

Chapter 9

The Institutional Approach to Political Leadership

Robert Elgie

Institutions can have a profound impact on the quality of democratic political leadership. We are familiar with the differential effects of electoral systems and the basic trade-off between representation and governmental effectiveness. We are confident that presidentialism is more likely to be associated with lower levels of democracy than parliamentarism. Generally, we know that people respond to the incentives created by institutional rules. Institutionalism—the study of the effects of political institutions—has helped to shape the research agenda over the last 30 years. The popularity of institutionalism is derived from its potential to identify theoretically grounded law-like propositions that are empirically testable. In so doing, it provides the opportunity to identify which institutions are most likely to be associated with better or worse political outcomes. With this knowledge, we can shape institutions so as to generate the best possible outcomes.

However, institutionalism is increasingly being challenged. The rise of anti-foundationalist approaches, such as constructivism and interpretivism, threatens the epistemological basis of institutionalism. Even within its own epistemological

framework, the institutionalist project has been criticized. These criticisms include well-known claims that institutionalism is overly deterministic, that it can explain stability but is poor at explaining change, that institutions are chosen endogenously and, therefore, do not have their supposed exogenous effects, and so forth. This chapter, though, focuses on a different criticism, namely that institutionalism has failed to produce robust empirical results. For instance, while there are good theoretical reasons to support the claim that parliamentarism is more likely to generate better leadership outcomes than presidentialism, the empirical evidence to support this proposition is decidedly mixed. In other words, after nearly 30 years of intensive research and even when judged on its own terms, the results of empirical institutional analysis remain highly contested, perhaps casting doubt on the merits of this approach overall.

We begin this chapter by outlining the fundamentals of an institutional approach to political leadership and highlighting some of the work that has been produced in this area over the last three decades. We then reiterate a fundamental weakness of empirical institutional analysis, namely the problem of equifinality and multifinality. This problem is the product of the reductionist way in which empirical institutionalist studies are normally conducted. In response, we propose a way forward for empirical institutionalist analysis. We suggest that an institutional approach to political leadership needs both to identify the full set of institutional variables that affect leadership outcomes and to specify not only the likely effect of each individual variable on such outcomes, but also the likely effect of the combination of institutional variables. Having done so, we could then begin to test whether or not there is empirical evidence to support these effects and on the basis of such evidence draw more robust conclusions about which institutional

configurations promote good democratic leadership.

The Institutional Approach to Political Leadership

There is now a large body of work that is consistent with the institutional approach to political leadership. This approach rests on three assumptions. The first is a permissive definition of political leadership. In the 1970s and 1980s those working within the behavioral tradition spent considerable time debating the concept of political leadership. This work generated hundreds of competing definitions (Burns 2010; Hah and Bartol 1983: 119–120; Rost 1991: 102). In many cases, the definition was central to the analysis. If a person was considered to have met the requirements set down in the definition, then s/he was a leader and had exercised leadership. Otherwise, s/he was not and had not. The institutional approach to leadership does not rest on any such requirements. This approach focuses on the actions of what Edinger (1975) calls positional leaders, usually presidents and prime ministers but also legislative leaders and leaders at the sub-national level, such as governors and mayors, as well. In this approach, these people exercise leadership simply by acting. The net result is that the institutional approach to political leadership is primarily defined by the subject of the study—a certain class of political actors—rather than by the object—what those actors do. Thus, Helms (2005: 3) considers executive leadership to be a subset of political leadership studies generally and defines it as the “forms of political leadership to be exerted by the office-holders in the executive branch of a given political system.” For his part, Elgie (1995: 4) operationalizes leadership as “the extent to which heads of state and heads of government ... are able to determine the outcome of the decision-making process.” Here, what is meant by being “able to determine the outcome of the decision-making process” is never

specified. This is because the exercise does not require it. The aim is to explain why executive office-holders behave in certain ways rather than to determine whether or not they are exercising political leadership on the basis of a checklist of definitional requirements.

The second assumption is that institutions shape the behavior of political actors. This element is the *sine qua non* of any institutional approach. That said, the institutional approach to political leadership is almost universally situated in a broader interactionist framework. As Sheffer (1993: iv) puts it, “most scholars in this area agree that in addition to personal attributes, leadership is intimately related to the fabric of the leaders’ relevant societies, to social and political organizations, to established institutions, and to leaders’ relations with smaller and larger groups of followers”. Certainly, within this framework institutional factors are the primary explanatory variables of interest. However, the interactionist underpinning of the institutional approach to political leadership makes this particular manifestation of institutionalism relatively immune from the standard criticism of institutional determinism (Radaelli, Dente and Dossi 2012). To put it another way, the institutional approach to political leadership operates almost always within an explicitly probabilistic universe. There is an assumption that institutions generate identifiable and regular incentives for executive actors to behave in certain ways. Even so, there is an essential contingency to the analysis. This contingency is shared both by those who prefer to derive their conclusions from a controlled statistical analysis and by those who prefer their leadership studies to be more descriptive. The former wish to avoid the ecological fallacy and, therefore, accept individual level deviation from general level institutional regularities. The latter wish to emphasize how institutional factors locate or structure

executive power relations, but acknowledge the impact of idiosyncratic personality and local contextual factors.

The third assumption is that institutional variation creates variation in executive leadership. Consistent with the second assumption, leadership is treated as the dependent variable. Thus, institutions explain executive behavior, but institutions are themselves observed to vary both across space and, less obviously, across time as well. The standard way of operationalizing the institutional approach to leadership is via a synchronous cross-sectional analysis. The variation in national level institutions is shown to be responsible for different general patterns of executive leadership at that level. However, the interactionist framework also allows this approach to integrate both diachronic single country analysis and time series cross-sectional analysis. Contextual variables, such as economic crises, can be treated as exogenous events that challenge existing institutional equilibria. Such events create new institutional configurations, leading to new patterns of executive leadership. Thus, the interactionist framework not only saves the institutional approach from the problem of determinism, it can also rescue it from the equivalently standard criticism that institutionalism may be very good at explaining stability but less good at explaining change.

The institutional approach to political leadership comprises a general but nonetheless systematic way of studying executive politics. A small sub-set of institutional analysis focuses specifically on political leadership. This work provides general institutional frameworks for studying political leadership (Elgie 1995; Helms 2005). Thus, relying on Peter Hall's (1986) institutionalist approach, Elgie (1995: 205) argues that institutions are collections of rules, procedures, and standard operating practices that

generate incentives for leaders to behave in certain ways. From this perspective, leadership takes place within a given environment, but institutions help to shape the leaders' responses to that environment. Given institutions are relatively invariant over time; leaders operating within the same general environment exhibit repeated patterns of behavior, creating relatively stable patterns of political leadership. By identifying the key institutions within any given environment, it is possible to make generalizations about the likely practice of political leadership. So, France and Britain have very leader-centered processes. By contrast, Japan and pre-reform Italy had very party-centered leadership. In the United States and Germany, leadership was very much the product of multiple institutions competing for shared power. Thus, an institutional approach can help to identify very general cross-national patterns of political leadership.

The institutional turn revolutionized the study of politics. It was attractive partly because it provided a way forward for post-behavioral positivist-centered scholarship, generating testable propositions of observed outcomes. It was also attractive partly because it offered additional explanatory tools for more qualitative historicist and sociological-based research. For sure, there have always been criticisms of institutionalism both from those who start from a different epistemological tradition and from those working within the institutionalist paradigm itself. However, the institutionalist project remains vibrant. So, what is the problem? The next section outlines the problem of equifinality and multifinality. This is a particular problem for positivist institutional scholarship and it challenges the research agenda in this domain.

The Problem of Equifinality and Multifinality

The fundamental problem with the institutional approach to political leadership is a

variant of the well-known many variables, small-n problem. The complexity of social life is such that outcomes require explanations based on the combination of multiple explanatory variables. The number of possible outcomes increases exponentially as each additional explanatory variable is included in the analysis (Scharpf 1997: Ch. 1). This leads to the problem of equifinality and multifinality. Equifinality refers to the situation where the same outcome can arise from different starting points. Multifinality is the situation where different outcomes can arise from the same starting point. Even though the causal effect of particular institutions may be very well specified and even if there is good empirical evidence to support the relationship between the institution and the hypothesized outcome, “since the systematic effects of omitted variables cannot be controlled for, the results obtained are of doubtful validity” (Scharpf 1997: 42). This is not merely a re-expression of the essentially probabilistic nature of institutional analysis; it is a statement about how much we can know about the world from the study of institutions and institutional interactions (Scharpf 1997: 43). In theory, we can know a lot. In practice, though, we can know much less. This means that we have to be very careful drawing conclusions about the implications of institutional analysis for good and bad leadership.

We illustrate this point in relation to the debate about the relative impact of presidential, parliamentary, and semi-presidential regimes on democratic performance (Shugart and Carey 1992; Cheibub 2007; Samuels and Shugart 2010; Elgie 2011). This is a quintessentially institutionalist debate. It is founded on the principle of institutional differentiation. Presidentialism is where there is a fixed-term directly elected president, where there is no prime minister or where the prime minister and cabinet are not

collectively responsible to the legislature, and where the legislature serves for a fixed term. Parliamentarism is where there is either a monarch or an indirectly elected president, where the prime minister and cabinet are collectively responsible to the legislature, and, usually, where the legislature does not necessarily serve for a fixed term. Semi-presidentialism is where there is a fixed-term directly elected president, where the prime minister and cabinet are collectively responsible to the legislature, and, usually, where the legislature does not necessarily serve for a fixed term. Within semi-presidentialism, president-parliamentarism is where the prime minister and cabinet are collectively responsible both to the legislature and to the president and premier-presidentialism is where the prime minister and cabinet are collectively responsible solely to the legislature. Thus, there is variation in the institutional variable of interest.

There are also good theoretical reasons to suggest that institutional variation has an impact on leadership outcomes. For example, there is a long-standing argument about the pros and cons of presidentialism and parliamentarism. For example, Juan Linz (1990a, 1990b, 1994) identified a number of arguments against presidentialism. Amongst other matters, he was concerned with the “rigidity” of presidentialism (Linz 1994: 8–10). In presidential systems, the president serves for a fixed term and so does the legislature, meaning that the political process “becomes broken into discontinuous, rigidly determined periods without the possibility of continuous readjustments as political, social, and economic events might require” (Linz 1994: 8). The worry is that, in order to introduce some element of flexibility into the system, either the legislature may resort to impeaching the president, thus intensifying the crisis, or the president may use his/her powers to govern over and above the legislature, thereby threatening the rule of law. A

further problem concerns the winner-takes-all/loser-loses-all nature of presidential elections (Linz 1994: 14–16). There is the fear that the unsuccessful candidates may call into question the conduct of the election and the legitimacy of the president’s mandate, encouraging their supporters to take to the streets and overturn the result, and democracy, by force.

This judgment about presidentialism has been contested. For example, Mainwaring and Shugart (1997: 469) argue that Linz “understated the importance of differences among constitutional and institutional designs within the broad category of presidential systems and in doing so overstated the extent to which presidentialism is inherently flawed.” They argue that “providing the president with limited legislative power, encouraging the formation of parties that are reasonably disciplined in the legislature, and preventing extreme fragmentation of the party system enhance the viability of presidentialism” (1997: 469). In other words, the literature on presidentialism and parliamentarism has generated plenty of testable hypotheses relating to the institutional effects of the different systems.²

Finally, there are plenty of studies that examine whether or not there is empirical evidence to support the theoretical arguments. This is where the problem starts. In an early study, Stepan and Skach (1993) relied on descriptive statistics for non-OECD democracies in the period 1973 to 1989 to show that presidential systems were more likely to collapse than parliamentary democracies. By contrast, Power and Gasiorowski (1997: 137) using a similar method, but in relation to 56 third-world democracies from 1930 to 1995 found that presidential and parliamentary democracies had virtually identical breakdown rates. More recently, Kapstein and Converse (2008) have examined

123 democratizations in 88 countries between 1960 and 2004 and found that parliamentarism performs worse than presidentialism. In a large-n statistical study of 135 democratic periods from 1800 to 2004, [Maeda \(2007\)](#) has found that initially presidential and parliamentary systems have a similar breakdown rate, but that over time presidential systems are more likely to collapse. By contrast, in another large-n study [Cheibub \(2007\)](#) has found that presidentialism per se is no more dangerous than parliamentarism, except if it is adopted after a period of military rule when it is more likely to collapse. Finally, [Sing \(2010\)](#) examined 85 democracies in the period 1946 to 2002 and found that when control variables were added presidential democracies were no more likely to collapse than parliamentary democracies. In short, there is no consensus as to whether or not the pros or cons of a particular regime are supported by the empirical evidence.³

Undoubtedly, the extreme variation in the findings is partly a result of the choice of method and whether or not the findings are based on in-depth qualitative case studies, descriptive statistics, or large-n controlled statistical analyses. Whatever the method, the findings also partly depend on how democracy is defined, the countries that are included in the study, and the time frame that is covered. More than that, even when the findings are the product of large-n controlled statistical analyses, the results vary as a function of the control variables that are included in the model and the estimation technique that is applied. In other words, the extreme variation in the findings is partly a function of the state of political science as a discipline. Even though there have been great methodological advances in recent years, individual writers are free to make fundamental research design choices. Consequently, as a function of data availability, time constraints, personal skills, and so on, even studies that are researching the same basic question will

be based on quite different choices and such choices may lead writers to draw very different conclusions about the topic under investigation.

The problem, though, is more profound. In this example, our variable of interest is the type of democratic regime, presidential, parliamentary, or semi-presidential. Let us assume that when investigating the effects of these regimes on democratic performance we were working to some agreed scientific standards whereby conclusions were drawn solely from large-n controlled statistical analyses, whereby democracy was an uncontested concept and, therefore, democratic survivals and collapses could be identified unequivocally, whereby the choice of time period was standard, and, therefore, the choice of cases was not open to question, whereby an optimal set of control variables was identified and a particular estimation technique was agreed, and so on. Let us further assume that there were no personality or contextual variables to distort the effect of institutions. Finally, let us assume that the results of the statistical analyses showed that presidentialism was likely to be significantly more dangerous for democracy than parliamentarism. Even under this hypothetical and unrealistic set of conditions, the model would still include some cases where presidential democracies had survived and others where they had collapsed. It would also include some cases where parliamentary democracies had survived and others where they had collapsed. As a result, we would not be able to say what would happen if country x were to adopt presidentialism, only what would be most likely to happen there.

The probabilistic nature of the results even under such unlikely methodological conditions is a function of the problem of both equifinality and multifinality. From different starting points, presidentialism on the one hand and parliamentarism on the

other, the same outcome will have occurred. That is to say, both presidential and parliamentary regimes have collapsed. Equally, from the same starting point, say presidentialism, different outcomes will have occurred. In other words, some presidential regimes have collapsed and others have survived. What this means is that even though we can distinguish between institutions, even though we can specify their causal effects, and even if we were to operate under extremely unrealistic conditions of scientific rigor, we would still be able to make only a general statement about the empirical effect of the institutional variation with which we are concerned. Thus, there is a gap between the law-like theoretical predictions of institutional analysis and the probabilistic results of empirical institutional studies. This gap undermines the institutionalist agenda.

The problem of equifinality and multifinality occurs because in practice we operationalize institutional variation in a very reductionist manner. For example, we explore the effect of presidentialism versus parliamentarism, but the explanatory variable of interest is merely one institutional variable among many similar institutional variables. Other institutional factors interact with presidential and parliamentary institutions to help to determine the nature of political leadership. These factors might include the various constitutional powers of the president and prime minister, the organization and powers of the legislature, the electoral system, and so on. Any of these institutional factors can vary in their likely effect on leadership. Presidents can have many, few, or a balance of constitutional powers. Legislatures can be organizationally weak, strong, or mixed. Electoral systems can represent voter preferences proportionally or disproportionately, and so on for each institutional variable.

Even under the conditions of extreme scientific rigor presented above, to

understand the impact of presidential and parliamentary institutions on political leadership we would need to take account not just of a single institutional variable, but also of the interactions between this variable and the full set of institutional variables. If these variables were to covary systematically in ways that reinforced the effects of the basic institutional variable of interest, then we could discount them and focus solely on that variable. For example, let us assume that presidentialism is perilous because it generates personalized leadership that can be damaging for the rule of law in a way that risks the collapse of democracy. In this event, if presidentialism was always combined with institutions that reinforced this weakness, then we could focus solely on presidentialism. So, if presidentialism always occurred in countries where the president also had many constitutional powers, where the legislature was very weak, where there was a highly majoritarian system in which any presidential advantage in the electorate was translated into a supportive presidential majority in the legislature, and so on, then the basic problem of presidentialism would be reinforced at each stage. In principle, completely systematic covariation could eliminate the problems of equifinality and multifinality. However, institutions do not covary so systematically. Countries have a mix of institutions with varying effects. While some individual institutional effects may be mutually reinforcing, others will counteract each other. Political leadership will be the result of these multiple interactions. By focusing on a single institutional variable, we will still generate only probabilistic results even under highly artificial scientific standards.

Let us illustrate the basic dilemma with reference to semi-presidentialism. First, let us take a case of multifinality. By definition, all premier-presidential countries have a

directly elected president and a prime minister and cabinet that are collectively responsible solely to the legislature. Therefore, they have the same institutional starting point. However, within this sub-type of semi-presidentialism we still observe huge institutional variation and very different leadership patterns. For example, Armenia has a relatively strong president, scoring 6 on a 0–9 scale of presidential powers (Siaroff 2003); a relatively weak parliament, registering 0.56 on a scale from 0–1 (Fish and Kroenig 2009); and a mixed plurality-proportional electoral system that has the potential to generate majorities that support the directly elected president. Overall, Armenia has consistently had a presidentialized form of premier-presidentialism. By contrast, Slovenia has a very weak president, recording a score of just 1 on Siaroff's 9-point scale; a relatively strong parliament with a score of 0.75 on the Fish-Koenig scale; and a highly proportional electoral system with only a 4 per cent threshold for representation. This combination of factors renders Slovenia's president very weak and makes the prime minister the focus of leadership in a system that is nonetheless marked by multiparty coalition governments. For its part, Mongolia has a relatively strong president with a Siaroff score of 5; as well as a strong parliament with a Fish-Koenig score of 0.85; and a mixed plurality-proportional electoral system that can generate single-party majorities. Mongolia has experienced periods of cohabitation where there has been conflict between the president and prime minister, as well as periods of single-party rule where the prime minister has been the dominant political actor. Thus, even by combining just four institutional variables we see three very different patterns of political leadership. It goes without saying that these patterns are the result of the combination of more than just these four variables, but even at this level of detail we witness the potential for multifinality.

Second, let us take a case of equifinality. Again, by definition, premier-presidential and president-parliamentary sub-types of semi-presidentialism exhibit institutional variation. In the former the prime minister and cabinet are responsible solely to the legislature, whereas in the latter they are responsible jointly to the legislature and the president. Therefore, they have different institutional starting points. Premier-presidential Ireland has a weak president, recording a score of 3 on the Siaroff scale; a relatively strong parliament with a Fish-Koenig score of 0.66; and a relatively proportional electoral system in which the coalition government in now is the norm. In Ireland, the head of government is the dominant political actor and, according to O'Malley's (2007: 17) survey, prime ministerial influence scores 6.08, which is just below the mean for the 22 countries that he records. For its part, president-parliamentary Austria also has a weak president with a Siaroff score of just 1; the legislature is also relatively strong with a Fish-Koenig score of 0.72; and there is a proportional-like electoral system that has regularly generated coalition governments. In O'Malley's survey, the Austrian prime minister scores 5.42, which is one of the weakest in the study but which is also not very far from either the mean or the Irish score. All told, and without repeating the caveats in the previous passage, we have two institutional starting points but a relatively similar pattern of political leadership in both countries. By focusing solely on the institutional variable of interest—the sub-type of semi-presidentialism—we would expect different outcomes, but with the addition of other institutional variables we observe substantively the same outcome.

Overall, institutional analysis is compelling because it promises to eliminate the probabilism associated with institutional effects on political outcomes. True, because

political leadership is studied in an interactionist framework that includes personality factors and exogenous contextual factors, then an institutional approach to political leadership cannot eliminate all uncertainty. However, if we could specify institutions and their interactions carefully enough, then in theory we could completely eliminate the uncertainty related to institutions and drastically reduce the empirical uncertainty in the analysis as a whole. In practice, though, even if we discount the impact of personality and contextual factors, institutional analysis is imperfect because it is operationalized in a highly reductionist manner. For this reason, it generates only very general conclusions that are not only very sensitive to basic research design choices, but conclusions that are easily contestable because of the existence of often easily identifiable counter-examples. The gap between the huge potential of the institutional approach applied to political leadership and the empirical limitations of this approach in practice weakens its appeal. In this context, the temptation might be to give up on institutionalism altogether. However, we argue that, instead, we should work to refine and improve institutionalism. We sketch some options for the future direction of the institutional approach to political leadership in the next section.

The Future of the Institutional Approach to Political Leadership

The problem of equifinality and multifinality is the result of the reductionist application of the institutional approach to political leadership and the failure to account for the interaction of multiple institutional variables. Here, we identify three elements that help to address this problem. We suggest that a combination of these elements will help to advance the institutional approach and better identify good and bad leadership outcomes.

The first element addresses the issue of institutional reductionism. Here, we draw

upon work that has proposed a general framework for studying political leadership. Such frameworks include Cole (1994); Elgie (1995); Rhodes (1997); Gaffney (2003) and Poguntke and Webb (2007). For example, Cole (1994: 456) presents an interactionist framework for the study of political leadership. Within this framework, there are personality factors, such as the leader's personal characteristics, including political and communication skills, as well as both political intelligence and personal attributes e.g., courage, ruthlessness, stamina. There are also contextual factors, such as the socio-economic equilibrium, cultural traditions, and the prestige of the nation in the international system. In addition, there are institutional or "positional" factors. Some of these variables are specified at an extreme level of abstraction, notably the reference to the "constitutional framework." Interestingly, though, Cole's list of institutional factors also makes specific reference to interactions within the executive, including ministers, other leadership contenders, and staffs, as well as interactions with other institutions, such as the bureaucracy, parliament, parties, and groups. Certainly, these interactions are not specified with any level of precision, but the theoretical logic behind the framework is consistent with a solution to the problem that was identified in the previous section.

These frameworks have the advantage of emphasizing the need to incorporate multiple variables when explaining leadership outcomes. As they stand, though, none of the aforementioned frameworks specifies the set of institutional variables with either the necessary degree of comprehensiveness or specificity. However, it would be possible to devise an equivalent framework that does provide a more comprehensive list of institutional variables and that does specify them more fully. A further limitation is that they do not provide any theoretical expectations about the impact of any particular

variable or about the interaction of any combination of variables. Thus, while the identification of a comprehensive list of institutional variables is a necessary condition for an institutional approach to the study of political leadership, it is not a sufficient condition.

The second element is to identify the list of institutional variables with a greater degree of specificity. To do so, we turn to the recent literature about the executive or presidential toolbox (Raile, Pereira and Power 2011; Chaisty, Cheeseman and Power 2013). This work starts from the observation that in contrast to established theoretical expectations (Mainwaring 1993) presidents in Latin America and elsewhere have managed to build successful coalitions of support even in the supposedly difficult context of multiparty legislatures. To explain why they have managed to do so, this work identifies the particular set of tools that presidents have been able to call upon. This work examines the presidential use of such tools in the context of a wider set of variables and with reference to local factors, suggesting that the toolbox approach is essentially compatible with the broader interactionist frameworks identified previously. When examining the presidential toolbox, the authors explicitly assume that institutions affect political outcomes (Chaisty et al. 2013: 5). Thus, this approach is also compatible with an institutional approach to political leadership more specifically. What is more, this work also explicitly rejects institutional reductionism. Instead of emphasizing particular institutional factors, this work underlines the fact that presidents draw upon “multiple institutional tools” (Raile et al. 2011: 326). As Chaisty et al. (2013: 5) state: “rather than assume that a single institutional resource permits presidents to elicit multiparty support ... we assume that presidents have access to a plurality of tools which can be used to

incentivize coalition formation and legislative support.” This approach also makes it clear that the interaction of institutional variables helps to generate leadership outcomes (Raile et al. 2011: 325). Thus, the literature on the presidential toolbox is consistent with the general requirements of a mature institutional approach to the study of political leadership.

The value added of the presidential toolbox approach lies in the specification of the institutional factors that are associated with leadership outcomes. For example, in their cross-national study Chaisty et al. (2013: 8) identify five “broad clusters” of presidential tools. They are: “*agenda power* (legislative powers awarded to the president, executive decree authority), *budgetary prerogatives* (control of public spending), *cabinet management* (distribution of portfolios to alliance members), *partisan powers* (influence of the president over one or more coalition parties), and *informal institutions* (a diverse residual category reflecting country-specific historical and cultural factors ...)” (Chaisty et al. 2013: 8). While these clusters remain “broad,” the variables within each of them are specified with a somewhat greater degree of precision than the frameworks identified previously. Moreover, other work identifies some of these variables more clearly still. For instance, Raile et al. (2011: 325) emphasize the interaction of pork and coalition goods for the presidential management of potential partners in the legislature. Coalition goods include a party’s membership in the presidential cabinet. For Raile et al. (2011: 325), these are one-off sunk costs that form the basis of a deal. However, pork is distributed on an ongoing basis. The authors propose various ways in which these two variables may interact (2011: 326). Overall, the presidential toolbox approach has the potential to specify both the effect of individual institutional variables and the

interactions between those variables.

The third element is to identify such effects. Here, we draw upon the so-called strategic analysis of institutions that was pioneered in France. The origins of this approach can be found in the work of Maurice Duverger (Colliard 2010), but its mature expression can be found in the work of Jean-Luc Parodi and Olivier Duhamel (Parodi 1980, 1983, 1984, 1985; Duhamel 1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1987). The basic logic behind this analysis is the identification of the effect of the institutions under consideration, the analysis of the ways in which these institutional effects combine, and the identification of the outcomes that flow from them. For Parodi (1983: 999), this approach makes three assumptions: (1) Each institution has an a priori theoretical impact on political outcomes; (2) The impact of each institution must be situated in a more general institutional context, the other elements of which can either reinforce or counteract the original institutional effect; (3) A change in any of the elements of the institutional context will alter the impact of the original institutional outcome. Thus, this approach is based on the assumption that institutions have an impact on political outcomes. However, it avoids the problem of institutional reductionism by explicitly placing the impact of any given institution in a broader institutional context. Patterns of political leadership are the result of the specific combination of these different institutional effects.

To illustrate this logic, let us take Parodi's (1984) study of the Fifth French Republic. He wishes to explain the emergence of a particular pattern of political leadership after 1958, namely a majoritarian presidential system. To do so, he identifies five "founding" variables (1984: 630–631). They are: the two-ballot majority electoral system for legislative elections; the president's power to dissolve the legislature; the

introduction of direct presidential elections; the president's ability to call referendums; and the legislature's ability to dismiss the government by way of a motion of censure. He then proceeds to analyze the individual effect of each of these institutions (1984: 631–637). For example, he argues that all else equal the direct election of the president is likely to lead to the autonomy of the executive; the bipolarization of the party system; the nationalization of electoral debate; the personalization of election campaigns; and the probability of conflict with other elected institutions. The next step is to analyze the combined effect of these institutions. He does so by pairwise combinations. For instance, when the type of electoral system for legislative elections is combined with the type of election of the president he identifies three different situations. When a majoritarian electoral system for the legislature is combined with the direct election of the president, then there is likely to be the greatest degree of presidentialization. When a majoritarian electoral system for the legislature is combined with the indirect election of the president, then there is likely to be some degree of presidentialization. By contrast, when any type of electoral system is combined with an indirectly elected president, or, obviously, a system in which there is no president, then presidentialization is likely to be absent. Indeed, he goes further than that. Focusing solely on the first two scenarios, he identifies the effects of the type of electoral system on the different outcomes of the direct election of the president (1984: 640). So, Parodi hypothesizes that a majoritarian electoral system will lead only rarely to conflict between the president and other institutions, but to very severe conflict when it does occur. Conversely, he hypothesizes that a proportional electoral system will lead to more regular but less severe conflict. The Fifth Republic combines a majoritarian electoral system and direct presidential election. Therefore, we

would expect to see rare but severe conflict between the president and other institutions. The experience of three periods of cohabitation from 1986–1988, 1993–1995, and 1997–2002 where there was considerable tension between the president and the prime minister/government provides basic empirical evidence to support Parodi's theoretical analysis.

The problems of equifinality and multifinality provide a real challenge to empirical institutional analysis. Nonetheless, existing institutional scholarship offers clues as to how these problems may be solved or at least mitigated. To do so, various elements of this scholarship need to be combined. The insight that multiple institutions affect the nature of political leadership is at the core of this exercise. This insight is consistent with the very general institutionalist accounts of political leadership that were identified in the first section of this chapter. The acknowledgement that the precise effects of these different institutions need to be specified very carefully is also core to this exercise. This aspect of the research agenda is consistent with the existing body of institutionalist work that has identified the specific effects of individual institutions. Crucially, though, the problems of equifinality and multifinality can only be properly addressed by understanding that outcomes are the result of the combined effects of many different institutional interactions. The strategic analysis of institutions is a useful heuristic tool in this regard. It shows the value of identifying institutional interactions systematically and provides the opportunity for more fine-grained predictions about the likely impact of institutional variation on leadership outcomes. In theory, these predictions are empirically testable. This combination of elements offers a way of generating more reliable conclusions about the effects of institutions on political

outcomes. True, institutions operate within a broader interactionist framework that includes essentially unpredictable personality and contextual factors that add an essentially stochastic element to the analysis. Nonetheless, if this type of institutionalist approach was adopted, then the variance associated with institutional variables would at least be minimized.

Conclusion

Over the last 30 years institutionalism has generated a vibrant research agenda. On the basis of this work, we are now much better placed to identify the effects of institutional rules and to make informed judgments about the consequences of those rules for the quality of political leadership. However, there is still a gap between the potential of this approach to generate theoretically rich, empirically testable propositions and the actual results that have been found. Aside from any foundational or theoretical critiques of institutionalism, the failure of institutional analysis to generate robust empirical results is problematic and threatens the credibility of the institutional approach generally. The absence of definitive empirical findings is caused by the reductionist way in which empirical institutional studies are carried out. The focus on the effect of a single institutional variable, such as presidentialism or parliamentarism, fails to account for the multiple interactions between many such variables. Consequently, even though we can make statements about different institutional effects, those statements often remain contestable and subject to readily available counter-examples. This situation does not weaken the theoretical promise of institutionalism, but it does weaken the practical application of institutionalist work.

In this context, a mature institutionalist approach to political leadership requires

the acknowledgement that the quality of political leadership is shaped by multiple institutions. It rests on the clear specification of those institutional variables and the identification both of the likely effect of individual variables, but also, and crucially, the effects of the different combinations of those variables. While the impact of personality and contextual factors will always render the institutional approach to political leadership essentially probabilistic, the comprehensive and coherent specification of multiple institutional interactions will minimize the variance associated with institutions themselves, thus offering the potential to generate more reliable accounts of politics generally and political leadership in particular.

The obvious objection to this reworking of the institutional approach is that it will generate so many institutional scenarios that we will not have enough observations to test them. There are two ways to respond to this objection. The first is pragmatic. While we may have enough observations to test only a small sub-set of the different institutional combinations, if we can generate extremely robust empirical evidence for such a sub-set then by extrapolation we could reasonably conclude that the hypothesized effects in the unobserved cases would be likely to hold. The second response is more idealistic. The alternative to reworking the institutional approach to political leadership in this way is to give up on it altogether. Yet, to do so would be to let slip the basic advantage of institutional analysis. The strength of institutionalism is that it has the potential to reduce the uncertainty of political analysis and generate systematic accounts of political outcomes. In this chapter, we have sketched a basis for reworking the institutionalist approach in a way that could improve the reliability of the evidence that is used to support institutional arguments. If we can do so, then we will be much better placed to

draw up an agenda for better democratic leadership. The rewards for doing so could be great indeed.

Bibliography

Burns, James MacGregor 2010, *Leadership*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, New York.

Chaisty, Paul, Cheeseman, Nic and Power, Timothy 2013, "Rethinking the 'presidentialism debate': Conceptualizing coalitional politics in cross-regional perspective," *Democratization*, online first.

Cheibub, José Antonio 2007, *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Cheibub, José Antonio and Chernykh, Svitlana 2009, "Are semi-presidential constitutions bad for democratic performance?" *Constitutional Political Economy*, 29(3–4): 202–229.

Clemens, Clay and Paterson, William E. (eds) 1998, *The Kohl Chancellorship*, Frank Cass, London.

Cole, Alistair 1994, *François Mitterrand: A Study in Political Leadership*, Routledge, London.

Colliard, Jean-Claude 2010, "Un homme d'intuitions," *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée*, 17(1): 13–21.

Duhamel, Olivier 1985, "Les logiques cachées de la constitution de la Cinquième République?" in Olivier Duhamel and Jean-Luc Parodi (eds), *La Constitution de la Cinquième République*, Presses de la FNSP, Paris, 11–23.

Duhamel, Olivier 1986a, "Questions constitutionnelles pour l'après-mars 1986," *Projet*, 198: 12–18.

Duhamel, Olivier 1986b, "L'hypothèse de la contradiction des majorités en France," in Maurice Duverger (ed), *Les régimes semi-présidentiels*, PUF, Paris, 257–272.

Duhamel, Olivier 1987, "Remarques sur la notion de régime semi-présidentiel," in *Droits, institutions et systèmes politiques. Melanges en hommage à Maurice Duverger*, PUF, Paris, 581–590.

Edinger, Lewis J. 1975, "Approaches to the comparative analysis of political leadership," *Comparative Politics*, 7(2): 253–269.

Elgie, Robert 1995, *Political Leadership in Liberal Democracies*, Palgrave, London.

Elgie, Robert 2011, *Semi-Presidentialism: Sub-types and Democratic Performance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Fish, M. Steven and Kroenig, Matthew 2009, *The Handbook of National Legislatures: A Global Survey*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Gaffney, John 2003, "The French Fifth Republic as an opportunity structure: A neo-institutional and cultural approach to the study of leadership politics," *Political Studies*, December, 51(4): 686–705.

Hah, Chong-Do and Bartol, Frederick C. 1983, "Political leadership as a causative phenomenon: Some recent analyses," *World Politics*, 36(1): 100–120.

Hall, Peter 1986, *Governing the Economy: The Politics of State Intervention in Britain and France*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Helms, Ludger 2005, *Presidents, Prime Ministers and Chancellors: Executive Leadership in Western Democracies*, Palgrave, London.

Hicken, Allen and Stoll, Heather 2013, "Are all presidents created equal? Presidential Powers and the shadow of presidential elections," *Comparative Political Studies*, March, 46(3): 291–319.

Kapstein, Ethan B. and Converse, Nathan 2008, *The Fate of Young Democracies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Linz, Juan J. 1990a, "The perils of presidentialism," *Journal of Democracy*, winter, 1(1): 51–69.

Linz, Juan J. 1990b, "The virtues of parliamentarism," *Journal of Democracy*, fall, 1(4): 84–91.

Linz, Juan J. 1994, "Presidential or parliamentary democracy: Does it make a difference?" in Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela (eds), *The Failure of Presidential Democracy: Comparative Perspectives*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 3–87.

Lodge, Martin and Wegrich, Kai 2012, "Public administration and executive politics: Perennial questions in changing contexts," *Public Policy and Administration*, July, 27(3): 212–229.

Maeda, Ko 2007, "Two modes of democratic breakdown: A competing risks analysis of democratic durability," *Journal of Politics*, 72(4), 1129–1143.

Mainwaring, Scott 1993, "Presidentialism, multipartism, and democracy—The difficult combination," *Comparative Political Studies*, 26(2): 198–228.

Mainwaring, Scott and Shugart, Matthew S. 1997, "Juan Linz, presidentialism, and democracy: A critical appraisal," *Comparative Politics*, 29(4): 449–471.

Moestrup, Sophia 2007, "Semi-Presidentialism in young democracies: Help or hindrance?" in Robert Elgie and Sophia Moestrup (eds), *Semi-Presidentialism Outside Europe*, Routledge, London, 30–55.

O'Malley, Eoin 2007, "The power of prime ministers: Results of an expert survey," *International Political Science Review*, 28(7): 7–27.

Parodi, Jean-Luc 1980, "Effets et non-effets de l'élection présidentielle au suffrage universel direct," *Pouvoirs*, 14: 5–14.

Parodi, Jean-Luc 1983, "La Cinquième République à l'épreuve de la proportionnelle. Essai de prospective institutionnelle," *Revue française de science politique*, 33(6): 987–1008.

Parodi, Jean-Luc 1984, "Éléments constitutifs et combinaisons institutionnelles," *Revue française de science politique*, 34(4): 628–647.

Parodi, Jean-Luc 1985, "Imprévisible ou inéluctable, l'évolution de la Cinquième République?" in Olivier Duhamel and Jean-Luc Parodi (eds), *La Constitution de la Cinquième République*, Presses de la FNSP, Paris, 24–43.

Poguntke, Thomas and Webb, Paul (eds) 2007, *The Presidentialization of Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Power, Timothy J. and Gasiorowski, Mark J. 1997, "Institutional design and democratic consolidation in the third world," *Comparative Political Studies*, 30(2): 123–155.

Radaelli, Claudio M., Dente, Bruno and Dossi, Samuele 2012, "Recasting institutionalism: Institutional analysis and public policy," *European Political Science*, 11: 537–550.

Raile, Eric D., Pereira, Carlos and Power, Timothy J. 2011, "The executive toolbox: Building legislative support in a multiparty presidential regime," *Political Research Quarterly*, 64(2): 323–334.

Rhodes, R. A. W. 1997, "Shackling the leader?": Coherence, capacity and the hollow crown" in Patrick Weller, Herman Bakvis and R. A. W. Rhodes (eds), *The Hollow Crown: Countervailing Trends in Core Executives*, Palgrave, London, 198–223.

Rost, Joseph C. 1991, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, Praeger, New York.

Samuels, David and Shugart, Matthew 2010, *Presidents, Parties, Prime Ministers: A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Scharpf, Fritz W. 1997, *Games People Play: Actor-Centred Institutionalism in Policy Research*, Westview Press, Boulder.

Sheffer, Gabriel 1993, "Introduction: In search of innovative leadership in world politics" in Gabriel Sheffer (ed), *Innovative Leaders in International Politics*, State of New York University Press, Albany, vii–xviii.

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

Siaroff, Alan 2003, "Comparative presidencies: The inadequacy of the presidential, semi-presidential and parliamentary distinction," *European Journal of Political Research*, 42(3): 287–312.

Sing, Ming 2010, "Explaining democratic survival globally (1946–2002)," *Journal of Politics*, 72(2): 438–455.

Stepan, Alfred and Skach, Cindy 1993, "Constitutional frameworks and democratic consolidation: Parliamentarism versus presidentialism," *World Politics*, 46(1): 1–22.

Suleiman, Ezra N. 1980, "Presidential government in France" in Richard Rose and Ezra N. Suleiman (eds), *Presidents and Prime Ministers*, American Enterprise Institute, Washington DC, 94–138.

Notes

¹This term differs from Lodge and Wegrich's (2012: 214) definition of "executive politics" as "the systematic study of the political factor within administrative or bureaucratic arrangements, and about the administrative factor in political life" and is concerned with a more restricted set of actors than the ones they identify. However, it shares with them the idea of a "concentration on a field of study" (Lodge and Wegrich 2012: 214), rather than on a particular type of behavior as constitutive of the term.

²The same point also applies to the debate about the pros and cons of semi-presidentialism. See Elgie (2011: Ch. 2).

³Again, the same point also applies to semi-presidentialism. For example, Moestrup (2007) finds that semi-presidential democracies are no more liable to collapse than presidential or parliamentary democracies. By contrast, Cheibub and Chernyk (2009) find that semi-presidential is no more or less problematic than other forms of government. Elgie (2011) finds strong support for the argument that president-parliamentarism is more dangerous for young democracies than premier-presidentialism.

⁴Needless to say, none of these frameworks was constructed with the express aim of providing a solution to the many variables problem.