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Comparative Analysis of Governance Models in Emerging Democracies

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
History Revised format: Oct, 2022 Available Online: Dec, 2022 Keywords emerging democracies, governance models, parliamentary government, presidential government, federalism, political accountability	Governance models significantly influence democratic consolidation, political stability, public-sector performance, citizen participation, and institutional accountability in emerging democracies. However, no single institutional model produces identical results across countries because governance outcomes are shaped by political history, social diversity, party-system development, constitutional design, administrative capacity, and the distribution of economic resources. This article comparatively examines five governance configurations: majoritarian parliamentary governance, consensus and coalition governance, presidential governance, federal and decentralized governance, and hybrid or semi-presidential governance. It employs a qualitative comparative approach based on institutional and democratic-governance literature. The analysis demonstrates that majoritarian systems may promote policy decisiveness but can marginalize minorities and weaken consensus-building. Consensus systems offer greater representation and political inclusion, although coalition bargaining may delay decisions. Presidential systems provide directly identifiable executive leadership but may create institutional conflict between executives and legislatures. Federal and decentralized arrangements improve regional representation and local responsiveness, yet their effectiveness depends on fiscal capacity and coordination. Hybrid systems offer institutional flexibility but may produce overlap authority and executive rivalry. The article concludes that governance quality in emerging democracies depends less on adopting a particular constitutional label and more on creating an appropriate balance among inclusion, accountability, administrative capacity, judicial independence, electoral integrity, and policy effectiveness.

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Introduction:

Emerging democracies are political systems undergoing transitions from authoritarian, colonial, military-dominated, or weakly institutionalized forms of government toward more competitive and representative political arrangements. Elections may be held regularly in these states, yet democratic institutions often remain vulnerable to executive interference, political polarization, corruption, weak judicial independence, administrative fragmentation, and unequal access to political power. Governance is broader than government. It includes the institutions, rules, processes, administrative organizations, political relationships, and accountability mechanisms through which public decisions are formulated and implemented. Fukuyama defines governance primarily in terms of the state's capacity to develop and enforce rules and deliver public services, while recognizing that democratic accountability and government capacity must be analytically distinguished. Contemporary democracy assessments demonstrate why comparative governance analysis remains important. International IDEA reports that representation, political rights, rule of law and participation remain under pressure in many parts of the world. Its 2025 assessment particularly identifies declines in judicial independence, press freedom, and electoral integrity. Similarly, the V-Dem Democracy Report 2026 concludes that democratization is occurring in relatively few countries while autocratization continues to affect a substantial number of political systems. The Worldwide Governance Indicators assess governance through six dimensions: voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. The indicators cover more than 200 economies and provide comparative data extending from 1996 to 2024. These dimensions demonstrate that democratic governance cannot be assessed through elections alone. A country may conduct competitive elections but continue to experience ineffective administration, weak legal enforcement, political exclusion, or extensive corruption. This article uses a qualitative and institutional comparative method. It examines governance models according to four principal criteria: accountability, inclusiveness, policy decisiveness, and democratic resilience. The objective is not to declare one universal model superior, but to identify the circumstances under which particular institutional arrangements are more likely to contribute to democratic stability and effective public governance.

Conceptual Foundations of Democratic Governance:

Governance models establish the formal and informal rules through which political authority is acquired, exercised, monitored, and transferred. Formal institutions include constitutions, legislatures, courts, electoral systems, executive offices, local governments, and public administrations. Informal institutions include patronage networks, political traditions, elite agreements, social hierarchies, and unwritten practices that influence institutional behavior. The institutional literature commonly distinguishes between majoritarian and consensus democracy. Majoritarian governance concentrates political authority in the hands of the electoral majority, whereas consensus democracy disperses power among political parties, territorial units, social groups, and constitutional institutions. Lijphart's comparative research emphasizes that consensus arrangements can provide broader representation and improve accommodation in socially divided societies. Governance quality also requires capable institutions. Democratic participation without administrative competence can produce promises that governments are unable to implement. Conversely, a technically capable administration without accountability may become authoritarian, unresponsive, or captured by political and economic elites. Effective democratic governance therefore requires both institutional capacity and mechanisms that prevent the arbitrary exercise of power. In emerging democracies, institutional effectiveness is frequently constrained by limited financial resources, weak bureaucratic professionalism, and political interference in appointments, uneven territorial development, and low public trust. Griddle's concept of "good enough governance" suggests that reform programmers should establish realistic priorities rather than requiring developing states to reproduce every institutional

feature of advanced democracies simultaneously. Governance reform should consequently be sequenced. Electoral integrity, judicial protection, civil-service competence, public financial accountability, access to information, and peaceful political competition should be treated as foundational priorities. More complex reforms can subsequently be developed according to administrative capacity and national circumstances.

Majoritarian Parliamentary and Consensus Governance:

A majoritarian parliamentary model normally gives the political party or coalition controlling the legislature the authority to form the executive. The executive remains formally accountable to parliament and may be removed through a vote of no confidence. This fusion of executive and legislative authority can improve coordination and facilitate the passage of legislation. The major advantage of majoritarian parliamentary governance is decisiveness. A stable legislative majority can approve budgets, introduce reforms, and respond to crises without prolonged institutional conflict. The government's responsibility is also relatively identifiable because voters can associate policy success or failure with the governing party. Nevertheless, majoritarian governance can result in the excessive concentration of political authority. When one party dominates parliament, legislative oversight may become weak, parliamentary committees may lack independence, and opposition parties may have little influence over policymaking. In ethnically, linguistically, religiously, or regionally divided societies, a permanent majority can repeatedly exclude minority groups from meaningful political power. Consensus governance attempts to address these weaknesses through proportional representation, coalition government, power-sharing arrangements, bicameralism, judicial review, and territorial autonomy. Lijphart's analysis associates consensus democracy with broader participation and the inclusion of diverse political interests. Consensus systems are especially valuable where political exclusion could produce separatism, violence, or rejection of the democratic order. Coalition governments compel political parties to negotiate, distribute authority, and recognize competing interests. They can also prevent one political organization from capturing all state institutions. However, consensus governance has costs. Coalition negotiations can delay government formation, blur political responsibility, and encourage the distribution of ministries as political rewards. Governments composed of ideologically incompatible parties may struggle to maintain policy consistency. Small parties may also gain disproportionate bargaining power when their support is necessary for forming a governing coalition. The comparative evidence therefore suggests that majoritarian institutions are more appropriate where the party system is institutionalized and minority protections are strong. Consensus institutions are more appropriate where society is deeply divided and democratic survival depends on negotiated inclusion. The most effective arrangement may combine a government capable of making decisions with electoral and constitutional safeguards that prevent exclusion.

Presidential, Semi-Presidential and Hybrid Arrangements:

Presidential governance is based on the separate electoral legitimacy of the executive and legislature. The president normally serves for a fixed term and cannot be removed through an ordinary parliamentary vote. Supporters argue that this arrangement produces stable executive leadership, a clear national mandate, and stronger checks and balances. The presidential model can be beneficial when political parties are fragmented and citizens want to identify a national executive directly. Fixed executive terms may protect policy continuity from frequent parliamentary crises. The legislature can also scrutinize the executive without immediately threatening the government's survival. The central difficulty is the possibility of conflict between two institutions claiming democratic legitimacy. A president may claim a nationwide electoral mandate, while the legislature claims representative authority based on its own election. When the executive and legislative majority belongs to opposing political groups, policy deadlock may result. Linz argued that presidential systems can intensify political conflict because of fixed terms, winner-take-all competition, and competing claims to legitimacy. However, later studies challenged the argument that presidentialism automatically causes democratic breakdown. Cheibub emphasizes that democratic survival is also

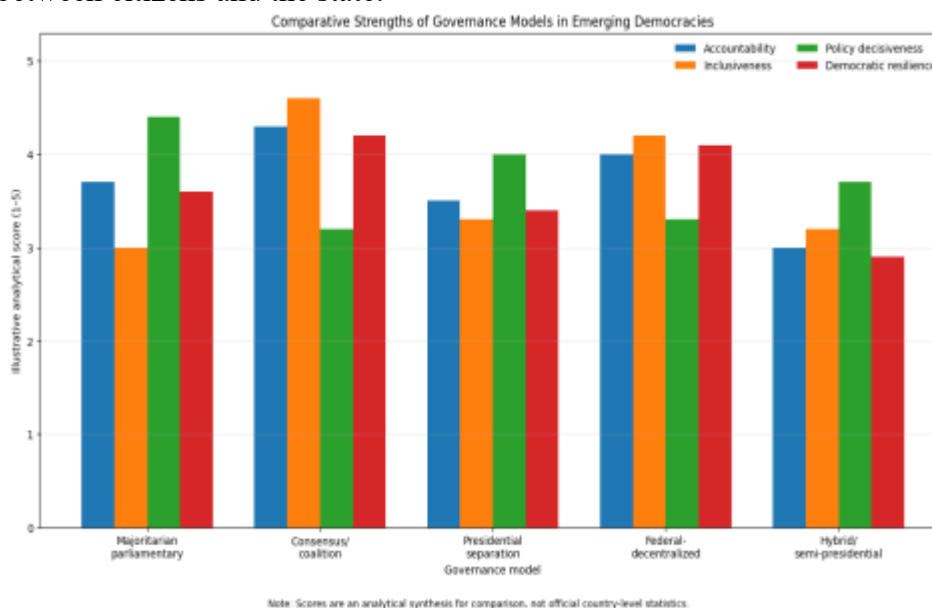
influenced by historical conditions, party structures, military intervention, coalition incentives, and constitutional design. Mainwaring and Sugar similarly argue that the effects of presidentialism depend on presidential powers, party fragmentation, legislative discipline, electoral rules, and the capacity to build coalitions. Presidential systems with strong oversight, independent courts, professional administrations, and effective legislative bargaining can remain democratic and stable. Semi-presidential or hybrid systems divide executive authority between a directly elected president and a prime minister responsible to parliament. The model is intended to combine presidential leadership with parliamentary accountability. It may offer institutional flexibility during coalition formation and national emergencies. Its central weakness is uncertainty over authority. Conflict may arise when the president and prime minister represent different parties or interpret their constitutional powers differently. In weakly institutionalized democracies, the president may dominate foreign policy, security institutions, appointments, and emergency powers while the prime minister remains responsible for unpopular domestic policies. Hybrid governance can consequently become a pathway to executive aggrandizement. Bermeo observes that contemporary democratic backsliding often occurs gradually through the weakening of institutions rather than through sudden military coups. Levity and Way further demonstrate that some hybrid regimes preserve formal electoral competition while incumbents use state resources, media influence, and administrative power to create an unequal political contest. Emerging democracies adopting presidential or hybrid models therefore require clear constitutional boundaries, effective impeachment procedures, judicial independence, transparent emergency powers, legislative oversight, and politically neutral security institutions.

Federal, Decentralized and Polycentric Governance:

Federal governance constitutionally divides authority between national and subnational governments. Decentralization transfers administrative, political, or financial responsibilities to provincial, regional, district, or municipal institutions. These arrangements are particularly relevant to geographically large, socially diverse, or regionally unequal emerging democracies. The first advantage of decentralization is responsiveness. Local governments are generally closer to citizens and may possess better information about community needs. They can adapt education, sanitation, infrastructure, health, environmental, and welfare policies to local conditions. The second advantage is political inclusion. Federalism gives regional communities an institutional stake in the political system. Provincial legislatures and local councils create additional opportunities for participation, leadership development, and representation. Territorial autonomy may reduce conflict where regional communities fear domination by the central government. The third advantage is experimentation. Different provinces or municipalities can test policy approaches, allowing successful programmes to be adapted elsewhere. Nostrum's theory of polycentric governance suggests that complex problems may be addressed more effectively through multiple, overlapping centers of authority than through a single centralized institution. Federal and decentralized systems nevertheless face serious challenges. Local governments may lack revenue, trained personnel, administrative technology, and reliable data. Responsibilities may be transferred without sufficient financial resources. Political elites can capture local institutions just as they capture national institutions, while regional inequalities may grow if wealthier areas possess stronger tax bases and administrative capacity. Coordination is another difficulty. Health emergencies, climate disasters, water management, internal migration, energy policy, and national infrastructure require cooperation across different levels of government. Unclear responsibilities can create duplication, blame shifting, and delayed responses. Effective decentralization therefore requires more than constitutional recognition. It requires predictable fiscal transfers, transparent local budgeting, professional municipal administrations, independent auditing, public participation, and mechanisms for intergovernmental coordination. National standards should protect equal citizenship, while local autonomy should permit policies that respond to territorial diversity.

Comparative Lessons and Reform Priorities:

The comparison shows that every governance model involves trade-offs. Majoritarian parliamentary systems generally provide greater policy decisiveness, but they require strong safeguards against majority domination. Consensus systems provide inclusion and negotiation, but they may produce slower policymaking and unclear responsibility. Presidential systems offer identifiable executive leadership and institutional separation, yet they may produce conflict between the executive and legislature. Semi-presidential systems provide flexibility but can create overlapping authority. Federal and decentralized systems strengthen territorial participation and local responsiveness, although they depend heavily on administrative capacity and fiscal coordination. The most important conclusion is that institutional labels do not determine outcomes by themselves. A parliamentary constitution cannot guarantee accountability when the governing party controls parliament, electoral authorities, public appointments, and information institutions. A presidential constitution cannot create stability when political parties are personality and opposition groups reject electoral outcomes. Federalism cannot promote inclusion when subnational governments lack resources or are controlled by unaccountable local elites. Emerging democracies should therefore pursue six interconnected reform priorities. First, electoral institutions must be independent, transparent, and professionally administered. Elections must provide meaningful competition rather than merely periodic voting. Second, legislatures require research services, committee authority, budget scrutiny powers, and access to government information. Parliamentary oversight should not be reduced to partisan confrontation. Third, judicial independence must be protected through transparent appointments, secure tenure, institutional resources, and compliance with court decisions. Courts should defend constitutional rights without replacing elected institutions in ordinary policymaking. Fourth, public administration should be professionalized. Recruitment and promotion should be based on merit, while senior officials should remain accountable for performance. Political leaders should establish policy priorities without converting the civil service into a partisan organization. Fifth, decentralization should be accompanied by financial and administrative capacity. Local governments cannot be held responsible for services unless they possess adequate authority, personnel, and revenue. Finally, democratic participation should extend beyond elections. Access-to-information laws, public consultations, participatory budgeting, citizen complaint systems, independent media, civil society organizations, and digital participation platforms can improve the relationship between citizens and the state.



Summary:

This article has comparatively examined majoritarian parliamentary, consensus, presidential, semi-presidential, federal, decentralized, and hybrid governance arrangements in emerging democracies. The analysis demonstrates that each model provides particular institutional advantages while creating corresponding risks. Majoritarian parliamentary governance can facilitate rapid decision-making and direct political responsibility, but it may weaken minority representation and legislative oversight. Consensus governance strengthens inclusion, coalition-building, and social accommodation, although it can slow policy decisions and obscure responsibility. Presidential governance offers stable executive tenure and a directly identifiable mandate, but competing executive and legislative legitimacy may generate institutional conflict. Semi-presidential governance may balance executive leadership and parliamentary responsibility, yet unclear constitutional authority can create rivalry between presidents and prime ministers. Federalism and decentralization improve territorial representation, citizen participation, and policy responsiveness, but their success depends on fiscal resources, administrative competence, coordination, and protection from elite capture. No governance model can guarantee democratic consolidation when electoral institutions are manipulated, courts are politically controlled, public administration is partisan, and citizens lack reliable access to information. Conversely, different constitutional models can perform successfully when supported by institutional accountability, professional administration, competitive elections, and peaceful transfers of power, independent oversight, and respect for constitutional rights. The most appropriate governance strategy for emerging democracies is therefore adaptive rather than imitative. States should not mechanically import institutional designs from established democracies. They should develop arrangements that correspond to their social diversity, political history, territorial structure, party system, and administrative capacity. A resilient governance model combines effective authority with meaningful limitations on power. It enables governments to make and implement decisions while allowing legislatures, courts, media organizations, opposition parties, civil society, local governments, and citizens to scrutinize those decisions. Democratic success ultimately depends not only on who governs, but also on how authority is distributed, exercised, reviewed, and peacefully transferred.

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