

21st Century Political Science: A Reference Handbook

Presidentialism Versus Parliamentarism

Contributors: Joseph W. Robbins

Editors: John T. Ishiyama & Marijke Breuning

Book Title: 21st Century Political Science: A Reference Handbook

Chapter Title: "Presidentialism Versus Parliamentarism"

Pub. Date: 2011

Access Date: October 21, 2013

Publishing Company: SAGE Publications, Inc.

City: Thousand Oaks

Print ISBN: 9781412969017

Online ISBN: 9781412979351

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412979351.n21>

Print pages: 177-186

This PDF has been generated from SAGE knowledge. Please note that the pagination of the online version will vary from the pagination of the print book.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412979351.n21>

[p. 177 ↓]

Chapter 21: Presidentialism Versus Parliamentarism

Whether a country employs a presidential or parliamentary regime is an incredibly meaningful distinction. Numerous studies have shown that presidential systems result in more open trade policies and greater particularistic spending (i.e., transportation funding, agricultural subsidies, etc.) and are better suited to represent the entire electorate (Cheibub, 2006; Evans, 2004; Keech & Pak, 1995; Shugart & Carey, 1992). In addition, and perhaps more important, researchers have argued that presidential regimes were prone to conflict and, in some cases, democratic collapse (Linz, 1990a, 1994). More recent work has gone even further to help us understand the nuances of regime type. Margit Tavits's (2009) book considers whether directly elected presidents in parliamentary governments produce greater political divisiveness, pervasive apathy among the electorate, and more frequent intergovernmental conflict. Likewise, much has been written on the benefits of parliamentary governments because they are perceived to be fundamentally different from presidential systems. Specifically, parliamentary governments are thought to engender greater public goods spending (e.g., education, health care, and pensions) and be more efficient and more durable than alternative regime types are. Therefore, it is necessary to highlight the differences between these regimes by focusing on how the chief executive and legislature are elected, how these two branches interact with one another, and how government formation occurs. Once we can clearly distinguish among alternative government types, we can better identify the relevance for understanding topics such as policy making, representation, and democratic survival.

After this chapter describes the key attributes of presidential and parliamentary systems, it discusses the positive attributes of each system. Furthermore, it addresses the recent proliferation of mixed or hybrid regimes—which contain elements of both presidential and parliamentary systems. Political scientists have long debated the potential dangers or “perils of presidentialism” (Linz, 1990a), and a recapitulation of

this discussion represents the final section of this chapter. Finally, the chapter briefly delineates the policy impacts of each regime type.

Theory: Identifying the Main Components of Presidential Regimes

When one thinks of presidential systems, the United States and Latin America typically come to mind because they house a vast majority of all presidential regimes currently in operation. But what exactly is included in a presidential state? Fundamentally, presidential regimes are those in which there is a singularly elected politician who [p. 178 ↓] represents an entire country and whose tenure is not predicated on legislative support. There are also states such as Germany, Hungary, and India that have presidents but whose leaders are comparatively minor players in policy making. Accordingly, the mere existence of a president does not necessarily indicate a presidential state; indeed, the German, Hungarian, and Indian regimes are seldom considered true presidential regimes. Clearly, then, there can be substantial variation among presidential regimes since the aforementioned powers are not possessed by all presidents. In fact, presidents may possess any combination of the following tools: appointment powers, cabinet meeting control, veto power, line-item veto power, emergency powers, foreign policy control, authority over government formation, and the power to dissolve the legislature. Aside from this litany of presidential powers, there is another way to discuss or categorize these systems. That said, perhaps it is more useful to focus on four key characteristics of presidential regimes that can be used to differentiate among executive types.

In Matthew Shugart and John Carey's (1992) impressive book, *Presidents and Assemblies*, the authors discuss the relationship between regime type and electoral system and the subsequent implications for how the two concepts interact. Aside from this discussion, Shugart and Carey focus on a number of key characteristics that can help students classify governments as presidential, parliamentary, or mixed. In particular, they argue that there is an inherent trade-off between presidential and parliamentary governments: Presidential governments tend to be more efficient than parliamentary regimes, but the former may not be as representative as the

latter. Efficiency, in this case, refers to voters' ability to identify the final government composition in advance. That is, a presidential system is efficient in that voters can identify who will serve as president, or lead the government, prior to the casting of the final vote. In the 2008 presidential election, voters knew that either Senator John McCain or Barack Obama would become the 44th president of the United States. In contrast, parliamentary systems are not as efficient since the final government composition is contingent on the final electoral results and the subsequent political wrangling over the formation of a governing coalition. On the other hand, representation or representativeness refers to how much of the population is represented by the ruling government. Although presidents can theoretically represent the entire populace, this is certainly not a given. The oft-cited example of Salvador Allende's 1970 electoral victory in Chile, with just over 30% of the popular vote, serves as a reminder that presidents seldom represent the entire populace. In parliamentary systems, moreover, representation of the entire electorate is more easily attained through coalitional governments than under a single leader in a presidential system. Thus, parliamentary regimes offer greater representation but are typically less efficient than their presidential counterparts.

Beyond this demarcation, Shugart and Carey (1992) reason that there are other certain essential attributes found in all presidential systems. First, they claim that a separation of powers among branches of government is necessary. For students of American politics, this concept is well-known. A separation of powers refers to a clear division of responsibility, in which most often the executive branch administers the law, the legislature writes the laws, and the judiciary interprets or reviews the constitutionality of the laws. In parliamentary governments, however, such a division of authority is often lacking, as the legislative and executive branches are essentially fused together.

Second, Shugart and Carey (1992) note that presidents are directly elected through some type of nationwide vote. Their ascension into office is not contingent on parliamentary support, but rather they are elected by an entire country. Of course, this too can take place through various mechanisms. Some states use a simple-majority voting system, in which the winner secures most (or a *plurality*) of the popular vote. Meanwhile, countries such as France use a slightly modified format, where the winner must possess more than 50% of the nationwide vote. In those elections in which there is no clear-cut majority winner, the top two vote getters will compete against each

other in a second, runoff election. Another approach uses an indirect mechanism, best illustrated by some type of *electoral college*, to elect the president. Although it is not the only country to use this tool, the United States is perhaps the most well-known country to use this complex mechanism. In the case of the United States, both the Republican and the Democratic Party select a slate of electors for each state equal to the number of House of Representatives members and senators from that state. The presidential candidate who wins a plurality of a state's popular vote receives the Electoral College votes of that same state. Each candidate's electoral votes are then summed, and the candidate with a majority of the Electoral College votes (i.e., 270) is declared the victor.

Third, presidents serve fixed terms that are not dependent on the support or confidence of the legislature. Presidents, in most cases, serve 4- or 5-year terms, and at the end of a term, the president must either step down from the office or run for reelection. Put differently, presidents are not permitted to remain in office indefinitely, whereas (theoretically) prime ministers in some parliamentary governments are. It is worth noting, however, that certain provisions are in place in the event an official commits an egregious offense. For example, following the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal during the 1990s, the U.S. Congress impeached the president, although it did not remove him from office. Similarly, during the First Russian Republic, the Russian legislature sought to impeach Boris Yeltsin for his disastrous economic policies, the First Chechen War, and a host of other calamities. Thus, in most cases, there are mechanisms in place to remove from office a much maligned president, but in ordinary circumstances the president's term will conclude [p. 179 ↓] after 4 or 5 years in most cases. And, unlike in parliamentary systems, the president's term is not susceptible to legislative approval. In parliamentary governments, a prime minister may be asked, or forced, to step down if he or she loses the confidence or support of his or her legislative counterparts. In contrast, a president can be eternally at odds with legislators and not jeopardize his or her political survival. Therefore, a presidential regime is also characterized by fixed terms, which are not contingent on legislative approval. This design is popular for numerous reasons, but it is not without its critics. These topics, though, will be elucidated later in this chapter.

That presidents retain the power to form their own cabinet is the fourth component of presidential structures. Having the authority to appoint cabinet members is a crucial tool at the president's disposal, and this can help the president pursue, and, it is hoped,

fulfill, his or her campaign promises. Without this power, a president may have to resort to political negotiating with rivals to fill these positions. In such a scenario, a president's appointments may be delayed as a result of political wrangling between parties or candidates. Such occurrences may hinder a president's ability to carry out his or her mandate, and such a failure could have economic, social, or political repercussions. After all, if a president struggles to appoint defense, education, or economic ministers, then these agencies' ability to carry out changes in defense, education, or economic policies could be undermined. This authority is significantly different under parliamentary regimes, in which cabinet appointments are typically more of a cooperative endeavor.

The final primary attribute in presidential systems involves the executive's lawmaking authority. In some states, presidents have virtually no lawmaking authority. The U.S. president, for example, has some tools available to circumvent Congress's policy-making authority. He can issue executive decrees and executive treaties that can, but do not always, carry the same weight as congressional legislation. In other countries, however, presidential lawmaking authority rivals that of the legislature. As a result, some legislative authority and/or autonomy may be usurped by an overly ambitious executive. One such case is the Russian and Ukrainian presidencies, in which presidents have wielded considerable power (Protsyk, 2004). In contrast, the French executive is considerably different because of the accepted practice of *cohabitation*. During cohabitation, in which the legislature and executive are controlled by different political parties, the president often allows the prime minister to lead the government. This scenario can also include a president's *veto power*, whereby the executive can prevent a bill from becoming a law.

Appeals and Implications of Presidentialism

Before turning to the potential dangers of presidential governance, it is necessary to identify the positive attributes of these systems. To this extent, those who study regime types have emphasized three primary aspects of presidential states that help us understand their appeal to politicians throughout the world. The three appeals include efficiency in political results and governance, the representativeness of the entire populace, and the checks and balances typically found in these governments.

As discussed earlier, efficiency is an attractive aspect of most presidential systems because of the information conveyed to voters. In particular, efficiency means that voters know, prior to casting a ballot, what the new government will look like. That is not to say that the outcomes are preordained but rather that the most likely scenarios are widely known. This efficiency provides voters with a wealth of information as they decide which candidate to support. They also know that, if elected, their candidate should pursue with few obstacles or restrictions the policies supported by his or her electorate. Parliamentary systems, however, differ considerably. In some instances, the described scenario can, and does, unfold in parliamentary regimes. More common, however, is the formation of a coalition government. In such a situation, two or more parties join together in a coalition. Consequently, each party's demands or expectations are tempered as a result of the coalition formation exercise. Therefore, if a voter supported a conservative party, then the voter's preferred policies may not come to fruition because parties must compromise their positions in order to join the governing coalition. Furthermore, a singularly elected official (e.g., a president) may make it easier for voters to hold government officials accountable. At times, the president may be assigned too much blame if economic problems arise, but it is generally easier to punish one official than an entire legislature for lackluster economic policies. Therefore, efficiency is more apparent in presidential systems in comparison with parliamentary ones.

The second positive contribution of presidential regimes is the representativeness of one elected official. In parliamentary systems, with multiple political parties, it is likely that each party will represent only its supporters. For conservative voters, this means that their needs will be ignored if the majority winner is a liberal party that seeks to represent (or reward) its supporters. Such a possibility becomes even more complex if we consider a country with several political parties. Supporters of presidential governments, however, contend that this scenario is less likely to occur in a presidential state. They argue that presidents represent the entire country and, therefore, are beholden to the entire electorate rather than just a subset of the population. In 2000, when George W. Bush was declared president of the United States, he stated that he would represent the entire country rather than just his supporters, despite his narrow margin of victory. And 8 years later, Barack Obama made a similar pledge as president. Accordingly, a single elected official can, at least theoretically, be better positioned

to represent an entire country than may be likely under parliamentary governments. Whether this happens is certainly debatable.

[p. 180 ↓]

Presidential systems may also be preferred to parliamentary regimes because a presidential system balances representation with another branch of government. That is, most presidential regimes distribute powers among the branches of government. This arrangement provides multiple points for citizens to influence their government. If lobbying the president proves fruitless, then a concerned citizen can turn his or her attention to the legislature. Thus, states with popularly elected presidents can balance or distribute power over multiple branches of government. This institutional fragmentation can also prevent one branch from becoming too powerful and thus running roughshod over minority interests. Therefore, people from all ideological backgrounds should have some say in policy making as long as there are multiple political actors or institutions with some semblance of power. Because the electorate is represented by at least two different institutions (i.e., the legislature and the executive in this case), presidential systems can foment democratic stability by offering voters more opportunities to influence the policy-making process.

Theory: Identifying the Main Components of Parliamentary Regimes

Although presidential systems are common in the Western hemisphere, they are not the only option available to governments. In fact, presidential systems are in the minority when it comes to regime types found throughout the world. Parliamentary systems actually outnumber presidential states when we take stock of the entire global community. To many students of U.S. politics, parliamentary systems remain a foreign concept, and the inner workings of these regimes are equally befuddling. Accordingly, it is necessary to discuss the defining characteristics and operation of parliamentary governments before presenting the appeals of parliamentary systems and discussing an emerging type of government, generally referred to as *hybrid regimes*.

Often referred to as the *Westminster model*, after the United Kingdom's government, parliamentary systems differ from presidential states in several ways. One of the key defining characteristics of parliamentary systems is the fusion of the executive and legislative branches. Whereas the heads of state and government are often embodied in the same person in a presidential regime, parliamentary systems often separate the two roles. In addition, presidential systems generally have a separation of powers among the various branches of government, but such a clear allocation of responsibility is not found in most parliamentary regimes. Instead, parliamentary governments often combine the responsibilities of both the legislative and the executive branches.

After an initial election, in which voters decide how many seats are allocated to the various political parties, the elected representatives in a parliamentary system are then given the task of establishing or forming the government. Not only do these individuals have to organize the legislative branch, but they are also charged with structuring the executive branch. Legislative officials determine who will serve as the head of the government (or who will serve as the prime minister or premier), which politicians will fill the various cabinet positions, and who will head the various legislative committees. If there is a clear majority winner in the initial elections, then government formation is fairly straightforward, and typically no coalition is formed. In other instances, however, where there is no majority party, the party with the most seats (often referred to as the *formateur* party) is responsible for constructing the governing coalition. This party will seek a coalition partner—or sometimes multiple partners—and, after cobbling together enough support to give the coalition a majority of seats, the parties involved will then jointly determine the prime minister, cabinet positions, and other leadership posts. Although this is the norm, there are cases when a coalition government is not formed, even in the absence of a majority winner. Currently, the Canadian government has a minority government led by the Conservative Party. In the Canadian case, there is no majority party, and coalition formation efforts have proved futile. Consequently, the Conservative Party, by default, is the *de facto* governing party even though it lacks a clear majority of seats.

Cabinet dominance is another important feature of parliamentary democracies (Lijphart, 1999). On forming the ruling coalition, those in power make a number of key appointments, although none more powerful than that of the prime minister. The prime minister is enlisted to serve at the behest of the governing majority and will do so until

he or she loses the support of the legislature. When the prime minister loses support of the legislature, as evidenced through a *vote of no confidence*, then new elections must be held. An alternative practice is the *vote of confidence*, which is an act initiated by the government. Here, if the ruling government is incapable of securing a majority of the votes in the legislature, then the government must step down (Clark, Golder, & Golder, 2009). Some states use a slightly different version of the confidence vote, referred to as a *constructive vote of confidence*. In Germany and Hungary, two countries where such a tool is in use, the legislature must agree on a replacement government prior to dissolving the extant body.

Predictably, cooperation among politicians is very important in parliamentary systems, for without it, all elected officials must run for reelection and thus risk losing their positions. Lacking party discipline or cooperation, the government is likely to collapse. This is exactly what has happened recently in the Czech Republic. Like so many other countries in the past few years, the Czech Republic was plagued by the recent global economic downturn, and when economic troubles combined with internal political strife, it was hardly surprising that the governing coalition lost its grasp on power.

Although coalitional survival is predicated on party discipline and cooperation, the most prominent or powerful [p. 181 ↓] actor in most parliamentary governments is the prime minister. Prime ministers are elected by their governing coalition; but not all prime ministers are equally powerful. Indeed, Giovanni Sartori (1994) explains that there are at least three scenarios common to most parliamentary governments: A prime minister may be *first above unequals*, *first among unequals*, or *first among equals*. The power of the prime minister is greatest in the first case (i.e., first above unequals), examples of which can be found in places such as Germany, Greece, and the United Kingdom (Lijphart, 1999). In contrast, among the weakest prime ministers (i.e., first among equals) are the heads of government in Italy, the Netherlands, and Norway (Lijphart, 1999). How does one discern between powerful and weak prime ministers? Typically, researchers have relied on the prime minister's authority vis-à-vis fellow members of the executive branch (e.g., the Exchequer in the United Kingdom compared with the prime minister), the prime minister's ability to navigate through the policy-making process, and his or her ability to remove and appoint members of the executive branch. These are but a few examples of how we can measure prime ministerial strength; many more examples can be found in other sources (see King, 1994; Lijphart, 1999).

Beyond these features, what other defining characteristics do we see in parliamentary governments? Other than the aforementioned lack of separation between the legislature and executive, a few additional attributes are worth stressing. In particular, parliamentary governments are often more conducive to cooperation. Because their political survival depends on cooperation, members of the legislature are more willing to work with the executive branch than are legislatures in presidential regimes. In addition, although established and fully functioning judiciaries are common in many democracies, the separation of powers or checks and balances between the legislative and executive branches found in many presidential governments is often missing from parliamentary governments.

In most parliamentary governments, we also see the use of a *proportional representation* (PR) electoral system to translate votes into legislative seats. There are some exceptions to this. Great Britain and India each employ a *single member district* (SMD) plurality electoral system to fill legislative seats. The use of the SMD electoral system in Great Britain has largely favored the two major parties—the Conservatives and the Labour Party—at the expense of the Liberal Democrats. Although there are other examples of parliamentary systems that use SMD electoral systems, more often than not parliamentary systems employ a PR system. Under these electoral systems, we typically see the emergence of multiple-party systems because more seats per electoral district are up for grabs. Maurice Duverger (1954), a noted French political scientist, observed many years ago that PR systems typically produce multiparty systems while SMD systems typically have a constraining effect on the number of political parties. More specifically, he explained that most SMD systems should produce two-party systems like those seen in the United States and, to a similar degree, the United Kingdom.

Multiple-party systems are often found in parliamentary governments that use PR electoral systems. This can be especially attractive to highly fragmented societies. In fact, given the deep sectarian divides in Iraq, it should not be surprising that the architects of this young democracy opted for a parliamentary style of governance with a PR electoral system. This structure enables Iraqi leaders to represent a multitude of diverse interests—including political, ethnic, religious, and geographic. The choice of government type and electoral system is a significant decision; indeed, this setup should allow multiple parties to participate in the policy-making process, which should,

at least in theory, temper Iraqi tensions. That parliamentary governments with PR electoral systems are better able to represent multiple interests is one of the more attractive features of this regime type.

Another distinguishing feature of parliamentary governments is the absence of fixed terms. The confidence votes used to sustain a coalition government suggest that a government can fail at any time. Although most parliamentary states have provisions that require elections to be held every 4 or 5 years, virtually all parliamentary terms can be cut short. Elections that may be held at any time are also referred to as *endogenously timed elections*. Recent political science research has found that politicians may use this feature to extend their political careers: When a government is viewed in a positive manner, elections may be called earlier to capitalize on this success, but when public approval ratings are low or decreasing, then the governing coalition will often postpone elections. Others, however, have found that since political leaders possess more accurate information than voters, early elections will be held if elected officials anticipate political strife or economic turmoil (Smith, 2003). As a corollary, other works have found that voters are cognizant of this practice and, in some cases, may punish coalition members for holding elections too early. Nevertheless, this is an attractive feature of the Westminster model as it gives the electorate more tools to keep tabs on elected officials.

Appeals and Implications of Parliamentary Governments

Parliamentary systems offer several remedies to the majoritarian tendencies common to most presidential governments. For starters, many suggest that accountability is in fact greater in parliamentary—not presidential—systems. While ineffective presidents could scapegoat their rivals in the legislature, this argument is unconvincing for leaders in parliamentary systems. Because there is no other actor who can thwart policy making, coalition members are more accountable for the results of their policies. As one can imagine, this is a double-edged sword. On one hand, if the government's policies are utterly disastrous, then everyone knows whom to blame. Thus, it is easy to [p. 182 ↓] remove from power those responsible for the ineffective or harmful policies.

On the other hand, if a government's policies prove to be a rousing success, then this can certainly work to the coalition members' advantage. Because it was the coalition's steady hand alone that implemented the policies responsible for economic growth, political stability, and so forth, its members are poised to be the lone beneficiaries of the policies in question. As such, advocates of the parliamentary model would suggest that this style of governance is better able to reward or punish the politicians at the helm of the state apparatus.

Similarly, the presence of endogenously timed elections is also seen as a boon for accountability and, by extension, democratic stability. This mechanism rewards popular or highly regarded politicians for their policies by granting them an extended tenure. One of the arguments against presidentialism is that if a president has done an excellent job, he or she still must run for reelection at the end of a term. But in parliamentary systems, if those in power are highly regarded, then there is no need to hold elections (again, there are exceptions to this). Equally telling, though, is the constant threat of dissolving the government. If a country's political or economic climate has suffered at the hands of a coalition government, then that government can be removed from office at any time. This enables voters to oust unpopular politicians at any time, which is an improvement over presidential structures. Barring any significant scandal or an attempted coup d'état, most presidents cannot be removed from office until the expiration of their term. Consequently, a nefarious or incompetent president cannot be removed prematurely (unless impeachment proceedings are initiated), thus enabling the president to wreak further havoc on a country's livelihood.

Finally, parliamentary systems are thought to be more conducive to political party formation, especially multiparty systems. While this likelihood is partly attributed to the frequent use of PR electoral systems in parliamentary governments, party systems also thrive under parliamentary governments because of the incentives to create and sustain parties in this type of regime. As Duverger noted long ago, PR contests foment multiparty systems. This notwithstanding, it is also worth noting that presidential systems tend to constrain party-building efforts. After all, if a president is endowed with adequate constitutional power with respect to the legislature, then he or she need not be overly concerned with working with the legislature. Furthermore, when presidents can circumvent the legislature, there is little incentive for legislators to build or maintain political parties. Thus, political parties may be less instrumental in lawmaking under

presidential regimes. Conversely, in parliamentary governments, political parties are effective vehicles for overcoming collective action problems that often surface in legislative bodies (Aldrich, 1995). Creating and maintaining parties, moreover, can help legislators overcome collective action problems through organizing members, delivering necessary information, and rewarding loyal rank-and-file members. By providing these benefits, individual legislators will succumb to the party in hopes of furthering their careers. And, in exchange for this loyalty, parties are better able to legislate given this increased party discipline. Without political parties, parliamentary systems could become immobilized due to the rampant chaos stemming from the lack of organization and structure. Likewise, we can point to the Weimar Republic in Germany and the French Fourth Republic as two examples of what happens when party organizations are incipient or unable to coerce discipline from their rank-and-file members. In both cases, the weak parties populating the political landscape undermined policy-making efforts.

Perils of Presidentialism: Do Presidential Systems Produce Democratic Instability?

The decision of whether to implement a parliamentary or a presidential system has engendered a healthy debate among scholars. Much of this discussion was fueled in part by the experience of Latin America, where many countries implemented presidential systems that would collapse years later. Because of this turbulent regional experience, a number of scholars were quick to write off presidential regimes because, they argued, these systems would undermine democracy and lead to political unrest. The reasons for this skepticism rest on four primary criticisms. Ostensibly, the argument contends that presidentialism hinders democratic survival due to the prevalence of minority governments, frequent legislative impasses, the lack of durable coalitions, and the propensity of the executives to exploit constitutional authority for their own benefit.

At their core, presidential systems are essentially majoritarian, winner-takes-all contests. That is, the second-place finisher receives nothing in return for his or her strong showing. When George W. Bush narrowly edged out Al Gore in the Electoral College in the 2000 U.S. presidential election, there was no consolation prize for then Vice President Gore even though he had in fact won the popular vote. Given this, the

winner of a presidential contest has considerable authority and can do as he or she pleases. Furthermore, if the losing candidate is or was serving in the legislature, then the victorious candidate has little incentive to work with his or her former opponent. This situation can result in a political stalemate that could prompt drastic measures that could have a devastating effect on the overall political system.

Furthermore, because there is only one president, presidential systems also tend to produce minority governments. One excellent example of such a scenario is Chile's Allende, who became president after winning only slightly more than 30% of the popular vote. A similar case is the 2002 French presidential elections. Due to pervasive frustration with their government, much of the French electorate voted against [p. 183 ↓] familiar candidates, and nearly 20% of voters supported the right wing candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen—a caustic individual whose campaign has been described as xenophobic if not anti-Semitic in many instances. In France's two-round presidential contest, Le Pen was one of two candidates to make it to the second round, in which he was soundly defeated by Jacques Chirac. Nevertheless, these examples, particularly Allende's story, serve as subtle reminders that presidentialism may result in minority governments. Furthermore, in the case of Le Pen, had he been elected, it is plausible that his policies would have contrasted sharply with the views of much of the French electorate, thus causing a potentially dangerous scenario.

Another reason presidents may hinder democratic survival stems from what is commonly referred to as dual democratic legitimacies. Because presidents and legislators are elected in separate contests—unlike in parliamentary systems—it is possible, if not probable, that both the legislative and executive branches of government may claim separate political mandates. If there are rules or provisions in place to guide the government through these potentially rough waters, then there is little cause for concern. However, in most cases, there is little clarity in doling out responsibilities between these branches of government, in which case, any showdown between the legislature and the president could result in a political stalemate and, possibly, democratic collapse. The latter is certainly not a given, but at the very least, legislative gridlock is likely to ensue. If a political shutdown does not result, the separate mandates of each branch could result in an impasse that could at least stall policy making, which could deprive government agencies, citizens, and politicians of potentially valuable policies or funding that is needed to keep society running smoothly.

Additionally, if the president and legislative majority hold different or contrasting ideological backgrounds or partisan affiliations, then any quasi coalition will likely be short-lived. Admittedly, this is certainly not a given, but it is a likely outcome when the president and legislature hold different views on the direction of a given country. And since there are few incentives for these actors to work together, coalitional stability is likely to be tenuous at best. This instability could slow the political process as these institutions battle for influence, thus resulting in delayed or nonexistent policy making. If policy making does not grind to a halt, then an alternative scenario exists whereby presidents would simply eschew the traditional lawmaking process and opt for extralegal options. This too could precipitate a political showdown that could trigger a democratic crisis or, worse yet, collapse.

Faced with this scenario, many presidents were quick to exploit the constitution for their own personal gains. This potential consequence of presidentialism is based on numerous experiences in Latin America, where presidents attempted to cling to power even when faced with mounting opposition from the legislature and/or the polity. This consequence can be viewed as the culmination of the other components identified thus far. In the event that a president seeks to rewrite, distort, or even ignore the constitution, the fate of democracy has been sealed, and it will be on the brink of collapse.

Although much has been written about the potential perils of presidentialism, this debate remains ongoing. Other scholars have questioned this contention and have countered that presidential systems are not inherently dangerous. For example, Donald Horowitz (1990) takes umbrage with a number of Juan Linz's conjectures. First, Horowitz points out that Linz's evidence is predominantly based on the Latin American experience and neglects stable presidencies found in other regions. Second, Horowitz maintains that the perils of presidentialism are based primarily on exaggerated interpretations of these systems that do not represent all presidential states. It is important to note that Horowitz also points out several instances in which parliamentary systems have prompted instability. Among others, Nigeria is mentioned as one case in which parliamentarism has resulted in an unstable polity. Another point of contention stems from the confusion surrounding presidential systems and electoral systems. Those subscribing to the perils-of-presidentialism school of thought have essentially confused presidential systems with electoral systems, thus producing some misguided conclusions. For example, the single member plurality systems used to elect

many presidents often result in disproportional outcomes that potentially exacerbate underlying social, political, or geographic tensions. Finally, those questioning the dangers of presidentialism also point out that the potentially beneficial aspects of presidential systems have been largely overlooked, which has provided a rather biased view of these regimes.

Although useful, this theoretical discussion does not provide much empirical evidence of the dangers of presidentialism. Fortunately, a number of political scientists have used a variety of statistical techniques to evaluate the perils-of-presidentialism argument. Alfred Stepan and Cindy Skach (1993) have reviewed several constitutional frameworks, along with a host of other data sources, and have discovered that presidentialism is indeed correlated with weaker democracies. Not surprisingly, others have reached much different conclusions. In their study of more than 50 countries, Timothy Power and Mark Gasiorowski's (1997) findings refute the dangers of presidentialism. In the most comprehensive work to date, Jose Antonio Cheibub (2007) has echoed Power and Gasiorowski's conclusions. Cheibub (2007) asserts that it is not presidential systems that are dangerous; rather, he demonstrates that it is the underlying social conditions or background characteristics that jeopardize democratic stability. Specifically, he suggests that whether or not a military regime had previously existed is far more important than whether a presidential system is in place. Because many Latin American countries have had experiences with military dictatorships, Cheibub's findings put Linz's theoretical work in a new perspective.

[p. 184 ↓]

Future Directions

Clearly, much has been written on the topic of regime choice. Convincing arguments have been made on both sides of the debates—those warning of the perils of presidentialism and those questioning this assertion. Cheibub's work is a compelling study of the presidentialism argument; here, the author disaggregates the various components of the presidentialism argument and finds that statistical evidence dispels many of the concerns espoused by the camp opposed to presidentialism. This work, however, does not address every concern. In fact, Cheibub goes on to say that testing

the relationship between political party discipline and presidents is impaired by our inability to measure party discipline cross-nationally. Aside from this empirical problem, there are other concerns with how we measure these regimes. Although scholars such as Alan Siaroff (2003) include several considerations to measure presidential strength, our ability to clearly distinguish presidential states from parliamentary ones is still a work in progress. This issue is further complicated when we take into account the large number of hybrid systems that are also particularly elusive in categorizing regime type.

Conclusion

There are several different ways a country can set up its own government. It can take the form of a presidential, parliamentary, or hybrid regime. To be sure, there are attractive aspects of each regime, but it should not be surprising that many newer democracies have opted for a hybrid regime that seeks the best of both worlds. For example, several former Communist states, such as Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine, have opted for semipresidential regimes, in part to mitigate the shortcomings of either presidential or parliamentary systems (Clark, Golder, & Golder, 2009). Having said that, simply because a country opts for a presidential regime does not necessarily precipitate democratic collapse. For some time, scholars had reasoned that presidential systems were anathema to democracy, but contemporary analysis has largely disputed this finding. Thus, presidential systems may not be as perilous as Linz and others have forecast. This is not to suggest that regime type is insignificant. Rather, regime type remains an important distinction, and it is imperative that we understand the costs and benefits of different regime types in order to minimize the potential negative consequences for a given country.

Joseph W. Robbins *Shepherd University*

References and Further Readings

Aldrich J. 1995. *Why parties? The origin and transformation of party politics in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Baldez L. Carey J. 2001 Budget procedure and fiscal restraint in posttransition Chile . In Haggard S., ed. McCubbins M. D. (Eds.), *Presidents, parliaments, and policy* (pp. pp. 105–148). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Cheibub J. A. Minority governments, deadlock situations, and the survival of presidential democracies *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 35 pp. 284–312 2002 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0010414002035003002>

Cheibub J. A. Presidentialism, electoral identifiability, and budget balances in democratic systems *American Political Science Review* vol. 100 pp. 353–368 2006

Cheibub J. A. 2007. *Presidentialism, parliamentarism, and democracy* . New York: Cambridge University Press.

Clark T. D. Wittrock J. N. Presidentialism and the effect of electoral law in postcommunist systems: Regime type matters *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 38 pp. 171–188 2005 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0010414004271076>

Clark W. R. Golder M. Golder S. N. 2009. *Principles of comparative politics* . Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Cox G. W. 1987. *The efficient secret: The cabinet and the development of political parties in Victorian England* . Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511571473>

Duverger M. 1954. *Political parties* . New York: Wiley.

Evans D. 2004. *Greasing the wheels: Using pork barrel projects to build majority coalitions in Congress* . New York: Cambridge University Press.<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511617140>

Frye T. A politics of institutional choice: Post-Communist presidencies *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 30 pp. 523–552 1997 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0010414097030005001>

Hellman J. S. Constitutions and economic reform in the postcommunist transitions East European Constitutional Review vol. 5 pp. 46–56 1996

Horowitz D. Comparing democratic systems Journal of Democracy vol. 1 pp. 783–794 1990

Ishiyama J. T. Kennedy R. Superpresidentialism and political party development in Russia, Ukraine, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan Europe-Asia Studies vol. 53 pp. 1177–1191 2001 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09668130120093183>

Ishiyama J. T. Velten M. Presidential power and democratic development in post-Communist politics Communist and Post-Communist Studies vol. 31 pp. 217–233 1998 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0967-067X%2898%2900010-5>

Keech W. R. Pak K. Partisanship, institutions and change in American trade politics Journal of Politics vol. 57 pp. 1130–1142 1995

King A. 1994 “Chief executives” in western Europe . In I. Budge, ed. McKay D. (Eds.), Developing democracy: Comparative research in honor of J.F.P. Blondel (pp. pp. 150–163). London: Sage.

Laver M. Shepsle K. A. 1996. Making and breaking governments: Government formation in parliamentary democracies . New York: Cambridge University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511625671>

Lijphart A. 1999. Patterns of democracy: Government forms and performance in thirty-six countries . New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Linz J. J. The perils of presidentialism Journal of Democracy vol. 1 pp. 51–69 1990a

Linz J. J. Virtues of parliamentarism Journal of Democracy vol. 1 pp. 83–91 1990b

Linz J. J. 1994 Presidential or parliamentary democracy: Does it make a difference? In Linz J. J., ed. Valenzuela A. (Eds.), The failure of presidential democracy (pp. pp. 3–87). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lohmann S. O'Halloran S. Divided government and U.S. trade policy: Theory and evidence *International Organization* vol. 48 pp. 595–632 1994 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300028320>

Mainwaring S. Presidentialism, multipartism, and democracy: The difficult combination *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 26 pp. 198–228 1993 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0010414093026002003>

Marsteintredet L. Berntzen E. Reducing the perils of presidentialism in Latin America through presidential interruptions *Comparative Politics* vol. 41 pp. 83–102 2008 <http://dx.doi.org/10.5129/001041508X12911362383714>

McCarty N. Presidential pork: Executive veto power and distributive politics *American Political Science Review* vol. 94 pp. 117–129 2000

McGregor J. P. The presidency in east Central Europe RFE/R1 Research Report vol. 3 pp. 23–31 1994

McGregor J. P. Constitutional factors in politics in post-Communist central and eastern Europe *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* vol. 29 pp. 147–166 1996 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0967-067X%2896%2980003-1>

Metcalf L. K. Measuring presidential power *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 33 pp. 660–685 2000 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0010414000033005004>

Persson T. Roland G. Tabellini G. Comparative politics and public finance *Journal of Political Economy* vol. 106 pp. 1121–1160 2000

Persson T. Tabellini G. The size and scope of government: Comparative politics and rational politicians *European Economic Review* vol. 43 pp. 699–735 1999 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0014-2921%2898%2900131-7>

Power T. J. Gasiorowski M. J. Institutional design and democratic consolidation in the third world *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 30 pp. 123–155 1997 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0010414097030002001>

Protsyk O. Ruling with decrees: Presidential decree making in Russia and Ukraine *Europe-Asia Studies* vol. 56 pp. 637–660 2004 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0966813041000235083>

Roper S. D. Are all semipresidential regimes the same? A comparison of premier-presidential regimes *Comparative Politics* vol. 34 pp. 253–272 2002 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/4146953>

Sartori G. 1994 Neither presidentialism nor parliamentarism . In Linz J. J., ed. Valenzuela A. (Eds.), *The failure of presidential democracy* (pp. pp. 106–118). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Shugart M. S. Carey J. M. 1992. *Presidents and assemblies: Constitutional design and electoral dynamics* . Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Siaroff A. Comparative presidencies: The inadequacy of the presidential, semipresidential and parliamentary distinction *European Journal of Political Research* vol. 42 pp. 287–312 2003 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.00084>

Smith A. Election timing in majoritarian parliaments *British Journal of Political Science* vol. 33 pp. 397–418 2003 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0007123403000188>

Stepan A. Skach C. *Constitutional frameworks and democratic consolidation* *World Politics* vol. 46 pp. 1–22 1993 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2950664>

Tavits M. 2009. *Presidents with prime ministers: Do direct elections matter?* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412979351.n21>