

Varieties of Semi-Presidentialism and Their Impact on Nascent Democracies

Robert Elgie

Abstract

Semi-presidentialism is the situation where the constitution identifies both a directly elected president and a prime minister responsible to the legislature. There are now some sixty countries in the world with a semi-presidential constitution. However, the academic wisdom is resolutely opposed to the adoption of semi-presidentialism and nascent democracies are advised to avoid this form of government. This essay examines the performance of semi-presidentialism. Particular attention is paid to the effect of various forms of semi-presidentialism. Different forms of semi-presidentialism are expected to have different effects. To this end, all the countries with a semi-presidential constitution that have embarked on the process of democratic transition are identified. To what extent was semi-presidentialism a factor in the cases when the transition process was successful? When the transition process failed, to what extent was semi-presidentialism responsible for this failure? What was the effect of different forms of semi-presidentialism on the process of democratization? The findings suggest that there is inconclusive evidence to document some of the major problems commonly associated with semi-presidentialism. The performance of semi-presidentialism seems strongly influenced by noninstitutional factors. However, there is a difference between the performance of the two main types of semi-presidentialism that are identified. Overall, the findings do not provide grounds to recommend for or against the adoption of semi-presidentialism as opposed to parliamentarism or presidentialism, but if constitution-makers decide to adopt a semi-presidential constitution, then the findings suggest that they should adopt a premier-presidential form of semi-presidentialism.

The concept of semi-presidentialism was first introduced by Maurice Duverger in the 1970s.¹ Writing in French, he examined the West European experience

Robert Elgie is the Paddy Moriarty Professor of Government and International Studies at Dublin City University. <robert.elgie@dcu.ie>

of semi-presidentialism.² He was not concerned with the effect of semi-presidentialism on democratization. Instead, he was interested in explaining why countries with similar constitutional structures operated in very different ways. His main purpose in this regard was to explain why the French political process could vary between a highly presidentialized form of government and a system in which the president's influence was much less great. Duverger's legacy lies in the formulation of the concept of semi-presidentialism and its application to Western Europe rather than its application to the study of democratization. Duverger introduced the concept to comparative politics and his standard English-language article brought the concept to general attention.³

The study of semi-presidentialism developed with the wave of democratization in the 1990-1991 period. At this time, many countries adopted a recognizably semi-presidential form of government. While the degree of attention paid to semi-presidentialism was much less great than the attention paid to the study of both presidentialism and parliamentarism,⁴ the basic elements of the current debate were established at that point. At first, these points were made in the context of wider debates in which the discussion of semi-presidentialism was only a part.⁵ More recently, though, there have been a number of focused works that have discussed the concept of semi-presidentialism and have included either in-depth studies of particular semi-presidential countries and/or comparative studies of particular regions.⁶

¹ For an overview of the development of the concept of semi-presidentialism, see Robert Elgie, "The Politics of Semi-presidentialism," in *Semi-presidentialism in Europe*, ed. Robert Elgie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1-21, and Horst Bahro, Bernhard H. Bayerlein, and Ernst Vesser, "Duverger's Concept: Semi-presidential Government Revisited," *European Journal of Political Research* 34 (1998): 201-224.

² Maurice Duverger, *Echec au roi* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1978).

³ Maurice Duverger, "A New Political System Model: Semi-presidential Government," *European Journal of Political Research* 8 (1980): 165-187. Paradoxically, scholars of French politics have been slow to take on board his analysis of the French political system. Indeed, in France, Duverger remained a very contested figure. See Vincent Hoffmann-Martinot, "A Short Biography of Maurice Duverger," *French Politics* 3, no. 3 (2005): 304-309.

⁴ An overview of the study of semi-presidentialism is provided in Robert Elgie, "Semi-presidentialism: Concepts, Consequences and Contesting Explanations," *Political Studies Review* 2 (2004): 314-330.

⁵ Juan J. Linz, "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy: Does It Make a Difference," in *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*, ed. Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 48-62; Giovanni Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry into Structures, Incentives and Outcomes*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1997), chap. 7.

⁶ Robert Elgie, ed., *Semi-presidentialism in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Robert Elgie and Sophia Moestrup, eds., *Semi-presidentialism Outside Europe* (London: Routledge, 2007); Robert Elgie and Sophia Moestrup, eds., *Semi-presidentialism in Central and Eastern Europe* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2008); François Frison-Roche,

The main argument in favor of semi-presidentialism is that the dual executive can allow for a degree of power sharing between competing forces.⁷ In a country where there is intense political conflict between two opposing forces, semi-presidentialism creates the potential for power to be shared. One force can hold the presidency at the same time as the other force holds the premiership. If each force has an institutional stake in the system, then the chances of both supporting the system as a whole are assumed to be greater than if there is a presidential-style winner-take-all system. In his article on democratization in Mongolia, Steven Fish suggested that semi-presidentialism was advantageous to the process for this sort of reason.⁸

The secondary argument in favor of semi-presidentialism is that the direct election of a fixed-term president can provide the system with political stability and legitimacy, even if the parliament is highly fractionalized and governments are unstable. In this context, semi-presidentialism can be more conducive to democratization than pure parliamentarism.

Even though there are clear arguments in favor of semi-presidentialism, the supporters of the concept are few and far between. The most well-known proponent is Giovanni Sartori.⁹ However, Sartori's support for semi-presidentialism is far from unequivocal. He argues that mixed systems are better than either pure presidentialism or pure parliamentarism.¹⁰ However, he includes both semi-presidential and what he calls "semi-parliamentary"

Le "Modèle semi-présidentiel" comme instrument de la transition en Europe post-communiste, Bulgarie, Lituanie, Macédoine, Pologne, Roumanie et Slovénie (Bruxelles: Bruylant, 2005); Anna Sophia Nyholm Moestrup, *Semi-presidentialism in Comparative Perspective: Its Effects on Democratic Survival* (PhD Diss.: George Washington University, 2004); Oleh Protsyk, "Prime Ministers' Identity in Semi-Presidential Regimes: Constitutional Norms and Cabinet Formation Outcomes," *European Journal of Political Research* 44 (2005): 721-748; Oleh Protsyk, "Politics of Intraexecutive Conflict in Semi-presidential Regimes in Eastern Europe," *East European Politics and Society* 18, no. 2 (2005), 1-23; Thomas Sedelius, *The Tug-of-War between Presidents and Prime Ministers. Semi-Presidentialism in Central and Eastern Europe* (PhD Diss.: Örebro University, Sweden, 2006), Örebro Studies in Political Science 15; Cindy Skach, *Borrowing Constitutional Designs: Constitutional Law in Weimar Germany and the French Fifth Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁷ Sophia Moestrup, "Semi-presidentialism in Young Democracies: Help or Hindrance?" in *Semi-presidentialism Outside Europe*, ed. Robert Elgie and Sophia Moestrup (London: Routledge, 2007), 31.

⁸ M. Steven Fish, "The Inner Asian Anomaly: Mongolia's Democratization in Comparative Perspective," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 34, no. 3 (2001): 323-338.

⁹ The other main proponent is Gianfranco Pasquino. However, he tends to examine semi-presidentialism only in the context of Europe and then not in the context of democratization. See, for example, Gianfranco Pasquino, "The Advantages and Disadvantages of Semi-presidentialism: A West European Perspective," in *Semi-presidentialism Outside Europe*, ed. Robert Elgie and Sophia Moestrup (London: Routledge, 2007), 14-29.

¹⁰ Giovanni Sartori, "Neither Presidentialism nor Parliamentarism," in *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*, ed. Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 115.

systems in his category of mixed systems. He defines a semi-parliamentary system as a parliamentary system with a strong prime minister, as in the United Kingdom. When he compares semi-presidentialism with semi-parliamentarism, he states:

Within the aforesaid range of “mixed” polities, do I have a favorite? Not really. That political form is best that best applies. That is tantamount to saying that at this stage of the argument context is essential.¹¹

In a slightly later version of his argument, he comes down somewhat more clearly in favor of semi-presidentialism, but again with reservations. He states:

...my argument is not—in the context of parliamentarism—that semi-presidentialism is “best” but, rather, that it is “more applicable”.... And I further wish to underscore that this recommendation is not a strong one. Semi-presidentialism does leave us with unsettled problems. Nor do I deny that semi-presidentialism is a somewhat fragile system.¹²

In the end, Sartori recommends what he calls “alternating presidentialism.”¹³ This system may be compatible with some forms of semi-presidentialism, but it is far from a ringing endorsement of this type of government.

There are various arguments against semi-presidentialism. The first reiterates a criticism of presidentialism. The direct election of the president may encourage the personalization of the political process and it may encourage the president to disregard the rule of law because s/he feels above the normal political process. For example, Lijphart has argued that semi-presidential systems “actually make it possible for the president to be even more powerful than in most pure presidential systems.”¹⁴ He states that although “there can be considerable power sharing among president, prime minister and cabinet, the zero-sum nature of presidential elections remains.”¹⁵ So, Lijphart argues against one of the main supposed virtues of semi-presidentialism. He judges that semi-presidential systems “represent only a slight improvement over pure presidentialism”¹⁶ and concludes that “parliamentary government should be [a] general guideline for constitution writers in divided societies.”¹⁷

¹¹ Ibid., 110.

¹² Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering*, 137.

¹³ Ibid., chap. 9.

¹⁴ Arend Lijphart, “Constitutional Design for Divided Societies,” *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 2 (2004): 102.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

The second and third arguments are quite different from the previous one and relate very directly to the dual nature of the executive in semi-presidential constitutions. The notion that both the president and the prime minister are key actors in semi-presidential systems has led scholars to warn against the problems of a dual executive, even when the president and the prime minister are from the same party or coalition. Suleiman explains one reason why: “The reason for this lies in the competitive element that the system introduces.”¹⁸ For Linz: “The result inevitably is a lot of politicking and intrigues that may delay decision making and lead to contradictory policies due to the struggle between the president and prime minister.”¹⁹ Another reason is the ambiguity created by the dual executive. For example, in 2004 when Afghanistan was drafting its new constitution, one of the participants in the drafting procedure summed up the reasons why presidentialism was chosen ahead of a semi-presidential system: “There would be no uncertainty about who held executive power in Kabul, and Washington would retain the benefit of having a clearly identifiable Afghan partner....”²⁰ For his part, Linz is particularly concerned about the effect of the dual executive on the relationship between the executive and the military. Under semi-presidentialism, there may be three or even four major actors: the president, the prime minister, the minister for defense, and the joint chief of staff of the armed forces. In this situation, he states: “The hierarchical line that is so central to military thinking acquires a new complexity.”²¹ This complexity leaves room for “constitutional ambiguities regarding one of the central issues of many democracies: the subordination of the military to the democratically elected authorities and hopefully to civilian supremacy.”²² In other words, the dual executive creates an inherent incentive for the military to intervene in young democracies.

The third argument against semi-presidentialism is perhaps the most familiar, but in a way it merely builds on the previous point. Under semi-presidentialism, there is the potential for “cohabitation,” meaning the situation where the president is from one political force and the prime minister is from another. What proponents see as an advantage of semi-presidentialism, namely executive power sharing, critics see as a distinct weakness when it manifests itself as a divided executive. With a divided executive, conflict between the president and prime minister may lead to policy stalemate. In this event, the

¹⁸ Ezra N. Suleiman, “Presidentialism and Political Stability in France,” in *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*, ed. Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 158.

¹⁹ Linz, “Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy: Does It Make a Difference,” 55.

²⁰ Barnett R. Rubin, “Crafting a Constitution for Afghanistan,” *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 3 (2004): 12.

²¹ Linz, “Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy: Does It Make a Difference,” 57.

²² *Ibid.*, 59.

military may be encouraged to assume power so as to restore decision-making authority. Alternatively, a divided executive may encourage one of the main actors, usually the president, to seize power illegally so as to restore executive authority. Linz and Stepan outline the dangers of this latter scenario very clearly:

When supporters of one or the other component of semi-presidentialism feel that the country would be better off if one branch of the democratically legitimated structure of rule would disappear or be closed, the democratic system is endangered and suffers an overall loss of legitimacy, since those questioning one or the other will tend to consider the political system undesirable as long as the side they favor does not prevail.²³

In this way, the inherent incentive for the military to intervene in young semi-presidential democracies is only enhanced when there is a period of cohabitation.

The fourth argument against semi-presidentialism is the opposite of the secondary argument in favor of semi-presidentialism. This criticism is associated with Cindy Skach.²⁴ She has warned against the perils of what she calls “divided minority government.” She defines this situation as the case where “neither the president nor the prime minister, nor any party or coalition, enjoys a substantive majority in the legislature.”²⁵ She says that this situation “can predictably lead to an unstable scenario, characterized by shifting legislative coalitions and government reshuffles, on the one hand, and continuous presidential intervention and use of reserved powers, on the other.”²⁶ In turn, the situation can deteriorate: “The greater the legislative immobilism, governmental instability, and cabinet reshuffling resulting from the minority position of the government, the more justified or pressured the president may feel to use their powers beyond their constitutional limit, for a prolonged period of time.”²⁷ In other words, while the scenario is different from cohabitation, the result is the same. When the executive is weakened, in this case because of the absence of either a stable presidential or prime ministerial parliamentary majority, directly elected presidents feel the need to assert their control over the system and the process of democratization suffers.

²³ Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 286.

²⁴ Skach, *Borrowing Constitutional Designs*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

In a recent essay, Wu argued that semi-presidentialism is very easy to choose, but very difficult to operate.²⁸ Certainly, semi-presidentialism has been adopted by a large number of countries, including many nascent democracies. Paradoxically, though, scarcely any commentator would seem to recommend its choice. As we shall see, the academic consensus against semi-presidentialism is widespread. The aim of this article is to explore the performance of semi-presidentialism and investigate whether its record has been as poor as the predictions indicate. Before doing so, we provide a definition of semi-presidentialism and identify the current set of semi-presidential countries, emphasizing the variety of semi-presidential forms.

Semi-presidentialism in Its (almost) Infinite Variety

The original definition of semi-presidentialism was provided by Maurice Duverger:

[A] political regime is considered as semi-presidential if the constitution which established it combines three elements: (1) the president of the republic is elected by universal suffrage; (2) he possesses quite considerable powers; (3) he has opposite him, however, a prime minister and ministers who possess executive and governmental power and can stay in office only if the parliament does not show its opposition to them.²⁹

A revised definition was provided by Sartori. He identified five criteria of semi-presidentialism:

- (i) The head of state (president) is elected by popular vote—either directly or indirectly—for a fixed term of office.
- (ii) The head of state shares the executive power with a prime minister, thus entering a dual authority structure whose three defining criteria are:
- (iii) The president is independent from parliament, but is not entitled to govern alone or directly and therefore his will must be conveyed and processed via his government.
- (iv) Conversely, the prime minister and his cabinet are president-independent in that they are parliament-dependent: they are subject

²⁸ Yu-Shan Wu, “Semi-presidentialism—Easy to Choose, Difficult to Operate: The Case of Taiwan,” in *Semi-presidentialism Outside Europe*, ed. Robert Elgie and Sophia Moestrup (London: Routledge, 2007), 201-218.

²⁹ Duverger, “A New Political System Model,” 166.

- to either parliamentary confidence or no-confidence (or both), and in either case need the support of a parliamentary majority.
- (v) The dual authority structure of semi-presidentialism allows for different balances and also for shifting prevalences of power within the executive, under the strict condition that the “autonomy potential” of each component unit of the executive does subsist.³⁰

We argue that Duverger’s and Sartori’s definitions are unsettling because they include reference to the powers of the president and the prime minister.³¹ This is problematic because, in doing so, the authors introduce a subjective element into the definition of the concept. What is to count as “quite considerable powers”? What amount of power needs to be shared? What constitutes “autonomy potential”? The answer to any of these questions is necessarily subjective. The effect is that the list of semi-presidential countries varies from one person to another. Worse, the study of semi-presidentialism defined in this way suffers from a major problem of selection bias. If semi-presidentialism is defined as the situation where power is shared, then, by definition, we are only studying countries where power sharing is an issue. Therefore, we are bound to associate semi-presidentialism with the effects of power sharing, whether we consider the effects to be positive or, more usually, negative. However, we only do so because we have defined semi-presidentialism in that way in the first place.

The solution is to define semi-presidentialism without reference to the powers of either the president or the prime minister and to do so solely on the basis of uncontested constitutional provisions. So, we define semi-presidentialism as:

A regime where there is both a popularly elected fixed-term president and a prime minister and cabinet responsible to the legislature.

This definition does require some constitutional interpretation. For example, in Guyana, the leader of the party that receives the most votes in the parliamentary election is elected as president. This situation comes very close to the direct election of the president. However, we exclude Guyana from the list of semi-presidential regimes because there is no separate election for the president.

The advantage of this definition is that it is replicable. In thirty years’ time, students of semi-presidentialism would be able to employ this definition and arrive at essentially the same list of regimes. The same is not true when mention is made of presidential and prime-ministerial powers. A further advantage of

³⁰ Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering*, 131-132.

³¹ Robert Elgie, “The Classification of Democratic Regime Types: Conceptual Ambiguity and Contestable Assumptions,” *European Journal of Political Research* 33 (1998): 219-238.

this definition is that it incorporates countries that almost everyone would wish to include in a list of semi-presidential regimes—France, Poland, Portugal, and so on. Finally, this definition avoids the selection bias problem. We do not skew our conclusions about the effect of semi-presidentialism from the start.³² On the basis of this definition, there were sixty countries with semi-presidential constitutions as of December 2007. (For a list of semi-presidential countries, see figure 1).

Figure 1. Semi-presidential Regimes in the World, end 2007

Algeria	Haiti	Rwanda
Angola	Iceland	Sao Tome
Armenia	Ireland	Senegal
Austria	Kazakhstan	Serbia
Azerbaijan	Kyrgyzstan	Singapore
Belarus	Lithuania	Slovakia
Bulgaria	Macedonia	Slovenia
Burkina Faso	Madagascar	South Korea
Cameroon	Mali	Sri Lanka
Cape Verde	Mauritania	Taiwan
Central African Republic	Mongolia	Tajikistan
Chad	Montenegro	Tanzania
Croatia	Mozambique	Timor-Leste
Democratic Republic of Congo	Namibia	Togo
Egypt	Niger	Tunisia
Finland	Peru	Turkey
France	Poland	Uganda
Gabon	Portugal	Ukraine
Georgia	Romania	Uzbekistan
Guinea-Bissau	Russia	Yemen

The list of semi-presidential countries in figure 1 is extremely heterogenous. There are long-standing democracies as well as long-standing autocracies in which the commitment to constitutional government is minimal. In these latter countries, the constitution may take a semi-presidential form, but we should not expect the constitution to have any impact on the exercise of power, which may be arbitrary and brutal.

More importantly, for the purposes of this essay at least, even within the set of partly democratic and fully democratic countries, we find large variations in the constitutional form of semi-presidentialism. For example, some countries have constitutions where the president is both head of state and

³² A much more lengthy defense of this definition can be found in Robert Elgie, “What Is Semi-presidentialism and Where Is It Found?” in *Semi-presidentialism Outside Europe*, ed. Robert Elgie and Sophia Moestrup (London: Routledge, 2007), 1-13.

head of government and where the prime minister, although still responsible to the legislature, is constitutionally obliged to follow the president's directions. An example is Namibia, where article 27 of the 1990 constitution states, "The President shall be the Head of State and of the Government and the Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Force," and where article 36 states, "The Prime Minister shall be the leader of Government business in Parliament, shall co-ordinate the work of the Cabinet and shall advise and assist the President in the execution of the functions of Government." By contrast, other countries have figurehead presidents whose role is purely ceremonial. In these countries, the prime minister is the sole *de facto* decision maker within the executive. Examples include Iceland, Ireland, and Slovenia. In a further set of countries, the constitutional position of the president and prime minister is more balanced. Both have policy-making responsibilities either in different areas or in the same areas. The classic example is France, and it is one that has been copied by many former French colonies. Article 15 of the 1958 constitution states, "The President of the Republic shall be commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He shall preside over the higher national defense councils and committees," while article 21 states, "The Prime Minister shall direct the operation of the Government. He shall be responsible for national defense...."

The variation in the constitutional form of semi-presidentialism in young democracies raises an important issue. Even if the results found that all nascent semi-presidential democracies performed either well or badly, we would have to conclude that the finding was almost certainly spurious because the set of countries is so heterogenous. In effect, the institutional differences among the countries are so great that they are incommensurable. In other words, as defined above, semi-presidentialism as a general category should not be used as an explanatory variable. As a result, we argue that there is little sense in comparing the performance of semi-presidential countries with the performance of presidential and parliamentary countries. Instead, we argue that we need to examine the impact of varieties of semi-presidentialism.

From the literature review above, there is good reason to believe that variation within the set of semi-presidential countries should matter. In his critique, Lijphart emphasized the power of presidents in semi-presidential systems. We can hypothesize that semi-presidential countries where the president is powerful are less likely to democratize successfully than countries where the president is weak. By contrast, another body of work emphasized the potential benefits of executive power sharing, whereas others emphasized the problems associated with competition and/or ambiguity within a dual executive. The competing arguments in this body of work all assume that there is some sort of balance between the president and prime minister. The balance may lie somewhat more with one actor than another, or the balance may change from one actor to another over time, but the executive is inherently dual. When there is a balance, is this advantageous or disadvantageous for nascent democracies? The final criticism of semi-presidentialism is less sensitive to the varieties

of semi-presidentialism. We may assume that divided minority government requires something more than a figurehead president, but there is no expectation as to whether it will have a better or worse effect under the situation where the president is powerful or where there is a balance of presidential and prime-ministerial powers. All the same, we still have two competing arguments to assess. Does the fixed-term nature of the presidency provide stability under minority situations, or does divided minority government encourage a president to act arbitrarily? In the next section, we establish how we intend to explore these questions.

Data

The aim is to determine the effect of semi-presidentialism on democratization and to test whether its impact is as bad as the standard wisdom would suggest. We stress that we are not comparing the performance of semi-presidentialism with the performance of either presidentialism or parliamentarism. We are interested only in the performance of countries with semi-presidential constitutions and, in particular, we are interested in the effects of different forms of semi-presidentialism on democratization.

We begin by identifying the set of cases where semi-presidentialism has been present in a nascent democracy. We assume that institutions such as presidentialism, parliamentarism, or semi-presidentialism only begin to have an effect when a country has started on the road to democratization. In other words, we are only interested in the effect of semi-presidentialism once some basic level of democratization has already been reached. From that point on, we wish to know whether semi-presidentialism has had a generally positive or negative effect. Obviously, this means that we have to make a judgment call as to what counts as “some basic level of democratization.” One option would be to count countries from the point when they are first classed by Freedom House as Partly Free. Which of these countries have gone on to be classed as Free and can be counted as a success, and which have slipped back into the category of Not Free and can be counted as a failure? Another option would be to use Polity’s index of democratization. We choose the latter because it allows us to use a longer time series and also because the methodology used to establish the Polity scores is publicly available.

Using Polity scores, we have to determine what counts as the threshold beyond which a country can be classed as partly free. The Polity scores range from -10 (complete autocracy) to +10 (complete democracy). We assume that the institutional effects of semi-presidentialism may begin to have an effect when a country first scores in the range +1 to +7.³³ Thus, we only begin to assess the

³³ This range was adopted on the advice of Monty G. Marshall, Director, Polity IV, in personal correspondence.

effect of semi-presidentialism on countries that have scored within this range at some point in time. This means that we exclude countries if they have only ever scored in the range -10 to 0 inclusive: examples include Cameroon, Mauritania, Uzbekistan, and Yemen. Here, democratization has never really begun and so we would not expect semi-presidentialism to have had any particular effect. Also, we exclude countries if they have only ever scored in the range +8 to +10 inclusive when they have been semi-presidential: examples include Lithuania, Mongolia, Portugal, and Taiwan (Republic of China). We exclude this latter set of countries because, here, semi-presidentialism was introduced when democracy was “the only game in town.” The literature on democratization assumes that complete democracies do not collapse. Institutions may affect the policy performance of those democracies. For example, there is a long-standing debate as to the policy effect of “divided government” in the United States. However, the assumption is that democracy itself is safe. Therefore, if we were to include these countries in our sample, we would bias our findings in favor of semi-presidentialism. Finally, we exclude semi-presidential countries that have always been scored in the range +1 to +7. These countries are neither democratic successes nor democratic failures.

Thus, our sample is the set of countries with semi-presidential constitutions that at some point have scored in the range +1 to +7 on the Polity scale. These countries are classed as democratic failures if they exited the +1 to +7 range and went on to score between 0 and -10 inclusive. Alternatively, they are classed as democratic successes if they exited the +1 to +7 range and went on to score between +8 and +10. We include a country as two separate cases if democracy failed at one point, but then the democratization process began again and the country reentered the range +1 to +7. Thus, we have two cases for the Comoros, Guinea-Bissau and Peru. For each case, we record the time period as all the years spent as both a semi-presidential system and a partly free regime, plus the final year when the country was marked by either democratic failure or success.

Having established the sample, we wish to identify different forms of semi-presidentialism. Here, we rely on Shugart and Carey’s distinction between president-parliamentary regimes and premier-presidential regimes.³⁴ The former is a variant of semi-presidentialism in which the prime minister is responsible to both the legislature and the president. The latter is a variant in which the prime minister is only responsible to the legislature. We use this schema because it allows variations in semi-presidentialism to be identified objectively. To distinguish between the two systems, we simply need to read the constitution. The shortcoming of this distinction is that it does not allow

³⁴ Mathew S. Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

us to identify a semi-presidential system in which there is merely a figurehead president. However, in our sample of countries there is no such example.

The twofold distinction between president-parliamentary constitutions and premier-presidential constitutions allows us to test some of the expectations derived from the literature review. In a recent article, Shugart has argued that president-parliamentary regimes are “much closer to pure presidentialism”³⁵ than premier-presidential regimes, which he claims to be more “Madisonian.” To the extent that the first critique of semi-presidentialism presented above was a variant of a traditional criticism of presidential systems, it seems reasonable to suggest that we should expect the president-parliamentary type of semi-presidentialism to perform worse than the premier-presidential type.

To test whether semi-presidentialism performs worse when countries experience cohabitation, we rely on a data set compiled especially for this article. We identified periods of cohabitation by consulting www.worldstatesmen.org/. This is a very thorough and reliable data source. It provides the names and terms of office of all presidents and prime ministers. It also records their party affiliation. We identified all cases when the party affiliation of the two executive actors was different. We then consulted secondary sources to confirm whether these instances were examples of coalition government, where the president and prime minister were from different parties but the same political alliance, or cohabitation, when they were from opposing parties and/or alliances. We expect semi-presidentialism in nascent democracies to perform poorly when there is cohabitation.

To test whether semi-presidentialism performs worse when countries experience divided minority government, we rely mainly on the World Bank’s Database of Political Institutions (DPI).³⁶ This dataset has an entry called “Majority.” The DPI codebook states that this entry records “the fraction of seats held by the government.” It is calculated by dividing the number of government seats by the total number of seats in the main house of the legislature. When the score for “Majority” was below 50 percent in a given year, we coded the case as a period of divided minority government. The DPI database goes back only to 1975. This range covers most of our examples. For pre-1975 cases, we use secondary sources to determine whether there was divided minority government, including Cindy Skach’s work for Weimar Germany.³⁷ When there is divided minority government, then we would expect semi-presidentialism to perform poorly.

³⁵ Matthew Søberg Shugart, “Semi-presidential Systems: Dual Executive and Mixed Authority Patterns,” *French Politics* 3, no. 3 (2005): 334.

³⁶ <http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTRESEARCH/0,,contentMDK:20699744~pagePK:64214825~piPK:64214943~theSitePK:469382,00.html> (accessed September 24, 2007).

³⁷ Skach, *Borrowing Constitutional Designs*.

Having established our institutional variables, we now turn to noninstitutional factors. The literature on democratization suggests that noninstitutional factors are also important. In particular, it suggests that there is a link between economic development and institutional performance. For example, Przeworski and his co-authors have shown that the economy has a strong effect on the probability that a democracy will survive.³⁸ Thus, we include a variable for economic performance. We take per capita GDP as our proxy for economic performance. We use Angus Maddison’s database of historical economic statistics as the source of data because it has a long time series and because it has good academic credentials.³⁹ He has a measure of per capita GDP in 1990 International Geary-Khamis dollars. In the descriptive statistics in figure 3 below, we record the mean GDP per capita for the each country during the period under consideration. We would expect countries with higher GDP per capita to perform better than countries with lower GDP per capita.

The literature on democratization also suggests that the success or failure of democratization partly depends on the level of division in society. Countries with more social divisions—such as competing ethnic identities—are more likely to fail than countries with more homogenous societies. We use the fractionalization of the legislature as our proxy for social divisions. We rely on an indicator in the Henisz Political Constraint Index (POLCON) as our measure.⁴⁰ The fractionalization of the legislature is the probability that two random draws from the lower legislative will be from the same party: the lower the figure, the higher the fractionalization. The formula is:

$$1 - \sum_{i=1}^n \left[\frac{(n_i - 1) \frac{n_i}{N}}{N - 1} \right]$$

In the formula, n = the number of parties, n_i = seats held by nth party and N = total seats.⁴¹ We would expect countries with a lower probability score (i.e., a higher fractionalization) to perform worse than countries with a higher probability score (i.e., a lower fractionalization). In the descriptive statistics, we record the fractionalization score in the year that the country either failed as a democracy or succeeded.

³⁸ Adam Przeworski, Michael E. Alvarez, José Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³⁹ Angus Maddison, *The World Economy: Historical Statistics* (Paris: OECD, 2003).

⁴⁰ Henisz Political Constraint Index (POLCON), <http://www-management.wharton.upenn.edu/henisz/>.

⁴¹ Quoted from the 2005 POLCON codebook.

The Results and Discussion

There are five main findings from the descriptive statistics. First, we find that there are more semi-presidential failures than successes. In total, there are twenty-two cases, six of which were democratic successes and sixteen of which were failures. (See figure 2 below.)⁴² This seems to corroborate the general conclusion that constitution makers should avoid semi-presidentialism.

Figure 2. Semi-presidential Successes and Failures to 2003

Democratic Successes (6)	Democratic Failures (16)
France (1963-1969)	Armenia (1991-1996)
Macedonia (1992-2002)	Austria (1929-1933)
Peru II (1993-2001)	Azerbaijan (1992-1993)
Poland (1990-1991)	Belarus (1994-1995)
Romania (1990-1996)	Burkina Faso (1978-1980)
South Korea (1988-1998)	Central African Republic (1993-2003)
	Comoros I (1992-1995)
	Comoros II (1996-1999)
	Congo Brazzaville (1992-1997)
	Cuba (1940-1952)
	Germany (1919-1933)
	Guinea-Bissau I (1994-98)
	Guinea-Bissau II (1999-2003)
	Haiti (1994-1999)
	Niger (1992-1996)
	Peru I (1979-1992)

Note: The first date corresponds to the year when an already semi-presidential country first scored +1 to +7 (partly free) on the Polity IV scale, or when a partly free county adopted semi-presidentialism. The second date refers to the year when the country exited the partly free category either as a success (+8 to +10) or as a failure (0 to -10).

Second, the descriptive statistics confirm the intuition that different forms of semi-presidentialism have different effects. As hypothesized, the figures suggest that the performance of the president-parliamentary form of semi-presidentialism is considerably worse than the premier-presidential form. (See figure 3 below.) We find that four of the six successes are premier-presidential,

⁴² If we include countries that have only ever been classed as partly free and take a decline in the Polity IV scores within the range +1 to +7 as a failure and an increase within this range as a success, then we would add one further country as a failure (Mali) and five countries as successes (Croatia, Madagascar, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine). In addition, there are seven semi-presidential countries whose Polity IV scores have not changed from the year when they were first classed as partly free until the end of the series in 2003 (Armenia—1998-2003; Mozambique, Namibia, Niger—1999-2003; Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Timor-Leste).

whereas ten of the sixteen failures were president-parliamentary. The statistics show that premier-presidential constitutions can fail and also that president-parliamentary constitutions can succeed. On balance, though, the hypothesis is confirmed. If semi-presidentialism is chosen, then it is better to choose a premier-presidential constitution by which the prime minister is responsible only to the legislature than a president-parliamentary constitution by which the prime minister is responsible to the president as well.

Figure 3. Descriptive Statistics for Semi-presidential Successes and Failures

	Executive, pres-parl = 0, premier-pres = 1	Cohabitation no = 0, yes = 1	DMG no = 0, yes = 1	Per Capita GDP; (1990 International Geary-Khamis dollars)	Henisz, LEGFRA lower (F or NF year)
Successes					
France	1	0	0	9771	0.602465393
Macedonia	1	0	0	3144	0.671848740
Peru II	0	0	1	3636	0.746839986
Poland	1	0	0	4926	0.704385716
Romania	1	0	0	3093	0.819609159
South Korea	0	0	1	10364	0.683020583
Mean				5822	0.704694929
Failures					
Armenia	0	0	1	3641	0.601427352
Austria	1	0	0	3269	0.679279279
Azerbaijan	0	0	0	3048	0.000000000
Belarus	0	0	1	4867	0.000000000
Burkina Faso	0	0	1	738	0.720000000
CAR	0	0	0	559	0.728969697
Comoros I	1	0	0	646	0.501732160
Comoros II	1	0	0	615	0.299003322
Congo-Brazzaville	1	0	0	2150	0.788645161
Cuba	0	0	n/a	1786	n/a
Germany	0	0	0	3433	0.792517446
Guinea-Bissau I	0	0	0	780	0.567070707
Guinea-Bissau II	0	0	0	643	0.748603480
Haiti	1	0	0	785	0.330296797
Niger	1	1	0	487	0.758301499
Peru I	0	0	0	3730	0.768218498
Mean				1949	0.552271027

Third, the descriptive statistics seem to show that cohabitation is associated with democratic failure. There are no cases of successes experiencing cohabitation and it has been associated with failure. This would appear to confirm the existing wisdom, too. However, we have to bear in mind that cohabitation has occurred only rarely. It occurred during the Weimar Republic

in Germany from November 21, 1922, to October 5, 1923, from June 3, 1924, to January 14, 1925, from January 20 to May 16, 1926, and from January 29, 1927, to June 28, 1928.⁴³ The Weimar Republic did collapse, but it collapsed in 1933, five years after the last experience of cohabitation.⁴⁴ So, it would be a stretch to suggest that cohabitation was a proximate cause of democratic failure in this case. Cohabitation also occurred in Niger from February 21, 1995, to January 27, 1996. In fact, this is the only other example of cohabitation in the dataset. The Niger case is important because it is a textbook case of cohabitation causing democratic failure. The 1995 parliamentary elections returned a majority in the legislature opposed to the president. The legislature appointed a prime minister from the majority and the relationship between the head of state and the government was poor. The business of government almost shut down because of the stand-off between the two actors. After less than a year, the military stepped into the institutional breach and declared martial law, suspending the constitution. Thus, the situation in Niger matches perfectly the predictions of writers such as Linz. Cohabitation can be dangerous for nascent democracies. That said, we have to suspend judgment about the effects of cohabitation for the time being. With so few cases of cohabitation in nascent democracies, we cannot draw a valid conclusion about its effects. Is cohabitation almost automatically associated with democratic failure, as in the case of Niger, or is it possibly problematic and yet not destructive of democracy, as in the case of Weimar Germany? As things stand, we cannot yet pass judgment on the effect of cohabitation.

Fourth, the descriptive statistics indicate that divided minority government can be dangerous for nascent democracies but that it has not always had the same deleterious effects as Skach has predicted. We find that it is associated with democratic failure in a number of cases, notably Armenia, Belarus, and Burkina Faso.⁴⁵ In these three countries, there was divided minority government at the very time when democracy failed. Moreover, in both Armenia and Belarus, the breakdown of democracy was marked by the president using excessive decree powers and overruling parliament. Again, this is exactly what Skach predicts will happen in cases of divided minority government. In addition, we might also note that there was divided minority government in Germany during the

⁴³ Skach, *Borrowing Constitutional Designs*, 51.

⁴⁴ We code Germany as 0 (no cohabitation) in figure 3 partly for this reason, partly also because, over the period as a whole, cohabitation was not the dominant political situation, and partly because the literature on semi-presidentialism suggests that cohabitation is so dangerous that it should almost automatically lead to failure, meaning that the code for the last year in the dataset is the most appropriate figure to take and that figure is 0 in the Weimar case.

⁴⁵ Divided minority government also occurred in Cuba in 1944 and 1945. However, we have not been able to verify from secondary sources whether divided government occurred after this time and particularly whether it was present in 1952 when democracy collapsed. We speculate that there was divided minority government, but we are not certain.

Weimar regime, although, as with cohabitation, the last period of divided minority government occurred sometime before the collapse of democracy. So, notwithstanding its impact in Germany, it is clear that divided minority government can be dangerous for democracy. At the same time, though, we also find that divided minority government is associated with democratic success. In both Poland and Romania, divided minority government occurred in the year when each country exited the partly free category and joined the ranks of full democracies. There is no doubt that, in both countries, the president's role was highly contested even after the success of democratization. However, neither country exited the category of full democracy, having achieved it. Therefore, while divided minority government may undoubtedly be problematic and for the reasons Skach suggests, it is not terminal for democratization.

Fifth, the noninstitutional variables are good predictors of semi-presidential performance. The success or failure of semi-presidentialism seems to be correlated at least as much with the circumstances in which it operated as with the constitutional system itself. We find that the average GDP per capita was significantly lower in the semi-presidential failures (GK1990 \$1,949) than in the successes (GK1990 \$5,822). Semi-presidentialism was chosen by many highly underdeveloped sub-Saharan African countries as well as Haiti. These countries had a very low GDP per capita figure and they all failed. We also find that the countries where semi-presidential constitutions succeeded tended to be richer countries, including France and South Korea. In other words, it is clear that semi-presidentialism has been introduced in countries where any system would have had difficulty operating because of the precarious economic situation, as well as in countries where any system would have had a reasonable chance of success because of the level of wealth.

By the same token, semi-presidentialism has also tended to fare better in countries that are less fractionalized and worse in more fractionalized systems. Among the set of semi-presidential failures, we find systems in which there was complete fragmentation of party representation, namely Azerbaijan and Belarus. We also find cases of failures where the level of fragmentation was significantly higher than even in the case with the highest figure among the set of successes. So, France had the highest level of fractionalization of all the successes (0.602465393), whereas some of the failures recorded much lower scores (i.e., much higher levels of fractionalization), namely Comoros I and II and Haiti. Again, this finding, although not as a clear-cut as the situation regarding economic performance, nonetheless confirms the notion that the performance of semi-presidentialism is affected by noninstitutional factors.

Conclusion

The record of semi-presidentialism is poor. When it has been present in nascent democracies, the democratization process has failed much more often than it has succeeded. However, we need to note that the failure of semi-

presidentialism has often been associated with very unfavorable economic and social conditions. In short, semi-presidentialism has been introduced in countries where any institutional arrangement is likely to have had difficulty succeeding. This suggests that the performance of semi-presidentialism has been judged somewhat harshly. From our study, there is no reason to suggest that semi-presidentialism helps democratization. And we emphasize that we have not explored whether semi-presidentialism either helps or hinders democratization relative to presidentialism or parliamentarism. However, we have to place the failures of semi-presidentialism in context and, when we do so, there are often mitigating economic and social circumstances that need to be taken into account. Moreover, when we drill down into the context of semi-presidentialism, we find that when it has failed it has not been because of cohabitation. There is only one example of cohabitation being associated with democratic collapse. The fact that cohabitation is so rare means that we cannot be complacent about its effects, but, to date, it has not been the main cause of semi-presidentialism's failures. The same is true of divided minority government. This situation is associated with collapse, but only in a few cases. What is more, countries have experienced divided minority government and have still democratized. So, we find that two of the main critiques of semi-presidentialism have correctly identified weaknesses of this type of constitutional system, but these weaknesses only rarely have a direct association with the failure of semi-presidentialism. By contrast, the institutional form of semi-presidentialism does seem to make a difference. President-parliamentary forms of semi-presidentialism have performed worse than premier-presidential forms. This is not evidence that premier-presidentialism has been more successful because it allows power sharing, but it does suggest that semi-presidential failures are more associated with strong presidents than with more balanced arrangements within the executive. Overall, we are not in a position to recommend for or against the adoption of semi-presidentialism. After all, we have not tested the performance of semi-presidentialism relative to that of presidentialism or parliamentarism. We can say, though, if semi-presidentialism is to be adopted, then it is wiser to adopt the premier-presidential form of this general system of government.

