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The President and Congress in Postauthoritarian Chile: Institutional Constraints to Democratic Consolidation

Peter M. Siavelis

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As many formerly authoritarian regimes have been replaced by democratic governments in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere, questions have arisen about the stability and durability of these new governments. One concern has to do with the institutional arrangements for governing bequeathed to the new democratic regimes by their authoritarian predecessors and with the related issue of whether presidential or parliamentary systems work better for the consolidation of democracy.

In this book, Peter Siavelis takes a close look at the important case of Chile, which had a long tradition of successful legislative resolution of conflict but was left by the Pinochet regime with a changed institutional framework that greatly strengthened the presidency at the expense of the legislature. Weakening of the legislature combined with an exclusionary electoral system, Siavelis argues, undermines the ability of Chile's National Congress to play its former role as an arena of accommodation, creating serious obstacles to interbranch cooperation and, ultimately, democratic governability.

Unlike other studies that contrast presidential and parliamentary systems in the large, Siavelis examines a variety of factors, including socioeconomic conditions and characteristics of political parties, that affect whether or not one of these systems will operate more or less successfully at any given time. He also offers proposals for institutional reform that could mitigate the harm he expects the current political structure to produce.

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