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Presidents with Prime Ministers: Do Direct Elections Matter? - Book Review

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fait de poser que chacun était «libre de concevoir la divinité selon ses convictions personnelles» (51) n'ouvrirait-il pas la voie à une instrumentalisation du divin qui pouvait tout aussi bien l'asservir aux différentes idéologies qu'à une forme de relation personnelle à un «Tout Autre» indéterminé qui n'est en rien incompatible, au contraire, avec des formes d'individualisme égoïste forcené situé aux antipodes de la mesure?

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Presidents with Prime Ministers: Do Direct Elections Matter?

Margit Tavits

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 273

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Depending on how countries have established the relationship between their executive and legislative branches, and divided power between them, one can distinguish presidential from parliamentary systems and those that are neither completely presidential nor completely parliamentary. It is the latter that have been of particular interest to scholars who have developed numerous typologies and debated the merits of labeling these "mixed" cases as instances of semi-presidentialism. Others have been more interested in the political consequences of these institutional variations, such as the effects of presidentialism or parliamentarism on stability and regime survival in countries that have recently transitioned to democracy.

One would think that there is not a single institutional feature that has not yet been thoroughly explored in the existing literature. However, Margit Tavits has managed to identify one such area, namely, the mode of selection of presidents in parliamentary democracies. Does the method of election of the head of state in a parliamentary democracy make any difference? It has generally been assumed that directly elected presidents obtain a higher degree of legitimacy than their indirectly elected counterparts. The former are thus expected to be activist and take full advantage of the powers inherent in their office while the latter are believed to be more passive in carrying out their duties. If this were true, any parliamentary democracy that had just emerged from authoritarian rule should be wary of adopting direct popular elections for president since that could potentially lead to power struggles between the country's heads of state and government and consequently result in political instability.

Tavits' study is the first that uses a mixed (quantitative and qualitative) research design to empirically test these general assumptions that have long been taken for granted. She finds that the conventional wisdom about the differences between directly and indirectly elected presidents in parliamentary systems is wrong. Directly elected presidents are no more likely to try to take full advantage of their powers and interfere in the governance of the country than their indirectly elected counterparts. Instead, the most important factor that will have an effect on the degree of presidential activism is the nature of the political opportunity structure facing a head of state. According to Tavits, a fragmented legislature with a government that relies on an unstable majority or has no majority contributes to presidential activism as does a situation in which the president is facing an ideologically opposing government and legislative majority.

Tavits also finds no evidence in support of the claim that involving a country's citizens directly in the selection of their head of state will reduce voter apathy and public disillusionment with the political system. Direct elections actually seem to lead to a decrease in voter turnout in parliamentary elections. Finally, indirect elections are not necessarily less contentious, divisive, and polarizing than direct elec-

tions. This is because holding the presidency is an important prize for any political party even if that president is indirectly elected and no more than a figurehead. As Tavits shows, the president's party can expect to gain an average of six percentage points in parliamentary elections.

With this book the author joins the theoretical debate over the value of typologies that make a distinction between presidential, parliamentary and semi-presidential systems. Tavits questions "the analytical usefulness of the theoretical division between regimes according to the method of electing the head of state" (237) and points out that "if parliamentary regimes need to be further classified" it should be done "according to their constitutional powers, which define the limits of their political playing field" (54). That is a good point and she is certainly not alone in doubting the value of distinguishing between parliamentary and semi-presidential systems. However, it is interesting to note that France, the paradigm case of semi-presidentialism, often does not fit easily into her conclusions. For example, in contrast to Tavits' general findings, in France presidential activism actually decreases during times of cohabitation. It is during times of unified government that the president is strongest and most active. Thus, while Tavits' argument may be true for purely parliamentary systems, it may not hold up as well when one is dealing with a system that has traditionally been categorized as semi-presidential.

The question that the author fails to answer is whether a case like France is qualitatively different from places like Iceland or Germany. Thus, it would have been interesting to see whether running the analyses separately for purely parliamentary and semi-presidential systems would have affected her overall results. By lumping all of these cases together she may have missed out on some potentially interesting findings.

Finally, apart from a number of typos throughout the text, there are a few mistakes that need to be corrected. For example, German President Heinemann was elected in 1969 while a grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD was governing and served the remainder of his time in office during an SPD-FDP coalition and thus never cohabited with a CDU-FDP government (82). German presidents are indirectly elected while Austrian presidents emerge from direct popular elections and not the other way around (27).

Despite these comparatively minor shortcomings, Tavits' book makes an important contribution to the literature on presidential and parliamentary government and should be required reading for anyone interested in constitutional engineering in general and institutional design in particular.

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Electing a Diverse Canada: The Representation of Immigrants, Minorities, and Women

Caroline Andrew, John Biles, Myer Siemiatycki and Erin Tolley, eds.

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Canada's diversity is often pointed to as one of the country's main strengths. Less clear, however, is how well the country's political institutions reflect this understanding of strength in diversity. *Electing a Diverse Canada*, edited by Caroline Andrew, John Biles, Myer Siemiatycki and Erin Tolley, examines this question and, in particular, evaluates the extent to which immigrants, minorities, and women are represented in Canadian legislatures. Innovative research design combined with a careful effort to consider the role of history and context provide the reader with substantial insight into the (non)representation of these traditionally marginalized groups in the