

## MAURICE DUVERGER: A LAW, A HYPOTHESIS AND A PARADOX

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### INTRODUCTION

Maurice Duverger was born in Angoulême, France, in 1917. He is undoubtedly the most influential French political scientist to date. Indeed, it would scarcely be an exaggeration to suggest that he is also perhaps the most well-known political scientist anywhere, given that all students of politics are bound to come across Duverger's Law at some point or another in their professional studies. As we shall see, Duverger's work profoundly shaped the international political science research agenda and it did so in three distinct areas – the study of party organisations, the consequences of electoral systems, and the concept of semi-presidentialism. The paradox, though, and we may wish to call it Duverger's Paradox, is that the ideas for which Duverger was internationally famous had very little impact on the research agenda within France. With the notable exception of Jean Blondel, who spent almost all of his working life outside France, there are very few other French political scientists who have studied political parties comparatively. The same is true for the study of electoral systems. Perhaps most tellingly of all, there are very few scholars within France who are willing even to entertain the concept of semi-presidentialism, particularly those whose training lies in constitutional and public law.

In both his academic work and his popular writings Duverger was often a controversial and contested figure. This was at least partly because he was always politically active. In 1936 he was a member of the extreme-right *Parti populaire français* (Hoffmann-Martinot, 2005, p. 305). In 1941 he published an article in the prestigious *Revue du Droit Public* that addressed the issue of the Vichy regime's newly introduced rules concerning recruitment to the public

service (Duverger, 1941). Duverger subsequently argued that this article merely described the anti-semitic rules that had been introduced by the regime. However, Duverger's opponents, and they remain very vocal,<sup>16</sup> argued that Duverger was providing a legal defence of the regime's policies and, therefore, that he was a collaborator. Twice Duverger won a court case against magazines that portrayed this article as a collaborationist publication. After the war, Duverger became a regular contributor to the left-of-centre French newspaper of record, *Le Monde*, writing hundreds of articles over a 40-year period and commenting on all aspects of politics and policy. In the early 1960s he was a committed opponent of de Gaulle's vision of the Fifth Republic. He became loosely associated with the socialists, and remained resolutely anti-communist in its pro-Soviet form (Duverger, 1980a). In 1989, he accepted an invitation to be included on the highly revisionist Italian Communist Party (PCI) list for the European Parliament (EP) and he was elected.<sup>17</sup> He served for one term as a Member of the European Parliament (MEP). When the PCI was wound up he followed the majority of his MEP colleagues into the Social Democratic group in the EP. He was a member of the Committee on Institutional Affairs there and wrote at least two reports, one on transparency in EU documents and the other on relations between the EP and national parliaments. By the end of the 1990s he had left both academia and active politics.

There is no doubt that Duverger was a controversial figure. His wartime association with the extreme-right was probably a reason why he was never appointed to the Constitutional Council in France and it was certainly a reason why he failed to win election to the *Académie française* (Hoffmann-Martinot, 2005, p. 305). That said, he was a major figure in the development of the French political science community. In 1948, he was a driving force behind the creation of the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Bordeaux, serving as the first director of the institution from 1948-55. He played a major role in the development of the Association française de science politique (AFSP) and was a member of the first Conseil d'administration of the AFSP in 1949. He helped to establish the International Political Science Association and was a member of its first Executive Committee also in 1949. In 1969, he was instrumental in the creation of the only stand-alone political science department in a French university, the

Département de Science politique de la Sorbonne (now incorporated as l'UFR 11 de Science politique). In 1971 he played an absolutely pivotal part in the creation of an *agrégation* for political science, the qualification required to become a university professor in France. This was a crucial development in the professionalisation of the discipline in France and he was the president of the first political science jury (Milet, 2001).

In 1985 Duverger retired from the Sorbonne. By this time, he had already written an autobiography, although it contained precious few details about his controversial extreme-right past (Duverger, 1977). In 1987 he was the subject of a monumental *festschrift* (Colas and Emeri eds., 1987). Unusually, Duverger wrote the biographical sketch about himself in this book, including a defence of his 1941 *Revue du Droit Public* article, even though this was scarcely necessary in such a celebratory volume. To this day, Duverger himself continues to be a subject of study. The ways in which his journalistic work complemented his academic career were explored by Dorandeu (1992). In 1998 his work was used to illustrate the teaching of political science within French Departments of Law (François, 1998). In 2003 Pascal Ory provided evidence that Duverger had written for the collaborationist magazine *Progrès* from late 1941 to early 1943 under the pseudonym Philippe Orgène (Ory, 2003). In 2005 the journal *French Politics* published a symposium of various aspects of Duverger's work, including a biographical essay (Hoffmann-Martinot, 2005).<sup>iv</sup> In 2009 at its biennial conference the Association française de science politique held a panel on Duverger's contribution to political science. This was an interesting development and it is perhaps a sign that French political science is finally willing to confront and perhaps resolve Duverger's Paradox.

Over the course of his career, Duverger was an extremely prolific writer (Colas and Emeri eds., 1987, pp. 771-790). He was the author of more than 20 books, many of which were regularly updated and published in revised editions. For example, his standard textbook *Le système politique français: Droit constitutionnel et Science politique* was published in its 21<sup>st</sup> edition in 1996 (Duverger, 1996). He was also the author of dozens of journal articles, most of which appeared in French journals including two landmark articles on French politics in the *Revue française de Science politique* (Duverger, 1959 and 1964). In

addition, Duverger was also the author of dozens of book chapters, pamphlets and reports. The vast majority of Duverger's work was published in French. However, he did publish in the *American Political Science Review* (Duverger, 1952) and in the *European Journal of Political Research* (Duverger, 1980b). He also contributed a small number of book chapters in English (e.g. Duverger, 1986). For the most part, though, Duverger's work is best known in translation. His books have been translated into many different languages. For example, Hoffmann-Martinot (2005, p. 307) reports that his book *Les régimes politiques* was translated into eleven languages, including Japanese and Turkish. However, Duverger's impact on the international political science research agenda results mainly from the English translation of his major book-length work, *Les partis politiques*, which was published in French in 1951 and which was translated into English as early as 1954.

In his work Duverger covered a huge variety of topics. In French, he wrote university textbooks on constitutional law, political institutions, political sociology, public finances, and political methodology. He also wrote books on international relations, as well as books that might be considered 'light' political theory dealing with topics such as democracy and dictatorship. He was an acknowledged expert on the study of French politics and, unlike his comparative work, his work on French party politics and the political institutions of both the Fourth and Fifth Republics had a great impact on the work of the French political science community from the 1950s through to the 1980s. More generally, Duverger was one of the first to write systematically about gender and politics, notably his UNESCO report on the political role of women (Duverger, 1955). That said, Duverger's contribution to the international comparative politics research agenda rests primarily on his work on three topics – the development of party organisations, the effect of electoral systems on party systems, and the concept of semi-presidentialism. The rest of this chapter focuses on these three contributions, the enduring impact of which varies from one topic to another.

## **PARTY ORGANISATIONS**

In his book *Les partis politiques* Duverger set out to provide nothing less than a “general theory of political parties” (Duverger, 1967, p. vii). Indeed, he claimed to be providing the “first” such theory (ibid.). The book is organised in two parts. The first part deals with the organisation of parties, the second with the structure of the party system. In the first part of the book Duverger presents a distinction between different types of parties, notably between cadre and mass parties, and makes a general argument about the development of party organisations over time. This distinction and the argument about why there has been a shift from one type of party organisation to another is the source of Duverger’s first major contribution to the study of comparative politics.

In *Les partis politiques*, Duverger draws a number of distinctions between different types of parties. For example, he makes a distinction between parties whose origins lie within parliamentary politics and those whose origins are extra-parliamentary (ibid., pp. 2-16). He makes a further distinction between parties that have a direct structure – whereby there are members who join the party individually and pay a membership fee – and those that have an indirect structure – whereby the party is composed of unions, cooperatives, mutual societies and intellectual groups that come together to form an electoral organisation (ibid., pp. 22-34). Most notably, though, Duverger makes a distinction between cadre parties and mass parties (ibid., pp. 84-92). For Duverger, cadre parties are distinguished by the fact that they are top-down organisations. They are parties of notables who come together to stand at elections, to run the election campaign, and to finance the party’s operations (ibid., p. 85). By contrast, mass parties are more popular organisations, both in terms of party financing and in terms of participation in political life (ibid.).

By itself, the distinction between cadre and mass parties might have constituted merely one more dichotomous distinction among quite a number of others in the book. However, consistent with his aim of trying to provide a general theory of political parties, Duverger places the differences between the two types of parties in the context of a broader argument. This is the element of his argument that has shaped the research agenda over the years. Duverger argues that there was a general move from cadre parties to mass parties over time and that the move was caused by the shift from restricted suffrage to

universal suffrage (*ibid.*, p. 87). For Duverger, the parties of the left were the precursors of this move. They required a mass organisation in order to compete with the financial and political resources that were controlled by the (cadre) parties of the right that dominated during the period of restricted suffrage (*ibid.*, pp. 89-92). While he did not say so explicitly in his discussion of cadre and mass parties, Duverger's general theory of political parties suggested that the development of party organisation in this way was a natural phenomenon. For him, left-wing parties were "more developed" (*ibid.*, p. 466) than their right-wing counterparts and generally, for Duverger, the transformation of political parties in this way "constituted a development of democracy" (*ibid.*, p. 467).

Over the years, Duverger's argument about the development of party organisations has been contested. However, the fact that scholars have continued to take issue with it can be taken as a sign of strength rather than weakness. For example, Kirchheimer (1966) argued that West European party systems had witnessed the emergence of catch-all parties. Such parties were increasingly professional and leader-oriented. They were less concerned with ideology for its own sake and were more concerned with vote maximisation, communicating their messages via the mass media rather than through traditional party channels. The catch-all hypothesis is consistent with Duverger's general argument about the apparently natural development of party organisations and Kirchheimer believes that parties have changed in response to the same electoral incentive that Duverger identified. Kirchheimer (1990, p. 56) states that "[c]onversion to catch-all parties constitutes a competitive phenomenon". At the same time, Kirchheimer applies the argument to both bourgeois and socialist parties in Western Europe and he assumes that parties will compete for the median voter in the centre-ground (*ibid.*, pp. 53-54).

A similar contribution to this argument was made by Epstein (1980, original 1967). As noted above, Duverger implied that left-wing parties in the era of mass suffrage represented the natural model of party organisation and he drew on evidence from the development of European social democratic parties to make this point. By contrast, Epstein argued that American political parties, particularly the Republican party, provided the model for modern party organisations. Consequently, as Ware (1996, p. 97) commented, "according to

Epstein, it was not 'contagion from the left' but 'contagion from the right' ... that would characterize the future of party organizations in liberal democracies".

In 1982, Panebianco (1988) provided an alternative approach to the study of party organisations. He argued that party organisations differ in terms of their genetic origins and their institutionalisation. In terms of their origins, Panebianco distinguishes between parties with territorial penetration – where the central party organisation “controls, stimulates, or directs” (ibid., p. 50) local organisations – and territorial diffusion – where “local elites construct party associations which are only later integrated into a national organization” (ibid.). Panebianco also identifies ‘charismatic parties’, meaning parties that are associated with a particular founding leader. When drawing up this taxonomy, Panebianco explicitly separates his model from Duverger’s distinction between the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary origins of political parties (ibid.), providing the example of liberal parties whose origins were parliamentary and which developed through territorial diffusion, and conservative parties whose origins were also parliamentary but which developed through territorial penetration (ibid., p. 51). In terms of institutionalisation, Panebianco distinguishes between highly institutionalised parties that have considerable autonomy and independence from local party organisations and affiliated groups and weakly institutionalised parties that are reliant on their environment. Panebianco linked the genetic origins of parties and their institutionalisation, arguing that organisational change can occur over time but that it is based on a party’s initial genetic imprint and is constrained by the level of institutionalisation. Thus, for Panebianco, parties have different organisational characteristics from the ones identified by Duverger and respond to different incentives.

While Panebianco engaged with Duverger’s work, he provided an alternative to the Duvergerian explanation for the development of party organisation. By contrast, Katz and Mair’s (1995) notion of the ‘cartel party’ places itself explicitly in the Duvergerian tradition of party evolution and provides the most recent development in the study of party organisation. They outline two previous stages in the development of party organisation, namely the move from cadre parties to mass parties, and the move from mass parties to

catch-all parties (ibid., pp. 8-12). Their innovation is to identify a third stage of party organisation development, the emergence of the cartel party, and to suggest that this model more neatly corresponds to contemporary party organisations (ibid., pp. 12-15). According to Katz and Mair, this development was caused by a number of factors (ibid.). The provision of welfare and education by the state meant that this function longer needed to be provided by parties and their social networks. Also, once in office, political parties found that they adapted to the practicalities of power, meaning that they often had to work in tandem with the state bureaucracy. Overall, whereas Duverger, Kirchheimer and Epstein viewed parties as essentially synonymous with civil society, the essence of Katz and Mair's cartel party model is that parties have now become associated with the state: "On the one hand, parties aggregate and present demands from civil society to the state bureaucracy, while on the other they are the agents of that bureaucracy in defending policies to the public" (ibid., p. 13).

Together, these examples demonstrate Duverger's impact on the study of party organisations. Duverger's main contribution lies in his identification of different types of party organisation and in his key intuition that party organisations react to external incentives, specifically the changing nature of electoral competition. To put it another way, Duverger's contribution lies in the fact that he was the first to consider party organisation to be a dependent variable – something that varies over time and place and the variation in which, therefore, needs to be explained by reference to certain factors. In this context, the debate as to whether parties have reacted to exactly the same incentive but not in exactly the same way that Duverger predicted (*à la* Kirchheimer, Epstein, and Katz and Mair) or whether they have reacted to different incentives and in different ways from the one that Duverger suggested (*à la* Panebianco) is less important than the very idea that they have reacted. By considering party organisations in this way, Duverger established a highly fruitful research agenda that was based on a cross-national comparative method rather than a historicist single-country study.

That said, these examples also indirectly illustrate the limits to Duverger's impact on the study of political parties. In recent years, the study of political parties, particularly in the US, has focused primarily on parties as an explanatory



variable. Specifically, the recent debate has been about party motivations – are parties office-seeking, vote-seeking, or policy-seeking? On the basis of these motivations, how do we explain the formation and termination of cabinets? (See, for example, Strøm and Müller eds., 1999). So, while Duverger was discussing very profound and important developments – the transformation of electoral politics and the organisation of political parties – and while Duverger’s work is central to those engaging in this debate, there is also a sense in which this is now a relatively specialised field of political inquiry. Indeed, in a recent review, Gianfranco Pasquino goes further, stating, regretfully, that “organisational analyses of contemporary parties have become quite rare, if not completely disappeared” (Pasquino, 2008, p. 515). Overall, while Duverger’s name is still inextricably linked with the study of party organisations and while he has had a tremendous influence on the development of studies in this area, this topic is perhaps no longer the main focus of the international research agenda on political parties.

## ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

The difference between the study of party organisations and the study of electoral systems could not be greater. Benoit (2006, p. 70) notes that the study of the political consequences of electoral laws now constitutes “an entire subfield”. Moreover, Bowler (2008, p. 578) claims that the “electoral systems literature is one of the more advanced within political science ...”. Riker (1982) used the study of electoral systems to illustrate that the study of politics could accumulate knowledge in a way that was characteristic of the study of science in general. More boldly still, Shugart (2005a, p. 27) asserts that the study of electoral systems has the potential to serve as the political science equivalent of the Rosetta Stone when it comes to unlocking the secrets of the systematic study of political life. In this context, Duverger’s work in *Les partis politiques* remains “the canonical statement ...” (Bowler, 2008, p. 579), the “first truly seminal work” (Shugart, 2005a, p. 28). As Shugart (ibid.) notes: “[p]robably the vast majority of works on electoral systems that have been published since [*Les partis politiques*] have continued in Duverger’s tradition ...”. In other words, the study of electoral

systems is central to the discipline of political science and Duverger's contribution to the study of the consequences of electoral systems has helped to shape the development of the discipline over the last 50 and more years.

Duverger's influence on the study of electoral systems stems from his formulation in *Les partis politiques* of what has come to be known universally as Duverger's Law as well as what is now usually known as Duverger's Hypothesis (Riker, 1982, p. 754). Duverger's Law states: "*the simple-majority single-ballot system favours the two-party system*" (ibid., p. 247 – emphasis in the original). Duverger's Hypothesis asserts: "*the simple-majority system with second ballot and proportional representation favours a multi-party system*" (ibid., p. 269 - emphasis in the original). The relationship between electoral systems and party systems was well known before Duverger's formulation in *Les partis politiques*. Indeed, Riker (1982, p. 758) states that acceptance of both Duverger's Law and Duverger's Hypothesis was "quite general" by the early 1950s. The fact that these terms have stuck is due in part to Duverger's temerity in claiming a law-like value for one of them. So, talking of the link between single-member plurality electoral systems and two-party systems, Duverger states famously: "Of all the hypotheses ... in this book, this approaches most nearly perhaps to a true sociological law" (ibid., p. 247). That said, Duverger's contribution is based on more than just the chutzpah of a youthful academic. He provided a causal mechanism to explain the relationship between electoral systems and party systems and this element of his analysis was truly innovatory. He explains the relationship in terms of both a 'mechanical' effect and a 'psychological' effect (Duverger, 1967, p. 256). While Duverger failed to define these concepts rigorously, he states that the mechanical effect refers simply to the 'under-representation' of third parties in a simple-majority single-ballot system (ibid.), whereas the psychological effect relates to the voters' anticipation of the mechanical effect ('the fear of the wasted vote' phenomenon).

There is now a voluminous amount of work in the Duvergerian tradition. Together, this has led Shugart (2005a, pp. 51-52) to state that "we have largely settled some of the core questions of the field – notably the relation between various electoral system variables and the number of parties and proportionality – and that these findings have been, to a significant degree, incorporated into

mainstream political science". For example, the standard test confirming Duverger's mechanical effect was conducted by Rae (1971). He "showed definitively by an empirical comparison that plurality rules gave a greater relative advantage to large parties over small ones than did proportional representation rules" (Riker, 1982, p. 761). More recently, attention has shifted to the mechanical effect of district magnitude, which is often a proxy for electoral system type – majority systems having a lower district magnitude than proportional systems. So, Taagepera and Shugart (1993, p. 455) assert that if a single reason had to be given in answer to the question 'What determines the number of parties?', then "it would have to be the *district magnitude* ..." (emphasis in the original). Cox (1997) has extended the work on district magnitude to incorporate the  $M + 1$  rule, namely that in an  $M$ -seat district there can be at most  $M + 1$  viable candidates or lists. This work focuses on electoral coordination problems, both in terms of the problems faced by parties when deciding whether or not to stand candidates and the problems faced by voters when deciding whether or not to vote strategically. In this sense, Cox's work emphasises the psychological rather than the mechanical effect of electoral systems.

Generally, we now know that there is no deterministic link between electoral systems and party systems, even when it concerns single-member simple-majority systems (Benoit, 2006, p. 76). Then again, Duverger never posited such a relationship. He did state that there was a "nearly general association" (Duverger, 1967, p. 247) between first-past-the-post electoral systems and two-party systems, but he explicitly stated that socio-economic and ideological factors also help to shape party systems (ibid., p. 234). We also know that there is a stronger link between electoral systems and (dis)proportionality than between electoral systems and two-party or multi-party systems (Lijphart, 1994). Finally, we suspect that Duverger may have got the relationship between electoral systems and party systems the wrong-way-round. For example, Colomer (2005) has argued that countries with multi-party systems choose proportional representation (PR) and that countries with a small number of parties tend to choose majority electoral systems. Overall, though, while the study of the consequences electoral systems has clearly moved on since

Duverger's work on this topic, Duverger's intuitions remain broadly accurate and the impact of his proposed causal mechanism, particularly the mechanical effect, has been repeatedly demonstrated.

In this context, it is perhaps remarkable that Duverger's influence on the study of electoral systems stems from a single chapter in *Les partis politiques* (Duverger, 1967, pp. 236-312). Duverger never returned to this topic in a substantive way in any of his later work. Certainly, he repeated his claims in the various editions of his textbooks and he updated some of his examples, but he never devoted another chapter, journal article or book-length study to developing his ideas any further. In other words, the maturation of the subfield of electoral studies is entirely the result of people who have (presumably) read Duverger's original statement and who have worked within the Duvergerian tradition, rather than the result of further work by Duverger himself and this is despite the fact that Duverger was academically active for more than 35 years after the original statement of the eponymous Law and Hypothesis.

In this context, Benoit (2006, pp. 71-72) identifies three reasons why Duverger's work in *Les partis politiques* was so influential – as noted above, he was the first to claim a law-like status for the effect of electoral systems and he identified a causal mechanism to explain the law-like association; in addition, he provided more empirical evidence to back up his claims than previous writers. These reasons are undoubtedly correct, but Duverger's long-term impact in this domain is also a function of two further factors. The first concerns the nature of the exercise in which he was engaged. Shugart (2005a, p. 27) argues that Duverger's Law and electoral systems research in general “lends itself to quantification more readily than many of the other concerns in comparative politics because of the availability of ‘hard’ data, such as the number of votes and the number of seats”. In other words, Duverger's work has been so influential because by outlining a clear causal mechanism and by identifying hypotheses that could be tested empirically on the basis of ‘hard’ data he was engaging in a method of analysis that was consistent with the subsequent development of the discipline of political science as a whole, particularly in the US. For example, Joseph and Mildred Schlesinger (2006, p. 59) argue that Duverger's work on electoral systems has fared well because it “fits neatly into the rational-choice

model". In other words, the micro-foundations of Duverger's Law and Duverger's Hypothesis are consistent with a preference-based individualistic analysis. Given the dominance of this type of analysis in the development of comparative politics research agenda particularly over the last 25 years, Duverger's work on electoral systems naturally finds its way into the canon of texts in this domain. Indeed, this point also helps to account for this element of Duverger's Paradox. Rational choice has not been prevalent within France and large-n comparative studies using statistical methods have not been standard. Therefore, while the research agenda set by Duverger meshed very well with the development of political science as a discipline primarily in the US, it is unsurprising that researchers within France have generally been less inclined to follow his lead and develop the study of electoral systems in the same way.

The second reason why Duverger's work on electoral systems has been so influential is because it is so transferable. That is to say, electoral systems can be operationalised as a variable in studies completely unrelated to party systems, proportionality etc., but still on the basis of the logic inherent in Duverger's original analysis. For example, Stephanie Rickard (2009) has shown that electoral rules determine the benefits politicians gain from providing transfers to either broad or narrow groups. She hypothesises that politicians under PR systems are more likely to supply transfers to narrow interests. This is partly because PR is associated with multi-party governments. Here, "although the costs of providing many narrow transfers may be detrimental to the country as a whole, each party in a coalition government can shirk responsibility for these costs" (ibid., p. 9). The transferability of specific research on electoral systems to more general questions on completely unrelated topics is another difference between this aspect of Duverger's work and his work on party organisations. There is little scope to operationalise variation in party organisation as an explanatory variable. Indeed, to the extent that Duverger and many of his successors proposed a teleological-like conception of the development of party organisation whereby particular forms of party organisation have been dominant at particular times, then at any one time there is often little variation to operationalise.

In sum, Duverger's work on electoral systems has been influential not just in terms of the substantive way in which he set the agenda for the study of the

consequences of electoral systems, but also because the logic underpinning this work can serve as the bedrock of studies in many other aspects of comparative politics too.

## **SEMI-PRESIDENTIALISM**

The term 'semi-presidential' predates Duverger's work on the topic.<sup>v</sup> However, he was the first to identify systematically the concept of semi-presidentialism in the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of his textbook *Institutions politiques et Droit constitutionnel* in 1970 (Duverger, 1970). Over the course of the next few editions of this book, he refined the concept identifying a slightly different set of semi-presidential countries each time.<sup>vi</sup> The mature expression of the concept came with his book *Echec au roi* (Duverger, 1978), which has never been translated into English. He returned to the topic in a number of French-language books during the 1980s, including the first ever edited volume on the topic (Duverger ed., 1986). While his French-language work on this topic remains very rewarding and is by far the most comprehensive expression of his ideas, Duverger's influence on the study of semi-presidentialism stems largely from a single English-language article in the *European Journal of Political Research* (Duverger, 1980). He did return, tangentially, to this theme in English when his 1980 article was chosen as one of the most influential articles in the first 25 years of the journal (Duverger, 1997), but, as with his work on party organisations and electoral systems, Duverger's influence on the study of semi-presidentialism is derived for the most part from a very small amount of English-language work.

The truly innovative element of Duverger's work on semi-presidentialism is the identification of the concept itself. Prior to his analysis, attention had focused solely on the concepts of presidentialism and parliamentarism. Duverger identified a new type of constitutional arrangement, semi-presidentialism, with the following characteristics: "[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 [sic] 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" (Duverger, 1980, p. 166). Duverger's formulation of semi-presidentialism was undoubtedly inspired by the constitutional situation in France and, in particular, by the situation after the 1962 constitutional reform there. That said, while much of his empirical analysis also focuses on France – indeed, almost half of *Echec au roi* considers the French case – Duverger always places semi-presidentialism in a comparative context, comparing France with five contemporary cases of semi-presidentialism in Western Europe and the case of Weimar Germany.

In his work on semi-presidentialism, Duverger's sole aim is to explain why presidential power varies both across time within individual countries and across countries generally. He states: "the purpose of the concept of semi-presidential government is to explain why relatively homogeneous constitutions are applied in radically different ways" (ibid., p. 177). To this end, he proposes four factors: "the actual content of the constitution, the combination of tradition and circumstances, the composition of the parliamentary majority, and the position of the president in relation to this majority" (ibid.). In other words, and while Duverger did not use these terms, the definition of semi-presidentialism acts as his case-selection mechanism, presidential power is his dependent variable, and he interacts four independent variables to explain the variations in presidential power within and across the cases in his set.

In contrast to Duverger's work on party organisations and electoral systems, his work on semi-presidentialism was not immediately influential. Instead, semi-presidentialism came to shape the international comparative politics research agenda only after 1990 when the collapse of communism resulted in the creation of many new semi-presidential countries. At this time, a debate took place about the relative merits of presidentialism vs parliamentarism (Linz 1990a, 1990b). At first, semi-presidentialism was only a relatively minor element of that debate. For example, Linz (1994) only addressed semi-presidentialism as an aside within his standard essay on presidentialism and parliamentarism. Moreover, the focus of this debate was very different from the one with which Duverger himself was concerned in his work. This debate operationalised semi-presidentialism as an explanatory variable, while the dependent variable was invariably the success or failure of democracy.

From very early on in this debate, semi-presidentialism was generally viewed as a problematic constitutional choice for unconsolidated democracies. For example, Linz states: "In view of some of the experiences with this type of system it seems dubious to argue that in and by itself [semi-presidentialism] can generate democratic stability" (ibid, p. 55). Similarly, Lijphart (2004, p. 102) states: "Semi-presidential systems represent only a slight improvement over pure presidentialism ... [P]arliamentary government should be the general guideline for constitution writers in divided societies". By contrast, Sartori (1997) believes that semi-presidentialism, while not perfect, does have some advantages over alternative constitutional arrangements. In the sole statement that he made on the subject, Duverger (1997, p. 137) supported the adoption of semi-presidentialism by young democracies, asserting that semi-presidentialism has "become the most effective means of transition from dictatorship towards democracy in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union".

In the years since Duverger's work on the topic, the study of semi-presidentialism has developed in two main ways. The first development concerns the definition of semi-presidentialism. The problem with Duverger's definition lies with the criterion that a president must possess "quite considerable" powers in order for a country to be called semi-presidential (Elgie, 1999). Duverger's own work created some confusion in this regard because he regularly included Ireland and Iceland in his list of semi-presidential countries, even though both have purely figurehead presidents. More generally, even if most writers excluded Ireland and Iceland from their list of semi-presidential countries, the concept of 'quite considerable' presidential powers was still sufficiently ambiguous for different writers to identify different sets of semi-presidential countries. This meant that writers often failed to compare like with like when examining the performance of semi-presidentialism. Moreover, it led to a problem of case selection bias. In their list of semi-presidential regimes, writers often assumed a behavioural definition of semi-presidentialism and included only those countries where, in practice, the president and the prime minister both have some powers. They observed that these countries often suffered from presidential/prime ministerial conflict and they concluded that semi-presidential countries in general suffer from problems of executive



coordination. Obviously, though, they reached this conclusion because the countries they chose to define as semi-presidential were ones most likely to suffer from problems of executive coordination in the first place. The solution to both of these problems has been to reformulate Duverger's definition. Semi-presidentialism is now usually defined as the situation where a constitution establishes both a directly elected president and a prime minister and cabinet that are collectively responsible to the legislature (Elgie, 2005, Shugart 2005b, Skach 2005).

The second development follows on from the first. When Duverger's definition is reformulated, then around one-third of all countries in the world now have a semi-presidential constitution, including France, Ireland, Russia, and Timor Leste. However, as these examples suggest, there is great institutional and political variation within the set of semi-presidential countries. This variation makes it impossible to use semi-presidentialism as an explanatory variable in, for example, studies that compare its impact on democratic survival relative to that of presidential and parliamentary regimes. The solution is to identify different types of semi-presidentialism and to compare the effects of each type. Shugart and Carey (1992) were the first to adopt this strategy when they distinguished between president-parliamentarism – semi-presidential countries where the prime minister is responsible both the president and the legislature – and premier-presidentialism – where the prime minister is responsible only to the legislature. There is strong evidence to suggest that the president-parliamentary form of semi-presidentialism is much more damaging to democracy than its premier-presidential counterpart (ibid.).

The concept of semi-presidentialism remains contested. There are still political scientists who refuse to operationalise the concept of semi-presidentialism and who prefer the somewhat differently formulated concept of 'mixed' regimes (Cheibub, 2007). The concept of semi-presidentialism also has very little support within the sub-discipline of constitutional law. For example, a recent suite of articles in the *European Constitutional Law Review* explicitly preferred the term "presidential elements in government" to that of semi-presidentialism (Reestman, 2006). Indeed, in France this element of Duverger's Paradox is very strong. There has been opposition to the concept of semi-

presidentialism from students of public law from the time when Duverger first identified it in 1970.<sup>viii</sup> Here, the presidential/parliamentary dichotomy remains firmly entrenched. Finally, even among those political scientists who fully accept the concept of semi-presidentialism and who work resolutely within the Duvergerian tradition, fundamental problems with Duverger's work on the topic are still acknowledged (Elgie, 2009, p. 261).

Overall, Duverger's impact on the study of semi-presidentialism lies somehow midway between his impact on the study of party organisations and his study of the consequences of electoral systems. In contrast to the study of party organisations, there is a thriving debate about the impact of semi-presidentialism on political outcomes, particularly democratic survival. In this sense, Duverger's work is still shaping the international comparative political research agenda. However, in contrast to his work on electoral systems, where his identification of the mechanical and psychological effect remains the underlying causal explanation for the impact of different electoral systems, Duverger's work on semi-presidentialism remains noteworthy more for his identification of the concept in the first place rather than for his attempts to explain why presidential power varies across the set of semi-presidential countries. In summary, of Duverger's three key contributions to political science, semi-presidentialism is the area where those working within the Duvergerian tradition have moved furthest away from Duverger's own ideas on the subject. This is not to diminish his contribution in this domain, merely to place it in its appropriate academic context.

## CONCLUSION

Maurice Duverger was one of the most important contributors to the study of French political life from the 1950s to the 1980s. More generally, he is known as the writer who distinguished between cadre and mass parties, who formalised Duverger's Law, and who identified a new type of political system – semi-presidentialism – when only a handful of examples of such a system were in existence. The success of *Les partis politiques* was so immediate because he was the first to express certain ideas, because he expressed them in a way that was

both rigorous and startling, and because he marshalled copious amounts of empirical evidence to back up his arguments. While Duverger's short-term reputation may have been assured by such an exercise, his enduring legacy lies in the fact that he approached the study of politics – at least in much of *Les partis politiques* and later in the study of semi-presidentialism – in a way that was consistent with the general development of political science as a discipline. Duverger emphasised the explanatory importance of political institutions. Moreover, he did so three decades before the 'institutional turn' in political science in the mid-1980s. As his work on semi-presidentialism clearly shows, he understood the need to interact variables in order to explain political outcomes. This method is at the core of the contemporary international comparative politics research agenda. Certainly, comparativists have taken the study of political parties, electoral systems and semi-presidentialism both much further and in different directions from the ways in which they were studied by Duverger, but at bottom contemporary political scientists are engaged in exactly the same sort of exercise that he was engaged in. The fact that Duverger engaged in such an exercise at a time when the study of political science was in its infancy and in a country where the normative study of institutions was, and remains, dominant is testimony to Duverger's unique contribution to the development of comparative politics.

## Notes

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<sup>ii</sup> See the report in Nicolas César, 'A Bordeaux, l'exposition Chaval soulève la polémique', in *La Croix*, 6 June 2008, <http://www.la-croix.com/article/index.jsp?docId=2339707&rubId=5548>, accessed 5 June 2009.

<sup>iii</sup> See the article by Duverger in *Le Monde*, 'Les élections européennes. Pourquoi je suis candidat sur la liste du PCI', 7 May, 1989.

<sup>iv</sup> The symposium was published in *French Politics* vol. 3, no. 3, 2005, and vol. 4, no. 1, 2006.

<sup>v</sup> Quotations are taken from the 1967 edition to take account of the slight amendment that Duverger made to his original 1951 text. All translations from this edition are by the author.

<sup>vi</sup> See the series of posts under the heading 'Is this the first reference to semi-presidentialism?' at [www.semipresidentialism.com](http://www.semipresidentialism.com).

<sup>vii</sup> For a review, see Elgie (1999).

<sup>viii</sup> See, for example, Philippe Lauvaux' review of the 18<sup>th</sup> ed. of Duverger's textbook *Le système politique français. Droit constitutionnel et systèmes politiques*, in *Revue internationale de droit comparé*, 1987, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 284-286.

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