

Comparative Government

Dr Chao-Yo Cheng



Week 5: Leading



Today's plan

- ▶ Logistics: Seminar log due this Friday
- ▶ Recap from previous weeks
 - Regime change and democratic transition
 - Comparative authoritarianism and authoritarian governance
 - Reading exercise: "US Descent Into Authoritarianism"
- ▶ Refresher lecture: Executive and legislature branches
 - Executive system: Presidential versus parliamentary democracies
 - Unicameral and bicameral legislatures
 - Recap: Supreme/constitutional courts and judicial review



Reading exercise summary: “Flawed” constitutions and democracies

- ▶ In addition to the technical details, "who" is behind the making of the constitution also matters a lot
- ▶ Many democracies did not rewrite their constitutions when they went through the democratic transition; that is, regime change does not always lead to constitutional changes
- ▶ Democratic constitutions can be "flawed" or "biased" when outgoing autocrats took part in or led the designing of the new constitution of the new democratic government by giving them unfair advantage (how?)
- ▶ "Correcting" flawed constitutions requires patience and shrewd statecraft
- ▶ Both history and leadership matter for the practice of constitutions





• This article is more than 10 months old

The Trump administration is descending into authoritarianism

From media to culture and the arts to the refusal to abide by court orders, we're nearing 'Defcon 1 for our democracy', experts say

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2025/mar/22/trump-administration-authoritarianism>



- ▶ What are the indicators that the US might be rolling into "authoritarianism?"
- ▶ Are there any indicators being left out?
- ▶ Can you use the US anecdote to come up with the measurement of democratic backsliding?



Measuring Democratic Backsliding

Andrew T. Little, *University of California, Berkeley, USA*

Anne Meng, *University of Virginia, USA*

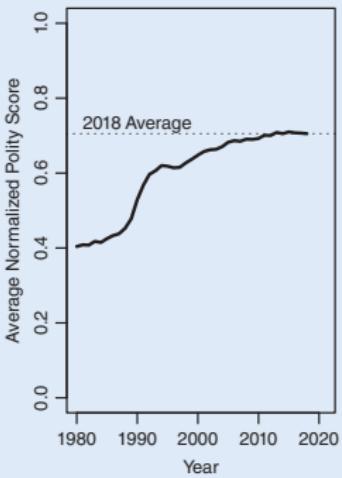
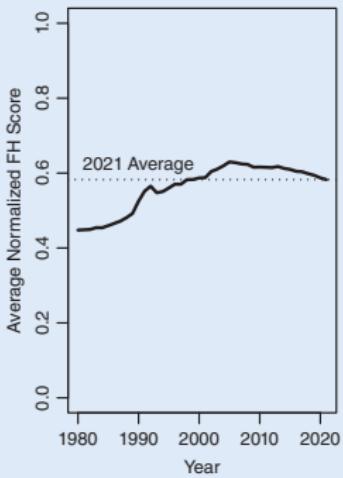
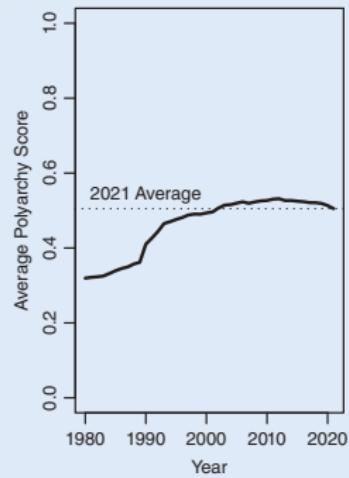
ABSTRACT Despite the general narrative that the world is in a period of democratic decline, there have been surprisingly few empirical studies that assess whether this is systematically true. Most existing studies of global backsliding are based largely if not entirely on subjective indicators that rely on expert coder judgment. Our study surveys objective indicators of democracy (e.g., incumbent performance in elections) and finds little evidence of global democratic decline during the past decade. To explain the discrepancy in trends between expert-coded and objective indicators, we consider the role of coder bias and leaders strategically using more subtle undemocratic action. Although we cannot rule out the possibility that the world is becoming less democratic exclusively in ways that require subjective judgment to detect, this claim is not justified by existing evidence.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S104909652300063X>

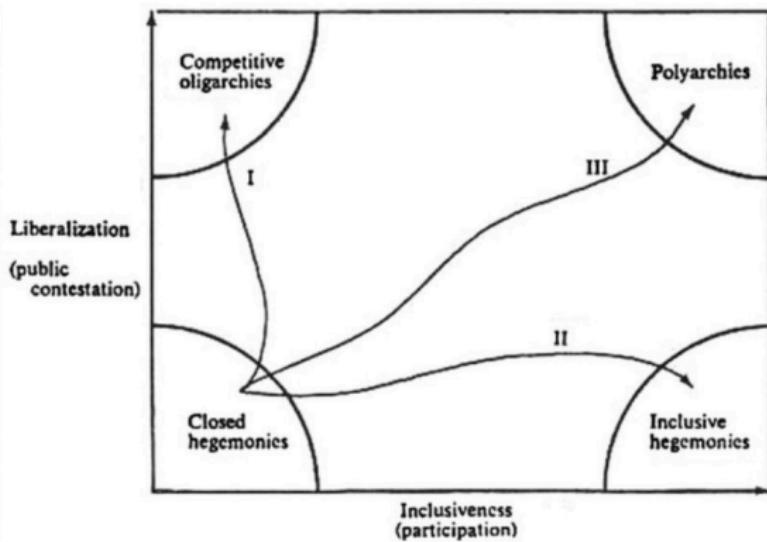
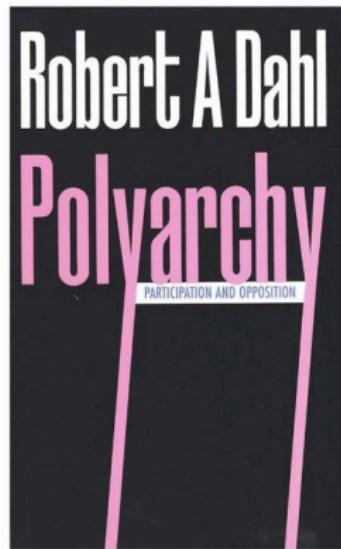


Figure 1

Average Democracy Scores by Year



Democracy as “polyarchy” (Robert Dahl 1971)



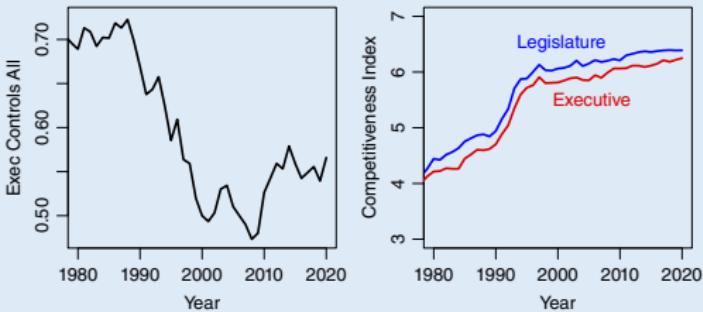
Recap: Democratic backsliding

- ▶ Competitiveness of elections, including incumbency (dis)advantage
- ▶ Constraints on executive power
- ▶ Freedom of press (and other civil liberties)



Figure 4

Are Elections Competitive?

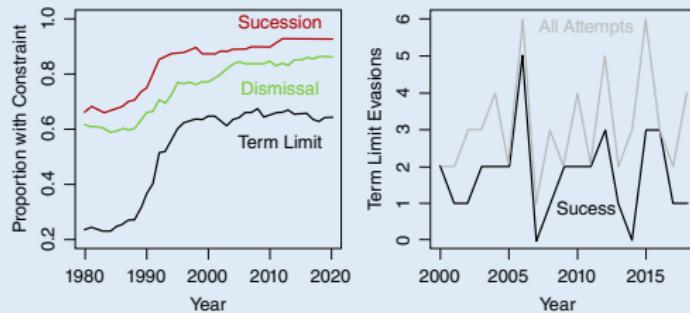


- ▶ Unified government control peaked at 55% around 2010; while higher than the 1990s, it remains well below the pre-1990s high of 70%
- ▶ Electoral Competitiveness for both executive and legislative indices shows a clear upward trend, indicating a global increase in multi-party competition and election contestability



Figure 6

Trends in Executive Constraints

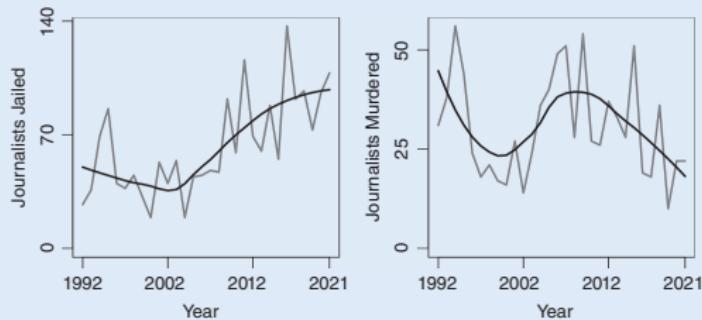


- ▶ Post-Cold War, term limits, dismissal rules, and succession procedures surged; while term limits have recently plateaued, dismissal and succession rules continue a slight upward trend
- ▶ Between 2000 and 2018, 26% of term-limited leaders (all in authoritarian or hybrid regimes) attempted to evade limits, with a 57% success rate and no clear chronological trend



Figure 7

Trends in Journalists Jailed (Left) and Murdered (Right)



- ▶ Jails for "anti-state" or professional reasons have risen steadily since 2000, marking a decade-long deterioration
- ▶ Conversely, fatalities peaked in the early 2000s and have decreased consistently since 2008



- ▶ Varieties of constitutional democracy
 - **Executive system:** presidential, parliamentary and semi-presidential
 - **Legislative system:** uni- or bi-cameral
 - Electoral system: majoritarian/plurality, PR and mixed-member (and the resulting party system)
 - Central-local relations: federal, unitary and decentralized
- ▶ Democratic constitutional design is a response to "**Madison's Dilemma**"
 - the goal is to create a government strong enough to govern while limited enough to protect civil liberties
 - Two visions of democracy: Majoritarian Model (power concentration) versus Consensus Model (power dispersion)

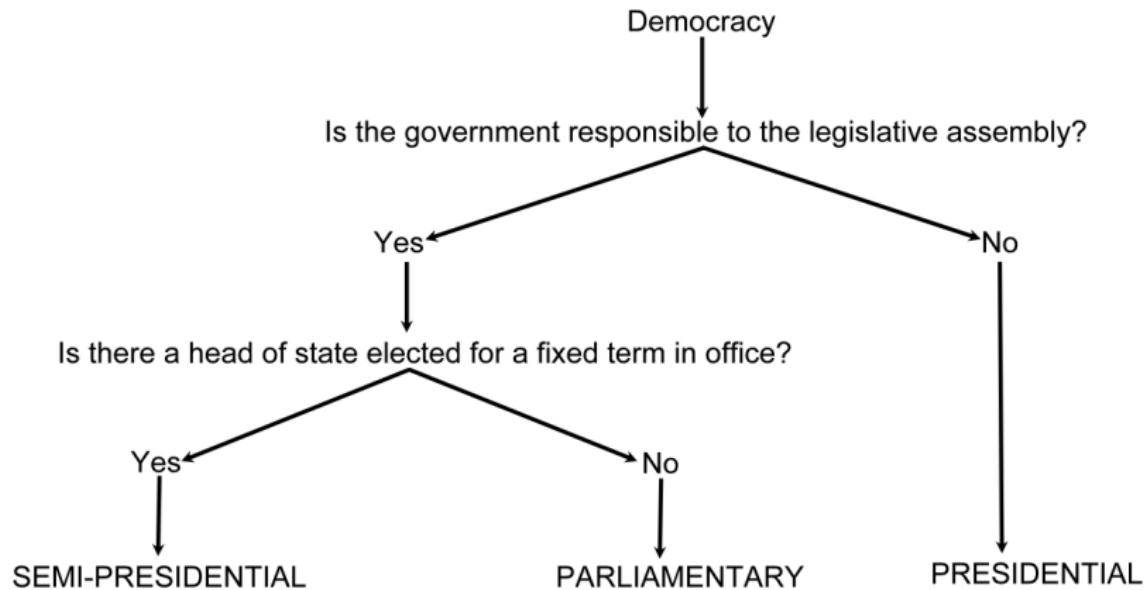


Refresher lecture

- ▶ Executive structures
 - Presidential versus parliamentary democracies (and semi-presidentialism)
 - "Perils of presidentialism"
- ▶ Unicameral and bicameral legislatures
 - Why bicameralism?
 - Different types of bicameralism: (a)symmetry and (in)congruence
- ▶ Recap: Supreme/constitutional courts and judicial review (skim by yourself)



Presidential versus parliamentary systems

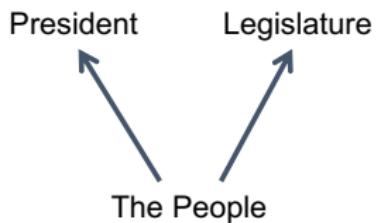


- ▶ Is the government responsible for the legislative assembly?
 - Separation of origin
 - Separation of survival

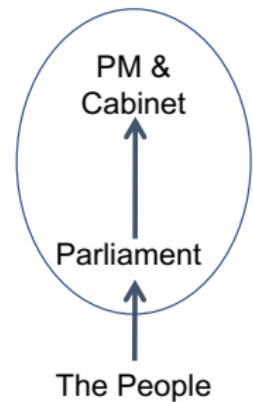
- ▶ Is there a "head of state" elected for a fixed term in office?



Presidential versus parliamentary democracies from a delegation perspective



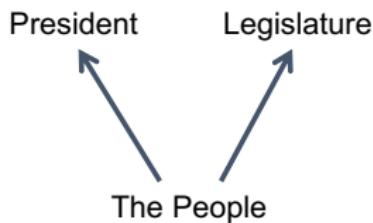
**Presidential
System**



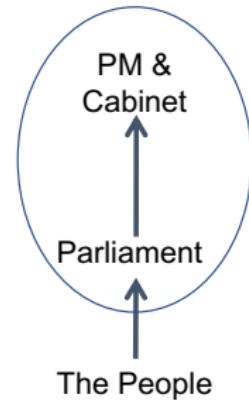
**Parliamentary
System**



Presidential versus parliamentary democracies from a delegation perspective



**Presidential
System**

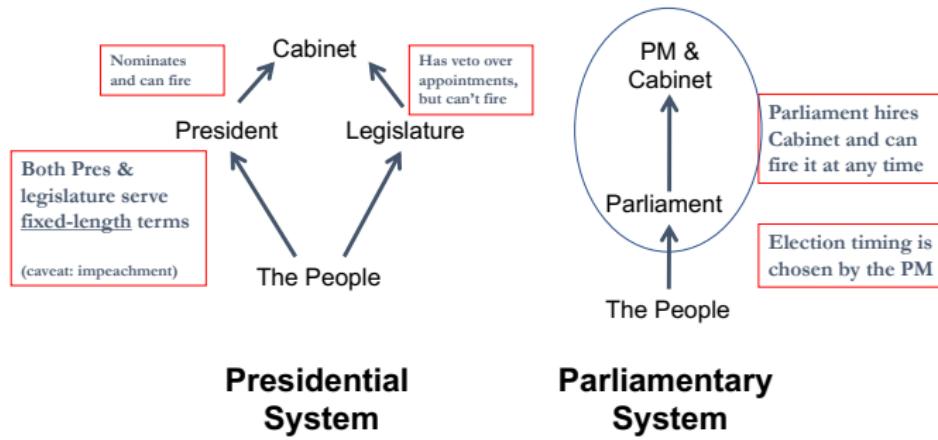


**Parliamentary
System**

Having a president does not mean the country is a presidential democracy because "president" can mean different things in different countries!



Presidential versus parliamentary democracies from a delegation perspective

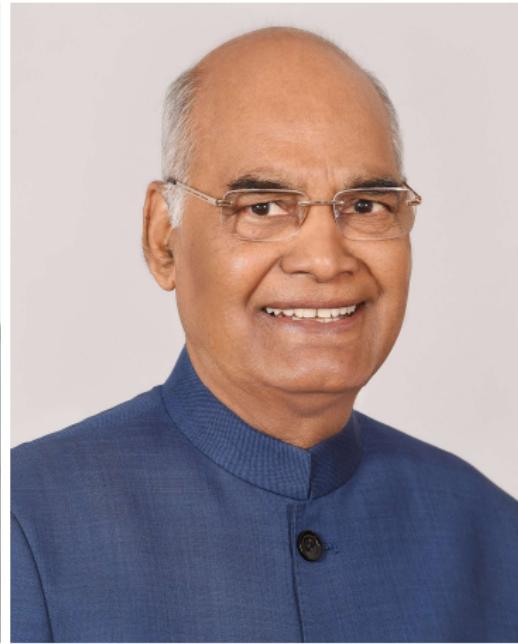


Having a president does not mean the country is a presidential democracy because "president" can mean different things in different countries!





Narendra Modi
(Prime Minister)



Ram Nath Kovind
(President)





Angela Merkel
(Prime Minister)

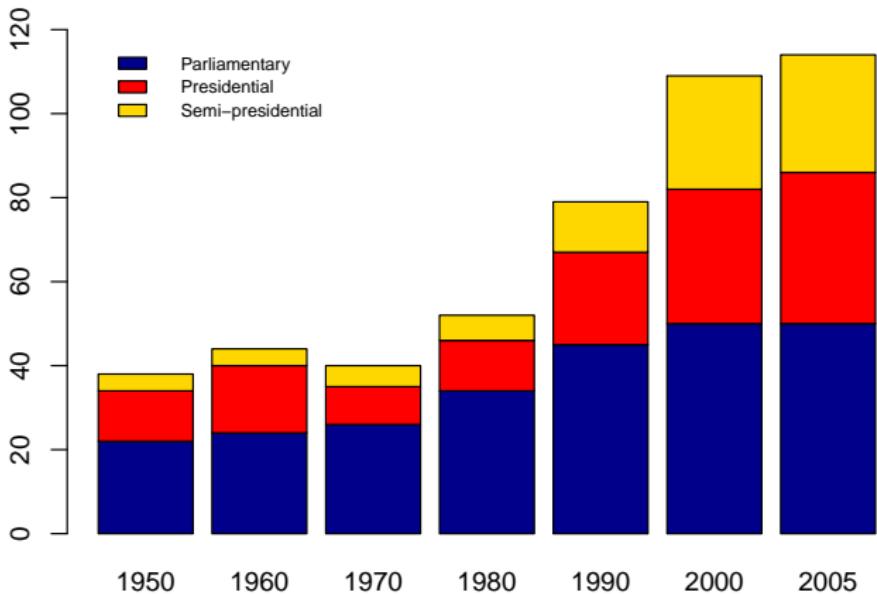


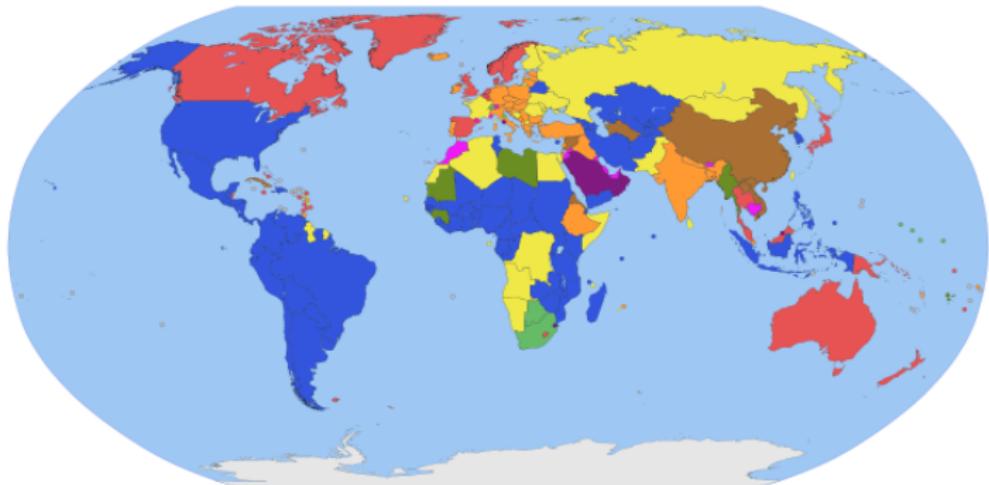
Frank-Walter Steinmeier
(President)





Merkel and Gauck in Rio de Janeiro, FIFA World Cup 2014





Full presidential republics.
Presidential republics with the role of the president and prime minister combined.
Semi-presidential republics.
Parliamentary republics.
Parliamentary constitutional monarchies in which the monarch does not personally exercise power.
Parliamentary constitutional monarchies in which the monarch personally exercises power (often alongside a weak parliament)
Absolute monarchies.
Single-party republics.
Military dictatorships
Countries which do not fit any of the above systems.



Presidential democracies are much less likely to survive

	Parliamentary	Presidential
Democratic for at least one yr	28	25
Continuously democratic for 10 yrs	17	5
Democratic survival rate	61%	20%





Rio de Janeiro, April 1, 1964



Perils of presidentialism

- ▶ The nature of executive-legislature relationship is different between parliamentary and presidential democracies
 - Presidential: Separation of origin and survival
 - Parliamentary: Legislative responsibility
- ▶ What if the executive and legislature do not agree with each other?
 - Presidential: Locked in with temporal rigidity (and hence **policy** stability)
 - Parliamentary: Vote of confidence by the govt **OR** vote of no confidence by the parliament



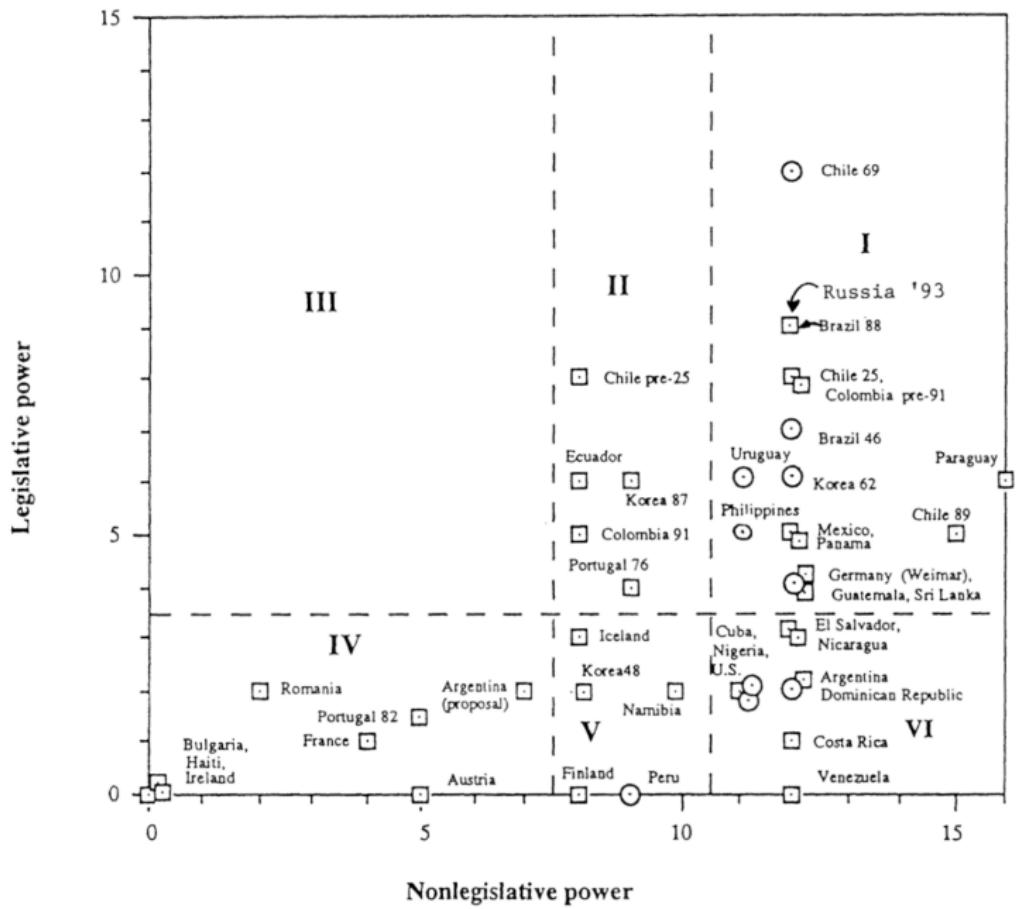
- ▶ Presidential: Extreme policy stability leads to gridlock and regime (or democratic) instability
- ▶ Parliamentary: Extreme policy stability leads to government (or cabinet) instability

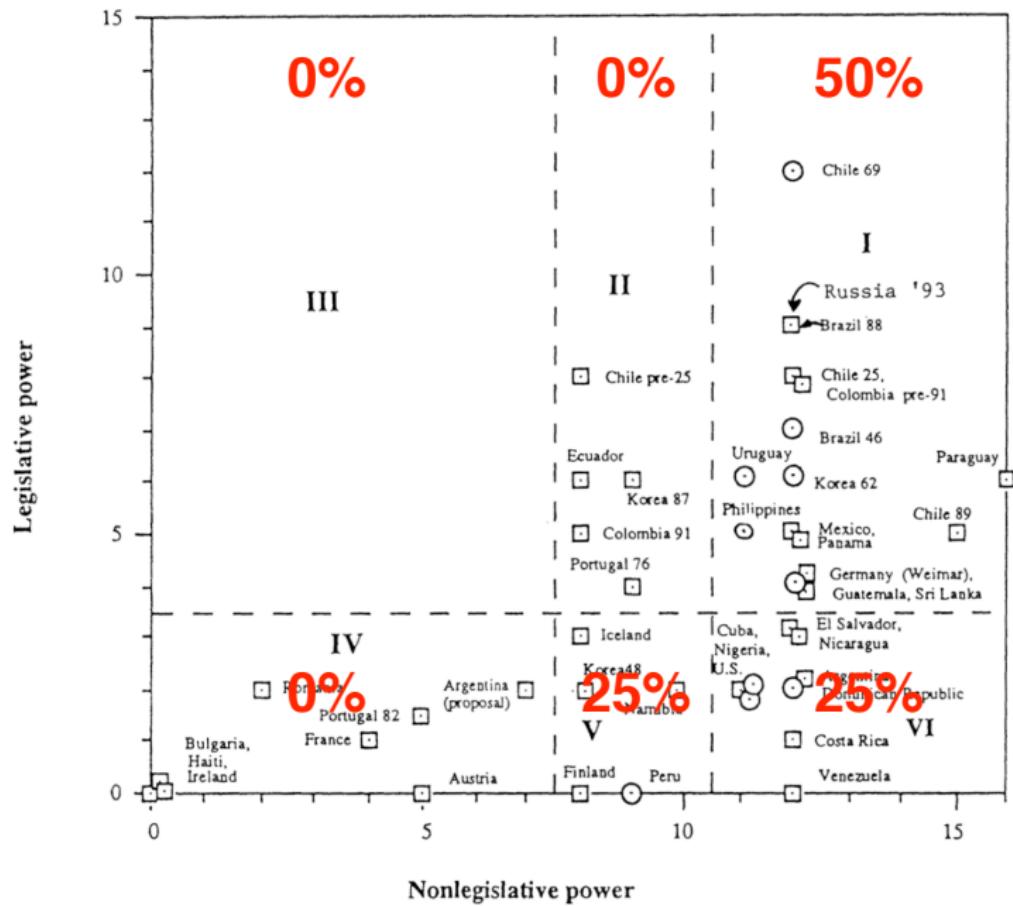


Varieties of presidentialism

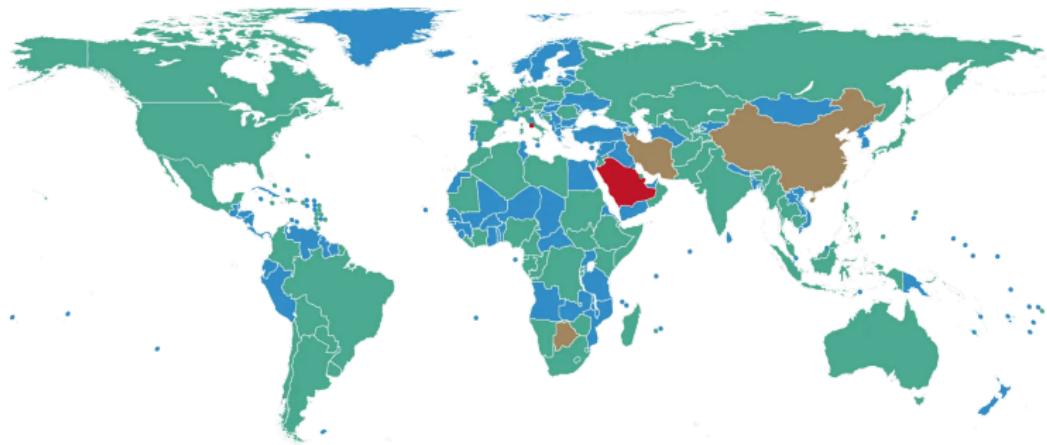
Legislative Powers	Non-legislative Powers
Package veto/override Partial veto/override Decree Budgetary powers Proposal of referenda Exclusive introduction of legislative (reserved policy areas)	Cabinet formation Cabinet dismissal Censure Dissolution of assembly







Unicameral and bicameral legislatures in the world



Close to half of countries around the world have bicameral legislatures (in green), while more countries have unicameral legislatures (in blue). Data: Rice University and OpenStax.



Why bicameralism

- ▶ History and constitutional design
- ▶ Different forms of political "representation"
 - By constituency (e.g., House of Representatives in Japan)
 - By region (e.g., Senate in the US)
 - By socioeconomic class (e.g., House of Lords in the UK)
- ▶ Malapportionment: When the distribution of political representation between constituencies does not match the constituency's relative population





National Diet
(Japan)



Lok Sabha
(India)



Duma
(Russia)

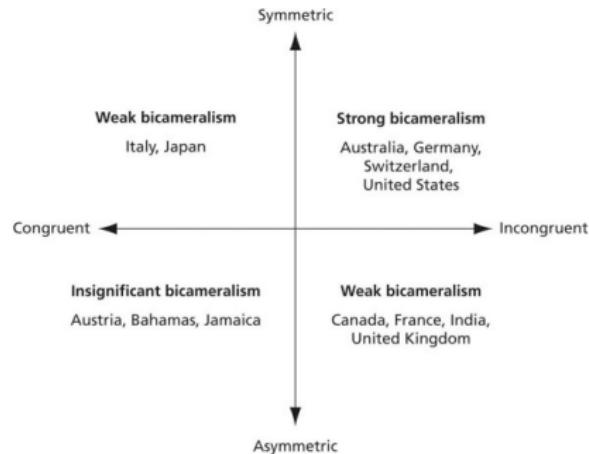


Bundestag
(Germany)

- ▶ Japan: House of Representatives (lower) and Hose of Councilors (upper)
- ▶ Germany: Bundestag (lower) and Bundesrat (upper)
- ▶ India: Lok Sabha (lower) and Rajya Sabha (upper)
- ▶ Russia: State Duna (lower) and Federal Council (upper)



(A)symmetry and (in)congruence bicameralism



Source: Based on information in Lijphart (1999, 212).

- ▶ (A)Symmetry: Relative powers between two chambers/houses
- ▶ (In)Congruence: Relative preferences (and interests) between two chambers/houses





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Recap: Supreme/constitutional courts and judicial review

- ▶ Judiciary in the constitution organizes relations between the executive and legislative branches of government:
 - **Parliamentary supremacy:** a principle according to which judges' decisions remain subordinate to decisions of the legislative majority (e.g., UK before 2009)
 - **Judicial review:** the ability of a country's high court to invalidate laws the legislature has enacted by declaring them unconstitutional (e.g., USA, Germany and UK after 2009)
- ▶ What explains the adoption of either principle? What is the "politics" behind the operation of these principles?





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US Supreme Court appears reluctant to let Trump fire Fed's Lisa Cook

During two hours of arguments, some justices pressed US lawyer on why Cook was not given a chance to formally respond.



Lisa Cook, member of the United States Federal Reserve Board, has called the allegations against her an effort to pressure the Fed to cut US interest rates [File: Aaron Schwartz/EPA]



AfD classified as extreme-right by German intelligence



| Alice Weidel, joint AfD leader, said the decision was a "severe blow against German democracy"

Paul Kirby
Europe digital editor

2 May 2025

Germany's Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party has been designated as right-wing extremist by the country's federal office for the protection of the constitution.



"Domestic intelligence cannot push for a ban on the party – that can only go through the **two houses of parliament, government or the constitutional court** – but its latest decision could encourage others to start the process."



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UK Supreme Court rules legal definition of a woman is based on biological sex

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