



**PRESIDENTIALISM, PARLIAMENTARISM AND
SEMI-PRESIDENTIALISM
WHICH IS BEST AND HOW WOULD WE KNOW?**

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Aim

To review the evidence that some types of executive-legislative arrangements are better than others

Structure

- 1.) What are competing claims about the different types of executive-legislative relations?
- 2.) What is the evidence to support such claims?
- 3.) What is the status of this evidence?
- 4.) Conclusion

What are the competing claims about executive-legislative relations?

1.) Presidentialism

Where there is a directly elected fixed-term president, where there is no prime minister, where the cabinet is not responsible to the legislature, and where the legislature serves for a fixed term

e.g. US, most of Central and South America

What are the competing claims about executive-legislative relations?

1.) Presidentialism

- The president and assembly have competing claims to legitimacy**
- The fixed presidential term is too rigid**
- The presidential election is a zero-sum contest**
- Presidents believe they are above politics**
- Presidential elections encourage populist candidates**

Source: Mainwaring and Shugart (1997)

What are the competing claims about executive-legislative relations?

2.) Parliamentarism

Where there is an indirectly elected fixed-term president or a figurehead monarch, where the PM and cabinet are collectively responsible to the legislature, which can (usually) be dissolved

e.g. UK, Canada, Australia, NZ, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Hungary, Czech Rep, Turkey pre-2007

What are the competing claims about executive-legislative relations?

2.) Parliamentarism

- **Parliamentary elections can be zero-sum if one party wins a large majority**
- **Populists can still win power under parliamentarism**
- **Very divided legislatures can lead to instability**
- **There can still be conflicts of legitimacy**

What are the competing claims about executive-legislative relations?

3.) Semi-presidentialism

Where there is both a directly elected fixed-term president, and where the PM and cabinet are collectively responsible to the legislature, which can (usually) be dissolved

e.g. France, Portugal, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, ex-Yugoslavia, much of ex-USSR, inc. Russia, francophone and lusophone Africa, Iceland, Ireland, Austria, Turkey post-2007

What are the competing claims about executive-legislative relations?

3.) Semi-presidentialism

- The dual executive creates problems of executive coordination**
- Dual legitimacy can cause problems of coordination between the executive and the legislature – cohabitation**
- Divided minority government**

where neither the president's party nor the PM's party enjoys majority support

What is the state of current thinking?

- 1.) In rich democracies, the form of executive-legislations relations does not affect the prospects of democratic survival

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What is the state of current thinking?

- 1.) In rich democracies, the form of executive-legislations relations does not affect the prospects of democratic survival
- 2.) Parliamentarism is a better choice than presidentialism
- 3.) Semi-presidentialism is a bad choice
- 4.) **Some forms of semi-presidentialism are better than others**

Semi-presidentialism with a weaker president is a better choice than semi-presidentialism with a stronger president

What is the state of current thinking?

- 1.) In rich democracies, the form of executive-legislations relations does not affect the prospects of democratic survival
- 2.) Parliamentarism is a better choice than presidentialism
- 3.) Semi-presidentialism is a bad choice
- 4.) **Some forms of semi-presidentialism are better than others**

Premier-presidentialism (where the PM is responsible only to the legislature) is a better choice than president-parliamentarism (where the PM is also responsible to the president)

What is the evidence to support the competing claims?

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e.g. Przeworski et al. (2000), 1945-1990 - Once a country has a democratic regime, its level of economic development has a very strong effect on the probability that democracy will survive

Above \$6,000 per capita income (in 1985 PPP US\$), democracies are impregnable and can be expected to live forever

What is the evidence to support the competing claims?

- 1.) In rich democracies, the form of executive-legislations relations does not affect the prospects of democratic survival

Good evidence

What is the evidence to support the competing claims?

2.) Parliamentarism is a better choice than presidentialism

All else equal, unconsolidated democracies are more likely to collapse under presidentialism than parliamentarism

What is the evidence to support the competing claims?

2.) **Parliamentarism is a better choice than presidentialism**

e.g. Przeworski et al. (2000), 1945-1990 - 14 democracies (or 28% of 50 cases) died under a parliamentary system; 24 (52% of 46 cases) died under presidentialism

What is the evidence to support the competing claims?

2.) **Parliamentarism is a better choice than presidentialism**

e.g. Svobik (2009), 1789-2001 - only about 1 in 6,800 presidential democracies will consolidate at median levels of other covariates compared with 6 in 7 for parliamentary democracies

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Parliamentarism is associated with a better quality of democracy

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2.) **Parliamentarism is a better choice than presidentialism**

Gerring et al (2009), 1951-2000 – parliamentarism is associated with 45% more telephone mainlines, a 5% reduction in import duties as a percentage of imports, 30% more trade openness, an increased investment rating of more than 6 points (on a scale of 100), a 30% higher per capita income, a nearly 23% lower infant mortality rate, and a greater life expectancy of more than 2%

What is the evidence to support the competing claims?

2.) Parliamentarism is a better choice than presidentialism

Parliamentarism is associated with a better quality of democracy

Limited evidence

What is the evidence to support the competing claims?

3.) Semi-presidentialism is a bad choice

Most of the evidence relating to semi-presidentialism is based on country case studies, or studies of particular regions

What is the evidence to support the competing claims?

3.) Semi-presidentialism is a bad choice

Young democracies are more likely to collapse under semi-presidentialism than parliamentarism

What is the evidence to support the competing claims?

3.) Semi-presidentialism is a bad choice

Moestrup (2008), 1974-2005 - parliamentary regimes have a statistically significant positive impact on the level of democracy, compared to semi-presidential regimes

What is the evidence to support the competing claims?

3.) Semi-presidentialism is a bad choice

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Very limited evidence

What is the evidence to support the competing claims?

4.) Some forms of semi-presidentialism are better than others

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President-parliamentary semi-presidentialism is more dangerous for unconsolidated democracies than premier-presidentialism

What is the evidence to support the competing claims?

4.) Some forms of semi-presidentialism are better than others

e.g. Elgie and Schleiter (2010), 1919-2008 – where the PM is accountable to the assembly and the president the risk of democratic breakdown is increased by a factor of 5.24 compared to semi-presidential countries where the PM is accountable only to the assembly

What is the evidence to support the competing claims?

4.) Some forms of semi-presidentialism are better than others

President-parliamentary semi-presidentialism is more dangerous for unconsolidated democracies than premier-presidentialism

Good evidence

What is the evidence to support the competing claims?

4.) Some forms of semi-presidentialism are better than others

Elgie (2011), 1919-2008; President-parliamentary democracies have a lower level of democracy than premier-presidential democracies

Limited evidence

How good is the evidence?

1.) There are now more large-n controlled studies as opposed to individual country studies or small-n descriptive comparisons of particular regions

Large-n controlled studies should produce more reliable results

We should be wary of anecdotal arguments

How good is the evidence?

- 1.) There are now more large-n controlled studies
- 2.) These studies are always contested

e.g. Boix and presidentialism

Cheibub and presidentialism

Cheibub and Chernyk and semi-presidentialism

The results vary because of how regimes are defined, cases selected, statistical method used, variables included

How good is the evidence?

- 1.) There are now more large-n controlled studies
- 2.) These studies are always contested
- 3.) **Even if large-n studies are more reliable, the findings are probabilistic not deterministic**

We can make recommendations based on the general effects of institutions

We cannot guarantee that those effects will be observed in individual cases

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- 2.) We have to be very careful when making recommendations for particular countries

e.g. I would not recommend that Kenya adopt a presidential system

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- 2.) We have to be very careful when making recommendations for particular countries

I would hesitate to recommend what system Turkey should adopt

If pushed, and if democratic survival is the key outcome, I would recommend either a parliamentary system, or a semi-presidential system with a figurehead president