Kent Academic Repository

Full text document (pdf)

Citation for published version

Morgan-Jones, Edward and Schleiter, Petra (2018) Presidential Influence on Parliamentary Election Timing and the Electoral Fate of Prime Ministers. Journal of Legislative Studies, 24 (2). pp. 211-226. ISSN 1357-2334.

DOI

https://doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2018.1477273

Link to record in KAR

http://kar.kent.ac.uk/64169/

Document Version

Author's Accepted Manuscript

Presidential Influence on Parliamentary Election Timing and the Electoral Fate of Prime Ministers

Edward Morgan-Jones
Senior Lecturer in Comparative Politics
(School of Politics and International Relations
University of Kent)

and

Petra Schleiter
Professor of Comparative Politics
(Department of Politics and International Relations and St Hilda's College,
University of Oxford)[1]
St Hilda's College
Cowley Place, Oxford, OX4 1DY
Tel: 01865 728627
petra.schleiter@politics.ox.ac.uk
Corresponding Author

forthcoming in:

Journal of Legislative Studies

---

[1] Author-order is alphabetical.

Presidential Influence on Parliamentary Election Timing and the Electoral Fate of Prime Ministers

Most presidential heads of state in parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies have constitutional powers to influence early election calling. They can therefore affect under which conditions prime ministers are held accountable by the electorate. Do these presidents use their powers to shape the timing of early elections for partisan advantage and to influence the electoral performance of incumbent prime ministers? We examine this question using data from 193 elections in eighteen European democracies (1945-2013). Our results indicate that presidents use their dissolution powers to shape the frequency of early elections and to influence under which conditions elections occur, affecting the electoral success of prime ministers. Presidents with significant influence on the dissolution of parliament enable prime ministers of governments that include the president's party to realize a significant electoral bonus compared to governments that exclude the party of the president.

Do presidents influence the electoral success of prime ministers in parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies? To date, the literature in comparative politics offers no answer to this question. Instead, scholars have examined how the electoral success of incumbents is affected by their government's performance. Much of this work shows that voters reward or punish prime ministers and governments for the state of the economy and other indicators of policy performance (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000; Anderson 2007; Duch and Stevenson 2008). This emphasis on performance and economic voting ignores the fact that most parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies have a presidential head of state who almost always has some ability to influence early election calling (Strøm and Swindle 2002; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009). Such presidents can shape whether prime ministers face elections when conditions are favourable or unfavourable, which may condition whether incumbents are rewarded or punished by citizens. Among the eighteen European countries, which we examine

in this paper, the overwhelming majority grant the president some influence over the dissolution of parliament.[2]

Anecdotal evidence suggests that presidential powers to influence the calling of early parliamentary elections are politically consequential: In Italy in 1994, President Scalfaro, originally a member of the centrist Christian Democratic party who later joined the centre-left PPI and then La Margherita, refused a pre-term parliamentary dissolution request by the right-wing Prime Minister Berlusconi (Grimaldi 2011: 112; Pasquino 2012: 850). As a consequence, Berlusconi was forced out of office. Another well-documented example is the decision of Jorge Sampaio, the Portuguese socialist President, to dissolve parliament in 2004. At the time, Sampaio was cohabiting with a centre-right coalition led by Prime Minister Pedro Santana Lopes. During the course of the year the government's economic austerity and social policies became increasingly unpopular and disputes within the governing coalition cast doubt over the cabinet's competence and stability. When the Socialist Party elected a new leader, José Sócrates Carvalho Pinto de Sousa, who proved highly popular with the electorate, President Sampaio seized on the government's growing unpopularity and internal divisions to dissolve parliament a year ahead of schedule. In the elections that followed, the president's Socialist

---

[2] This study focuses on European democracies with presidential heads of state. In some of the older European democracies, the monarch constitutionally still has a constitutional role in the assembly dissolution process. However, monarchs differ from presidents with a role in parliamentary dissolution, because they are constrained by the universal norm that the dissolution of a popularly elected parliament by the discretionary choice of a hereditary monarch is impermissible. This norm applies to all European democracies throughout the period under consideration (since 1945). For this reason constitutional monarchies do not form part of our sample.

Party secured an absolute majority in parliament while the prime minister's party (PSD) sustained heavy electoral losses of 11.4 percent (Magone 2005, 2006).

In this paper we argue that presidents with the power to influence the calling of early parliamentary elections use these prerogatives to further their partisan goals, which has consequences for the prime minister's electoral performance. We test this argument with data on early elections in eighteen European democracies (1945-2013). Our results indicate that presidents with greater dissolution powers increase the incidence of early elections and enable their political allies to face the electorate in more favourable contexts than governments that they oppose. Consequently, prime ministers who are allied to a president with significant influence on parliamentary dissolution realize a sizable vote and seat share bonus when early elections are called. Thus, the political relationship between president and government as well as the scope of a president's constitutional powers over parliamentary dissolution affect a prime minister's electoral success.

These findings contribute to two literatures of importance in comparative politics. First, our study of presidential influence on election outcomes complements and extends the literature on presidential activism, which has so far documented how presidents shape government composition, formation and termination (Amorim Neto and Strøm 2006; Tavits 2009; Kang 2009; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2010). By charting the impact of presidents on the electoral performance of governments, we take this literature in a new direction. Second, our results have implications for the literature on electoral accountability because they suggest that presidents use their powers to influence early election calling in order to promote their own political interests. This opens up new ways of thinking about electoral accountability in parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies and charts an institutional influence on the accountability relationship between voters and governments, which has remained unexplored to date.

Electoral accountability, prime ministers and presidential activism

We draw on three distinct literatures in constructing our argument. The first body of work focuses on electoral accountability and asks how far voters hold incumbents to account for policy outcomes (Anderson 2007). This literature views electoral choice as shaped by voters' observations of the past performance of incumbents, which in turn inform their expectations for future performance (Fiorina 1981; Fearon 1999; Duch and Steveson 2008). Empirically these studies have primarily examined accountability for economic outcomes (Fiorina 1981; Nannestad and Paldam 1994; Manin 1997; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000; Powell 2000). A central finding of this work is that voters are performance oriented: '[W]hen citizens perceive the macro economy as preforming poorly, they vote against the government' (Roberts 2008: 534) and when they see the economy performing well they will reward it.

Multiple studies suggest that voters focus predominantly on the prime minister and his or her party in holding the government to account (Anderson 2000; Hellwig and Samuels 2007; Leigh, 2009; Kayser and Peress 2012). Prime ministers have primary political and administrative responsibility for the decisions of their governments, and citizens identify prime ministers and their parties as the actors who are most responsible for governing and will reward or sanction these politicians for their performance. As Duch and Stevenson put it: 'Economic voting …. is both overwhelming incumbency-oriented (i.e. a poor economy hurts incumbents and helps opposition parties) and more important to the party of the chief executive than to other incumbents (Dutch and Stevenson 2008: 338). In examining how presidents affect electoral accountability in Europe, we therefore focus on the electoral performance of prime ministers.

Second, our study speaks to work which charts the institutional context that shapes how governments are held accountable. One prominent argument is that institutional and governmental structures affect the clarity of responsibility, which conditions how well voters

are able to attribute responsibility for outcomes and to reward or punish incumbents (Powell and Whitten 1993; Anderson 2000; Duch and Stevenson 2008; Hobolt et al. 2013). Thus, scholars have suggested that economic and performance voting is stronger when it is easier to identify who is responsible for policy. A second argument originates in the political economy literature on opportunistic election timing and proposes that incumbents can shape their accountability relationship with the electorate when parliamentary terms are not fixed. These studies document that incumbents often call early elections when conditions are favourable and governments look their best (Balke 1990; Chowdhury 1993; Ito 1990; Ito and Park 1988; Kayser 2005, 2006; Palmer and Whitten 2000; Roy and Alcantara 2012). We draw attention to a further feature of the institutional context that can be expected to affect the incumbent's electoral performance: Most parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies are republics with presidential heads of state who have some degree of constitutional power to influence early election calling (Strom and Swindle 2002; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009). The influence of these presidents on incumbent performance remains completely unexplored to date and we address this lacuna in this paper.

Third, we build on the literature on presidential activism, which documents many areas in which presidential heads of state have proven influential, including government formation, cabinet composition and termination (Amorim Neto and Strøm 2006; Tavits 2009; Kang 2009; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2010; Glasgow et al. 2011). Two studies directly investigate the role of the head of state and their power to influence the pre-term dissolution of the parliament: Strøm and Swindle (2002) explore how far heads of state shape the frequency of early parliamentary elections. Schleiter and Morgan-Jones (2009) examine the effect of presidential powers to call early elections on premature government termination. These studies are important because they show that the head of state's power to call elections is consequential, but they do not investigate the electoral consequences of these

6

powers. In what follows, we provide the first such study. We explore how presidents use their influence on parliamentary dissolution to further their partisan ends and ask how these powers impact on the incumbent prime minister's electoral performance.[3]

Presidents, assembly dissolution powers and incumbent electoral performance

The literature on presidential activism shows that presidents are political actors whose behaviour is shaped by two parameters - their constitutional powers and political motivations (Tavits 2009, Shugart and Carey 1992). Constitutional powers determine which formal prerogatives presidents can bring to bear in pursuing their aims. Presidents who are endowed with constitutional powers to affect the pre-term dissolution of parliament can influence in which context such elections are held. Early elections that are called in favourable circumstances such as good economic performance can be expected to benefit the prime minister electorally because voters are performance oriented and tend to reward incumbents when the economy is doing well. But favourable conditions can also arise through other circumstances, such as good performance in other policy areas or opposition weakness, which can allow even prime ministers whose position is threatened by weak policy performance or a fragile parliamentary majority to secure a victory at the polls. In sum, presidents with influence

---

[3] European constitutions grant both popularly and indirectly elected presidents powers to influence parliamentary dissolution and we examine how both types of presidents employ their powers. Our study therefore includes parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies. A long-running debate focusses on the question whether the behavior of directly elected and parliamentary presidents is comparable. Tavit's work (2009) conclusively settles this debate and demonstrates that parliamentary presidents, like their directly elected peers, pursue partisan goals by making use of their constitutional powers.

on election calling have opportunities to shape the electoral fortunes of the prime minister. How presidents employ these constitutional powers is conditioned by their political motivations. A president who shares the partisanship of the government can be expected to influence parliamentary dissolution to the prime minister's electoral advantage, while presidents opposing the government have no political motivation to advantage the prime minister.

Presidents can be expected to employ their powers in order to affect three outcomes: (i) the frequency of early elections, (ii) the economic circumstances in which such early elections occur and (iii) the performance of the prime minister's party in early elections. Turning first to the frequency of early elections, some presidents have full constitutional discretion to dissolve parliament, and these heads of state can be expected to have the most extensive impact early election calling. Presidents with intermediate levels of dissolution power must typically reach agreement with other political actors and therefore have more limited opportunities to achieve early elections, while their peers with little or no dissolution power are unable to exercise significant discretionary influence on the timing of parliamentary dissolution. If presidents make use the opportunities to which their constitutional dissolution powers give rise, then we would expect early elections to occur more frequently when presidents have greater dissolution powers. This is our first hypothesis:

(Hypothesis 1) Early elections are more frequent when presidents have significant election calling powers than when they lack such powers.

Moreover, we anticipate that presidents employ their dissolution powers in a manner that is motivated by partisan political considerations. Specifically, presidents with significant dissolution powers can be expected to promote the electoral fortunes of prime ministers to

whom they are politically allied. This expectation has two observable implications. First, presidents with discretionary influence on parliamentary dissolution should enable their political allies to access early elections systematically under more favourable conditions (such as a strong economy) than governments that they oppose. By timing the elections strategically, presidents can ensure that their allies typically face early elections, when they look their best. Second, because voters are performance oriented as the literature on economic voting shows, the systematic timing of early elections to favourable circumstances can be expected to yield an electoral advantage for prime ministers who are allied to presidents with significant dissolution powers. Prime ministers whose governments are allied to such presidents should therefore outperform their peers electorally.[4] These are our second and third hypotheses:

(Hypothesis 2) Governments allied to a president with significant parliamentary dissolution power face early elections under systematically more favourable conditions than governments that lack such an alliance.

(Hypothesis 3) Governments allied to a president with significant parliamentary dissolution power outperform governments that lack such an alliance electorally in early elections.

---

[4] To reiterate, we do not propose that governments become more popular when presidents call early elections. Our argument is that a president's influence on election timing allows incumbents allied to the president to benefit electorally because the elections are held under more favorable circumstances than might otherwise have prevailed.

Data and variables

To test our expectations we draw on a dataset that covers 193 elections in European parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies with presidential heads of state from 1945 to June 2013 (a list of the democracies included in this study is available in the appendix). The data are organised as country-year panels.

Our hypotheses focus on three outcomes: the frequency of early elections, the conditions under which early elections occur, and the electoral performance of the prime minister. To analyse how presidents influence the frequency of early elections we draw a distinction between regular elections, which must be held at the end of parliament's constitutional term, and early parliamentary elections, which are scheduled prior to the end of the constitutionally mandated parliamentary term. Constitutions usually provide a time window (often 2 months) for the calling of regular elections, so that these polls do not normally occur on the very last day of a parliamentary term. We code an election as regular if it occurs within two months of the mandatory end of parliament's term or if it is called after an early election, in the final year of parliament's term during the month in which parliamentary elections are by convention held. All other elections are coded as early. In order to capture the second outcome of interest – the conditions under which elections are held – we focus on the state of the economy. GDP growth describes the trajectory of the economy. In order to measure growth in the crucial months prior to the election, we lag this variable by 6 months relative to the election date. To measure the incumbent's electoral performance, we focus on the prime minister's party and use two alternative measures, the vote share and the seat share of the party in elections to the lower (or sole) house of parliament.

Our theory focuses on two explanatory variables, presidential dissolution powers and the president's political relationship with the government. We measure presidential powers to dissolve the parliament by drawing on an index of presidential dissolution power developed by

Goplerud and Schleiter (2016). The index records the constitutional (i.e., de jure) powers of presidents to bring about pre-term dissolution of the parliament.[5] It is anchored at one end at a minimum value of 0, denoting presidents who have no influence on dissolution (i.e., Slovenia) and at the other end by a maximum value of 10, which records the complete discretion of a president to dissolve the parliament (i.e., Finland 1919). The index proceeds from this maximum value to which it applies penalties for different types of constraints on a president's ability to call pre-term elections, including (i) constraints on the president's agenda setting role in initiating and advancing the dissolution process, (ii) constraints on the ability to decide and trigger dissolution, (iii) time-related constraints on early election calling, for example a ban on dissolution for part of the parliamentary or presidential term, (iv) the conditionality of a president's ability to initiate, advance or decide dissolution on the binding consent or non-binding consultation of one (or more) further actors. The precise scoring for any of these penalties is detailed in Goplerud and Schleiter (2016). The index applies these penalties multiplicatively to the maximum score of 10 for each president. When a constitution foresees multiple paths to dissolution, Goplerud and Schleiter (2016) focus on the maximum score for a president across any of the paths available to them on the assumption that presidents will use the dissolution path that they can most easily influence (scores reported in the

---

[5] We employ a de jure rather than a de facto measure of presidential dissolution powers because our objective is to explore how far constitutional prerogatives shape presidential behavior and political outcomes. The use of a de facto (i.e. behavioural) measure of presidential power in order to account for presidential behaviour would pose problems of circularity and would not be appropriate.

appendix).[6] Finally, we measure the political relationship of the president with the government by recording whether the president's party is in government (or not). Cases in which either the president or the government lack partisan affiliation are coded as cases in which the president's party is not represented in government.

Analysis

To examine our expectations we employ descriptive analyses and difference-of-means tests. The small number of early elections, when further sub-divided by the level of presidential dissolution powers and the government's status as politically allied to the president (or not) yields analytical groups that are too small to conduct meaningful controlled analyses.[7] Our conclusions are therefore tentative pending more sophisticated future studies. However, if

---

[6] As we explain below, the small number of cases in each analytical category does not enable us to conduct meaningful controlled analyses. However, a relevant question is whether any effect of presidential dissolution powers may be incidental to the correlation between presidential dissolution powers and other legislative or government-related powers of a president. To examine this possibility, we draw on Shugart and Carey's (1992) and Metcalf's (2006) indices of presidential powers. In those democracies that form part of our sample, presidential dissolution powers as coded by these two indices have a weak and statistically non-significant correlation with other presidential powers (Metcalf: -.38, $p = .45$; Shugart and Carey: .42, $p = .23$). The results that we uncover in this paper are therefore unlikely to be driven by any correlation between dissolution powers and other presidential powers.

[7] A controlled analysis would have to take account of country level, election level and party level sources of variation which, given the small number of early elections, gives rise to problems of collinearity.

presidents behave in the way that we anticipate, the patterns described above should be evident in descriptive analyses and difference-of-means tests and should not merely be an artefact of model specification in more sophisticated studies. Our paper's contribution is to provide this essential evidence.

(i)   The frequency of early elections

We begin by examining how presidents influence the frequency of early elections. Recall that we expect presidents who can influence pre-term parliamentary dissolution to raise the incidence of early elections. Table 1 reports the frequency of regular and early elections in our sample. For the purposes of the analysis in this paper, we dichotomize presidential dissolution powers and distinguish between presidents with significant and weak influence on the calling of parliamentary elections.

Table 1: Presidential Dissolution Power and the Frequency of Early Elections

	Frequency
Strong Presidential Dissolution Powers (>= 5)	
Regular Election	77
	(55.8)
Early Election	61
	(44.2)
Total	138
	(100.0)
Weak Presidential Dissolution Powers (< 5)	
Regular Election	41
	(74.5)
Early Election	15
	(26.79)
Total	56
	(100.0)

Note: Table entries are frequencies, column percentages in parentheses.

The upper half of the table focusses on strong presidents with a dissolution powers score of at least 5 (the mid-point of the $0 - 10$ scale), the lower half focusses on weak presidents whose dissolution power score is smaller than 5. As the frequencies make clear, 44 per cent of

all elections under presidents with extensive dissolution powers are called early, compared to only 27 per cent under weaker presidents. This 17 per cent difference in the frequency of early elections is substantively large and statistically significant (p = .024), which suggests that presidents with discretionary influence on parliamentary dissolution make use of their constitutional powers, exactly as hypothesis 1 anticipates. This raises the question whether presidents take partisan considerations into account in making their decisions to dissolve.

(ii) The economic conditions under which early elections are called

Our second hypothesis anticipates that presidents with extensive influence on parliamentary dissolution employ their powers to promote the electoral fortunes of prime ministers to whom they are allied politically, by permitting them to access to early elections when conditions are favourable. Prime ministers whose governments are allied to such presidents should therefore face early elections under systematically more favourable conditions than cabinets that lack such political ties. Table 2 examines this hypothesis by contrasting the average GDP growth levels when early elections are called by a president whose party is (and is not) in government. The last two columns of the table report the difference-of-means between these two groups and the p-values of difference-of-means tests (based on t-tests).

Table 2: Economic conditions in early elections by partisan relationship to government

	N	Pres Pty not in Govt	N	Pres Pty in Govt	Difference-of-Means	(p-value)
Strong Presidential Dissolution Powers (>= 5)						
GDP Growth (6 m lagged)	19	1.65	36	2.63	0.98	0.10
Weak Presidential Dissolution Powers < 5)						
GDP Growth (6 m lagged)	11	1.26	3	2.07	0.80	0.80

Note: Missing growth data reduce the number of early elections in this analysis to 69.

The upper half of the table focusses on presidents with strong dissolution powers (i.e., a score of at least 5). The averages make clear that early elections are on average called in a very favourable context of strong economic growth, i.e., 2.63 per cent GDP growth, when the party of such a president is in government. In contrast, when governments lack an alliance to such a president, they face early elections under significantly less favourable conditions (i.e., at an average level of GPD growth of 1.65 per cent). This difference is sizable at around 1 per cent of GDP growth and statistically significant at the ten per cent level (p = .10).

The lower half of the table focusses on weak presidents with a dissolution power score smaller than 5. Like the upper half of the table, it suggests that governments, which are allied to the president tend to face early elections under somewhat more favourable economic conditions (i.e., average GDP growth 2.07 per cent) than their peers who experience early elections at average GDP growth of just 1.26 per cent. However, the difference of means is not systematic and large enough to reach statistical significance (p = .80), given the very small number of early elections called by weak presidents. In sum, these results indicate that only prime ministers whose governments are allied to presidents with significant dissolution powers face early elections under systematically more favourable conditions than their peers, precisely as hypothesis 2 anticipates. Recall, moreover, that not just the economy, but also successes in other policy areas and opposition weakness give presidents opportunities to time elections to circumstances that favour their allies. The advantages that a president with discretionary dissolution powers can confer on his or her allies in government are therefore likely to be even more formidable than table 2 suggests.

(iii)   The electoral performance of prime ministers in early elections

Our third hypothesis is that a president's influence on timing early elections to more (or less) favourable circumstances has consequences for the electoral performance of the prime

minister. Specifically, we anticipate that powerful presidents influence the timing of early elections to aid their allies in government. When presidents have significant dissolution powers, we therefore expect prime ministers whose governments include the presidential party to perform significantly better in early elections than their peers whose governments exclude the presidential party. Weaker presidents should not be able to promote the interests of their co-partisans in the same way. Table 3 tests that expectation.

Table 3: Presidential Influence on Dissolution and Prime Ministers' Electoral Performance in Early Elections

	N	Pres Pty not in Govt	N	Pres Pty in Govt	Difference -of-Means	p-value
Strong Presidential Dissolution Powers (>= 5)						
PM Party's Vote Share	25	25.90	36	38.10	12.20	0.00
PM Party's Seat Share	25	28.92	36	41.91	12.99	0.00
Weak Presidential Dissolution Powers (< 5)						
PM Party's Vote Share	11	26.56	3	35.47	8.90	0.12
PM Party's Seat Share	11	30.22	3	35.70	5.47	0.38

Note: PM denotes prime minister.

The upper panel of table 2 focuses on presidents with strong dissolution powers and compares the average performance in early elections of prime ministers who lead governments that do and do not include the president's party. The last two columns of the table report the difference-of-means between these two groups and the p-values of difference-of-means tests (based on t-tests). As the panel makes clear, the mean vote share and seat share of prime ministers whose governments include the presidential party are 12 to 13 per cent higher than those of prime ministers whose governments exclude the president's party. The difference-of-means tests indicate that these differences are statistically significant at the one percent level or better.

The lower panel of table 2 focuses on weak presidents. While prime ministers under these presidents also appear to fare better in early elections when the president's party is in

government, the gap in average performance is smaller (9 per cent for vote shares and 5.5 per cent for seat shares), and never reaches conventional levels of statistical significance. Thus powerful presidents appear to be able to promote the electoral interests of their allies better than presidents with weaker dissolution powers. These results support our third hypothesis that presidents with high levels of dissolution power use their prerogatives to influence early election calling to the advantage of their partisan allies.

In sum, our findings offer the first tentative evidence to suggest that presidents use their dissolution powers in a partisan fashion. Presidents with significant influence on parliamentary dissolution raise the frequency of early elections and influence election timing to enable governments that include their co-partisans to take electoral advantage of favourable conditions such as a strong economy. Consequently, governments that are allied to presidents with extensive dissolution powers perform significantly better in early elections than their peers. Our analysis offers suggestive evidence, which will need to be carefully probed in future analyses that control for potential confounding variables. While our opportunities to conduct multivariate controlled analysis are limited by the small number of cases, our conclusions are strengthened by the fact that three different outcomes – the frequency of early elections, their context, and the electoral result for the prime minister – show evidence of presidential activism and influence.

Discussion and conclusion

Our results provide the first tentative comparative evidence that presidents influence the electoral performance of incumbent prime ministers. Two factors, our findings suggest, are important in understanding the scope and nature of presidential influence on election outcomes: a president's constitutional powers to influence parliamentary dissolution and the president's political relationship to the government.

Presidents with the ability to influence parliamentary dissolution raise the frequency of premature polls and ensure that early elections coincide with circumstances favourable to their allies in government. Moreover, prime ministers who are allied to a president with significant influence on assembly dissolution achieve a sizable vote and seat share bonus compared to their peers who are allied to presidents with weak influence on dissolution or who lack an alliance to a president. Jointly, these results provide the first suggestive evidence that dissolution powers can be viewed as enabling presidents to have a direct influence on the electoral accountability of prime minister in ways that have not previously been identified.

These findings have potential implications for two areas of importance in comparative politics. First, they lay the foundations for a fuller understanding of the political importance of presidential dissolution powers in the growing literature on presidential activism. While much of this work has focussed on presidential influence in relation to government formation, composition and termination, we take a first step in mapping how presidents affect election results.

Second, our findings open up new ways of thinking about the electoral accountability of incumbent governments in Europe's parliamentary and semi-presidential republics. In nearly all of Europe's republics, presidents have some influence on the timing of early elections. Our results suggest that presidential influence shapes under what conditions governments are held accountable by voters, which moderates the accountability relationship. This basic institutional variation in presidential dissolution powers has remained completely unexplored in the literature on performance voting but is likely to be consequential. Given our findings, the role of presidents in conditioning the strength of the economic vote may be as important as that of clarity of responsibility. In sum, our work has implications for scholars working in a range of different fields.

References

Amorim Neto, O., and Strøm, K. (2006). Breaking the parliamentary chain of delegation: Presidents and non-partisan cabinet members in European democracies. British Journal of Political Science, 36(04), 619-643.

Anderson, C. J. (2000). Economic voting and political context: a comparative perspective. Electoral Studies, 19(2), 151-170.

Anderson, C. J. (2007). The end of economic voting? Contingency dilemmas and the limits of democratic accountability. Annual Review of Political Science, 10, 271-296.

Balke, N. S. (1990). The rational timing of parliamentary elections. Public Choice, 65(3), 201-216.

Chowdhury, A. R. (1993). Political surfing over economic waves: parliamentary election timing in India. American Journal of Political Science, 37(4)1100-1118.

Cheibub, J. A., and Przeworski, A. (1999). Democracy, elections, and accountability for economic outcomes. In: Przeworski, A., Stokes, S. C. and B. Main, (eds.) (1999). Democracy, accountability, and representation. Cambridge University Press, 222-49.

Duch, R. M., and Stevenson, R. T. (2008). The economic vote: How political and economic institutions condition election results. Cambridge University Press

Fearon, J. D. (1999). Electoral Accountability and the Control of Politicians: Selecting Good Types versus Sanctioning Poor Performance. In: Przeworski, A., Stokes, S. C. and B. Main, (eds.) (1999). Democracy, accountability, and representation. Cambridge University Press. 55-97.

Fiorina, M. (1981). Retrospective Voting in American National Elections. Yale University Press.

Glasgow, G., Golder, M., and Golder, S. N. (2011). Who "wins"? Determining the party of the prime minister. American Journal of Political Science, 55(4), 937-954.

Grimaldi, S. (2011). The role of Italian presidents: the subtle boundary between accountability and political action. Bulletin of Italian Politics 3(1) 103-125.

Goplerud, M., and Schleiter, P. (2016). An Index of Assembly Dissolution Powers. Comparative Political Studies, 49(4), 427-456

Hellwig, T., and Samuels, D. (2007). Voting in Open Economies: The Electoral Consequences of Globalization. Comparative Political Studies, 40(3), 283-306.

Hobolt, S., Tilley, J., and Banducci, S. (2013). Clarity of responsibility: How government cohesion conditions performance voting. European Journal of Political Research, 52(2), 164-187.

Ito, T. (1990). The timing of elections and political business cycles in Japan. Journal of Asian Economics, 1(1), 135-156.

Ito, T., and Park, J. H. (1988). Political business cycles in the parliamentary system. Economics Letters, 27(3), 233-238.

Kang, S. G. (2009). The influence of presidential heads of state on government formation in European democracies: Empirical evidence. European Journal of Political Research, 48(4), 543-572.

Kayser, M. A. (2005). Who surfs, who manipulates? The determinants of opportunistic election timing and electorally motivated economic intervention. American Political Science Review, 99(01), 17-27.

Kayser, M. A. (2006). Trade and the Timing of Elections. British Journal of Political Science, 36(03), 437-457.

Kayser, M. A., and Peress, M. (2012). Benchmarking across borders: electoral accountability and the necessity of comparison. American Political Science Review, 106(3), 661-684.

Laver, M. (2006). Legislatures and Parliaments in Comparative Perspective. In: Weingast, B. R., and Wittman, D. (eds). The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy, Oxford University Press, 121–38.

Leigh, A. (2009). Does the World Economy Swing National Elections? Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics, 71(2), 163-181.

Linz, J., (1994). The failure of presidential democracy. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lewis-Beck, M. S., and Stegmaier, M. (2000). Economic determinants of electoral outcomes. Annual Review of Political Science, 3(1), 183-219.

Magone, J. M. (2005), Portugal. European Journal of Political Research, 44(7): 1158–1166

Magone, J. M. (2006), Portugal. European Journal of Political Research, 45(7): 1247–1253.

Manin, B. (1997). The Principles of Representative Government. Cambridge University Press.

Metcalf, L.K. (2000). Measuring presidential power. Comparative Political Studies, 33(5): 660-685.

Müller, W. C. (2000) Political parties in parliamentary democracies: Making delegation and accountability work. European Journal of Political Research 37(3): 309-333.

Nadeau, R., Lewis-Beck, M. S., and Bélanger, É. (2013). Economics and elections revisited. Comparative Political Studies, 46(5), 551-573.

Nannestad, P., and Paldam, M. (1994). The VP-function: A survey of the literature on vote and popularity functions after 25 years. Public Choice, 79(3-4), 213-245.

Palmer, H. D., and Whitten, G. D. (2000). Government competence, economic performance and endogenous election dates. Electoral Studies, 19(2), 413-426.

Pasquino, G. (2012). Presidents and their accordion: pre-1992 and post-1994. Parliamentary Affairs, 65(4), 845-860.

Powell, G. B. (2000). Elections as instruments of democracy: Majoritarian and proportional visions. Yale University Press.

Powell, G. B., and Whitten, G. D. (1993). A cross-national analysis of economic voting: taking account of the political context. American Journal of Political Science, 391-414.

Roberts, A. (2008). Hyperaccountability: economic voting in Central and Eastern Europe. Electoral Studies, 27(3), 533-546.

Roy, J., and Alcantara, C. (2012). The election timing advantage: Empirical fact or fiction? Electoral Studies, 31(4), 774-781.

Tavits, M. (2009). Presidents with prime ministers: do direct elections matter? Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schleiter, P., and Morgan-Jones, E. (2009). Constitutional power and competing risks: monarchs, presidents, prime ministers, and the termination of East and West European cabinets. American Political Science Review, 103(03), 496-512.

Schleiter, P., and Morgan-Jones, E. (2010). Who's in charge? Presidents, assemblies, and the political control of semipresidential cabinets. Comparative Political Studies, 43(11), 1415-1441.

Strøm, K., and Swindle, S. M. (2002). Strategic parliamentary dissolution. American Political Science Review, 96(03), 575-591.

Appendix: Countries and Presidential Dissolution Power

Country	Presidential Dissolution Powers
Austria	10
Czech Republic (1992)	3.17
Czech Republic (2009)	3.17
Estonia	5
Finland (1919)	10
Finland (1991)	4.75
France (1958)	9.03
Germany	2.50
Greece (1975)	9.50
Greece (1986)	2.50
Hungary (1989)	2.48
Hungary (2011)	4.78
Iceland	10
Ireland	5
Italy	9.03
Latvia	5
Lithuania	2.38
Poland (1989)	5.23
Poland (1992)	5.23
Poland (1997)	4.75
Portugal (1976)	9.50
Portugal (1982)	8.10
Romania	2.02
Slovakia (1992)	2.38
Slovakia (1999)	3.09
Slovenia	0

Notes: The source of the dissolution powers index is Goplerud and Schleiter (2016).