

## Three waves of semi-presidential studies

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### Abstract

This article reviews the scholarship on semi-presidentialism since the early 1990s. We identify three waves of semi-presidential studies. The first wave focused on the concept of semi-presidentialism, how it should be defined, and what countries should be classified as semi-presidential. The second wave examined the effect of semi-presidential institutions on newly democratized countries. Does semi-presidentialism help or hinder the process of democratic consolidation? The third wave examines the effect of semi-presidential institutions on both recent and consolidated democracies. Third-wave studies have been characterized by three questions: to what extent does the direct election of the president make a difference to outcomes; to what extent does variation in presidential power make a difference; and what other factors interact with presidential power to help to bring about differential outcomes? The article argues that the concept of semi-presidentialism remains taxonomically valid, but that the empirical scholarship on countries with semi-presidential institutions needs to respond to broader developments within the discipline if it is to remain relevant.

### Keywords

Semi-presidentialism; comparative politics; democratization; political science

In the 1990s, the long-running debate about presidential and parliamentary government was given new urgency and focus following the collapse of communism. This debate was also marked by the beginning of a new era of work on semi-presidentialism. This article reviews the scholarship on semi-presidentialism since this time. We identify three waves of semi-presidential studies. Without implying that work consistent with one wave had to end before another could start, we show that the first wave focused on the concept of semi-presidentialism, how it should be defined, and what countries should be classified as semi-presidential. The second wave examined the effect of semi-presidential institutions on newly democratized countries. Does semi-presidentialism help or hinder the process of democratic consolidation? The third wave examines the effect of semi-presidential institutions on both recent and consolidated democracies, focusing on issues such as government formation and termination. In addition to providing an overview of the three waves of semi-presidential studies, the article also identifies three challenges to the contemporary scholarship on semi-presidentialism. The first reflects the shift from the study of semi-presidentialism to the effects of presidential power; the second concerns a more general skepticism regarding the importance ascribed to formal elite-level political institutions on the process of democratization; the third is derived from concerns about how best to study of the causal effects of institutions generally. Having discussed these challenges, the article concludes by arguing that the concept of semi-presidentialism remains taxonomically valid, but that the empirical scholarship on countries with semi-presidential institutions needs to respond to broader developments within the discipline if it is to remain relevant.

#### THE FIRST WAVE: DEFINITIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS

The concept of 'semi-presidentialism' was introduced in the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of Maurice Duverger's textbook on political systems in 1970. Here, he identified a set of 'semi-presidential regimes', including France, Austria, Finland and the defunct regime in Weimar Germany.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of the next decade, Duverger refined his definition and extended his examples to include Iceland,

Ireland and Portugal. This work culminated in his book, *Échec au Roi*,<sup>2</sup> which was summarized in an English-language article in the *European Journal of Political Research* in 1980.<sup>3</sup> The definition that was formulated by Duverger in 1970 and that was then popularized in 1980 generated a debate about how the concept of semi-presidentialism should be defined and, by extension, which countries should be classed as semi-presidential.

Duverger defined a political regime 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.<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of the 1990s, Duverger was the only person to have provided a formal definition of the concept.

In the early 1990s, though, Duverger's definition was challenged. For example, O'Neil argued that a country could be classed as semi-presidential even if the president was not directly elected, so long as the institution was fairly powerful.<sup>5</sup> However, this interpretation was not widely adopted. By contrast, Sartori preferred to reformulate Duverger's definition entirely.<sup>6</sup> Even though Sartori's work was widely cited, again this interpretation of semi-presidentialism was not widely adopted. In short, throughout the 1990s Duverger's definition remained standard.

This position was challenged at the end of the decade. Elgie argued that problem with Duverger's definition was that it rested on an essentially ambiguous clause.<sup>7</sup> For Duverger, one of the defining elements of the concept was that the president had to possess "quite considerable powers". However, what one writer believed to be quite considerable differed from what another scholar believed it to be. The ambiguity of this clause raised two issues. First, the list of semi-presidential countries varied from one person to the next. Country experts would claim that their country was or was not semi-presidential because they considered their president to have either too few or too many powers than could rightly be counted as "quite considerable". Second, and more importantly, it generated an endogeneity problem in cross-national comparative research.

Often, scholars classed as semi-presidential only those countries where the president was observed to exercise quite considerable powers. They then looked at political practice in these countries and found that semi-presidentialism was problematic because the president had quite considerable powers that generated tension within the executive. They then concluded that semi-presidentialism was problematic because it created tension within the executive. The logic of such an argument was inescapably circular.<sup>8</sup>

The solution to this problem was to remove any reference to the powers of the president from the definition of the concept. Thus, Elgie proposed the following definition:

Semi-presidentialism is the situation where a constitution makes provision for both a directly elected fixed-term president and a prime minister and cabinet who are collectively responsible to the legislature.<sup>9</sup>

The advantage of this definition was that it allowed countries to be classed as semi-presidential on the basis of publicly available documents rather than essentially contestable local knowledge. This meant that the list of countries with semi-presidential constitutions could be agreed. It also allowed countries to be classified as semi-presidential without reference to any behavioral condition, meaning that the endogeneity problem could be avoided.<sup>10</sup>

According to Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, this definition of semi-presidentialism has now been adopted by “the majority” of scholars, effectively replacing Duverger’s definition of the concept<sup>11</sup> This is now the standard way of defining the term and is used by almost all leading comparativists, such as Samuels and Shugart.<sup>12</sup> That said, like any social science concept, it remains open to challenge. Magni-Berton has recently provided an alternative way of identifying semi-presidential countries.<sup>13</sup> What is more, some country experts are still exercised by the thought of their country being classed as semi-presidential and revert back to a Duvergerian understanding of the term. For example, Clark has explicitly rejected the classification of Russia as semi-presidential because the president there is too strong.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, Munkh-Erdene has argued that Mongolia should be classified as parliamentary, because the president there has too few powers.<sup>15</sup> While Duverger’s influence will always be strong and while country experts will always challenge the application of the term to their

particular case, there is now much less debate about how to define the concept of semi-presidentialism than there used to be. More than that, among comparativists there is very little disagreement as to the list of semi-presidential countries. In this way, we can reasonably conclude that this element of controversy in the first wave of semi-presidential studies is now all but resolved. There is a standard definition of semi-presidentialism and a relatively consensual list of semi-presidential countries.

There is, though, a second definitional controversy. Even the briefest of glances at the list of countries with semi-presidential constitutions based on the now standard post-Duvergerian definition reveals that it includes some countries with very strong presidents (e.g. Russia), some with very weak presidents (e.g. Slovenia), and some where the president has relatively strong but still limited powers (e.g. Romania). While comparativists are generally willing to classify all such countries as semi-presidential, this variation poses a problem for comparative empirical analysis. There is little to be gained from operationalizing semi-presidentialism as an explanatory variable when there is such extreme variation within the set of semi-presidential countries. Therefore, even if the post-Duvergerian definition captures a form of constitutional government that is essentially different from presidentialism and parliamentarism, when scholars wish to explore the empirical effects of semi-presidentialism they are obliged to find a way of operationalizing the variation within the set of semi-presidential countries. Thus, work in the first wave of semi-presidentialism has generated a two-step logic. The first step is a process of taxonomic classification based on the interpretation of certain constitutional rules – is the president directly elected and are the prime minister and cabinet collectively responsible to the legislature? This process allows countries with semi-presidential constitutions to be distinguished from those with presidential and parliamentary constitutions, but it reveals nothing about the actual distribution of presidential power. The second step is a further process of classification that aims to generate some basic distinctions within the set of semi-presidential countries in a way that captures variation in actual presidential power. In the second stage of this process, there is an ongoing debate about how best to capture such variation. Here, there are three basic options.

The first option is to fall back on descriptive terms. For example, Elgie distinguishes between highly presidentialized semi-presidential countries, semi-presidential countries with ceremonial presidents and strong prime ministers, and semi-presidential countries with a balance of executive power.<sup>16</sup> Tsai and Wu have proposed similar typologies.<sup>17</sup> This option is problematic, because it reintroduces the inherent ambiguity present in Duverger's original formulation of the concept. For example, what counts as a highly presidentialized system will differ from one person to another. Thus, most comparativists have rejected this option. The second option is to avoid definitional debates altogether and simply use a metric of presidential power. There are now many measures that generate such metrics. They include Metcalf, Shugart and Carey, and Siaroff.<sup>18</sup> These measures provide scores for the extent of presidential power across a range of countries. The effect of variation in presidential power can then be empirically tested. The scores are usually generated from the coding of country constitutions. The main advantage of these measures is that, in theory, they are replicable. There are two main disadvantages. The first is that constitutional powers often differ from actual powers, meaning that the scores for specific countries can be misleading. For example, Iceland often scores highly for presidential power, whereas the president is mainly a figurehead. By the same token, the French president often generates a low score, even though presidents there have often been very powerful.<sup>19</sup> The second is that the measures themselves are often capturing different dimensions of presidential power and lack validity for that reason.<sup>20</sup> Rather than trying to measure presidential power, the third option is to distinguish between semi-presidential countries on the basis of a further constitutional rule. Here, Shugart and Carey's distinction between president-parliamentary and premier-presidential forms of semi-presidentialism has become dominant.<sup>21</sup> For Shugart, "Under premier-presidentialism, the prime minister and cabinet are exclusively accountable to the assembly majority, while under president-parliamentarism, the prime minister and cabinet are dually accountable to the president and the assembly majority".<sup>22</sup> Broadly speaking, president-parliamentary countries have stronger presidents than premier-presidential countries. The advantage of this option is that, like the now standard definition of semi-presidentialism itself, the distinction between the two sub-

types of semi-presidentialism can be based on a publicly available constitutional rule that requires no specialist country knowledge. The disadvantage is that, as with measures of presidential power, constitutional divisions of power sometimes do not neatly match actual divisions. Generally, the second and third ways of distinguishing between semi-presidential countries are used, but there are problems with both.

The first wave of semi-presidential studies generated a considerable amount of work and some often heated debates. The debate about the definition of semi-presidentialism itself has now been resolved at least to the satisfaction of most comparativists, though even among this set of scholars there is an ongoing debate about the best way to distinguish between countries with semi-presidential constitutions in terms of presidential power. However, this shift of emphasis raises its own question. If the concept of semi-presidentialism is of purely taxonomic interest, then is it redundant? Given concepts are fundamental to the scientific enterprise and they are particularly important in the social sciences, the answer is fundamentally no. The post-Duvergerian definition of semi-presidentialism provides the basis for a more reliable taxonomy of regime types than Duverger's original definition. Therefore, if the aim is to identify the institutional differences between semi-presidentialism, presidentialism, and parliamentarism at a conceptual level, then only the post-Duvergerian definition of semi-presidentialism will do in this regard. However, if the aim is to capture the effect of institutional differences between countries in empirical terms, then operationalizing semi-presidentialism as a discrete explanatory variable will not do at all. At the very least, Shugart and Carey's distinction between premier-presidentialism and president-parliamentarism can serve as the basis for potentially valid conclusions about the effect of the variation in presidential power within semi-presidentialism. Perhaps better still, a more fine-grained measure of presidential power should be used. There are after all, differences in presidential power across the set of presidential countries as well as semi-presidential ones and, indeed, there are differences in presidential power in parliamentary republics, as Tavits has clearly shown.<sup>23</sup> Thus, semi-presidentialism remains part of the arsenal of political concepts at political scientists' disposal, but empirically it should be operationalized very carefully

with a focus on the effect of variation in presidential power. We now turn to empirical studies of semi-presidentialism since the early 1990s.

## THE SECOND WAVE: DEMOCRATIZATION

The debate about the definition of semi-presidentialism and the classification of countries as semi-presidential was important because in the 1990s there was a rapid increase in the number of countries with a semi-presidential constitution. By itself, this increase was enough to generate a certain academic interest, but the distribution of semi-presidential countries also changed, encouraging a particular research agenda. Rather than being mainly confined to rich, consolidated, European democracies, semi-presidentialism was introduced in many newly democratic countries, including newly established countries in the former USSR and the former Yugoslavia. Given this distribution, scholars focused overwhelmingly on the impact of semi-presidentialism on democratization. This generated a second wave of semi-presidential studies that began in the early 1990s.

In retrospect, Shugart and Carey's volume *Presidents and Assemblies* was the first second-wave study.<sup>24</sup> They countered the general criticism of presidentialism by arguing that countries with directly elected presidents were not necessarily harmful to democracy if presidential institutions were crafted carefully. As part of this argument, they pointed to the potential benefits of premier-presidentialism in contrast to president-parliamentarism, which they classed among the potentially dangerous institutional configurations. They relied on only anecdotal evidence, but their volume was extremely influential. At the time, Shugart and Carey rejected the label of semi-presidentialism. Instead, they stated that "what Duverger refers to as semi-presidential, we designate premier-presidential".<sup>25</sup> They also made it clear that president-parliamentarism was separate from premier-presidentialism, implying that it was not a form of semi-presidentialism either.<sup>26</sup> The result was that even though Shugart and Carey were sympathetic to premier-presidentialism as a form of constitutional design for new democracies, their argument was rarely interpreted as an argument in favour of either semi-presidentialism or a particular form of semi-presidentialism.

Only later did Shugart explicitly and systematically classify both premier-presidentialism and president-parliamentarism as sub-types of semi-presidentialism.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, this is now the standard way in which Shugart presents these concepts.<sup>28</sup>

With Shugart and Carey explicitly rejecting the semi-presidential label, there appeared to be very few proponents of semi-presidentialism in the mid-1990s. For example, in 1994 Linz published a long essay that reiterated his arguments about the perils of presidentialism<sup>29</sup> and the virtues of parliamentarism<sup>30</sup> and that also included a discussion of semi-presidentialism.<sup>31</sup> Again based on anecdotal evidence, Linz was willing to concede that some forms of semi-presidentialism might be conducive to democratization, notably where the directly elected president was a figurehead and where the system functioned like a parliamentary system. In general, though, he expressed his opposition to French-style semi-presidentialism where the president had quite considerable powers, which was how the concept was generally understood at the time, given, as we have seen, Duverger's definition was still dominant. This argument was reiterated in Linz and Stepan's comparative volume.<sup>32</sup> Again based on largely anecdotal, qualitative country studies, they pointed to the particular problems of cohabitation within semi-presidentialism. This is the situation where the president and prime minister are from opposing parties or coalitions and the president's party or coalition is not represented in the government. Pointing to Poland as an example, they argued that this situation created the potential for power struggles within the executive that were liable to threaten fragile new democracies. With Shugart and Carey's work not being interpreted as an argument in favour of semi-presidentialism or at least one type of semi-presidentialism, Linz's negative judgment about the effect of semi-presidentialism on democratization came to dominate thinking in this regard. Among scholars and constitution-builders, the clear recommendation was that semi-presidentialism should be avoided.

This position was challenged by Giovanni Sartori.<sup>33</sup> He addressed the issue of cohabitation. Whereas Linz emphasized the likelihood of conflict within the executive when the majority in the legislature was opposed to the president, Sartori pointed to the French case and noted that cohabitation caused power to

shift to the prime minister, leaving the president a figurehead. This 'head-shifting', he suggested, was a source of institutional flexibility, leading him to suggest that cohabitation could lead to a 'rebalancing' within the executive.<sup>34</sup> On the basis of this argument, Sartori has come to be seen as one of the first people to support semi-presidentialism. However, two points need to be stressed. The first is that Sartori's support for semi-presidentialism was equivocal. Certainly, he preferred it to presidentialism, but he refused to choose between semi-presidentialism and parliamentarism as his preferred form of government.<sup>35</sup> More than that, Sartori also noted that there were potential problems with a French-style dual authority structure.<sup>36</sup> So, even though Sartori's book was very influential, it did little to change the generally negative judgment about semi-presidentialism. For the most part, scholars were still reluctant to recommend it as a constitutional choice for new democracies. The second point is that, like both Shugart and Carey and Linz before him, Sartori's argument about semi-presidentialism was based almost entirely on anecdotal examples from consolidated democracies. There may have been little option at the time of writing, because the experience of semi-presidentialism in young democracies was so new. All the same, it did point to limitations in the empirical work on this topic at this time.

The key development in the second wave of semi-presidential studies can be traced back to Roper's article in *Comparative Politics*.<sup>37</sup> This article explicitly identified premier-presidentialism and president-parliamentarism as two forms of semi-presidentialism, meaning that work by scholars of semi-presidentialism was now consistent with the work of Shugart and Carey. This article also stressed the importance of institutional variation not just within semi-presidentialism, but within premier-presidentialism too. To do so, Roper measured the power of presidents in a number of premier-presidential countries using a variation of Shugart and Carey's index of presidential power.<sup>38</sup> This was important because it changed the terms of the debate that had been dominated by Linz and Sartori. They gave the impression that the effects of semi-presidentialism were unidirectional, whereas Roper stressed that variation within semi-presidentialism was likely to be associated with variation in outcomes. This is the equivalent of the two-step process that we saw in terms of

the debate about the definition and classification of semi-presidential systems in the previous section. Importantly, Roper also applied his argument to a mix of young and old democracies in Europe. In this way, he did more than just extrapolate from the experience of consolidated democracies. From this point on the research agenda for the second wave of semi-presidential studies was set. The aim was to explain the extent to which semi-presidential institutions affected the success or failure of new democracies; this question was approached from the principle that there was variation in presidential power within semi-presidentialism; and empirically tests of the effect of such variation needed to include consideration of new democracies.

With the research agenda set in this way, the more recent work in the second wave of semi-presidential studies has been characterized by two developments. First, whereas previous work on semi-presidentialism and democratization in new democracies tended to draw conclusions on the basis of anecdotal evidence from single-country or small-n studies, now there has been a shift to medium- and large-n comparison. So, Moestrup presented the first statistical test of the performance of presidential, parliamentary and semi-presidential countries, distinguishing between the effect of premier-presidential and president-parliamentary forms of semi-presidentialism.<sup>39</sup> Since then, large-n studies testing the effect of semi-presidentialism and/or variation within semi-presidentialism have been undertaken by various writers.<sup>40</sup> We should note, though, that some studies still operationalize a 'mixed' regime type variable, which we can understand to correspond to semi-presidentialism but which does not take account of any variation within this regime type.<sup>41</sup> Second, whereas before the research question was couched primarily in terms of which one of presidentialism, parliamentarism or semi-presidentialism was most conducive to the success of new democracies, now this question has been asked in terms which form of semi-presidentialism is most conducive to this end. So, Elgie and Elgie and Schleiter have focused solely on the effects of institutional variation within semi-presidentialism, finding evidence that premier-presidentialism is more conducive to democratization than president-parliamentarism.<sup>42</sup> These studies do not aim to draw any conclusions about the performance of semi-presidentialism relative to other regime types, but they do wish to draw

conclusions about the performance of semi-presidential countries relative to each other.

In general, the shift from anecdotal accounts of consolidated democracies to much more rigorous large-n comparative studies of new democracies has improved our chances of drawing general conclusions about the average effect of institutional variation on democratization. Even so, despite the apparent increase in scientific rigour, we still cannot be sure about the effects of semi-presidentialism and variation within it relative to the effects of presidential and parliamentary institutions. For example, Moestrup finds that parliamentary systems perform significantly better than semi-presidential system and that there is no significant difference between semi-presidentialism and presidentialism.<sup>43</sup> By contrast, Hiroi and Omori argue that the parliamentarism performs worse than presidentialism, though there is some evidence that semi-presidentialism performs better than presidentialism.<sup>44</sup> For their part, Cheibub and Chernykh conclude that semi-presidentialism has no significant effect relative to other regime types.<sup>45</sup> The studies by Maeda and Svulik can be interpreted as coming to a similar conclusion.<sup>46</sup> In short, when we focus solely on more recent second-wave studies, it would be perilous to draw any definitive conclusions about the general effect of semi-presidentialism and variation within it relative to presidentialism and parliamentarism. Results are very sensitive to the time period of the study, the countries included, how democracy and the collapse of democracy are defined, the variables included in the estimations, the proxies used for the concepts being captured by those variables, what estimation technique is used, and so on. So, notwithstanding the inherent lack of validity in conclusions that some scholars still wish to draw about the effect of semi-presidentialism in general on democratization, we should maintain a healthy degree of skepticism about any conclusions concerning the impact of variation within semi-presidentialism as well the effect of such variation relative to presidentialism and parliamentarism. In short, we still cannot be sure about the causal effect of particular institutions.

This conclusion generates two further challenges for the study of semi-presidentialism. The first concerns the focus of inquiry. Partly because robust conclusions about the effect of institutions on democratization have been difficult

to identify, some scholars are now privileging bottom-up, society-centred research rather than top-down institutional accounts.<sup>47</sup> For example, rather than analyzing the effect of formal institutions, scholars are increasingly examining the impact of informal institutions and non-institutional factors. As a result, the study of semi-presidentialism risks being crowded out of the research agenda. The second challenge concerns the method of inquiry. Positivist political science has been hit by the identificationist revolution.<sup>48</sup> Concerns about how to identify causal relationships have posed general problems for political analysis, particularly the study of institutions. One response has been to focus on experimental methods. Yet elite-level institutions are difficult to study in this way, not least because of fundamental issues regarding the absence of randomized assignment. Consequently, there is the real risk that academic attention will shift to topics that are easier to study in the lab or in the field, such as studies of voting behavior and ideology, and away from institutions, such as presidentialism, parliamentarism and semi-presidentialism.

The study of semi-presidentialism needs to respond to both of these challenges. To this end, there is still room for essentially qualitative, single-country or small-n studies of the effect of elite-level institutions on democratization. However, such studies need to be based on a rigorous research design. Lydia Beuman's study of semi-presidentialism in Timor-Leste is an excellent example in this regard.<sup>49</sup> Such studies also need to directly compare the effect of elite-level institutions relative to informal institutions and non-institutional factors. In other words, qualitative-oriented scholars need to identify the relative importance of different explanatory factors and not merely assume that elite-level institutions are important by ignoring informal institutional and non-institutional factors or controlling them away through the judicious use of case selection. In addition, positivist-style scholars of semi-presidentialism need to respond to the identificationist challenge. For example, there has been plenty of lab-based work on the effect of electoral systems. With a certain degree of imagination, the basic principles of this work could be applied to the study of the effects of presidentialism, parliamentarism and semi-presidentialism, including variation within semi-presidentialism. Overall, there have been profound developments in the study of semi-presidentialism and

democratization since the early 1990s. In order to remain relevant, work in this area has to respond to broader developments in the discipline. Otherwise, there is the real prospect that work on semi-presidentialism and democratization will become marginalized and increasingly irrelevant.

## THE THIRD WAVE: PARTIES, POWER AND PARLIAMENTS

The study of semi-presidentialism in consolidated democracies started at a very early stage. Writing well before the wave of democratization in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Duverger was concerned with explaining why countries with the same basic constitutional structure operated in very different ways. Why was France so presidentialized, when in Austria, Iceland and Ireland the system operated in a parliamentary-like manner, even though the president was directly elected? To answer this question, he identified four factors: “the actual content of the constitution, the combination of tradition and circumstances, the composition of the parliamentary majority, and the position of the president in relation to this majority”.<sup>50</sup> As we shall see, these factors remain central to the analysis of third-wave semi-presidential studies. In one sense, this means is that what we are calling the third wave of semi-presidential studies actually predates the beginning of the second wave. In another sense, though, with attention initially focused on the issue of democratization, the systematic study of semi-presidentialism in consolidated democracies was largely ignored throughout the 1990s. Now, though, it has become the principal focus of attention. This is the sense in which we can identify it as the third wave of semi-presidential studies. In general, third-wave studies have been characterized by three questions: to what extent does the direct election of the president make a difference to outcomes; to what extent does variation in presidential power make a difference; and what other factors interact with presidential power to help to bring about differential outcomes?

Samuels and Shugart argue that the direct election of the president does make a difference.<sup>51</sup> In particular, it affects party politics, which in turn has an impact of other aspects of the political process. They state: “*to the extent that the constitutional structure separates executive and legislative origin and/or survival, parties*

*will tend to be presidentialized*" (emphasis in the original).<sup>52</sup> Separate origin refers to the situation where there is a direct presidential election that is held separately from legislative elections, albeit perhaps simultaneously. Separate survival "means that a party or legislative majority cannot remove a sitting president".<sup>53</sup> The separate origin of the executive and the legislature means that what it takes for the president to be elected is not necessarily what it takes for individual party deputies to be elected or for the party as a whole to gain a majority there. Presidential candidates are likely to adopt a vote-seeking strategy that emphasises public goods because they need to win a large proportion of the national electorate.<sup>54</sup> By contrast, the party's legislative candidates may adopt a policy-seeking strategy or they may emphasize constituency goods. The separate survival of the executive and the legislature also has implications. Here, presidents "have little to fear from their own colleagues" because they cannot be dismissed.<sup>55</sup> Thus, Samuels and Shugart state: "*to the extent that capture of a separately elected presidency is important for control over the distribution of the spoils of office and/or the policy process, party behavior and organization will tend to mimic constitutional structure, giving rise to 'presidentialized' parties*" (emphasis in the original).<sup>56</sup> By contrast, under parliamentarism parties may dismiss their own leaders, meaning that potentially leaders have much to fear from their own colleagues, meaning that parties remain parliamentarized. Overall, they show that variation in separation-of-powers systems, including the direct election of the president, has considerable effects on political parties and the political process generally.

This position has been challenged by Tavits.<sup>57</sup> She argues that, by itself, the introduction of direct elections does not make a difference to political outcomes. To illustrate this argument she takes a sample of European parliamentary democracies and semi-presidential democracies with weak presidents. Using the share of non-partisan ministers in government as her proxy for presidential activism, she shows that there is no significant statistical relationship between directly or indirectly elected presidents and the level of presidential activism.<sup>58</sup> More qualitatively, she shows that presidents in some parliamentary systems, such as Hungary, have more power than presidents in some semi-presidential systems, such as Ireland. Taking the example of Slovakia, she also shows that the

introduction of direct presidential elections in a parliamentary system does not necessarily empower the president. Instead, drawing on the concept of political opportunity structures, she states that “constitutional powers are the most important aspect of the opportunity structure”,<sup>59</sup> but she argues that the incentives for presidential activism will be greater when political consensus is low, notably during periods of cohabitation or divided government, and when other political institutions are weak, particularly during periods of coalition and minority government. This formulation is reminiscent of Duverger’s way of thinking about the effect of the relationship between the president and the parliamentary majority that was presented 30 years earlier. That said, the fact that Tavits questions the idea that direct presidential elections makes a difference to political outcomes leads at least one scholar to conclude that her analysis challenges the “continued use of the concept” of semi-presidentialism no less.<sup>60</sup>

What are we to conclude about the debate over the effect of direct presidential elections? First, we can certainly continue to hold the position that the direct election of the president makes a taxonomic difference. As we have seen, in a post-Duvergerian world the presence or absence of direct presidential elections has considerable taxonomic implications, but no necessary empirical implications. Those who hold to the post-Duvergerian definition make no claim that, by itself, direct election makes any difference to political outcomes. They merely claim that it makes a difference to the taxonomic classification of a country. For such scholars, when the Czech Republic introduced the direct election of the president, it shifted from a parliamentary to a semi-presidential regime without implying that it had any implications for empirical outcomes. Thus, we can reject the idea that Tavits’ work challenges the very concept of semi-presidentialism. This idea is based on a misreading of post-Duvergerian scholarship. Second, while taxonomically the matter is clear-cut, whether or not the introduction of direct election has an effect on political outcomes still remains open to empirical investigation. This is the third-wave equivalent of the two-step process that we identified previously. For their part, Samuels and Shugart claim that it does make an empirical difference, whereas Tavits argues that it does not. Third, even though Samuels and Shugart and Tavits seem poles apart in terms of their answer to the question of whether direct presidential elections matter, they

are not as radically opposed as they might at first appear. For one, Tavits compares parliamentary presidents to only a limited subset of premier-presidential presidents, namely ones with very few constitutional powers. In effect, she has deliberately truncated her sample. If she had considered the full set of premier-presidential countries, i.e. including those with strong presidents, such as France and Romania, then she may have found that direct election was a significant predictor of presidential activism. In addition, Samuels and Shugart are making a probabilistic rather than a deterministic argument. They can perfectly well claim that direct election matters in general, but that it does not always matter. Therefore, they can happily conclude that some parliamentary presidents may indeed be stronger than some semi-presidential presidents as Tavits shows, without this meaning that in general direct election does not have an effect. More importantly, though, even though Samuels and Shugart emphasize the empirical importance of the separate origin of the executive and the legislature, they focus on more than just the importance of direct election. As we have seen, they show there is variation in outcomes between presidentialism and president-parliamentarism and, particularly, between these two different separation-of-powers regimes and premier-presidentialism, yet all three have directly elected presidents. So, direct election alone cannot explain such variation. In fact, when they state: *“to the extent that capture of a separately elected presidency is important for control over the distribution of the spoils of office and/or the policy process, party behavior and organization will tend to mimic constitutional structure, giving rise to ‘presidentialized’ parties”*, we can interpret them as saying that their theory applies only to relatively strong presidents.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, we might even interpret them as saying that when a separately elected presidency is not important, i.e. when there are Tavits-style weak presidents, then they do not expect direct election to make a difference. Overall, while there is certainly a difference of emphasis between Shugart and Carey and Tavits, the debate about the effect of direct presidential elections is not as polarized as it might at first appear.

In this way, we can see how the debate between Shugart and Carey and Tavits is at least partly a debate about the effect of presidential power. More generally, the impact of variation in presidential power has been a particular focus of third-wave studies. This work has been applied both solely to the

population of semi-presidential democracies and to a broader population of semi-presidential and usually parliamentary countries. There are many different studies that include semi-presidential countries as part of a large-n analysis. For example, Hicken and Stoll show how the size of the presidential prize, i.e. the variation in presidential power in presidential and semi-presidential regimes, affects the legislative party system in interaction with the sequencing of presidential and legislative elections and the effective number of candidates at the presidential election.<sup>62</sup> Elgie and Fauvelle-Aymar show how variation in presidential power in semi-presidential systems affects the level of turnout at presidential and legislative elections with turnout generally higher at the former than the latter above a certain threshold of presidential power.<sup>63</sup> While there are various individual studies of this sort, there has been a more focused attention on the relationship between presidential power and both government formation and termination.

In terms of government formation, Protsyk demonstrates that cabinet formation in premier-presidential regimes is “much more predictable” than under president-parliamentarism.<sup>64</sup> Under premier-presidentialism, the choice of prime minister “more consistently reflect[s] the preferences of the parliamentary majority”.<sup>65</sup> Building on work by Amorim Neto and Strøm, Schleiter and Morgan-Jones demonstrate that variation in the president’s constitutional power affects the outcomes of the cabinet formation process under semi-presidentialism.<sup>66</sup> Preferring to operationalize a more fine-grained measure of presidential power than the simple president-parliamentary/premier-presidential dichotomy, they show that the greater the president’s power, the more control the president has over cabinet composition. Equally, the greater the fragmentation of party groups in parliament, the greater the president’s control over formation outcomes. However, if the cabinet formation process immediately follows a parliamentary election, then the president’s influence is reduced. Schleiter and Morgan-Jones also compare the outcome of cabinet formation under semi-presidentialism with parliamentarism.<sup>67</sup> They find that the level of non-partisan ministers is higher under the former relative to the latter. They account for the variation in ministerial non-partisanship by reference to differences in the powers of presidents under semi-presidentialism and to the more complex nature of the

government formation process under semi-presidentialism due to the president's involvement under this type of regime.

In terms of government termination, Sedelius and Ekman have used a mixture of secondary reports and an expert survey to determine whether there is a link between intra-executive conflict in Eastern Europe and cabinet instability.<sup>68</sup> They find that there is an association and that intra-executive conflict is particularly destabilizing in president-parliamentary countries relative to premier-presidential countries. By contrast, in a comparative study of parliamentary and semi-presidential regimes in Europe Schleiter and Morgan-Jones find no relationship between the type of semi-presidential regime and government survival.<sup>69</sup> However, they do find that if the president has the power to dissolve the legislature then there is a greater likelihood of governments being replaced between elections. Contrary to this finding, Cheibub and Chernykh show that variation in government stability in semi-presidential and parliamentary countries is more affected by the electoral system than by whether or not the president is directly elected or by the powers of the president.<sup>70</sup> Overall, whereas there does seem to be a basic consensus that presidential power matters for the process of government formation, the same consensus does not exist in relation to government termination.

Consistent with Duverger's work in the 1970s, presidential power is not the only variable that has been shown to matter. In particular, scholars have stressed the relationship between the president and the parliamentary majority, leading to work about the effect of both cohabitation and minority government on presidential outcomes. The standard way of thinking about cohabitation was set by Pierce.<sup>71</sup> Based on a study of the French case he showed that cohabitation reduced the power of the president and increased the level of conflict within the executive between the president and the prime minister. More recent third-wave studies have built on this work. For example, focusing on semi-presidential governments in Eastern Europe Protsyk shows that cohabitation increases the level of intra-executive conflict.<sup>72</sup> He measures the extent of such conflict by counting the examples that were recorded in *East European Constitutional Review*. Using a similar sample of countries but relying on a broader set of sources for the data, Sedelius and Mashtaler also find that a higher degree of intra-executive

conflict under cohabitation than under unified government.<sup>73</sup> The results of these comparative studies are confirmed and extended in single-country studies. For example, in her study of Timor-Leste Beuman finds there was a greater degree of conflict between the president and the government under cohabitation.<sup>74</sup> In their study of Portugal, Amorim Neto and Costa Lobo also find that there is greater intra-executive conflict under cohabitation.<sup>75</sup> However, contrary to the standard wisdom, they also show that cohabitation is associated with an increase in presidential power rather than a decline. This is because when there is unified government the prime minister is the leader of the parliamentary majority. This means that the president's authority is weaker than the prime minister's. Under cohabitation, though, the president becomes the de facto leader of the majority in the executive, giving the president greater legitimacy. The Portuguese case neatly illustrates Duverger's point that it is not only the presence or absence of a parliamentary majority that matters, but also the president's relationship with the majority.

In relation to the effect of minority government on presidential activity, the general argument is that presidential activity increases during periods of minority government. For example, there is considerable scholarship on the situation in Russia in the early and mid-1990s. This was a period of democracy, even though, as events have subsequently demonstrated, Russia was hardly a consolidated democracy at that time. For that reason, there have been studies of Russia during this period from a second-wave perspective.<sup>76</sup> All the same, prior to the collapse of democracy under President Putin's United Russia regime, there was considerable instability caused by the absence of a cohesive majority in the Duma. Various authors have shown how this period was associated with a high degree of presidential decree activity<sup>77</sup> and with veto activity (Chandler 2001).<sup>78</sup> This finding is consistent with Skach's work about the perils of divided minority government.<sup>79</sup> Again, this work is more associated with second-wave studies, but it includes a chapter on the early years of the French Fifth Republic when the system was democratic and when the president used a variety of constitutional powers to deliver his preferred outcomes. From a comparative perspective, Protsyk has confirmed this general intuition.<sup>80</sup> He has found that presidents were more likely to initiate conflict than prime ministers in semi-presidential countries

in Eastern Europe and that they were more likely to do so when the prime minister headed a minority government, suggesting that the presidents sensed potential prime ministerial weakness and moved to try to capitalize on the situation. By contrast, when there were technocratic cabinets the level of presidential/prime ministerial conflict declined.

To sum up, we can conclude that there is a vibrant third-wave research agenda. This work has relied on evidence solely from studies of semi-presidential countries as well as on evidence from broader cross-national comparisons. While there are ongoing debates and controversies, we have seen that conclusions drawn from single-country studies, purely semi-presidential studies, and broader comparative studies are not necessarily at odds with each other. This is a sign that we should continue to engage in all three types of studies, so as to arrive at conclusions that are as robust as possible. That said, even though there is now a much greater sophistication in analytical techniques than before and even though these techniques have been applied to a much broader range of issues than was previously the case, scholars often return to the variables that Duverger identified some 30 years ago to explain outcomes under semi-presidentialism. Thus, while Duverger's definition of semi-presidentialism may now have been overtaken, his insights into the working of semi-presidential systems in practice remains current. That said, we should also note that the identificationist challenge applies to third wave studies too. Therefore, when exploring the effect of variables such as presidential power and the president's relationship with the parliamentary majority, scholars need to conduct their analysis in ways that reflect broader methodological developments. This challenge is by no means confined to the study of semi-presidentialism, but scholars of countries with semi-presidential constitutions need to be aware of it and need to be able to respond to it.

## CONCLUSION

The systematic study of semi-presidentialism began in the early 1990s. Since this time, the focus of the scholarship has changed. We can see a shift from debates about the definition of the concept and the classification of countries to

empirically rich work about the effects of semi-presidentialism on democratization and, more recently, a host of other issues too. We can also see that there is now a basic two-step process to semi-presidential studies. The first step is the taxonomic classification of semi-presidential countries on the basis of a post-Duvergerian definition of the term. The second is the identification of variation within this set of semi-presidential countries and the empirical investigation of the effects of such variation. This two-step process has also encouraged different types of empirical investigation. Previously, there was an emphasis on single-country case studies. These studies still exist and they have their merits, bringing rich empirical detail to the table. However, the idea that the effect of semi-presidentialism is not unidirectional and that variation within semi-presidential countries has differential effects has encouraged comparative scholarship. This is a welcome development because it helps to identify more general conclusions about the consequences of semi-presidentialism as well as providing the opportunity for broader theoretical developments in comparative politics to be applied to the study of semi-presidential countries specifically. Thus, students of semi-presidentialism can both draw upon comparative scholarship to understand the politics of semi-presidentialism better and contribute to comparative scholarship from a better understanding of semi-presidentialism.

There are, though, challenges to the study of semi-presidentialism. Early work was quick to draw conclusions about semi-presidentialism on the basis of the more or less implicit assumption that semi-presidential countries comprised a discrete category separate from presidentialism and parliamentarism. Yet, institutional variation within semi-presidentialism clearly shows it does not. Therefore, while the concept of semi-presidentialism has considerable taxonomic value, it has little empirical validity if it is operationalized as a discrete variable. A focus on variation in presidential power is more useful in this regard. For some, this shift questions the empirical usefulness of the concept. More generally, the interest in institutional analysis that began in the mid-1980s is arguably now waning. The study of semi-presidentialism benefited greatly from the fact that there was a ready-made theoretical framework with which to study the rise in the number of countries with a semi-presidential constitution in the early 1990s.

As the study of institutions progressed with the development of principal-agent approaches and so on, so too did the work on semi-presidentialism and the variation within it. Now, though, there have been profound ideational developments. When scholars discuss issues such as democratization, there is an increasing tendency to adopt a bottom-up analysis that focuses on the impact of social actors, new media, and so forth. Scholars of semi-presidentialism need to demonstrate the importance of institutional effects relative to these other factors if the research of the last 20 years is to remain relevant. Finally, the study of semi-presidentialism runs the risk of being undermined in the face of the identificationist revolution. For example, how will the study of semi-presidentialism fare in the trend towards a more experimental positivist political science? The answer is not immediately apparent, but in order to remain relevant semi-presidential scholars have to engage with these broader methodological developments.

That said, the study of political institutions is unlikely to disappear anytime soon. The work of coalition presidentialism in Latin America has the potential to be applied more broadly and semi-presidentialism is one obvious area of interest. In this regard, the work on the presidential toolkit has the potential for a much broader application and would suit the study of semi-presidential countries very well.<sup>81</sup> The ongoing work on comparative constitutions challenges certain received ideas about semi-presidentialism, but also provides the opportunity for debate as well as new data-led studies.<sup>82</sup> In turn, the study of semi-presidentialism has much to offer to the work about the presidentialization and/or personalization of parliamentary systems. Overall, while we can now identify three waves of semi-presidential studies after 20 years of scholarship, we can also look forward to more work and new waves of scholarship in the years to come.

## FOOTNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Duverger, *Institutions politiques et Droit constitutionnel*, 279.

<sup>2</sup> Duverger, *Échec au Roi*.

<sup>3</sup> Duverger, 'A New Political System Model: Semi-presidential Government'.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 166

<sup>5</sup> O'Neil, 'Presidential Power in Post-Communist Europe: The Hungarian Case in Comparative Perspective'.

<sup>6</sup> Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering*, 131-132.

<sup>7</sup> Elgie, 'The Politics of Semi-Presidentialism'.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the chapter on the problems of cohabitation in Poland in Linz and Stepan *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 13

<sup>10</sup> A list of countries with semi-presidential constitutions can be found in Elgie, *Semi-Presidentialism: Sub-Types And Democratic Performance*.

<sup>11</sup> Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 'Review Article: Citizens, Presidents and Assemblies', 874.

<sup>12</sup> Samuels and Shugart, *Presidents, Parties, and Prime Ministers*.

<sup>13</sup> Magni-Berton, 'Reassessing Duvergerian semi-presidentialism'.

<sup>14</sup> Clark, 'Boxing Russia'.

<sup>15</sup> Munkh-Erdene, 'The Transformation of Mongolia's Political System'.

<sup>16</sup> Elgie, 'A Fresh Look at Semipresidentialism', 102.

<sup>17</sup> Tsai, 'Sub-types of Semi-presidentialism and Political Deadlock';  
Wu, 'Clustering of Semi-Presidentialism.

<sup>18</sup> Metcalf, 'Measuring Presidential Power'; Shugart and Carey *Presidents and Assemblies*; Siaroff, 'Comparative presidencies'.

<sup>19</sup> Cheibub, and Svitlana Chernykh 'Constitutions and Democratic Performance in Semi-Presidential Democracies'.

<sup>20</sup> Fortin, 'Measuring presidential powers'.

<sup>21</sup> Shugart and Carey *Presidents and Assemblies*.

<sup>22</sup> Shugart, 'Semi-presidential Systems', 333.

<sup>23</sup> Tavits, *Presidents In Parliamentary Systems*

<sup>24</sup> Shugart and Carey *Presidents and Assemblies*.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>27</sup> For example, Shugart, 'Semi-presidential Systems'.

<sup>28</sup> Samuels and Shugart, *Presidents, Parties, and Prime Ministers*.

<sup>29</sup> Linz, 'The Perils of Presidentialism'.

<sup>30</sup> Linz, 'The Virtues of Parliamentarism'.

<sup>31</sup> Linz, 'Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy'.

<sup>32</sup> Linz and Stepan *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*.

<sup>33</sup> Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering*.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 135-137.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>37</sup> Roper, 'Are All Semipresidential Regimes the Same?'.

<sup>38</sup> Shugart and Carey *Presidents and Assemblies*.

<sup>39</sup> Moestrup, 'Semi-Presidentialism in Young Democracies'.

<sup>40</sup> For example, Cheibub, and Chernykh 'Constitutions and Democratic Performance in Semi-Presidential Democracies'; Cheibub and Chernykh 'Are Semi-Presidential Constitutions Bad for Democratic Performance?'; Elgie, *Semi-Presidentialism: Sub-Types And Democratic Performance*; Elgie and Schleiter 'Variation in the Durability of Semi-Presidential Democracies'; Hiroi and Omori 'Perils of parliamentarism?'; Maeda, 'Two Modes of Democratic Breakdown'; Svoblik, 'Authoritarian Reversals and Democratic Consolidation'.

<sup>41</sup> This is the case for Hiroi and Omori 'Perils of parliamentarism?'; Maeda, 'Two Modes of Democratic Breakdown'; and Svoblik, 'Authoritarian Reversals and Democratic Consolidation'.

<sup>42</sup> Elgie, *Semi-Presidentialism: Sub-Types And Democratic Performance*; Elgie and Schleiter 'Variation in the Durability of Semi-Presidential Democracies'.

<sup>43</sup> Moestrup, 'Semi-Presidentialism in Young Democracies'.

<sup>44</sup> Hiroi and Omori 'Perils of parliamentarism?'.

<sup>45</sup> Cheibub, and Chernykh 'Constitutions and Democratic Performance in Semi-Presidential Democracies'; Cheibub and Chernykh 'Are Semi-Presidential Constitutions Bad for Democratic Performance?'.

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- <sup>46</sup> Maeda, 'Two Modes of Democratic Breakdown'; and Svobik, 'Authoritarian Reversals and Democratic Consolidation'.
- <sup>47</sup> For example, Bratton and van de Walle *Democratic Experiments in Africa*.
- <sup>48</sup> Imai, 'Introduction to the Virtual Issue'.
- <sup>49</sup> Beuman, 'Cohabitation in New Post-Conflict Democracies'.
- <sup>50</sup> Duverger, 'A New Political System Model: Semi-presidential Government', 177-186.
- <sup>51</sup> Samuels and Shugart, *Presidents, Parties, and Prime Ministers*.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.
- <sup>57</sup> Tavits, *Presidents In Parliamentary Systems*.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.
- <sup>60</sup> Gallagher, 'Review of Presidents with Prime Ministers', 405.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.
- <sup>62</sup> Hicken and Stoll 'Are All Presidents Created Equal?'
- <sup>63</sup> Elgie and Fauvelle-Aymar 'Turnout Under Semipresidentialism'.
- <sup>64</sup> Protsykh, 'Prime Ministers' Identity in Semi-Presidential Regimes', 742.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>66</sup> Amorim Neto and Strøm 'Breaking the Parliamentary Chain of Delegation'; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 'Who's in Charge?'
- <sup>67</sup> Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 'Party government in Europe?'
- <sup>68</sup> Sedelius and Ekman, 'Intra-executive Conflict and Cabinet Instability'.
- <sup>69</sup> Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 'Who's in Charge?'
- <sup>70</sup> Cheibub and Chernykh 'Are Semi-Presidential Constitutions Bad for Democratic Performance?'
- <sup>71</sup> Pierce, 'The Executive Divided Against Itself'.
- <sup>72</sup> Protsykh, 'Prime Ministers' Identity in Semi-Presidential Regimes'; Protsykh, 'Intra-Executive Competition between President and Prime Minister'.

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- <sup>73</sup> Sedelius and Mashtaler 'Two decades of semi-presidentialism'.
- <sup>74</sup> Beuman, 'Cohabitation in New Post-Conflict Democracies'.
- <sup>75</sup> Amorim Neto and Costa Lobo 'Portugal's semi-presidentialism (re)considered'.
- <sup>76</sup> Schleiter, 'Mixed Constitutions and Political Instability'.
- <sup>77</sup> Troxel, *Parliamentary Power in Russia*.
- <sup>78</sup> Chandler, 'Presidential Veto Power in Post-Communist Russia'.
- <sup>79</sup> Skach, *Borrowing Constitutional Designs*.
- <sup>80</sup> Protsykh, 'Prime Ministers' Identity in Semi-Presidential Regimes'.
- <sup>81</sup> Chaisty, Cheeseman, and Power 'Rethinking the 'presidentialism debate''.
- <sup>82</sup> Cheibub et al, 'Beyond Presidentialism and Parliamentarism'.

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