

## ONE

# Stability and Reform of the Regime Structures of Established Democracies

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THIS STUDY USES the concept of *politics* to describe the struggles between the forces that try to preserve the regime structure and those that try to change it, as well as the struggles and cooperation inside each of these camps. The nature of this struggle, and its results, should be understood as a function not only of the amount of power that these forces use, but also of their notions about how the present regime structure functions, and their estimations about the impact of the suggested reforms to it. These notions and forecasts stem from the way these forces perceive their self-interests and group interests, and their perceptions of what the ideal regime structure would look like. Both perceptions, of interests and values, are linked to how power relations and value systems are interpreted at a given time.

The term “constitutional reform” is sometimes used in research literature to describe a change in the structure of a regime in democracies. The problem is that this term is employed to describe *all* constitutional amendments, including those with no bearing on the regime structure. Thus, the concept of reform in the regime structure is significant for this study, as it refers to the object being changed, not to the place where the reform might appear, that is, the constitutional document. *Reform in the regime structure* implies the adoption of new rules for the division of powers inside government institutions, between them, and between them and the citizens, both as a group and as individuals. The concept describes an orderly change distinct from revolutions or coups. Many times, established democracies have special procedures for reforming their regime structure, and, in any case, such a move will usually take the form of legislation.

Using the institutional characteristics in Lijphart's (1984) distinction between two subtypes of democracies—consensus and majoritarian—will clarify which government institutions that undergo a substantial change (including their establishment or abolition) could be interpreted as experiencing a change in the regime structure (Table 1.1). Within the branches of government, this typology relates to cases of substantial change of the electoral system by which the parliament is elected, the establishment or abolition of a bicameral parliament, or a redistribution of power between the two legislative chambers. Between government branches, this typology refers to substantial changes in the government system, such as replacing a parliamentary regime with a presidential one—which leads to a change in the pattern of horizontal power distribution—or replacing unitary arrangements with federalism—which entails a change in the pattern of vertical power distribution. The adoption of a written and rigid constitution, a bill of rights, or a referendum device means that power is transferred to the citizens, while their abolishment means that power is expropriated from them. The adoption of a written and rigid constitution or a bill of rights can also change the power relationship between government branches—for example, between the judiciary branch and the other branches when legislation becomes an object of judicial review.

Reform in the regime structure implies the adoption of a change with substantial and continued impact on the rules of power distribution between the political entities and government institutions listed in Table 1.1. It should be distinguished from other, less substantial changes that would not be

TABLE 1.1  
Basic Institutional Features of Regimes in Democracies\*

<i>The Institutional Feature</i>	<i>The Bodies Involved in Power Distribution</i>
Electoral system**	Parties in parliament
Government system	Legislative and executive branches
Constitution/Bill of Rights	The government and the citizens; the judicial branch and the other branches
Referendum	The government and the citizens
Cameral structure	One chamber or two
Unitarism/federalism	Central and regional governments

\* The six features were selected from the list of nine that Lijphart (1984) proposed. The three features not included are the ones that do not appear in constitutions or laws: the party system, social cleavages, and coalition structure.

\*\* In cases when the head of the executive branch is directly elected (presidential systems or the system adopted in Israel in 1992 and used between 1996 and 2001), an additional feature should be added to the electoral system.

defined as *reforms*. Replacing a PR (proportional representation) electoral system with a majoritarian system will be considered a reform in the regime structure, while smaller changes—such as a slight increase in the legal threshold or a change in the formula for allocating remaining seats—would not. Adopting the mechanism of constructive vote of no confidence also would not be considered as such, since it would leave the parliamentary system in place. A partial separation of powers, such as the establishment of a separate source of legitimacy for the PM through his or her direct election, would be considered a reform in the regime structure because it is a change of one of the two basic elements of parliamentarism—the selection of the Government\* by the parliament (Hazan, 1996).

### THE STATE OF RESEARCH

Prior to 1995, only a few studies attempted to construct a basis for a theory on the politics of reform in the regime structure of established democracies (Banting & Simeon, 1985; Longley, 1988; Longley & Olson, 1991a,b). As Norris (1995b, p. 4) claimed in her 1995 introduction to a special issue of *International Political Science Review* on the politics of electoral reform: “We lack a theoretical framework to understand how political systems reform basic constitutional principles.”

The following reasons explain why research of this phenomenon did not develop prior to 1995. First, while interest groups and political parties in many countries attempted to promote reforms in their regime structure, their failure to achieve their goal had put the phenomenon in the category of a “non-event” that the discipline does not tend to address.<sup>1</sup> There were several studies about the politics of the status quo, such as Bachrach and Baratz’s (1963) on “nondecision making.” Marxists and neo-Marxists often conducted such studies, but they were not interested in institutional differences in regime structures, which were seen from their perspective as a nonsubstantial nuance. Thus, the study of the reasons for not adopting reform was neglected (although there were a few exceptions, as we will see). Only in the 1990s, after such reforms were adopted, did it become apparent that the stability of regime structures of established democracies from the early 1950s deserves a developed theoretical treatment.

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\*In this study, Government (with a capital G) refers to the group of ministers and the PM who lead the executive branch. It is unwarranted to use the term cabinet in the Israeli case, as this label often refers to a smaller group of ministers who deal with specific issues and does not include all the ministers (e.g., the “security cabinet”). When referring to government (with a small g), this study means the combination of all government branches.

Second, prominent occurrences of political change, such as the “third wave” of democratization (Huntington, 1991), overshadow internal changes in established democracies.<sup>2</sup> Changes that occur in the developing world were analyzed by stressing the politics of regime change, including institutional features. Research literature on developments in Western democracies, however, almost ignored the possibility that the reform of regime structures of liberal democracies might be the answer to social, economic, and cultural changes that occurred in their societies. Even those approaches that did not forecast the extinction or decline of liberal democracy refer to the institutional structure as static and solid, with society being the place in which new patterns of action and organization are expected to arise (Kaase & Newton, 1995).

Third, until the 1980s, there were too few meeting points between the society-centered approach used for the research of political change, which gained prominence in the 1960s, and the (old) institutional approach, which was previously dominant (Banting & Simeon, 1985; Bogdanor, 1988). General discussions of regime structure reform in democracies took place within the framework of formal institutional analysis (Andrain & Apter, 1995), with no connection to the political and social context of power relations. The renewed interest in institutions, in the framework of the “new institutional approach” that has developed since the mid-1980s, was more conducive to the study of regime structure reform. Yet one of its main characteristics was that it focused mainly on institutions as independent, rather than dependent, variables (Peters, 1996). That is, it was more interested in the political consequences of institutions than in their origins.

Following the adoption of reforms at the beginning of the 1990s, we witness a growing interest in the theoretical aspects of the politics of electoral reform. Generalizations and theoretical propositions were made on the basis of cross-national comparisons (Norris, 1995b; Sakamoto, 1999; Shugart, 2001) and single-case studies (Bueno de Mesquita, 2000; Dunleavy & Margetts, 1995). In addition to these, numerous single-case studies appeared after 1995 (see, e.g., Norris, 1995a; Shugart & Wattenberg, 2001a). Other (mostly earlier) studies that are of interest—although they focus on a substantially different context—are the seminal comparative-historical study by Carstairs (1980) about the adoption of PR systems in Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century, and Boix’s (1999) rational choice interpretation of this phenomenon. Several studies also address the phenomenon of preservation, such as Nohlen’s (1984) analysis of the stability of electoral systems in Western democracies, and the more historical studies of the failed attempts at electoral reform in the UK (Bogdanor, 1981; Butler, 1963, 1984; Farrell, 2001) and Canada (Weaver 2001).

WHY DID THE REGIMES STRUCTURES OF  
ESTABLISHED DEMOCRACIES REMAIN UNCHANGED?

As already noted, stability was the rule in the regime structures of most of the established democracies since the early 1950s. Most reform initiatives—even when initiated by parties with a legislative majority—were blocked. The few exceptions when substantial reforms in the regime structure took place usually led to focused contextual treatments in research literature, not to attempts at developing theory. Except for the case of France, no electoral or government system reform was adopted until the 1990s.<sup>3</sup>

Several explanations representing different research approaches and different levels of analysis can be offered to explain this stability (Table 1.2). First, the institutional procedures for legislating such a reform give primacy to the institutional *status quo*. In any reform attempt, the institutional status quo is a default, while the reform alternative faces several procedural barriers; if it fails to pass even one of them, it returns to the starting point. In many countries, reform requires a constitutional amendment or an amendment to special laws. These may involve recruiting special majorities or securing the consent of additional majorities: second chambers, subnational legislatures (in federal systems), or the electorate (through a referendum).<sup>4</sup>

In Israel, where neither special majorities nor special procedures were required for most reforms in the regime structure, stability was the rule until the 1990s.<sup>5</sup> The usual legislative process benefited the status quo, since reform required the mobilization of majorities in the Knesset plenum in at least two (in the case of Government bills) or three (in the case of private

TABLE 1.2  
Barriers to Reform in Democracies

<i>The Barrier</i>	<i>Approach</i>
Procedural superiority of the institutional status quo	“Old” institutional approach
Political tradition	Political culture
Systemic rationale	New institutional approach/rational choice (system level)
Actors’ vested interests	Rational choice (group/individual level)
A majority for change; disagreement over content	Rational choice (game theory)
Coalition politics	Rational choice (game theory)

member bills) readings that take place at different points in time. The number of voting rounds is even greater than the number of readings; the second reading might require dozens of them—on amendment proposals and on the separate articles of the law. A majority must also be mobilized in the committee that discusses the bill. Since the composition of the committee does not generally mirror the exact partisan composition of the Knesset plenum, due to the difference in size, the mobilization of a majority could become even more difficult. Thus, even in this case, reform is not about a single successful recruitment of a majority, but rather about recruiting, maintaining, and rebuilding majorities at different times and within different forums. Thus, the guardians of the institutional status quo have at their disposal many opportunities to block reform. Reformers, on the other hand, cannot allow themselves to be defeated in any one of these battles.

Procedural maneuvers are additional tools that can be used by the guardians of the status quo. Postponement of legislation can be an effective strategy for blocking reform. It can help reform opponents to delay a decision until the timing is better, for example, when public pressure for reform decreases. The effect of such a delay can resemble that of a vote against the reform bill when it leads to the burial of the bill for a period long enough to force it to restart the entire legislation process.<sup>6</sup> An additional possible strategy is neutralizing a bill. This can be done by entrenching amendments that remove the central reformist component from the bill. For example, a bill that was supposed to substantially change the electoral system may end up being replaced with only a slight change of the legal threshold. It is also possible to include a component that will break the supporting majority. For example, majority support for reform based on an agreement about the postponement of its implementation might be undermined by an amendment that proposes its immediate implementation. Such an amendment might be supported at earlier stage by both impatient reformists and shrewed reform opponents, only to lead to the rejection of reform at a later legislative stage by reform opponents and the (pro-reformist) opponents of its immediate implementation.

In an empirical study of fifty U.S. state constitutions and thirty-two national constitutions, Lutz (1994) demonstrated that there is a significant correlation between the levels of difficulty set by the constitutional amendment formula and the frequency of the adoption of constitutional amendments. However, he argues that the procedural barrier does not supply the whole explanation and that other factors should be used to explain differences in a constitution's stability. There are also prominent cases that demonstrate the limitations of the procedural perspective. It might be expected that amending constitutional rules in the UK and New Zealand (until the 1990s), who have no written constitution, would be a relatively easy task. Yet these countries experienced fewer changes in comparison to countries with written

and rigid constitutions and a more demanding amendment formula (Duchacek, 1973). A strong basis also exists for the claim that the stability of the U.S. Constitution stems more from traditional reservations about making amendments than from procedural barriers (Schechter, 1985).

Second, institutional arrangements have their roots in the cultural, social, and political traditions of each country. As Lijphart (1994, 1998) explains, the cultural approach is well suited to explain the tendency of the Anglo-American democracies toward majoritarian features and the Continental democracies toward consensual ones.

Most electoral systems in established democracies, as well as other conventions for dividing power between and within government institutions, were set up in times of fundamental political and social change, such as the adoption of universal suffrage (Carstairs, 1980; Nohlen, 1984). In a situation of relative stability, which characterizes established democracies, it would be difficult to mobilize support for abandoning an institutional principle linked to local traditions and seen as one that has proven itself. For example, the Israeli regime structure is viewed as reflecting a successfully inclusive political culture—one that was constructive in laying the foundations for the formation of the state of Israel—with origins that can be found in the pre-independence era, in the Zionist and Yishuv institutions (Eisenstadt, 1985; Galnoor, 1982; Horowitz & Lissak, 1978; Sager, 1985).

Third, Lijphart (1984) also claims that the institutional order in established democracies usually fits the conditions of a given society and can thus be seen a rational arrangement at the system level. In a multiclefted society, sharing power (a consensus regime) is rational for those who wish to live in a common democratic framework; a homogenous society can allow itself a majoritarian regime because it can avoid cutting the pie into many pieces. Thus, from a functional-systemic perspective, it is rational to keep the existing order.

Fourth, the dominant political forces, who hold the key to change, have vested interests in preserving the conventions that enabled them to be the guardians of this key in the first place. These forces might have been the designers of the institutional conventions for the division of power or perhaps had begun as opponents but adapted themselves (Nohlen, 1984; Taagepera & Shugart, 1989). They are expected to prefer a mini-max strategy, defending what they have already achieved and avoiding risks—the uncertain political consequences of reform. It is not only parties that have vested interests in maintaining the institutional status quo, but also incumbents, as individuals, and strong interest groups (Dunleavy & Margetts, 1995). Thus, institutional order is described as reflecting the equilibrium between the interests of various political actors. This equilibrium might express an optimal division of power between those who hold the key to reform or, in certain contexts, a suboptimal one.

Following this logic, even a change in the social or the (noninstitutional) political environment would not usually lead to the adoption of reform in the regime structure. There would be a systemic preference for adaptation rather than reform when facing new problems or the entrance of new actors into the game (Kaiser, 1997).<sup>7</sup> This systemic preference reflects the notion that the cost of adaptation is lower than the cost of reform, and that its consequences are more certain.

Evidence points to the limits of this approach. For example, parties that faced similar situations chose to promote different electoral systems. Using the rational choice approach, Bawn (1993) explains the adoption of PR (1949) and double ballot systems (1953) in West Germany as a result of the balance of interests of the various parties that were involved in the design of the electoral system. The largest party, the Christian Democratic Party, supported a majoritarian system that was supposed to supply it with a manufactured majority, while all other parties preferred PR. Prominent among the latter was the Social Democratic Party, the second largest at that time. It understood that under a majoritarian system it would gain less overrepresentation than its Christian Democratic counterpart and therefore its chances to take part in Government would be harmed. This explanation is parsimonious, elegant, and does seem to support the requirements of accessibility to information on voters' preferences (and therefore on the forecasted affect of each electoral system on parties' representation), the knowledge of the parties about other parties' preferences, and the rules that will decide this issue. We can argue that the Israeli scene in the 1950s seemed to follow the same logic, when only the large party tried to promote the majoritarian alternative while the smaller parties preferred to reject it. However, things are not that simple. The British Labor Party, facing a similar situation in the post-First World War era—in terms of its power vis-à-vis the Conservative Party—tended to prefer preserving the majoritarian system. In this case, what is the rational choice? Is it getting a proportional share and thus higher chances of sharing posts in Government, or the risk of underrepresentation together with the possibility of single-party Government? It seems that cultural factors can explain these different rationales: the Anglo-American tendency toward majoritarianism versus the Continental consensual tendencies.

Ideological leanings inside parties also seem to dictate stands toward reform. For example, in the first decades of the twentieth century, the time that electoral reform was on the agenda in Europe, this issue was contested inside the social democratic parties. The “socialists” preferred the majoritarian system, which by manufacturing majorities would enable single-party rule and the implementation of the socialist program, while the “democrats” preferred the principal of PR, even at the price of power-sharing and compromised policy (Carstairs, 1980).



Fifth, mobilizing majorities to support reform, and coordinating their activities, requires the creation of an agreement regarding its substance. In a situation when a majority supports change, but there is no agreement on substance, the status quo—supported by a minority—will have the upper hand. This can happen for various reasons. Lack of agreement on substance could make the institutional status quo a “Condorcet Winner”—that is, an option preferred by a majority in all pair-wise matches. This will happen when the alternatives are rejected, one by one, by the temporary coalitions of status quo loyalists (by themselves only a minority) and those supporting a different version of reform. Lack of agreement can also lead to the postponement and burial of reform bills. In addition, there is the possibility of “voting paradox.” This happens when a majority tends to prefer various reform initiatives to the status quo, but each camp refrains from supporting the other camps’ versions (although preferable to the status quo) because it hopes that the others will give up and support its specific version of reform. Thus, a situation illustrated by the “chicken” game could lead to the failure of a reform attempt, when postponements would result in the closing of the window of opportunity for reform.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, coalition politics make reform difficult, in that any crucial member of the coalition holds veto power against reform. In such situations, even a small minority can block a reform initiative that has the support of the majority in the legislature. Such a minority may cause the rejection of reform by offering support for other policies of the coalition government in exchange for throwing reform off the governmental agenda. It can also threaten to help oust the Government if the reform initiative is promoted. This veto power is not limited to parties in minimal winning coalitions. As H. Diskin and A. Diskin (1995) explain, a minority veto can be effective in super-size coalitions. A small party cannot oust such a coalition, but can nevertheless influence the behavior of its larger partners. It can offer its support for a narrow coalition led by the larger party who would reject reform or threaten to refrain from supporting it in the future. Such a minority is also not necessarily a parliamentary party group, and might be composed of only a single party from an alliance of parties or even an intraparty faction.

This list of barriers will be used in this study to explain both failures and successes in promoting reform initiatives. The study of the failed attempts at reform will give an opportunity to estimate the strength of each barrier, and successful attempts will allow us to see how the reformers overcame all of them.

#### NEVERTHELESS, A REFORM IN THE REGIME STRUCTURE

Adopting a reform in the regime structure is not part of normal, everyday politics. A reform initiative has to pass all of the previously-mentioned obstacles

to be adopted. Nevertheless, in the 1990s, New Zealand, Italy, Japan, and Israel adopted such reforms. These cases proved the viable possibility of substantial reform of the rules for institutional division of power in established democracies.

New Zealand used to serve as an almost pure example of the majoritarian Westminster model—even purer than the UK, where the model originated (Lijphart, 1984, 1987). In 1993, the single member districts system (SMD)—the dominant characteristic of the Westminster model—that served New Zealand from the nineteenth century, was replaced with a mixed member proportional (MMP) system. This new system, used in 1996 for the first time, closely resembles the German one. The vote at the district level determines only the individuals who will represent the parties, while the share of seats in parliament of each party list is determined in proportion to its share of the national (list) vote, as long as it passes the 5 percent legal threshold. Slightly more than half of the members of parliament (MPs) are elected in single member districts (sixty-five), while the rest (fifty-five) are elected from national party lists (Denemark, 2001).

Since the end of the Second World War to the 1990s, Italy used a list PR system in multimember districts, which included a preference vote for the candidates on the list. In 1993, this system was replaced by a mixed semi-majoritarian system, which was first implemented in the 1994 elections. According to the new system, three-quarters of the representatives in both houses of parliament are elected in SMDs, while the remaining quarter are elected from lists in multimember districts, partly compensating for the biases of the majoritarian tier (Katz, 2001).

Israel has kept its closed-list PR system—with the entire nation serving as one district—for the Knesset elections, but in 1992 added the direct election of the PM. This reform meant a change in the government system, with parliamentarism being replaced by a hybrid government system. This system, first implemented in 1996, preserved a parliamentary element—as the Knesset could oust the Government in a vote of no confidence—and added a presidential element of directly electing the head of the executive branch. In addition, this reform can be seen as an electoral reform, where the closed-list PR election of the Knesset is mixed (and interacts) with the personal and majoritarian election of the PM. From this perspective, Israel adopted a unique version of an MMP system (Shugart, 2001).

In 1994, Japan replaced its single non-transferable vote system with a mixed semimajoritarian system, first implemented in 1996. Under the old system, MPs were elected in multimember districts (usually three to five representatives per district), where each voter had one vote for electing one candidate. Under the new system, the voter has two votes, one for electing a representative in one of the three hundred SMDs and one for the party lists in one of the eleven multimember districts. Two hundred MPs are elected

through the multimember districts, with no compensation for the representation biases in the SMDs (Shiratori, 1995).

Each of these electoral reforms was substantial enough to be seen as a reform in the regime structure. New Zealand made a complete and clear move from a majoritarian system to a PR system. Italy moved more than halfway between the PR pole and the majoritarian pole. Israel has passed half of the way in the government system dimension. The system that was adopted was substantially different from the old system, in which the PM was decided on (sometimes formally but sometimes effectively) by post-election negotiations. From the perspective of the electoral system, the mixing of majoritarian and PR systems had crucial ramifications (Diskin, 1999; Hazan & Rahat, 2000). The change in the level of proportionality in the Japanese case does not seem to be substantive; however, reform was crucial in the intraparty dimension (Shugart, 2001). In the former system, candidates from the same party had to compete against each other in the general elections; in the new system they do not. This is a substantial change in a country in which one dominant party has held a majority of seats for decades, and most coalition politics occurred between its competing personal factions.

#### APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF REFORM OF THE REGIME STRUCTURE

This section presents three possible paths for studying the politics of reform in the regime structure of established democracies: rational choice, institutional approaches, and an historical-comparative approach.

##### THE RATIONAL CHOICE APPROACH

The rational choice approach offers two perspectives on stability and change of the regime structure. The first regards stability in the regime structure as a reflection of equilibrium in the interests of the main actors in the political system. From this perspective, only a strong external shock can lead to reform. This shock should be strong enough not only to make the anticipated benefit from reform higher than the benefit from the existing situation, but also higher than the added cost of change itself—adaptation and uncertainty (Kaiser, 1997).

Boix's (1999) rational choice analysis of electoral reform in Europe during the first decades of the twentieth century demonstrates the advantages and limitations of this perspective. He explains the adoption or rejection of reform by estimating the level of threat to the old ruling parties by the new emerging parties. This analysis, however, is about reforms that took place in the context of developments completely different from those of the 1990s: a massive growth of franchise, substantial changes in parties' organizational patterns, and a massive realignment of voters.<sup>9</sup>

The claim that a large window of opportunity for reform is opened at times of great political crisis—a sudden change in contextual factors or a dramatic deterioration in satisfaction with policy—does not supply a clear answer as to the nature of the crisis that will lead to reform (Kaiser, 1997). That is, we can easily argue that most established democracies suffered such a crisis since the 1980s, yet most did not adopt reform; or we can suggest that no crisis occurred because those democracies continued to function and did not face a real possibility of collapse.

The second perspective claims that institutional equilibrium does not exist, and that a continued struggle over the regime structure takes place between actors who are trying to maximize their power. Dunleavy and Margetts (1995) suggest this approach as a critique on the orthodoxy of mainstream political scientists—who hold that it is rational to stick to the existing order and refrain from the costs of reform. They argue that the political background in Japan, New Zealand, and even Italy, prior to the 1990s reforms, was far from being a crisis of the system. According to this approach, reform takes place when the actors with the ability to reform find that it is in their interest to do so—a rare but possible scenario.

Replacing equilibrium with the concept of continuous dynamism negates the actual experience, which points clearly toward a tendency to preserve the system rather than reform it. Even if there is a continuous struggle, the consequence is rarely the adoption of reform. In addition, even in the case of reform, there is a tendency to integrate the old with the new, as pronounced by the adoption of mixed systems. Thus, the notion of continued dynamism does not improve our understanding of the phenomenon. The notion of equilibrium, on the other hand, is constructive because it focuses attention on the fact that irregularities are expected in the patterns of the rarely successful attempt at reform. Thus, the notion of equilibrium, as suggested by the first perspective, should be preferred. Yet it must be taken into account that reform may be successfully promoted following developments within the system, not necessarily as a result of “external shocks.”

Several problems arise when the rational choice approach is used exclusively to analyze the politics of regime structure reform in established democracies.<sup>10</sup> First, placing an exclusive emphasis on the interests of the partisan actors might lead us to disregard a crucial part of the picture—the origins of the changes in the benefits and costs of the action that caused the movement from equilibrium to nonequilibrium. Easily moving from explaining stability on the basis of partisan “vested interests” to explaining reform on the basis of a change in these partisan interests neglects the importance of the influences that caused the changes in the actors’ cost/benefit analysis in the first place. It also neglects the importance of the influence of nonpartisan actors (with no immediate vested interests)—whose pressures for reform are also added to the calculations of the partisan actors—in the analysis of the politics of reform.

Second, interests in their strict and narrow sense are not the only factors that play a role in this case, even when what is at stake are the rules for distributing institutional powers. As Lamare and Vowels (1996) show, even if rational variables can explain most of the variance in citizens' voting behavior in New Zealand's 1993 referendum on electoral reform, the difference between rejection and adoption was determined by other factors. Finding that there is a minority that supports reform is not surprising, so the weight of these variables that made the difference is more than their relatively small statistically explanatory power.

For actors with vested interests—political parties and members of parliament—nonrational factors such as ideology play a role in determining stands toward reform (Bowler, Donovan, & Karp, 2006). In his analysis of the positions in Britain on constitutional reform, Norton (1982) suggests six different approaches to the issue, each based on a coherent set of political values. Some of them are parallel to partisan stands, some reflect different streams within parties. These different ideological approaches can have an impact on partisan stands and behaviors during the opening stages of the reform promotion process, when the adoption of reform seems far enough away to allow actors to treat it as a theoretical issue on the basis of their own ideology. Later on, actors who were accustomed to the rapid demise of reform initiatives might suddenly find themselves bound to their initial stands and behaviors. This would require them to weigh the price of being inconsistent *vis-à-vis* the cost that adopting reform might put on their future power under the new rules set by the reform. Parties that raise the flag of reform, and are distinguished by it from other parties in a multiparty system, may support reform even when it might endanger their existence since their uniqueness and credibility are dependent on this. The strength of ideology can also have an impact on parties' preferences. A party that fears that a new institutional order might harm issues central to its ideology will resist reform more than a party that views ideology as less important than popular public opinion.

It is possible to widen the concept of interest in such a way that it will include self-satisfaction and value-oriented benefits, and not only maximization of power as a motive for supporting reform; in this way, however, we lose elegance and parsimony—the main promised benefits of the rational choice approach—and its use becomes quite awkward.

Third, rational choice scholars who are faithful to the promise of a parsimonious explanation present actors' preferences as solid, for the most part, at the time of the reform promotion process (Bueno de Mesquita, 2000; Doron & Kay, 1995). However, reform is a multistage process during which actors change their interests, perceptions, and behaviors. The behavior of 120 Israeli MKs in three crucial votes is an illuminating example: 71 of them voted against reform and 82 supported it in at least one of the three readings (see chapter seven).

Fourth, in many cases, the promised simplicity of the rational choice approach does not come to pass because the politics of reform reflects a plethora of interests. Reformers' exploitation, and even creation, of these interests enables them to break the existing equilibrium. These interests have different values for different time frames, and sometimes also for different units (the individual politician, his faction, her party, etc.). The way that MPs vote on reform is affected by both short-term and long-term considerations. The short-term interest may be the immediate (electoral) benefits and costs for them and their parties if they support or oppose reform. The long-term interest may be the way that the change in the rules of power division will affect their personal power and their party power.

Oversimplification is especially prominent when the analysis treats the party, and sometimes even "party camps," as the exclusive analytical unit and as a unitary rational actor.<sup>11</sup> Dunleavy and Margetts (1995), for example, suggest a model to explain the British parties' stands on electoral reform. The model is built on two dimensions that relate to the parties' interests concerning governability (served by an SMD system) and representation (served by a PR system). Their model has no equilibrium, but instead changes over two continua. In 1995, the Conservatives, who were the ruling party for a long period, tended to prefer governability (and SMD) to representation (and PR). The Liberal Democrats, as the main victims of the SMD system, tended to prefer representation (and PR); their potential status as a pivotal party only enhanced this preference. Labor, after a long time in the opposition, tended more and more to support PR, but was not ready to give up the governability that stems from the SMD tendency to create a governing majority. According to the model, there is a certain space in which a collision of interests can lead to electoral reform. Although this model is parsimonious, it is oversimplified. It is hard to see how can it serve as more than a post facto rationalization of the adoption of electoral reform in Britain. The model does not integrate enough interests even in the British case, which is a relatively simple one because the number of relevant actors involved is small. Dunleavy and Margetts (1995) themselves admit that other "vested" interests in the political system that block reform are not included in the model, such as the personal interests of the incumbent MPs in the preservation of their constituencies, intraparty biases, and the influence of interest groups. Furthermore, the model does not fit analyses of other case studies, even that of New Zealand—in which the reform passed even though most politicians rejected it—with its very similar regime and party system.

Each MP has partisan interests: institutional (as an MP); personal (reelection); factional (the faction stance inside the party); and systemic (the effect of reform on the stability and functioning of the political system). Lehoucq (1995) suggested a way to integrate such different interests—maximizing influence in parliament, defending a political career, and preserving the stability of

the system—in a rational choice analysis. In his case, the reform of electoral laws in Costa Rica in 1948, the reform results seemed certain. Thus, the simplicity of the analysis according to the different strategic considerations of different actors appeared useful. However, when a civil war or its prevention is not one of the forecasted reasonable results of the actors' behavior (as it was in the Costa Rican case), the calculation of various interests becomes more complex. That is, when uncertainty about the long-term effects of reform is high, as in the electoral reforms in the 1990s, no such simple solution is available.

Fifth, it is dubious to assume that political actors can calculate the costs and benefits of reform. In their analysis of electoral reform proposals on the Israeli agenda, H. Diskin and A. Diskin (1988) show that a great gap exists between the intentions and interests of reform initiators and the expected political consequences of their proposals. Many times we tackle contradicting perceptions of interests of actors from whom we would expect to have shared interests. These stem from different estimations of the anticipated results of reform (Longley & Olson, 1991b). Thus, our analysis cannot presuppose that actors' preferences are in accord with their interests, but rather should test it. Moreover, it may be that creating a gap between interests and their perception explains how an institutional equilibrium was broken. That is, studying the manipulation of perceptions of interests should be an integral part of the study of the politics of reform, a key to explaining its occurrence.

The rational choice approach is much more useful for explaining stability in regime structure than change. Understanding the politics of reform requires the analysis of the interests of the major actors, rather than their presuppositions; these interests should be analyzed in their historical and immediate context. This requires the study of variables that are exogenous as far as a basic rational choice approach is concerned. The perceptions of interest should be understood in the context of long-term developments that took place before the process begun as well as events that occur throughout the process. In this study, information is not a given, but a part of the struggle for reform. Actors' preferences can be the result of getting biased information on the anticipated consequences of reform from those who are acting in the role of professional experts; of having to calculate popular pressures for reform against calculations concerning its anticipated consequences; and of being attracted to systems that might look (as mixed electoral and government systems might look) like the best of both worlds.

This study would not a priori simplify the terms for analysis. It would treat it as a process rather than a single game. It would see information, perceptions, and motives as part of the research process, rather than presuppositions. In this framework, rational choice will serve as a research tool (rather than as a paradigm): actors would be expected to act rationally in a certain context (under a plethora of pressures and with biased information), making a seemingly rational decision at a distinct point in time.

## INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES

While established democracies look quite stable, the discipline of political science has many theories of crisis, catastrophe, change, and transformation (Kaase & Newton, 1995). These theories did not take into consideration (or chose not to relate to) the possibility that a reform of the regime structure would be the response to the developing social problems they identified in democracies. However, even if these projections were not fulfilled, we identified several developments that could make the ground fertile for the promotion of reform. Among these are the increase in the importance of public opinion and public behavior; the identification of democratic pathologies such as alienation and dissatisfaction; and the growth in certain types of political participation, which led to a growth in demands and resulted in overburdened polities. These overburdened polities suffer from problems of governability and a decline in legitimacy.

Various institutional studies, however, did address the relationship between reform or preservation of the institutional structures and social, cultural, and international factors. In his seminal work on types of regimes in democracies, Lijphart (1984) argues that we should expect institutions to fit the societies in which they are located. Using his models, he justified reform pressures in both New Zealand (Lijphart, 1987) and Israel (Lijphart, 1993). In New Zealand, which was located in the majoritarian pole, the move was toward a more consensus-based regime; in Israel, located in the consensus pole, the move was toward a (seemingly) more majoritarian regime. In line with Lijphart's theory, Jackson (1994) claims that the evolutionary transformation of New Zealand's society from a homogenous to a multicultural one explains the pressure to reform the majoritarian model. In Israel, a change in power distribution among political and social forces preceded the reform in the regime structure (Medding, 1999; Sheffer, 1999a,b). Reform can be seen as an attempt either to adapt to these changes or counter their influence.

One of the characteristics of democracies is the ability to respond and adapt to changes in their environment. A main mechanism is periodic elections. It is expected that social and cultural changes would be reflected in changes in citizens' preferences, which would result in a change in the policies of elected governments. Shugart (2001) argues that electoral systems can be distinguished by their level of sensitivity to the preferences of the citizens. He offers a classification of electoral systems according to their distance from an optimal midpoint of "electoral efficiency." This point stands in the middle of two continua, which represent two separate dimensions: the interparty dimension, with its poles of hyperrepresentative systems and pluralitarian systems, and the intraparty dimension, with its poles of hyperpersonalistic systems and hypercentralized systems. The midpoint represents optimal efficiency, which means the best possible translation of the preferences of a



majority of voters into policy. This analysis leads him to claim that regimes with “extreme” electoral systems—that is, those in which the electoral systems are located close to the poles of one or two dimensions and are thus less electorally efficient—are expected to be more prone to reform pressures.

Longley and Olson (1991b) explain the institutional-cultural logic of the abolishment of second chambers in three established democracies. What was abolished, after all, was a predemocratic remnant in countries whose relatively small size and homogenous social structure did not justify the existence of a second chamber (Lijphart, 1984).

Keeler (1993) demonstrates that there is a correlation between the occurrence and success of social and economic reforms and two factors: the magnitude of crisis that the government faced and the size of mandate given to it by the citizens. These two define the size of the “window of opportunity” in which government can act. Walking this path is impossible for the analysis of the politics of regime structure reform. First, the vested interest of a government that earns a “large mandate” (measured as the size of governmental majority) in the institutional status quo is expected to increase, rather than decrease. Second, as already noted, the notion of “crisis” is too vague and its applicability to the 1990s cases of reform is especially questionable.

In his analysis of two hundred years of constitutional history, Bogdanor (1988) argues that constitutional bursts happened in stormy political times, all of which signaled the end of a historical era. From this point of view, dramatic developments at the end of the 1980s—the collapse of the Soviet bloc, democratization, and globalization—might be seen to signal that this was a stormy era in which constitutional bursts are to be expected. On the other hand, these developments were interpreted as expressions of the victory of democracy and the free market, rather than of a certain institutional model of democracy. Still, some claim that these developments indirectly influenced regime structure reform. It is claimed, for example, that the end of the cold war influenced the timing of the Italian political crisis and its magnitude, and that it helped to promote electoral reform as well as other reforms (Sidoti, 1993). According to this view, what legitimized the corrupted government and its clientelistic practices was the existence of the communist threat, which was tangible in Italy with its strong Communist Party. When the cold war threat vanished, the necessary evil of *partitocrazia* was no longer justified. Putting this interpretation into a wider context, it can be argued that only when the “communist threat” disappeared, and when the authoritarian alternative lost its appeal, did democracies start to look inward. That is, democracies turned to fix what was neglected for years under the pressures (or *alibi*) of the “Red” threat. While this hypothesis is quite appealing, we have too few diverse cases to validate it.

The studies mentioned earlier do not pretend to offer exclusive or deterministic explanations for reform, but instead argue for its probability.

The probability of the promotion and adoption of reform is expected to be higher in certain regime structures or under certain domestic or international circumstances than in others. The main fault of the institutional approaches is that of overemphasizing background factors in the analysis. First, there is a tendency when analyzing reform to look at indicators that signify political, social, and economic change and decline, while ignoring those that imply stability, continuity, and improvement in the functioning of the system. Andeweg's (1997) analysis of the pressures for reform in the Netherlands is an example. Analyzing indicators of the levels of trust in government, he demonstrates that describing the situation as a "legitimacy crisis"—what justified the establishment of committees for studying the possibility of reform of the regime structure—was an exaggeration. It seems that such a sober outlook also applies to the 1990s case studies (Dunleavy & Margetts, 1995).

Second, even when the relationship between background factors and reform is not presented as deterministic, the centrality of the former as an explanation may still be exaggerated. While long-term developments and events can be constructive for the promotion of reform, scholars tend to ignore the fact that the existence of similar conditions in the past—for example, "crises" of the same and even higher magnitudes—did not lead to reform.

Weaver's (2001) analysis of the Canadian case, in which electoral reform did not penetrate into the decision-makers' agenda, serves as an important evidence for the limits of the explanatory power of background factors and events. The Canadian procedure for electoral reform is simple—especially in comparison to other constitutional elements. There is dissatisfaction with the institutional status quo, along with recognition that regional cleavages are magnified due to the biases of the majoritarian electoral system. In addition, five rounds of discussion on constitutional reform, which dealt with various structural issues, took place in the 1980s and 1990s, so decision-makers had many opportunities to address the issue of electoral reform. But the issue of electoral reform was marginal in all these rounds, and was absent from all proposals. Thus, long-term developments and events are not sufficient, not only for the analysis of the adoption of reform, but even for the analysis of its penetration into the agenda.

In short, while institutionalists (used in the wide sense here) tend to refrain from suggesting deterministic explanations, the weight they attribute to background factors should be considered carefully. Long-term developments and prominent events must be considered as part of the analysis, however, because they supply reformers with the opportunity to rest their case and collect "evidence" on the faults of the existing system. Certain long-term developments may also be necessary (but not sufficient) conditions for a successful reform move.

## HISTORICAL-COMPARATIVE APPROACH

Most single-case studies use an approach that can be called “historical comparative.” They do not just present chronological descriptions, but combine elements such as long-term developments and events with elements that characterize the rational choice approach, such as interests and actions of political actors.<sup>12</sup> This blend also includes standard concepts and taxonomies of comparative politics. The historical-comparative approach is characterized by seeing the politics of reform as a process that, on the one hand, moves along a path that develops its own logic as a result of human action and inaction and the interactions between political actors, and, on the other hand, is bound by procedural requirements and constitutional conventions. Regarding regime structure reform as a *process* implies a distinction between phases, in which actors’ calculations and behaviors are substantially different.

Such an approach can also be found in the cross-national comparative analysis of Banting and Simeon (1985) and that of Longley and Olson (1991b). In their introductions and summaries to collections of single-case studies on reforms of regime structures in established democracies, they suggest some generalizations on the basis of a historical-comparative approach. Longley (1988) also suggests a framework for analyzing the politics of reform in Britain and the United States that includes six components: events, individuals, organizations, mass media, issues, and perceptions of self-interests.

Reed (1998) suggests abandoning the “Newtonian” approach in political science, inspired from physics, which sees the goal of political analysis as discovering the conditions in which a phenomenon will occur again and again. He suggests replacing it with inspiration from chemistry, viewing the politics of reform as the reactions of different components with each other. In essence, he appears to suggest adopting a path-dependent approach.

Kingdon (1995) offers a similar approach, but from the point of view of decision-making theories. On the one hand, he claims that rational decision-making does not take place most of the time and is therefore not the right tool for analyzing most policy decisions (and for our concern, reform adoption is a policy decision). On the other hand, the incremental approach cannot be sufficient to explain sudden changes in the agenda—and, translated to our own concern, to understand not an evolution of institutions but rather the adoption of a substantial change in the rules of power distribution. He thus suggests adopting the “garbage can” model, according to which the “policy primeval soup” (a metaphor for the theories that explain the creation of life on earth) contains a blend of problems, solutions, participants, and their resources. From this perspective, the focal point for research is the meeting between three independent streams: policy (the solution), problems, and

politicians. Although Kingdon concentrated his research on the penetration of issues into the agenda, his approach is very useful for the study of the politics of reform and served as an inspiration in the design of the analytical framework presented later on.

The equilibrium metaphor suggested by the rational choice approach and the “organic” conceptions of the fitness of political institutions to society and culture are very useful in explaining stability in regime structure. Yet they are not very promising for explaining reform of the regime structure in established democracies. The politics of reform does not fit a standard rational choice setting because it cannot be reduced to a single event (of reform adoption) or to a game between stable coalitions of actors with stable perceptions of interests and behavioral patterns (“supporters” and “opponents”). The politics of reform of the regime structure are also not about the appearance of a problem and the adoption of its solution, as may be interpreted from an exclusive use of institutional approaches. It should also be remembered that the product of the process is not one of carefully planned constitutional engineering, but rather of various political compromises (Norris, 1995b). Therefore, this study chose to use the more flexible and dynamic historical-comparative approach.

Adopting the historical-comparative approach has its costs. Due to the lack of a restricted paradigm that is based on a few universal presuppositions, research may not lead to the creation of elegant and parsimonious theoretical generalizations. A flexible framework might better suit the purpose of this study because research on the politics of reform is in its beginnings. It would be preferable to use a complete series of available research tools and learn which of those are most useful for analyzing the phenomenon. Moreover, different approaches may better fit the analysis of different parts of the phenomenon.

Almond (1973), presenting a framework for analysis of political change, recommends the “historical remedy” to transfer historical episodes into analytical ones. He suggests different approaches for analyzing different components and phases of the process, incorporating theories of stability and change, determinism and choice. Lijphart (1998, p. 107) suggests a similar approach, claiming that different approaches should be judged according to their explanatory power, and “that it is unwise and self-defeating to focus on one [approach] to the complete exclusion of the others.”

The framework for analysis presented in the next section adopts the historical-comparative approach. It allows the testing of several theories and thus serves the aim of this study, the development of theoretical and methodological recommendations for researching the politics of reform in the framework of different paradigms. It tests the explanatory power of each approach, and enables a determination of which is better to analyze the whole phenomenon and which can serve in understanding defined parts of it.

## FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

As described in Table 1.3, the framework for analysis contains five elements: long-term developments, events that occur at the time reform is promoted, the political actors, the stages in the reform process, and the characteristics of the reform initiative. The contribution of each component to our understanding of the phenomenon and its different parts will be tested for several failures to promote electoral reform in Israel and the successful attempt to promote government system reform; it will also be used for a cross-national comparison.

## LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENTS

The five long-term developments listed in this subsection are expected to make the ground more fertile for the adoption of reform. They are also expected to interact with the other components of the framework: to supply the basis for the interpretation of the origins of events; to influence actors' perceptions and interests; and to influence the interpretation of the reform proposal and its marketing techniques.

The common characteristic of these long-term developments is that each one can signify changes in the power relationship inside the political system or changes in the power of the system as a whole—as it is or as it is perceived. In other words, these developments signify changes in the power equilibrium, which means that the price of change is reduced, at least according to the real-time perceptions of the political actors.

First, changes in voters' behavior can result in substantial change in the party system. Such change in power distribution among parties and party camps may create pressures for a reform in the regime structure, aimed at creating different regulations for power distribution. For example, it was claimed that the transformation of the Israeli party system from a dominant party system to a bipolar system had increased the bargaining power of small, pivotal parties and created pressures for putting the large parties back in control (Brichta, 1998; Doron & Kay, 1995). However, in other cases, party system change did not anticipate the reform process, but reform was instead aimed at changing the party system through weakening what was perceived as parties' duopolies (New Zealand) or monopolies (Italy, Japan).

The second characteristic is an overly burdened and malfunctioning polity. The inability of the political system to deal with problems and challenges—derived from the weakening of its steering capacity or the nature of the challenges it faces—may create pressures for reform of the regime structure. This inability can result from such developments as party system change, combined with growing demands from government. In the 1980s, many political scientists and politicians claimed that this diagnosis described the state of established democracies. Pressures for decreasing the role of the

TABLE 1.3  
A Framework for the Analysis of the Politics of Reform

<i>Long-term Developments</i>	<i>Events</i>	<i>Political Actors</i>	<i>Stages in the Reform Process</i>	<i>Characteristics of the Reform Initiative</i>
Changes in voters' behavior	Elections	The parliament	Initiative and recognition	A multifaceted proposal or a simple proposal?
Overly burdened and malfunctioning polity	Coalition building	The Government	Initial approval	
	Coalition breakdown	Head of state	Struggle for survival	
	Other events	The judiciary	Reform adoption	
Changes in citizens' perceptions of the polity		Political parties		
Developments in the functioning of government institutions		Interest/pressure groups		
		Experts		
		Mass media		
Accumulated experience		The public/ public opinion		