — The economic floor is a condition of civic voice. A person below The Floor (economic framework, Step 4) cannot exercise exit, because leaving requires the ability to reach what a life requires elsewhere; and cannot freely withhold support, because the costs of withholding fall on someone with no margin to absorb them. Their consent is consent under pressure. Hume (1748) supplies the observation directly and from outside this framework: a poor peasant or artisan who knows no foreign language or manners, and lives from day to day by the small wages he acquires, has no free choice to leave his country. Hume's purpose was to refute tacit consent, not to establish a floor — which is what makes the observation useful here. The economic condition of the person determines whether the civic mechanism means anything.

D.4 — Civic voice is a condition of the economic floor. The arrangements determining access to exchange — what is provided, what is permitted, what is enforced — are maintained by governing power, whatever their origin. A floor secured by a power its beneficiaries cannot hold to account is provision at the discretion of the provider, which is the condition the economic branch identifies as a transfer rather than participation. It meets the material need and leaves the person dependent on a decision about them.

D.4 is the weaker of the two connections, and it draws objections from opposite directions. The first holds that exchange conditions often arise without design. The framework does not claim they are designed. It claims they are *maintained*: recognized, enforced, and altered by governing power, and that suffices. The second holds that concentrated economic power is itself governing power, so the two branches collapse into one. The framework's criterion answers this directly. Governing power is identified by property, not by institution (B.1), so any concentration of economic power that is standing, binding, and costly to exit is a governing power, and the civic chain applies to it without modification. The branches are distinguished by the two ways decisions reach a life, not by two kinds of institution. This is intended: the fork is a distinction in how decisions reach a person, and where economic power meets the criterion, the civic chain governs it.

D.5 — Therefore neither branch completes alone. A voice exercised by a person who cannot reach the floor is consent under pressure. A floor granted by a power that person cannot hold to account is charity with better infrastructure. The two requirements are jointly necessary, and the framework holds that this is a structural result rather than a rhetorical pairing: each branch identifies a condition the other requires.

This is not circular. Neither requirement is derived from the other. Each derives independently from the shared trunk (Steps 1–3): the floor through the economic branch, voice through the civic branch. They meet only after both are established. D.3 and D.4 show that each is a condition of the other being *realized*, not a premise for the other being *owed*.

One consequence should be said plainly. Because voice below The Floor is consent under pressure, the civic standard cannot be satisfied independently of the economic one. Where The Floor is unmet — as the economic framework finds it has been, for some persons, in every system to

date — no governing arrangement can meet the civic standard for those persons either, whatever its channels.

Section E: Framework Beliefs

This section states the belief commitments that follow from the civic framework, each shown with its transitive grounding so the logic is transparent and auditable. The first belief is shared with the economic framework; the rest belong to the civic branch.

Belief	Statement	Transitive Grounding
Inherent Dignity	Every person has inherent dignity that is not contingent on productivity, status, or social role.	Foundational; carried verbatim from the economic framework (shared trunk, Steps 1–2). All other beliefs derive from it.
Legitimacy	A governing power is legitimate only when it answers to the persons it binds. Legality, effectiveness, and good outcomes do not establish legitimacy on their own.	Steps 1–3 → C1 → C2 (civic axiom); Legitimacy (B.1); A.1
Revocability	Authority must remain withdrawable by those it binds. A limit that those bound cannot enforce is a promise, not a constraint.	C3; Revocability and Accountable Constraint (B.1, C.1); A.6. <i>The framework's most exposed step.</i>
Voice Where Exit Fails	The less a person can leave a governing power, the more fully that power must answer to their voice.	C4 → C5; Exit (B.1); A.4; C.2
Free Consent	Participation that cannot be withheld, or is withheld only at costs a person cannot absorb, registers agreement without conferring it.	C6; Nominal Voice and Consent Under Pressure (C.1)
Equal Standing	No person's say in a governing power is structurally weighted above another's, whether by exclusion or by dilution.	C7; Equal Standing (B.1); Structural Dilution (C.1); A.5
Standing Is Not Forfeited	No status someone assigns, and no conduct, removes a person's standing. Limits on the exercise of voice are set by law and policy through the participation of the governed; the framework states only that standing survives them.	Inherent Value and Standing (B.1); A.8
Barriers to Voice Are Structural	The conditions restricting voice are features of designed arrangements, and are therefore remediable.	C.2; Barrier to Voice (B.1)
Voice Is Wider Than the Ballot	Voice is any channel through which a person takes part in determining the power that binds them, including the capacity to withhold support. No single mechanism exhausts it.	Voice (B.1); C4; Nominal Voice (C.1)
Neither Branch Completes Alone	Voice without the economic floor is consent under pressure; a floor without voice is provision at another's discretion.	D.3 → D.4 → D.5

Section F: Foundation for the Horizon

This section traces the horizon the civic argument points toward back to its grounding propositions. As in the economic framework, a closing note distinguishes the argument's horizon from the GEN Council's own mission.

Horizon (the argument's, not an organization's): civic dignity made possible for every person through the removal of structural barriers to voice. The framework identifies what that would re-

quire. It does not prescribe what should be built to achieve it, by whom, or in what constitutional form.

Vision: a world in which every governing power answers to the persons it binds, on equal terms — where free and equal consent is the default condition of power, not a concession granted by those who hold it.

Framework Proposition	Horizon / Vision Component	Connection
Every person has inherent dignity (B.1)	“Civic dignity made possible for every person”	The horizon says <i>every person</i> , not every member, because standing rests on a value no one assigned (A.8).
Civic dignity cannot be granted, only made possible or obstructed (B.1)	“Made possible”	The horizon avoids “granted” and “restored”: dignity is a condition to be unobstructed, not a gift, and no prior state is claimed.
Barriers to voice are structural (C.2)	“Removal of structural barriers to voice”	Because barriers are designed features, they are remediable, including by people who did not design them.
Legitimacy requires that power answer to those it binds (C2)	“Every governing power answers to the persons it binds”	The vision names answerability, not any institution or mechanism, as the target.
Free and Equal Consent is the terminal condition (C8)	“Free and equal consent is the default condition of power”	The vision names the compound condition the civic chain produces, parallel to Fair Voluntary Exchange in the economic branch.
Revocability distinguishes constraint from promise (C3)	“Not a concession granted by those who hold it”	Consent held at the discretion of the powerful is the benevolent master’s position (A.6).

A note on whose mission this is. The horizon above is where the argument points. It is not the mission of any organization, and it names no organization as its agent. Removing barriers to voice, and building whatever replaces them, belongs to everyone the framework concerns — not to the authors of this document.

The GEN Council, which stewards both frameworks, holds a distinct and deliberately narrow mission: to keep the frameworks freely available, to convene open and non-partisan discussion of them, and to name no solution of its own. It endorses no candidate, party, policy, or form of government. Endorsing no form is not the same as accepting every form: the requirement that power answer to those it binds is one some arrangements will fail, wherever they exist, and the framework says so on the same terms everywhere (A.7). Consistent with the economic framework’s A.3, an institution faithful to this argument is one built toward its own irrelevance.

Section G: Complete Terminology and Transitive Connections Map

One consolidated reference showing how every major term in the civic framework connects to every other, and where the civic branch meets the economic.

G.1 — Full Transitive Pathway

Person carries *Inherent Value*, which demands *Dignity*, which requires *Autonomy*. A person with autonomy nonetheless lives in *the Governed Condition*: some decisions bind them regardless of their agreement. By the civic axiom, binding power is compatible with autonomy only if it meets the *Legitimacy* requirement — that it answer to those it binds. Answering requires *Revocability*:

authority those bound can withhold or withdraw. Revocability works through two channels, *Exit* and *Voice*. Where power is standing, binding, and costly to exit — a *Governing Power* — voice carries more of the load, and all of it where exit fails entirely. Voice satisfies revocability only if it is *Free* (refusable in fact, not *Nominal* or given *Under Pressure*) and *Equal* (never weighted or *Diluted*). Together these constitute *Free and Equal Consent*, the terminal condition, and the state it produces in the person is *Civic Dignity*.

Barriers to Voice are what happens when arrangements are designed, by intent or by default, so that power does not answer. The civic branch meets the economic at the *Economic Floor*: below it, exit is unavailable and withholding support carries costs a person cannot absorb, so consent is consent under pressure. And the arrangements that maintain the floor are themselves held by governing power, so a floor without voice is provision at another's discretion. Neither branch completes alone.

G.2 — Term-by-Term Connection Reference

Term	Connects To	Direction of Connection
Autonomy	The Governed Condition	A person owed autonomy is nonetheless bound by decisions they did not make (<i>factual premise, C1</i>)
The Governed Condition	Legitimacy	Binding power is compatible with autonomy only if it answers to the person bound (<i>civic axiom, C2</i>)
Legitimacy	Revocability	Answering requires that authority be withdrawable by those it binds (<i>C3, most exposed step</i>)
Revocability	Exit / Voice	The two channels through which authority can be withdrawn
Governing Power	Voice	The costlier exit is, the more the consent requirement falls on voice
Exit	Voice	Substitutes at the margin: as exit falls, the requirement on voice rises
Voice	Free Consent	Voice discharges revocability only if it can be withheld (<i>Autonomy</i>)
Voice	Equal Standing	Voice must count the same as anyone's (<i>Dignity</i>)
Free Consent + Equal Standing	Free and Equal Consent	The compound condition; the civic terminal
Free and Equal Consent	Civic Dignity	The state the terminal condition produces in the person
Arbitrary Power	Revocability	Power is non-arbitrary only when those bound can enforce its limits
Accountable Constraint	Revocability	A limit is a constraint only if those bound can enforce it; otherwise a promise
Irrevocable Delegation	Barrier to Voice	Delegation is legitimate; delegation without recall is not
Nominal Voice	Legitimacy	A channel's existence does not establish that power answers
Structural Dilution	Equal Standing	Weight, not only admission, is what equal standing requires
Cost of Voice	Barrier to Voice	An unequal burden on participation is a designed, removable barrier
Consent Under Pressure	Economic Floor	Below the floor, consent is given in form and not in substance
Economic Floor	Free Consent	The floor is a condition of voice (D.3)

Term	Connects To	Direction of Connection
Voice	Economic Floor	Voice is a condition of the floor being participation rather than provision (D.4)
Barrier to Voice	Structural (not natural)	Barriers are design features, and remediable

Interpretive Instructions for Readers and Reviewers

The following principles apply to any work that uses, cites, or extends this framework.

- **Do not add claims not grounded in the framework.** It is designed as a complete logical structure, and claims outside the transitive chain are unsupported assertions.
- **Do not remove the objections.** Section A is part of the framework’s intellectual structure, not a disclaimer.
- **Do not treat the framework as settled.** A logical error, a missing step, or a definition that does not hold is a success condition when found, not a failure.
- **Know where the framework is most exposed.** C3 (Legitimacy → Revocability) carries the most weight with the least independent support. If constraint, or popular direction without the power to withdraw, suffices for power to answer to those it binds (A.6), much of the civic branch loses its force — including Accountable Constraint, Irrevocable Delegation, and D.4 — while the shared trunk survives intact. A reviewer who breaks C3 has done the framework a service. C2 (Governed Condition → Legitimacy) is stated as a civic axiom, not an entailment, because pre-publication review showed it does not follow from inherent value alone. A reader who rejects C2 has not left the trunk; they have declined the civic axiom, and should say so.
- **Distinguish the entailments from the factual premise.** C1 enters a factual premise, as Step 5a does in the economic framework; C2 enters a normative one, the civic axiom. Every other step is an entailment, and should be tested as one.
- **Distinguish framework claims from cited sources.** Hume, Simmons, Pettit, Estlund, Brennan, Arrow, Munger, Ober, Nussbaum, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are cited because specific findings corroborate or challenge specific claims. None endorses this framework, and it does not depend on their authority — only on the validity of the findings cited.
- **Read the civic and economic frameworks together.** They share a trunk and each identifies a condition the other requires (Section D). Neither should be cited as if it were the whole argument.
- **This framework is institution-agnostic.** It names no candidate, party, policy, constitutional form, or voting mechanism as the solution. It identifies the requirement that any governing arrangement must meet.

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Change Log

Version 1.0 — First publication. Any later revision will be recorded here with its date, the superseded wording kept for provenance, and the reason for the change.