

web of interests more complex than just remaining on top of an impoverished society has allowed room for others to emerge. Just as the colonial state had to allow for the emergence of the social classes that led the nationalist movements in much of Asia and Africa in order to manage its political and economic interests efficiently, so the postcolonial state's army must do the same.

In the case of Burma, however, this challenge is perhaps greater than in comparable Southeast Asian societies. There is no revered monarchy as in Thailand to stand above the battle of factions and cliques, ultimately arbitrating and moderating conflict. There is as yet no web of external linkages with foreign governments and international financial institutions that can provide carrots as well as sticks to moderate government behavior and demonstrate the utility of sharing economic and political power for the advantage of all sectors of society. This must happen if democracy is to emerge. Unlike the situation with respect to Thailand and Indonesia in the 1960s, the United States and other Western governments believe that they have no strategic interests in Burma. Therefore, criticism of continued military rule is a convenient and costless way in which Western politicians can display their advocacy of democratic rights. But by forcing the army to feel even more isolated and alone, such external criticism may provoke a nationalist rejection of democracy rather than encourage the trust necessary for democracy to emerge.

The prodemocracy upheaval of 1988 and the election of 1990 are only first steps toward the creation of the institutions that will be needed if Burma is to become a stable democracy. The political tolerance and dialogue necessary for democracy does not yet exist. Only if the army sees that it is in its interest to allow autonomous organizations to emerge will the prospects for democracy improve. Events will soon decide whether Burma is to undergo a democratic transition toward durable institutions, or whether, in the absence of economic growth and in the face of international isolation, the social stagnation and political repression of the last 20 years will continue.

NOTES

1. In June 1989, Burma officially renamed itself Myanmar, which is an English transliteration of the name of the country in Burmese. For the convenience of readers, this essay will use the old name. Many Western newspapers have refused to accept the change, though governments and international organizations have adopted the new usage.
2. For the parallels in mind see Chai-Anan Samudavanija, "Thailand: A Stable Semi-Democracy" in *Democracy in Developing Countries*, vol. 3, Asia, eds. L. Diamond, J. Linz, and S.M. Lipset (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1989), 305-346; and Harold Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*, rev. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

Debate Presidents vs. Parliaments

COMPARING DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS

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In "The Perils of Presidentialism" [*Journal of Democracy* 1 (Winter 1990): 51-69], Professor Juan Linz makes the claim that parliamentary systems are "more conducive to stable democracy" than are presidential systems. "This conclusion," he continues, "applies especially to nations with deep political cleavages and numerous political parties." This theme forms a *leitmotiv* in Professor Linz's recent works, has been picked up by other scholars, and runs the risk of becoming conventional wisdom before it receives searching scrutiny.

Linz argues that the presidential office introduces an undesirable element of winner-take-all politics into societies that need mechanisms of conciliation instead. A presidential candidate is either elected or not, whereas in parliamentary systems many shades of outcome are possible. Moreover, a directly elected president may think he has a popular "mandate," even if he has been elected with only a small plurality of the vote, perhaps even less than 40 percent. The potential for conflict is accordingly enhanced.

Conflict is promoted, in Linz's view, by the separation of powers that divides the legislature from the president. The fixed term of a separately elected president makes for rigidity between elections. By contrast, parliamentary systems are able to resolve crises at any time simply by changing leaders or governments. Separate presidential election also produces weak cabinets and fosters electoral contests in which extremists either have too much influence or the whole society becomes polarized. This is a powerful indictment, supported by an abiding concern for

the stability of precarious democratizing regimes. Linz's claims, however, are not sustainable. First, they are based on a regionally skewed and highly selective sample of comparative experience, principally from Latin America. Second, they rest on a mechanistic, even caricatured, view of the presidency. Third, they assume a particular system of electing the president, which is not necessarily the best system. Finally, by ignoring the functions that a separately elected president can perform for a divided society, they defeat Linz's own admirable purposes.

Presidentialism and Political Instability

As frequent references to Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, and Chile attest, Linz believes that presidentialism has contributed to instability in Latin America. If, however, his focus had been on instability in postcolonial Asia and Africa, the institutional villain would surely have been parliamentary systems. Indeed, Sir Arthur Lewis argued 25 years ago in his lectures on *Politics in West Africa* that the inherited Westminster system of parliamentary democracy was responsible for much of the authoritarianism then emerging in English-speaking Africa. What Lewis emphasized was the winner-take-all features of the Westminster model, in which anyone with a parliamentary majority was able to seize the state.

Lewis's understanding conforms to that of many Africans seeking to restore democratic rule. The most impressive efforts at democratization, those of Nigeria in 1978-79 and again at the present time, involve adoption of a presidential system to mitigate societal divisions. Under the parliamentary system inherited at independence, a cluster of ethnic groups from the north had managed to secure a majority of seats and shut all other groups out of power. This game of total inclusion and exclusion characterized Nigerian politics after 1960, precipitating the military coups of 1966 and the war of Biafran secession from 1967 to 1970. By choosing a separation of powers, the Nigerians aimed to prevent any group from controlling the country by controlling parliament.

Now it is possible that parliamentary systems helped stifle democracy in Africa while presidential systems helped stifle it in Latin America, but there are grounds for doubt. Linz refers to the emergence of conciliatory practices in the presidential systems of Colombia, Venezuela, and Brazil, but he dismisses them as "deviations." Chile under Salvador Allende, on the other hand, is regarded as closer to the norm, with presidentialism exacerbating social conflict. Yet at least some research by Arturo Valenzuela suggests that, before Allende, many Chilean presidents actually bolstered centrist, moderating tendencies. The experience of the presidency in the United States, where the presidency was invented, is also explained away as "an exception." Consequently, Chile's exacerbated conflict is traced to its presidency, while the moderated conflict of the

United States is said to have other roots. Political success has, so to speak, many parents; political failure, only one: the presidency.

In a variety of ways, Linz characterizes the presidency as a rigid institution, conducive to zero-sum politics. But that is the straw presidency he has conjured, rather than the presidency in fact. He says, for example, that parliamentary systems, unlike presidential systems, do not dichotomize winners and losers. In parliamentary regimes, coalition governments may form; and government and opposition may cooperate in the legislative process.

These outcomes, however, are equally possible in presidential systems. The Nigerian Second Republic had both a president and a coalition in the legislature. In presidential systems, moreover, government and opposition frequently cooperate in the legislative process. The United States Congress is notorious for such cooperation. Linz ascribes this cooperation to the "uniquely diffuse" party system of the United States. That party system has its roots in federalism, which also underpins the way the president is elected. Does that not argue against condemnation of a single institution like the presidency without examining the total configuration of institutions proposed for a given country?

It is difficult to see how a presidential system could produce more absolute win-or-lose outcomes than a parliamentary system does. One of Linz's objections to presidentialism is that it sets up a needless conflict between the executive and the legislature, especially if the two are controlled by different parties. But if the two are controlled by different parties, the system has not produced a winner-take-all result. It is difficult to complain about interbranch checks and balances and winner-take-all politics at the same time.

The presidency, says Linz, is an office that encourages its occupant to think that he has more power than he actually does. Where several candidates have contested, a president elected with, say, one-third of the vote gains the full power of the office. (The example of Allende, elected with a 36.2-percent plurality, is cited.) The new president can make appointments, propose and veto legislation, and, given his fixed term of office, even survive fluctuations in the strength of party support. A crisis in government during a fixed presidential term becomes, according to Linz, a constitutional crisis, since there is generally no lawful way to bring down a failed president in the middle of his term. By contrast, a parliamentary government that has lost its majority in the legislature will fall, whether or not elections are due. So conflict is routinized and need not ripen into a crisis.

Before responding to these claims, it is necessary to underscore a central assumption of the Linz analysis: that the president will be elected under a plurality (first-past-the-post) system or a majority system, with a runoff election if necessary. From this assumption follow most of Linz's complaints. Consequently, it needs to be said clearly that

presidents do not need to be elected on a plurality or majority-runoff basis. In divided societies, as I shall explain shortly, presidents should be elected by a different system, one that ensures broadly distributed support for the president. This greatly alleviates the problem of the narrowly elected president who labors under the illusion that he has a broader mandate. Winner-take-all is a function of electoral systems, not of institutions in the abstract.

Modes of Presidential Election

Electoral assumptions color all of Linz's analysis. He suggests that presidential candidates in plurality systems habitually cultivate the political extremes to facilitate election, thus giving the extremes influence denied them in a parliamentary system. But the supposed need to make concessions to extremists for the sake of building a plurality dissolves if presidents are not elected in this manner. By the same token, the influence of extremists in parliamentary systems is variable. One thing governing it, as the Israeli system shows, is the mode of election.

Electing the president by a majority attained in a runoff between the top two candidates poses a different problem, according to Linz. The runoff may facilitate alliances among moderates, but it also promotes a "confrontation" between the top two candidates, with a possibility that the society as a whole might become polarized.

Now, in fact, election of the president by straight plurality or majority vote is not a principle in favor with all those who have adopted presidential constitutions lately. Even the Electoral College system by which presidents of the United States are chosen is far more complex than a straight majority or runoff system. Presidential candidates in the United States are induced by the way electoral votes are distributed among the states to make discerning judgments about which interests are powerful in which states. The process cannot be captured in terms of extremism or polarization. But since Linz is especially keen to discourage presidentialism in societies with deep cleavages, it is preferable to focus on examples of presidential electoral systems in two such severely divided societies: Nigeria and Sri Lanka.

In the Nigerian Second Republic, which began in 1979, a presidential system was created. (The same presidency and electoral system will be used in the Third Republic, scheduled to begin in 1992.) To be elected, a president needed a plurality plus distribution. The successful candidate was required to have at least 25 percent of the vote in no fewer than two-thirds of the then-19 states. This double requirement was meant to ensure that the president had support from many ethnic groups. To put the point in Linz's terms, the aim was to shut out ethnic extremists and elect a moderate, centrist president. That is precisely the sort of president the Nigerians elected under the new system. The extremists, in fact, were

elected to parliament, not the presidency. Nor was there any of the polarization that Linz associates with majority runoffs. Carefully devised presidential-election arrangements can bolster the center and knit together the rent fabric of a divided society. In choosing a presidential electoral system with incentives for widely distributed support, the Nigerians were rejecting winner-take-all politics. They aimed instead for a president bent on conciliation rather than on conflict. They succeeded.

In 1978, Sri Lanka also moved to a presidential system. Its principal purpose was to create a political executive with a fixed term that would permit the incumbent to make unpopular decisions, particularly those concerning the reduction of ethnic conflict. A majority requirement was instituted. Since most candidates were unlikely to gain a majority in Sri Lanka's multiparty system, a method of alternative voting was adopted. Each voter could vote for several candidates, ranking them in order of preference. If no candidate attained a majority of first preferences, the top two candidates would be put into what amounted to an instant runoff. The second preferences of voters for all other candidates would then be counted (and likewise for third preferences) until one of the top two gained a majority. It was expected that presidential candidates would build their majority on the second and third choices of voters whose preferred candidate was not among the top two. This would put ethnic minorities (especially the Sri Lankan Tamils) in a position to require compromise as the price for their second preferences. So, again, the presidential system would rule out extremists, provide incentives to moderation, and encourage compromise in a fragmented society.

The majority requirement originated in a fear that Linz shares. Like him, the Sri Lankans were concerned that a plurality election could result in the choice of a president who enjoyed the support of only 30 or 35 percent of the voters and perhaps had won election by a very narrow margin. Lest such a chief executive think himself in possession of a "mandate," the Sri Lankans insisted on aggregating second and subsequent preferences in order to produce the requisite majority. The ease of devising such a system entirely vitiates the objection.

Indeed, had the Sri Lankans and Nigerians adopted their presidential electoral systems earlier, there is every reason to think that their conflicts would have been moderated by those systems. Instead, their conflicts worsened because of the winner-take-all rules that governed their parliamentary systems and excluded minorities from power.

Insubstantial Differences

The remaining elements of the indictment—the rigidity of the fixed term, the weak cabinet, and the prospects for abuse of presidential power—are all said to be inherent drawbacks of presidentialism. All are insubstantial in practice.

It is true, of course, that presidents serve during a fixed term of years and cannot be removed on a vote of no confidence. Nevertheless, the fixed term of a directly elected president is not more likely than the more flexible term of a parliamentary government to cause a governmental crisis. When parliamentary regimes begin with secure majorities, they tend to serve their full terms. The exception occurs when a government calls an early election to take advantage of its transient popularity. In theory, it is easier to remove a parliamentary government in the middle of its term than it is to remove a president. In practice, however, the need seldom arises unless the government consists of an unstable coalition because the society is fragmented. In that event, there is a good case for shifting to a presidential system, supported by a mode of election that fosters conciliation and consensus building. That, in fact, would be a sound interpretation of what the French did when they created the presidency of the Fifth Republic in 1958.

In presidential systems, as Linz observes, cabinets are typically weaker than they are in parliamentary systems. The weakness of cabinet ministers in presidential systems is due in part to the separation of powers. Since cabinet ministers are not elected legislators, they owe their offices to the president. If the president is conciliatory, they too will be conciliatory—which is more important for the politics about which Linz is properly concerned than whether cabinet ministers are weak or strong. In any case, the difference is exaggerated. Linz argues that the weakness of the cabinet is a function of the undue strength of the president. But there is another reason. In the United States, for example, cabinets are composed as they are because they represent special interests: agriculture, commerce, labor, and so on. What this means is that the president does *not* have a completely free hand in selecting them. Furthermore, strong prime ministers like Margaret Thatcher or Indira Gandhi have been able to dominate and reshuffle their parliamentary cabinets with impunity. This distinction between the two systems is breaking down.

Finally, abuse of power is hardly a presidential monopoly. Parliamentary regimes in Asia and Africa have produced more than their share of abuses of power. In Latin America and southern Europe, as well as Asia and Africa, abuse of power is made possible principally by the military coup or the growth of single-party hegemony. On this score, there is nothing to choose between presidential and parliamentary systems. Both have succumbed.

Choosing Among Democratic Institutions

Although the sharp distinction between presidential and parliamentary systems is unwarranted, Linz's disquiet is not. He has genuine cause for concern about the institutions adopted by democratizing states,

particularly those with deep cleavages and numerous parties. He is right to worry about winner-take-all outcomes and their exclusionary consequences in such societies. Nevertheless, it is Westminster, the Mother of Parliaments, that produces such outcomes as often as any presidential system does.

As this suggests, Linz's quarrel is not with the presidency, but with two features that epitomize the Westminster version of democracy: first, plurality elections that produce a majority of seats by shutting out third-party competitors; and second, adversary democracy, with its sharp divide between winners and losers, government and opposition. Because these are Linz's underlying objections, it is not difficult to turn his arguments around against parliamentary systems, at least where they produce coherent majorities and minorities. Where no majority emerges and coalitions are necessary, sometimes—but only sometimes—more conciliatory processes and outcomes emerge. As a result, Linz's thesis boils down to an argument not against the presidency but against plurality election, not in favor of parliamentary systems but in favor of parliamentary *coalitions*.

These are indeed important arguments, because democratizing societies need to think, and think hard, about electoral systems that foster conciliation and governmental systems that include rather than exclude. Prominent among innovations they might consider are presidents chosen by an electoral formula that maximizes the accommodation of contending political forces. Democratic innovators can only be aided by Linz's emphasis on institutional design. But they can only be distracted by his construction of an unfounded dichotomy between two systems, divorced from the electoral and other governmental institutions in which they operate.