the capacity of the legislature to monitor and control the executive and to participate fully in the policy-making process is far from uniform across presidential systems.

In addition, while public officials are in all cases elected, the nature of election procedures—such as the share of votes required for winning the presidency, the allocation of legislative seats, and the degree of concurrence between presidential and legislative elections—differs significantly across presidential systems (see Chapters Four and Five). Election rules have far-reaching effects, ranging from their impact on the popular legitimacy and authority enjoyed by public officials to their impact on the number of political parties represented in the congress and the incentives for individual legislators to respond to the needs and demands of their constituents.

Though not directly linked to the constitutional or legal make-up of the system, the structure of the political party system is another element whose varied forms can profoundly affect the dynamics of presidential democracy (see Chapter Six). The number of parties represented in the legislature, the stability of inter-party competition, and the depth of parties’ roots in society can affect the quality of political representation, prospects for effective executive oversight by the congress, and the likelihood of reasonable cooperation between the executive and the legislature.

Aside from the general structure of the party system, the internal organization of political parties, including the openness and competitiveness of procedures for selecting candidates for public office and party officials, can profoundly affect the quality of political rep-
representation and leadership and the strength and credibility of representative institutions. Similarly, the framework of laws and enforcement mechanisms surrounding the financing of electoral campaigns and party activities can also exert an important influence on the equity of political representation and the vulnerability of the political system to corruption (see Chapter Seven).

Included in the Madisonian constitutional design is a judicial branch whose responsibility is to interpret the constitution and enact laws, and to check and balance the authority of the executive and the legislature. However, while most presidential systems have followed this design by putting in place supreme courts or constitutional tribunals, the nature of the role of the judiciary varies greatly. The degree to which the judiciary can assert itself as an independent branch and interpret and enforce the law and the constitution in a non-partisan manner is greatly affected not only by different legal traditions and administrative structures, but also by the rules governing the nomination, selection, tenure and dismissal of judges.

Aside from the checks and balances implicit in the existence of the three main branches, presidential systems have developed additional appointed branches to monitor and control the elected branches. Examples are supreme audit institutions, attorney general and public prosecutor offices, and ombudsman offices (see Chapter Nine). Depending on how their directors are appointed and dismissed, their budgetary and administrative autonomy, and the extent of the authority granted them, these offices can help to ensure that governmental officials adhere to the law and do not abuse the public trust, and that citizen rights are protected.

To varying degrees, democracies have also incorporated mechanisms for more direct citizen participation such as referenda, plebiscites, citizen initiatives, and the recall of elected officials. If well designed and used, such mechanisms can complement the traditional "representative" structure of democracy, thereby increasing the responsiveness of government to its citizens (see Chapter Ten).

It must be recognized, however, that political institutions are not the only factors that affect the performance of democratic systems. A host of noninstitutional factors—including the level of social and economic development, the intensity of ethnic, religious and socioeconomic divisions, the proclivity of citizens toward association and cooperation, the independence and plurality of the news media, and international political and economic pressures—shape the operation of all democratic systems, regardless of their particular constitutional structure.

The quality of political leadership is also important. Regardless of the structure of incentives provided by formal institutions, individual politicians still have room to influence the performance of the political system. Daring and capable political leadership, in fact, is necessary to bring about sound political and institutional reforms. Because of different political leadership and the collective learning of political actors, the same formal institutional structure may produce crisis in one historical context and stability and effective governance in another.

To a great extent, the socio-structural factors specified above are inherited and cannot easily be changed in a short span of time. By contrast, despite being embedded to some extent in this larger context, political institutions can be changed relatively swiftly. Thus, to
improve the governability of democracy, the reform of political institutions is at least one crucial place to start.

Political Reform and Development

The specific configuration of institutions within the broad rubric of presidentialism can help account for why some systems operate relatively smoothly while others are constantly in a state of crisis. The relevance of the formal political institutions of democratic governance has clearly been recognized by political actors and citizen groups in Latin America. Alongside the profound economic reforms adopted in much of the region, the last two decades have also witnessed a ferment of constitutional reform and other modifications to democratic rules. Each of the 18 countries examined in this study has reformed or replaced the constitution that it brought into the period. Nearly all of the countries have reformed laws governing elections and political parties.

The motivation behind such reforms varies considerably from case to case. Such reforms rarely, if ever, contradict the interests of the largest political parties. In fact, they are often motivated by the desire to further the advantages and privileges of those parties and the social groups supporting them. The achievement of a more governable and stable democratic system, while often in the background, is only in some instances the central goal. Even in cases where this objective has been the predominant goal of reformers, broad consensus about the reforms needed has been rare. Thus, given the force of pragmatic and political considerations and the indeterminacy of, and lack of consensus about, the effects of reform, the process of political change is even more prone than economic reform to missteps.

Much attention has been paid to examining the economic reforms adopted by countries in the region over the past two decades. Such considerations have generated a lively and impassioned debate about the adequacy and appropriateness of the “neo-liberal” thrust of much of the economic reforms. By contrast, however, few attempts have been made to study in a systematic and a broadly comparative manner the political reforms of the period, or to assess the extent to which they hold the possibility for reducing the problems of governability plaguing the region’s young democracies. What have been the main regional reform trends with respect to the institutional dimensions highlighted above? What have been and are likely to be the effects of these changes on the functioning of democracy? What do these reform experiences suggest about the types of political reforms that will be most needed in the near future? The chapters that follow provide at least partial and contingent answers to these questions.