On the first point, the presidential term is sometimes longer, and usually no shorter, than for legislators. The longer the term, the easier it is for presidents to adopt a broad perspective free from the immediate burden of re-election. At just four years, the term of office of American presidents is perhaps rather short. The danger is that the first year is spent acquiring experience and the fourth year campaigning, leaving only the middle phase for real accomplishments.

Second, term limits are often imposed, restricting the incumbent to just one or two periods in office. The fear is that without such constraints presidents will be able to exploit their unique position to secure re-election without end. Thus, the USA introduced a two-term limit after Franklin Roosevelt won four elections in a row between 1932 and 1944. Mexican presidents (and its legislators) cannot stand for re-election.

As with many institutional fixes, term limits bring unintended consequences. Clearly, a president who cannot be re-elected is no longer directly accountable to the voters – an important, if not necessarily undesirable, limitation on democracy. Also, presidents lose political clout as their term nears its end. And popular presidents, replete with confidence and experience, may be debarred from office at the peak of their careers.

Third, the timing of presidential elections matters. When they occur at the same time as elections to the assembly, the successful candidate is more likely to be drawn from the largest party in the legislature. Without threatening the separation of powers, concurrent elections limit fragmentation, increasing the likelihood that president and congress will be of similar mind. Such thinking lay behind the decision in 2000 to reduce the French president’s term to five years, the same tenure as that of the assembly. In the United States, by contrast, presidential and congressional elections are only weakly aligned, complicating the president’s job (see Chapter 16).

### Electoral systems: design and reform

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, by far the most common reform of electoral systems was from a majority or plurality system to PR (Colomer, 2004b). That direction of travel was for a reason. Because PR is not a winner-takes-all system, it is always a safe option for parties negotiating electoral reform. In the discussions preceding suffrage exten-