The Perils of Presidentialism

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THE PERILS OF PRESIDENTIALISM

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Juan J. Linz, Sterling Professor of Political and Social Science at Yale University, is widely known for his contributions to the study of authoritarianism and totalitarianism, political parties and elites, and democratic breakdowns and transitions to democracy. In 1987 he was awarded Spain’s Príncipe de Asturias prize in the social sciences. The following essay is based on a paper he presented in May 1989 at a conference in Washington, D.C. organized by the Latin American Studies Program of Georgetown University, with support from the Ford Foundation. An annotated, revised, and expanded version of this essay (including a discussion of semipresidential systems) will appear under the title "Presidentialism and Parliamentarism: Does It Make a Difference?" in a publication based on the conference being edited by the author and Professor Arturo Valenzuela of Georgetown University.

As more of the world’s nations turn to democracy, interest in alternative constitutional forms and arrangements has expanded well beyond academic circles. In countries as dissimilar as Chile, South Korea, Brazil, Turkey, and Argentina, policymakers and constitutional experts have vigorously debated the relative merits of different types of democratic regimes. Some countries, like Sri Lanka, have switched from parliamentary to presidential constitutions. On the other hand, Latin Americans in particular have found themselves greatly impressed by the successful transition from authoritarianism to democracy that occurred in the 1970s in Spain, a transition to which the parliamentary form of government chosen by that country greatly contributed.

Nor is the Spanish case the only one in which parliamentarism has given evidence of its worth. Indeed, the vast majority of the stable democracies in the world today are parliamentary regimes, where executive power is generated by legislative majorities and depends on such majorities for survival.

By contrast, the only presidential democracy with a long history of
constitutional continuity is the United States. The constitutions of Finland and France are hybrids rather than true presidential systems, and in the case of the French Fifth Republic, the jury is still out. Aside from the United States, only Chile has managed a century and a half of relatively undisturbed constitutional continuity under presidential government—but Chilean democracy broke down in the 1970s.

Parliamentary regimes, of course, can also be unstable, especially under conditions of bitter ethnic conflict, as recent African history attests. Yet the experiences of India and of some English-speaking countries in the Caribbean show that even in greatly divided societies, periodic parliamentary crises need not turn into full-blown regime crises and that the ousting of a prime minister and cabinet need not spell the end of democracy itself.

The burden of this essay is that the superior historical performance of parliamentary democracies is no accident. A careful comparison of parliamentarism as such with presidentialism as such leads to the conclusion that, on balance, the former is more conducive to stable democracy than the latter. This conclusion applies especially to nations with deep political cleavages and numerous political parties; for such countries, parliamentarism generally offers a better hope of preserving democracy.

Parliamentary vs. Presidential Systems

A parliamentary regime in the strict sense is one in which the only democratically legitimate institution is parliament; in such a regime, the government’s authority is completely dependent upon parliamentary confidence. Although the growing personalization of party leadership in some parliamentary regimes has made prime ministers seem more and more like presidents, it remains true that barring dissolution of parliament and a call for new elections, premiers cannot appeal directly to the people over the heads of their representatives. Parliamentary systems may include presidents who are elected by direct popular vote, but they usually lack the ability to compete seriously for power with the prime minister.

In presidential systems an executive with considerable constitutional powers—generally including full control of the composition of the cabinet and administration—is directly elected by the people for a fixed term and is independent of parliamentary votes of confidence. He is not only the holder of executive power but also the symbolic head of state and can be removed between elections only by the drastic step of impeachment. In practice, as the history of the United States shows, presidential systems may be more or less dependent on the cooperation of the legislature; the balance between executive and legislative power in such systems can thus vary considerably.
Two things about presidential government stand out. The first is the president's strong claim to democratic, even plebiscitarian, legitimacy; the second is his fixed term in office. Both of these statements stand in need of qualification. Some presidents gain office with a smaller proportion of the popular vote than many premiers who head minority cabinets, although voters may see the latter as more weakly legitimated. To mention just one example, Salvador Allende's election as president of Chile in 1970—he had a 36.2-percent plurality obtained by a heterogeneous coalition—certainly put him in a position very different from that in which Adolfo Suárez of Spain found himself in 1979 when he became prime minister after receiving 35.1 percent of the vote. As we will see, Allende received a six-year mandate for controlling the government even with much less than a majority of the popular vote, while Suárez, with a plurality of roughly the same size, found it necessary to work with other parties to sustain a minority government. Following British political thinker Walter Bagehot, we might say that a presidential system endows the incumbent with both the "ceremonial" functions of a head of state and the "effective" functions of a chief executive, thus creating an aura, a self-image, and a set of popular expectations which are all quite different from those associated with a prime minister, no matter how popular he may be.

But what is most striking is that in a presidential system, the legislators, especially when they represent cohesive, disciplined parties that offer clear ideological and political alternatives, can also claim democratic legitimacy. This claim is thrown into high relief when a majority of the legislature represents a political option opposed to the one the president represents. Under such circumstances, who has the stronger claim to speak on behalf of the people: the president or the legislative majority that opposes his policies? Since both derive their power from the votes of the people in a free competition among well-defined alternatives, a conflict is always possible and at times may erupt dramatically. There is no democratic principle on the basis of which it can be resolved, and the mechanisms the constitution might provide are likely to prove too complicated and aridly legalistic to be of much force in the eyes of the electorate. It is therefore no accident that in some such situations in the past, the armed forces were often tempted to intervene as a mediating power. One might argue that the United States has successfully rendered such conflicts "normal" and thus defused them. To explain how American political institutions and practices have achieved this result would exceed the scope of this essay, but it is worth noting that the uniquely diffuse character of American political parties—which, ironically, exasperates many American political scientists and leads them to call for responsible, ideologically disciplined parties—has something to do with it. Unfortunately, the American case seems to be an exception; the development of modern political parties,
particularly in socially and ideologically polarized countries, generally exacerbates, rather than moderates, conflicts between the legislative and the executive.

The second outstanding feature of presidential systems—the president's relatively fixed term in office—is also not without drawbacks. It breaks the political process into discontinuous, rigidly demarcated periods, leaving no room for the continuous readjustments that events may demand. The duration of the president's mandate becomes a crucial factor in the calculations of all political actors, a fact which (as we shall see) is fraught with important consequences. Consider, for instance, the provisions for succession in case of the president's death or incapacity: in some cases, the automatic successor may have been elected separately and may represent a political orientation different from the president's; in other cases, he may have been imposed by the president as his running mate without any consideration of his ability to exercise executive power or maintain popular support. Brazilian history provides us with examples of the first situation, while Maria Estela Martínez de Perón's succession of her husband in Argentina illustrates the second. It is a paradox of presidential government that while it leads to the personalization of power, its legal mechanisms may also lead, in the event of a sudden midterm succession, to the rise of someone whom the ordinary electoral process would never have made the chief of state.

Paradoxes of Presidentialism

Presidential constitutions paradoxically incorporate contradictory principles and assumptions. On the one hand, such systems set out to create a strong, stable executive with enough plebiscitarian legitimation to stand fast against the array of particular interests represented in the legislature. In the Rousseauian conception of democracy implied by the idea of "the people," for whom the president is supposed to speak, these interests lack legitimacy; so does the Anglo-American notion that democracy naturally involves a jostle—or even sometimes a melee—of interests. Interest group conflict then bids fair to manifest itself in areas other than the strictly political. On the other hand, presidential constitutions also reflect profound suspicion of the personalization of power: memories and fears of kings and caudillos do not dissipate easily. Foremost among the constitutional bulwarks against potentially arbitrary power is the prohibition on reelection. Other provisions like legislative advice-and-consent powers over presidential appointments, impeachment mechanisms, judicial independence, and institutions such as the Contraloría of Chile also reflect this suspicion. Indeed, political intervention by the armed forces acting as a poder moderador may even be seen in certain political cultures as a useful check on overweening executives. One could explore in depth the contradictions between the
constitutional texts and political practices of Latin American presidential regimes; any student of the region's history could cite many examples.

It would be useful to explore the way in which the fundamental contradiction between the desire for a strong and stable executive and the latent suspicion of that same presidential power affects political decision making, the style of leadership, the political practices, and the rhetoric of both presidents and their opponents in presidential systems. It introduces a dimension of conflict that cannot be explained wholly by socioeconomic, political, or ideological circumstances. Even if one were to accept the debatable notion that Hispanic societies are inherently prone to personalismo, there can be little doubt that in some cases this tendency receives reinforcement from institutional arrangements.

Perhaps the best way to summarize the basic differences between presidential and parliamentary systems is to say that while parliamentarism imparts flexibility to the political process, presidentialism makes it rather rigid. Proponents of presidentialism might reply that this rigidity is an advantage, for it guards against the uncertainty and instability so characteristic of parliamentary politics. Under parliamentary government, after all, myriad actors—parties, their leaders, even rank-and-file legislators—may at any time between elections adopt basic changes, cause realignments, and, above all, make or break prime ministers. But while the need for authority and predictability would seem to favor presidentialism, there are unexpected developments—ranging from the death of the incumbent to serious errors in judgment committed under the pressure of unruly circumstances—that make presidential rule less predictable and often weaker than that of a prime minister. The latter can always seek to shore up his legitimacy and authority, either through a vote of confidence or the dissolution of parliament and the ensuing new elections. Moreover, a prime minister can be changed without necessarily creating a regime crisis.

Considerations of this sort loom especially large during periods of regime transition and consolidation, when the rigidities of a presidential constitution must seem inauspicious indeed compared to the prospect of adaptability that parliamentarism offers.

**Zero-sum Elections**

The preceding discussion has focused principally on the institutional dimensions of the problem; the consideration of constitutional provisions—some written, some unwritten—has dominated the analysis. In addition, however, one must attend to the ways in which political competition is structured in systems of direct presidential elections; the styles of leadership in such systems; the relations between the president, the political elites, and society at large; and the ways in which power is exercised and conflicts are resolved. It is a fair assumption that
institutional arrangements both directly and indirectly shape the entire political process, or "way of ruling." Once we have described the differences between parliamentary and presidential forms of government that result from their differing institutional arrangements, we shall be ready to ask which of the two forms offers the best prospect for creating, consolidating, and maintaining democracy.

Presidentialism is ineluctably problematic because it operates according to the rule of "winner-take-all"—an arrangement that tends to make democratic politics a zero-sum game, with all the potential for conflict such games portend. Although parliamentary elections can produce an absolute majority for a single party, they more often give representation to a number of parties. Power-sharing and coalition-forming are fairly common, and incumbents are accordingly attentive to the demands and interests of even the smaller parties. These parties in turn retain expectations of sharing in power and, therefore, of having a stake in the system as a whole. By contrast, the conviction that he possesses independent authority and a popular mandate is likely to imbue a president with a sense of power and mission, even if the plurality that elected him is a slender one. Given such assumptions about his standing and role, he will find the inevitable opposition to his policies far more irksome and demoralizing than would a prime minister, who knows himself to be but the spokesman for a temporary governing coalition rather than the voice of the nation or the tribune of the people.

Absent the support of an absolute and cohesive majority, a parliamentary system inevitably includes elements that become institutionalized in what has been called "consociational democracy." Presidential regimes may incorporate consociational elements as well, perhaps as part of the unwritten constitution. When democracy was reestablished under adverse circumstances in Venezuela and Colombia, for example, the written constitutions may have called for presidential government, but the leaders of the major parties quickly turned to consociational agreements to soften the harsh, winner-take-all implications of presidential elections.

The danger that zero-sum presidential elections pose is compounded by the rigidity of the president's fixed term in office. Winners and losers are sharply defined for the entire period of the presidential mandate. There is no hope for shifts in alliances, expansion of the government's base of support through national-unity or emergency grand coalitions, new elections in response to major new events, and so on. Instead, the losers must wait at least four or five years without any access to executive power and patronage. The zero-sum game in presidential regimes raises the stakes of presidential elections and inevitably exacerbates their attendant tension and polarization.

On the other hand, presidential elections do offer the indisputable advantage of allowing the people to choose their chief executive openly,
directly, and for a predictable span rather than leaving that decision to the backstage maneuvering of the politicians. But this advantage can only be present if a clear mandate results. If there is no required minimum plurality and several candidates compete in a single round, the margin between the victor and the runner-up may be too thin to support any claim that a decisive plebiscite has taken place. To preclude this, electoral laws sometimes place a lower limit on the size of the winning plurality or create some mechanism for choosing among the candidates if none attains the minimum number of votes needed to win; such procedures need not necessarily award the office to the candidate with the most votes. More common are run-off provisions that set up a confrontation between the two major candidates, with possibilities for polarization that have already been mentioned. One of the possible consequences of two-candidate races in multiparty systems is that broad coalitions are likely to be formed (whether in run-offs or in preelection maneuvering) in which extremist parties gain undue influence. If significant numbers of voters identify strongly with such parties, one or more of them can plausibly claim to represent the decisive electoral bloc in a close contest and may make demands accordingly. Unless a strong candidate of the center rallies widespread support against the extremes, a presidential election can fragment and polarize the electorate.

In countries where the preponderance of voters is centrist, agrees on the exclusion of extremists, and expects both rightist and leftist candidates to differ only within a larger, moderate consensus, the divisiveness latent in presidential competition is not a serious problem. With an overwhelmingly moderate electorate, anyone who makes alliances or takes positions that seem to incline him to the extremes is unlikely to win, as both Barry Goldwater and George McGovern discovered to their chagrin. But societies beset by grave social and economic problems, divided about recent authoritarian regimes that once enjoyed significant popular support, and in which well-disciplined extremist parties have considerable electoral appeal, do not fit the model presented by the United States. In a polarized society with a volatile electorate, no serious candidate in a single-round election can afford to ignore parties with which he would otherwise never collaborate.

A two-round election can avoid some of these problems, for the preliminary round shows the extremist parties the limits of their strength and allows the two major candidates to reckon just which alliances they
must make to win. This reduces the degree of uncertainty and promotes more rational decisions on the part of both voters and candidates. In effect, the presidential system may thus reproduce something like the negotiations that "form a government" in parliamentary regimes. But the potential for polarization remains, as does the difficulty of isolating extremist factions that a significant portion of the voters and elites intensely dislike.

The Spanish Example

For illustration of the foregoing analysis, consider the case of Spain in 1977, the year of the first free election after the death of Francisco Franco. The parliamentary elections held that year allowed transitional prime minister Adolfo Suárez to remain in office. His moderate Union del Centro Democratico (UCD) emerged as the leading party with 34.9 percent of the vote and 167 seats in the 350-seat legislature. The Socialist Party (PSOE), led by Felipe González, obtained 29.4 percent and 118 seats, followed by the Communist Party (PCE) with 9.3 percent and 20 seats, and the rightist Alianza Popular (AP), led by Manuel Fraga, with 8.4 percent and 16 seats.

These results clearly show that if instead of parliamentary elections, a presidential contest had been held, no party would have had more than a plurality. Candidates would have been forced to form coalitions to have a chance of winning in a first or second round. Prior to the election, however, there was no real record of the distribution of the electorate's preferences. In this uncertain atmosphere, forming coalitions would have proven difficult. Certainly the front-runners would have found themselves forced to build unnecessarily large winning coalitions.

Assuming that the democratic opposition to Franco would have united behind a single candidate like Felipe González (something that was far from certain at the time), and given both the expectations about the strength of the Communists and the ten percent of the electorate they actually represented, he would never have been able to run as independently as he did in his campaign for a seat in parliament. A popular-front mentality would have dominated the campaign and probably submerged the distinct identities that the different parties, from the extremists on the left to the Christian Democrats and the moderate regional parties in the center, were able to maintain in most districts. The problem would have been even more acute for the center-rightists who had supported reforms, especially the reforma pactada that effectively put an end to the authoritarian regime. It is by no means certain that Adolfo Suárez, despite the great popularity he gained during the transition process, could or would have united all those to the right of the Socialist Party. At that juncture many Christian Democrats, including those who would later run on the UCD ticket in 1979, would not have been willing
to abandon the political allies they had made during the years of opposition to Franco; on the other hand, it would have been difficult for Suárez to appear with the support of the rightist AP, since it appeared to represent the "continuist" (i.e., Francoist) alternative. For its part, the AP would probably not have supported a candidate like Suárez who favored legalization of the Communist Party.

Excluding the possibility that the candidate of the right would have been Fraga (who later became the accepted leader of the opposition), Suárez would still have been hard-pressed to maintain throughout the campaign his distinctive position as an alternative to any thought of continuity with the Franco regime. Indeed, the UCD directed its 1977 campaign as much against the AP on the right as against the Socialists on the left. Moreover, given the uncertainty about the AP's strength and the fear and loathing it provoked on the left, much leftist campaigning also targeted Fraga. This had the effect of reducing polarization, especially between longtime democrats, on the one hand, and newcomers to democratic politics (who comprised important segments of both the UCD's leadership and its rank and file), on the other. Inevitably, the candidate of the right and center-right would have focused his attacks on the left-democratic candidate's "dangerous" supporters, especially the Communists and the parties representing Basque and Catalan nationalism. In replying to these attacks the candidate of the left and center-left would certainly have pointed to the continuity between his opponent's policies and those of Franco, the putative presence of unreconstructed Francoists in the rightist camp, and the scarcity of centrist democrats in the right-wing coalition.

There can be no doubt that in the Spain of 1977, a presidential election would have been far more divisive than the parliamentary elections..."
a party congress that saw the defeat of the PSOE’s utopian left wing and a campaign aimed at winning over the centrist majority of Spanish voters. Spanish politics since Franco has clearly felt the moderating influence of parliamentarism; without it, the transition to popular government and the consolidation of democratic rule would probably have taken a far different—and much rougher—course.

Let me now add a moderating note of my own. I am not suggesting that the polarization which often springs from presidential elections is an inevitable concomitant of presidential government. If the public consensus hovers reliably around the middle of the political spectrum and if the limited weight of the fringe parties is in evidence, no candidate will have any incentive to coalesce with the extremists. They may run for office, but they will do so in isolation and largely as a rhetorical exercise. Under these conditions of moderation and preexisting consensus, presidential campaigns are unlikely to prove dangerously divisive. The problem is that in countries caught up in the arduous experience of establishing and consolidating democracy, such happy circumstances are seldom present. They certainly do not exist when there is a polarized multiparty system including extremist parties.

**The Style of Presidential Politics**

Since we have thus far focused mostly on the implications of presidentialism for the electoral process, one might reasonably observe that while the election is one thing, the victor’s term in office is another: once he has won, can he not set himself to healing the wounds inflicted during the campaign and restoring the unity of the nation? Can he not offer to his defeated opponents—but not to the extremist elements of his own coalition—a role in his administration and thus make himself president of all the people? Such policies are of course possible, but must depend on the personality and political style of the new president and, to a lesser extent, his major antagonists. Before the election no one can be sure that the new incumbent will make conciliatory moves; certainly the process of political mobilization in a plebiscitarian campaign is not conducive to such a turn of events. The new president must consider whether gestures designed to conciliate his recent opponents might weaken him unduly, especially if he risks provoking his more extreme allies into abandoning him completely. There is also the possibility that the opposition could refuse to reciprocate his magnanimity, thus causing the whole strategy to backfire. The public rejection of an olive branch publicly proffered could harden positions on both sides and lead to more, rather than less, antagonism and polarization.

Some of presidentialism’s most notable effects on the style of politics result from the characteristics of the presidential office itself. Among
these characteristics are not only the great powers associated with the presidency but also the limits imposed on it—particularly those requiring cooperation with the legislative branch, a requirement that becomes especially salient when that branch is dominated by opponents of the president’s party. Above all, however, there are the time constraints that a fixed term or number of possible terms imposes on the incumbent. The office of president is by nature two-dimensional and, in a sense, ambiguous: on the one hand, the president is the head of state and the representative of the entire nation; on the other hand, he stands for a clearly partisan political option. If he stands at the head of a multiparty coalition, he may even represent an option within an option as he deals with other members of the winning electoral alliance.

The president may find it difficult to combine his role as the head of what Bagehot called the "deferential" or symbolic aspect of the polity (a role that Bagehot thought the British monarch played perfectly and which, in republican parliamentary constitutions, has been successfully filled by presidents such as Sandro Pertini of Italy and Theodor Heuss of West Germany) with his role as an effective chief executive and partisan leader fighting to promote his party and its program. It is not always easy to be simultaneously the president, say, of all Chileans and of the workers; it is hard to be both the elegant and courtly master of La Moneda (the Chilean president’s official residence) and the demagogic orator of the mass rallies at the soccer stadium. Many voters and key elites are likely to think that playing the second role means betraying the first—for should not the president as head of state stand at least somewhat above party in order to be a symbol of the nation and the stability of its government? A presidential system, as opposed to a constitutional monarchy or a republic with both a premier and a head of state, does not allow such a neat differentiation of roles.

Perhaps the most important consequences of the direct relationship that exists between a president and the electorate are the sense the president may have of being the only elected representative of the whole people and the accompanying risk that he will tend to conflate his supporters with "the people" as a whole. The plebiscitarian component implicit in the president’s authority is likely to make the obstacles and opposition he encounters seem particularly annoying. In his frustration he may be tempted to define his policies as reflections of the popular will and those of his opponents as the selfish designs of narrow interests. This identification of leader with people fosters a certain populism that may be a source of strength. It may also, however, bring on a refusal to acknowledge the limits of the mandate that even a majority—to say nothing of a mere plurality—can claim as democratic justification for the enactment of its agenda. The doleful potential for displays of cold indifference, disrespect, or even downright hostility toward the opposition is not to be scanted.
Unlike the rather Olympian president, the prime minister is normally a member of parliament who, even as he sits on the government bench, remains part of the larger body. He must at some point meet his fellow legislators upon terms of rough equality, as the British prime minister regularly does during the traditional question time in the House of Commons. If he heads a coalition or minority government or if his party commands only a slim majority of seats, then he can afford precious little in the way of detachment from parliamentary opinion. A president, by contrast, heads an independent branch of government and meets with members of the legislature on his own terms. Especially uncertain in presidential regimes is the place of opposition leaders, who may not even hold public office and in any case have nothing like the quasi-official status that the leaders of the opposition enjoy in Britain, for example.

The absence in presidential regimes of a monarch or a "President of the Republic" who can act symbolically as a moderating power deprives the system of flexibility and of a means of restraining power. A generally neutral figure can provide moral ballast in a crisis or act as a moderator between the premier and his opponents—who may include not only his parliamentary foes but military leaders as well. A parliamentary regime has a speaker or presiding member of parliament who can exert some restraining influence over the parliamentary antagonists, including the prime minister himself, who is after all a member of the chamber over which the speaker presides.

The Problem of Dual Legitimacy

Given his unavoidable institutional situation, a president bids fair to become the focus for whatever exaggerated expectations his supporters may harbor. They are prone to think that he has more power than he really has or should have and may sometimes be politically mobilized against any adversaries who bar his way. The interaction between a popular president and the crowd acclaiming him can generate fear among his opponents and a tense political climate. Something similar might be said about a president with a military background or close military ties—which are facilitated by the absence of the prominent defense minister one usually finds under cabinet government.

Ministers in parliamentary systems are situated quite differently from cabinet officers in presidential regimes. Especially in cases of coalition or minority governments, prime ministers are much closer to being on an equal footing with their fellow ministers than presidents will ever be with their cabinet appointees. (One must note, however, that there are certain trends which may lead to institutions like that of Kanzlerdemokratie in Germany, under which the premier is free to choose his cabinet without parliamentary approval of the individual ministers. Parliamentary systems with tightly disciplined parties and a
prime minister who enjoys an absolute majority of legislative seats will tend to grow quite similar to presidential regimes. The tendency to personalize power in modern politics, thanks especially to the influence of television, has attenuated not only the independence of ministers but the degree of collegiality and collective responsibility in cabinet governments as well.)

A presidential cabinet is less likely than its parliamentary counterpart to contain strong and independent-minded members. The officers of a president’s cabinet hold their posts purely at the sufferance of their chief; if dismissed, they are out of public life altogether. A premier’s ministers, by contrast, are not his creatures but normally his parliamentary colleagues; they may go from the cabinet back to their seats in parliament and question the prime minister in party caucuses or during the ordinary course of parliamentary business just as freely as other members can. A president, moreover, can shield his cabinet members from criticism much more effectively than can a prime minister, whose cabinet members are regularly hauled before parliament to answer queries or even, in extreme cases, to face censure.

One need not delve into all the complexities of the relations between the executive and the legislature in various presidential regimes to see that all such systems are based on dual democratic legitimacy: no democratic principle exists to resolve disputes between the executive and the legislature about which of the two actually represents the will of the people. In practice, particularly in those developing countries where there are great regional inequalities in modernization, it is likely that the political and social outlook of the legislature will differ from that held by the president and his supporters. The territorial principle of representation, often reinforced by malapportionment or federal institutions like a nonproportional upper legislative chamber, tends to give greater legislative weight to small towns and rural areas. Circumstances like these can give the president grounds to question the democratic credentials of his legislative opponents. He may even charge that they represent nothing but local oligarchies and narrow, selfish clienteles. This may or may not be true, and it may or may not be worse to cast one’s ballot under the tutelage of local notables, tribal chieftains, landowners, priests, or even bosses than under that of trade unions, neighborhood associations, or party machines. Whatever the case may be, modern urban elites will remain inclined to skepticism about the democratic bona fides of legislators from rural or provincial districts. In such a context, a president frustrated by legislative recalcitrance will be tempted to mobilize the people against the putative oligarchs and special interests, to claim for himself alone true democratic legitimacy as the tribune of the people, and to urge on his supporters in mass demonstrations against the opposition. It is also conceivable that in some countries the president might represent the more traditional or provincial
electorates and could use their support against the more urban and modern sectors of society.

Even more ominously, in the absence of any principled method of distinguishing the true bearer of democratic legitimacy, the president may use ideological formulations to discredit his foes; institutional rivalry may thus assume the character of potentially explosive social and political strife. Institutional tensions that in some societies can be peacefully settled through negotiation or legal means may in other, less happy lands seek their resolution in the streets.

The Issue of Stability

Among the oft-cited advantages of presidentialism is its provision for the stability of the executive. This feature is said to furnish a welcome contrast to the tenuousness of many parliamentary governments, with their frequent cabinet crises and changes of prime minister, especially in the multiparty democracies of Western Europe. Certainly the spectacle of political instability presented by the Third and Fourth French Republics and, more recently, by Italy and Portugal has contributed to the low esteem in which many scholars—especially in Latin America—hold parliamentarism and their consequent preference for presidential government. But such invidious comparisons overlook the large degree of stability that actually characterizes parliamentary governments. The superficial volatility they sometimes exhibit obscures the continuity of parties in power, the enduring character of coalitions, and the way that party leaders and key ministers have of weathering cabinet crises without relinquishing their posts. In addition, the instability of presidential cabinets has been ignored by students of governmental stability. It is also insufficiently noted that parliamentary systems, precisely by virtue of their surface instability, often avoid deeper crises. A prime minister who becomes embroiled in scandal or loses the allegiance of his party or majority coalition and whose continuance in office might provoke grave turmoil can be much more easily removed than a corrupt or highly unpopular president. Unless partisan alignments make the formation of a democratically legitimate cabinet impossible, parliament should eventually be able to select a new prime minister who can form a new government. In some more serious cases, new elections may be called, although they often do not resolve the problem and can even, as in the case of Weimar Germany in the 1930s, compound it.

The government crises and ministerial changes of parliamentary regimes are of course excluded by the fixed term a president enjoys, but this great stability is bought at the price of similarly great rigidity. Flexibility in the face of constantly changing situations is not presidentialism's strong suit. Replacing a president who has lost the confidence of his party or the people is an extremely difficult
proposition. Even when polarization has intensified to the point of violence and illegality, a stubborn incumbent may remain in office. By the time the cumbersome mechanisms provided to dislodge him in favor of a more able and conciliatory successor have done their work, it may be too late. Impeachment is a very uncertain and time-consuming process, especially compared with the simple parliamentary vote of no confidence. An embattled president can use his powers in such a way that his opponents might not be willing to wait until the end of his term to oust him, but there are no constitutional ways—save impeachment or resignation under pressure—to replace him. There are, moreover, risks attached even to these entirely legal methods; the incumbent's supporters may feel cheated by them and rally behind him, thus exacerbating the crisis. It is hard to imagine how the issue could be resolved purely by the political leaders, with no recourse or threat of recourse to the people or to nondemocratic institutions like the courts or—in the worst case—the military. The intense antagonisms underlying such crises cannot remain even partially concealed in the corridors and cloakrooms of the legislature. What in a parliamentary system would be a government crisis can become a full-blown regime crisis in a presidential system.

The same rigidity is apparent when an incumbent dies or suffers incapacitation while in office. In the latter case, there is a temptation to conceal the president's infirmity until the end of his term. In event of the president's death, resignation, impeachment, or incapacity, the presidential constitution very often assures an automatic and immediate succession with no interregnum or power vacuum. But the institution of vice-presidential succession, which has worked so well in the United States, may not function so smoothly elsewhere. Particularly at risk are countries whose constitutions, like the United States Constitution before the passage of the Twelfth Amendment in 1804, allow presidential tickets to be split so that the winning presidential candidate and the winning vice-presidential candidate may come from different parties. If the deceased or outgoing president and his legal successor are from different parties, those who supported the former incumbent might object that the successor does not represent their choice and lacks democratic legitimacy.

Today, of course, few constitutions would allow something like the United States' Jefferson-Burr election of 1800 to occur. Instead they require that presidential and vice-presidential candidates be nominated together, and forbid ticket-splitting in presidential balloting. But these formal measures can do nothing to control the criteria for nomination. There are undoubtedly cases where the vice-president has been nominated mainly to balance the ticket and therefore represents a discontinuity with the president. Instances where a weak vice-presidential candidate is deliberately picked by an incumbent jealous of his own power, or even where the incumbent chooses his own wife, are not unknown. Nothing about the presidential system guarantees that the country's voters or
political leaders would have selected the vice-president to wield the powers they were willing to give to the former president. The continuity that the institution of automatic vice-presidential succession seems to ensure thus might prove more apparent than real. There remains the obvious possibility of a caretaker government that can fill in until new elections take place, preferably as soon as possible. Yet it hardly seems likely that the severe crisis which might have required the succession would also provide an auspicious moment for a new presidential election.

The Time Factor

Democracy is by definition a government pro tempore, a regime in which the electorate at regular intervals can hold its governors accountable and impose a change. The limited time that is allowed to elapse between elections is probably the greatest guarantee against overweening power and the last hope for those in the minority. Its drawback, however, is that it constrains a government’s ability to make good on the promises it made in order to get elected. If these promises were far-reaching, including major programs of social change, the majority may feel cheated of their realization by the limited term in office imposed on their chosen leader. On the other hand, the power of a president is at once so concentrated and so extensive that it seems unsafe not to check it by limiting the number of times any one president can be reelected. Such provisions can be frustrating, especially if the incumbent is highly ambitious; attempts to change the rule in the name of continuity have often appeared attractive.

Even if a president entertains no inordinate ambitions, his awareness of the time limits facing him and the program to which his name is tied cannot help but affect his political style. Anxiety about policy discontinuities and the character of possible successors encourages what Albert Hirschman has called "the wish of vouloir conclure." This exaggerated sense of urgency on the part of the president may lead to ill-conceived policy initiatives, overly hasty stabs at implementation, unwarranted anger at the lawful opposition, and a host of other evils. A president who is desperate to build his Brasilia or implement his program of nationalization or land reform before he becomes ineligible for reelection is likely to spend money unwisely or risk polarizing the country for the sake of seeing his agenda become reality. A prime minister who can expect his party or governing coalition to win the next round of elections is relatively free from such pressures. Prime ministers have stayed in office over the course of several legislatures without rousing any fears of nascent dictatorship, for the possibility of changing the government without recourse to unconstitutional means always remained open.

The fixed term in office and the limit on reelection are institutions of
unquestionable value in presidential constitutions, but they mean that the political system must produce a capable and popular leader every four years or so, and also that whatever "political capital" the outgoing president may have accumulated cannot endure beyond the end of his term.

All political leaders must worry about the ambitions of second-rank leaders, sometimes because of their jockeying for position in the order of succession and sometimes because of their intrigues. The fixed and definite date of succession that a presidential constitution sets can only exacerbate the incumbent’s concerns on this score. Add to this the desire for continuity, and it requires no leap of logic to predict that the president will choose as his lieutenant and successor-apparent someone who is more likely to prove a yes-man than a leader in his own right.

The inevitable succession also creates a distinctive kind of tension between the ex-president and his successor. The new man may feel driven to assert his independence and distinguish himself from his predecessor, even though both might belong to the same party. The old president, for his part, having known the unique honor and sense of power that come with the office, will always find it hard to reconcile himself to being out of power for good, with no prospect of returning even if the new incumbent fails miserably. Parties and coalitions may publicly split because of such antagonisms and frustrations. They can also lead to intrigues, as when a still-prominent former president works behind the scenes to influence the next succession or to undercut the incumbent’s policies or leadership of the party.

Of course similar problems can also emerge in parliamentary systems when a prominent leader finds himself out of office but eager to return. But parliamentary regimes can more easily mitigate such difficulties for a number of reasons. The acute need to preserve party unity, the deference accorded prominent party figures, and the new premier’s keen awareness that he needs the help of his predecessor even if the latter does not sit on the government bench or the same side of the house—all these contribute to the maintenance of concord. Leaders of the same party may alternate as premiers; each knows that the other may be called upon to replace him at any time and that confrontations can be costly to both, so they share power. A similar logic applies to relations between leaders of competing parties or parliamentary coalitions.

The time constraints associated with presidentialism, combined with the zero-sum character of presidential elections, are likely to render such contests more dramatic and divisive than parliamentary elections. The political realignments that in a parliamentary system may take place between elections and within the halls of the legislature must occur publicly during election campaigns in presidential systems, where they are a necessary part of the process of building a winning coalition. Under presidentialism, time becomes an intensely important dimension
of politics. The pace of politics is very different under a presidential, as opposed to a parliamentary, constitution. When presidential balloting is at hand, deals must be made not only publicly but decisively—for the winning side to renege on them before the next campaign would seem like a betrayal of the voters’ trust. Compromises, however necessary, that might appear unprincipled, opportunistic, or ideologically unsound are much harder to make when they are to be scrutinized by the voters in an upcoming election. A presidential regime leaves much less room for tacit consensus-building, coalition-shifting, and the making of compromises which, though prudent, are hard to defend in public.

Consociational methods of compromise, negotiation, and power-sharing under presidential constitutions have played major roles in the return of democratic government to Colombia, Venezuela, and, more recently, Brazil. But these methods appeared as necessary antinomies—deviations from the rules of the system undertaken in order to limit the voters’ choices to what has been termed, rather loosely and pejoratively, democradura. The restoration of democracy will no doubt continue to require consociational strategies such as the formation of grand coalitions and the making of many pacts; the drawback of presidentialism is that it rigidifies and formalizes them. They become binding for a fixed period, during which there is scant opportunity for revision or renegotiation. Moreover, as the Colombian case shows, such arrangements rob the electorate of some of its freedom of choice; parliamentary systems, like that of Spain with its consenso, make it much more likely that consociational agreements will be made only after the people have spoken.

Parliamentarism and Political Stability

This analysis of presidentialism’s unpromising implications for democracy is not meant to imply that no presidential democracy can be stable; on the contrary, the world’s most stable democracy—the United States of America—has a presidential constitution. Nevertheless, one cannot help tentatively concluding that in many other societies the odds that presidentialism will help preserve democracy are far less favorable.

While it is true that parliamentarism provides a more flexible and adaptable institutional context for the establishment and consolidation of democracy, it does not follow that just any sort of parliamentary regime will do. Indeed, to complete the analysis one would need to reflect upon the best type of parliamentary constitution and its specific institutional features. Among these would be a prime-ministerial office combining power with responsibility, which would in turn require strong, well-disciplined political parties. Such features—there are of course many others we lack the space to discuss—would help foster responsible decision making and stable governments and would encourage genuine
party competition without causing undue political fragmentation. In addition, every country has unique aspects that one must take into account—traditions of federalism, ethnic or cultural heterogeneity, and so on. Finally, it almost goes without saying that our analysis establishes only probabilities and tendencies, not determinisms. No one can guarantee that parliamentary systems will never experience grave crisis or even breakdown.

In the final analysis, all regimes, however wisely designed, must depend for their preservation upon the support of society at large—its major forces, groups, and institutions. They rely, therefore, on a public consensus which recognizes as legitimate authority only that power which is acquired through lawful and democratic means. They depend also on the ability of their leaders to govern, to inspire trust, to respect the limits of their power, and to reach an adequate degree of consensus. Although these qualities are most needed in a presidential system, it is precisely there that they are most difficult to achieve. Heavy reliance on the personal qualities of a political leader—on the virtue of a statesman, if you will—is a risky course, for one never knows if such a man can be found to fill the presidential office. But while no presidential constitution can guarantee a Washington, a Juárez, or a Lincoln, no parliamentary regime can guarantee an Adenauer or a Churchill either. Given such unavoidable uncertainty, the aim of this essay has been merely to help recover a debate on the role of alternative democratic institutions in building stable democratic polities.
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CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND
DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION
Parliamentarianism versus Presidentialism

By ALFRED STEPAN and CINDY SKACH*

INTRODUCTION

THE struggle to consolidate the new democracies—especially those in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia—has given rise to a wide-ranging debate about the hard choices concerning economic restructuring, economic institutions, and economic markets. A similar debate has focused on democratic political institutions and political markets. This literature has produced provocative hypotheses about the effects of institutions on democracy. It forms part of the “new institutionalism” literature in comparative politics that holds as a premise that “political democracy depends not only on economic and social conditions but also on the design of political institutions.”

* This article grew out of an exchange at a December 1990 meeting in Budapest of the East-South System Transformations Project, which brought together specialists on Eastern Europe, Southern Europe, and South America. When we were discussing topics for future research and dividing up our collective work, Adam Przeworski lamented that although there were assertions in the literature about the probable impact of different types of institutional arrangements on democratic consolidation, there were no systematic data available. In his notes about the Budapest meeting, Przeworski reiterated that “we seem to know surprisingly little about the effects of the particular institutional arrangements for their effectiveness and their durability. Indeed, the very question whether institutions matter is wide open.” See Przeworski, “Notes after the Budapest Meeting” (Chicago: University of Chicago, January 11, 1991), 10. We acknowledge the careful reading and/or comments of Adam Przeworski, Jack Snyder, Douglas Rae, Juan Linz, Mike Alvarez, Martin Gargiulo, Lisa Anderson, Anthony Marx, Gregory Gause, Joel Hellman, and Scott Mainwaring. The normal ca- veats apply.


2 James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, “The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life,” American Political Science Review 78 (September 1984), 738. For a pioneer- ing early work exemplifying this approach, see Maurice Duverger, Political Parties (New
One fundamental political-institutional question that has only recently received serious scholarly attention concerns the impact of different constitutional frameworks on democratic consolidation. Although the topic has been increasingly debated and discussed, little systematic cross-regional evidence has been brought to bear on it. This is unfortunate, because constitutions are essentially “institutional frameworks” that in functioning democracies provide the basic decision rules and incentive systems concerning government formation, the conditions under which governments can continue to rule, and the conditions by which they can be terminated democratically. More than simply one of the many dimensions of a democratic system, constitutions create much of the overall system of incentives and organizations within which the other institutions and dimensions found in the many types of democracy are structured and processed.

Study shows that the range of existing constitutional frameworks in


We agree with Philippe C. Schmitter’s argument that there are many types of democracies and that “consolidation includes a mix of institutions.” See Schmitter, “The Consolidation of Democracy and the Choice of Institutions,” East-South System Transformations Working Paper, no. 7 (Chicago: Department of Political Science, University of Chicago, September 1991), 7. See also Schmitter and Terry Karl, “What Democracy Is . . . and Is Not,” Journal of Democracy (Summer 1991). The authors list eleven important dimensions that provide a matrix of potential combinations by which political systems can be differently democratic.
the world's long-standing democracies is narrower than one would think. With one exception (Switzerland), every existing democracy today is either presidential (as in the United States), parliamentary (as in most of Western Europe), or a semipresidential hybrid of the two (as in France and Portugal, where there is a directly elected president and a prime minister who must have a majority in the legislature). In this essay we pay particular attention to contrasting what we call "pure parliamentarianism" with "pure presidentialism." Each type has only two fundamental characteristics, and for our purposes of classification these characteristics are necessary and sufficient.

A pure parliamentary regime in a democracy is a system of mutual dependence:

1. The chief executive power must be supported by a majority in the legislature and can fall if it receives a vote of no confidence.
2. The executive power (normally in conjunction with the head of state) has the capacity to dissolve the legislature and call for elections.

A pure presidential regime in a democracy is a system of mutual independence:

5 We realize that any effort to operationalize the concept of "democracy" so that it can be used for purposes of classification of all the countries of the world is inherently difficult. Fortunately there have been two independently designed efforts that attempt this task. One, by Michael Coppedge and Wolfgang Reinicke, attempted to operationalize the eight "institutional guarantees" that Robert Dahl argued were required for a polyarchy. The authors assigned values to 137 countries on a polyarchy scale, based on their assessment of political conditions as of mid-1985. The results are available in Coppedge and Reinicke, "A Measure of Polyarchy" (Paper presented at the Conference on Measuring Democracy, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, May 27–28, 1988); and in idem, "A Scale of Polyarchy," in Raymond D. Gastil, ed., Freedom in the World: Political Rights and Civil Liberties, 1987–1988 (New York: Freedom House, 1990), 101–28. Robert A. Dahl's seminal discussion of the institutional guarantees needed for polyarchy is found in his Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 1–16.

The other effort to operationalize a scale of democracy is the annual Freedom House evaluation of virtually all the countries of the world. The advisory panel in recent years has included such scholars as Seymour Martin Lipset, Giovanni Sartori, and Lucian W. Pye. The value assigned for each year 1973 to 1987 can be found in the above-cited Gastil, 54–65. In this essay, we will call a country a "continuous democracy" if it has received no higher than a scale score of 3 on the Coppedge-Reinicke Polyarchy Scale for 1985 and no higher than a 2.5 averaged score of the ratings for "political rights" and "civil liberties" on the Gastil Democracy Scale, for the 1980–89 period.


1. The legislative power has a fixed electoral mandate that is its own source of legitimacy.

2. The chief executive power has a fixed electoral mandate that is its own source of legitimacy.

These necessary and sufficient characteristics are more than classificatory. They are also the constraining conditions within which the vast majority of aspiring democracies must somehow attempt simultaneously to produce major socioeconomic changes and to strengthen democratic institutions.\(^8\)

Pure parliamentarianism, as defined here, had been the norm in the democratic world following World War II.\(^9\) However, so far, in the 1980s and 1990s, all the new aspirant democracies in Latin America and Asia (Korea and the Philippines) have chosen pure presidentialism. And to date, of the approximately twenty-five countries that now constitute Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, only three—Hungary, the new Czech Republic, and Slovakia—have chosen pure parliamentarianism.\(^10\)

We question the wisdom of this virtual dismissal of the pure parliamentary model by most new democracies and believe that the hasty embrace of presidential models should be reconsidered. In this article we bring evidence in support of the theoretical argument that parliamentary democracies tend to increase the degrees of freedom that facilitate the momentous tasks of economic and social restructuring facing new democracies as they simultaneously attempt to consolidate their democratic institutions.

It is not our purpose in this article to weigh the benefits and the drawbacks of parliamentarianism and presidentialism. Our intention is to report and analyze numerous different sources of data, all of which point

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\(^{8}\) Alfred Stepan will develop this argument in greater detail in a book he is writing entitled *Democratic Capacities/Democratic Institutions*.

\(^{9}\) For example, in Arend Lijphart’s list of the twenty-one continuous democracies of the world since World War II, seventeen were pure parliamentary democracies, two were mixed, one was semipresidential, and only one, the United States, was pure presidential. See Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-one Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 38.

\(^{10}\) The norm is a directly elected president with very strong de jure and de facto prerogatives coexisting with a prime minister who needs the support of parliament. As of this writing (April 1993), only Hungary and the newly created Czech Republic and Slovakia had opted for the pure parliamentary constitutional framework. Despite having directly elected presidents, Slovenia, Estonia, and Bulgaria have strong parliamentary features. In Slovakia and Estonia presidents will now be selected by parliament. Bulgaria, however, has moved from an indirectly to a directly elected president. For political, legal, and sociological analyses of constitution making in East European transitions, see the quarterly publication *East European Constitutional Review*, which is part of the Center for the Study of Constitutionalism in Eastern Europe at the University of Chicago. The center was established in 1990 in partnership with the Central European University.
in the direction of a much stronger correlation between democratic consolidation and pure parliamentarianism than between democratic consolidation and pure presidentialism. We believe our findings are sufficiently strong to warrant long-range studies that test the probabilistic propositions we indicate.\footnote{Duration analysis would be particularly appropriate because it estimates the conditional probability of an event taking place (for example, of a democracy "dying," by undergoing military coup), given that the regime has survived for a given period of time as a democracy. This conditional probability is in turn parameterized as a function of exogenous explanatory variables (such as constitutional frameworks). The sign of an estimated coefficient then indicates the direction of the effect of the explanatory variable on the conditional probability of a democracy dying at a given time. Such models allow us to estimate whether democracies exhibit positive or negative "duration dependence": specifically, whether the probability of a democracy dying increases or decreases, respectively, with increases in the duration of the spell. Mike Alvarez, a Ph.D. candidate in political science at the University of Chicago, is creating the data and the appropriate statistical techniques and then implementing this duration analysis as part of his dissertation. Adam Przeworski, too, has embarked on such research. See also Nicholas M. Kiefer, "Economic Duration Data and Hazard Functions," \textit{Journal of Economic Literature} 26 (June 1988).}

\textbf{Constitutional Frameworks: Constructing Relevant Data}

We were able to construct a data set about party systems and consolidated democracies. Since we are interested in the lessons about party systems in long-standing consolidated democracies, we include the countries of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). There were forty-three consolidated democracies in the world between 1979 and 1989.\footnote{We consider a country to be a "consolidated democracy" if it has received no higher than a scale score of 3 on the Coppedge-Reinicke Polyarchy Scale for 1985 and no higher than a 2.5 average of the ratings for "political rights" and "civil liberties" on the Gastil Democracy Scale. Countries that met these joint criteria for every year of the 1979–89 decade are considered "continuous consolidated democracies." See fn. 18 herein.} Excluding the "mixed cases" of Switzerland and Finland, there were thirty-four parliamentary democracies, two semipresidential democracies, and only five pure presidential democracies.\footnote{Duverger calls Finland semipresidential because the president has significant de jure and de facto powers; it should be pointed out, however, that from 1925 to 1988 the Finnish president was not so much directly elected as indirectly chosen by party blocs. The candidates normally did not campaign in the country, and though parties put the names of their candidates on the ballot, the electoral college votes were not pledges and often entailed deliberations and multiple balloting, leading Shugart and Carey to conclude that the presidential election system in Finland from 1925 to 1988, "given its party-centered character . . . was not much different from election in parliament." See Shugart and Carey (fn. 2), 212–21, 226–28, quote at 221. We consider Finland to have been a "mixed" constitutional system until 1988.} We used the powerful yet relatively simple formula devised by Markku Laakso and Rein Taagepera to measure the "effective" number of political parties in the legislatures of these forty-one political systems.\footnote{Laakso and Taagepera, "‘Effective’ Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe," \textit{Comparative Political Studies} 12 (April 1979). The formula takes into ac-}
Of the thirty-four parliamentary democracies, eleven had between three and seven effective political parties. Both of the semipresidential democracies in this universe had between three and four effective political parties. However, no pure presidential democracy had more than 2.6 effective political parties. These data indicate that consolidated parliamentary and semipresidential democracies can be associated with a large number of parties in their legislatures, whereas consolidated presidential democracies are not associated with the type of multiparty coalitional behavior that facilitates democratic rule in contexts of numerous socioeconomic, ideological, and ethnic cleavages and of numerous parties in the legislature. The currently empty column in Table 1 of long-standing presidential democracies with “3.0 or more” effective legislative parties is probably one of the reasons why there are so few continuous presidential democracies.

The Finnish political scientist Tatu Vanhanen published an important study of democratic durability that incorporates the nuances in individual countries’ socioeconomic structures. Hence, it provides another data set for testing our hypothesis regarding constitutional frameworks.

Vanhanen constructed a political Index of Democratization (IPD) based on (1) the total percentage of the vote received by all parties except the largest vote getter and (2) the total percentage of the population that votes. He has also constructed a socioeconomic Index of Power Resources (IPR) based on six variables: (1) degree of decentralization of nonagricultural economic resources, (2) percentage of total agricultural land owned as family farms, and percentage of population (3) in universities, (4) in cities, (5) that is literate, and (6) that is not employed in agriculture. His

count each party’s relative size in the legislature, as measured by the percentage of seats it holds. The “effective” number of parties is “the number of hypothetical equal-size parties that would have the same total effect on fractionalization of the system as have the actual parties of unequal size.” The formula for calculating the effective number of parties (N) is

\[ N = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} \pi_i^2} \]

where \( \pi_i \) = the percentage of total seats held in the legislature by the i-th party.

For each country listed in Table 1, we determined the number of seats held in the lower or only house of the legislature at the time of each legislative election between 1979 and 1989. Then, the effective number of political parties (N) was calculated for each of these election years and multiplied by the number of years until the next legislative election.

Austria, Ireland, and Iceland have directly elected presidents, but we do not classify them as semipresidential; we concur with Duverger that they are not de facto semipresidential since “political practice is parliamentary.” See Duverger (fn. 6, 1980), 167.

major hypothesis is that all countries above his threshold level of 6.5 on his Index of Power Resources "should be democracies," and all countries below his minimum level, 3.5 index points, "should be non-democracies or semi-democracies." He has constructed his indexes for 147 countries for 1980 and 1988.

His hypothesis was broadly confirmed in that 73.6 percent of the countries that were above 6.5 in his IPR qualified as democracies as measured by his Index of Democracy. In his regression analysis with these indexes, Vanhanen found the correlation (r2) between the ID and IPR equal to .707 in 1980 and .709 in 1988. Approximately 76 percent of the 147 country cases tested by Vanhanen had small residuals and deviated from the regression line by less than one standard error of estimate.

However, thirty-six countries in 1980 and thirty-four in 1988 had negative or positive residuals larger than one standard error of estimate. These seventy large-residual cases indicate that about 24 percent of the variance in Vanhanen's regression analysis is unexplained. Vanhanen noted that "large positive residuals indicate that the level of democratization is considerably higher than expected on the basis of the average relationship between ID and IPR [we will call these cases 'democratic over-achievers'], and large negative residuals indicate that it is lower than expected [we will call these 'democratic underachievers']." He then asks "how to explain these deviations that contradict my hypothesis? I have not found any general explanation for them."17

Vanhanen's unexplained variance—his democratic over- and underachievers—constitutes a data set with which to test our hypothesis regarding constitutional frameworks. Of the total seventy deviating cases in his 1980 and 1988 studies, fifty-nine occurred in constitutional frameworks we have called "pure parliamentary" or "pure presidential" (thirty-seven and twenty-two cases, respectively). When we analyze democratic underachievers in Vanhanen's set, we find that presidential systems had a democratic underachiever rate 3.4 times greater than did the parliamentary systems. Further, parliamentary systems in Vanhanen's set were 1.8 times more likely than presidential systems to be democratic overachievers. (See Table 2.)

Another set of data concerns both comparative capacity to be democratic survivors and vulnerability to military coups. Since we are concerned primarily with countries that are making some effort to construct democracies, we restrict our analysis to those countries in the world that qualified in the Gastil Political Rights Scale as democracies for at least

17 Ibid., 84.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parliamentary</th>
<th>Semipresidential</th>
<th>Presidential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.0 or More Parties</td>
<td>Fewer Than 3.0 Parties</td>
<td>3.0 or More Parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>Nauru</td>
<td>Tuvalu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Vincent 1.4</td>
<td>Dominica 1.5</td>
<td>Jamaica 1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad and Tobago 1.6</td>
<td>Barbados 1.7</td>
<td>St. Lucia 1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada 2.0</td>
<td>UK 2.1</td>
<td>India 2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria 2.4b</td>
<td>Australia 2.5</td>
<td>Solomon Islands 2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain 2.7</td>
<td>Ireland 2.7b</td>
<td>Japan 2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia 2.1</td>
<td>Dominican Republic 2.3</td>
<td>Costa Rica 2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
West Germany 3.2
Norway 3.2
Sweden 3.4
Luxembourg 3.4
Israel 3.6
Netherlands 3.8
Italy 3.9
Papua New Guinea 4.0
Iceland 4.3b
Denmark 5.2
Belgium 7.0

France 3.2
Portugal 3.6

Source: See fnn. 12, 14 for explanation of the Laakso/Taagepera Index formula, criteria for inclusion into this universe of continuous democracies, and data used to construct this table.

a Switzerland and Finland are “mixed” systems with 5.4 and 5.1 “effective” political parties, respectively. See fn. 13 for why we classify Finland, until 1988, as a mixed rather than semipresidential regime.

b See fn. 15 for why Duverger (and we) classify Austria, Ireland, and Iceland as parliamentary rather than presidential regimes.

c Traditionally in Kiribati, all candidates for the unicameral legislature—the Maneaba—have fought as independents. In 1985 various Maneaba members that were dissatisfied with government policies formed a Christian Democrat opposition grouping. The government grouping then “is generally known as the National Party, although it does not constitute a formal political party.” It is more accurate to refer to Kiribati’s “parties” as “pro” and “anti” assembly groupings, of which there are a total of two. See J. Denis and Ian Derbyshire, Political Systems of the World (Edinburgh: W. and R. Chambers, 1989), 724. This is also true in Tuvalu, where there are no formal political parties, and in Nauru, where there are loosely structured pro- and antigovernment groupings. See Arthur Banks, Political Handbook of the World (Binghamton: State University of New York, csa, 1989), 422, 627.
Table 2
Significant "Over-" and "Under-" Democratic Achievers:*
Comparison of Pure Parliamentary and Pure Presidential Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Countries</th>
<th>Democratic Underachievers</th>
<th>Democratic Overachievers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pure parliamentary</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6 (16.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure presidential</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12 (54.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Vanhanen (fn. 16), 75–79, 94–97, presents data for his Index of Democratization and his Index of Power Resources. We determined whether the systems were parliamentary, presidential, or "other" using the references contained in Table 5, fn. 1. "Other" includes semipresidential, one-party, and ruling monarchy.

* Based on residuals in Vanhanen's regression analysis with his Index of Power Resources and his Democratic Index for 1980 and 1988.

one year between 1973 and 1989. Only 77 of the 168 countries in the world met this test. In an attempt to control for economic development as an intervening variable that might independently influence political stability, we eliminate from this section of our analysis the twenty-four OECD countries. This leaves a data set of the fifty-three non-OECD countries that experimented with democracy for at least one year between 1973 and 1989. Of these, twenty-eight countries were pure parliamentary, twenty-five were pure presidential, and surprisingly none were either semipresidential or mixed. Only five of the twenty-five presidential democracies (20 percent) were democratic for any ten consecutive years in the 1973–89 period; but seventeen of the twenty-eight pure parliamentary regimes (61 percent) were democratic for a consecutive ten-year span in the same period. Parliamentary democracies had a rate of survival more than three times higher than that of presidential democracies. Pure presidential democracies were also more than twice as likely as pure parliamentary democracies to experience a military coup. (See Tables 3 and 4.)

Another source of relevant data concerns the set of countries, ninety-three in all, that became independent between 1945 and 1979. During the ten-year period between 1980 and 1989 only fifteen of the ninety-three merit possible classification as continuous democracies. Since we are interested in evolution toward and consolidation of democracy, we examine the regime form that these countries chose at independence. Forty-one countries functioned as parliamentary systems in their first

18 We use the date of independence since it was usually within one year of independence that new constitutions were drafted and approved in these countries. We exclude from our analysis those countries that became independent after 1979 because we want to see which of these countries were then continuously democratic for the ten-year period 1980–89. This gives us a sample of time between World War II and 1979.
### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regime Type during Democracy</th>
<th>Total non-OECD countries democratic for at least one year during 1973–89</th>
<th>Number of countries from above set continuously democratic for ten consecutive years in this period</th>
<th>Democratic survival rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pure Parliamentary</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure Presidential</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semipresidential or Mixed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Criteria for inclusion in this universe of countries is based on the Gastil Democracy Scale and the Coppedge-Reinicke Polyarchy Scale (see fn. 5).

At this stage of our research, we are impressed by the fact that no matter what their initial constitutional form, not one of the fifty-two countries in the nonparliamentary categories evolved into a continuous democracy for the 1980–89 sample period, whereas fifteen of the forty-one systems (36 percent) that actually functioned as parliamentary systems in their first year of independence not only evolved into continuous democracies but were the only countries in the entire set to do so. (See Table 5.)

If the data in Table 5 were strictly numerical observations, the chances of this distribution occurring randomly would be less than one in one thousand. But we realize that the quantification of this qualitative data masks important realities, such as the fact that the classes catch some countries that were always ademocratic or even antidemocratic. We do not rule out the hypothesis that the more democratic countries chose parliamentary systems at independence. Also, the fact that many of the
Table 4
Percentage of the 53 Non-OECD Countries That Were Democratic for at Least One Year in 1973–89 and Experienced a Military Coup* While a Democracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regime Type at Time of Coup</th>
<th>Pure Parliamentary</th>
<th>Pure Presidential</th>
<th>Semipresidential or Mixed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total non-OECD countries democratic for at least one year during 1973–89</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of countries from above set having experienced a military coup while a democracy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military coup susceptibility rate</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* We define a military coup as an unconstitutional removal of the executive by or with the aid of active-duty members of the domestic armed forces.

“Democratic survivors” are island states and that all but two (Papua New Guinea and Nauru) are former British colonies should be taken into account.19 We can control for the British colonial legacy, however, by isolating the fifty former British colonies from our original set of ninety-three. Of the thirty-four from this subset that began independence as parliamentary systems, thirteen (38 percent) evolved into continuous democracies for the 1980–89 period. Of the five former British colonies that began as presidential systems, not one evolved into a democracy for the

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19 Myron Weiner observes that “most of the smaller, newly independent democracies... are also former British colonies” and puts forth the hypothesis that “tutelary democracy under British colonialism appears to be a significant determinant of democracy in the Third World.” See Weiner, “Empirical Democratic Theory,” in Myron Weiner and Ergun Özbudun, eds., Competitive Elections in Developing Countries (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987), esp. 18–23, quote at 19. This question is also addressed by Jorge Dominguez, “The Caribbean Question: Why Has Liberal Democracy (Surprisingly) Flourished?” in Dominguez, ed., Democracy in the Caribbean: Political, Economic, and Social Perspectives (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). Dominguez discusses how these Caribbean democracies have faced (and survived) severe economic crises. He attributes their democratic stability to the legacy of British institutions (including, but not limited to, the Westminster parliamentary model) and the prodemocratic disposition of the countries’ leadership.
1980–89 period. Similarly, not one of the eleven former British colonies that began independence as ruling monarchies evolved into a continuous democracy for 1980–89. This suggests that factors other than British colonial heritage are related to the democratic evolution and durability in these countries. Moreover, the fifteen democratic survivors in our set survived despite challenges such as tribal riots, linguistic conflicts, economic depressions, and/or mutinies. They therefore constitute a set of countries for which the constitutional form may be crucial in explaining democratic durability.

The comparative tendency for different constitutional frameworks to produce legislative majorities can also be ascertained. This is relevant to our central question because majorities help to implement policy programs democratically. Examining evidence from our set of the non-OECD countries that were democratic for at least one year from 1973 to 1987, we note that in presidential democracies the executive’s party enjoyed a legislative majority less than half of the time (48 percent of the democratic years). Parliamentary democracies, in sharp contrast, had majorities at least 83 percent of the time. (See Table 6.)

A final set of data concerns the duration and reappointment of cabinet ministers in presidential versus parliamentary frameworks. These data relate to the issue of continuity in governance. Some minimal degree of ministerial continuity and/or prior ministerial experience would seem to be helpful in enhancing the political capacity of the government of the day to negotiate with state bureaucracies and with national and transnational corporations. Using a number of recent studies, we have examined all ministerial appointments during the years of democratic rule in Western Europe, the United States, and Latin America between 1950 and 1980. Two major findings emerge. First, the “return ratio” of ministers (that is, the percentage who serve more than once in their careers) is almost three times higher in parliamentary democracies than in presidential democracies. Second, the average duration of a minister in any one appointment is almost twice as long in parliamentary democracies as it is in presidential democracies. Even when only those countries with more than twenty-five years of uninterrupted democracy are included in the sample, the findings still hold. The conclusion is inescapable: min-

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20 The five former British colonies that chose presidential systems within one year of independence were Zambia, Cyprus, Malawi, Seychelles, and South Yemen.

Table 5
Regime Type of the 93 Countries of the World That Became Independent between 1945 and 1979 and All the Continuous Democracies from This Set in 1980–89

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parliamentary N = 41</th>
<th>Presidental N = 36</th>
<th>Semi-presidential N = 3</th>
<th>Ruling Monarchy N = 13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>Madagascar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>Malawi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>Nauru</td>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>Mali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>B. Faso</td>
<td>Mauritania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>Mozambique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>Cape Verde(^b)</td>
<td>Niger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominica</td>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
<td>CAR</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>St. Vincent</td>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>Rwanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambia</td>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Comoros</td>
<td>Sao Tomé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana(^a)</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>Seychelles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grenada</td>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>Djibouti</td>
<td>Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guyana(^a)</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Eq. Guinea</td>
<td>Togo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Sri Lanka(^a)</td>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>Suriname</td>
<td>Guinea Bissau</td>
<td>Vietnam (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>Swaziland</td>
<td>Ivory Coast</td>
<td>Vietnam (S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>Korea (S)</td>
<td>Yemen (S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>Trinidad and Tobago</td>
<td>Korea (N)</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>Tuvalu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W. Samoa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Continuous Democracies 1980–89

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>N = 15/41</th>
<th>N = 0/36</th>
<th>N = 0/3</th>
<th>N = 0/13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
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<td>Botswana</td>
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<td>Dominica</td>
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<tr>
<td>India</td>
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<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
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<td>Jamaica</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nauru</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
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<td>St. Vincent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad and Tobago</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuvalu</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Results of a Pearson’s chi-squared test with this data allow us to reject the null hypothesis that the above distribution is random. The chances of observing this distribution randomly are less than one in one thousand.

* Sri Lanka was certainly and Ghana and Guyana appear to have been parliamentary democracies upon independence in 1948, 1957, and 1966, respectively. In 1960 Ghana changed to a presidential system, and in 1966 it experienced a military coup. The changes to a strong semipresidential system in Sri Lanka (1978) and a presidential system in Guyana (1980) were followed by increased restrictions on political rights and civil liberties. The last years that Sri Lanka and Guyana were classified as democracies on the Gastil Democracy Scale were 1982 and 1973, respectively. Ghana was classified as a democracy on this scale only in 1981–82.

* Although Cape Verde became independent in 1975, its first constitution was not promulgated until 1980. For the first five years of independence, Cape Verde appears to have functioned as a presidential system.
Table 6
TOTAL YEARS OF PRESIDENTIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY OF NON-OECD COUNTRIES (1973–87) AND TOTAL YEARS IN WHICH THE EXECUTIVES PARTY HAD A LEGISLATIVE MAJORITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Years of Democracya</th>
<th>Total Democratic Years in Which Executive Had a Legislative Majority</th>
<th>Percentage of Democratic Years in Which Executive Had a Legislative Majorityb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary years</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential years</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


a Includes all non-OECD countries that qualified as democracies for at least one year during the 1973–87 period, according to the Gastil Polyarchy Scale ten-year evaluation (fn. 5). Countries that became independent after 1979 are excluded.

b We consider an executive to have had a legislative majority each year in which his or her party held at least 50% of the legislative seats in the country’s lower house for parliamentary frameworks and in both houses for presidential frameworks. Coalitional majorities formed after the elections for legislative seats in the parliamentary frameworks are not included here. Therefore, the percentage of parliamentary years in which prime ministers actually governed with legislative majorities is likely to be higher than 83%. The norm in Western Europe, for example, is the coalitional, not single-party, legislative majority. See Kaare Strom, Minority Government and Majority Rule (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

isters in presidential democracies have far less experience than their counterparts in parliamentary democracies.

THE CONTRASTING LOGICS OF PURE PARLIAMENTARIANISM AND PURE PRESIDENTIALISM

Let us step back from the data for a brief note about the type of statements that can be made about political institutions and democratic consolidation. The status of statements about the impact of institutions is not causally determinative (A causes B) but probabilistic (A tends to be associated with B). For example, Maurice Duverger’s well-known observation about electoral systems is a probabilistic proposition: it holds that

systems with single-member districts and where a simple plurality wins the seat tend to produce two-party systems, whereas electoral systems with multimember districts and proportional representation tend to produce multiparty systems.\textsuperscript{22} The fact that Austria and Canada are exceptions to his proposition is less important than the fact that nineteen of the twenty-one cases of uninterrupted democracy in postwar industrialized countries conform to his proposition.\textsuperscript{23}

A probabilistic proposition in politics is more than a statistical assertion. It entails the identification and explanation of the specific political processes that tend to produce the probabilistic results. And to establish even greater confidence in the proposition, one should examine case studies to explain whether and how the important hypothesized institutional characteristics actually came into play in individual cases.\textsuperscript{24}

Whatever the constitutional framework, consolidating democracy outside of the industrialized core of the world is difficult and perilous. The quantitative evidence we have brought to bear on presidentialism and parliamentarianism would assume greater theoretical and political significance if a strong case could be made that the empirically evident propensities we have documented are the logical, indeed the predictable, result of the constitutional frameworks themselves. We believe that such a case can be made.

The essence of pure parliamentarianism is mutual dependence. From this defining condition a series of incentives and decision rules for creating and maintaining single-party or coalitional majorities, minimizing legislative impasses, inhibiting the executive from flouting the constitution, and discouraging political society's support for military coups predictably flows. The essence of pure presidentialism is mutual independence. From this defining (and confining) condition a series of incentives and decision rules for encouraging the emergence of minority governments, discouraging the formation of durable coalitions, maximizing legislative impasses, motivating executives to flout the constitution, and stimulating political society to call periodically for military coups pre-

\textsuperscript{22} See Duverger (fn. 2).
\textsuperscript{24} There is a growing literature of case studies examining the influence of constitutional frameworks on stability and/or breakdown in developing countries. See, e.g., David M. Lipset, "Papua New Guinea: "The Melanesian Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, 1975–1986," in Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., \textit{Democracy in Developing Countries: Asia} (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1989), esp. 413. Lipset discusses how the constitutional framework came into play to prevent regime breakdown in Papua New Guinea. See also Dominguez (fn. 19).
dictably flows. Presidents and legislatures are directly elected and have their own fixed mandates. This mutual independence creates the possibility of a political impasse between the chief executive and the legislative body for which there is no constitutionally available impasse-breaking device.

Here, then, is a paradox. Many new democracies select presidentialism because they believe it to be a strong form of executive government. Yet our data show that between 1973 and 1987 presidential democracies enjoyed legislative majorities less than half of the time. With this relatively low percentage of “supported time” and the fixed mandates of the presidential framework, executives and legislatures in these countries were “stuck” with one another, and executives were condemned to serve out their terms. How often did these executives find it necessary to govern by decree-law—at the edge of constitutionalism—in order to implement the economic restructuring and austerity plans they considered necessary for their development projects?

Our evidence shows that, in contrast to presidentialism, the executive’s party in parliamentary democracies enjoyed a majority of seats in the legislature over 83 percent of the time period under study. For the remaining 17 percent of the years, parliamentary executives, motivated by the necessity to survive votes of confidence, formed coalition governments and party alliances in order to attract necessary support. When they were unable to do this, the absence of fixed mandates and the safety devices of the parliamentary institutional framework allowed for calling rapid new elections, the constitutional removal of unpopular, unsupported governments through the vote of no confidence, or simply the withdrawal from the government of a vital coalition partner.

Parliamentarianism entails mutual dependence. The prime minister and his or her government cannot survive without at least the passive support of a legislative majority. The inherent mechanisms of parliamentarianism involved in the mutual dependency relationship—the executive’s right to dissolve parliament and the legislature’s right to pass a vote of no confidence—are deadlock-breaking devices. These decision rules do not assure that any particular government will be efficient in formulating policies; nor do they assure government stability. But the decision mechanisms available in the parliamentary framework do provide constitutional means for removing deadlocked or inefficient governments (executives and parliaments). The danger that a government without a majority will rule by decree is sharply curtailed by the decision rule that allows the parliamentary majority (or the prime minister’s coalition allies or even his or her own party) to call for government reformation.
CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Why is it logical and predictable that military coups are much more likely in pure presidential constitutional frameworks than in pure parliamentary frameworks? Because, as we discussed above, parliamentary democracies have two decision rules that help resolve crises of the government before they become crises of the regime. First, a government cannot form unless it has acquired at least a “supported minority” in the legislature; second, a government that is perceived to have lost the confidence of the legislature can be voted out of office by the simple political vote of no confidence (or in Germany and Spain by a positive legislative vote for an alternative government). Presidentialism, in sharp contrast, systematically contributes to impasses and democratic breakdown. Because the president and the legislature have separate and fixed mandates, and because presidents more than half of the time find themselves frustrated in the exercise of their power due to their lack of a legislative majority, presidents may often be tempted to bypass the legislature and rule by decree-law. It is extremely difficult to remove even a president who has virtually no consensual support in the country or who is acting unconstitutionally; it usually requires a political-legal-criminal trial (impeachment), whose successful execution requires exceptional majorities.

Thus, even when the socioeconomic crises are identical in two countries, the country with the presidential system is more likely to find itself in a crisis of governance and will find it more difficult to solve the crisis before it becomes a regime crisis. Such situations often cause both the president and the opposition to seek military involvement to resolve the crisis in their favor.

Guillermo O'Donnell documented a phenomenon observed in the new Latin American democracies in his extremely interesting (and alarming) article on “delegative democracy,” a conceptual opposite of representative democracy. Key characteristics of delegative democracy include (1) presidents who present themselves as being “above” parties, (2) institutions such as congress and the judiciary that are viewed as “a nuisance,” with accountability to them considered an unnecessary im-

25 Schmitter and Karl (fn. 4) quite correctly build into their definition of democracy the concept of accountability. But with the exception of the U.S. where a president can be directly reelected only once, no president in any other long-standing democracy in the world, once in office, can be held politically accountable by a vote of the citizens’ representatives. The accountability mechanism is so extreme and difficult—with the political-legal-criminal trial that needs exceptional majorities (impeachment)—that the accountability principle in presidentialism is weaker than in parliamentarianism.

26 For theoretical differentiation between crises of government and crises of regime, see Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds., The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), esp. 74.

pediment, (3) a president and his staff who are the alpha and omega of politics, and (4) a president who insulates himself from most existing political institutions and organized interactions and becomes the sole person responsible for "his" policies. We suggest that these characteristics of O'Donnell's delegative democracy are some of the predictable pathologies produced by the multiple logics of the presidential framework. Consider the following: Presidential democracy, due to the logic of its framework, always produces (1) presidents who are directly elected and (2) presidents with fixed terms. Presidential democracy often produces (1) presidents who feel they have a personal mandate and (2) presidents who do not have legislative majorities. Thus, the logic of presidentialism has a strong tendency to produce (1) presidents who adopt a discourse that attacks a key part of political society (the legislature and parties) and (2) presidents who increasingly attempt to rely upon a "state-people" political style and discourse that marginalizes organized groups in political society and civil society. Delegative democracy can no doubt exist in the other constitutional frameworks; however, the multiple logics of pure parliamentarianism seem to work against delegative democracy.

Why are there many enduring multiparty parliamentary democracies but no long-standing presidential ones? In a parliamentary system, the junior political parties that participate in the ruling coalition are institutional members of the government and are often able to negotiate not only the ministries they will receive, but who will be appointed to them. All members of the coalition have an incentive to cooperate if they do not want the government of the day to fall. In these circumstances, democracies with four, five, or six political parties in the legislature can function quite well.

There are far fewer incentives for coalitional cooperation in presidentialism. The office of the presidency is nondivisible. The president may select members of the political parties other than his own to serve in the cabinet, but they are selected as individuals, not as members of an enduring and disciplined coalition. Thus, if the president's party (as in President Collor's party in Brazil) has less than 10 percent of the seats in the legislature, he rules with a permanent minority and with weak coalitional incentives. On a vote-by-vote basis, the president may cajole or buy a majority, but repeated purchases of majorities are absolutely inconsistent with the principled austerity plans of restructuring that face most East European and Latin American democracies.

East European or Latin American political leaders who believe that their countries, for historical reasons, are inevitably multiparty in political representation are playing against great odds if they select a presiden-
tial system, as the existing evidence demonstrates. Brazil’s high party fragmentation, for example, has contributed to a presidential-legislative deadlock that has frozen the lawmaking process in an already fragile democracy. Party fragmentation, the lack of party discipline, and general party underdevelopment in Brazil have been exacerbated by its electoral system, which combines proportional representation with an open list. The 1990 elections yielded 8.5 effective parties in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies and 6.0 in the Senate. These numbers seem alarmingly high considering that all the long-standing, pure presidential democracies reported in Table 1 had fewer than 2.6 effective political parties.

Moreover, the closer a country approaches the ideal types of “sultan- ship,” “totalitarianism,” or early “posttotalitarianism,” the “flatter” are their civil and political societies. In these circumstances, adopting the constitutional framework of presidentialism in the period of transition from sultanship, totalitarianism, or early posttotalitarianism reduces the degrees of freedom for an emerging civil and political society to make a midcourse correction, because heads of government have been elected for fixed terms (as in Georgia). In contrast, the Bulgarian transition had significant parliamentary features, which allowed an emerging political society to change the prime minister (and the indirectly elected president) so as to accommodate new demands.

In Poland, where constitutional reformers are flirting with the idea of strengthening the role of the president, party fragmentation is even greater than in Brazil; the effective number of parties in the Polish Sejm after the 1991 legislative elections was 10.8. Most of these parties in the Polish legislature, like those in Brazil, lack clear programs and exist as mere labels for politicians to use for election into office. Our data suggest that Poland would be playing against the odds were it to move toward a purely presidential system.

Also flowing from the logic of the constitutional framework are the

28 These numbers were calculated using the Laakso/Taagepera formula and the data reported in Keesings Record of World Events (1990); and Arthur S. Banks, ed., Political Handbook of the World (Binghamton; CSA Publishers, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1991).

29 This argument is developed in Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, “Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Eastern Europe, Southern Europe and South America” (Book manuscript), pt. 1.

30 This is developed in Stepan and Suleiman (fn. 7).

31 For a discussion of how both the political culture and the institutional structure in Brazil contributed to the country’s weak party system, see Scott Mainwarin, “Dilemmas of Multiparty Presidential Democracy: The Case of Brazil,” Kellogg Institute Working Paper no. 174 (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1992). See also idem, “Politicians, Parties, and Electoral Systems: Brazil in Comparative Perspective,” Comparative Politics 24 (October 1991); and his forthcoming book on Brazilian political parties.
questions of why ministers serve short terms in presidential democracies and why they are rarely reappointed in their lifetime. Because presidents do not normally enjoy majorities in the legislature, they resort to rapid ministerial rotation as a device in their perpetual search for support on key issues. In parliamentary systems, by contrast, coalitional majorities make such rapid turnover unnecessary. Furthermore, key ministers usually have long and strong associations with their political parties and are often reappointed as government coalitions form and re-form during the life of their careers. In presidential democracies, ministers are strongly associated with a particular president, leave office when the president does, and normally never serve as a minister again in their life.

Conclusion

Let us consider the question that follows from the data. Why does pure parliamentarianism seem to present a more supportive evolutionary framework for consolidating democracy than pure presidentialism? We believe we are now in a position to say that the explanation of why parliamentarianism is a more supportive constitutional framework lies in the following theoretically predictable and empirically observable tendencies: its greater propensity for governments to have majorities to implement their programs; its greater ability to rule in a multiparty setting; its lower propensity for executives to rule at the edge of the constitution and its greater facility at removing a chief executive who does so; its lower susceptibility to military coup; and its greater tendency to provide long party-government careers, which add loyalty and experience to political society.

The analytically separable propensities of parliamentarianism interact to form a mutually supporting system. This system, qua system, increases the degrees of freedom politicians have as they attempt to consolidate democracy. The analytically separable propensities of presidentialism also form a highly interactive system, but they work to impede democratic consolidation.