



5 Presidential and Parliamentary Government

We have seen in Chapter 4 that each democratic constitution has its own particular and special features and each combines them in a different way. This might produce a severe problem for comparative politics, for if every system were unique, then all we could do would be to describe them in bewildering and endless detail. Fortunately for students of comparative politics, this is not the case. The great majority of democracies combine their three branches of government in one of three general ways – most of them fall fairly neatly into presidential or parliamentary or semi-presidential systems. Of course, each particular democracy retains its own special features and there are a few that do not fall neatly into one of these three categories (e.g. Israel, Switzerland and the European Union), but most conform to one of the three types, and can be classified accordingly.

The first task of this chapter is to map out the three systems and the main differences between them. Since each has its own strengths and weaknesses, the second task is to consider their respective merits and deficiencies. Third, since constitutions do not exist in a societal vacuum, the next task is to try to sort out the form of government best suited to different social and historical circumstances. Some forms of government are likely to work better in certain conditions than others, and it is also possible that countries might do well to shift from one form to another as they develop over time.

The five major topics in this chapter are:

- Presidential systems
- Parliamentary systems
- Semi-presidential systems
- Presidential, parliamentary and semi-presidential systems compared
- Theories of parliamentary, presidential and semi-presidential government

■ Presidential Systems

In this section we discuss executive presidents who are both head of state and head of government, setting aside the non-executive type of presidents who are head of state but not of government. A great many executive **presidential systems** are modelled on the US, and they reproduce many features of the American system, though not in every detail. The main point about this form of government is that its president is **directly elected** by the electorate as a whole and his or her executive power is balanced by a legislature that is independent of the president because it, too, is popularly elected. The president, alone among all the officials of state, has general responsibility for public affairs. He or she may appoint ministers or cabinet members, but they are responsible only for their own department business, and they are accountable to the president, not the legislature. To ensure a real separation of powers, neither the president nor members of the cabinet can be members of the legislature.

Presidential systems A directly elected executive, with a limited term of office and a general responsibility for the affairs of state.

Directly elected Election by the electorate as a whole (popular election) rather than the legislature, or another body.

Presidential government is marked by four main features:

1. *Head of state and government* Presidents perform the ceremonial duties of head of state and are also in charge of the executive branch of government: they are usually chief of the armed forces and head of the national civil service, and responsible for both foreign policy and for initiating domestic legislation. In most instances presidential office is held by a single person, but there are examples of dual and multiple presidential office holders. Switzerland is unique in having seven members of the Federal Council (Bundesrat), one being selected to be formal president each year.
2. *The execution of policy* Presidents appoint cabinets to advise them and run the main state bureaucracies.
3. *Dependence on the legislative branch* Presidents initiate legislation but depend on the legislature to pass it into law.
4. *Fixed tenure* Presidents are directly elected for a fixed term and are normally secure in office unless, in exceptional circumstances, they are removed from it by the legislature. Most are restricted to one or two terms of office, a few to three, and most such systems set a minimum age for candidates

that is higher than for other public offices in order to get more experienced candidates.

The separation of executive and legislative, each with its independent authority derived from popular election, is a deliberate part of the system of checks and balances. In theory both have powers and are independent of each other, but in practice presidents and assemblies usually have to share power. They must cooperate to get things done, and the result is not so much a separation of powers as a complex mix of them, consisting of a separation of institutions but a mix of powers in the daily give-and-take of their political relations (see Briefing 5.1).

Briefing 5.1

The presidential system in Costa Rica

Costa Rica offers a typical example of the separation of powers in presidential systems. Its constitution provides for independent executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, with a clear division of offices and powers with checks and balances on each.

- The president is head of state and government and is elected by popular vote for a four-year term. The fifty-seven members of the legislative assembly – the deputies – are also elected for a four-year term.
- The executive branch (president, vice-presidents and ministers in the Government Council) has the power to tax and spend according to law, but the legislative branch (the Legislative Assembly) has the power to amend the president's budget, and appoints a Comptroller General to check public expenditure and prevent overspending.
- The president has the duty to maintain order and tranquillity in the nation and to safeguard public liberties, but the Assembly (provided it has a two-thirds majority) has the power to suspend individual rights if it believes there is a public need to do so.
- The president has the power to enter into agreements, public treaties and accords, and to enact and execute them according to the constitution, but the Assembly has the right to approve or disapprove international conventions, public treaties and concordats.
- The Legislative Assembly appoints members of the Supreme Court, which has used its right to enforce constitutional checks on presidential power.
- The Legislative Assembly appoints a powerful and independent Special Electoral Tribunal to oversee elections and ensure their free and fair conduct.
- The Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court reviews legislation and executive action when required and also receives appeals contesting the constitutionality of government action.
- A further set of independent state officials – a Comptroller General, a Procurator General and an Ombudsman – have powers to oversee government action and are active in reviewing, scrutinising and sometimes prosecuting elected and appointed officials of government.

This division of powers has an important effect on the way that presidents work, because they are ultimately dependent on their legislatures to get legislation accepted. It is said, for example, that the US president has little power over Congress other than the power of persuasion. Some in the White House have found this inadequate for the purposes of government. If Congress and the president are of a different political mind, they may fight each other and get little done. One image likens the president, the House of Representatives and the Senate to participants in a three-legged race – difficult to move along unless they move together, and easy to fall over if they pull in different directions. The problem is heightened if the presidency is controlled by one political party while one or both houses of the legislature are controlled by another. The result is that presidents who are powerful in theory are sometimes neutralised by elected assemblies.

For this reason, many presidential systems have failed the test of democratic stability, and some experts believe that they do not make for effective government. The US is probably the most successful example, although Costa Rica has successfully maintained its presidential system since 1949.

■ Parliamentary Systems

In **parliamentary systems** the executive is not directly elected but usually emerges or is drawn from the elected legislature (the parliament or assembly) and, unlike a directly elected president, is often an integral part of it. This form of parliamentary executive usually consists of a prime minister (sometimes called chancellor or premier) and a cabinet or a council of ministers. The cabinet or council is the collective executive body. Usually the most powerful offices of state are taken by the leaders of the largest party in the assembly or the governing coalition within it. Unlike presidents, who are the only officials with general responsibilities for government affairs, parliamentary executives share responsibilities among their members. This means that the cabinet, including the prime minister, is collectively responsible for all the actions of government, and the prime minister, in theory, is only *primus inter pares* (first among equals). In fact, prime ministers in many countries have acquired more power than this, as we shall see.

Parliamentary systems These have (1) a directly elected legislative body, (2) fused executive and legislative institutions, (3) a collective executive that emerges from the legislature and is responsible to it, and (4) a separation of head of state and head of government.

Whereas the executive and legislative branches in presidential systems are separated, this is not so clearly the case in parliamentary systems where:

1. the leader of the party or coalition of parties with most support in parliament becomes the prime minister or chancellor;
2. the prime minister or chancellor forms a cabinet usually – but not necessarily – chosen from members of parliament, and the cabinet then forms the core of government;

Briefing 5.2

The parliamentary system in Japan

- Japan is a constitutional monarchy with an emperor who is largely limited to a ceremonial role as head of state. The Japanese system of government sets out to create the checks and balances of presidential systems, but with a different set of executive, legislative and judicial institutions to do so. The Japanese parliament has two chambers: a lower house, the House of Representatives, and an upper house, the House of Councillors. Together they are called the National Diet and designated by the constitution as 'the sole law-making organ of the state', with powers to make laws, approve national budgets and ratify treaties. Both are directly elected by popular vote.
- The House of Representatives is the more powerful of the two. The House of Councillors can delay important matters such as a budget, a foreign treaty or the selection of a prime minister, and it has the power to veto other matters. But the House of Representatives can override the veto with a two-thirds majority.
- Both houses can conduct investigations into government and order the prime minister and cabinet members to attend inquiries and answer questions. The National Diet can also propose constitutional amendments, but these must be passed by national referendum.
- The prime minister is appointed (from among the members of either house) by the National Diet in order to establish its supremacy over the executive, but the House of Councillors has little power to oppose the nomination of the House of Representatives.
- The prime minister is the head of government, the cabinet and the Japan Self-Defence Forces, with power to appoint and dismiss cabinet members, to initiate legislation and present it to the Diet to sign bills, and to declare a state of national emergency.
- In practice, most proposals for legislation come from the prime minister and the cabinet, but the Diet has the power to accept, reject or amend them.
- The prime minister can dissolve the House of Representatives, but not the House of Councillors. The Diet can also dissolve the government if a vote of no confidence gains the support of fifty members of the House of Representatives.
- The Japanese Supreme Court is independent of government and has the power of judicial review of laws, regulations and acts of government.

3. the government is dependent upon the support of parliament, which may remove the executive from power with a vote of no confidence. The executive is also dependent on the legislature because the latter can reject, accept or amend legislation initiated by the government. Equally, the executive may have the power to dissolve the legislature and call an election (see Briefing 5.2).

This means that the executive in a parliamentary system is directly dependent on, and accountable to, the legislature (i.e. the parliament). Since the

executive has **collective responsibility** for government (unlike a president), it must stick together because public disagreement within the cabinet or council on a major political matter will almost certainly result in its being seriously weakened.

Collective responsibility The principle that decisions and policies of the cabinet or council are binding on all members who must support them in public.

The prime minister and the cabinet must be closely bound together by mutual dependence and 'collegiality' if they are to have a chance of remaining in office. The prime minister appoints cabinet members and can sack them, but to remain in power, the prime minister must also retain the confidence of the cabinet.

Presidential systems are usually modelled on the US and often found in Latin America, while parliamentary systems are often modelled on the British system and are widely found in the British Commonwealth, but also in western Europe. While, in theory, presidential and parliamentary systems operate in very different ways, in practice they tend to converge. Both depend on a close working relationship between executive and legislature. Although the power of a president is formally greater than that of a prime minister, in practice prime ministers in the modern world are said to be accumulating power so that they become more and more 'presidential'. For example, British prime ministers and German chancellors seem to have become progressively more powerful in the last decades. The process of **presidentialisation**

can be observed in many countries, implying a further concentration of political power in the hands of the executive in parliamentary systems, especially strengthening the power of the prime minister, premier or chancellor.

Presidentialisation The process of increasingly concentrating political power and autonomy in the hands of the executive, especially its head.

One of the advantages of parliamentary over presidential systems is said to be that the former produce strong and stable government by virtue of the fusion of executive and legislature. This has generally been the case in Australia, Britain, Canada, Denmark and Japan. But just as presidential systems are sometimes weak, divided or deadlocked, so also are some parliamentary systems – for example, in Italy and in the French Fourth Republic (1946–58). The difference between stable and unstable parliamentary systems may lie less in their constitutional arrangements than in their party systems. Where there is a strong, stable and disciplined party majority (either a single party or a coalition), the result is often strong and stable government, because the executive can usually depend on majority support in the legislature. Where parties are fragmented, factious and volatile, or where majorities are small and uncertain, the parliamentary system is likely to be weak and unstable. Equally, where party discipline in parliament is strong, prime ministers can also be strong and dominate their parties and parliament, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the checks and balances said to be built into parliamentary systems. This directs attention away from constitutional arrangements to the role of political parties, a theme we will revisit, especially in Chapter 13.

Parliamentary systems are most common in the older democracies of western Europe (including Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK), and half of them are in British Commonwealth countries (including Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand and Botswana where the prime minister is confusingly called the president). A large proportion of parliamentary democracies are smaller states (India is an exception), and many are small island democracies. Of the democratised countries of central and east Europe, Croatia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia and Slovakia are fully parliamentary.

In contrast to presidential systems, the prime ministers or chancellors of parliamentary systems do not have limited terms of office, and in recent decades some of them have had successive election victories and have held on to power for a long time – Gonzales (Spain), Kohl and Merkel (Germany), Menzies, Fraser and Hawke (Australia), Thatcher, Major and Blair (UK) and Trudeau and Mulroney (Canada).

■ Semi-Presidential Systems

The French Fourth Republic suffered from chronic instability caused by party fragmentation and deadlock in the assembly, running through twenty-seven

Semi-presidential system A government consisting of a directly elected president who shares power with a prime minister who is appointed by the president from among the elected members of the legislature.

governments in thirteen years. To overcome this problem, the French Fifth Republic created a **semi-presidential system** in 1958 with a strong, directly elected president with substantial powers to act as a stable centre for government. Often known as hybrid systems (i.e. mixed systems) or

as dual-executive systems, semi-presidential government combines a directly elected president who shares power with a prime minister. The president has powers to:

- appoint prime ministers from the elected assembly, and to dismiss them;
- dissolve parliament and call a referendum;
- declare a state of emergency, and is given substantial powers to deal with it.

The prime minister, in turn, appoints a cabinet from the assembly (the president may do this if he or she is from the same party as the prime minister), which is then accountable to the assembly. In this way, the French system of semi-presidential government combines the strong president of a presidential system with a prime minister and the fused executive and legislature of parliamentary systems.

This system worked smoothly in the early years of the Fifth Republic when the president (de Gaulle) and the prime minister (Debré) were from the same political party. During this time the president was the dominant force. To the surprise of many, the system continued to work well later, when the president (Mitterrand) and the prime minister (Chirac) came from different parties – what the French call ‘cohabitation’. In this period, the balance of power tends to swing in favour of the prime minister.

Semi-presidentialism is found in relatively few democracies: Finland, France and Portugal are the only ones maintaining it for more than a quarter of a century, and Finland has changed so that it is now classified as a parliamentary system by some experts. Semi-presidentialism has been adopted by some of the democracies of central Europe (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovenia), which have tried to blend parliamentary systems with a comparatively strong, directly elected president. The attraction of an elected president in the ex-communist democracies is to have a single strong public figure who can act as (1) a focus of national feeling (important in a newly independent state that needs a strong central figure) and (2) as the centre of executive power to help overcome extreme party fragmentation in the new legislatures.

There are indications of a tendency to move away from semi-presidentialism in some countries as political conditions change. In Finland, there have been attempts to reduce the power of the president. The central European states are still feeling their way, and if they develop strong party systems and consolidate their national identity, they may well move from a semi-presidential towards more purely parliamentary forms of government.

■ Presidential, Parliamentary and Semi-Presidential Systems Compared

We are now in a position to compare all three types of government. The main points of comparison are laid out in Briefing 5.3. It is clear that there are things to be said both for and against all three as forms of democratic government, and it is also clear that all three can work as effective democratic structures. Whether all three work equally well in countries with different social conditions and political histories is a different matter. One view is that presidential

Briefing 5.3

The three major forms of democratic government: main features

Presidential	Parliamentary	Semi-presidential
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Citizens directly elect the executive for a fixed term 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The executive emerges from a directly elected legislature and is closely related to it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Executive power is shared between a president (directly elected) and a prime minister who is appointed or directly elected
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The president alone has executive power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The cabinet shares executive power and must reach compromises to maintain unity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The prime minister appoints a cabinet, usually from the ruling party or coalition in the assembly

Presidential	Parliamentary	Semi-presidential
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The presidency is the only office of state with a general responsibility for the affairs of state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The executive is a collegial body (cabinet or council of ministers) that shares responsibility, though the prime minister, premier or chancellor may be much more than <i>primus inter pares</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The president often appoints the prime minister and has general responsibility for state affairs, especially foreign affairs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The president shares power with a separate and independently elected legislature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The office of the prime minister/premier/chancellor is separate from the head of state (whether monarch or president) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The president often has emergency powers, including the dissolution of parliament
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neither the president nor the legislature can remove the other (except in special circumstances such as impeachment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The prime minister and cabinet can dissolve parliament and call an election, but the prime minister and cabinet can be removed from office by a parliamentary expression of a lack of confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The prime minister and cabinet often have special responsibility for domestic and day-to-day affairs of state
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The president is directly elected and therefore directly accountable to the people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The prime minister and cabinet are responsible to parliament 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The president is directly elected and directly accountable to the people; the prime minister is responsible either to the president or to parliament
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples: US, many states in Central and South America (Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Venezuela), Cyprus, Philippines and South Korea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most stable democracies are parliamentary systems. Examples: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples: Finland (until 1991), France and many post-communist states, including Belarus, Poland, Russia and Ukraine

systems can be weak and ineffective, and run into problems of executive–legislative deadlock, leading to attempts to break through the problem by a ‘strong man’ who promises decisive and effective government. Not many countries have managed the presidential system as well as the US.

At the same time, semi-presidential systems also have their problems. They can produce deadlock between the president and the prime minister, leading to

ineffective government. Not many countries seem to be able to handle the problems of ‘cohabitation’ as well as France does. Some parliamentary systems have also produced weak, divided and unstable government, while others have tended towards an over-concentration of power (see Controversy 5.1). It is clear that we should look more closely at the arguments about parliamentary, presidential and semi-presidential government.

CONTROVERSY 5.1

<i>Presidential, parliamentary or semi-presidential government?</i>		
Presidential	Parliamentary	Semi-presidential
For		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The US is a long-standing model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most of the world's stable democracies are parliamentary systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In theory combines the best of presidential and parliamentary government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Separation of the executive and legislative institutions of government according to classical democratic theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fusion of executive and legislative can create strong and effective government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The president can be a symbol of the nation and a focus of national unity, while the prime minister can run the day-to-day business of the government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Direct election of the president means direct accountability of the president to the people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Direct chain of accountability from voters to parliament to cabinet to prime minister 	
Against		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conflict between executive and legislation may be chronic, leading to deadlock and immobilism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The fusion of the executive and legislative, and a large legislative majority, combined with tight party discipline, can produce leaders with too much power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conflict and power struggles between prime minister and cabinet, and between prime minister and president are not unusual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Weak and ineffective presidents have sometimes tried to make their office much stronger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parliamentary systems without a legislative majority can be weak and unstable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confusion of accountability between president and prime minister
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Few presidential systems have survived long 		

■ Theories of Parliamentary, Presidential and Semi-Presidential Government

At the heart of debates about the three types of government lies one of the fundamental problems of any democracy: How can a political system balance the need for accountability to citizens and protection of their basic rights against the need for government that is strong enough to be effective? Too much government power means too little democracy, but too little government power means too little government. How do our three systems measure up to this dilemma?

At the outset, we have the problem of evaluating semi-presidential systems: there are too few of them, and only two examples in established democracies (France and Finland, which has moved towards a parliamentary system). Many of the democracies of central and eastern Europe are semi-presidential, but these are rather special cases, and some seem to be transforming themselves into parliamentary systems. Only time will tell whether they remain semi-presidential or for how long.

A leading writer on the relative merits of presidential and parliamentary systems was the Spanish sociologist and political scientist Juan Linz (1926–2013). He claimed that presidentialism entails a paradox. On the one hand, presidents are strong because they are directly elected and have popular support. They can rise above the petty in-fighting of parties and factions and speak for their country and its people. The president is also a single person who takes all the power of the presidential office. On the other hand, presidents are normally bound by all sorts of constitutional provisions that limit their power: they must have legislative support for actions, decisions and appointments; they have to deal with the independence of the courts; and they sometimes face a highly fragmented, undisciplined and ineffective party system that makes it difficult to shape and implement a coherent policy. Because presidents do not always have the support of the majority in the assembly, they may be unable to implement their policies. In a word, presidentialism is prone to **immobilism** (see Briefing 5.4). In addition, unlike parliamentary leaders, presidents have a fixed term of office,

Immobilism The state of being unable to move (immobilised) or unable to take decisions or implement policies.

Briefing 5.4

The perils of presidential government

The outgoing president in 1952, Harry S. Truman, is said to have commented about his successor in the White House, the Second World War General, Dwight ('Ike') D. Eisenhower:

He'll sit here, and he'll say, 'Do this! Do that!' And nothing will happen. Poor Ike – it won't be a bit like the Army. He'll find it very frustrating.

R. E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership*, Free Press, 1960: 9.

which means it can be difficult to remove an unpopular president, but also means a sharp break in policies when a new one is elected.

According to Linz, parliamentary systems are more conducive to stable democracy. They are more flexible and adaptable because they do not impose the discontinuities of fixed terms of presidential office. Since the political executive is rooted in the majority party of the assembly, or in a coalition of parties, it is based on compromise and bargaining within or between parties.

And since parliamentary executives are not limited to one or two terms in office, they can maintain a degree of continuity – the party leader may be replaced, but the party or coalition may continue in power.

How does the theoretical argument about the superiority of parliamentary over presidential government measure up to the empirical evidence? At first sight, the evidence is compelling. The US and Costa Rica are among the few examples of long-lived democratic presidentialism, and there are a few notable failures – Argentina, Brazil and Chile. At the same time, a high proportion of west European democracies are parliamentary, as are many of the stable democracies of the British Commonwealth. It is estimated that of forty-three stable democracies in the world existing between 1979 and 1989, thirty-six were parliamentary, five presidential and two semi-presidential.

A second look at the evidence, however, suggests a more favourable evaluation of presidential government. First, while it is true that many presidential systems have failed, many of these are in Latin America, which raises the question of whether the explanation lies in inherent institutional design faults, or in the economic problems, lack of democratic traditions and fragmented parties of the countries which adopted the system in the first place. Would parliamentary government have worked any better in these countries? It is impossible to know, but it is important to note that parliamentary systems failed in Greece and Turkey, and have not performed well in France and Italy.

There are also different subtypes of presidential government, some giving the office great powers and others limiting them. Similarly, some presidents operate within a cohesive and well-organised party system. It may be that presidents with strong party support in the main legislative body have a better chance of producing stable democracy than presidents with weak party support.

■ What Have We Learned?

- In spite of great constitutional variety, democratic states fall into one of three general categories – presidential, parliamentary and semi-presidential systems.
- Presidents in democracies are directly elected for a fixed term of office to serve as the executive head of government. The main examples are found in the US and Latin America. However, powerful executive heads often must share power with elected legislative bodies and are subject to judicial review.
- In parliamentary systems the political executive (chancellor, premier or prime minister and the cabinet or council of ministers) is not directly elected

but emerges from the majority party or ruling coalition in the assembly and is accountable to it. The executive continues in office as long as it has the support of the elected assembly, so there is no fixed term of office. Parliamentary systems are found mainly in western Europe and the stable democracies of the British Commonwealth.

- The semi-presidential system is a hybrid of the other two types, consisting of a directly elected president and a prime minister who appoints a cabinet from the assembly. There are not many semi-presidential systems in the world, and the best known is in France.
- Most stable democracies in the world are parliamentary. Relatively few are presidential or semi-presidential.

■ Lessons of Comparison

- There is no single best formula for a stable and vibrant democracy. Each of the three main systems has its advantages and disadvantages.
- Different systems may be suited to different national circumstances, and the same country may change its system as it develops. The best system for any given country at any given time may depend on its particular historical, social and economic circumstances.
- The semi-presidential system seems to be well suited to the circumstances of the democracies of central Europe.
- It may not be the basic constitutional arrangements of presidentialism that tend to create unstable democracies so much as the political, economic and social characteristics of the countries that adopt this form of government. Presidents in countries with a history of democracy, a strong economy and a stable and organised party system might sustain stable democracy.

Projects

1. Assume you are a consultant brought in to advise a newly independent state that wishes to set up a democratic constitution. Would you recommend (a) a presidential, (b) a semi-presidential or (c) a parliamentary system? Explain the reasons for your decisions.
2. Why is there no single best institutional design for the relationships between the executive and legislative branches in a democracy?
3. How could we decide, using the comparative method, whether it is the basic design of presidential government or the weakness of party systems that causes democratic instability?

Further Reading

- R. Elgie, *Semi-Presidentialism: Sub-Types and Democratic Performance*, Oxford University Press, 2011. Explains variations in the structure and performance of semi-presidential systems.

- A. Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, Yale University Press, 2012, esp. ch. 7, 'Executive–Legislative Relations'. Presents a systematic comparative analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of these relations.
- A. Lijphart (ed.), *Parliamentary versus Presidential Government*, Oxford University Press, 1992. A seminal collection of work on parliaments and presidents.
- J. J. Linz and A. Valenzuela (eds.), *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. A critical commentary on presidential government.
- S. Mainwaring and M. S. Shugart (eds.), *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*, Cambridge University Press, 1997. A defence of some forms of presidentialism.
- T. Poguntke and P. Webb (eds.), *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies*, Oxford University Press, 2007. A comparative analysis of various developments stimulating the strengthening of executive powers in democracies.
- T. Raunio and T. Sedelius, *Semi-Presidential Policy-Making in Europe: Executive Coordination and Political Leadership*, Palgrave, 2019. Detailed analyses of the conflicts and coordination of presidents and prime ministers in semi-presidential systems.
- A. Siaroff, 'Comparative presidencies: The inadequacy of the presidential, semi-presidential and parliamentary distinction', *European Journal of Political Research*, 42/3, 2003: 287–312. Discusses the inadequacies of the three forms of government and presents a different typology.

Websites

www.encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com

Comprehensive accounts of parliamentary, presidential and semi-presidential systems of government.

www.ipu.org/dem-e/guide/summary.htm

A detailed account of the role and functions of democratic parliaments in the world.

www.keydifferences.com/difference-between-parliamentary-and-presidential-form-of-government.html

Short comparison of presidential and parliamentary government.

www.sites.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/stm103_articles/Cheibub_Pres_Parlt

Discusses the relative merits of presidential and parliamentary government.

www.researchgate.net/publication/265101267_The_Politics_of_Semi-Presidentialism

Introduces the concept of semi-presidentialism, examines the comparative experience of semi-presidentialism and addresses the issue of whether or not countries should adopt a semi-presidential form of government.