Advocates of parliamentary rule have been highly critical of presidentialism for dividing powers and providing the opportunity for gridlock between branches. Fixed executive terms can saddle publics with ineffectual leaders who are not easily removed. Yet the great theorists of presidential rule, beginning with the Federalists, saw very different qualities in the same institutions: a desirable combination of strong leadership with checks on executive discretion.

These diverse assessments arise because we have surprisingly little comparative work on how presidential democracies function. The introductory essays in this volume lay the theoretical groundwork for such comparative analysis. Drawing on detailed cases of economic policy making in Asia, Latin America, and Central Europe, this book shows the diversity of presidential systems and isolates the effects of presidentialism from other factors that influence public policy, such as party systems. In doing so, it casts doubt on the critique of presidential rule and underscores the continuing vitality of this particular form of democracy.

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PRESIDENTS, PARLIAMENTS, AND POLICY

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