



**JUAN LINZ, PRESIDENTIALISM, AND DEMOCRACY:  
A CRITICAL APPRAISAL**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper briefly reviews and critically assesses Juan Linz's arguments about the perils of presidentialism. We largely agree with Linz that presidentialism as it is normally practiced is less likely than parliamentarism to sustain democratic government. Nevertheless, we introduce a number of caveats into the argument. Although we agree with most aspects of Linz's four major criticisms of presidentialism, we disagree with one of them: we argue that presidentialism is less oriented towards winner-takes-all results than Westminster parliamentary systems. We also claim that presidentialism has some advantages that partially offset its drawbacks. These advantages can be maximized by paying careful attention to differences among presidential systems; we build a case for presidencies with weak legislative powers. Presidentialism also appears to be more viable with parties that are at least moderately disciplined, and it is especially problematic with highly fragmented multiparty systems and with congressional elections that occur more frequently than presidential elections. Finally, we argue that switching from presidentialism to parliamentarism could exacerbate problems of governability in countries with very undisciplined parties. All of these points suggest that even if Linz is largely correct in his argument that parliamentary government is more conducive to stable democracy, a great deal rests on what kind of parliamentarism and what kind of presidentialism are implemented.

## **RESUMEN**

El presente trabajo analiza brevemente y evalúa críticamente los argumentos de Juan Linz sobre los riesgos del presidencialismo. Nosotros estamos de acuerdo en gran medida con Linz en que el presidencialismo, tal y como es llevado normalmente a la práctica, tiene menos posibilidades que el parlamentarismo de sostener formas democráticas de gobierno. Sin embargo, hacemos varias observaciones en torno a este argumento. Aunque coincidimos con la mayoría de los aspectos de las cuatro principales críticas de Linz al presidencialismo, estamos en desacuerdo con uno de ellos: argumentamos que el presidencialismo se presta menos a resultados de todo o nada que el parlamentarismo de tipo Westminster. También sostenemos que el presidencialismo tiene algunas ventajas que compensan parcialmente sus inconvenientes. Estas ventajas pueden maximizarse poniendo una cuidadosa atención a las diferencias existentes entre sistemas presidenciales; argumentamos en favor de presidencias con facultades legislativas limitadas. El presidencialismo también parece ser más viable cuando los partidos son al menos moderadamente disciplinados, y es especialmente problemático en sistemas multipartidistas altamente fragmentados y con elecciones legislativas que ocurren con más frecuencia que las elecciones presidenciales. Finalmente sostenemos que un cambio del presidencialismo al parlamentarismo podría exacerbar los problemas de gobernabilidad en países con partidos muy indisciplinados. Todas estas observaciones sugieren que, aunque el argumento de Linz de que el gobierno parlamentario es más conducente a una democracia estable es en gran parte correcto, mucho depende del tipo de parlamentarismo y del tipo de presidencialismo que se lleve a cabo.

Since the 1960s, Juan J. Linz has been one of the world's foremost contributors to our understanding of democracy, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism. Although many of his contributions have had a significant impact, few have been as far reaching as his essay "Democracy: Presidential or Parliamentary. Does It Make a Difference?" Originally written in 1985, the essay argued that presidentialism is less likely than parliamentarism to sustain stable democratic regimes. It became a classic even in unpublished form, and both among policymakers and scholars, it has already spawned a broad debate about the merits and (especially) the liabilities of presidential government.

This paper briefly reviews and critically assesses Juan Linz's arguments about the perils of presidentialism. We largely agree with Linz that presidentialism as it is normally practiced is less likely than parliamentarism to sustain democratic government. Nevertheless, we introduce a number of caveats into the argument. Although we agree with most aspects of Linz's four major criticisms of presidentialism, we disagree with one of them: we argue that presidentialism is less oriented towards winner-takes-all results than Westminster parliamentary systems.<sup>1</sup> We also claim that presidentialism has some advantages that partially offset its drawbacks. These advantages can be maximized by paying careful attention to differences among presidential systems; we build a case for presidencies with weak legislative powers. Presidentialism also appears to be more viable with parties that are at least moderately disciplined, and it is especially problematic with highly fragmented multiparty systems and with congressional elections that occur more frequently than presidential elections. Finally, we argue that switching from presidentialism to parliamentarism could exacerbate problems of governability in countries with very undisciplined parties. All of these points suggest that even if Linz is largely correct in his argument that parliamentary government is more conducive to stable democracy, a great deal rests on what kind of parliamentarism and what kind of presidentialism are implemented.

Before proceeding, we should define the regime types that we shall discuss. By presidentialism, we mean a regime in which (1) the president is always the chief executive and is elected by popular vote or, as in the US, by an electoral college with little autonomy with respect to popular preferences; and (2) the terms of office for the president and the assembly are fixed. Another type that deserves comment here, but is distinct from presidentialism, is what we call premier-presidential and others have called semipresidential. In this type of regime, (1) the

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<sup>1</sup> We follow Arend Lijpart's understanding of a Westminster (British) style democracy. Lijpart discusses nine features of a Westminster democracy in *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), especially pp. 1-20. For our purposes, the most relevant of these features are: 1) single party majority cabinets; 2) disciplined parties; 3) something approaching a two-party system at the legislative level; 4) plurality single member electoral districts; and 5) parliamentary government.

president is elected by popular vote, (2) the president names a premier, who is head of government, (3) the premier and cabinet depend upon the confidence of the assembly alone, and (4) the president has meaningful political powers, usually including the right to dissolve parliament. There are some critical divergences between these two regime types. First, in a presidential democracy, the president is the head of government, whereas in a premier-presidential system, the chief executive post is divided, and formally the premier is the head of government. Second, the government in a presidential system is elected for a fixed term, whereas the government in a premier-presidential system depends on the ongoing confidence of the assembly. In addition, under pure presidentialism, the president has authority over the cabinet. Although some variants of presidentialism, including the oldest such regime (the United States), provide for confirmation by the assembly of presidential cabinet nominations, in all pure presidential regimes, including the US, only the president may dismiss members of the cabinet. On the other hand, a regime is not premier-presidential unless only the assembly majority, exercising its vote of censure (no confidence), can dismiss cabinets. Thus under pure presidentialism, the president has the right to retain ministers of his or her choosing regardless of the composition of the congress, while under premier-presidentialism, the parliamentary majority is capable of retaining cabinets to its liking even if the president disagrees with policies of the cabinet.

### **The Perils of Presidentialism: Linz's Argument**

Linz begins with the observation that few stable democracies have presidential systems of government. The gist of the argument is that "the superior historical performance of parliamentary democracies is no accident" (p. 52).<sup>2</sup> One can cull from his essay four major problems of presidential systems. Expecting that most readers will be familiar with Linz's arguments, we discuss these four points elliptically.

First, in presidential systems, the president and assembly have competing claims to legitimacy. Both powers are popularly elected, and the origin and survival of each is independent from the other.<sup>3</sup> If a majority of legislators favor policies different from those the president pursues, a dramatic conflict between the assembly and the executive can erupt. "No democratic

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<sup>2</sup> Page numbers in the text refer to the abridged version of Linz's essay, published as "The Perils of Presidentialism," *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 1 No. 1 (Winter 1990): 51-69. The definitive version of Linz's essay is due to appear in Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, eds., *The Crisis of Presidential Democracy: The Latin American Evidence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> For an elaboration of this point, see Matthew Shugart and John Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Chapter 2.

principle exists to resolve disputes between the executive and the legislature about which of the two actually represents the will of the people” (p. 63). Linz argues that parliamentarism obviates this problem because the executive is not independent of the assembly. If the majority of the assembly favors a change in policy direction, it can replace the government by exercising its no-confidence vote.

Second, the fixed term of the president’s office introduces a rigidity that is less favorable to democracy than the flexibility offered by parliamentary systems, where governments are not elected for a fixed term of office but rather depend on the ongoing confidence of the assembly. Because under presidentialism the chief executive cannot bolster his or her authority either through a vote of confidence or by dissolving the parliament to call new elections, presidential leadership can be weaker than that provided by some prime ministers. Presidential constitutions often manifest a contradiction “between the desire for a strong and stable executive and the latent suspicion of that same presidential power” (p. 55). Moreover, it is extremely difficult to remove a president from office, regardless of his/her level of competence and support among legislators and other relevant political actors. By virtue of their greater ability to promote changes in the cabinet and government, parliamentary systems afford greater opportunities for resolving disputes. Such a safety valve may enhance regime stability.

Just as presidentialism makes it difficult to remove a democratically elected head of government who no longer has support, it usually makes it impossible to extend the term of popular presidents beyond constitutionally set limits. Although such provisions are not inherent in the regime type, most presidential constitutions bar presidents from serving successive terms. Presidents therefore have relatively little time to pursue their projects and, as a result, are often tempted to try to accomplish a great deal in a short term. “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” (p. 66).

Third, Linz argues that presidentialism has a winner-takes-all logic that is unfavorable to democratic stability. In parliamentary systems, “Power-sharing and coalition-forming are fairly common, and incumbents are accordingly attentive to the demands and interests of even the smaller parties” (p. 56). In presidential systems, the direct popular election is likely to imbue the president with a feeling that he/she need not undertake the tedious process of constructing coalitions and making concessions to the opposition. Moreover, “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... The losers must wait at least four or five years without any access to executive power and patronage” (p. 56).

Fourth, Linz argues that the “style of presidential politics” is less propitious for democracy than the style of parliamentary politics. In contrast to prime ministers, a president is called upon to be both the head of state and the head of government,<sup>4</sup> and the exigencies of these two roles at times are in conflict. The president’s sense of being the representative of the entire nation may lead him/her to lamentable intolerance of the opposition. The absence in actual presidential systems of a monarch or a ‘president of the republic’ deprives them of an authority who can on occasion exercise restraining power (p. 62).

### **Assessing the Record of Presidentialism**

Linz is correct that most of the long established democracies in the world have parliamentary systems. As Table 1 shows, presidentialism is poorly represented among the stable democracies in the world today. Stable democracy is defined here strictly on the basis of democratic longevity, more specifically, at least 25 years of uninterrupted democracy.

Out of 31 countries that have had continuous democracy since at least 1967 (i.e., for at least 25 consecutive years), only four—Colombia, Costa Rica, the US, and Venezuela—have presidential systems. Twenty-four parliamentary democracies, two premier-presidential democracies, and one hybrid have lasted since at least 1967.<sup>5</sup>

The paucity of stable presidential democracies is not simply a product of few attempted presidential democracies. Elsewhere Mainwaring has counted fifty breakdowns of democracy since 1945. Of these, nineteen were parliamentary and twenty-seven were presidential (four were other types). The success rate, defined as the number of stable democracies divided by the sum number of the stable democracies plus the number of democratic breakdowns, was far lower among presidential systems (7 of 31, or 22.6%) than among parliamentary systems (25 of 43, or 58.1%).<sup>6</sup>

An initial reading of this information strongly supports Linz’s contention. However, it is not clear to what degree presidentialism *per se* is responsible for the lower success rate of presidential democracies. Perhaps the most striking fact that emerges from a study of the

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<sup>4</sup> This dual role is not inherent in presidentialism; there could be a monarch or other ceremonial head of state, plus a popularly elected head of government. There have been proposals in Israel, Italy, and the Netherlands for instituting the direct election of the ‘prime minister’ (i.e., president), while retaining the current ceremonial head of state. See Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*, Chapter 8.

<sup>5</sup> If we used Lijphart’s more stringent criterion for defining a long established democracy, *viz.*, countries that have had continuous democracy since 1950, there would be only two presidential systems (the US and Costa Rica), compared to eighteen parliamentary systems, two premier-presidential systems, and one hybrid. Lijphart, *Democracies*.

<sup>6</sup> “Presidentialism, Multipartism, and Democracy: The Difficult Combination,” *Comparative Political Studies* Vol. 26, No. 2 (1993).

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**TABLE 1**

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**Stable Democracies, 1967-1992**

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<b>Parliamentary Systems (24)</b>		<b>Presidential Systems (4)</b>		<b>Other Systems (3)</b>
Australia	(1900)	Colombia	(1958)	Finland (premier-presidential) (1906)
Austria	(1945)	Costa Rica	(1949)	France (premier-presidential) (1946)
Barbados	(1966)	United States	(1788)	Switzerland (hybrid) (1848)
Belgium	(1831)	Venezuela	(1958)	
Botswana	(1966)			
Canada	(1867)			
Denmark	(1855)			
Germany	(1949)			
Iceland	(1874)			
India	(1952)			
Ireland, Republic of	(1921)			
Israel	(1949)			
Italy	(1946)			
Jamaica	(1962)			
Japan	(1946)			
Liechtenstein	(1918)			
Luxembourg	(1868)			
Malta	(1964)			
Netherlands	(1848)			
New Zealand	(1852)			
Norway	(1814)			
Sweden	(1866)			
Trinidad and Tobago	(1962)			
United Kingdom	(1832)			

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Note: Years in parentheses refer to the time since when popular elections have continuously been held.

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relationship between regime type and successful democracy is that nearly all of the attempts at presidential democracy have taken place in less developed countries. The US is the only unequivocal exception, though Argentina and Uruguay at one time also ranked as quite developed. Because the standard of living is a major contributing factor to the viability of democracy,<sup>7</sup> the extent to which presidentialism can be held responsible for the failure of democracy is not clear.

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<sup>7</sup> This point has been established by many analysts. See, for example, Kenneth Bollen, "Political Democracy and the Timing of Development," *American Sociological Review* Vol. 44 (August 1979): 572-587.

Only eight countries in the Third World have maintained continuous democracies for at least 25 years as of 1992. Five of these are parliamentary (Barbados, Botswana, India, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago), and three are the previously mentioned Third World presidential systems. Five other Third World democracies lasted at least 25 years but then broke down. Of these five cases, three were presidential: Chile, the Philippines, and Uruguay. One, Sri Lanka, was parliamentary, although a constitutional amendment to change to a hybrid system was adopted in 1978, after which elections were suspended for several years. The last case, Lebanon, used a hybrid format.

The results of the analysis of democracy in the Third World, summarized in Table 2, suggest two conclusions: (1) The far greater success of parliamentary democracy overall is partially dependent upon the overwhelmingly greater success of democracy among the industrialized countries, none of which has a presidential constitution,<sup>8</sup> except for the US, (2) Neither of the two principal types of democracy has fared well in the Third World; both parliamentary and presidential democracy have faltered most of the time. The poor performance of parliamentarism in the Third World may be related to the fact that it has been implemented primarily in African and Asian countries where the social, economic, and cultural obstacles to democracy have been greater than in most Latin American cases. Most of the parliamentary democracies that experienced breakdowns were in 'fourth world' countries; many had recently been through turbulent independence struggles that were destabilizing; and several parliamentary democracies had deep ethnic cleavages and a poorly developed national identity. Nevertheless, the poor performance of parliamentarism in the underdeveloped world serves to remind us that inauspicious social and economic conditions and limited elite commitment to democracy create grave difficulties, regardless of regime type.

Any definitive empirical conclusions about the tendency of one type or the other to break down would have to rest on further detailed case studies of the various failures of democracy in the Third World, especially in the several parliamentary systems that have not been studied from the perspective of institutional analysis. As Linz's work on the breakdown of democratic regimes has shown,<sup>9</sup> study of breakdowns requires attention to the many contingent factors that contribute to the outcome of regime crises. Still, Linz builds a convincing case for why presidentialism—at least as practiced in most contemporary Latin American countries—has failed to put sufficient obstacles in the path of a crisis heading for breakdown.

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<sup>8</sup> The French Fifth Republic is premier-presidential.

<sup>9</sup> Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown, and Reequilibration*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).



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**TABLE 2**

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**Democracy in Less Developed Countries since 1945 by Regime Type**

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**A. Successful democracies, 1945–91**  
(dates of founding election in parentheses)

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<b>Parliamentary systems</b>	<b>Presidential systems</b>
Barbados (1966)	Colombia (1958)
Botswana (1966)	Costa Rica (1949)
India (1952)	Venezuela (1958)
Jamaica (1962)	
Trinidad and Tobago (1962)	

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**B. Democracies that broke down after at least 25 years**  
(dates of democratic rule in parentheses)

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<b>Parliamentary systems</b>	<b>Presidential systems</b>	<b>Hybrids or other types</b>
Sri Lanka (1948–78)	Chile (1933–73)	Lebanon (1943–75)
	Philippines (1946–72)	
	Uruguay (1942–73)	

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**A Critique of Linz's Argument**

We agree with the main thrust of three of Linz's four basic criticisms of presidentialism. We concur that the issue of dual legitimacy is nettlesome in presidential systems. In the most straightforward of parliamentary systems, the executive is chosen by and responsible to the assembly, which is the only democratically legitimated institution at the national level of the political system. Such an executive, unlike one that stems in whole or in part from a popularly elected presidency, lacks an independent base of legitimacy.

Nevertheless, to a lesser degree than in presidential systems, conflicting claims to legitimacy also exist in parliamentary systems. Conflicts sometimes arise between the lower and upper houses of a bicameral legislature, with each one claiming to exercise legitimate power. If both houses have the power of confidence over the cabinet, the most likely outcome when the houses are controlled by different majorities is a compromise coalition cabinet. In this case there is no dual legitimacy between executive and assembly, but between two chambers of the assembly. Such an arrangement could be troublesome if the two chambers were controlled by

sharply opposed parties or blocs,<sup>10</sup> but in most systems one or the other house can be dissolved in an attempt to resolve the deadlock. In a few parliamentary systems, including Canada, Germany, and Japan, upper houses have significant powers over legislation but cannot exercise a vote of no confidence against the government. In some the upper house cannot be dissolved by the government. Then there is a genuine dual legitimacy between the executive and (part of) the legislature. Thus dual democratic legitimacy is not exclusively a problem of presidentialism, though it is probably more pronounced with presidentialism. A unicameral parliament would avoid the potential of dual legitimacy under parliamentarism, but it sacrifices the advantages of bicameralism, especially for large, federal, or plural countries.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the existence of two agents of the electorate, each endowed with different but carefully defined authorities, can be an advantage of presidentialism, as Shugart and Carey have argued. The key is to define the powers and the method of election of the branches so as to mitigate interbranch conflict.

We also agree with Linz that the rigidity of presidentialism, created by the fixed term of office, can be a liability—sometimes a serious one. With the fixed term, it is difficult to get rid of unpopular or inept presidents without a system breakdown, and it is impossible (because it is constitutionally barred) in many countries to reelect a good president. However, there is no reason why a presidential system must prohibit reelection. Provisions against reelection have been introduced primarily to reduce the president's incentives to abuse executive powers to secure reelection. The prohibition of immediate reelection also appeals to ambitious politicians interested in seeking the nation's highest political post; it removes one potentially powerful contender from the scene. In some countries, regional politicians or *caciques* favored this prohibition as they sought protection against a popular president's potential to use a national reelection campaign against the often more parochial interests represented by congress. Elsewhere, democratic oppositions to pre-existing 'presidential' dictatorships have sought to forbid the possibility of a new perpetual president. Despite the potential for abuse, reelection can be permitted—and we believe it should be in countries where there are reliable institutions to safeguard elections from egregious manipulation by incumbents.

Even if reelection is permitted, however, we are still left with the rigidity of fixed term lengths. The argument about the 'flexibility' of replacing cabinets in parliamentary systems is two-edged. In a parliamentary system, the prime minister's party can replace its leader or a coalition partner can withdraw its support and usher in a change of government short of the coup that might be the only way to remove a president who lacks support. We agree with Linz that cabinet instability need not lead to regime instability and can offer a safety valve. Yet crises in many

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<sup>10</sup> See Lijphart, *Democracies*, for a discussion of such a constitutional crisis in Australia.

<sup>11</sup> See Lijphart, *Democracies*, Chapter 6.

failed parliamentary systems, including Somalia and Thailand, have come about precisely because of the difficulty of sustaining viable cabinets. Presidentialism raises the threshold for removing an executive; opponents must either wait out the term or else countenance undemocratic rule. There may be cases when this higher threshold for government change is desirable, as it would be expected to provide more predictability and stability to the policy-making process than the frequent dismantling and reconstructing of cabinets that afflicts some parliamentary systems.

Theoretically the problem of fixed terms could be remedied without adopting parliamentarism by permitting—under certain conditions—the calling of early elections.<sup>12</sup> This provision of early elections represents a deviation from presidentialism, which is defined by its fixed terms. Nevertheless, as long as one branch cannot dismiss the other without standing for reelection itself, the principle of separation of powers is still retained to an extent not present in any variant of parliamentarism.

We take issue with Linz's assertion that presidentialism induces more of a winner-takes-all approach to politics than does parliamentarism. As we see it, parliamentary systems do not afford a large advantage on this point. The degree to which democracies promote winner-take-all rules depends on the electoral and party system. Parliamentary systems with disciplined parties and a majority party offer the fewest checks on executive power, and hence promote a winner-takes-all approach more than presidential systems.<sup>13</sup> In Great Britain, for example, in the last two decades a party has often won a decisive majority of parliamentary seats despite winning well under 50% of the votes. Notwithstanding its lack of a decisive margin in popular votes, the party can control the entire executive and the legislature for a protracted period of time. It can even use its dissolution power strategically to renew its mandate for another five years by calling a new election before its current term ends.

Because of the combination of disciplined parties and the prime minister's ability to dissolve the parliament, Westminster systems provide essentially no legislative check on the premier. MPs regularly support their own party's legislative and policy initiatives regardless of the merits of particular proposals. Here more than in any presidential system, the winner takes all. Given the majority of a single party in parliament, it is unlikely that a no-confidence vote would prevail, so there is little or no opposition to check the government. Because of these imperfections, Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock at the party's 1991 Annual Conference proposed a constitutional change requiring fixed term parliaments. Other reforms, including proportional

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<sup>12</sup> After a failed coup attempt in February 1992, Venezuelan politicians began serious consideration of a plan to allow the voters to remove the chief executive through a recall election. Such power exists in some US states.

<sup>13</sup> This point helps illustrate one of our key arguments in this chapter, namely, that the features of the party system make a big difference in parliamentary and presidential democracy alike.

representation and a popularly elected upper house, are likewise frequently discussed as remedies to perceived ills of parliamentarism in the UK.

Presidentialism is predicated upon a system of checks and balances. Such checks and balances can be criticized from other perspectives, but they usually inhibit the winner-takes-all tendencies that Linz ascribes to presidentialism. The checks and balances are designed precisely to limit the possibility that the winner would take all. If it loses the presidency, a party or coalition may still control critical swing votes in congress, a situation that in most countries would allow it to restrain the president and block some presidential initiatives. If the president's own legislative powers are negative only (a veto, but not decree or exclusive agenda-setting powers), an opposition-controlled congress can even be the prime mover in legislating, as it is in the United States. Controlling congress is not the biggest prize and it usually does not enable a party or coalition to dictate policy, but it still allows the party or coalition to establish parameters within which policy occurs. It can be a big prize in its own right if the presidency has relatively weak legislative powers.

Moreover, compared to the Westminster-style parliamentary systems, most presidential democracies offer greater prospects of dividing the cabinet among several parties. This practice, which is essentially unknown among the Westminster parliamentary democracies, is common in multiparty presidential systems. To get elected, presidents need to assemble a broad interparty coalition, either for the first round (if a plurality format obtains) or for the second round (if a two-round, absolute-majority format obtains). Generally, presidents allocate cabinet seats to parties other than their own in order to attract the support of these parties or, after elections, to reward them for such support. Dividing the cabinet in this manner is another way to allow losers in the presidential contest a piece of the pie.

Thus, contrary to what Linz says, some parliamentary systems—in particular, those with single-member district electoral systems—have stronger winner-takes-all mechanisms than presidential systems. It is specifically the combination of parliamentarism and a single-member district plurality electoral system that produces these winner-takes-all results. In presidential systems with single-member plurality electoral systems, the party that does not control the presidency can control congress, thereby providing an important check on executive power.

This is not to say that presidentialism is generally more conducive to coalition government than parliamentary systems. In fact, as we argue later, the mechanisms of building interparty coalitions in presidential systems are arguably more fragile than in parliamentary systems. But the purest examples of what Lijphart calls Westminster democracy, in which the winner takes all, are parliamentary rather than presidential democracies.

## Advantages of Presidential Systems

Even though we disagree with one of Linz's four criticisms of presidentialism, we concur that he builds a strong case. On balance, parliamentary systems appear to afford compelling advantages over presidential systems. Yet presidential and premier-presidential systems afford some attractive features that can be maximized through careful attention to constitutional design.

The primary advantage of a presidential system lies precisely in the feature that led to Linz's warning against dual democratic legitimacies. If the powers are carefully defined and the method of election limits party system fragmentation, having two, rather than one, agents of the electorate can be beneficial. There are two broad models of citizen control in representative democratic government. In one, which Powell<sup>14</sup> called Government Accountability, voters must be afforded the opportunity to choose between two clearly identifiable alternative governments: the incumbent or the opposition. In the other, called Representative Delegates, voters must be given a wide menu of partisan options from which to choose, such that each voter is likely to find a party that expresses his or her general policy preferences. Parliamentarism requires a choice between these two desiderata; presidentialism or premier-presidentialism can allow both kinds of elections.

The Westminster model of parliamentarism performs very well on measures of Government Accountability, as the government and opposition are clearly defined: one votes either to retain the Conservatives or to throw them out and have a Labour government. That model performs poorly in providing minority representation, however: a supporter of Scottish nationalism or the Greens has little hope of seeing candidates of his or her preferred party elected and even less of seeing the party play any role in legislation, should it hold seats. The problem of severe minority attrition is one reason that several Westminster-style systems in the Third World (e.g., Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) have failed.

Other forms of parliamentarism perform very well in providing Representative Delegates, as for example Italy, where voters have many parties from which to choose. These parties represent several possible combinations of policy positions on various dimensions of the issues and many of them have a reasonable chance of sitting in the cabinet. Even those that do not obtain cabinet representation can play a meaningful role in sponsoring amendments to legislation in the active and representative committees or on the floor of the parliament. That model of parliamentarism performs poorly in affording voters Government Accountability, however, since many cabinet changes occur without any direct connection to an election. Typically the same

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<sup>14</sup> G. Bingham Powell, Jr., "Constitutional Design and Citizen Electoral Control," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 1 (1989): 107-30.

parties rotate in and out of government with no fundamental change in policy direction being feasible. The lack of an accountable, identifiable, and stable executive is one reason that such regimes have failed in some Third World countries (e.g. Somalia, Sudan, Thailand).

Parliamentarism thus requires a choice or a compromise between affording Government Accountability and affording diversity of representation. Since parliament is the only agent of the electorate, it is not feasible to provide both forms of citizen control through the electoral process. Add a second agent, a president, and it becomes possible to offer voters both. A presidential election, especially if the incumbent is eligible for reelection, can be structured so that it is ordinarily a contest between identifiable ins and outs, with voters able to make the same kind of choice made in Westminster parliamentary elections. The assembly election can be a representative affair, with proportional representation used to allow minor parties a role in the assembly. How the different voting decisions are translated into policy output, as well as whether the perils of dual legitimacies can be minimized, depends upon the powers of the two institutions and the extent to which they check one another. It also depends on the type of party system and its relation to the powers of each branch. These are the issues taken up in the remainder of our discussion.

### **Kinds of Presidencies: A Case for Weak Presidents**

Linz's article is based mostly on generic categories of parliamentary and presidential systems; he generally does not differentiate among kinds of parliamentary and presidential systems. In the concluding paragraphs, however, he argues that "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" (p. 68).

We agree that it is important to distinguish among different kinds of parliamentary regimes because not all types of parliamentarism function equally well. Parliamentary systems vary in the extent to which the parliament and its committees are disposed to amend bills submitted by the cabinet and also in the ease with which majorities may vote to displace a cabinet. Thus, as Linz acknowledges, the simple dichotomy, presidentialism vs. parliamentarism, while useful as a starting point, nevertheless is not sufficient to assess the relative merits of different constitutional designs.

It is not only among parliamentary regimes that differences within the basic regime type are important. Presidentialism also encompasses a range of systems of government, and variations within presidentialism are important—perhaps even more important than the variations

within the parliamentary type. Under some conditions, the perils of presidentialism can be attenuated, a point that Linz generally neglects. It is important to pay attention to factors that can attenuate the problems of presidentialism because it may be politically more feasible to modify presidential systems than to switch to parliamentary government. In the next sections we discuss three factors that help presidentialism function more smoothly: limited presidential powers; disciplined parties; and a small number of parties and/or the absence of deep divisions among parties.

A case can be made that presidential systems function better if the president has relatively limited powers. In a presidential system, weakening the presidency means primarily weakening its powers over legislation, although the importance of attenuating presidential powers over cabinet formation by requiring congressional confirmation of nominations should not be underestimated. In several Latin American countries as well as Korea and the Philippines, the tendency has been to constitutionally endow presidents with great legislative powers.

To compare presidential powers in the legislative arena, we examine six areas of legislative powers. For each of these areas, we devised a score ranging from zero (weak or no presidential powers) to four (strong presidential powers). The first is the package veto/override procedure: does the president have a veto, and if so, what majority of the congress is necessary to override? Presidents have greatest power if their veto cannot be overridden; they have least power if they have no veto or if a veto can be overridden with a simple majority. Second is the partial veto, a formidable weapon in the hands of some presidents, whereby they may reject parts of bills rather than accepting or rejecting the whole bill. Presidents have greatest power if they can exercise a partial veto that cannot be overridden, and weakest if they have no partial veto. Third are decree powers, by which we mean the authority of some presidents to make laws—at least provisionally—without prior consultation with congress. This power is distinct from decrees of a regulatory or administrative nature, which must conform to existing legislation. Presidents with great decree powers are able to make law despite congressional opposition. Fourth are powers granted to some presidents to be the sole agenda-setters in certain key policy areas. In such areas, legislation cannot be considered unless first proposed by the president. Exclusive presidential law-making initiatives are most powerful if the assembly cannot amend the president's initiatives but must accept them as presented or reject them. Fifth, we consider the extent to which the president has primacy in the budgetary process, limiting the ability of congress to change revenues or expenditures. At one end of the spectrum, the president prepares the budget and congress may not amend it. At the other end, the assembly either prepares the budget or has constitutionally unrestricted authority to amend it. Finally, a few presidents may submit legislative proposals to the voters directly, thereby bypassing the congress

altogether. This measure strengthens presidents' hands by giving them a second means of winning approval for legislation.

Details for the scoring of each of these six areas are provided in the top part of Table 3. The score in each area is simply summed to arrive at a total for the country, as shown for several countries in the bottom part of Table 3.

This scoring method may leave out some important constitutional dimensions of executive power, and it may overstate the importance of some dimensions and understate the importance of others. Nevertheless, an imperfect but well defined quantitative measure is preferable to nonquantitative, impressionistic rankings.

We are aware that a comparison of constitutional powers does not convey information about how powerful presidents actually are in different contexts. The extent to which presidents can sidestep constitutional norms to enhance their powers or can effectively build their power without infringing the constitution varies considerably. Moreover, the relationship between constitutional provisions and actual presidential powers depends on the nature of the parties and party system. In Mexico, for example, the president has relatively limited constitutional authority. But given his control over the PRI and the PRI's overwhelming legislative majorities, the president has great *de facto* powers, and the legislature rubber-stamps virtually all presidential initiatives. Despite these limitations, a comparison of constitutional powers provides useful information because constitutional norms establish a legal framework intended to regulate executive and assembly action. They therefore provide some clues about how the system might function if an election produced a change in party alignments.

When the president has great legislative powers, the ability of the congress to debate, logroll, and offer compromises on conflictual issues confronting the society is sharply constrained. Instead the presidency takes on enormous legislative importance and the incumbent has formidable weapons with which to fine tune legislation to fit his or her whims and limit consensus-building in the assembly. In this respect it is probably no accident that some of the most obvious failures among presidential democracies have been systems that score very high according to Table 3: Brazil's 1946 regime, Chile before the 1973 coup, and the Philippines, for example. Colombia's former regime (1958-1991) also scored quite high; it had a questionable record as a stable democracy and its presidential powers were recently attenuated. At the other end of the scale of presidential powers we find the three oldest presidential democracies, Costa Rica, the United States, and Venezuela, all with scores of 2 or less. Obviously there is no perfect correlation between presidential powers and stable democracy; two countries that have low scores (Argentina and Bolivia) have broken down frequently, and two with high scores (Chile 1932-73 and Colombia 1958-91) survived for a long time. Nevertheless, the fact that the most stable presidential democracies have had weak presidential powers is suggestive.



**TABLE 3**

**Presidential Legislative Powers**

<b>Package Veto/Override</b>		<b>Partial Veto/Override</b>	
4	Veto with no override	4	No override
3	Veto with override requiring majority greater than 2/3 (of quorum)	3	Override by extraordinary majority
2	Veto with override requiring 2/3	2	Override by absolute majority of whole membership
1	Veto with override requiring absolute majority of assembly or extraordinary majority less than 2/3	1	Override by simple majority of quorum
0	No veto; or veto requires only simple majority override	0	No partial veto
<b>Decree</b>		<b>Exclusive Introduction of Legislation (Reserved Policy Areas)</b>	
4	Reserved powers, no recession	4	No amendment by assembly
2	President has temporary decree authority with few restrictions	2	Restricted amendment by assembly
1	Authority to enact decrees limited	1	Unrestricted amendment by assembly
0	Decree powers only as delegated	0	No exclusive powers
<b>Budgetary Powers</b>		<b>Proposal of Referenda</b>	
4	No amendments to president's budget	4	Unrestricted
3	Assembly may reduce but not increase items	2	Restricted
2	President sets upper limit on total spending, within which assembly may amend	0	No presidential authority to propose referenda
1	Assembly may increase expenditures only if it designates new revenues		
0	Unrestricted powers for assembly		

Country	Package Veto	Partial Veto	Decree	Exclusive Leg. Init.	Budgetary Initiative	Propose Refer.	Total Score
Argentina	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Bolivia	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Brazil 1946	2	3	0	1	1	0	7
Brazil 1988	1	2	2	1	1	0	7
Chile 1925	2	3	1	1	1	0	8
Chile 1970	2	4	1	2	1	2	12
Chile 1989	2	0	0	1	2	0	5
Colombia pre-1991)	1.5	2.5	2	1	1	0	8
expenditures	(2)	(3)					
other	(1)	(2)					
Colombia 1991	1	2	1	0	1	0	5
Costa Rica	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
budget	(0)						
other	(2)						
Dominican Republic	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Ecuador	1.5	1.5	1	0	0	2	6
budget	(0)	(0)					
other	(4)	(4)					
Korea	2	0	1	0	3	0	6
Mexico	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Philippines	2	1.5	0	0	3	0	6.5
expenditure	(2)	(3)					
other	(2)	(0)					
United States	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Uruguay	1	1	0	2	2	0	6
Venezuela	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

When the presidency is weak relative to the congress, situations in which the president is short of a majority in the congress need not be crisis-ridden and may even be desirable. It certainly is desirable that the president's party be a major party, for otherwise the likelihood of executive/legislative impasse escalates; ways in which the likelihood of compatibility between president and assembly can be enhanced will be discussed below. But if the president's party is large but not dominant, then one or more of the several minor parties that win seats in congress can bargain with the president in the legislative process and thus play a meaningful role, yet not be the 'kingmaker' that minor parties frequently are in parliamentary systems.

If the regime is premier-presidential, the president's powers over government formation are (by definition) weaker than in a presidential regime. Typically such presidents have no or very limited powers over legislation as well, aside from powers that might be ceded for specific purposes by the cabinet or parliament. Thus in multiparty contexts premier-presidentialism is preferable to straightforward presidentialism because it avoids the perils of a cabinet responsible exclusively to a president who has only a small bloc of reliable supporters in the assembly. Under premier-presidentialism, most or all day-to-day executive powers shift to a cabinet responsible exclusively to parliament when the president lacks a reliable majority. Premier-presidentialism also holds one advantage over pure parliamentarism in multiparty contexts, in that the voters have an agent, the president, who designates which party or parties shall attempt to form a government, and this agent can be held accountable before the electorate for the choices made.

### **Presidentialism and Party Discipline**

Linz properly argues that parliamentary systems function better with disciplined parties. We believe that some measure of party discipline also facilitates the functioning of presidential systems.<sup>15</sup> Parties in presidential systems need not be highly disciplined, but wanton indiscipline makes it more difficult to establish reasonably stable relationships among the government, the parties, and the legislature. Presidents must be able to work with legislatures,

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<sup>15</sup> Fred Riggs makes the opposite argument, affirming that undisciplined parties facilitate the functioning of presidential democracies. See his "The Survival of Presidentialism in America: Para-Constitutional Practices," *International Political Science Review* Vol. 9 (1988): 247-278. Riggs bases his argument on the assumption that the US parties are undisciplined, an assumption that purportedly helps explain why presidentialism in the US did not prove more deleterious. But Riggs understates the degree of party discipline of the American parties. See D. Roderick Kiewiet and Mathew D. McCubbins, *The Logic of Delegation: Congressional Parties and the Appropriations Process* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). The two oldest presidential regimes other than the US (Costa Rica and especially Venezuela) have reasonably centralized and disciplined parties.

for otherwise they are likely to face inordinate difficulties in governing effectively. A modicum of party discipline helps make it possible for presidents to work out stable deals with congress.

Where discipline is extremely weak, party leaders can negotiate some deal only to have the party's legislative members back out of it. Presidents may not even be able to count on the support of their own party. Under these conditions, presidents are forced to rely on *ad hoc* bases of support, frequently needing to work out deals with individual legislators on a one-by-one basis, rather than negotiating primarily with party leaders who can deliver the votes of their fellow legislators. This is a difficult situation for presidents, and it encourages the widespread use of clientelism and patronage to secure the support of individual legislators. It can even tempt presidents to try to bypass congress through measures of questionable constitutionality or to flout the constitution, possibly with the military as an ally.

With moderately disciplined parties, presidents need not deal with legislators on a one-by-one basis. Rather, they can negotiate primarily with party leaders, which reduces the number of actors involved in negotiations and hence simplifies the process. They can count on party leaders usually being able to deliver the votes of most of their parties, so there is greater predictability in the political process.

This argument poses an obvious corollary: how to encourage greater party discipline in countries where it is lacking? Party discipline depends on how candidates are selected and on who controls the order of electoral tickets.<sup>16</sup> If a central party organization controls candidate selection, legislators have incentives to toe the party line; otherwise, they risk losing their candidacy the next time around. Conversely, where primary elections prevail or where candidate selection is decentralized, the central organization has less control over legislators, other things equal.

In a similar vein, if the party (especially the national party organization) controls who gets elected, as occurs with a closed list system under proportional elections, politicians have strong incentives to follow the party leadership; otherwise, they jeopardize their own position on the party list. Conversely, where members are elected because of their own resources and efforts, as in systems in which candidates of the same party must compete against one another, politicians are less dependent on their party. Under these conditions, party discipline is likely to be weaker.

### **Party Systems and Presidentialism**

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<sup>16</sup> This is true in both directions: politicians who prefer undisciplined parties choose methods of candidate selection and electoral systems accordingly.

Linz notes that the problems of presidentialism are compounded in nations with deep political cleavages and numerous political parties (p. 52). This argument could be taken further: the perils of presidentialism pertain largely to countries with deep political cleavages and/or numerous political parties. In countries where political cleavages are less profound and where the party system is not particularly fragmented, the problems of presidentialism are attenuated. Most countries with presidential systems do have either deep political cleavages or many parties, and hence Linz's arguments about the problems of presidentialism are usually pertinent. But some presidential systems have less indelibly engraved cleavages and less party system fragmentation. In these cases, presidentialism often functions reasonably well, as cases such as the United States, Costa Rica, and Venezuela suggest. This point is important, for it suggests that one way of easing the strains on presidential systems is to take steps to limit party system fragmentation.

Significant party system fragmentation is a problem for presidentialism because it increases the likelihood of executive–legislative deadlock. With significant party system fragmentation, the president's party will not have anything close to a majority of seats in congress, so he/she will be forced to rely on a coalition. Unfortunately, interparty coalitions tend to be more fragile in presidential systems, for two reasons.<sup>17</sup>

First, whereas in parliamentary systems, party coalitions generally take place after the election and are binding, in presidential systems they often take place before the election and are not binding past election day. Executive power is not formed through postelection agreements among parties and is not divided among several parties that are corresponsable for governing, even though members of several parties often participate in cabinets. Governing coalitions in presidential systems can differ markedly from electoral coalitions, whereas in parliamentary systems the same coalition responsible for creating the government is also responsible for governing.

Given the separation of powers, an agreement among parties may pertain only to congressional matters, with no binding implication for relations between the parties and the president. Several parties may support the president during the electoral campaign, but this does not ensure their support once he/she assumes office. Even though members of several parties often participate in cabinets, the parties are not responsible for the government. Parties or individual legislators can join the opposition without bringing down the government, so a president can end his/her term with little support in congress.

Second, in presidential systems, the commitment of individual legislators to support an agreement negotiated by the party leadership is often less secure. The extension of a cabinet

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<sup>17</sup> On this point, also see Arend Lijphart, "Presidentialism and Majoritarian Democracy: Theoretical Observations" in Linz and Valenzuela, eds., *The Crisis of Presidential Democracy*.

portfolio does not necessarily imply party support for the president, as it usually does in a parliamentary system. The commitment of individual legislators to vote the party line varies a great deal, for reasons mentioned in the previous section, ranging from the extremely cohesive congressional parties in Venezuela to the extremely undisciplined catch-all parties in Brazil. Consequently, party support for a government need not imply the support of individual congressional representatives. In Brazil, for example, the lack of party discipline means that individual legislators vote however they choose, a fact that reinforces the instability of congressional support for government policy. In contrast, in most parliamentary systems, individual legislators are more or less bound to support the government unless their party decides to drop out of the governmental alliance. MPs risk bringing down a government and losing their seats in new elections if they fail to support the government.<sup>18</sup>

These problems in constructing stable interparty coalitions make the combination of fragmented multipartism and presidentialism problematic and help explain the paucity of long-established multiparty presidential democracies. At present, Ecuador, which has had a democracy only since 1979—and a troubled one at that—is the world's oldest multiparty presidential democracy. Only one country with this institutional combination, Chile, has sustained democracy for at least 25 consecutive years. There were at least fourteen other multiparty presidential democracies before the present wave of democratization, but none lasted longer than the Brazilian regime of 1946–64.

Where party system fragmentation is limited, the need for interparty coalitions is diminished and the perils of presidentialism are usually attenuated. The president may not enjoy a majority in congress, but his/her party is certain to be a major party that controls a significant share of the seats. This situation mitigates the problem of competing claims to legitimacy because many legislators are likely to support the president. Conflicts between the legislature and the executive arise, but they tend to be less grave than when the overwhelming majority of legislators is pitted against the president.

The problems of the fixed term of office are also mitigated by limited party system fragmentation. The fixed term of office is particularly pernicious when the president's party is in a clear minority, making it difficult for the president to get his/her program accomplished. In a distinct minority situation, the specter of immobilism and ungovernability is ubiquitous. It is no coincidence that the oldest and most established presidential democracies—the US, Costa Rica, and Venezuela—have two or two-and-one-half party systems. Six of the seven presidential

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<sup>18</sup> The key issue here is whether or not parties are disciplined, and nothing guarantees that they are in parliamentary systems. Nevertheless, the need to support the government serves as an incentive to party discipline in parliamentary systems that is absent in presidential systems. See Leon Epstein, "A Comparative Study of Canadian Parties," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 58 (1964): 46-59.

democracies that have lasted at least 25 consecutive years (Uruguay, Colombia, and the Philippines, in addition to the three already mentioned cases) have had under three effective parties,<sup>19</sup> Chile being the sole exception.

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<sup>19</sup> The number of effective parties is calculated by squaring each party's fractional share of the vote (or seats), calculating the sum of all of the squares, and dividing this number into one.

## Electoral Rules for Presidentialism and Premier-Presidentialism

These arguments suggest that, other things equal, presidential systems function better with electoral rules or sequences that limit party system fragmentation and enhance the prospects for at least general compatibility between president and assembly majority. Party system fragmentation can be diminished by any one of a number of measures—and it is best to avoid draconian steps that might lead to the exclusion of politically important groups, for such an exclusion could undermine the legitimacy of the political system.<sup>20</sup>

Earlier we mentioned that having both an executive and an assembly come before the voters allows the presidential election to be structured so as to maximize accountability and the assembly election so as to permit broad representation. But how do we prevent the problems associated with having a president with a distinct minority of support either within the electorate or in the assembly or both? Electoral rules have a major impact here. Party system fragmentation can be limited, even with proportional representation, by any of three factors: 1) having a single round plurality format for electing the president; 2) having concurrent presidential and legislative elections; 3) establishing a relatively low district magnitude or a relatively high threshold.

The increasingly common majority run-off method for electing presidents has the important advantage of avoiding the election of a president who wins a narrow plurality but who would easily lose to another candidate in a face-to-face election. Majority run-off is appealing because it requires that the eventual winner obtain the backing of more than 50% of the voters. However, the run-off system also encourages fragmentation of the field of competitors for both presidency and assembly. Many candidates enter the first round with the aim of either finishing second and upsetting the front-runner in the run-off or else 'blackmailing' the two leading candidates into making deals between rounds. A candidate like Alberto Fujimori in Peru or Stanislaw Timynski in Poland can come out of nowhere and deny a first-round victory to the front-runner and even come from behind and win the second round. According to calculations of Shugart and Carey, in majority run-off systems the eventual winner garners on average just under 40% of the first-round vote, while the runner-up averages only 25%. The plurality rule, on the other hand, encourages only two 'serious' contenders for the presidency in most cases. In plurality systems, the averages for winners and runners-up are nearly 50% and 35%.<sup>21</sup> Other

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<sup>20</sup> On this point, see Arturo Valenzuela, "Origins and Characteristics of the Chilean Party System: A Proposal for a Parliamentary Form of Government," Latin American Program, Woodrow Wilson Center, Working Paper #164 (May 1985).

<sup>21</sup> The countries from which data are drawn are, for plurality, Brazil (1946-60), Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua (1990 only), the Philippines (1946-69), and Venezuela; for

mechanisms besides straight plurality can guard against the unusual but potentially dangerous case of a winner earning less than 40% of the vote. Such mechanisms include requiring 40% for the front-runner or a minimum gap between the top two finishers instead of requiring an absolute majority to avoid a run-off, or employing an electoral college in which electors are constitutionally bound to choose one of the top two popular vote-winners.

Perhaps even more importantly, holding assembly elections concurrently with the presidential election results in a strong tendency for two major parties to be the most important even if a very proportional electoral system is used, as long as the president is not elected by majority run-off. The presidential election is so important that it tends to divide voters into two camps, and voters are more likely to choose the same party in legislative elections than when presidential and legislative elections are nonconcurrent.

If assembly elections are held at different times from presidential elections, fragmentation of the assembly party system becomes much more likely. Examples include Brazil and Chile, even though in both countries before their coups (1964 and 1973, respectively) presidents were elected by plurality. In these cases, as well as the current regimes of Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, and South Korea, assemblies are elected more frequently than presidents, meaning that there are midterm elections. Presidents often have sharply diminished legislative support after midterm elections. In some cases the party systems for congress and president are so divergent that presidents have only a small minority of legislators whose votes they can rely on. We caution, therefore, that with presidentialism, concurrent elections are preferable. Under premier-presidentialism, a regime may function quite well, given weaker presidential powers and the vote of no confidence, with nonconcurrent elections. Presidentialism with nonconcurrent elections, however, is asking for trouble, especially in the presence of other incentives towards party system fragmentation.

If the president is elected so as to maximize the possibility of two-candidate races and a majority (or nearly so) for the winner, the assembly can be chosen so as to allow the representation of partisan diversity. Does this not mean that the president must have only a small number of seats in the assembly? No, extreme fragmentation need not result if only a moderately proportional system is used and especially if the assembly is elected at the same time as the president (and the president, as discussed, is *not* elected by majority run-off). Proportional representation can be achieved, permitting the representation of some important 'third' parties without going to the extreme of countries such as Israel, Italy, Poland, or Brazil.

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majority, the current regimes of Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, France, Peru, Poland, and Portugal. See Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*, Chapter 10.



## Switching from Presidential to Parliamentary Government: A Caution

Convinced that parliamentary systems are more likely to sustain stable democracy, Linz implicitly advocates switching to parliamentary government. We are less than sanguine about the results of shifting to parliamentary government in countries with undisciplined parties. Undisciplined parties create problems in presidential democracies, but they create even more daunting problems in parliamentary systems.<sup>22</sup> There is a danger that in countries with undisciplined parties, switching to parliamentary government could exacerbate rather than ameliorate problems of governability and instability, unless party and electoral legislation were simultaneously changed to promote greater discipline.

In parliamentary systems, the government depends on the ongoing confidence of the assembly. Where individual assembly members act as free agents, unfettered by party ties, the governmental majorities that were carefully crafted in postelection negotiations easily dissipate. Free to vote as they please, individual legislators abandon the government when it is politically expedient to do so. Under these conditions, the classic Achilles heel of some parliamentary systems, frequent cabinet changes, is likely to be a problem.

A counterargument can be made that presidentialism has contributed to party weakness in some Latin American countries, so that switching to parliamentary government should strengthen parties by removing one of the causes of party weakness. Moreover, analysts might expect that the mechanism of confidence votes would itself promote party discipline, since remaining in office would hinge upon party discipline. We do not dismiss such claims, but even so in the short term, switching to parliamentary government without effecting parallel changes to encourage greater party discipline could prove problematic. The French Fourth Republic showed that parliamentary government in and of itself need not encourage the formation of disciplined parties. It also showed the perils of undisciplined parties in a parliamentary democracy even in the context of an advanced industrial nation, as governments were toppled with considerable frequency.

Any switch to parliamentary government, therefore, would need to carefully design a panoply of institutions to increase the likelihood that it would function well. In presidential and parliamentary systems alike, institutional combinations are of paramount importance.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Giovanni Sartori argues this point in "Neither Presidentialism nor Parliamentarism" in Linz and Valenzuela, eds., *The Crisis of Presidential Democracy*.

<sup>23</sup> From a different perspective, James W. Ceaser makes a similar argument. See his "In Defense of Separation of Powers" in Robert A. Goldwin and Art Kaufman, eds., *Separation of Powers—Does It Still Work?* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1986), pp. 168-193.

## **Conclusion**

Our arguments do not suggest a radical disagreement with Linz's seminal contribution to our understanding of how presidentialism affects prospects for democracy. Presidentialism as it is usually practiced is less favorable to stable democracy than parliamentarism. Nevertheless, we believe that Linz understated the importance of differences among constitutional and institutional designs within the broad category of presidential systems, and in doing so overstated the extent to which presidentialism as a regime type is inherently flawed, regardless of constitutional and institutional arrangements. Presidential systems can be designed to function more effectively than they usually have. We have argued that providing the president with limited legislative power, encouraging the formation of parties that are reasonably disciplined in the legislature, and preventing extreme fragmentation of the party system all enhance the viability of presidentialism. Linz clearly recognizes that not any kind of parliamentarism will do; we are making the same point about presidentialism.

We have also argued that presidentialism, particularly if it is carefully designed, has some advantages over parliamentarism. In our view, Linz does not sufficiently consider this point. Moreover, on one key issue—the alleged winner-takes-all nature of presidentialism—we question Linz's argument. The sum effect of our arguments is to call more attention to institutional combinations and constitutional designs and to suggest that the advantages of parliamentarism may not be quite as pronounced as Linz argued. Nevertheless, we clearly share the consensus that his path-breaking article was one of the most important scholarly contributions of the past decade, and that it deserves ample attention among scholars and policymakers.