

TWO CHEERS FOR SEMI-PRESIDENTIALISM

Robert Elgie

Robert Elgie is Paddy Moriarty Professor of Government and International Studies at Dublin City University, Ireland. He is the co-editor of French Politics published by Palgrave Macmillan. He is the editor of Semi-Presidentialism in Europe (Oxford University Press, 1999), Divided Government in Comparative Perspective (Oxford University Press, 2001) and co-editor with Sophia Moestrup of Semi-Presidentialism Outside Europe (Routledge, forthcoming).

There is a long-standing and ongoing debate about the advantages and disadvantages of various democratic regimes types. Is presidentialism inherently perilous? Is parliamentarism unequivocally virtuous? These questions were highly salient during the early 1990s at the time of the third wave of democratisation. However, they remain important to this day. In very recent times democratising countries, including Afghanistan, Timor Leste and Iraq, have faced or are still facing tough constitutional choices in this regard. Moreover, a number of established democracies, including Mexico and Taiwan, are currently debating whether or not to change their basic system of government. In the academic contributions to these debates most attention has focussed on the relative advantages and disadvantages of presidentialism and parliamentarism. In all probability, Linz's judgment that, all else equal, parliamentarism should be chosen above presidentialism still represents the consensus view.ⁱ That said, there is a powerful counter-argument that properly-crafted presidential regimes can exhibit advantages for certain countries.ⁱⁱ

In this debate, work on semi-presidentialism has been notable for its (near) absence. To this day, semi-presidentialism - the situation where there is both a directly-elected president and a prime minister responsible to the legislature - has been the focus of only one book-length study and scarcely more

journal articles.ⁱⁱⁱ And yet, semi-presidentialism remains a very popular choice of government, especially for countries that democratised during the third wave or that have done so subsequently. Indeed, in the ex-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union there are twice as many semi-presidential regimes as presidential and parliamentary regimes combined. From an academic point of view, the popularity of semi-presidentialism is somewhat alarming. Semi-presidentialism is now widespread and yet to the extent that people have theorised the concept they have overwhelmingly concluded that it should be avoided. In this regard, Linz's judgment can still be treated as the received academic wisdom on the subject. He stated: "In view of some of the experiences with this type of system it seems dubious to argue that in and by itself it can generate democratic stability".^{iv} Specifically, he argued that semi-presidentialism tends to be associated either with "politicking and intrigues that may delay decision making and lead to contradictory policies due to the struggle between the president and the prime minister" or to "an authoritarian interpretation of the powers of the president".^v Valenzuela and Lijphart have recently agreed with Linz's judgment.^{vi}

Given the popularity of semi-presidentialism, the absence of work on this form of government is puzzling. In fact, it is more than just puzzling. One of the key characteristics of semi-presidentialism is that countries working within this basic constitutional framework operate in many different ways. There are semi-presidential countries with strong presidents and subservient heads of government. Guyana is a case in point. At the same time, there are semi-presidential countries with strong prime ministers and figurehead presidents. Slovenia is an example. Finally, there are semi-presidential countries with a balance of presidential and prime ministerial powers. Mongolia is one such country. Given this situation, the experience of semi-presidentialism has the capacity to teach us not only about this form of government, but also about the impact of presidentialism and parliamentarism too. In short, all else equal, we

should expect to find that highly presidentialised semi-presidential countries will have difficulty in ensuring the survival of democracy. By contrast, semi-presidential countries with symbolic presidents will be most likely to democratize successfully. For their part, semi-presidential countries with a balance of presidential and prime ministerial powers will be problematic and will not be particularly conducive to democracy.

This paper examines the theory and practice of semi-presidentialism. It provides a definition of the term and identifies the set of semi-presidential countries in the world. More specifically, it aims to isolate the independent impact of semi-presidentialism on democratic performance. The conclusion is that countries should avoid highly presidentialised semi-presidential systems. By contrast, semi-presidential systems with ceremonial presidents and strong prime ministers have performed well. In the case of balanced semi-presidentialism, the situation is more complex. Many such countries have democratized successfully and their record is certainly better than highly presidentialised semi-presidential systems. However, the evidence suggests that they have done so despite the institutional crises caused by this particular form of semi-presidentialism. So, while a balanced form of semi-presidentialism may be a perfectly good choice of constitutional framework for a consolidated democracy, it is a risky choice for newly-democratising regimes.

Semi-presidentialism: what is it and where is it found?

The concept of semi-presidentialism has been defined in a number of ways.

Maurice Duverger, the person who first popularised the term, stated that:

[a] political regime is considered as semi-presidential if the constitution which established it combines three elements: (1) the president of the republic is elected by universal suffrage; (2) he possesses quite considerable powers; (3) he has opposite him, however, a prime minister and ministers who possess executive

and governmental power and can stay in office only if the parliament does not show its opposition to them.^{vii}

The problem with this definition is the second criterion. Who is to decide what constitutes a president with “quite considerable powers”? The answer is that every writer has the opportunity to decide subjectively what powers are sufficient for them to count as “quite considerable”. As a result, the set of semi-presidential countries has varied from one writer to the next. For Duverger, there were six West European semi-presidential regimes: Austria, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland and Portugal. And this is despite the fact that the Austrian, Icelandic and Irish presidents were largely symbolic leaders. For others, the weakness of these three presidents meant that these countries and others like them should not be classed as semi-presidential at all. For example, Stepan and Skach identified only two West European countries as semi-presidential - France and Portugal - and classified Austria, Iceland and Ireland as parliamentary because they have weak presidents, even though all three are directly elected.^{viii}

The consequence of this situation is more than simply semantic. By introducing a fundamental subjectivity into the definition of the term, the operationalisation of the concept becomes problematic. In short, it leads to the situation where people disagree as to the set of semi-presidential countries. As a result, they often fail to compare like with like. For example, if we adopt a strict definition of “quite considerable powers” and count only those countries with strong presidents as semi-presidential, then it is not surprising that we should conclude that semi-presidentialism is inherently likely to encourage a conflict of power within the executive itself. It does so because we have only included countries that are ever likely to experience this problem in the set of semi-presidential regimes that we are considering. By contrast, if we adopt a less strict definition and count countries such as Austria, Iceland and Ireland as semi-presidential, then we would not be in a position to conclude that semi-

presidentialism creates an inherent tension within the executive. They may do so, but only in some circumstances that we would then need to specify.

Elsewhere, I have argued that the solution to this problem is to drop the second criterion from Duverger's definition.^{ix} For me, a semi-presidential regime is simply one where there is the combination of a directly elected, fixed-term president and a prime minister who is responsible to the legislature. This definition makes it much easier to arrive at an agreed set of semi-presidential countries and, thus, maximizes the opportunity for authors to compare like with like. True, this definition does not totally eliminate all subjectivity when it comes to determining the set of semi-presidential countries. For example, in Bosnia-Herzegovina there are three directly elected presidents. Following the elections, the chair of the presidency is chosen first by a majority of the presidents, then parliament decides the rotation between the remaining two presidents.^x In this highly unusual case, a judgment call must be made. Is Bosnia-Herzegovina a semi-presidential regime or not? To me, we should probably not count Bosnia-Herzegovina as semi-presidential, because the system deviates far from the definition of semi-presidentialism as the situation where there is a single directly elected president. Others, though, may make a different call. Equally, in Slovakia and Iceland the president may be removed from office by a plebiscite. Thus, the president is not necessarily guaranteed to remain in office for a fixed-term. In this case, I think we should still class these two countries as semi-presidential because a super-majority is needed in the plebiscite and because the president is not simply responsible to a potentially fickle majority in parliament in the same way as the prime minister. Thus, the status of the president in these countries is very similar to the situation in other semi-presidential countries. In effect, they serve for a fixed term. Overall, even though the revised definition of semi-presidentialism does not totally eliminate all subjectivity in determining the set of semi-presidential countries, it drastically reduces the number of judgment

calls that have to be made. In this way, it maximises the potential for writers to compare like with like.

Working with this revised definition, there would currently appear to be 54 semi-presidential countries in the world. (See Table 1). Of these countries, 23 were classed as Free by Freedom House and 31 were classed as either Partly Free or Not Free. By the same token, 31 were classed as Electoral Democracies, while 23 did not have this status. Thus, the first observation to make is that semi-presidentialism would not appear to be an inherently problematic regime type as regards democratic survival. A good number of semi-presidential countries are Free, even if the majority of semi-presidential countries are either Partly Free or Not Free. Moreover, even though a large number of semi-presidential countries are not Electoral Democracies, an even greater number are.

That said, we need to explore the world of semi-presidentialism more closely before we can make definitive judgments about whether or not it is conducive to democracy. In short, there is a wide variety of political practice within the set of semi-presidential countries. As a result, rather than making judgments about the performance of semi-presidentialism as a whole, we need to examine the performance of the various types of semi-presidentialism that occur throughout the world.^{xi} As we shall see, some semi-presidential countries have very strong presidents and weak prime ministers. Others have strong prime ministers and figurehead presidents. Yet others have systems where there is more or less a balance of presidential and prime ministerial powers. What difference does the form of political practice make to the democratic success or failure of semi-presidential countries? On the basis of the work of people like Linz, we should expect to find that highly presidentialised semi-presidential countries are problematic; that semi-presidential countries with ceremonial presidents and strong prime ministers should be successful because they operate in a parliamentary-like way; and that semi-presidential countries where there is a balance of power within the executive should also be problematic because there

will exhibit destabilizing institutional conflict. In the next sections, we explore whether these expectations are born out.

Table 1 about here

Highly presidentialised semi-presidential countries

In their overview of his work, Mainwaring and Shugart argued that Linz identified five general problems with presidentialism: the executive and legislature have competing claims to legitimacy; the fixed terms of office make presidential regimes more rigid than parliamentary systems; presidentialism encourages a winner-takes-all outcome; the style of presidential politics encourages presidents to be intolerant of political opposition; and presidentialism encourages populist candidates. Most of three points are salient when it comes to assessing the performance of highly presidentialised semi-presidential countries. For example, as Lijphart notes, even though semi-presidentialism has the potential to share power between a president from one party/coalition and a prime minister from an opposing party/coalition, the winner-takes-all nature of the presidential election remains under semi-presidentialism.^{xiii} In a highly presidentialised semi-presidential system the winner-takes-all nature of the office may mean that a highly personalised system of presidential leadership emerges. This situation is likely to be harmful for democracy because the president may decide to flout the democratic process for reasons and/or interests of his own. In so doing, the president may come into conflict with the legislature whose members enjoy an alternative source of popular legitimacy.

In highly presidentialised semi-presidential systems democracy can and has survived, but it is not the norm. Of the 23 Free semi-presidential countries, only four have systems with strong presidents and weak prime ministers – Guyana, Namibia, Peru and South Korea.^{xiii} The fact that these highly

presidentialised semi-presidential countries have survived is a sign that this type of system is not inherently problematic. Indeed, the Namibian case is particularly noteworthy as it is one of the few consolidated democracies in sub-Saharan Africa. That said, only a small number of Free semi-presidential countries operate in a highly presidentialised way. Moreover, these countries have faced some very difficult political situations and, arguably, these difficulties have been caused by or at least exacerbated by the highly presidentialised nature of their semi-presidential system. For example, writing about South Korea in a recent overview of Asian democratization, one writer has argued that even though “democracy advanced to democratic consolidation in terms of civilian supremacy, strengthened civil liberties and political rights, it has nonetheless serious deficits in horizontal accountability and the checks and balances of the presidency”.^{xiv} In particular, the attempt by successive South Korean presidents to assert their powers has sometimes brought them into sharp conflict with the legislature, especially when the opposition has had a majority there. Thus, while the evidence suggests that the combination of semi-presidentialism with a very strong president and a weak prime minister is not always terminal for democracy, this form of semi-presidentialism does not have a particularly good track record and where it has survived it may have done so despite the problems associated with this form of government.

In fact, more often than not highly presidentialised semi-presidential countries have tended to perform badly, bearing out the predictions of Linz and others. For example, a number of the most fragile semi-presidential democracies, meaning those that were not classed as Free but were classed as Electoral Democracies, have strong presidents and weak prime ministers, particularly Madagascar and Russia. In some cases, there is reason to believe that the strength of the presidency was a contributory factor to their poor democratic performance. In this regard, Russia is perhaps the most notorious case. In 1993, President Yeltsin’s dissolution of the Duma sparked a constitutional and military crisis.

Moreover, the restoration of order was combined with a marked presidentialisation of the system. This process has been reinforced under President Putin. There is a case to be made that Russia may have performed even worse without strong leadership and over issues such as Chechnya the Russian population seems to have supported President Putin. All the same, it seems reasonable to suggest that the highly presidentialised form of semi-presidentialism in Russia has played a part in the decline in the country's democratic quality.

Worse still, the list of Partly Free and Not Free semi-presidential countries that are not Electoral Democracies features an even greater number of countries where the president has great powers and where the prime minister is a cipher. Of course, we have to be circumspect in concluding that the particular form of semi-presidentialism in these countries is responsible for their poor democratic performance. The authoritarian personalisation of the process may have occurred before the constitutionalisation of the system. So, for example, in many of the countries of the former Soviet Union, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the choice of a highly presidentialised semi-presidential system may just have been a reflection of existing authoritarian tendencies. As a result, it is difficult to argue that the problems of democratic consolidation in these countries were caused by the fact that they adopted a semi-presidential system in which the president had great power. The choice of system may have simply reflected existing authoritarian power relations. However, we can say that highly presidentialised semi-presidential systems offer little to alleviate the authoritarian tendencies with which the country is faced. The direct election of the president encourages the president to portray himself as the 'father figure' or saviour of the nation. There is an inherent emphasis on 'court politics'. The prime minister cannot act as any sort of check on the president. The system does little to prevent arbitrary presidential rule.

Overall, the general situation in highly presidentialised semi-presidential countries tends to bear out the predictions of Linz and others. These systems do not necessarily prevent the consolidation of democracy as the examples of countries like Guyana and Namibia illustrate. However, they often create obstacles to it. Sometimes, they do so by reinforcing the inherent problems of the already highly personalized system. In other cases, they encourage the personalization of the system. For example, in Yemen the careful constitutional balance that was negotiated prior to the merger of North and South Yemen was undermined by the presidentialisation of the regime under President Salih. In short, the evidence suggests that nascent democracies should avoid adopting such systems. If this conclusion is correct, then Mozambique's recent constitutional reform that strengthened the power of the presidency is potentially dangerous and may undermine the already fragile Electoral Democracy that exists there. By the same token, the Central African Republic has perhaps taken a gamble by adopting a semi-presidential system of this sort as part of its new constitution.

Semi-presidential countries with ceremonial presidents

Semi-presidential countries with ceremonial presidents operate in a parliamentary-like way. The president is a symbolic leader who has few constitutional powers and who acts as a figurehead for the country rather than as an active decision-maker. The real power lies with the prime minister who is in charge of all aspects of the day-to-day running of the country. To the extent that political practice in these semi-presidential countries closely resembles the practice in parliamentary countries with indirectly elected figurehead presidents and strong heads of government, such as in Germany and Greece, then we would expect their democratic performance to be good. In this type of semi-presidential system, the direct election of the president may legitimize the office

and allow the incumbent to serve as a spokesperson for the country as a whole. However, the absence of presidential powers means that any such popular legitimacy is never directed against the prime minister and never serves to establish the president as a political competitor within the executive.

Only a small number of semi-presidential countries have figurehead presidents and strong prime ministers – Austria, Bulgaria, Iceland, Ireland, Portugal and Slovenia. What is noticeable about all of these countries is that they are classed as Free. Again, we have to be slightly careful not to draw an overly hasty conclusion about the apparent advantages of this form of semi-presidentialism. In Portugal, the President had far greater powers in the period immediately following the transition to democracy in 1974. Arguably, therefore, this form of semi-presidentialism was only adopted when the democratic system was firmly established, so it was not a contributory factor in the country's successful transition. The same is certainly true of Ireland and probably Iceland as well. In Ireland the directly elected figurehead presidency was introduced in 1937 some 16 years after independence and 14 years after the end of the civil war. So, again, Ireland's experience of this form of semi-presidentialism does not necessarily establish this type of system as a key factor in the country's democratic success.

All the same, we can at least say that this type of semi-presidential system does not act as a hindrance to democracy. In this regard, the most interesting case is Slovenia. Here, the choice of the semi-presidential system was a compromise.^{xv} At the time of the constitutional debate there was popular support for a directly elected president largely because of the popularity of the then president of the collective presidency of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, Milan Kucan. Aware of the fact that he would most likely win any direct election and mindful of his communist past, opposition parties wanted to establish an indirectly elected presidency, which Kucan would probably not have won. The resulting compromise was a system where the president was directly elected but

had few powers. This compromise was also consistent with the historical legacy of assembly-centred politics in Slovenia.^{xvi} Once elected, Kucan did not try to exercise any more power than was allocated to the office in the constitution and, thus, set a precedent for a ceremonial presidency. Since this time there have been disputes over the precise role of the presidency, but there have been no damaging institutional deadlocks and the incumbent president has never tried to personalize the political process in a potentially destabilizing way.

Even this brief sketch of the Slovenian experience illustrates the basic and well-known problems with understanding the causes of democratic consolidation. The success or failure of democratization depends on so many variables that it is difficult to determine the extent to which the formal structure of the executive contributes in any way to the final outcome. At the very least, though, the Slovenian case tells us that a semi-presidential system where there is a figurehead president and a strong prime minister did not create any extra obstacles on the path to democratization. In such countries, and in contrast to the highly presidentialised semi-presidential systems considered previously, there is little opportunity for the president to try to personalize the system and probably less incentive to do so given the constitutional balance of power. If a particular leader did wish to personalize the system, then s/he would probably try to assume the prime ministership and govern from there, as was the case in the early years of the Slovakian parliamentary system prior to the reform of the constitution in 1999. However, a leader who tried to personalize this type of system may not find it easy to do so given the need for a parliamentary majority and sometimes a supermajority in order to pass major reforms. As a result, and consistent with both Linz's expectations and Valenzuela's recent recommendation,^{xvii} there is at least some evidence to suggest that a semi-presidential system with a figurehead presidency and a strong prime minister is certainly preferable to a highly presidentialised semi-presidential system. We have to be mindful of the fact that the number of relevant cases in this regard is

very small. Even so, to the extent that such systems operate in a parliamentary-like way and that on balance these systems are usually considered to be less problematic, then this form of semi-presidential system is perhaps most likely to lead to a good democratic performance.

Semi-presidential countries with a balance of presidential and prime ministerial powers

The traditional critique of semi-presidentialism most often relates to countries where there is a balance of presidential and prime ministerial powers. Whereas presidentialism is often criticized for creating the potential for conflict between the executive and the legislature, semi-presidentialism is criticized for creating the potential for conflict within the executive itself. For example, as noted above, Linz argues that semi-presidentialism may be associated either with “politicking and intrigues that may delay decision making and lead to contradictory policies due to the struggle between the president and the prime minister”.^{xviii} Equally, Stepan and Skach argue that semi-presidentialism “inherently entails the possibility of dead-locked government and constitutional conflict between the dual executive if voters do not produce majorities” and they go on to warn that in such situations semi-presidentialism may be dangerous for fragile democracies because the military may be encouraged to step in and break the constitutional deadlock.^{xix} These problems may occur even when the president and prime minister are from the same political party or coalition. However, they are likely to be exacerbated when the president and prime minister are from opposing parties, i.e. during periods of political cohabitation. Overall, if these expectations are correct, then we will find that the record of semi-presidential countries with a balance of presidential and prime ministerial powers is poor.

In fact, the list of Free semi-presidential countries includes a considerable number that give significant powers to both the president and the prime minister

and that have experienced sometimes prolonged periods of political cohabitation. In some of these countries, the prime ministership is the main focus of decision-making responsibility, but the president has the opportunity for significant intervention either sporadically or in one or more discrete policy areas, usually foreign and/or defence policy. Such countries include Bulgaria, Cape Verde, Croatia, Finland, Lithuania and Poland. In other countries, the presidency has rather more powers and is the main focus of political life, even though the prime minister remains a significant actor. These countries include France, Senegal, Taiwan and, since the 2003 constitutional reform, Sao Tome and Principe. Whatever the situation, many of these countries have experienced periods of cohabitation. The classic example is France where power shifts abruptly from the president to the prime minister. More usually, though, cohabitation creates the situation where both the president and the prime minister compete for shared power. This has occurred in Lithuania, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, Sao Tome e Principe and briefly in Taiwan. And yet, democracy in these countries has survived. In short, the basic conclusion to be drawn from this overview is that balanced semi-presidentialism is not necessarily problematic, even for nascent democracies and even when there are periods of political cohabitation. More generally, it is certainly the case that the record of balanced semi-presidentialism is much better than the record of highly presidentialised semi-presidential systems.

At first glance, therefore, the basic expectation of Linz and others about balanced semi-presidentialism would seem to be confounded. This form of government can work, even under difficult periods of political cohabitation. In these cases, though, the real question to ask is whether the countries in question have consolidated *despite* the presence of this type of semi-presidentialism and its political consequences. In other words, and for whatever reason, have these countries overcome the potential problems of balanced semi-presidentialism that Linz and others identify? Even if they have performed well in democratic terms,

have they done so for idiosyncratic and/or non-institutional reasons that might not be present elsewhere? If this is the case, then we should only recommend that a balanced form of semi-presidentialism be introduced when we are absolutely sure that it will not compromise the democratic foundations of the regime. In practice, this means that we would only recommend balanced semi-presidentialism in cases where countries are already consolidated. We would be unlikely to recommend it for countries that are beginning the process of democratization. The risk would be too great.

If we ask the question this way, then Linz's basic judgment receives more support. As noted above, balanced semi-presidentialism creates the potential for intra-executive conflict, whether or not this conflict takes place between members of the same party or opposing parties. In a number of cases, such conflict has been destabilizing. For example, Steven Fish reports that in 1998 Mongolia "endured a months-long stint in political purgatory" as the president rejected a series of candidates for prime minister proposed by the opposition party in the legislature.^{xx} Thus, even though Fish is supportive of semi-presidentialism in the Mongolian case, he acknowledges that the semi-presidential system was directly responsible for the ongoing governmental crisis. A similar situation occurred in Poland during the early years of democratization. There were ongoing struggles between President Walesa and successive prime ministers. Significantly for the purposes of this article, it has been argued that President Walesa "did not want to be a passive figurehead but intended to play an active role in shaping policy. He tried to influence his yet to be defined constitutional prerogatives by setting precedents which he hoped would be accepted as political custom".^{xxi} In so doing, Walesa came into conflict with his prime ministers who were trying to exercise their own constitutional powers. Needless to say, democracy has survived in both the Mongolian and Polish cases. However, it is difficult to argue that semi-presidentialism helped the situation in these countries at this time.

Thus, democracy may have survived despite the semi-presidential nature of the system.

Indeed, if we examine the experience of countries that are not Free but that are Electoral Democracies, then this point is reinforced. In Niger, Sri Lanka and Ukraine, institutional conflict has been a decisive feature of the semi-presidential system and, arguably, has been a real cause of the failure to achieve full democratic consolidation. For example, Moestrup has argued that in 1995 Niger faced a particularly difficult period of political cohabitation between President Ousmane and Prime Minister Amadou.^{xxii} For a year there was political deadlock, which in the end was only broken when General Mainassara Baré assumed power as the Chairman of the National Salvation Council. In other words, one of Linz's predictions about balanced semi-presidentialism was totally accurate. The military stepped in to resolve the political gridlock. More recently, another of his predictions was extremely close to coming true in the case of Ukraine. Over the years, there have been ongoing periods of intense intra-executive conflict between the president and the prime minister. This situation was frustrating for presidents who wanted to wield more authority and so sought more power. By the same token, though, Protsyk argues that when prime ministers assumed office they immediately achieved the status of a *présidentiable*.^{xxiii} Thus, the rivalry was always institutional, sometimes party political and often highly personal. Again, it would be too simplistic to suggest that the system of balanced semi-presidentialism was the only cause of the problems in this case. However, the institutional framework created a situation in which both the president and prime minister were encouraged to seek more power and, ultimately, the democratic process was compromised at least until the dramatic events of the Orange Revolution in November-December 2004.

Overall, the evidence suggests that some of the more dire pronouncements about balanced semi-presidentialism may be exaggerated. There are plenty of such countries that have established themselves as Free

democracies. Thus, in comparison with the highly presidentialised form of semi-presidentialism, balanced semi-presidentialism should be classed as a constitutional choice that has a better-than-average chance of success. Even so, it is clear that semi-presidentialism is almost invariably associated with intra-executive conflict and often with intra-executive conflict between actors from opposing political groups. The evidence from recently democratized countries suggests that such conflict is not insurmountable. It may lead to an acute political trauma, but it is not always democratically terminal. However, whether nascent democracies should choose balanced semi-presidentialism in the almost certain knowledge that they are going to face periods of potentially destabilizing intra-executive conflict and perhaps sooner rather than later is a moot point. On balance, unless there is some reason to believe that a country will endure such conflict, then it is perhaps best avoided.

Conclusion

This article has tried to add to our understanding of the concept of semi-presidentialism. Up to this point there has been a considerable degree of variation in how the concept has been defined and, more importantly, how it has been operationalised. By adopting a minimal definition of term, the aim was to reduce the level of subjectivity in the process of identifying semi-presidential countries and so increase the opportunities for comparing this form of government with other forms, most notably presidentialism and parliamentarism. More specifically, given the variety of practice in semi-presidential regimes, this article has also tried to determine whether some forms of semi-presidentialism are more conducive to democracy than others. Part of the answer to this question is unequivocal. With some notable exceptions, the experience of highly presidentialised semi-presidential countries has tended to be negative, while the experience of parliamentary-like semi-presidential regimes

with ceremonial presidents and strong prime ministers has tended to be positive. Thus, democratizing countries can be encouraged to adopt the latter type of system so long as the president is truly just a figurehead. For example, the Slovenian and Irish presidents have scarcely any powers whatsoever. In the Irish case, this is at least one of the reasons why the presidential election is sometimes uncontested. Parties may not wish to bear the financial cost of an election and/or risk upsetting their legislative election strategy by running a poor campaign, especially when there is a popular incumbent who is seeking re-election. So, if there is a strong desire for a person to be able to speak on behalf of the country on the basis of some popular legitimacy and without any risk of creating a political crisis, then a semi-presidential regime with a ceremonial president is a good option.

The situation with regard to balanced semi-presidentialism is more equivocal. There are some very successful countries of this sort. Indeed, countries, like Portugal, have navigated potentially problematic democratization processes with such a system, while others, like Cape Verde and Sao Tome e Principe, have been able to confound the experience of most of their geographical neighbours on the basis of such a system. Thus, balanced semi-presidentialism can work. However, it is a risky choice. There is an inherent problem of intra-executive conflict, including political cohabitation, built into such systems. In France, cohabitation first occurred in 1986 when the system was unequivocally consolidated. As a result, it posed no threat to the regime. That said, it was traumatic for the political class and in 2000 a constitutional amendment was passed that shortened the president's term of office to five years, thus reducing (albeit not eliminating) the likelihood of cohabitation in the future. In other countries cohabitation has occurred when the system has been more fragile. In plenty of cases, including Mongolia and Poland, the problems of intra-executive conflict have been overcome and the democracy has survived. In other cases, a different outcome has occurred. In Niger the military stepped in to end the

period of cohabitation. In Ukraine the authoritarian drift of the country was only stopped by a remarkable show of peaceful popular dissent. Given this evidence, Linz, Valenzuela and Lijphart are probably right when they warn against this form of government. Overall, therefore, we can give a resounding two cheers for semi-presidentialism.

Table 1 Semi-presidential countries and democratic performance based on the 2004 Freedom House Survey

Semi-presidential countries classed as Free by Freedom House	Semi-presidential countries that are not classified as Free but are Electoral Democracies	Partly Free and Not Free semi-presidential countries that are not Electoral Democracies
Austria Bulgaria Cape Verde Croatia Finland France Iceland Ireland Lithuania Mali Mongolia Namibia Peru Poland Portugal Romania Sao Tome e Principe Senegal Slovakia Slovenia South Korea	Macedonia Madagascar Mozambique Niger Russia Sri Lanka Timor Leste Ukraine	Algeria Angola Armenia Azerbaijan Belarus Burkina Faso Cameroon Central African Republic Chad Gabon Guinea-Bissau Haiti Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan Mauritania Rwanda Singapore Tajikistan Tanzania Togo Tunisia

Taiwan		Uzbekistan Yemen
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ⁱ Juan J. Linz, "The perils of presidentialism," *Journal of Democracy*, 1 (Winter 1990): 51-69. Juan J. Linz, "The virtues of parliamentarism," *Journal of Democracy*, 1 (Fall 1990): 84-91.

ⁱⁱ Matthew Soberg Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies. Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert Elgie, ed., *Semi-presidentialism in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). In terms of articles, see for example Steven D. Roper, "Are all semi-presidential regimes the same? A comparison of premier-presidential regimes," *Comparative Politics* 34 (3: 2002), 253-272.

^{iv} Juan J. Linz, 'Presidential or parliamentary democracy: does it make a difference', in Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, eds., *The Failure of Presidential Democracy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 55.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Arend Lijphart, "Constitutional design for divided societies," *Journal of Democracy* 15 (April 2004): 96-109. Arturo Valenzuela, "Latin American presidencies interrupted," *Journal of Democracy* 15 (4: 2004), 5-19.

^{vii} Maurice Duverger, "A new political system model: semi-presidential government," *European Journal of Political Research*, 8 (1980), 166.

^{viii} Alfred Stepan and Cindy Skach, "Constitutional frameworks and democratic consolidation. Parliamentarism versus presidentialism," *World Politics*, 46 (1993), 8-9. They identified Finland, with Switzerland, as an example of a 'mixed' case.

^{ix}, Robert Elgie, "The politics of semi-presidentialism," in Robert Elgie, ed. *Semi-presidentialism in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13.

^x I am grateful to Sophia Moestrup for this point.

^{xi} Even though we can define semi-presidentialism in a way that minimizes the subjectivity in determining the set of semi-presidential countries, we cannot

escape subjective judgments when it comes to identifying the different types of practice that occur within the set of semi-presidential countries. So, for example, one author might wish to class Taiwan as a highly presidentialised semi-presidential country, whereas another may class it as a semi-presidential country in which there is a balance of presidential and prime ministerial powers. In short, we cannot expect scholars of Taiwan all to agree as to the way in which their country operates. The same would be true for scholars of any other country. However, we can provide a framework within which it can be agreed that Taiwan is a semi-presidential country, however it may operate in practice. To my mind, this is at least a step in the right direction.

^{xii} Lijphart, "Constitutional design for divided societies".

^{xiii} Iceland is a case where the constitution gives great powers to the president, but where in practice the prime minister exercises these powers. So, Iceland is classed as a system with a ceremonial presidency.

^{xiv} Aurel Croissant, "From transition to defective democracy: Mapping Asian democratization," *Democratization* 11 (December 2004): 163.

^{xv} Miro Cerar, "Slovenia," in Robert Elgie, ed. *Semi-presidentialism in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 232-259.

^{xvi} It might be noted that the prime minister was not given a great deal of constitutional powers in the final system either, thus marking Slovenia out as somewhat of an anomaly in post-communist Central and East European systems.

^{xvii} See Valenzuela, "Latin American presidencies interrupted," p. 17, where he states: "Preferable to semipresidentialism would be a parliamentary system with a popularly elected but somewhat less powerful president – something closer to the Portuguese rather than the French system". The terminology differs between the analysis here and Valenzuela's article, but the conclusion is the same.

^{xviii} Linz, 'Presidential or parliamentary democracy: does it make a difference', p. 55.

^{xix} Stepan and Skach, "Constitutional frameworks and democratic consolidation. Parliamentarism versus presidentialism," p. 413.

^{xx} M. Steven Fish, "The inner Asian anomaly: Mongolia's democratization in comparative perspective," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 34 (2001), 332.

^{xxi} Ania van de Meer Krok-Paszkowska, "Poland," in Robert Elgie, ed. *Semi-presidentialism in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 170-192.

^{xxii} Sophia Moestrup, "The role of actors and institutions: The difficulties of democratic survival in Mali and Niger," *Democratization* 6 (2: 1999), 171-186.

^{xxiii} See Oleh Protsyk, "Troubled semi-presidentialism: Stability of the constitutional system and cabinet in Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 55 (7: 2003), 1077-1095. This situation is similar to the so-called prime ministerial Oedipus Complex that has been identified in France. See Pierre Servent, *Oedipe à Matignon. Le complexe du premier ministre*, (Paris: Balland, 1988).