

# Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics - A Comprehensive Examination



## Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics by John M. Carey

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

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In the realm of political science, the relationship between presidents and assemblies holds profound significance for the design of constitutional systems and the dynamics of electoral processes. This meticulously crafted book delves into this intricate interplay, providing a comprehensive analysis of how constitutional arrangements shape the distribution of power between presidents and assemblies, and how electoral rules influence the composition and functioning of these institutions.

### Constitutional Design: The Foundation of Power Relations

The book commences by exploring the diverse constitutional arrangements that govern the relationship between presidents and assemblies. It examines presidential systems, where the president is both head of state and head of government, and parliamentary systems, where the head of government is typically the leader of the majority party in the legislature.

The analysis highlights the distinct powers and responsibilities granted to presidents and assemblies under these different constitutional models.

Through detailed case studies, the book demonstrates how constitutional design can influence the balance of power between these two institutions. It examines how the distribution of veto powers, the ability to dissolve the legislature, and the scope of emergency powers can significantly impact the dynamics of governance.

### **Electoral Dynamics: Shaping Representation and Influence**

The book proceeds to investigate the role of electoral dynamics in shaping the composition and behavior of presidents and assemblies. It analyzes various electoral systems, including majoritarian, proportional, and mixed systems, and explores their implications for the representation of different political parties and interests.

The analysis reveals how electoral rules can influence the level of fragmentation within assemblies and the ability of presidents to form stable coalitions. It also examines how electoral dynamics can shape the accountability mechanisms between presidents and assemblies, affecting the responsiveness of governments to public demands.

### **Comparative Perspectives: Lessons from Around the World**

To provide a comprehensive understanding, the book draws upon comparative case studies from a diverse range of countries. It examines constitutional arrangements and electoral dynamics in established democracies such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, as well as in emerging democracies and hybrid regimes.

By comparing different political systems, the book identifies common patterns and variations in the relationship between presidents and assemblies. It explores how historical, cultural, and institutional factors have influenced the evolution of these relationships and sheds light on the challenges and opportunities faced by democratic governance in different contexts.

## **Implications for Democratic Governance**

Ultimately, the book underscores the profound implications of the relationship between presidents and assemblies for democratic governance. It highlights how the design of constitutional systems and electoral rules can shape the level of responsiveness, accountability, and stability within political systems.

The analysis provides insights into how to strengthen democratic institutions, promote political stability, and enhance the effectiveness of government in meeting the needs of citizens. It offers valuable lessons for policymakers, scholars, and anyone interested in understanding the complexities of modern democratic governance.

## **: A Path to Informed Decision-Making**

This comprehensive guide to presidents and assemblies in constitutional design and electoral dynamics is an invaluable resource for anyone seeking an in-depth understanding of the intricate relationship between these two institutions. Through a rigorous analysis of constitutional arrangements, electoral dynamics, and comparative case studies, the book empowers readers with the knowledge and insights necessary to make informed decisions about the design and functioning of democratic systems.

Whether you are a student of political science, a practicing politician, or simply a concerned citizen, this book will provide you with the tools you need to navigate the complex world of presidential and assembly relations and contribute to the advancement of democratic governance.

Eventually, they contributed to the organization's loss of legitimacy.

A sluggish economy took off in the aftermath of Israel's victory in the June War, in 1967. Israel's occupation of the conquered territories and its administrative control over a greatly enlarged Arab population permitted its political leaders to resume their older orientation of providing subsidies to capital and creating jobs for workers. Economic expansion (interrupted for half a decade) resumed but was soon sapped by the costs of continued war and dramatic alterations in world market forces. Israel's labor movement institutions could never fully satisfy its several constituencies. And without substantial economic growth, the labor movement could no longer function as an effective electoral instrument. Failing to mobilize enough votes in the general election of 1977, the Labor party lost its dominant position in the government and its hegemony over the Histadrut.

*Labour and the Political Economy in Israel* is an interpretive essay, rather than a conventional history, and the book's thesis is complex and controversial. It will draw fire from many specialists who will find some events and developments difficult to fit into an argument that ties economics and politics so tightly together. Readers who are searching for an introductory text on Israeli politics may find the thesis difficult to understand or appreciate. But for those well versed in the conventional interpretations, this book is essential reading. Although amendments, even corrections, may be offered to some aspects of the analysis, Shalev's framework for understanding Israeli political and economic development is likely to retain its vitality.

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**Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics.** By Matthew Soberg Shugart and John M. Carey. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 316p. \$54.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper.

Since the mid-1970s, dozens of countries have become democratic, some for the first time and some after an authoritarian interlude of long or short duration. In each of these countries, many choices about the large and small details of the institutional form democracy would take had to be made. In response to these events, scholars have renewed their interest in the consequences of different institutional choices for representativeness, economic policy performance, and political stability, to name some of the most important. This book, by Matthew Shugart and John Carey, makes an important contribution to the debates over the effects of different political institutions.

It takes issue with an idea that has almost achieved the status of stylized fact: the idea that parliamentary systems are inherently more stable than presidential systems. The two main arguments that support this idea are that parliamentarism prevents the intense conflict that can arise between the executive and the legislature in presidential systems, and that parliamentarism provides a mechanism for removing unsuccessful governments without overturning the regime. Since seemingly irresolvable conflict between the president and congress as well as government failure in the economy have played key roles in many democratic breakdowns, these arguments have strong initial plausibility.

Shugart and Carey do not challenge these arguments head on. Instead, they first show empirical evidence that presidential systems have not broken down more frequently than parliamentary systems. Most of the remainder of the book is taken up with demonstrating the enormous institutional variety that occurs in what we commonly call presidential systems, and how different institutional details interact to affect party fragmentation and the likelihood of executive-legislative conflict, factors that in turn affect the quality of government and likelihood of political stability.

In their analysis of the frequency of breakdowns in presidential as opposed to parliamentary systems, Shugart and Carey show that for the twentieth century as a whole, about the same number have occurred in each type of system. Most breakdowns of presidential systems happened after World War II, and they were especially likely in Latin America (the region with the highest incidence of presidential democracies). Most breakdowns of parliamentary systems occurred either in Europe before World War II or in Britain's former colonies (the two groups with a high incidence of parliamentarism). The predominance of presidential systems among more recent breakdowns seems to account for the general perception that presidential regimes are more fragile. Since Shugart and Carey do not provide denominators (that is, they tell us that 22 parliamentary systems have broken down, but they do not tell us how many parliamentary systems over how many years there have been altogether), we cannot tell which kind of system is really more unstable. But one conclusion emerges straightforwardly from their data: newer democracies are more likely to suffer breakdowns than older ones, so whichever form is currently more popular among emerging democracies will appear to be less resilient. During recent decades presidentialism has attracted most adherents and, consequently, more breakdowns have occurred in presidential systems.

Most of the book is devoted to explorations of the effects of institutional variations within presidential systems. Prominent among these is the discussion of the effects of the timing of legislative elections on party fragmentation and the likelihood of conflict between the president and the legislature. Shugart and Carey show convincingly that non-concurrent elections increase party fragmentation. They also show that concurrent and especially hegemony (that is, within a year of the presidential vote) congressional elections increase the probability that the president will face a supportive legislature, that midterm elections on average lead to a substantial reduction in legislative support for the president, and that a congressional election opposite in timing from that for the president increases the likelihood of divided government and, consequently, of conflict between the branches of government and immobilism.

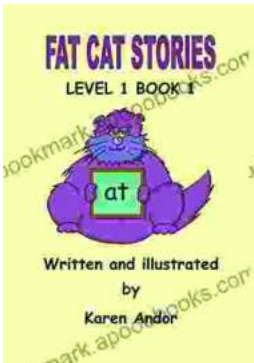
Since intense conflict between a president from one party and a legislature dominated by others was a major cause of the political crisis and economic chaos that precipitated military interventions in several countries during the 1960s and 1970s, these conclusions about the effects of the timing of elections have obvious implications for political stability. Timing helps explain the instability of some presidential systems without implicating presidentialism per se. Here and elsewhere, the authors show that features characteristic of some presidential systems contribute to instability, but that presi-

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