

THE ROLE OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN TACKLING POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION AND POLARIZATION: PRESIDENTIALISM VERSUS PARLIAMENTARISM

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the influences of “political institutions” on the “political stability”. More specifically, whether there are significant differences between parliamentary and presidential systems for handling political fragmentation and polarization constitutes the main question of this inquiry. Hence, the prospects of presidential and parliamentary systems about political polarization and fragmentation have been evaluated, and especially it has been sought to determine under what conditions those arguments are convincing and cogent. In this regard, the political systems of the Philippines and Malaysia have been briefly reviewed.

Keywords: Politics, Institutions, Parliamentarism, Presidentialism, Stability

Özet

Siyasal Kurumların Siyasal Parçalanma ve Kutuplaşmayı Önlemedeki Rolü: Başkanlık Sistemi ve Parlamenter Sistem

Çalışma, siyasal kurumların siyasal istikrar üzerine etkisini değerlendirmektedir. Siyasal parçalanma ve kutuplaşmayı önlemede parlamenter sistem ve başkanlık sistemi arasında dikkate değer farklılıklar bulunup bulunmadığı incelemenin ana sorunsalını oluşturmaktadır. Başkanlık sistemi ve parlamenter sistemin siyasal parçalanma ve kutuplaşmaya yönelik sundukları çözümler değerlendirildi ve bu tartışmaların özellikle hangi şartlarda geçerli olduğu belirlenmeye çalışıldı. Bu çerçevede, Filipinler ve Malezya'nın siyasal sistemleri kısaca gözden geçirildi.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siyaset, Kurumlar, Parlamenter Sistem, Başkanlık Sistemi, İstikrar

Introduction

Main institutional differences among democracies are based on the relationship between executive and the legislature. Hence, alternative models of governance are shaped according to the structure of political institutions: Parliamentarism or presidentialism. In the first part, the focus will be on institutions, here we will attempt to construct a theoretical framework. In the second and third parts, we will define and analyze parliamentary and presidential systems concerning their similarities and differences, shortcomings and advantages. It will facilitate the arguments of the last part: whether parliamentary or presidential system provides efficient means to develop and institutionalize

democracy, and tackles political polarization and fragmentation efficiently. We will consider the hypotheses of both systems while briefly comparing the cases of the Philippines' presidentialism, and Malaysia's parliamentarism.

1. Theories of Institutionalism and Political Institutions

Before analyzing parliamentary and presidential systems, it is a requirement to define and clarify the (political) institutions and their role in politics. Douglass C. North argues that "institutions are the humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interaction" (North, 1991: 97), and "they consist of both informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct), and formal rules (constitutions, laws, property rights)" (North, 1991: 97). We prefer to cite definitions of other authors to attain a convenient and restricted one. For instance, Hall and Taylor assert that historical institutionalists define institutions as "the formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity ... In general, historical institutionalists associate institutions with organizations and rules or conventions promulgated by formal organization" (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 938). On the other hand, Alexander M. Hicks and Duane H. Swank posit that "political institutions are broadly con[s]trued to connate a very wide range of elements that extends beyond the formal organizations of the state to encompass political parties and interest associations ... that serve important interest group functions" (Hicks and Swank, 1992: 660). Margaret Levi (1987: 684) briefly describes the institutions as "the structures and organizations that regulate human interactions".

March and Olsen (1984: 738) determine that the ideas in new institutionalism "deemphasize the dependence of the polity on society in favor of an interdependence between relatively autonomous social and political institutions". New institutionalism emphasizes a more autonomous role of political institutions. "The state is not only affected by society but also affects it" (March and Olsen, 1984: 738). More important of those is that "political democracy depends not only on economic and social conditions but also on the design of political institutions" (March and Olsen, 1984: 738) (1).

In this point, the explanation of Markus M. L. Crepaz may be considered highlighting:

Regime performance is critically influenced by the rules of the regime. *Rules of the regime* are direct constitutional features such as the type of executive-legislative relations, that is, whether these relations are presidential or parliamentary; the type of electoral system, that is, whether single-member district or proportional representation is used—or indirect features such as the type of the party system, that is, whether there is a "strong" two-party or "weak" multiparty system; or the type of government, that is, whether a country is governed by a single party, bare majority cabinet, minority cabinets, minimal winning or

oversized coalition cabinets (Crepaz, 1996: 5; Anderson and Guillory, 1997: 66; Przeworski, Bardhan et. al., 1995: 42-52) (2).

In short, we can easily assert that the design of political institutions, either parliamentarism or presidentialism, affects the politics and society, more accurately political and social stability.

Considering the shortcomings and advantages of the theories of institutionalism, we will apply a combination of rational choice theory and historical institutionalism. As Margaret Levi points out, “ at the heart of the rational choice approach to institutional change is the investigation of how individuals create and maintain institutions through their choices and of what the unintended consequences of their choices are” (Levi, 1987: 687).

The rational choice theory is “an approach that investigates the strategic interactions among individuals who calculate the costs and benefits of an action and then make the choice that maximizes their goals” (Levi, 1987: 685; also see, Hall and Taylor, 1996: 942-946). It emphasizes the role of actors in politics but in an a-historical manner, this constitutes the main shortcoming of rational choice theory. Yet, it is also important to consider the role of actors. This disadvantage can be coped with by the historical institutionalism (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 937-957). Therefore, we can analyze the role of institutions emphasizing the historical determinants and concerning how and what kind of roles actors play in the establishment and change of institutions. For instance, we can not comprehend the presidentialism in the Philippines without considering the heritage of the US, and the parliamentarism in Malaysia without referring to the heritage of British colonial rule.

2. Institutional Differences between Parliamentary and Presidential Systems

With minimal exception, every existing democracy today is either presidential or parliamentary or a semi-presidential hybrid of the two. A pure parliamentary regime in a democracy is a system of mutual dependence (Stepan and Skach, 1993: 5): (i) the chief executive power must be supported by a majority in the legislature and can fall if it receives a vote of no confidence: (ii) the executive power (normally in conjunction with the head of state) has the capacity to dissolve the legislature and call for elections. According to Stepan and Skach, a pure presidential regime in a democracy is a system of mutual independence (Stepan and Skach, 1993: 5-6): (i) the legislative power has a fixed electoral mandate that is its own source of legitimacy; (ii) the chief executive power has a fixed electoral mandate that is its own source of legitimacy. Arend Lijphart adds another point to differentiate parliamentarism and presidentialism and explains the position of prime ministers and presidents in cabinet:

“Parliamentary systems have collective or collegial executives whereas presidential systems have one-person, non-collegial executives ... The prime minister’s position in the cabinet can vary from pre-eminence to virtual equality with the other ministers, but there is always a relatively high degree of collegiality in decision making; in contrast, the members of presidential cabinets are mere advisers and subordinates of the president ... [T]his distinction plays an important role in the debate on the advantages and disadvantages of the alternative forms of government” (Lijphart, 1992: 3).

Here we find it convenient to mention Douglas V. Verney’s classification of basic principles applicable to the parliamentary government (Verney, 1992: 32-40): (i) The ministry (or government) is a collective body; (ii) Ministers are usually members of parliament; (iii) The government is politically responsible to the assembly; (iv) Parliament as a whole is supreme over its constituent parts, government and assembly, neither of which may dominate the other; (vi) Parliament is the focus of power in the political system. Those principles give significant cues about the nature of executive-legislature relations. Moreover, they determine the boundaries of the executive itself. On the other hand, those propositions of presidential system may lead to political instability and conflicts (Verney, 1992: 40-47): (i) The executive is not divided but is a president elected by the people for a definite term at the time of assembly elections; (ii) The president appoints heads of departments who are his subordinates; (iii) The president is sole executive; (iv) The assembly is ultimately supreme over the other branches of government and there is no fusion of the executive and legislative branches as in a parliament. They bear the dangers that tempt to transform democracies into monarchies, more accurately into dictatorships.

3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Presidential and Parliamentary Systems: Prospects for Political Polarization and Fragmentation

There are advantages and disadvantages of each system, because neither system is direct democracy. Yet, while presidentialism has advantages and principal disadvantages, parliamentarism has disadvantages and principal advantages. Presidentialism has the advantages of executive stability, and more limited government, but disadvantages of executive-legislative deadlock, temporal rigidity, and less inclusive ‘winner take all’ government. Parliamentarism has opposite consequences; the advantages of presidentialism are its disadvantages and vice versa (Lijphart, 1992: 11). However, we argue that while the disadvantages of presidentialism outweigh the disadvantages of parliamentarism, the advantages of parliamentarism outweigh the advantages of presidentialism. What is worthwhile to argue with respect to the developing democracies that are not homogenous is that parliamentary system rather than presidential system achieves more political stability and order.

3.1. Advantages and Disadvantages of Presidential System

The first advantage of presidentialism is its executive stability based on the president's fixed term of office. Second advantage of presidentialism is its popular election of the chief executive, because it may be regarded as more democratic than the indirect election of the executive in parliamentary system. Robert A. Dahl argues that "the plural executive may help to prevent any single man from gaining too much power; yet where one executive checks another, decisions may be paralysed" (Dahl, 1992: 58). Similar arguments are favoured by the Constitution Drafting Committee of Nigeria (1992: 182): "The single executive has the merit of unity, energy, and despatch. Energy in the executive ... is a leading character in the definition of good government. The unity of a single executive clearly conduces more to energy and despatch than the disunity of many wills". However concentration of executive power in the hands of one person may be regarded as inherently undemocratic; we argue that this situation may lead to the transformation of democratic government into dictatorship in non-consolidated democracies. The conclusions of the International Forum of the Israel-Diaspora Institute (IFIDI) support this view (1992: 199): "There is no guarantee that a presidential system will always produce a powerful executive". It is further argued that "the personalization of power is inherent in authoritarian regimes and it is easier to slide into autocracy from a presidential system" (IFIDI, 1992: 199).

Third advantage of presidentialism is supposed to be that the separation of powers limits government tyranny, "but it does so by encouraging confrontation, indecision and deadlock, and by diffusing accountability for the results" (Committee on the Constitutional System, 1992: 79). This advantage seems as an illusion and turns into the disadvantage. Therefore, one of the major disadvantages of presidentialism is the executive-legislative deadlock. This is especially true in the fragmented party systems in the presidentialism; this situation exacerbates the executive immobilism (Mainwaring, 1992: 113). Mainwaring argues that the combination of a fractionalized party system and presidentialism is inconducive to democratic stability because it easily creates difficulties in the relationship between the president and the congress (Mainwaring, 1992: 114; Wilson, 1992: 156-157).

Second shortcoming of presidentialism is its rigidity. Walter Bagehot criticizes the presidential government due to its rigidity. Bagehot (1992: 71) asserts that "there is no elastic element, everything is rigid, specified, dated". On the other hand, this executive rigidity may easily turn into dictatorship in developing democracies, a president's attempt to retain his office results in coups and dictatorships. Bolívar Lamounier (1992: 134-135) proposes the Brazilian case as an example of this argument.

The third disadvantage of presidentialism is its winner-take all character. This condition is directly related to the electoral and political party system (Horowitz, 1993: 130) (3). *First-past-the-post* system of single-member

constituencies gives rise to two polarized coalitions that involve in open confrontation (Wilson, 1992, 153). Since presidentialism especially disfavors the generation of coalitions and multi-party convergences (Council for the Consolidation of Democracy, 1992: 160), the risk of zero-sum game probably appears (Linz, 1993a, 108-126; Linz, 1993b: 138-145).

3.2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Parliamentary System

The executive ‘instability’ of parliamentary systems may give these systems the flexibility to change governments quickly when circumstances are changed. In this respect, The fact that parties must agree to form a government gives parliamentary systems an institutionalized mechanism for dealing with a large number of parties, a mechanism lacking in presidential systems (Mainwaring, 1992: 116).

Second advantage of parliamentarism is its ability to resolve the executive-legislative deadlock by the factor of legislative confidence. Moreover, as Walter Bagehot asserts, administration requires the continued aid of legislation. “If the persons who have to do the work are not the same as those who have to make the laws, there will be a controversy between the two sets of persons... The executive is spoiled by having to act without responsibility: the executive becomes unfit for its name since it cannot execute what it decides on; the legislature is demoralized by liberty, by taking decisions of which others (and not itself) will suffer the effects” (Bagehot, 1992: 67).

Third advantage of parliamentarism is its ability to be inclusive instead of exclusive. Politics in parliamentary system becomes inclusive rather than exclusive. Here, we are to mention one of the intervening variables, that is, the role of electoral system on political stability. Baylis found that collegially ruled (executive power-sharing) political regimes have a higher gross national product (GNP) per capita, lower unemployment rates, lower levels of protest demonstrations, and lower levels of political strikes, riots, armed attacks, political assassination, and “political deaths” than monocratically ruled (president or single-party, bare majority cabinets) political regimes (Baylis, 1992: 236-241). Such a situation is directly related to the existence of consensus democracy (Lijphart and Crepaz, 1991: 236; Lijphart, 1984: chapters 1 and 2; Crepaz, 1996).

On the other hand, parliamentarism has also some disadvantages. One of them is that the lack of separation of powers in this system may lead executive to dominate the parliament. Arthur M. Schlesinger argues that “while the parliamentary system formally assumes legislative supremacy, in fact it assures the almost unassailable dominance of the executive over the legislature” Schlesinger, 1992: 91), and “the cabinet can often blackmail the legislature into accepting its wishes” (Lijphart, 1992: 13). J. P. A. Gruijters, in parallel to those authors, over-

emphasizes the point that the cabinet can threaten the legislation to make issues matters of confidence (Gruijters, 1992: 191-192).

Another disadvantage of parliamentary system is supposed to be that it undermines executive stability. However, we argue that executive instability does not necessarily pave the way for the instability of political system, and hence democracy. Here, what is of great significance is to differentiate executive stability from "Political Stability". Yet, that the executive instability may signal the political instability is not to be overlooked.

4. Presidentialism versus Parliamentarism: A Brief Survey of the Philippines and Malaysia

As Giovanni Sartori points out elsewhere (1991), comparative politics is about the comparing and contrasting countries in terms of their differences and similarities. Smelser adopting a similar approach argues that "the more similar two or more [cases] are with respect to crucial variables... the better able is the investigator to isolate and analyze the influences of other variables that might account for the differences he wishes to explain" (Smelser, 1967: 113; Lijphart, 1975: 164). Another label for comparable-cases approach is the "most similar systems" design (Przeworski and Teune, 1970: 32). According to Przeworski and Teune:

Systems as similar as possible constitute the optimal samples for comparative inquiry. ... [those] countries are seen as good samples because these countries share many economic, cultural, and political characteristics; therefore the number of "experimental" variables ... is minimized (Przeworski and Teune, 1970: 32).

We have chosen the Philippines and Malaysia because both countries have strong similarities and have not significant differences except their political systems. While the Philippines has presidentialism, Malaysia has parliamentarism. This point encourages the author to compare those similar countries and determine which system achieves political stability (by political stability we do not mean executive stability). Here, some questions may arise: Are those countries regarded as democracies? If so, what are the criteria of regarding a country democracy? We are especially interested in the presidential and parliamentary systems in terms of their capability of tackling political polarization and fragmentation in divided and developing democracies. Both countries satisfy the first criterion. In addition to this, both countries are regarded democracies (Stepan and Skach, 1993: 4, 14; Lijphart (ed.), 1992: 23-27, 40, 42, 171, 172, 214-215, 219, 226, 230.; Lijphart, 1993: 148) because both countries, though they are not continuous democracies, have political parties that compete for achieving political authority in democratic electoral systems.

We have categorized their similarities and differences in terms of demographic, economic, historical, and political indicators. The two countries of Southeastern Asia, the Philippines and Malaysia have a great number of similarities beyond sharing same borderlines. First of all, they both experienced a long period of colonial rule. Second, they experienced Japanese invasion during the World War II (Pye, 1967: 15-33). Third, both attempted to establish a nation-state. Modernization and nationalism gained well sounding grounds in both countries. Both moved peacefully into independence by determined stages and negotiations. Fourth, both countries were, and have been, agriculture-based traditional societies. Patron-client relations and hierarchical structures were dominant in both. Fifth, both countries consist of ethnic, religious, racial, linguistic groups; hence, they are highly heterogeneous. Sixth and one of the most important similarities in terms of our inquiry, in both countries there were \have been significant attempts to establish democratic government. Related to this, seventh, both countries experienced coups, that is, the break in democracy, and martial law. Malaysia has been relatively stable, although its democratic government was interrupted for a short period in 1969-70 by martial law, following severe race riots. The Philippines once considered Southeast Asia's showcase of democracy, moved to civilian dictatorship when President Marcos abrogated the constitution in 1972 (until 1986).

Despite all those similarities, there was/has been a major difference between those two countries: While the Philippines has chosen presidential system, Malaysia has preferred parliamentary system. This difference constitutes the main argument of this paper: How does this difference affect political stability? Which system, whether presidential system or parliamentary system, does produce more affirmative results? We will concentrate on those questions and argue in the light of the theoretical and historical framework presented in the beginning that parliamentarism in Malaysia is more likely to provide political stability.

4.1. Presidential System in the Philippines

The Philippines once the most westernized of all the Southeast Asia's nations. Over 90 percent of the population is Christian. This reflects the legacy and heritage of Spanish rule. In 1899, we witness the Americanization of the Philippines. Especially missionaries, teachers, and government officials influenced the Filipino people, and the Philippine's economy became integrated into the American economy. From 1899 until 1946, some steps were taken to Filipinize the civil services (Neher, 1987: 82-83; Vandenbosch and Butwell, 1966: 107-130).

Especially corruption and patron-client relations stigmatized the history of the Philippines. Major institutions of the political system were based on the American model and a two party system evolved. The presidency of the Philippines fluctuated from one party to another until 1969, when Ferdinand Marcos became the first president to be reelected. There were few, if any

ideological differences between the two parties. Instead, politics revolved around support of personalities rather than ideas and programs.

The major two parties of the Philippine are the Nacionalistas and Liberal Party. That Senator Raul S. Manglapus describes his country's political structure as a "two-faction one-party system" (Vandenbosch and Butwell, 1966: 143) may be considered as an accurate description. Such a political structure of the presidential system determines the direction of political stability. Here, it suffices to briefly mention the process of political competition and its effects on stability.

The candidate of the Nacionalist Party, for the first presidency of the Philippines after the independence, was Sergio Osmena. Since Osmena was assured the party's presidential nomination, Manuel Roxas, another nacionalistas, founded his own party, the Liberals, and became the president. President Roxas died suddenly in 1948. Elpidio Quirino, the vice president, succeeded Roxas. Though Nacionalistas nominated José P. Laurel for presidency in 1949 elections, President Quirino managed to win the election by using all of the great powers of the presidential office and by exerting great pressure on officials and voters alike. The Laurel forces charged that the election had been stolen.

By 1950, the HUK movement (*Hukbo ng Bayan Laban Sa Hapon: People's Army to Fight the Japanese*) strengthened; so President Quirino appointed Ramon Magsaysay as secretary of defense to cope with that communist organization. Magsaysay suppressed the HUK movement and became a national hero. The Nacionalistas seeing certain victory in his nomination named him their presidential candidate in 1952 election. Therefore, he left the government. Such developments meant that party-jumping was to become chronic in subsequent years. Magsaysay became president in 1953, but the regular Nacionalistas were reluctant to accept Magsaysay's leadership, and Congress delayed and sometimes diluted his bills. He died in 1957 and vice president Carlos P. Garcia succeeded him, won nomination in 1957 as the Nacionalista presidential candidate through manipulation, and became president. Vice president Diosdado Macapagal used four years of his office to campaign for the presidency. He later received the Liberal party nomination in 1961 and defeated Garcia. Yet Macapagal faced a problem: The Nacionalistas won control of the House of Representatives. Macapagal's opponent in the 1965 presidential election was Senator Ferdinand E. Marcos, who had contested the 1961 Liberal party nomination against Macapagal and quit the Liberals to join the Nacionalistas in 1964 because President Macapagal chose to run again in 1965. So eager were the candidates in the 1965 campaign to gain their party's endorsement of their bids to be (or remain) president that the national nominating conventions were held a year before the actual balloting. (Vandenbosch and Butwell, 1966: 130-142).

Marcos became sixth president in 1965 and reelected in 1969. Marcos's goals were ambitious, but results were minimal, because the Congress refused to

vote for the needed tax increases to finance his projects. This led to the revival of HUK movement in the Philippines.

To guarantee his second term presidency Marcos provided \$500 to some 20,000 village chiefs. His election victory, because of such activities, was conceived to have been “bought”. In such inconsistencies, Marcos proclaimed martial law in September 1972, and pointed the end of democracy. He imprisoned many members of the political opposition, including senators. Press severely censored and civil liberties were curtailed. During his era, private armies clashed, and crime was rampant. Unequal distribution of wealth and land were extended. Furthermore in this period, civil war between Muslim farmers and Christians in the southern islands was intense (Hill, 1987: 887; Neher, 1987: 85-86). Neher argues that:

If these conditions were the general context for the declaration of martial law, the precipitant was the fact that Marcos was constitutionally barred from seeking a third term as a president and desired to retain his power. (Neher, 1987: 86)

The program of the president was a personal program, rather than a program of his party, and party members may or may not have agreed with his program. In any case, their approval was secondary.

Marcos signed cease-fire in 1975 with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Yet, Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos were seen as crisis perpetrators rather than problem solvers. There was no clear succession mechanism. Moreover, Agrava Commission on assassination of Benigno Aquino was under the total influence of Marcos rule. Hence, it was an evidence of the personalistic nature of Philippine politics.

Marcos supported Tolentino against Corazon Aquino and Laurel. Elections held in 1986 but it was claimed that the elections are not just. Marcos and his party were forced out of office following the February 1986 election, because electorate believed that Marcos had fraudulently denied Aquino the presidency (Hill, 1987: 889). Mrs. Aquino’s a campaign speech was welcomed by a great number of the people, in her speech she declared that the real issue was Marcos himself:

How he and his cronies plundered the economy and mortgaged our future; How he and his wife have erected extravagant monuments to themselves that mock the painful poverty of our people; How he and his dummies have drained the National Treasury and stashed their hidden wealth abroad; How he and his goons have tortured and “salvaged” defenseless citizens; How he and his padrinos have turned the Batasan (National Assembly) into an expensive rubber stamp; How he and his misguided minions have prostituted professionalism in the military; And how he and his classmates have converted the Supreme Court into a compliant cabal of callous collaborators. (Neher, 1987, 97)

With the government of Aquino, the problems did not cease. In August 1987 the Aquino government survived coups in 1987, 1989, and a substantially less serious uprising in northern Mindanao was overcome in October 1990 (Banks, Day, Muller, 1997a: 667) (4). Another example of the political instability in the Philippines is the debates on the Fidel Ramos's term of office. A series of domestic problems encountered by the Ramos administration in late 1995 and through 1996 generated increased political dissatisfaction. In 1995, President Ramos felt obliged to deny a charge by ousted Senate president Angara that he planned to retain power beyond the 1998, expiration of his term (Banks, Day, Muller, 1997a, 668). This is the main agenda and the major source of the political conflict in the Philippines. Presidential system in the Philippines revolves around similar contentions and conflicts.

The departure of the LDP from the ruling coalition and the emergence of an anti-Ramos majority in the Senate were seen as reflecting skepticism regarding the president's assurance that he would not seek a constitutional amendment permitting him to run for a second term in 1998. Alternatively, there were some who felt that Ramos might seek to reintroduce parliamentary system with himself as candidate for prime minister (Banks, Day, Muller, 1997a, 669).

4.2. Parliamentary System in Malaysia

Malaysia was under British Colonialism until 1957. Islam became a symbol to help unify the nation and was used as a means to legitimate political authority. The communal nature of Malaysian politics with its emphasis on ethnic differences between the Chinese and Malay peoples has strengthened the bonds of Malays to their religion and resulted in the exclusion of Chinese (non-Muslims) from important areas of community life. In other words, Malays provided with special privileges, and this resulted in the alienation of Chinese and Hindu minority, and further resulted in riots of 1969 between Malay and Chinese in Kuala Lumpur (Neher, 1987, 120-121).

Malaysia adapted the British parliamentary system with a bicameral federal parliament and the prime minister was elected by the lower house. The distinctive Malaysian contribution to the constitutional arrangements was creation of the position of Yang di-Pertuan Agong (Paramount ruler or king), who was selected from the Council of Rulers, from each Malay State in a rotational system, and serves for a term of five years (Dawson, 1987: 708). Despite formally the head of government, the king is in practice a constitutional monarch with only very limited discretionary powers. The effective head of government is the *Perdana Menteri* (prime minister), working with and through the *Juma'ah Mentri* (cabinet). The king appoints as prime minister the member of the *Dewan Ra'ayat* (House of Representatives) likely to command the confidence of a majority in the House, normally the leader of the majority party. Members of the cabinet are appointed by the king from the Parliament on the advice of the prime minister. The cabinet is

required to be collectively responsible to the parliament (Dawson, 1987: 708). The House of Representatives has 154 members directly elected from single member constituencies by simple majorities. The maximum life of the House of Representatives is five years, but it may be at any time dissolved by the king acting upon the request of the prime minister (Dawson, 1987, 708).

As it is pointed out above, the Council of Rulers (*Majlis Raja Raja*) plays an important role in the function of political system. It consists of the thirteen rulers of the states of the federation including the nine hereditary royal rulers and the governors of Penang, Malacca, Sabah, and Sarawak, and meets three or four times a year. It acts as a third house of the Parliament on amendments to certain sections of the constitution (Dawson, 1987: 709).

Since independence the government coalition, dominated by the United Malays National Organization, has always held an absolute majority of the seats in the House of Representatives (Dawson, 1987: 709). This is the result of the process of permanent coalitions formed before the elections. Hence, to mention the most distinctive feature of Malaysian political parties is worthwhile. They are all communally based, but major characteristic is a tendency towards consociation and coalition. The communal divisions are not only racial, but are also reinforced by language, religion, culture, and somewhat by economic conditions. The three major parties, United Malays National Organization (UMNO), Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), and Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) specifically came into existence in the late 1940s to defend their respective ethnic communities. Before independence in 1957, they had formed a coalition which was formally registered as the Alliance Party in 1958. The Alliance collapsed by the communal rioting after the 1969 election. Yet, the coalition was reconstructed in 1971 as the National Front. Furthermore, it was broadened to include several minor parties (Dawson, 1987, 710).

The design of political institutions in Malaysia has paved the way for consociational politics and so, it contributed to the political stability and alleviated possible religious, racial, and ethnic conflicts. The Prime Minister Mahattir set as a national goal the achievement of fully developed status by the year 2020. Towards this end, he guided Malaysia into a massive construction program. A total of more than \$66 billion is determined to be spent on those projects ((Banks, Day, Muller, 1997b, 523).

Conclusion

In this paper, it is argued that the design of political institutions influences politics. In this respect, we have attempted to define institutions and weigh institutional approaches. We argued that rational choice theory alone is not sufficient to explain the role of institutions and actors. When it is combined with the historical institutionalism, the power of explanation increases.

We have, intensively referring to the literature, analyzed the advantages and disadvantages of parliamentary and presidential systems, and argued that especially in heterogeneous, developing, and non-consolidated democracies parliamentary system concedes to the “Political Stability” more than presidential system does. Furthermore, presidential system in those countries can easily transform into the dictatorship. The cases briefly analyzed in this paper confirm that proposition.

NOTES

1. James G. March and Johan P. Olsen further develop their views on the role of institutions in a book, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics*, New York: The Free Press, 1989. For a review of this book by Elinor Ostrom, see, *Public Choice*, vol. 72, no 1, October 1991, pp. 95-96.
2. It is worthwhile to quote the argument of Christopher J. Anderson and Christine A. Guillory. According to them: “A country’s political institutions and constitutional reality systematically mediate attitudes about the democratic progress among winners and losers ... Consensual and majoritarian democratic institutions differentially and systematically affect citizen satisfaction with the way democracy works ... Losers in systems that are more consensual display higher levels of satisfaction with the way democracy works than do losers in systems with majoritarian characteristics. Conversely, winners tend to be more satisfied with democracy the more a country’s political institutions approximate pure majoritarian government”.
3. Horowitz argues that winner-take-all is a function of electoral systems, not of institutions in the abstract.
4. For a detailed study of the Aquino era, see, W. Scott Thompson, *The Philippines in Crisis: Development and Security in the Aquino Era, 1986-92*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992.

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