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THE SURPRISING SUCCESS OF MULTIPARTY PRESIDENTIALISM

Carlos Pereira and Marcus André Melo

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Maintaining a sustainable democracy in a multiparty presidential regime—that is, a stable democratic presidential regime in a context where partisan fragmentation in the legislature abounds—was once thought to be nearly impossible. Until recently, pundits and scholars seemed as one in declaring that multiparty presidential democracies suffer from survival prospects that are poor at best.

In the early 1990s, the critique of presidentialism advanced by Juan J. Linz and others exerted a broad influence, and scholars viewed the coexistence of presidentialism and multipartism as "the difficult combination." Experts expected multipartism to sharpen the "perils of presidentialism" by increasing the probability of deadlock in executive-legislative relations, by promoting ideological polarization, and by making multiparty coalitions hard to achieve.[1] Presidential democracies' best chance for survival, these experts argued, lay in the adoption of a U.S.-style two-party format.

Yet multiparty presidentialism seems to be here to stay. Argelina Figueiredo and her coauthors have found that during the more than a quarter-century from 1979 through 2006, Latin America was host to only two countries (Costa Rica and Mexico) that had single-party governments the whole time. Six countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama) had coalition governments throughout that

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same period, while four others (Argentina, Paraguay, Venezuela, and Uruguay) had coalition governments at least some of the time.[2] Nor is the institutional combination of presidentialism and multipartism something unique to Latin America. Indonesia has been stable as a multiparty presidential regime since the fall of Suharto's authoritarian New Order and the transition to democracy in 1999. Since 2004, the governing coalition there has consisted of five parties with seats in congress plus eighteen supporting but unseated parties.[3]

The unexpected stability of multiparty presidential regimes demands further research. How have presidents been solving—or at least managing—the "difficult combination" with multipartism? We still know little about the tools and institutional conditions that presidents employ in this process. We have an observed fact, but no theory to explain it. The ability of multiparty presidentialism to subsist with sustainable democracy is beyond dispute, yet we lack a comprehensive account of why and how this institutional arrangement has proven durable.

Multiparty presidential regimes must be seen as special cases that function neither like parliamentary political systems nor like two-party presidential models. In other words, the expert literature does not fully grasp the operational nuances of coalition-based presidential regimes. Scholars have been misgauging the outcomes of these regimes because they have been using theoretical and analytical tools designed to analyze either European multiparty parliamentary regimes or the classic two-party presidential system of the United States.

Until the 1980s, experts believed that "the best of all worlds" was two-party parliamentarism. Neither multiparty parliamentarism nor any form of presidentialism, they claimed, could equal the combination of parliamentary government and two parties. The prevailing sentiment against coalition government, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, was encapsulated in Benjamin Disraeli's dictum that "England doesn't love coalitions."[4] More than half a century's worth of comparativists, it seemed, did not love them either.

As well as stability, two-party parliamentary systems supposedly offered an array of desirable qualities associated with the responsible-party model, including clear lines of responsibility, decisiveness, and responsiveness to citizen demands.[5] By contrast, comparativists and empirically oriented democratic theorists viewed multiparty governments as likely to lack stability and transparency, and prone to games of blame-shifting among coalition partners. They also argued that multipartism led to inefficient governments, paralysis, and an inability to reach effective, authoritative decisions.

According to this argument, strong presidents should only make things worse. Will not powerful executives tend unilaterally to impose their preferences on the legislature, triggering institutional crises along the way? And will this tendency not become all the more worrisome when such executives enjoy only weak support from parties and face fragmented legislatures? Thus constitutional-design experts viewed strong presidencies as terrible things to introduce into multiparty systems.[6]

In the 1980s, comparativists went part of the way toward correcting this bias. Experts learned to appreciate some aspects of multiparty systems, including the imperatives for compromise, tolerance, and inclusiveness that they often include. Research on presidentialism followed the lead of comparative politics, shifting from open criticism of multipartism to a more moderate view of what Linz called the "perils of presidentialism." Most scholars viewed presidentialism as likely to prove unstable where party systems were fragmented and executives enjoyed extensive constitutional powers. While this more nuanced view of presidentialism appeared in the seminal work of Matthew Shugart and John M. Carey, recent scholarship has argued that the process of government formation under both presidentialism and parliamentarism shares the same underlying institutional logic.[7]

Recent developments in Latin America and Asia have lent support not only to the general argument that coalition government is both viable and functional, but also to the more controversial claim that multiparty systems may *require* strong presidents in order to generate effective governance. Brazil and Chile have emerged as *the* successful models for governance in Latin America. Each is a multiparty presidential democracy whose chief executive numbers among the region's strongest. Bolivia, Mexico, and Venezuela, by contrast, where presidents enjoy scantier formal powers, have not performed so well. What explains this variation?

In Bolivia and Venezuela, presidents have tried to concentrate power and have created instability in the process. In Mexico, successive governments have suffered from deadlock as a result of divided government. Ironically, the pundits and academics of the 1980s and 1990s predicted that today's top performers would be the least likely to establish good governance. By contrast, countries that used to have what was once considered an ideal combination of weak presidentialism and strong partisan support have not performed well.

Interestingly, countries extolled for their social, political, and economic outcomes also proved to be pioneers in the introduction of proportional representation (PR) in the region: Costa Rica (1913), Uruguay (1918), Chile (1925), and Brazil (1933). These countries also boast the longest experience with multipartism in Latin America. The region's later adopters of PR (Argentina and Mexico, both 1963) have seen the emergence of hegemonic parties and zero-sum politics, pathologies associated with sharply divided polities.

Three things explain multiparty presidentialism's unexpected success: the powers of presidents; the availability of trade-worthy coalition goods (cabinet posts, "pork," patronage, and the like) that executives can use to gain legislators' support; and the strength of institutional checks on the executive's discretion. Good governance hinges on the delegation of extensive powers to *both* presidents *and* autonomous institutions that can and will check the executive branch. Where presidents concentrate powers without congress's consent, what is happening is not delegation but usurpation. Remembering that one is not the other can help us to avoid overstretching the concept of "strong presidents." This expression is too often used to cover both cases when legislatures democratically delegate constitutional powers to the executive and cases when powers are unilaterally abused. Some observers focus so intensely on how power helps presidents to overcome bargaining problems that they risk overlooking presidential abuses. The concentration of power may emerge as a result of presidents' influence over constitutional decisions in key constitutional moments or "paraconstitutional initiatives."[8]

The Multiparty Game Under Presidentialism

Only recently have scholars begun to examine the relevance of coalitions in multiparty presidential regimes. This newer research has addressed topics such as coalition voting discipline, the relationship between coalition type and legislative success, the flexibility that presidents derive from their powers of appointment,[9] the impact of cabinet formation on presidential survival in times of crisis, and the relationship between presidential policy-making strategies and cabinet formation.[10] Yet none of this research suggests how or why coalition-based multiparty presidential regimes may lead to sustainable democracy, much less which political and institutional conditions are necessary to achieve this outcome.

Coalition-based multiparty presidential regimes succeed if the president 1) is constitutionally strong, 2) has "goods" to trade in order to attract and keep coalition partners, and 3) faces institutionalized and effective checks on presidential actions. Some multiparty presidencies have avoided serious policy-making stalemates by developing complex and flexible systems of exchange among the various branches of government. The goods exchanged in return for legislative cooperation might include cabinet posts, pork projects, and policy concessions. These goods do not figure independently of one another in presidential strategies, nor do they produce independent effects on legislative support.[11] Thus, to generate sustainable legislative support and stable democracy in a fragmented environment, multiple goods are needed.

Although the tools used to evaluate two-party presidentialism are unsuited to taking the measure of multiparty presidentialism's peculiarities, so too are the tools used to analyze parliamentary regimes. Parliamentary systems typically feature certain bargaining threats and deadlock-resolvers, including the formal ongoing need for majority confidence from the legislature, the prospect of reforming government or calling early elections, and greater clarity of electoral accountability. Thus no one should assume that multiparty presidentialism works like parliamentarism, for this is not the case.

In multiparty presidential systems, even constitutionally strong executives may operate as perpetual *formateurs*, cobbling together a distinct voting coalition to support each important initiative. In such institutional environments, executives may assemble heterogeneous governing majorities using ideologically diverse political parties. Executives also must often use particularistic benefits (such as pork-barrel projects) along with political transfers (cabinet posts, other presidential appointments,[12] and policy concessions) in complex efforts aimed at garnering needed votes in congress.

In the vast majority of multiparty presidential regimes, it is the provision of such coalition goods—and not considerations of ideology, partisan loyalty, or power to set the agenda—that does the most to sway congress. In this environment, the electoral rules usually give legislators strong incentives to respond to particularistic monetary and political transfers. Therefore, the degree of political support in multiparty presidential regimes and, in turn, the stability of democracy often hinge on the extent to which a president can give legislators the goods they want on an ongoing basis.

For example, the strategic allocation of coalition goods helped Brazil's then-President Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva of the Workers' Party (PT) to pass pension reform within a year of first taking office on 1 January 2003. This reform represented an extreme departure from his previous rhetoric because it adversely affected the interests of public-sector workers by putting a ceiling on their benefits. Therefore it created serious fissures within both the PT and Lula's larger governing coalition. As Eric D. Raile and his coauthors have shown, Lula gathered a supermajority of the lower house behind his favored reform mainly by rewarding his own party with cabinet jobs while using pork to induce ideologically distant coalition partners and even outsiders to join.[13] Even strong partisan opponents such as the centrist Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) and the conservative Liberal Front Party (PFL) largely went along with the initiative. Helping Lula even more than the ideological acceptability of the legislation was the steering of nearly 41 percent of all 2003 pork spending to individuals associated with those two parties. Viewing things at the state level, we see that almost nine-tenths of the pork went to states governed by parties outside Lula's coalition (about a third of the total went to states run by the PSDB or the PFL).

The contrasting example of Ecuador shows how important the absence of coalition incentives can be. In the years leading up to and including the abortive presidency of Abadalá Bucaram, who was impeached and dismissed by Congress for "mental incapacity" in February 1997 after just six months in office, the Ecuadorean presidency lost so much control over such incentives that presidents found it nearly impossible to form coalitions. In Brazil, the trend ran the other way as presidents and party leaders gradually improved their ability to offer—and honor—incentives that served to cement durable governing coalitions.[14]

The Value of Checks on Executives

The most common type of presidential regime in Latin America is one in which the president lacks the support of a single majority party in congress. The fragmented party systems typical in Latin America make exchange mechanisms crucial. If democracy is to work—indeed, if it is to last—the government in general and the president in particular must build and keep winning coalitions. In order to do so, the president needs to be strong and attractive to different coalition partners. By "strong," we mean equipped with extensive constitutional powers that allow the president to change the status quo while at the same time avoiding unwelcome initiatives from the opposition.

Executive strength in this sense does *not* mean that congress issues the president blank checks or that oversight institutions are helpless to constrain executive-branch actions. On the contrary, in order for a multiparty regime with a strong presidency to sustain robust democracy, there must be an extensive system of checks and balances.[15] It is political competition and the fragmentation of power—both characteristics of multipartism—that will give rise to effective mechanisms for holding the executive accountable. In other words, party fragmentation itself works to constrain a powerful executive, functioning as a kind of parliamentary oversight.

Although presidential abuses of power and conflicts among governmental branches in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela have drawn much recent attention,[16] this should not obscure the progress that Brazil and Chile have made toward good governance. In the early 1990s, scholars believed these two countries were doomed to failure because of alleged constitutional-design flaws, including "exaggerated presidentialism," large effective numbers of parties and a corresponding need for multiparty coalition governments, and open-list PR, among other factors. Paradoxically, presidents in these countries have not only ensured stability, but have also gained constitutional power through incremental reform. Contrast with this the Latin American countries (Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela) that featured the weakest executives during the 1980s: They have had a much harder time achieving stability and governability. In these countries, presidents with few de jure powers have nonetheless imposed their preferences de facto, often by resort to what Carey and Shugart call "paraconstitutional initiatives."

This comparison suggests that the way to promote effective governance and democratic stability is to combine a strong presidency with a robust set of checks and balances. We differ from the expert literature's dominant strand in refusing to restrict our discussion of presidential strength to the question of whether presidents can pass their agendas. The key to promoting sustainable democracy in countries such as Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay has been the successful establishment of sturdy checks and balances. Lively and diverse media are needed, as are legislative oversight, an independent judiciary, and "horizontal-accountability" bodies. These can include the *contralorias* (comptroller-generals' offices) that exist in a number of Latin American countries, as well as the Ministério Público (public prosecutor's office) and *tribunais de contas* (audit courts) found in Brazil. In other words, governability requires that each of the three branches of government be strong. By focusing exclusively on dealings between presidents and congresses, the extant literature fails to account for the importance of the accountability institutions, both in themselves and as factors in shaping executive-legislative relations.

When it comes to accountability, multipartism can cut two ways. It may sap the desire of parties in the governing coalition to check the president, yet it also tends to work against the accumulation of presidential power by forcing chief executives to negotiate extensively with party leaders. The upshot can be a system in which clientelism is pervasive but greases rather than gums up the wheels of governance. Robust political contestation—often carried on by a viable opposition party or coalition such as one sees in Brazil and Chile—can keep such a system from degenerating into dysfunctional clientelism and corruption. It is no accident that the multiparty presidential democracies which are best endowed with pluralistic media outlets and independent oversight institutions are also those which regularly achieve the most impressive development outcomes.

Although Latin America's legislatures are generally weak by world standards, there are great variations in strength among them. Going by Sebastián Saiegh's regional index of legislative strength, the congresses of Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay rank near the top.[17] All else being equal, a more capable congress will not only handle basic lawmaking functions more smoothly, but will be better able to oversee the executive branch as well.

As for judicial independence, existing measures suggest that here, too, Brazil and Chile are among the top performers. According to one study, Chile earns the top score on five out of seven existing indicators, whereas Brazil ranks first or second on six of them.[18] In the widely cited index of judicial independence devised by Lars P. Feld and Stefan Voigt for the Inter-American Development Bank, Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, and Costa Rica are the top performers.[19] At the other end of the spectrum, Venezuela, Bolivia, Argentina, Honduras, and Ecuador have the least-independent courts.

In the long-term investigation of judicial independence in Latin America conducted by Anibal Pérez-Liñán and Andrea Castagnola, Brazil, Uruguay, and Chile also come out on top as regards the key proxy measure of judicial job stability.[20] In measures of turnover on the highest national court (the assumption being that the phenomenon of top jurists frequently leaving the bench suggests a likely judicial-independence deficit), Brazil does best: The highest Brazilian court evinced a level of stability (that is, a fixity of judicial tenure) only slightly below that achieved by the United States over the entire century (1904–2006) that the study covers. Conversely, El Salvador, Argentina, and Colombia had the least-stable high courts, particularly during the years from 1945 through 1977.

Among national auditing institutions, the *contralorias* of Chile, Colombia, and Costa Rica, along with Brazil's federal accountability office (known as the TCU), earn their respective countries high regional marks when it comes to tracking how public money is spent.[21] In the Andean subregion, the Colombian comptroller-general's office has become a model, which makes sense given Colombia's generally strong recent performance in the area of democratic governance. Indeed, despite the instability caused by a guerrilla conflict, the country has experienced none of the problems of neighboring Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, or Venezuela. By contrast, Argentina's Auditoria General and Peru's Contraloria General are among Latin America's weakest auditing agencies, whether one examines their autonomy, credibility, timeliness, or enforcement effectiveness.

When it comes to media outlets, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay boast the region's most diverse and feistily independent. Chile and Uruguay are the only countries that Freedom House credits with allowing full press freedom for the entire period from 2002 through 2009. Likewise, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay have consistently numbered among the top four Latin American countries in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranking. Uruguay and Chile were classified as having the highest press-freedom score, respectively ranking 52nd and 67th among the world's roughly 190 countries, according to the Freedom House report covering the year 2009.

Brazil as Paradigm

In order to add depth and dimension to our discussion of how a strong yet controlled presidency and a multiplicity of parties can bolster democracy, it may be helpful to turn to the case we know best: Brazil. Latin America's largest country, one may safely say, now stands as *the* paradigmatic case of a successful multiparty presidential democracy.

Brazilians have seen almost two decades of stable governments and have watched their country pass the test of peacefully passing the presidency from one party to another after a free and fair election. Brazil possesses a complex mix of electoral institutions that allow for the representation of diverse interests within its multiparty system, even if that system has been blamed for breeding enough fragmentation and decentralization to make the policy-making process cumbersome.[22]

There is truth to that critique, yet it is not the whole story. Brazil also possesses some "majoritarian" institutions that centralize agenda-setting powers and encourage national-level governability. These two sets of institutions—those that spread power and those that draw it in—stand as poles of a continuum. Brazil is not a pure specimen of either extreme, but rather is a hybrid that mixes what Arend Lijphart would call consensual and majoritarian elements in its constitutional scheme.[23]

Since the promulgation of the new constitution in 1988, Brazilian democracy has maintained several consensual features, including separation of powers under presidentialism, open-list PR voting, a fragmented party system, federalism, and an independent judiciary. Yet at the same time, Congress has delegated to the executive massive authorities including the power to rule by decree, the right to enact "provisional measures" that have the immediate force of law until Congress votes on them within sixty days,[24] both the full and the line-item veto, exclusive rights to legislate on budgetary and administrative issues, and the power to unilaterally appropriate the budget (the budget law is not mandatory but merely authorizes spending which the president can refuse to carry out). This paradoxical combination of consensualism and centralization has rendered democracy self-enforcing and consolidated. The combination, in other words, has created circumstances under which all relevant political forces have found it best to keep submitting their interests and values to the uncertain interplay of democratic institutions.

The Congress elected in 1986, acting as a constituent assembly, wrote and ratified the 1988 Constitution. It gives the executive branch vast powers in order to forestall a return to the chronic institutional instability and presidential-congressional deadlock that had led to the 1964 military coup and the more than two decades of dictatorship that followed it. An institutionally weak president, the framers feared, could not survive without a capacity to govern, to push through and enforce an agenda. Legislators decided to retain open-list PR (which encourages multipartism) because shifting away from it would have bred too much uncertainty about sitting legislators' electoral prospects.

In taking stock of the 1988 basic law, it is also important to note—as many observers fail to, unfortunately—that the document also hands extensive authority to the judicial branch as well as autonomous institutions like the Ministério Público and the TCU. Indeed, the autonomy and powers that these institutions enjoy are unprecedented. Viewing the framers' handiwork as a whole, then, we see a powerful presidency but also a potent web of watchdogs standing on guard to prevent wrongdoing. The competitive nature of the constitution-making process had much to do with the establishment of these strong autonomous institutions.

Brazil's 1988 Constitution preserves multipartism yet at the same time opts for a potent executive with the tools needed to make parties gel into coalitions, while independent oversight institutions keep an eye on the whole scene and apply checks where needed.

The most important consequence of the new institutional design has been the removal of a lurking threat to Brazilian democracy. Except for the first directly elected president, Fernando Collor de Mello, who resigned in late 1992 just ahead of impeachment and after less than three years in office, all presidents since the end of military rule have been able to build reasonably stable majority coalitions within Congress, and have been able to maintain fairly strong party discipline within the presidential governing coalition. This has resulted in effective levels of governability. Although no elected president has come from a party that held a congressional majority at the time of that president's election, each president has nonetheless been able to secure congressional support by wielding the presidency's extensive legislative and nonlegislative powers. In fact, under its current institutions, Brazil has yet to face a true divided-government situation. This is not coincidental. Rather, the institutional powers and resources that the executive holds and selectively distributes serve to prevent divided government.

The 1988 Constitution is the bedrock of all this. It defines the political institutions in Brazil and the powers of the political actors there. It provides the promising institutional ground upon which political cooperation can take place. And let it be remembered that the institutional groundwork which the 1988 Constitution lays down is solely the work of a democratically elected lawmaking body. In Brazil, there has been nothing like the illegitimate usurpation of powers that has become sadly common in some Latin American countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela.

The 1988 Constitution may be understood in part as the fruit of lessons learned from previous unsettled institutional experiences. These include the hyperactively representative and excessively fragmented democratic period of 1946 to 1964 as well as the centralized military regime that stretched from 1964 to 1985. The 1988 Constitution preserves multipartism (which, ironically, the military rulers had originally introduced as a ploy to split the opposition) yet at the same time opts for a potent executive with the tools needed to make parties gel into coalitions, while independent oversight institutions keep an eye on the whole scene and apply checks where needed.

The web of accountability institutions clearly plays a role in monitoring and constraining Brazil's powerful executive branch.[25] It is not uncommon to see the Supreme Court ruling against presidential preferences. Not only Lula, but also his predecessor Fernando Henrique Cardoso suffered important setbacks in court when jurists ruled certain reform initiatives unconstitutional.[26]

A very good example of such independence took place during Lula's first term at the height of the 2004–2005 scandal over the *mensalão* (a monthly bribe paid to members of Congress in return for their support of the administration). Constraining the popular Lula and his ten-party coalition was a far from easy task. The federal prosecutor, a Lula appointee, launched an independent investigation and in March 2006 asked the Supreme Court to open criminal proceedings against forty people linked to the *mensalão* affair, including the presidential chief of staff and other powerful figures. In August 2007, the Court unanimously approved all forty indictments—based on a report by a judicial official who was also a Lula appointee—and each of the accused is due to go on trial in 2012.[27]

By saying that Brazil's accountability institutions are independent of the executive, we do not mean that they are immune from political influence or that they are all equally efficient. For instance, Brazil's court system is so slow—especially when it comes to addressing political corruption—that a sense of impunity and loss of confidence in accountability institutions generally has come to pervade society at large. Contrary to the most pessimistic analyses, however, there is evidence that checks on corruption can be effective where there is political competition and where officials insulated from political influence run accountability institutions.[28]

Another key independent player in the web of accountability institutions is the media. Brazil has a complex, vibrant, and highly competitive media landscape. It includes a diversified newspaper market with at least four nationally distributed papers, three weekly newsmagazines that have played a decisive role in uncovering political scandals, and several radio networks that have strong journalism departments. The single most important source of coverage and information is the competitive television business. Media organizations possess significant autonomy from the state, and they play active roles in investigative journalism, denouncing corruption, and publicizing political wrongdoings.

In June 2011, just six months into the term of Lula's favored successor President Dilma Rousseff, her chief of staff (influential former finance minister Antonio Palocci) was forced to resign under fire. His undoing flowed from charges of illicit self-enrichment that appeared in Brazil's premier newspaper, *Folha de São Paulo*. Leading newsmagazine *Revista Veja* recently highlighted a corruption case involving the payment of bribes (in effect, they were payoffs to one of the presidential-coalition parties) in return for Transport Ministry contracts. Since *Veja*'s revelations of audit-court investigations into the case, President Rousseff has fired seventeen senior officials, including Transport Minister Alfredo Nascimento. Episodes such as this bespeak the existence of an accountability network strong enough to bring down even powerful executive-branch officials implicated in misdealings.

What Makes the Difference?

What are some testable hypotheses about the determinants of good governance and democratic stability that we can put forth based on the analysis so far? The normal idiosyncrasies of various countries aside, it appears that certain institutional conditions do favor governability and public integrity and might lead to good governance across multiparty presidential regimes.

First, an institutionally strong executive mitigates the destabilizing effects of party fragmentation that can result from minority government and, at the same time, lends itself to the formation of majority coalition governments after elections. For various historical reasons, Latin America seems to have learned that a constitutionally weak president cannot govern in a context of partisan fragmentation. The institutional choice of legislators has been to delegate numerous powers—including control over discretionary coalition goods—to the executive. These powers allow presidents to frame and enact policy thanks to stable supporting coalitions in congress. Where the constitutional delegation of extensive powers to presidents takes place in a competitive environment, the net governance gains can be positive if this delegation is accompanied by the strengthening of checks on the executive, as the cases of Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay have shown.

Second, multiparty democracies can promote good governance if presidents have "currency" that they can trade in order to secure legislators' cooperation. The coalition goods that form this currency work as a mechanism of selective incentives, as a means of rewarding or punishing legislators contingent upon their support or defection. These gains from trade tend to be highly effective because they benefit both sides: The presidential agenda gets enacted, while legislators get pork that they can bring home to their districts as an aid to reelection.

Third, evidence suggests that strong legislatures act as stabilizers in the policy-making process. Legislatures capable of mounting strong oversight (to say nothing of opposition) can render policy enactment costly for executives, thereby bolstering the stability of the status quo. There is risk in that, of course, but there is also risk if a legislature fails to serve as a policy-change gatekeeper and simply lets the executive act without check.

In addition to a robust and professional legislature, a presidential system also needs other independent check-and-balance institutions, including courts, public prosecutors, accountability agencies, and vigorous media.

By reconciling presidentialism and multipartism and illustrating how this institutional combination is capable of delivering good governance and sustainable democracy, our approach has set the stage for a more integrated and positive view of executive-legislative relations under multipartism. Because it fosters political inclusion, multipartism is normatively attractive for a region marked by extreme inequality and social heterogeneity. We do not claim that multiparty presidentialism with strong governments is an ideal institutional model. At best, it can be considered as a suboptimal arrangement that is functional. It may be plagued by numerous problems including clientelism, lack of transparency, and corruption (consider those scandals in Brazil again). The extensive use of pork and other tradeable political currencies for political bargaining may undermine legitimacy and could point to a serious downside of this governing method.[29] Across much of Latin America, however, multiparty presidentialism has boosted political stability, and has not degenerated into systemic corruption as long as robust political competition and a set of strong autonomous institutions exist alongside it to keep its potential excesses within bounds.

NOTES

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16. Numerous episodes illustrate these developments. In 2005, Ecuador's President Lucio Gutiérrez unconstitutionally fired members of the Supreme Court. In Hugo Chávez's Venezuela, the government disclosed the identities of voters in a plebiscite. In Bolivia, President Evo Morales has encouraged mobs to block access to legislative buildings during key sessions. For more, see Scott Mainwaring, Ana Maria Bejarano, and Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez, eds., *The Crisis of Democratic Representation in the Andes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Fabrice Lehoucq, "Bolivia's Constitutional Breakdown," *Journal of Democracy* 19 (October 2008): 110–24; and Javier Corrales, "For Chavez Still More Discontent," *Current History,* February 2009.

17. Sebastián Saiegh, "Active Players or Rubber Stamps? An Evaluation of the Policymaking Role of Latin American Legislatures," in Carlos Scartascini, Ernesto Stein, and Mariano Tommasi, eds., *How Democracy Works: Political Institutions, Actors, and Arenas in Latin American Policymaking* (Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Development Bank, 2010).

18. Julio Ríos-Figueroa and Jeffrey Staton, "Unpacking the Rule of Law: A Review of Judicial Independence Measures," Committee on Concepts and Methods Working Papers 21 (2008), IPSA.

19. Lars P. Feld and Stefan Voigt, "Economic Growth and Judicial Independence: Cross Country Evidence Using a New Set of Indicators," *European Journal of Political Economy* 19 (September 2003): 497–527.

20. Anibal Pérez-Liñán and Andrea Castagnola, "Presidential Control of High Courts

in Latin America: A Long-Term View (1904–2006)," *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 1, no. 2 (2009): 87–114.

21. See the index built by Carlos Santiso, *The Political Economy of Government Auditing: Financial Governance and the Rule of Law in Latin America and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2009).

22. Barry Ames, *The Deadlock of Democracy in Brazil* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

23. Octavio Amorim Neto, "O Brasil, Lijphart e o modelo consensual de democracia," in Magna Inácio and Lucio Rennó, eds., *Legislativo brasileiro em perspectiva comparada* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2009), 105–31.

24. If Congress fails to vote on the provisional decree within the first forty-five days, then it automatically goes to the top of the congressional agenda and overrides any other item of business. By forcing legislators to take a position regarding new provisional decrees within that period, the president has had incentive to issue a greater volume of (new) decrees. See Carlos Pereira, Timothy Power, and Lucio Renno, "Agenda Power, Executive Decree Authority, and the Mixed Results of the Reform in the Brazilian Congress," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 33 (February 2008): 5–33.

25. Marcus André Melo,"Strong Presidents, Robust Democracies: Separation of Powers and Rule of Law in Latin America," *Brazilian Political Science Review* 3, no. 2 (2009): 30–59. Timothy Power and Matthew Taylor, *Corruption and Democracy in Brazil: The Struggle for Accountability* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2011).

26. Lee Alston et al., "On The Road to Good Governance: Recovering from Economic and Political Shocks in Brazil," in Ernesto Stein and Mariano Tommassi, eds., *Policymaking in Latin America: How Politics Shapes Policies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 111–53.

27. Carlos Pereira, Timothy Power, and Eric D. Raile, "Presidentialism, Coalitions, and Accountability," in Timothy Power and Matthew Taylor, eds., *Corruption and Democracy in Brazil: The Struggle for Accountability* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2011), 31–55.

28. Marcus Melo, Carlos Pereira, and Carlos Figueiredo, "Political and Institutional Checks on Corruption: Explaining the Performance of Brazilian Audit Institutions," *Comparative Political Studies* 42 (March 2009): 1217–44. For Daron Acemoglu and his coauthors, checks and balances are endogenous, and voters in weakly institutionalized environments may prefer an unchecked president who redistributes over a constrained president susceptible to elite influence. But political competition is neglected in this framework. See Daron Acemoglu, James Robinson, and Ragnar Torvik, "Why Do Voters Dismantle Checks and Balances?" NBER Working Paper # 17293, 2011.

29. This contrasts with the weakness of checks on presidents and of the rule of law generally in such multiparty presidential regimes as Indonesia's. See Dan Slater, "Indonesia's Accountability Trap: Party Cartels and Presidential Power After Democratic Transition," *Indonesia* 78 (October 2004): 61–92. The fate of Indonesia's KPK (Commission to Eradicate Corruption) provides an instructive contrast to Brazil's. Following a series of investigations of high corruption, two of the KPK's deputy chairmen were arrested on dubious charges of extortion in a maneuver to undermine it. See "The Gecko Bites Back," *Economist*, 5 November 2009.