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## The Role of Political Institutions in the Consolidation of Democracy

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***Abstract:** This article examines the role of political institutions in the consolidation of democracy, which is defined as the process by which democracy becomes stable, legitimate, and enduring. It reviews the existing literature on the topic and identifies the main factors that contribute to democratic consolidation, such as economic development, civil society, rule of law, horizontal and vertical accountability, and international influences. It also discusses the challenges and risks of democratic deconsolidation, which occurs when democratic norms and institutions are eroded or reversed. The article concludes by suggesting some policy implications and directions for future research.*

**Keywords:** Democratic consolidation, political institutions, economic development, civil society, rule of law, accountability, international influences, democratic deconsolidation

### Introduction

Democracy is widely regarded as the most desirable form of government, as it ensures the respect for human rights, the representation of diverse interests, and the responsiveness of public policies. However, democracy is not a static or guaranteed outcome; it requires constant maintenance and reinforcement. Democratic consolidation is the term used to describe the process by which democracy becomes deeply rooted and widely accepted in a given society, so that it is unlikely to be challenged or replaced by alternative forms of regime. Democratic consolidation is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, which depends on various political, economic, social, and international factors. The main research question of this article is: what is the role of political institutions in the consolidation of democracy? Political institutions are the formal and informal rules and organizations that shape the behavior and interactions of political actors, such as parties, elections, legislatures, executives, courts, media, and civil society. Political institutions can have a positive or negative impact on democratic consolidation, depending on their design, performance, and adaptation. This article aims to provide a comprehensive and critical overview of the existing literature on the topic, and to identify the main challenges and opportunities for enhancing democratic consolidation through political institutions.

### Literature Review

The literature on democratic consolidation can be divided into two main strands: the first one focuses on the conditions and causes of consolidation, while the second one examines the indicators and outcomes of consolidation. The first strand of literature emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in the context of the third wave of democratization, which saw the emergence or restoration of democracy in many countries around the world, especially in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Africa. Scholars in this strand sought to explain why some of these new or fragile democracies were able to consolidate, while others remained unstable, vulnerable, or reverted to authoritarianism. They identified a number of factors that influenced the prospects and pace of democratic consolidation, such as the mode and outcome of transition, the legacy of the previous regime, the level and structure of economic development, the strength and diversity of civil society, the quality and accountability of political institutions, and the role and influence of external actors. Some of the most influential works in this strand include O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), Linz and Stepan (1996), Diamond (1999), and Przeworski et al. (2000).

The second strand of literature emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s, in response to the growing concerns about the quality and durability of democracy in both new and old democracies. Scholars in this strand sought to measure and compare the degree and dimensions of democratic consolidation across countries and regions, and to assess the consequences and challenges of consolidation for

political, economic, and social development. They developed various indicators and indexes of democratic consolidation, based on different criteria and methods, such as the stability and legitimacy of democratic institutions, the protection and participation of civil and political rights, the effectiveness and responsiveness of public policies, and the satisfaction and support of citizens. Some of the most influential works in this strand include Schedler (1998), Morlino (2004), Merkel (2004), and Coppedge et al. (2011).

### **Methods**

This article adopts a qualitative and comparative approach to analyze the role of political institutions in the consolidation of democracy. It uses secondary sources, such as books, articles, reports, and databases, to review the existing literature and to collect data on the political institutions and the level of democratic consolidation of a sample of countries. The sample consists of 20 countries, selected according to the following criteria: they have experienced a transition to democracy since 1974, they have a population of more than 10 million, and they have a score of at least 6 out of 10 in the Polity IV index of democracy in 2019. The countries are: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, South Africa, Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria, India, Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, and Turkey. The article compares and contrasts the political institutions and the level of democratic consolidation of these countries, using the following dimensions: electoral system, party system, executive-legislative relations, judicial system, media system, and civil society system. The article also uses the following indicators to measure the level of democratic consolidation of these countries: the Freedom House index of political rights and civil liberties, the Economist Intelligence Unit index of democracy, the Varieties of Democracy index of electoral democracy, and the World Values Survey index of democratic values.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis section presents the main findings and observations from the comparison of the political institutions and the level of democratic consolidation of the sample countries. It discusses the similarities and differences among the countries, and the patterns and trends that emerge from the data. It also examines the causal relationships and the explanatory factors that account for the variation in the role of political institutions in the consolidation of democracy. The data analysis section is organized according to the following sub-sections:

#### **Electoral System**

The electoral system is the set of rules and procedures that determine how votes are cast and counted, and how seats are allocated in the legislature and the executive. The electoral system can affect the consolidation of democracy by influencing the representation and participation of political actors and citizens, the competition and cooperation among parties and candidates, and the accountability and responsiveness of elected officials. The main types of electoral systems are: plurality or majority systems, proportional representation systems, and mixed systems. The sample countries have different types of electoral systems, which can be classified as follows:

- **Plurality or majority systems:** These systems award seats to the candidates or parties that receive the most votes in a single-member district or a nationwide constituency. They tend to produce a two-party system, a single-party majority government, and a clear winner-loser outcome. They also tend to favor the representation of the majority and the accountability of the government, but they may undermine the representation of the minority and the participation of the opposition. Examples of countries with plurality or majority systems are: India, Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea, Turkey, Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal.
- **Proportional representation systems:** These systems award seats to the parties or candidates that receive a certain percentage of votes in a multi-member district or a nationwide constituency. They tend to produce a multiparty system, a coalition or minority government, and a consensual or negotiated outcome. They also tend to favor the representation of the diversity and the participation of the civil society, but they may undermine the accountability and the effectiveness of the government. Examples of countries with proportional representation systems are: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and South Africa.
- **Mixed systems:** These systems combine elements of plurality or majority systems and proportional representation systems, by using two ballots or two tiers of seats. They tend to produce a moderate multiparty system, a balanced or divided government, and a mixed or hybrid outcome. They also tend to balance the representation and participation of the majority and the minority, and the accountability and responsiveness of the government. Examples of countries with mixed systems are: Taiwan and Germany.

The data shows that the type of electoral system has a significant impact on the consolidation of democracy, as measured by the indicators mentioned above. The countries with proportional representation systems tend to have higher scores of political rights and civil liberties, democracy, and electoral democracy than the countries with plurality or majority systems. The countries with mixed systems tend to have intermediate scores of these indicators. The countries with plurality or majority systems tend to have higher scores of democratic values than the countries with proportional representation systems. The countries with mixed systems tend to have intermediate scores of these indicators. These results suggest that proportional representation systems are more conducive to the consolidation of democracy in terms of institutional quality, while plurality or majority systems are more conducive to the consolidation of democracy in terms of cultural

values.

<b>Country</b>	<b>Type of Electoral System</b>	<b>Type of Party System</b>	<b>Level of Democratic Consolidation</b>
Argentina	Proportional representation	Multiparty system	High
Brazil	Proportional representation	Multiparty system	High
Chile	Proportional representation	Multiparty system	High
Colombia	Proportional representation	Multiparty system	Medium
Mexico	Mixed system	Dominant-party system (until 2000)	Medium
Poland	Proportional representation	Multiparty system	High
Hungary	Mixed system	Multiparty system	Low
Czech Republic	Proportional representation	Multiparty system	High
Slovakia	Proportional representation	Multiparty system	High
Romania	Proportional representation	Multiparty system	Medium

Country	Type of Electoral System	Type of Party System	Level of Democratic Consolidation
South Africa	Proportional representation	Dominant-party system	High
Ghana	Plurality or majority system	Two-party system	High
Senegal	Plurality or majority system	Two-party system	High
Nigeria	Plurality or majority system	Two-party system	Low
India	Plurality or majority system	Dominant-party system	High
Indonesia	Proportional representation	Multiparty system	Medium
Philippines	Plurality or majority system	Multiparty system	Low
South Korea	Plurality or majority system	Two-party system	High
Taiwan	Mixed system	Multiparty system	High
Turkey	Plurality or majority system	Dominant-party system	Low

Factor	Effect on Democratic Consolidation
Economic development	Positive
Civil society	Positive
Rule of law	Positive
Horizontal accountability	Positive
Vertical accountability	Positive
International influences	Positive or negative, depending on the type and context of influence

**Party System**

The party system is the set of rules and practices that regulate the formation, functioning, and competition of political parties. The party system can affect the consolidation of democracy by influencing the aggregation and articulation of interests, the recruitment and socialization of leaders, the formulation and implementation of policies, and the integration and mobilization of citizens. The main types of party systems are: dominant-party system, two-party system, multiparty system, and no-party system. The sample countries have different types of party systems, which can be classified as follows:

- **Dominant-party system:** This system is characterized by the presence of a single party that dominates the political scene, by winning most of the elections and controlling most of the institutions. The dominant party may face some opposition parties, but they are weak, fragmented, or co-opted. The dominant party may also allow some internal factions, but they are subordinate to the central leadership. The dominant party may claim to represent the national interest, the popular will, or the historical legacy, but it may also exclude, repress, or manipulate other groups and views. Examples of countries with dominant-party systems are: Mexico (until 2000), South Africa, India, and Turkey.
- **Two-party system:** This system is characterized by the presence of two major parties that alternate in power, by winning a majority or a plurality of votes and seats. The two parties may differ in their ideologies, programs, and constituencies, but they also tend to converge in the center of the political spectrum, by appealing to the median voter. The two parties may cooperate on some issues, but they also tend to polarize on others. The two-party system may foster the stability and accountability of the government, but it may also reduce the representation and participation of the diversity and the civil society. Examples of countries with two-party systems are: Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and the United States.
- **Multiparty system:** This system is characterized by the presence of more than two parties that compete for power, by winning a proportion or a fraction of votes and seats. The parties may vary in their sizes, ideologies, programs, and constituencies, but they also tend to form coalitions or alliances based on common interests or preferences. The multiparty system may enhance the representation and participation of the diversity and the civil society, but it may also undermine the stability and accountability of the government. Examples of countries with multiparty systems are: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and Indonesia.
- **No-party system:** This system is characterized by the absence of political parties or the prohibition of party activities. The political actors may run as independents or as members of non-partisan groups or movements. The no-party system may aim to

promote national unity, social harmony, or personal merit, but it may also serve to conceal authoritarian rule, elite domination, or ethnic division. Examples of countries with no-party systems are: China, Cuba, Iran, and Uganda.

The data shows that the type of party system has a moderate impact on the consolidation of democracy, as measured by the indicators mentioned above. The countries with two-party systems tend to have higher scores of political rights and civil liberties, democracy, and electoral democracy than the countries with dominant-party systems or no-party systems. The countries with multiparty systems tend to have intermediate scores of these indicators. The countries with dominant-party systems or no-party systems tend to have lower scores of these indicators. The countries with two-party systems tend to have lower scores of democratic values than the countries with multiparty systems or no-party systems. The countries with dominant-party systems or no-party systems tend to have intermediate scores of these indicators. These results suggest that two-party systems are more conducive to the consolidation of democracy in terms of institutional quality, while multiparty systems or no-party systems are more conducive to the consolidation of democracy in terms of cultural values.

### **Conclusion**

This article has examined the role of political institutions in the consolidation of democracy, which is the process by which democracy becomes stable, legitimate, and enduring. It has reviewed the existing literature on the topic and compared the political institutions and the level of democratic consolidation of 20 countries that have experienced a transition to democracy since 1974. It has identified the main factors that contribute to democratic consolidation, such as economic development, civil society, rule of law, horizontal and vertical accountability, and international influences. It has also discussed the challenges and risks of democratic deconsolidation, which occurs when democratic norms and institutions are eroded or reversed.

The article has found that the type of political institutions has a significant impact on the consolidation of democracy, depending on their design, performance, and adaptation. The article has shown that proportional representation systems are more conducive to the consolidation of democracy in terms of institutional quality, while plurality or majority systems are more conducive to the consolidation of democracy in terms of cultural values. The article has also shown that mixed systems tend to balance the representation and participation of the majority and the minority, and the accountability and responsiveness of the government. The article has argued that the party system is another important factor that influences the consolidation of democracy, by affecting the aggregation and articulation of interests, the recruitment and socialization of leaders, the formulation and implementation of policies, and the integration and mobilization of citizens. The article has demonstrated that two-party systems are more conducive to the consolidation of democracy in terms of institutional quality, while multiparty systems or no-party systems are more conducive to the consolidation of democracy in terms of cultural values.

The article has concluded that political institutions play a crucial role in the consolidation of democracy, but they are not the only or the decisive factor. The article has suggested that the consolidation of democracy also depends on the interaction and complementarity of political institutions with other factors, such as economic, social, and international factors. The article has recommended that future research should explore the dynamics and mechanisms of these interactions and complementarities, and how they affect the prospects and pace of democratic consolidation. The article has also recommended that policymakers and practitioners should pay attention to the design, performance, and adaptation of political institutions, and how they can enhance or hinder the consolidation of democracy in different contexts and situations.

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