1

Introduction

Metin Heper

With the advent of the 1990s, a renewed interest developed in democracy (inter alia, Huntington, 1991; Hermet, 1991). Concerning the fortunes of democracy in different countries, interest three decades ago had focused on the “prerequisites” of democracy. It was assumed, for instance by Lipset (1963), that industrialization, urbanization, higher rates of literacy, and the like would make individuals more aware of their environment and allow them to acquire the ability and have the time and the means to participate in politics more efficaciously. The preoccupation was with societal factors—the socioeconomic milieu within which the political system functioned. The goal was that of promoting “democratization,” or bolstering the political participation dimension of democracy.

This earlier perspective on democracy was later supplemented by a new approach which placed emphasis on the “requisites” of democracy (Rustow, 1970). It was suggested that, given the one important precondition of national unity, a viable democracy could be established through a process of polarization, crisis and compromise among the political actors. The assumption was that in the last analysis a smoothly functioning democracy would be the handwork of politicians skilled in bargaining techniques. The interest had now shifted from the societal factors to the political ones, and the goal was that of nurturing politicians who could work together harmoniously. More recently Di Palma (1990) has noted that what is needed are tactically skilled democratizing elites who can quickly bring the transition to democracy to a close by using formal pacts which would commit as many social actors as possible to democratic procedures and by finding ways to accommodate the organized interests of business, labor and the state.
The somewhat related "Transitions" project of O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (1986) in turn focussed on relatively short-run developments and the reactions of the political elites to those developments. The proponents of this approach came up with a scenario of gradual and controlled regime change which ensures successful transition to democracy. Again the stress was on the politicians, and the aim was that of developing a politics of harmony.

Earlier, Huntington (1968) had dwelled on a different problem. According to him the process of political institutionalization, that is the emergence of an autonomous political center with its distinctive norms and values, was more important than politicians adept at bargaining and compromise. A smoothly functioning democracy, according to Huntington, needs political institutions that would temper, moderate and redirect the relative power of social forces.

A recent approach developed first by Linz (1990a, 1990b), complemented by Horowitz (1990), and used inter alia by Vanhanen (1992), has stressed the importance of types of government (parliamentarism versus presidentialism) and of electoral system (plurality system versus proportional representation). Linz has argued that presidentialism exacerbates conflict while parliamentarism ameliorates it. The stakes of winning and losing are too high in the former; concerning the change of ruler, the system is too rigid. In his case study of Uruguay, González (1992) reached a conclusion similar to Linz's concerning the problematic effects of presidential systems vis-à-vis democratic stability. González's remedy, too, was a shift to a parliamentary system. In respect to electoral systems, a plurality system leading to majoritarian democracy is considered by Linz as appropriate in the case of relatively more homogeneous societies; proportional representation leading to consensual democracy is viewed as desirable concerning the relatively more heterogeneous societies. Linz's argument has assumed a close relationship between political harmony and types of government on the one hand, and social harmony and electoral systems on the other.

This last approach has attracted a plethora of criticism. Some like Shugart and Carey (1992) have contended that presidential systems may well be superior to parliamentary systems because the "two agents" involved, the presidency and the legislature, can optimize between the two contradictory goals of democratic systems—efficiency and representativeness. Others have taken issue with perceiving any one governmental system as a panacea and, like Lijphart (1991), have argued that each and every type of government has mixed implications for the polity. It was noted that presidentialism, for instance, yields majoritarian effects on the party system (it leads to a two-party system) and on the executive (a strong
executive emerges), but it has a consensus effect on executive-legislative relations (cooperation between the two organs of government becomes a necessity). Horowitz (1990) has criticized the condemnation of a single political institution like the presidency as a source of conflict without examining the total configuration of political institutions in a given country; the latter according to Horowitz may increase or decrease the impact of any particular political institution. This argument has been supported by Riggs (1988): Riggs has shown how in the United States such "para-constitutional" phenomena as loose political party structure, long ballots, tendency toward involvement in private rather than public organizations, common law tradition, and the like have contributed to the successful functioning of presidentialism. Horowitz (1990) has also argued that if Linz's focus had been on instability in post-colonial Asia and Africa instead of Latin America, the institutional villain would surely have been the parliamentary system. Lipset (1990) has come up with an argument similar to that of Horowitz when he has noted that, as there had been numerous successful and unsuccessful parliamentary and presidential forms of government, it was not at all clear whether constitutional variation in the type of executive was closely linked to democratic or authoritarian outcomes. In Lipset's (1990) estimation, except in the case of the French Fifth Republic and perhaps the post-1949 Federal Republic of Germany, political institutions did not have much effect on stable democratic government; critical here were economic and cultural factors. Lipset has noted that the long-enduring democracies were disproportionately found among the wealthier and Protestant nations. Hagopian (1993), in turn, has placed emphasis on political traditions; he has argued that institutional framework should to some extent fit "national patterns," otherwise problems may be exacerbated. Hagopian (1993: 500) has noted that in Brazil, for instance, if one adopted a parliamentary system of government to avert clientelism as has been suggested "...negotiations among parties to form parliamentary majorities would only intensify the rampant state clientelism that has destroyed... [Brazil's] fiscal health."

The latter two views in turn have been challenged by Eisenstadt (1992). Eisenstadt has argued that the picture is more complex and cannot be explained solely by structural factors (levels of economic development and education, ethnic conflicts, the growth of mass media and the like) and by the different political histories which have developed in various countries. Eisenstadt has given the examples of countries such as Germany, Italy and Japan which fell under dictatorial regimes but later successfully consolidated their democratic regimes. Eisenstadt has pointed out that despite the conflict and turmoil associated with the development of the so-called late, post-industrial or welfare societies, support for antidemocratic
tendencies on both the left and the right have subsided in America and western Europe.

It may be surmised that, depending upon circumstances, both non-institutional and institutional factors may be critical for democratic stability. As Fortin (1989) has shown, in Argentina and Chile although the sole existence of legal norms could not by themselves create and maintain democracy because social conditions did not allow it, nevertheless the legal framework had a patterning effect on the actors involved in the political struggle, particularly the military. As concerns the relationship between institutional patterns and the consolidation of democracy, the historical and contemporary expectations regarding those institutions and whether they have fulfilled the functions attributed to them by key actors also appear to be significant. Among other things, democratic stability may depend on the performance of the political institutions. Suarez (1987) argues that regime breakdowns may occur when a country's leading institutions (e.g. political parties [Pasquino, 1990], parliaments [Liebert, 1990], and the like) are incapable of coping with vital problems. The critical discontents may stem from capitalists, armed forces (Przeworski, 1992), masses (Correra and Cardoso, 1992), or “essential [political] players” (Di Palma, 1990).

If the assumption that institutional as well as non-institutional factors are critical to democratic stability we need to pay closer attention to the dynamics through which political institutions have been molded. As Macridis (1986) has argued, the political milieu plays a significant role in shaping the political institutions. There is no one-to-one relationship between social structure and the patterns of political institutions; for instance, both Britain with a homogeneous social structure and Canada with a heterogeneous social structure have a Westminster, or majoritarian, model of democracy. There is also no one-to-one relationship between political traditions and political institutions; for example, direct rule is exercised in Northern Ireland but not in the rest of the United Kingdom. In a given polity, rules and formal arrangements have always reflected the views and interests of different actors (Shefter, 1978). As Lipshart (1991) has pointed out, the United States would have had a different pattern of political institutions if the Constitutional Convention of 1787 had not changed its mind at the last moment; the Virginia Plan included the election of the chief executive by the national legislature; the Convention voted three times in favor of it before finally settling on the electoral college solution.

Political institutions are artifices; they reflect the institution makers’ values and expectations (Powell, 1982). First, political institutions should have the politicians’ support. Otherwise they constantly will become a matter of contention and conflict (Schnitter, 1992: 159; Valenzuela, 1992:...
Introduction

87). Secondly, institution makers may hope that the institutions they have created would serve to advance democratization, provide national unity, and help to solve critical problems the community faces. In all probability they may expect the institutions they help create to fulfill a combination of such goals and expectations. To the extent that these goals and expectations are fulfilled by the political institutions so created, stable democracies are likely to result (Schmitter, 1992: 159). As Sondrol (1990) has shown, the inevitable return to the strong presidency in Latin America was a direct result of the failure of many of the non-presidential arrangements there to meet political demands. Strong presidencies, in turn, led to authoritarian regimes (Linz, 1990).

Of course, social structure and political culture have significant roles to play. Looked at from the perspective noted here, they would facilitate or hinder the fulfillment of the functions political institutions are expected to perform. For instance, political institutions with majoritarian effects would fit a homogeneous society better than a heterogeneous one (Lijphart, 1984). Further, in countries whose political culture tends towards praetorianism (that is, political competition without restraints [Heper, 1991]), parliamentary government would exacerbate, rather than ameliorate, crises of political integration. A good example is Turkey of the 1945–1980 period (Heper, 1985; Heper, 1992).

It is clear that political realism and prudence should inform the patterning of political institutions. As Sartori (1987) has shown, democracy has both a horizontal (political participation) and a vertical (political realism and prudence) dimension. The consolidation of democracy requires both the democratization of the polity and also the presence of political institutions to temper, moderate and redirect the relative power of social forces. Sartori’s view is shared by O’Donnell (1992: 46) who has argued that in any attempt to build democracy, there are two fundamental issues to be considered. First, there is the issue of representation. Second, there is the issue of how representation will mesh with the characteristics of institutions. According to O’Donnell the principle challenge in Brazilian politics has been that of overcoming a high level of patrimonialism and elitism deriving from a lack of norms and institutions to distinguish between the public and the private. Thus, if political institutions are not designed to strike a balance between the horizontal and vertical dimensions of democracy the regime may eventually drift to either a debilitating pluralism or an excessively powerful executive. In both cases, the probability of a regime change increases. A regime change, however, would not take place if the salient goals and expectations are fulfilled.

The nature of regime change, in fact, provides the basis for how we have organized this volume. This organization is based on the relative
durability and stability of democratic regimes. Democratic regimes that have been long standing and essentially uninterrupted except through conquest and occupation fall into our first group of well-established democracies. Here we include Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, and France.

The second group of democratic regimes have experienced democracy continuously since the post-World War II era and are relatively well established. Indeed, two of the countries in this group, India and Israel, only received their independence in the few years following the end of World War II. Along with India and Israel, the two other countries that we include in this category are Italy and Germany.

Finally, a third category includes countries that have only recently emerged from authoritarian conditions (Poland), have done so at a point substantially after the end of World War II (Spain), or have fluctuated until very recently between bouts of democracy and spasms of authoritarianism (Turkey). These countries we call the newly established democracies.

The present volume explores the impact of both non-institutional and institutional factors on democratic stability, with special emphasis on the institutional factors. In regard to the institutional factors, answers to the following questions are critical for the prospects of democracy: (1) to what extent have institutional patterns been informed by political realism and prudence? Are they designed with a view to their appropriateness vis-à-vis the existing social structure and political culture, and has a balance been struck between the horizontal and vertical dimensions of democracy? (2) to what degree has the institutional design been the consequence of a basic consensus among the institution-builders? and (3) to what degree do political institutions fulfill salient goals and expectations of key actors?

These are not easy questions. Matters of congruity between institutional design and political reality and of fit between institutions and expectations are epistemologically very complex. In the last analysis, we can never be sure whether any set of institutions would solve deep problems of divisive conflict. Whether institutions seem to coincide with social divisions is hard to know. It is difficult to unearth expectations other than by inference. Still, it is worth trying; what is at stake is a democratic way of life.

References

Introduction


