



**Democracy Watch:
Social Perception of 15 July Coup Attempt**

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This book presents a comprehensive analysis of the results of the fieldwork by taking into account the main motivations of the people and their perception of the 15th July coup attempt.



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Government Systems, Party Politics, and Institutional Engineering in the Round

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ABSTRACT *Countries often debate the issue of constitutional reform. Typically, such debates focus on whether a country should have a presidential, semi-presidential, or parliamentary system of government. The advantages and disadvantages of each of these systems are now very well-known. However, it is important to move beyond the simple headline debate about the respective pros and cons of each system. This is because the operation of all three systems of government is conditioned by both the party political context in which they operate and the specific powers that are given to actors in the executive and legislative branch of government. This means that when considering constitutional reform, it is important to think about the specific context in which the reform will be introduced and the totality of changes that are being considered.*

Debating Institutional Reform

There are three main government systems – presidential, semi-presidential, and parliamentary. Over the years, many countries have debated switching from one system to another and some have actually decided to make the change. The move from a parliamentary to a semi-presidential system under President Charles de Gaulle in France is well known. Turkey's more recent shift from a parliamentary system to the direct election of the president and a semi-presidential system is also very familiar. Most recently, in December 2015, Armenia voted to change from a semi-presidential system to a parliamentary system after the next electoral cycle in 2017-2018. There are well-known arguments both for and against each of the three main government systems. This article places these arguments in context. It begins by defining the three systems in a way that allows them to be identified unambiguously. It then suggests that it is necessary to go beyond simple and well-worn arguments about the pros and cons of individual systems. Instead, it makes the point that the effects of such systems are conditioned by the interaction of

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party politics and specific institutional rules. This means that decision makers should focus less on the headline debate about the shift from one government system to another and think more about both the party political context in which such a change would be introduced, and the effects of the more detailed institutional reforms that usually accompany the system-level switch.

The Three Main Government Systems

The three common types of government systems can be distinguished on the basis of the combination of two different constitutional rules: i) whether the head of state is directly elected; and ii) whether the government or cabinet is collectively responsible to the legislature. In presidential systems, the head of state – the president – is directly elected, and the cabinet is not collectively responsible to the legislature. In parliamentary systems, the head of state – who can be either a monarch in a parliamentary monarchy, or a president in a parliamentary republic – is not directly elected, but the cabinet is collectively responsible to parliament. In semi-presidential systems, the president is directly elected and the cabinet is collectively responsible. The fourth possible combination – an assembly-independent system where the president is not directly elected and where the government is not collectively responsible – can be found only in Switzerland. For the purposes of this article, it can be left to one side.

This simple taxonomic combination is sufficient to distinguish between the three main types of government systems. Typically, though, two additional constitutional rules are ascribed to them as well. The first concerns the term of the president. Under presidential and semi-presidential systems, presidents serve for a fixed term of office and can be dismissed mid-term only through a process of impeachment. The second rule relates to the term of the legislature. Under presidential systems the legislature serves for a fixed term and cannot be dissolved by the president. By contrast, under parliamentary and semi-presidential systems the legislature is usually open to dissolution, although more or less fixed-term parliaments can be a feature of both systems too, notably in Norway. When parliaments can be dissolved early, it is usually the prime minister who has the power to effect dissolution in parliamentary systems, and either the prime minister or the president who has such power in semi-presidential systems.

Thinking of how these rules combine generates familiar examples of each system. A U.S.-style presidential system has a fixed-term, popularly elected president and a fixed-term Congress. In the U.S. there is no prime minister. Presidential nominations to the cabinet must be approved by the Senate, but the cabinet is neither collectively approved by the legislature nor accountable to it. By

contrast, a German-style parliamentary republic has a president who is elected by a Federal Convention, comprising all members of the lower house of the legislature, the Bundestag, and an equal number of members from regional assemblies. There is a prime minister, the Chancellor, who has to win the support of a vote in the lower house of parliament to assume office and whose government has to leave office if it loses a confidence motion in the Bundestag, in which event new parliamentary elections are held. In Germany, the parliamentary term is semi-fixed, meaning that there are ways in which the Chancellor may engineer parliament's dissolution prior to the end of its term, but the Chancellor does not have the power simply to call parliamentary elections at any time. Finally, a French-style semi-presidential republic has a directly elected president who serves for a fixed term. There is a prime minister who heads a government that has to leave office if it loses a confidence motion in the lower house of the French legislature, the National Assembly, which itself can be dissolved by the president, subject to some restrictions. In France, the president does not have the constitutional power to dismiss the prime minister or the cabinet.



Many factors combine to shape the success or failure of democratization. Some of these factors are specific to individual countries. After all, only Turkey is Turkey and only the U.S. is the U.S., though such country-specific arguments are often a smokescreen cloaking personal, ideological, or partisan interests

The taxonomic application of these very simple constitutional rules has become the standard way of thinking about government systems. This is because it allows for the clear and unambiguous identification of the three main systems. This is possible because the rules on which the taxonomy is based are mutually exclusive. The head of state is either directly elected or not. The government is either collectively responsible to the legislature or not. Depending on the combination of rules, a system is either presidential, parliamentary, or semi-presidential. It is never a mix. Moreover, no expert knowledge is needed to identify the different government systems. For example, it is possible to tell whether a country is presidential or semi-presidential simply by looking at the basic rules in its constitution, which itself is a publicly available document. It is advantageous to be able to identify different government systems in a clear and unambiguous way because it allows scholars, politicians, and the public alike to know precisely what is meant when a particular system is being referred to. This facilitates the scientific comparison of government systems as well as coherent public discussion of them. Put differently, it also allows scholars, politicians, and the public to know when people are not thinking taxonomically about government systems, including when terms such as 'presidential' and 'semi-presidential' are being used to suit a particular partisan, political, or personal interest.



The Grand National Assembly of Turkey, which is made up of four political parties: AK Party, CHP, MHP and HDP.

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There is one very important consequence of thinking about government systems taxonomically. The rules that define the different systems have no necessary implications for the power of political leaders, including presidents. This is because the concept of ‘power’ is not a simple constitutional rule that is either present or absent and that can be applied taxonomically. Instead, power is an aggregation of many different economic, social, and political factors. This means that presidential and prime ministerial power can vary from one country to another even when they share the same government system. The most extreme variation can be found within semi-presidential systems. Here, France may be the standard reference point, but in some countries, including Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Russia, presidents are all-powerful, while in others, such as Finland, Iceland, and Slovenia, they are mere figureheads. Yet semi-presidential systems are not alone in this regard. There is considerable variation in power within presidential systems too. The U.S. may be the most cited example of a presidential system, or “presidentialism,” but in many respects it is quite unusual. Within Latin America alone, there are countries, notably Brazil, where presidential authority is often challenged, and others, including Venezuela, where presidential power is exercised autocratically. Both countries operate very differently from the U.S. There is also variation in power within parliamentary systems too. The UK is sometimes characterized as an ‘elective dictatorship’ because the prime minister is so strong, but there are also examples of parliamentary systems with very weak governments, notably France during the Fourth Republic, post-war Italy, and Japan for much of the same period.

Power is an aggregation of many different economic, social, and political factors. This means that presidential and prime ministerial power can vary from one country to another even when they share the same government system

In short, the terms ‘presidential,’ ‘semi-presidential,’ and ‘parliamentary’ should be used to refer solely to three different government systems defined on the basis of the taxonomic application of certain constitutional rules. They should not be used to imply anything about the power of presidents and/or prime ministers in any particular system, any particular country, or any particular leader in a given country. Thus, the term ‘presidential’ should not be used to imply that a country has a strong president in practice. Nor should the term ‘parliamentary’ be used to imply that the prime minister must necessarily be either a strong or weak figure. Without understanding this point, it is impossible to engage in either proper scientific debate or dispassionate public discussion.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of the Different Systems

There is a long-standing debate about the advantages and disadvantages of presidential and parliamentary systems of government. The scholarly consensus is that presidential systems are more dangerous for young democracies than parliamentary systems, though there are strong counter-arguments.

Scholars such as Juan J. Linz have identified a number of problems associated with presidentialism.¹ For example, under presidentialism both the president and the legislature are elected by the people and, therefore, both can claim to express the will of the people. This can create two competing claims of legitimacy, leading to conflict and/or ‘gridlock’ between the two branches of government, which may encourage either the president to bypass the legislature and rule by decree, or the military to intervene to break the impasse. The fixed-terms for both the presidency and the legislature can also create rigidity in the system, with elections being held only at particular dates. This means that it can be difficult for the political system to react to a rapidly changing situation, perhaps increasing the incentive for the military to resort to extra-constitutional change to address what they might think of as a crisis situation. The presidency is a winner-takes-all office, reducing the opportunity for power sharing between opposing political forces. Presidential elections are also said to encourage lowest-common-denominator, populist-style politics, as can-

Parties are often dominated by their leaders, turning parliamentary elections into *de facto* populist-style presidential-like elections

didates try to win enough votes to be elected. Such candidates may be political outsiders who have little respect for democratic principles.

For scholars such as Linz, parliamentary systems can avoid all of what he calls “the perils of presidentialism.”² In parliamentary systems there is only one source of popular legitimacy, namely the legislature, reducing the potential for institutional conflict. In parliamentary countries where the parliamentary term is not

fixed and even in cases where it is semi-fixed, new elections can be held at almost any time if the circumstances require them, making the system more flexible. Governments also typically come to office with majority support in the legislature, meaning that cabinets are often coalitions, facilitating power sharing. Parliamentary elections are essentially party-oriented contests, rather than candidate-centered elections, reducing the potential for populism. Prime ministers also usually come to power through the party ranks with parliamentary experience behind them, meaning they are not political outsiders.

That said, there are potential problems with parliamentary systems. If the legislature is very fragmented, then the system can suffer from extreme governmental instability as one cabinet after another is voted out of office. By contrast, if a single party enjoys a large and cohesive majority, then the prime minister can have complete control of the decision-making process, effectively abolishing any checks and balances between the executive branch and the legislature. In addition, parties are often dominated by their leaders, turning parliamentary elections into *de facto* populist-style presidential-like elections.

While there are arguments against parliamentarism, there are also arguments in favor of presidentialism. For example, fixed presidential and legislative terms can provide institutional stability. What is more, scholars such as José Cheibub have questioned whether presidential systems are really as bad as Linz argues.³ For instance, to win office presidential candidates usually have to build coalitions of support. This means that they have to appoint cabinets that reflect the winning coalition, bringing erstwhile opposition parties into the government. Equally, presidents still have to work through the legislature, encouraging coalition building there too. Cheibub also provides evidence that presidential systems have tended to fail in countries with a history of military coups, suggesting that they have been introduced in places where they are perhaps ill-suited, rather than being problematic in themselves.

The debate about the advantages and disadvantages of semi-presidential systems is somewhat less well developed, yet the scholarly consensus is clear. On

balance, semi-presidentialism is considered to be a problematic choice for young democracies, perhaps even more so than presidential systems. In theory, there are good arguments in favor of semi-presidential systems. The fixed presidential term can provide executive stability, while at the same time government responsibility to the legislature can allow flexibility, thus combining an apparent benefit of each of the other two main systems. Most notably, the presence of both a president and a prime minister creates the potential for power sharing in divided societies. If a country is split between two opposing groups, then having one group hold the presidency and the other the prime ministry can give both groups a feeling that they have a stake in the system, increasing support for the regime as a whole.

While there are arguments in favor of semi-presidential systems, there are also arguments against. This system sometimes seems to combine the disadvantages of the other two systems. For example, presidential elections can encourage populist politics and outsider candidates as in presidential systems. At the same time, though, government responsibility to the legislature means that if the legislature is very divided the system can suffer from the same government instability as it does in some parliamentary systems.

More importantly, semi-presidentialism generates two particular problems of its own. The presence of both presidential and legislative elections creates the potential for the president to be opposed to the legislative majority. In presidential systems, this can lead to conflict and/or 'gridlock' between the president and Congress. In semi-presidential systems, though, it can lead to 'cohabitation' within the executive branch between the president, on the one hand, and the prime minister and the government, on the other. This is because the government is responsible to the legislature. When the legislative majority is opposed to the president, the president still has to appoint a prime minister who has the support of the legislature. If a president tries to impose a prime minister on an opposing legislature, then this can cause problems of prime ministerial instability as the legislature can simply vote down the president's choice. When the president appoints an opposing prime minister who has the support of the legislature, the executive is 'divided against itself,' to use Roy Pierce's phrase.⁴ The president is alone in the executive branch against the prime minister and cabinet, which can be destabilizing. For example, who controls the military when the president is the commander-in-chief, yet the prime minister or the Minister of Defense is the head of the armed forces? In young democracies, cohabitation can be a very difficult problem to manage.

There is, though, a further problem with semi-presidentialism and it is the polar opposite of 'cohabitation.' When the president has the support of a loyal majority in the legislature, there can be the problem of what Arend Lijphart has called 'super-presidentialism.'⁵ In these circumstances, the president can

appoint a loyal prime minister who enacts the president's policies, which the legislature simply rubber stamps. Super-presidentialism is problematic because the president's power has a doubly democratic foundation, flowing from both presidential and legislative elections, meaning that it is difficult to contest. Yet, at the same time it concentrates power in a single individual. This can be a fragile thread on which to hang a young democracy.

From this brief review it is reasonable to conclude that parliamentary systems have a certain scholarly edge and that there are problems associated with both presidential and semi-presidential systems. Crucially, though, there are arguments for and against all systems. None is either immune to every criticism or devoid of all merit. Moreover, it is very easy to point to particular cases that confound any general argument. So, for example, there are parliamentary systems where democracy has collapsed, including Turkey in the past. There are also presidential systems where democracy has survived, not least in the U.S., as well as plenty of semi-presidential systems that have prospered too, notably in France since 1962 and much of Central and Eastern Europe after 1990. This suggests that it is necessary to go beyond simple and well-worn arguments about the pros and cons of individual government systems. More than that, it is actually misleading to suggest that the introduction of any particular system will necessarily lead to a certain outcome. For example, many factors combine to shape the success or failure of democratization. Some of these factors are specific to individual countries. After all, only Turkey is Turkey and only the U.S. is the U.S., though such country-specific arguments are often a smokescreen cloaking personal, ideological, or partisan interests. Other factors, though, are more general. In the rest of this article, the focus turns to two factors that often combine with different types of government systems to help shape the success of a democratization project, namely party politics and the broader set of constitutional rules.

The Interaction of Government Systems, Party Politics and Constitutional Rules

Party politics helps to condition the operation of government systems. This point is implicit in some of the arguments presented in the previous section. For example, it was noted that if the party system in the legislature is fragmented, then both parliamentary and semi-presidential systems can suffer from the problem of extreme government instability. It follows, though, that if a parliamentary or a semi-presidential system were to be introduced in a country where the party system in the legislature is not fragmented, then this problem would be less likely to arise. By the same token, the importance of party politics was implicit in the argument that presidential systems may suffer from the problem of executive/legislative conflict or 'gridlock,' and that semi-pres-

idential systems may be prone to ‘cohabitation.’ These problems are more likely to occur in a situation where a country has a bipolar party system, i.e. one where the system is dominated by two relatively equal but opposing parties or blocks of parties. This is because both the presidential and legislative elections

can be consequential in presidential and semi-presidential systems. When they are and when the party system is highly polarized, there is the potential for one party block to win one election and the other block to win the other. Given that coalition building is difficult across two such party blocks, when each block wins only one of the two electoral contests there is the potential for conflict to occur between them. Again, though, it follows that if a presidential or a semi-presidential system were to be introduced in a country where two-block party politics is absent, then some of the problems that are inherent in such systems would be less likely to arise. The nature of party politics also conditions the power of the main political leaders in a dominant party system. When a single, disciplined party is dominant in a parliamentary system, it can effectively abolish any checks and balances between the executive branch and the legislature. When such a party dominates a semi-presidential system it can lead to the problem of super-presidentialism. As before, though, it follows that if a parliamentary or a semi-presidential system were to be introduced in a country where a single disciplined party does not dominate the system, then such problems would be less likely to occur.

Party politics helps to condition the operation of government systems, but institutional rules also combine with party politics to bring about consequential effects. Take the example of a semi-presidential system where there is a moderate multi-party system in which a coalition is required to form a government. In this situation, as Matthew Shugart and John Carey argued originally,⁶ and as I have since confirmed empirically,⁷ the operation of semi-presidentialism is at least partly shaped by whether or not the president has the constitutional power to dismiss the prime minister and government. When only the legislature has the power to dismiss the prime minister, the president has a greater incentive to bargain with the legislature at the time of the formation of the government. This is because the president knows that once the government is formed, only the legislature then has the power to dismiss it. Thus, the president needs to shape the composition of the government at the very start of the process in order to maintain influence over it thereafter. The legislature is also likely to be willing to negotiate with the president over government formation, knowing that the only alternative is to try to impose a government on the president and risk being blamed for any subsequent instability caused by failing to negotiate.

The operation of semi-presidentialism is at least partly shaped by whether or not the president has the constitutional power to dismiss the prime minister and government

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In this context, both the president and the legislature are likely to feel that they have a stake in the government that is formed and will work with it. By contrast, when both the legislature and the president have the power to dismiss the prime minister and government, there is less incentive for either side to reach a lasting deal with the other at the start. Each side knows that the other can dismiss the government at any time. Each is likely to calculate that the other will try to gain political advantage by reneging on any deal that is struck. For that reason, little is likely to be invested in any government deal since neither side feels that it has a long-term stake in it.

This example suggests that in the context of a given party system, outcomes can differ depending on the presence or absence of an individual constitutional rule. However, constitutions comprise bundles of rules. The impact of governmental systems will be at least partly a function of how individual constitutional rules combine. This can be seen in relation to presidential powers. In presidential and semi-presidential systems, presidential powers can be highly consequential. They include whether or not the president has the power to chair the cabinet and set its agenda; to veto legislation and/or to refer a bill to the country's highest court for a ruling on its constitutionality; to dissolve the legislature before its scheduled term; to call a referendum on a given issue; to make appointments to higher levels of the public service; and so on. In a recent study, David Doyle and I showed that over time academic attention has begun to turn much more to the impact of presidential power than was previously the case.⁸ Scholars have estimated the effect of variation in presidential power on topics as varied as economic policy reforms, voter turnout, the party system, and democratization. In many cases, they have found presidential power to be a significant predictor of such outcomes. This work suggests that it is important to go beyond consideration of the effects of headline government systems and to focus additionally on the impact of the president's constitutional powers more generally.

This point can be illustrated with the Irish case. Ireland has a semi-presidential constitution, but a very weak president. This is mainly because the president has very few constitutional powers. In very specific circumstances the president may refuse the prime minister's request to dissolve the legislature. The president may also refer a bill to the Supreme Court, again under certain conditions. But that is about it. Due to these extreme limits, the concept of 'cohabitation' has absolutely no significance in the Irish case. There have been periods when the president's party has not been represented in government and when technically there has, therefore, been a period of 'cohabitation,' but



Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım presents Turkey's 65th government program to the Turkish Parliament, on May 24, 2016.

AFP PHOTO / ADEM ALTAN

the functioning of the political system has not altered one jot. In other words, Ireland is a semi-presidential country that does not suffer from the problem of 'cohabitation,' because the bundle of presidential powers is so small. This example suggests that the problem of 'cohabitation' in semi-presidential systems can be managed. The trick is to reduce the president's powers. This point can be made more generally across semi-presidential systems. Some of the problems with this type of government system can be alleviated if the bundle of presidential powers is reduced.

What about the situation when the constitution gives the president a large bundle of powers? Is this ever a good idea in a presidential or semi-presidential system? When there is a dominant party system, a constitutionally powerful president can be dangerous for democracy in both systems. Supported by a disciplined majority in the legislature, the president can exercise power with few checks or balances. In this event, the system is highly dependent on the personality of the president. History suggests that powerful presidents are rarely benevolent, at least for very long. When there is a bipolar party system a similar problem arises. A constitutionally powerful president may try to govern over and above the legislature. In presidential systems when the legislature is controlled by the party that opposes the president, the temptation is for the president to rule by decree against the will of the legislature. In semi-presidential systems during periods of 'cohabitation' the temptation is for presidents to appoint presidential governments that do not have the support of the legislature. This can bring the government and legislature into conflict. In these

circumstances, the combination of a certain party system and a large bundle of presidential powers can potentially be destructive to democracy. Only when there is an extremely fragmented legislature can a powerful president potentially be advantageous. This was the context in which the Fifth French Republic was established. This is also the context in which the debate about introducing a directly elected president in Italy has taken place for so long. When the legislature is fragmented, a powerful president can bring some much needed executive stability to the system. Even so, care needs to be taken. The return of executive stability can soon be transformed into the overuse of presidential power. For a young democracy, this may simply swap one problematic situation for another. Indeed, Scott Mainwaring once characterized the combination of a strong president and a multi-party system as a 'difficult combination.'⁹ These points suggest that there may be circumstances in which a strong president can be beneficial for a country, but party politics often tends to condition powerful presidents in ways that can be dangerous for democratization. In short, the case for strong presidential powers needs to be made very carefully and with due consideration for how the potential perils of presidential power will be avoided.

The French system neatly illustrates why it is important to think about how the government system, party politics, presidential powers, and, indeed, other institutional features combine to shape the political process. France has a semi-presidential system. In itself, though, this tells us very little. As has been shown, semi-presidential systems can operate in very different ways. In the French case, the president has only a relatively modest bundle of constitutional powers, but, in contrast to the Irish case, they are still sufficient to make the president a significant figure in the political process. More importantly, though, the power of the French president flows from the combination of a presidential election that is the centerpiece of the political process, and a bipolar system of party politics. The presidential election has usually generated a coattails presidential majority in the legislature, even if on occasion mid-term elections have led to a legislative majority that has opposed the president and 'cohabitation' has ensued. Thus, a president with only relatively limited constitutional powers has usually been able to rely on a loyal presidential majority to exercise power and has been able to govern indirectly through the appointment of a supportive prime minister. Other institutional rules have served to cement the president's authority in France. Most notably, the presidential and legislative terms of office are now the same length and the two sets of elections have been aligned, with the presidential election being held first and the legislative election coming just a few weeks after. This greatly increases the likelihood of a coattails presidential majority in the legislature and reduces the chances of 'cohabitation.' In short, it is not France's semi-presidential system alone that has caused the French president to be so powerful. It is the combination of this system and a much broader set of party political and institutional factors.

This brief sketch shows how important it is to think about institutional engineering in the round rather than focusing solely on headline government systems. When politicians say they support a French system, the implication is merely that they want to introduce a semi-presidential system, i.e. a directly elected president and a government that is responsible to the legislature. Yet the implication should be much more. The French system is a certain type of party system, a bundle of presidential powers in the constitution, plus a wider set of institutional rules as well. The president's constitutional powers go well beyond any of the features that are used to define government systems generally. The wider set of institutional features includes the two-ballot electoral system, the particular timing of elections, and, indeed, the broader set of institutional checks and balances within the system, including the presence of an independent Constitutional Council. In other words, to introduce the French system would be to go far beyond the introduction of semi-presidentialism alone. The same point would apply to the introduction of a U.S.-style presidential system, or a German-style parliamentary system. Overall, this suggests that a debate focusing solely on the advantages and disadvantages of headline government systems will miss a great deal of what is at stake in the wider process of institutional engineering.

Any given reform has the potential to affect outcomes conditional upon party politics. Rarely, though, do countries introduce a single reform alone. Typically, institutional engineering goes well beyond the headline shift from, say, a semi-presidential to a presidential system. Rather, it often involves the passage of a whole new constitution, or at least a wide-ranging set of reforms to the existing constitution

Institutional Engineering in the Round

When a country is considering institutional reform it is important to think about it in the round. What is the party political context into which institutional reform is being introduced? Is there a fragmented party system, a bipolar system, or a dominant party system? The particular type of party system can condition the effect of any proposed reform. It is also important to consider how both specific constitutional and institutional rules matter and how they bundle together. Any given reform has the potential to affect outcomes conditional upon party politics. Rarely, though, do countries introduce a single reform alone. Typically, institutional engineering goes well beyond the headline

shift from, say, a semi-presidential to a presidential system. Rather, it often involves the passage of a whole new constitution, or at least a wide-ranging set of reforms to the existing constitution. What is the effect of the whole set of institutional changes? How are they likely to combine with the particular party system in the country concerned? It is convenient to debate the advantages and disadvantages of competing government systems. Yet such a debate can often be too restrictive. Rather than focusing solely on the headline systems under discussion, politicians, scholars, and the public alike should be aware of the broader context in which such reforms are being proposed, and the effects of the totality of the reforms under consideration. ■

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