Juan Linz, Presidentialism, and Democracy

A Critical Appraisal

Scott Mainwaring and Matthew S. Shugart

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 "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy: 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 It became a classic even in unpublished form. Among both policymakers and scholars it spawned a broad debate about the merits and especially the liabilities of presidential government. Now that the definitive version of the essay has appeared, we believe that a critical appraisal is timely. This task is especially important because Linz's arguments against presidentialism have gained widespread currency.

This article critically assesses Linz's arguments about the perils of presidentialism. Although we agree with several of Linz's criticisms of presidentialism, we disagree that presidentialism is particularly oriented towards winner-takes-all results.[1] We argue that the superior record of parliamentary systems has rested partly on where parliamentary government has been implemented, and we 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. Other things being equal, presidentialism tends to function better where presidencies have weak legislative powers, parties are at least moderately disciplined, and party systems are not highly fragmented. Finally, we argue that switching from presidentialism to parliamentarism could exacerbate problems of governability in countries with undisciplined parties. Even if parliamentary government is more conducive to stable democracy, much rests on what kind of parliamentarism and presidentialism is implemented.[2]

By presidentialism we mean a regime in which, first, the president is always the chief executive and is elected by popular vote or, as in the U.S., by an electoral college with essentially no autonomy with respect to popular preferences and, second, the terms of office for the president and the assembly are fixed. Under pure presidentialism the president has the right to retain ministers of his or her choosing regardless of the composition of the congress.

The Perils of Presidentialism: Linz's Argument

Linz bases his argument about the superiority of parliamentary systems partially on the observation that few long established democracies have presidential systems. He maintains that the superior historical performance of parliamentary democracies stems from intrinsic defects of presidentialism. He analyzes several problems of presidential systems. We briefly summarize the five most important issues.

First, in presidential systems the president and assembly have competing claims to legitimacy. Both are popularly elected, and the origin and survival of each are independent from the other.[3] Since both the president and legislature "derive their power from the vote of the people in a free competition among well-defined alternatives, a conflict is always latent and sometimes likely to erupt dramatically; there is no democratic principle to resolve it."[4] 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 depend on the ongoing confidence of the assembly. Presidentialism "entails a rigidity . . . that makes adjustment to changing situations extremely difficult; a leader who has lost the confidence of his own party or the parties that acquiesced [in] his election cannot be replaced."[5] By virtue of their greater ability to promote changes in the cabinet and government, parliamentary systems afford greater opportunities to resolve disputes. Such a safety valve may enhance regime stability.

Third, presidentialism "introduces a strong element of zero-sum game into democratic politics with rules that tend toward a 'winner-take-all' outcome." In contrast, 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." In presidential systems direct popular election is likely to imbue presidents with a feeling that they need not undertake the tedious process of constructing coalitions and making concessions to the opposition.[6]

Fourth, the style of presidential politics is less propitious for democracy than the style of parliamentary politics. The sense of being the representative of the entire nation may lead the president to be intolerant of the opposition. "The feeling of having independent power, a mandate from the people . . . is likely to give a president a sense of power and mission that might be out of proportion to the limited plurality that elected him. This in turn might make resistances he encounters . . . more frustrating, demoralizing, or irritating than resistances usually are for a prime minister.[7] The absence in presidential systems of a monarch or a "president of the republic" deprives them of an authority who can exercise restraining power.

Finally, political outsiders are more likely to win the chief executive office in presidential systems, with potentially destabilizing effects. Individuals elected by direct popular vote are less dependent on and less beholden to political parties. Such individuals are more likely to govern in a populist, antiinstitutionalist fashion.

A Critique of Linz's Argument

We agree with the main thrust of four of Linz's five basic criticisms of presidentialism. We concur that the issue of dual legitimacy is nettlesome in presidential systems, but we believe that his contrast between presidential and parliamentary systems is too stark. 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, each 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 dual legitimacy exists, not between executive and assembly, but between the two chambers of the assembly. This arrangement could be troublesome if the two chambers were controlled by opposed parties or blocs. In a few parliamentary systems, including Canada, Germany, and Japan, upper houses have significant powers over legislation but can not exercise a vote of no confidence against the government. In some the upper house can not 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 more pronounced with it. A unicameral parliament would avoid the potential of dual legitimacy under parliamentarism, but it sacrifices the advantages of bicameralism, especially for large, federal, and plural countries.[8]

Another overlooked potential source of conflicting legitimacy in parliamentary republics is the role of the head of state, who is usually called "president" but tends to be elected by parliament. The constitutions of parliamentary republics usually give the president several powers that are — or may be, subject to constitutional interpretation — more than ceremonial. Examples include the president's exclusive discretion to dissolve parliament (Italy), the requirement of countersignatures of cabinet decrees (Italy), suspensory veto over legislation (Czech Republic, Slovakia), the power to decree new laws (Greece for some time after 1975), and appointments to high offices, sometimes (as in the Czech Republic and Slovakia) including ministries. Linz argues that the president in such systems "can play the role of adviser or arbiter by bringing party leaders together and facilitating the flow of information among them." He also notes that "no one in a presidential system is institutionally entitled to such a role." He is quite right that political systems often face moments

when they need a "neutral" arbiter. However, for the position of head of state to be more than feckless it is necessary to make it "institutionally entitled" to other tasks as well. Linz correctly notes that, "if presidents in pure parliamentary republics were irrelevant, it would not make sense for politicians to put so much effort into electing their preferred candidate to the office."[9]

Paradoxically, the more authority the head of state is given, the greater is the potential for conflict, especially in newer democracies where roles have not yet been clearly defined by precedent. Hungary and especially Slovakia have had several constitutional crises involving the head of state, and in some Third World parliamentary republics such crises have at times been regime-threatening, as in Somalia (1961–68) and Pakistan. Politicians indeed care who holds the office, precisely because it has potential for applying brakes to the parliamentary majority. The office of the presidency may not be democratically legitimated via popular election, but it typically has a fixed term of office and a longer term than the parliament's By praising the potential of the office in serving as arbiter, Linz implicitly acknowledges the Madisonian point that placing unchecked power in the hands of the assembly majority is not necessarily good. Again, the key is careful attention to the distribution of powers among the different political players who are involved in initiating or blocking policy.

We also agree 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 the system's breaking down, and 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. Despite the potential for abuse, reelection can be permitted, and we believe it should be in countries where reliable institutions safeguard elections from egregious manipulation by incumbents.

Even if reelection is permitted, we are still left with the rigidity of fixed term lengths. One way of mitigating this problem is to shorten the presidential term so that if presidents lose support dramatically, they will not be in office for as long a time. Therefore, we believe that a four year term is usually preferable to the longer mandates that are common in Latin America.

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 failed parliamentary systems, including Somalia and Thailand, have come about precisely because of the difficulty of sustaining viable cabinets. Presidentialism raises the threshold for remov-

ing 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 could provide more predictability and stability to the policymaking process than the frequent dismantling and reconstructing of cabinets that afflict 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. One way is to allow either the head of government or the assembly majority to demand early elections for both branches, as is the case under newly adopted Israeli rules. Such provisions represent a deviation from presidentialism, which is defined by its fixed terms. Nevertheless, as long as one branch can not 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 an advantage on this point. The degree to which democracies promote winner-take-all rules depends mostly on the electoral and party system and on the federal or unitary nature of the 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.[10] 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 percent 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, single member plurality electoral districts, and the prime minister's ability to dissolve the parliament, Westminster systems provide a very weak legislative check on the premier. In principle, the MPs of the governing party control the cabinet, but in practice they usually support their own party's legislative initiatives regardless of the merits of particular proposals because their electoral fates are closely tied with that of the party leadership. As a norm, a disciplined majority party leaves the executive virtually unconstrained between elections.[11] 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. Early elections occur not as a flexible mechanism to rid the country of an ineffective government, but at the discretion of a ruling majority using its dissolution power strategically to renew its mandate for another five years by calling a new election before its current term ends.[12]

Presidentialism is predicated upon a system of checks and balances. Such checks

and balances usually inhibit winner-takes-all tendencies; indeed, they 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 congress, allowing it to block some presidential initiatives. If the president's own legislative powers are reactive only (a veto, but no decree powers), an opposition-controlled congress can be the prime mover in legislating, as it is in the United States and Costa Rica, the two longest standing presidential democracies. Controlling congress is not the biggest prize, and it usually does not enable a party or coalition to dictate policy, but it allows the party or coalition to establish parameters within which policy is made. It can be a big prize in its own right if the presidency has relatively weak legislative powers.

Moreover, compared to Westminster 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 (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 allows losers in the presidential contest a piece of the pie. The norm in multiparty presidential systems is similar to that in multiparty parliamentary systems: a coalition governs, cabinet positions are divided among several parties, and the president typically must retain the support of these parties to govern effectively.

Thus, most parliamentary systems with single member district electoral systems have stronger winner-takes-all mechanisms than presidential systems. The combination of parliamentarism and a majority party specifically produces winner-takes-all results. This situation of extreme majoritarianism under parliamentarism is not uncommon; it is found throughout the Caribbean and some parts of the Third World. In fact, outside western Europe all parliamentary systems that have been continuously democratic from 1972 to 1994 have been based on the Westminster model (see Table 1). Thus, Linz is not right when he states that an absolute majority of seats for one party does not occur often in parliamentary systems.[13] In presidential systems with single member plurality districts, the party that does not win the presidency can control congress, thereby providing an important check on executive power.

Linz's fourth argument, that the style of presidential politics is less favorable to democracy than the style of parliamentary politics, rests in part on his view that presidentialism induces a winner-takes-all logic. We have already expressed our skepticism about this claim. We agree that the predominant style of politics differs somewhat between presidential and parliamentary systems, but we would place greater emphasis on differences of style that stem from constitutional design and the nature of the party system.

Table 1 Independent Countries That Were Continuously Democratic, 1972–1994

Inc. level	Pop. size	Parliamentary	Presidential	Other
Low/lower-middle	Micro			
	Small	Jamaica Mauritius	Costa Rica	
	Medium/ Large		Colombia Dominican Republic	
Upper-middle	Micro	Nauru Barbados Malta		
	Small	Botswana Trinidad and Tobago		
	Medium/ Large		Venezuela	
Upper	Micro	Luxembourg		Iceland
	Small	Ireland New Zealand Norway	Cyprus	
	Medium/ Large	Australia Belgium Canada Denmark Germany Israel Italy Japan Netherlands Sweden United Kingdom	United States	Austria Finland France Switzerland

All regimes in the "other" column are premier-presidential, except for Switzerland.

Countries that have become independent from Britain or a British Commonwealth state since 1945: Jamaica, Mauritius, Nauru, Barbados, Malta, Botswana, Trinidad and Tobago, Cyprus, Israel

Finally, we agree with Linz that presidentialism is more conducive than parliamentarism to the election of a political outsider as head of government and that this process can entail serious problems. But in presidential democracies that have more institutionalized party systems the election of political outsiders is the exception. Costa Rica, Uruguay, Colombia, and Venezuela have not elected an outsider president in recent decades, unless one counts Rafael Caldera of Venezuela in his latest incarnation (1993). Argentina last elected an outsider president in 1945, when Perón had not yet built a party. In Chile political outsiders won the presidential campaigns of 1952 and 1958, but they were exceptions rather than the norm. The most notable recent cases of elections of political outsiders, Fernando Collor de Mello in Brazil (1989) and Alberto Fujimori in Peru (l990), owe much to the unraveling of the party systems in both countries and in Fujimori's case also to the majority run-off system that encouraged widespread party system fragmentation in the first round.

Assessing the Record of Presidentialism

Linz correctly states that most long established democracies have parliamentary systems. Presidentialism is poorly represented among long established democracies. This fact is apparent in Table 1, which lists countries that have a long, continuous democratic record according to the criteria of Freedom House.

Freedom House has been rating countries on a scale of 1 to 7 (with 1 being best) on political rights and civil rights since 1972. Table 1 lists all thirty-three countries that were continuously democratic from 1972 to 1994. We considered a country continuously democratic if it had an average score of 3 or better on political rights throughout this period.[14] Additionally, the scores for both political and civil rights needed to be 4 or better in every annual Freedom House survey for a country to be considered continuously democratic.

Of the thirty-three long established democracies, only six are presidential despite the prevalence of presidentialism in many parts of the globe. Twenty-two are parliamentary, and five fall into the "other" category. However, the superior record of parliamentarism is in part an artifact of where it has been implemented.

Table 1 provides information on three other issues that may play a role in a society's likelihood of sustaining democracy: income level, population size, and British colonial heritage. It is widely recognized that a relatively high income level is an important background condition for democracy.[15] In classifying countries by income levels, we followed the guidelines of the World Bank's *World Development Report 1993:* low is under $635 per capita GNP; lower middle is $636 to $2,555; upper middle is $2,556 to $7,,910; and upper is above $7,911. We collapsed the bottom two categories. Table 2 summarizes the income categories of countries in Table 1.

Table 2 Income Levels of Continuous Democracies, 1972–1994 (number of countries in each category)

Per Capita GNP in US $	Parliamentary	Presidential	Other
0-2555	2	3	0
2556-7910	5	1	0
over 7911	15	2	5
total	22	6	5

Most of these long established democracies (twenty-eight of thirty-three) are in upper middle or upper income countries. But among the low to lower middle income countries there are actually more presidential (three) than parliamentary (two) systems. Fifteen of the parliamentary democracies are found in Europe or other high income countries such as Canada, Israel, and Japan. It is likely that these countries would have been democratic between 1972 and 1994 had they had presidential constitutions. So some of the success of parliamentary democracy is accidental: in part because of the evolution of constitutional monarchies into democracies, the region of the world that democratized and industrialized first is overwhelmingly populated with parliamentary systems.

Very small countries may have an advantage in democratic stability because they typically have relatively homogeneous populations in ethnic, religious, and linguistic terms, thereby attenuating potential sources of political conflict. We classified countries as micro (population under 500,000), small (500,000 to 5,000,000), and medium to large (over 5,000,000), using 1994 population data. Table 3 groups our thirty-three long established democracies by population size. Here, too, parliamentary systems enjoy an advantage. None of the five micronations with long established democracies has a presidential system.

The strong correlation between British colonial heritage and democracy has been widely recognized. Reasons for this association need not concern us here, but possibilities mentioned in the literature include the tendency to train civil servants, the governmental practices and institutions (which include but can not be reduced to parliamentarism) created by the British, and the lack of control of local landed elites over

Table 3 Population Size of Continuous Democracies, 1972–1994 (number of countries in each category)

Population	Parliamentary	Presidential	Other
Under 500,000	4	0	1
500,000 to 5,000,000	7	2	0
Over 5,000,000	11	4	5
total	22	6	5

the colonial state.[16] Nine of the thirty-three long established democracies had British colonial experience. Among them, eight are parliamentary and one is presidential. Here, too, background conditions have been more favorable to parliamentary systems.

It is not our purpose here to analyze the contributions of these factors to democracy; rather, we wanted to see if these factors correlated with regime type. If a back-

Table 4 Independent Countries That Were Democratic for at Least Ten Years (But Less Than Twenty-three) as of 1994

Inc. level	Pop. size	Parliamentary	Presidential	Other
Low/lower-middle	Micro	Belize (1981) Dominica (1978) Kiribati (1979) St. Lucia (1979) St. Vincent (1979) Solomons (1978) Tuvalu (1978) Vanuatu (1980)		
	Small	Papua New Guinea (1975)		
	Medium/ Large	India (1979)	Bolivia (1982) Brazil (1985) Ecuador (1979) El Salvador (1985) Honduras (1980)	
Middle	Micro	Antigua and Barbuda (1981) Grenada (1985) St. Kitts-Nevis (1983)		
	Small			
	Medium/ Large	Greece (1974)	Argentina (1983) Uruguary (1985)	Portugal[1] (1976)
Upper	Micro	Bahamas (1973)		
	Small			
	Medium/ Large	Spain (1977)		

Numbers in parentheses give the date when the transition to democracy took place or the date of independence for former colonies that were not independent as of 1972.

Note: 1. Portugal has a premier-presidential system

Countries that have become independent from Britain or a British Commonwealth state since 1945: Belize, Dominica, Kiribati, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Solomons, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, India, Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, St. Kitts-Nevis, Bahamas

ground condition that is conducive to democracy is correlated with parliamentarism, then the superior record of parliamentarism may be more a product of the background condition than the regime type.

Table 4 shows twenty-four additional countries that had been continuously democratic by the same criteria used in Table 1, only for a shorter time period (at least ten years). Together, Tables 1 and 4 give us a complete look at contemporary democracies that have lasted at least ten years.

There are three striking facts about the additional countries in Table 4. First, they include a large number of microstates that became independent from Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, and all of them are parliamentary. All seven presidential democracies but only three of the sixteen parliamentary democracies are in medium to large countries (see Table 5). All sixteen of the democracies listed in Tables 1 and 4 with populations under one-half million (mostly island nations) are parliamentary, as are eight of ten democracies with populations between one-half and five million. In contrast, no presidential systems are in microstates, and many are in exceptionally large countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, and the United States.

Second, with Table 4 the number of presidential democracies increases substantially. Most are in the lower and lower middle income categories, and all are in Latin America. Table 6 summarizes the income status of the newer democracies listed in Table 4. Clearly, not all of parliamentarism's advantage stems from the advanced industrial states. Even in the lower to upper middle income categories, there are more parliamentary systems (twenty-one if we combine Tables 1 and 4, compared to eleven presidential systems). However, every one of the parliamentary democracies outside of the high income category is a former British colony. The only other democracies in these income categories are presidential, and all but Cyprus are in Latin America.

Thus, if the obstacles of lower income (or other factors not considered here) in Latin America continue to cause problems for the consolidation of democracy, the number of presidential breakdowns could be large once again in the future. More optimistically, if Latin American democracies achieve greater success in consolidating themselves this time around, the number of long established presidential democracies will grow substantially in the future.

Table 5 Population Size of Continuous Democracies, 1985–1994 (number of countries in each category)

Population	Parliamentary	Presidential	Other
Under 500,000	12	0	0
500,000 to 5,000,000	1	0	0
Over 5,000,000	3	7	1
total	16	7	1

Table 6 Income Levels of Continuous Democracies, 1985–1994 (number of countries in each category)

Per Capita GNP in US$	Parliamentary	Presidential	Other
0-2555	10	0	0
2556–7910	4	5	1
Over 7911	2	2	0
total	16	7	1

Similarly, if British colonial heritage and small population size are conducive to democracy, parliamentarism has a built-in advantage simply because Britain colonized many small island territories. As a rule, British colonies had local self-government, always on the parliamentary model, before independence.[17] Further, if other aspects of Latin American societies (such as extreme inequality across classes or regions) are inimical to stable democracy, then presidentialism has a built-in disadvantage.

In sum, presidentialism is more likely to be adopted in Latin America and in Africa than in other parts of the world, and these parts of the world have had more formidable obstacles to democracy regardless of the form of government. In contrast, parliamentarism has been the regime form of choice in most of Europe and in former British colonies (a large percentage of which are microstates), where conditions for democracy have generally been more favorable. Thus, the correlation between parliamentarism and democratic success is in part a product of where it has been implemented.

Advantages of Presidential Systems

Presidential systems afford some attractive features that can be maximized through careful attention to constitutional design. These advantages partially offset the liabilities of presidentialism.

Greater Choice for Voters Competing claims to legitimacy are the flipside of one advantage. The direct election of the chief executive gives the voters two electoral choices instead of one — assuming unicameralism, for the sake of simplicity of argument. Having both executive and legislative elections gives voters a freer range of choices. Voters can support one party or candidate at the legislative level but another for the head of government.

Electoral Accountability and Identification Presidentialism affords some advantages for accountability and identifiability. Electoral accountability describes

the degree and means by which elected policymakers are electorally responsible to citizens, while identifiability refers to voters' ability to make an informed choice prior to elections based on their ability to assess the likely range of postelection governments.

The more straightforward the connection between the choices made by the electorate at the ballot box and the expectations to which policymakers are held can be made, the greater electoral accountability is. For maximizing direct accountability between voters and elected officials, presidentialism is superior to parliamentarism in multiparty contexts because the chief executive is directly chosen by popular vote. Presidents (if eligible for reelection) or their parties can be judged by voters in subsequent elections. Having both an executive and an assembly allows the presidential election to be structured so as to maximize accountability and the assembly election so as to permit broad representation.

One objection to presidentialism's claim to superior electoral accountability is that in most presidential systems presidents may not be reelected immediately, if at all. The electoral incentive for the president to remain responsive to voters is weakened in these countries, and electoral accountability suffers. Bans on reelection are deficiencies of most presidential systems, but not of presidentialism as a regime type. Direct accountability to the electorate exists in some presidential systems, and it is always possible under presidential government. If, as is often the case, the constitution bans immediate reelection but allows subsequent reelection, presidents who aspire to regain their office have a strong incentive to be responsive to voters and thereby face a mechanism of electoral accountability. Only if presidents can never be reelected and will become secondary (or non) players in national and party politics after their terms are incentives for accountability via popular election dramatically weakened. Even where immediate reelection is banned, voters can still directly hold the president's party accountable.

Under parliamentarism, with a deeply fragmented party system the lack of direct elections for the executive inevitably weakens electoral accountability, for a citizen can not be sure how to vote for or against a particular potential head of government. In multiparty parliamentary systems, even if a citizen has a clear notion of which parties should be held responsible for the shortcomings of a government, it is often not clear whether voting for a certain party will increase the likelihood of excluding a party from the governing coalition. Governments often change between elections, and even after an election parties that lose seats are frequently invited to join governing coalitions.

Strom used the term "identifiability" to denote the degree to which the possible alternative executive-controlling coalitions were discernible to voters before an election.[18] Identifiability is high when voters can assess the competitors for control of the executive and can make a straightforward logical connection between their preferred candidate or party and their optimal vote. Identifiability is low when voters can not

predict easily what the effect of their vote will be in terms of the composition of the executive, either because postelection negotiations will determine the nature of the executive, as occurs in multiparty parliamentary systems, or because a large field of contenders for a single office makes it difficult to discern where a vote may be "wasted" and whether voting for a "lesser-of-evils" might be an optimal strategy.

Strom's indicator of "identifiability" runs from O to 1, with 1 indicating that in l00 percent of a given nation's post-World War II elections the resulting government was identifiable as a likely result of the election at the time voters went to the polls. The average of the sample of parliamentary nations in Western Europe from 1945 until 1987 is .39, that is, most of the time voters could not know for which government they were voting. Yet under a parliamentary regime voting for an MP or a party list is the only way voters can influence the choice of executive. In some parliamentary systems, such as Belgium (.10), Israel (.14), nd Italy (.12), a voter could rarely predict the impact of a vote in parliamentary elections on the formation of the executive. The formation of the executive is the result of parliamentary negotiations among many participants. Therefore, it is virtually impossible for the voter, to foresee how best to support a particular executive.

In presidential systems with a plurality one round format, identifiability is likely to approach 1.00 in most cases because voters cast ballots for the executive and the number of significant competitors is likely to be small. Systems in which majority run-off is used to elect the president are different, as three or more candidates may be regarded prior to the first round as serious contenders. When plurality is used to elect the president and when congressional and presidential elections are held concurrently, the norm is for "serious" competition to be restricted to two candidates even when there is multiparty competition in congressional elections. Especially when the electoral method is not majority run-off, presidentialism tends to encourage coalition building before elections, thus clarifying the basic policy options being presented to voters in executive elections and simplifying the voting calculus.

Linz has responded to the argument that presidentialism engenders greater identifiability by arguing that voters in most parliamentary systems can indeed identify the likely prime ministers and cabinet ministers.[19] By the time individuals approach leadership status, they are well known to voters. While his rejoinder is valid on its face, Linz is using the term "identifiability" in a different manner from Strom or us. He is speaking of voters' ability to identify personnel rather than government teams, which, as we have noted, may not be at all identifiable.

Congressional Independence in Legislative Matters Because representatives in a presidential system can act on legislation without worrying about immediate consequences for the survival of the government, issues can be considered on their merits rather than as matters of "confidence" in the leadership of the ruling party or coalition. In this specific sense, assembly members exercise independent judgment

on legislative matters. Of course, this independence of the assembly from the executive can generate the problem of immobilism. This legislative independence is particularly problematic with highly fragmented multiparty systems, where presidents' parties typically are in the minority and legislative deadlock more easily ensues. However, where presidents enjoy substantial assembly support, congressional opposition to executive initiatives can promote consensus building and can avoid the passage of ill-considered legislation simply to prevent a crisis of confidence. The immobilism feared by presidentialism's detractors is the flip side of the checks and balances desired by the United States' founding fathers.

Congressional independence can encourage broad coalition building because even a majority president is not guaranteed the unreserved support of partisans in congress. In contrast, when a prime minister's party enjoys a majority, parliamentary systems exhibit highly majoritarian characteristics. Even a party with less than a majority of votes can rule almost unchecked if the electoral system "manufactures" a majority of seats for the party. The incentive not to jeopardize the survival of the government pressures members of parliament whose parties hold executive office not to buck cabinet directives. Thus, presidentialism is arguably better able than parliamentarism to combine the independence of legislators with an accountable and identifiable executive. If one desires the consensual and often painstaking task of coalition building to be undertaken on each major legislative initiative, rather than only on the formation of a government, then presidentialism has an advantage.

Variations among Presidential Systems

Linz's critique is based mostly on a generic category of presidential systems. He does not sufficiently differentiate among kinds of presidentialism. As Linz acknowledges, the simple dichotomy, presidentialism versus parliamentarism, while useful as a starting point, is not sufficient to assess the relative merits of different constitutional designs.

Presidentialism encompasses a range of systems of government, and variations within presidentialism are important. Presidential systems vary and their dynamics change considerably according to the constitutional powers of the president, the degree of party discipline, and the fragmentation of the party system.

Presidential Powers The dynamics of presidential systems vary according to presidents' formal powers. Some constitutions make it easier for the president to dominate the political process, while others make it more difficult.

One way to think of presidential legislative powers is in terms of the relationship of the exercise of power to the legislative status quo.[20] Powers that allow the president to attempt to establish a new status quo may be termed proactive. The best

example is decree power. Those that allow the president to defend the status quo against attempts by the legislative majority to change it may be termed reactive powers.

The veto is a reactive legislative power that allows the president to defend the status quo by reacting to the legislature's attempt to alter it, but it does not enable the president to alter the status quo. Provisions for overriding presidential vetoes vary from a simple majority, in which case the veto is very weak, to the almost absolute veto of Ecuador, where no bill other than the budget can become law without presidential assent (but congress can demand a referendum on a vetoed bill).

In a few constitutions the president may veto specific provisions within a bill. In a true partial veto, also known as an item veto, presidents may promulgate the items or articles of the bill with which they agree, while vetoing and returning to congress for reconsideration only the vetoed portions. A partial veto strengthens presidents vis-à-vis congress by allowing them to block the parts of a bill they oppose while passing those parts they favor; the presidents need not make a difficult choice of whether to accept a whole bill in order to win approval for those parts they favor.

Several presidents have the right of exclusive introduction of legislative proposals in certain policy areas. Often this exclusive power extends to some critical matters, most notably budgets, but also military policy, the creation of new bureaucratic offices, and laws concerning tariff and credit policies. This power is also reactive. If presidents prefer the status quo to outcomes likely to win the support of a veto-proof majority in congress, they can prevent changes simply by not initiating a bill.

A proactive power lets presidents establish a new status quo. If presidents can sign a decree that becomes law the moment it is signed, they have effectively established a new status quo. Relatively few democratic constitutions allow presidents to establish new legislation without first having been delegated explicit authority to do so. Those that confer this authority potentially allow presidents to be very powerful.

Decree power alone does not let presidents dominate the legislative process. They can not emit just any decree, confident that it will survive in congress. But it lets them shape legislation and obtain laws that congress on its own would not have passed. Even though a congressional majority can usually rescind decrees, presidents can still play a major role in shaping legislation for three reasons: unlike a bill passed by congress, a presidential decree is already law, not a mere proposal, before the other branch has an opportunity to react to it; presidents can overwhelm the congressional agenda with a flood of decrees, making it difficult for congress to consider measures before their effects may be difficult to reverse; and presidents can use the decree power strategically, at a point in the policy space where a congressional majority is indifferent between the status quo and the decree.

A case can be made that presidential systems generally function better if the president has relatively limited powers over legislation. When the congress is powerful relative to the president, situations in which the president is short of a majority in the

congress need not be crisis-ridden. If the president has great legislative powers, the ability of the congress to debate, logroll, and offer compromises on conflictual issues is constrained. The presidency takes on enormous legislative importance, and the incumbent has formidable weapons with which to fine tune legislation and limit consensus building in the assembly. It is probably no accident that some of the most obvious failures among presidential democracies have been systems with strong presidential powers.

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. Parties in presidential systems need not be extremely disciplined, but indiscipline makes it more difficult to establish stable relationships among the government, the parties, and the legislature. Presidents must be able to work with legislatures, for otherwise they are likely to face inordinate difficulties in governing effectively. Moderate party discipline makes it easier for presidents to work out stable deals with congress.

Where discipline is 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 sometimes forced to rely on ad hoc bases of support, frequently needing to work out deals with individual legislators and faction leaders rather than negotiating primarily with party leaders who deliver the votes of their copartisans. This situation can be difficult for presidents, and it encourages the widespread use of patronage to secure the support of individual legislators.

With more disciplined parties, presidents can negotiate primarily with party leaders, which reduces the number of actors involved in negotiations and hence simplifies the process. Party leaders can usually deliver the votes of most of their members, so there is greater predictability in the political process.

Party Systems and Presidentialism Linz notes that the problems of presidentialism are compounded in nations with deep political cleavages and numerous political parties. 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. Many presidential democracies either have deep political cleavages or many parties; hence Linz's arguments about the problems of presidentialism are often pertinent. But some presidential systems have less indelibly engraved cleavages and less party system fragmentation. In these cases, presidentialism often functions reasonably well, as the United States, Costa Rica, and Venezuela suggest. One way of easing the strains on presidential systems is to take steps to avoid high party system fragmentation.[21]

Significant party system fragmentation can be a problem for presidentialism because it increases the likelihood of executive-legislative deadlock. With extreme multipartism, the president's party will not have anything close to a majority of seats in congress, so the president will be forced to rely on a coalition. Interparty coalitions, however, tend to be more fragile in presidential systems than with parliamentarism.[22]

Whereas in parliamentary systems party coalitions generally are formed after the election and are binding for individual legislators, in presidential systems they often are formed before the election and are not binding past election day. The parties are not corresponsible 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. Parties' support during the electoral campaign does not ensure their support once the president 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 or 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 than in most parliamentary systems. The extension of a cabinet portfolio does not necessarily imply party support for the president, as it usually does in a parliamentary system. 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.[23]

The problems in constructing stable interparty coalitions make the combination of extreme 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 presidential democracy with more than 4.0 effective parties. Only one country with this institutional combination, Chile from 1932 to 1973, sustained democracy for at least twenty-five consecutive years. This combination is manageable, but not optimal.

Where party system fragmentation is moderate (under 4.0 effective parties), building and maintaining interparty coalitions are easier.[24] The president's party is certain to be a major one that controls a significant share of the seats. This situation mitigates the problem of competing claims to legitimacy because many legislators are likely to be the president's copartisans. Conflicts between the legislature and the executive 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 can not get legislation passed. This problem is more likely when the president's party is in a distinct minority. It is no coincidence that the oldest and most established presidential democracies — the U.S., Costa Rica, and Venezuela (from 1973 to 1993) — have two or two-and-one-half party systems. Six of the seven presidential democracies that have lasted at least twenty-five consecutive years (Uruguay, Colombia, and the Philippines, in addition to the three already mentioned cases) have had under three effective parties. Chile is the sole exception. Extreme multipartism does not doom presidential democracies, but it does make their functioning more difficult.

Electoral Rules for Presidentialism Other things being equal, presidential systems function better with electoral rules or sequences that avoid extreme multipartism, though it is best to avoid draconian steps that might exclude politically important groups, for such an exclusion could undermine legitimacy.[25] Party system fragmentation can be limited even with proportional representation by either of two factors: most important, by having concurrent presidential and legislative elections and a single round plurality format for electing the president, and by establishing a relatively low district magnitude or a relatively high threshold for congressional elections.

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.[26] 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 more likely. In some cases the party systems for congress and president diverge considerably, and presidents' parties have a small minority of legislators. Therefore, with presidentialism concurrent elections are preferable.

The increasingly common majority run-off method for electing presidents has the 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 percent 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. The plurality rule, in contrast, encourages only two

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

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. 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 is not elected by majority run-off. Proportional representation can permit the representation of some important minor parties without leading to extreme fragmentation.

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 daunting problems in parliamentary systems.[27] In countries with undisciplined parties, switching to parliamentary government could exacerbate problems of governability and instability unless party and electoral legislation was 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.

Linz counterargues 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 these claims, but in the short term switching to parliamentary government without effecting parallel changes to encourage greater party discipline could prove problematic.

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.[28]

Conclusion

While we greatly admire Linz's seminal contribution and agree with parts of it, we believe that he 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 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 enhance the viability of presidentialism. Linz clearly recognizes that not any kind of parliamentarism will do. We make the same point about presidentialism.

Under some conditions the perils of presidentialism can be attenuated, a point that Linz underplays. It is important to pay attention to factors that can mitigate the problems of presidentialism because it may be politically more feasible to modify presidential systems than to switch to parliamentary government.

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 as pronounced as Linz argued. Nevertheless, we share the consensus that his pathbreaking article was one of the most important scholarly contributions of the past decade and deserves the ample attention among scholars and policymakers that it has already received.

NOTES

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1. We follow Lijphart's understanding of a Westminster (British) style democracy. Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), esp. pp. 1–20. For our purposes, the most important features of a

Westminster democracy are single party majority cabinets, disciplined parties, something approaching a two party system in the legislature, and plurality single member electoral districts.

2. See Adam Przeworski et al., "What Makes Democracies Endure?," *Journal of Democracy,* 7 (January 1996), 39–55.

3. Matthew Shugart and John Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), ch. 2.

4. Juan J. Linz, "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy: Does It Make a Difference?," in Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, eds., *The Crisis of Presidential Democracy: The Latin American Evidence* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 7; Juan J. Linz, "The Perils of Presidentialism," *Journal of Democracy,* 1 (Winter 1990).

5. Ibid., pp. 9–10.

6. Ibid., p. 18.

7. Linz, "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy," p. 19.

8. Lijphart, ch. 6.

9. Linz, "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy," pp. 47, 46.

10. Donald L. Horowitz, "Comparing Democratic Systems," *Journal of Democracy,* 1 (Fall 1990), 73–79; and George Tsebelis, "Decision Making in Political Systems: Veto Players in Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Multicameralism and Multipartyism," *British Journal of Political Science,* 25 (1995), 289–325.

11. Assuming that the party remains united. If it does not, it may oust its leader and change the prime minister, as happened to Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Brian Mulroney in Canada. However, such intraparty leadership crises are the exception in majoritarian (Westminster) parliamentary systems.

12. A possible exception in Westminster systems is occasional minority government, which is more common than coalition government in such systems. Even then, the government is as likely to call early elections to attempt to convert its plurality into a majority as it is in response to a vote of no confidence.

13. Linz, "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy," p. 15.

14. Using an average of 3 on both measures would have eliminated three countries (India and Colombia in Table 1 and Vanuatu in Table 3) that we consider basically democratic but that have had problems with protecting civil rights, partly because of a fight against violent groups.

15. Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 62–80; Kenneth Bollen, "Political Democracy and the Timing of Development," *American Sociological Review*, 44 (August 1979), 572–87; Larry Diamond, "Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered," in Gary Marks and Larry Diamond, eds., *Reexamining Democracy: Essays in Honor of Seymour Martin Lipset* (Newbury Park: SAGE, 1992), pp. 93–139; Seymour Martin Lipset et al., "A Comparative Analysis of the Social Requisites of Democracy," *International Social Science Journal,* 45 (May 1993), 155–75.

16. Larry Diamond, "Introduction: Persistence, Erosion, Breakdown, and Renewal," in Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Democracy in Developing Countries: Asia* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1989); Myron Weiner, "Empirical Democratic Theory," in Myron Weiner and Ergun Özbudun, eds., *Competitive Elections in Developing Countries* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1987); Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

17 Some British colonies later adopted presidential systems and did not become (or remain) democratic. However, in many cases democracy was ended (if it ever got underway) by a coup carried out by the prime minister and his associates. Not presidential democracies, but parliamentary proto-democracies broke down. Typical was the Seychelles. The failure of most of these countries to evolve back into democracy can not be attributed to presidentialism.

18. Kaare Strom, *Minority Government and Majority Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

19. Linz, "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy," pp. 10–14.
20. Matthew Shugart, "Strength of Parties and Strength of Presidents: An Inverse Relationship" (forthcoming).
21. Przeworski, et al., "What Makes Democracies Endure?," found that the combination of presidentialism and a high degree of party system fragmentation was unfavorable to stable democracy.
22. Arend Lijphart, "Presidentialism and Majoritarian Democracy: Theoretical Observations," in Linz and Valenzuela, eds.
23. 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,* 58 (March 1964), 46–59.
24. 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.
25. Arturo Valenzuela, "Party Politics and the Crisis of Presidentialism in Chile: A Proposal for a Parliamentary Form of Government," in Linz and Valenzuela, eds., pp. 91–150.
26. Shugart and Carey; Mark P. Jones, *Electoral Laws and the Survival of Presidential Democracy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).
27. Giovanni Sartori, "Neither Presidentialism nor Parliamentarism,"' in Linz and Valenzuela, eds.,
28. James W. Ceaser, "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. 168–93.