

PARLIAMENTARISM AND PRESIDENTIALISM

Comparative Politics

Guillermo Toral

IE University

Where we are in the course

1. Introductions
- 2-3. Approach and method of comparative politics
- 4-5. The nature, formation, and development of states
- 6-7. Authoritarianism, types, and survival
- 8-9. Democracy, democratization, and survival
- 10-11. **Parliamentarism and presidentialism**
- 12-13. Elections and electoral system

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15. Midterm exam (October 13 – in person, closed book, on paper)

Review on concepts of democracy

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- **Przeworski**: turnover

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- Democratic politics therefore take different dynamics in different forms of government

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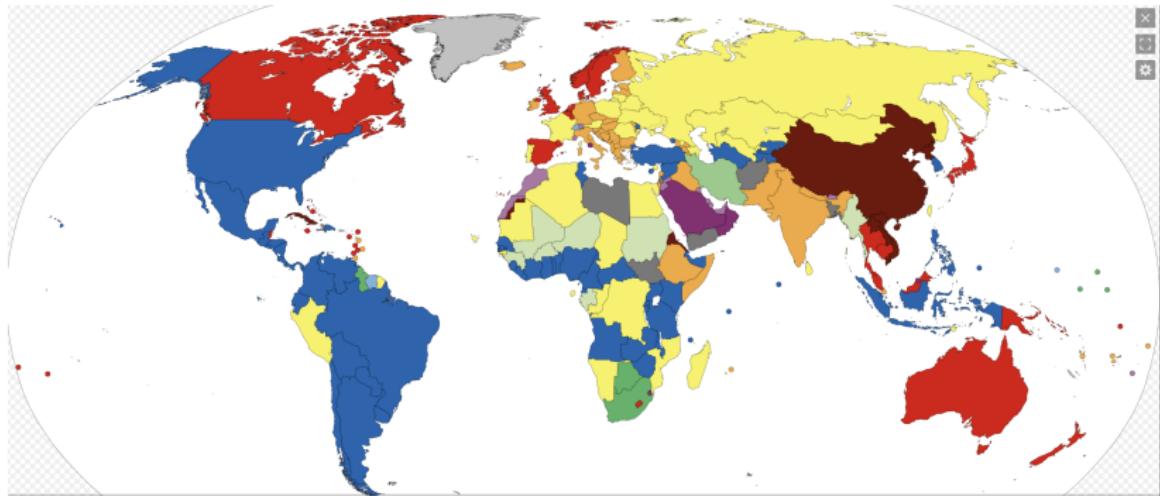
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- Guidelines for the final assignment

Fundamental differences

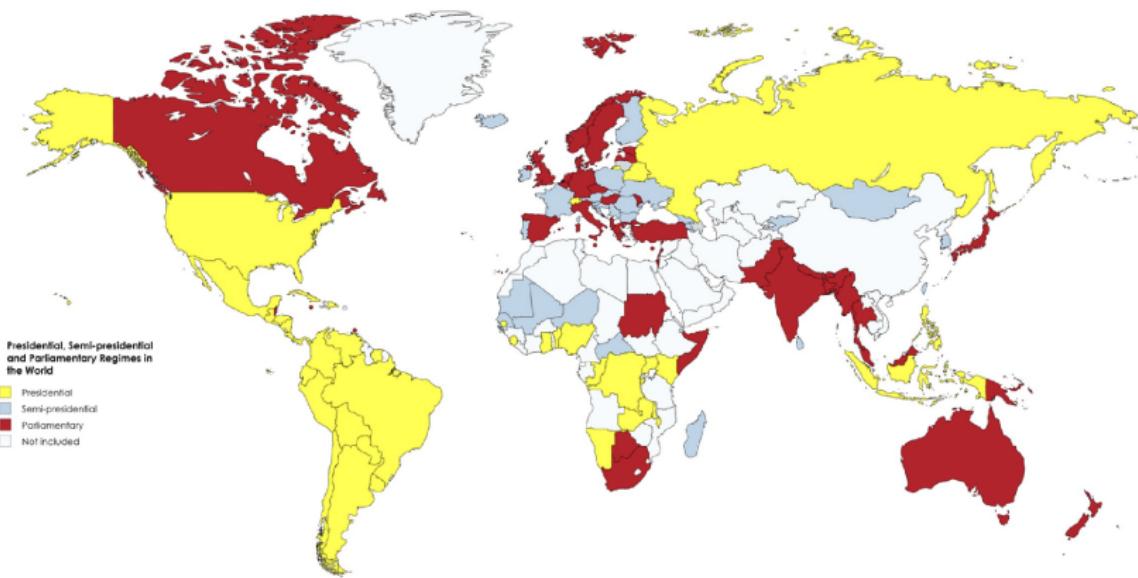
“Political systems” around the world



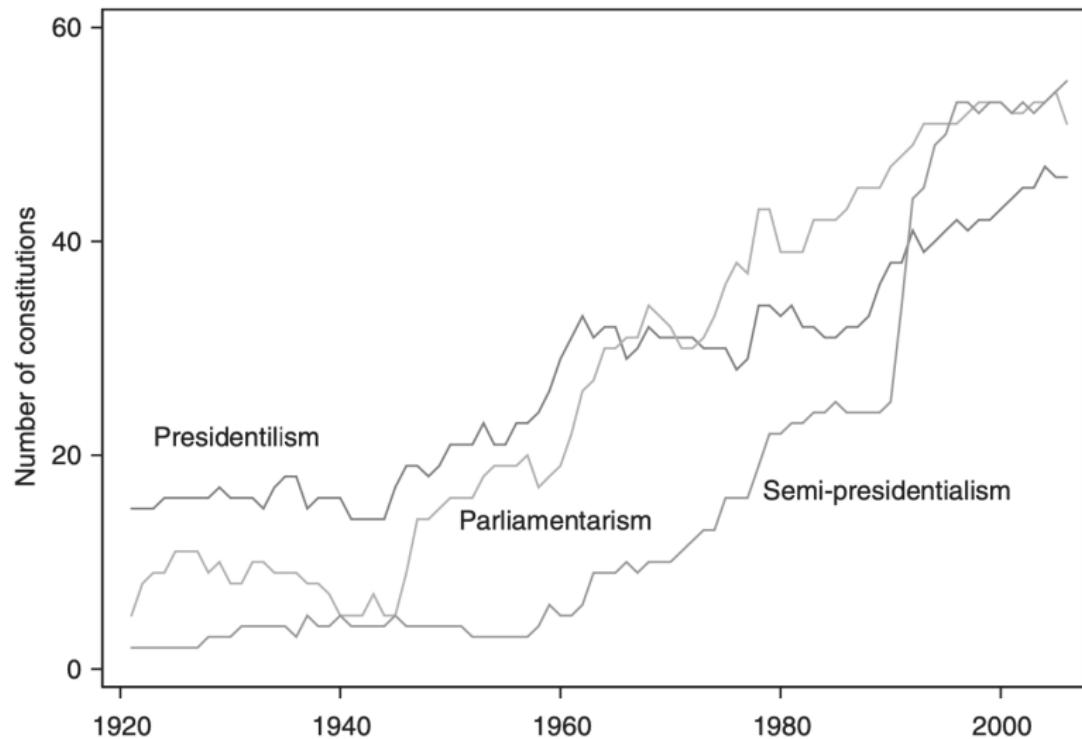
World's states coloured by systems of government: Parliamentary systems: Head of government is elected or nominated by and accountable to the legislature Constitutional monarchy with a ceremonial monarch Presidential republic with a ceremonial president Parliamentary republic with an executive president Presidential system: Head of government (president) is popularly elected and independent of the legislature President Hybrid systems: Semi-presidential republic: Executive president is independent of the legislature; head of government is appointed by the president and is accountable to the legislature Assembly-independent republic: Head of government (president or directory) is elected by the legislature, but is not accountable to it Theocratic republic: Supreme Leader holds significant executive and legislative power Semi-constitutional monarchy: Monarch holds significant executive or legislative power Absolute monarchy: Monarch has unlimited power One-party state: Power is constitutionally linked to a single political party Military junta: Committee of military leaders controls the government; constitutional provisions are suspended Provisional government: No constitutionally defined basis to current regime Dependent territories and places without governments Note: this chart represents [data from June](#).
systems of government, not the [de facto](#) degree of democracy. [View](#)

[More details](#)

Forms of government around the world



Forms of government over the past 100 years



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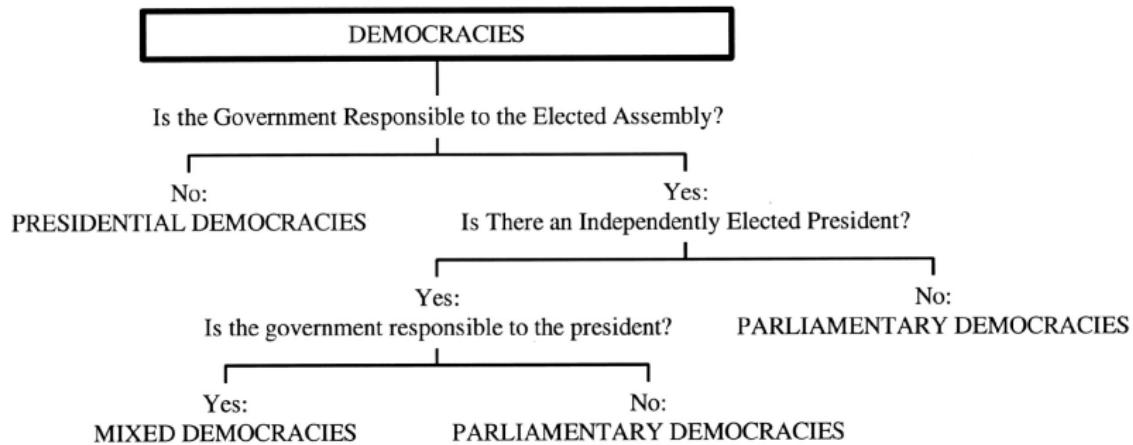
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- Official titles vs reality (e.g., heads of government in Spain and Italy are called “Presidents”, even though these are parliamentary systems)

Classifying forms of government



Note: In semi-presidentialism (“mixed democracies” in the graph above), there is a head of state who is popularly elected **and to whom the cabinet responds**

Key terms on forms of government

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- **Head of government:** leader of the administration of the state (may or may not coincide with the head of state), who may also be referred to by a variety of titles
- **Legislative responsibility:** a situation in which a legislative majority has the constitutional power to remove a government from office without cause.

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- An **impeachment** is a constitutional process through which a head of state or government can be charged with wrongdoing and potentially removed from office in a presidential or semi-presidential system by a legislature acting similarly to a court

Fundamental differences

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- Presidentialism is often referred to as “separation of powers”,
whereas parliamentarism is sometimes referred to as “fusion of
powers”

Fundamental differences

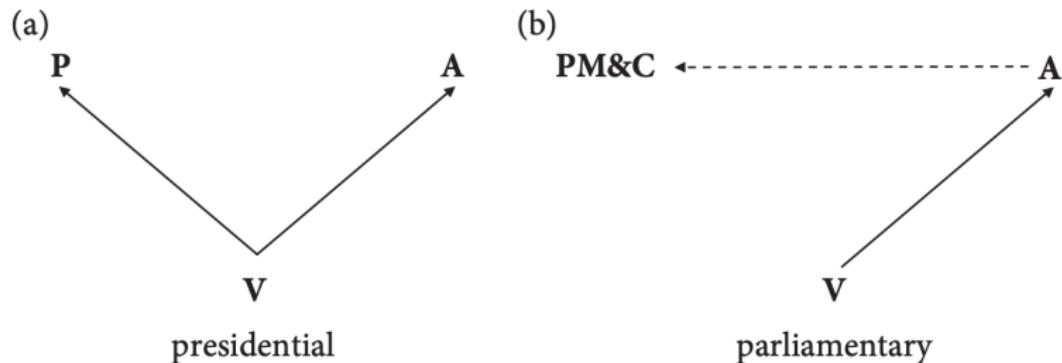


Fig. 2.1 Presidential and parliamentary government:
Fig. 2.1(a) presidential; Fig. 2.1(b) parliamentary

Notes: V = voters, A = assembly, P = President, PM = Prime Minister, C = Cabinet, \rightarrow = election, \dashrightarrow = dismissal.

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- In democracy, elections happen under a fixed schedule

Beyond fundamentals: Dependencies in practice

Leader turnover through action in the legislature

UK Johnson



(clip)

Spain Rajoy



(clip)

Brazil Rouseff



(clip)

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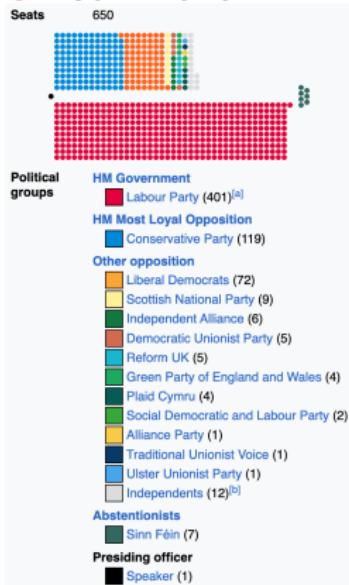
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- The case of Rajoy in Spain highlights the **importance of legislative coalitions**, even for single-party governments, in contexts of party system fragmentation
- The case of Rousseff in Brazil highlights how **legislative coalitions can be key for the survival of head of governments also in presidentialism**, especially when the party system is fragmented

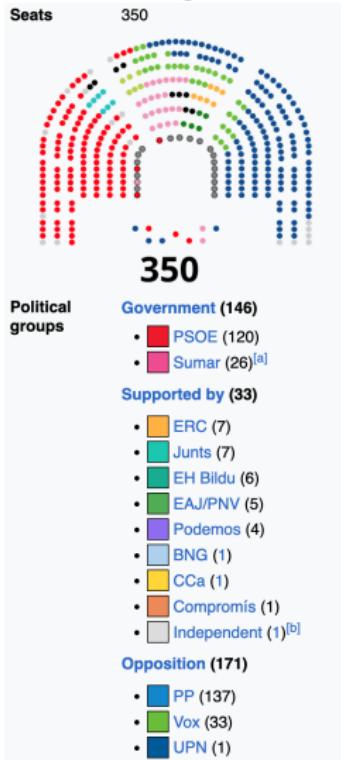
Legislative coalitions in the UK, Spain, Brazil

Brazil Câmara

UK Commons



Spain Congreso



Seats 513



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 - **Is leader turnover likely**, and if so how?

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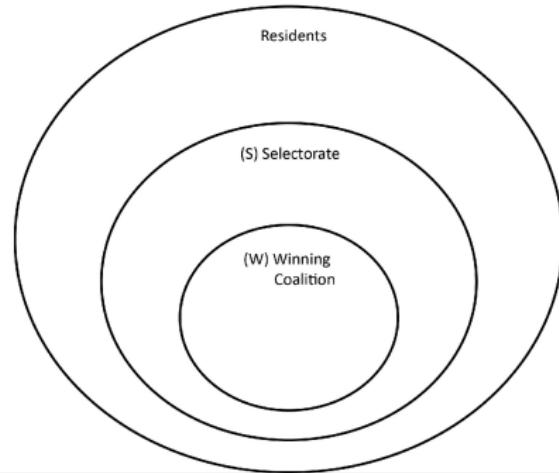
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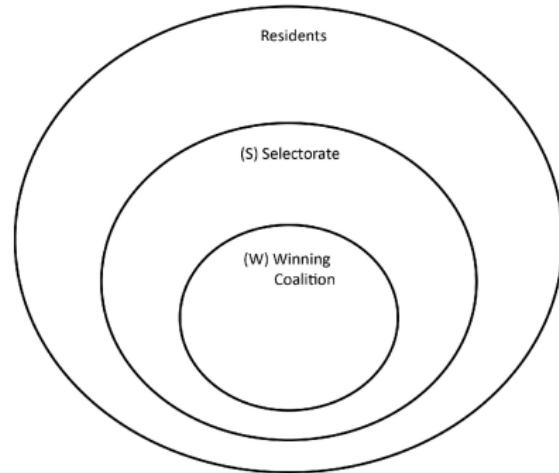
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- The **strength of parties** as organizations, and **internal competition** within the parties can reshape the dynamics of both parliamentarism and presidentialism

Legislative coalition building from the perspective of selectorate theory



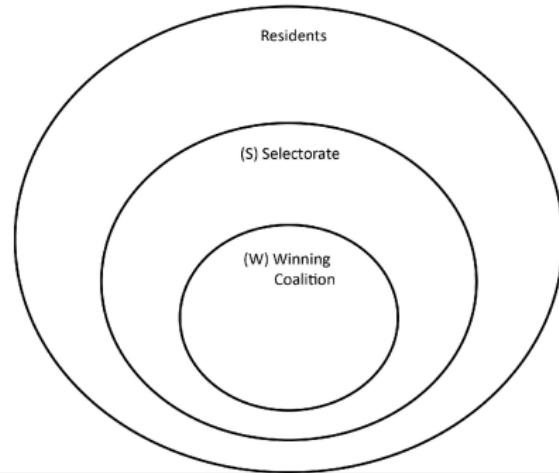
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Insights from selectorate theory for legislative politics

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- Counter to selectorate theory: in practice, **politicians often care about policy too**

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- A **minority coalition government** comprises multiple governmental parties that do not together command a majority of the legislative seats.
- A **surplus majority government** comprises more parties than are strictly necessary to control a majority of the legislative seats.

Government formation can get long in parliamentary systems

The Brussels Times

A BUSINESS ART & CULTURE EU AFFAIRS WORLD BELGIUM

Belgium breaks own record for longest period without government

Monday 3 August 2020



© Belga

Belgium on Sunday broke its own standing record for the longest political crisis and longest period without an elected government.

It has been 592 days since the previous government, led by former Prime Minister Charles Michel, collapsed over inter-party tensions on migration in December 2018.

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- Also depends on inter- and intra-party competition
- Key role for party bosses and backstage negotiations – referring back to Schumpeter & Przeworski's theories of democracy

Duration of the government formation process, by country

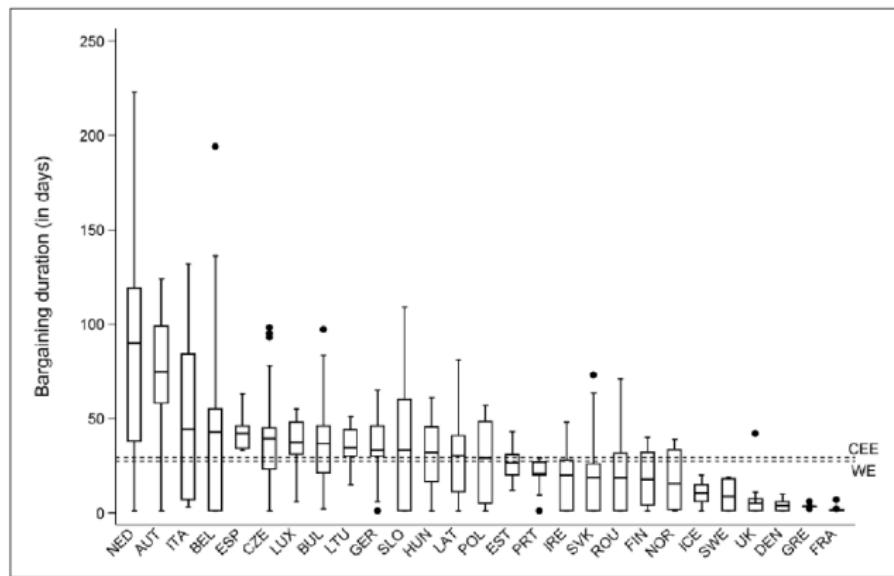
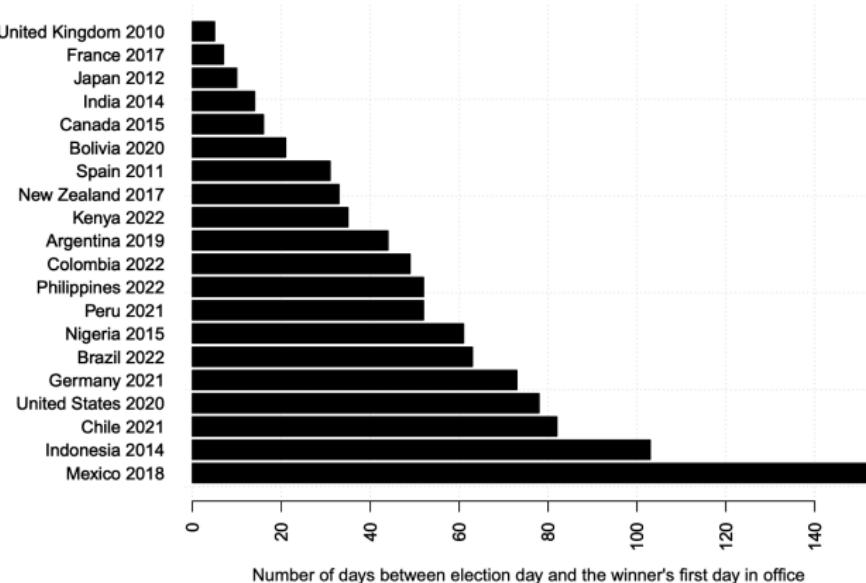


Figure 1. Bargaining duration across and within European countries.

Note: The box plots show the distribution of bargaining duration by country. The band inside the box depicts the average (not median) bargaining duration, while the whiskers span all data points within 1.5 inter-quartile-range of the nearer quartile. All countries are ordered based on their average bargaining duration. Dashed lines indicate the average duration of government formation processes in Western Europe (WE) and in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

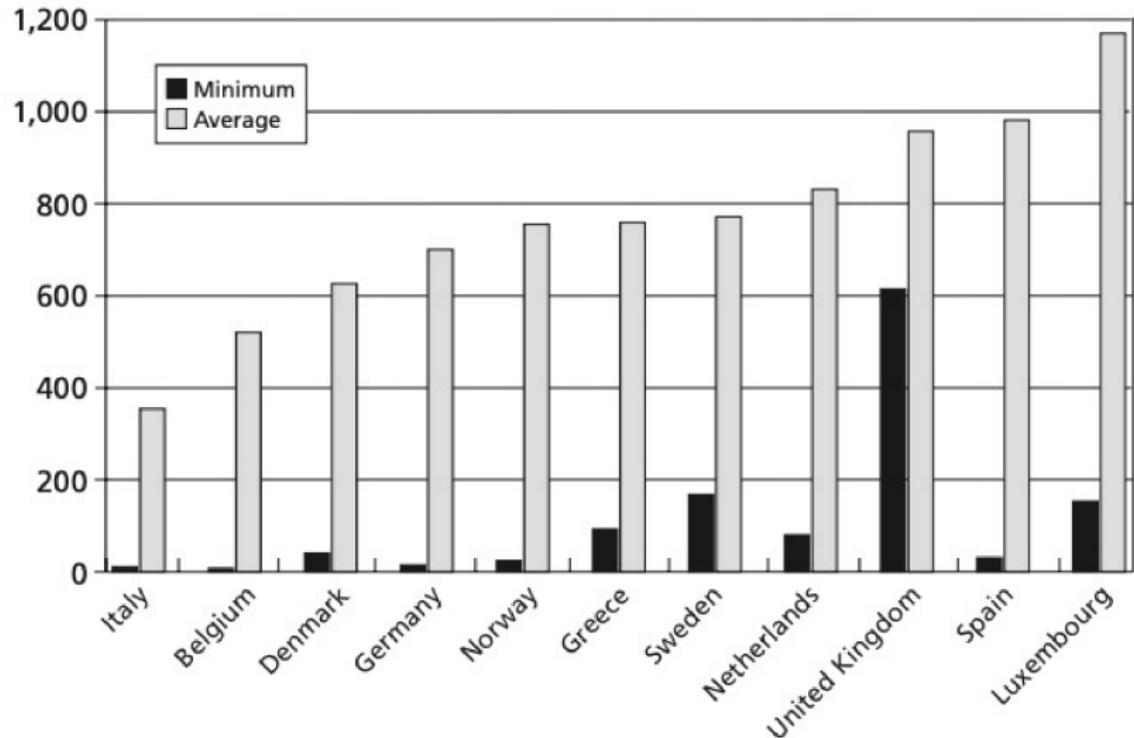
Although turnover can also be lengthy under presidentialism – for different reasons

Figure 1: Recent transition periods after national-level elections in a sample of 20 countries



For each country, data correspond to the latest instance (up until January 1, 2023) when a new party reached national-level executive office through popular election – either direct elections in (semi-)presidential systems, or legislative elections in parliamentary ones. See Appendix A for details.

Duration of cabinets



Consequences for political and economic development

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- **Economic performance**: economic growth, inflation, human development, corruption, etc.
- As usual with institutional choices, there are important **trade-offs** to consider

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- In presidentialism, the head of government has a “strong claim to democratic, even plebiscitarian, legitimacy”, and there may be **clashes in claims of democratic legitimacy between the executive and the legislative** powers
- Parliamentarism allows to deal with conflicts by going back to the polls (votes of no confidence, snap elections), which may serve as an escape valve for tensions in the political system. By having a fixed electoral schedule, **presidentialist systems do not have that escape valve** and may see political conflicts across branches of powers escalate more easily.

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- Presidentialism operates in the logic of **winner-takes-all politics**, and thus tends to make politics a zero-sum-game.
- In presidentialism, the head of government is **more likely to feel they are the representative of “the people”**. This may lead to authoritarian temptations when clashes with the legislature emerge.

A more recent take on the perils of presidentialism

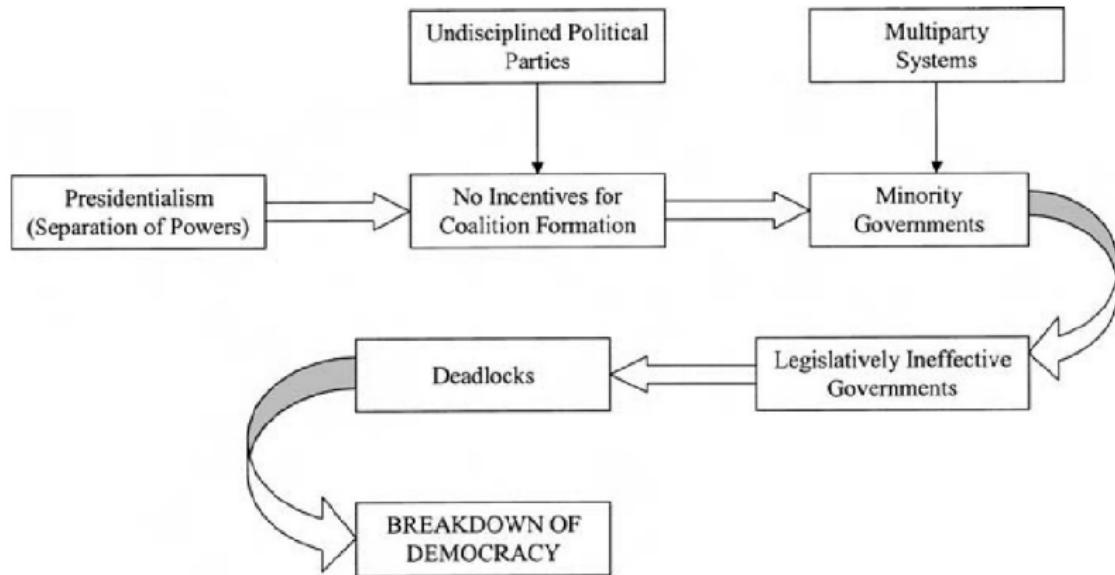


Figure 1.1 From Presidentialism to the Breakdown of Democracy.

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 - Would you have to worry about confounders? How could you address that?

Raw data on legislative success

TABLE 2 *Legislative Success of the Executive*

Coalition status	Parliamentarism	Obs.	Presidentialism	Obs.
All	80.15 (13.92)	335	62.63 (20.30)	214
Single majority	89.12 (10.17)	107	71.57 (17.78)	55
Coalition majority	76.07 (10.89)	122	51.31 (19.71)	33
Coalition minority	78.25 (17.21)	26	53.03 (21.25)	20
Single minority	79.28 (8.92)	45	61.34 (17.94)	84

Notes: 'All' includes 'Super majority' and 'Divided government' situations.
Standard deviations are shown in parentheses.

Raw data on democratic survival

TABLE 3 *Observed Probabilities that a Democracy Would Die in a Particular Year*

Coalition status	Parliamentarism	Presidentialism
All	0.0135 (1,632)	0.0419 (669)
Coalitions	0.0085 (709)	0.0483 (207)
Single party	0.0173 (923)	0.0390 (462)
Majority	0.0116 (1,298)	0.0461 (412)
Minority	0.0210 (334)	0.0350 (257)
Super majority	0.0128 (78)	0.0189 (53)
Single majority	0.0167 (717)	0.0451 (266)
Divided government	—	0.0408 (49)
Coalition majority	0.0040 (503)	0.0645 (93)
Coalition minority	0.0234 (128)	0.0492 (61)
Single minority	0.0194 (206)	0.0306 (197)

Notes: 'Coalitions' include 'Super majority' situations. The number of observations of each category is shown in parentheses.

Raw data on macroeconomic performance

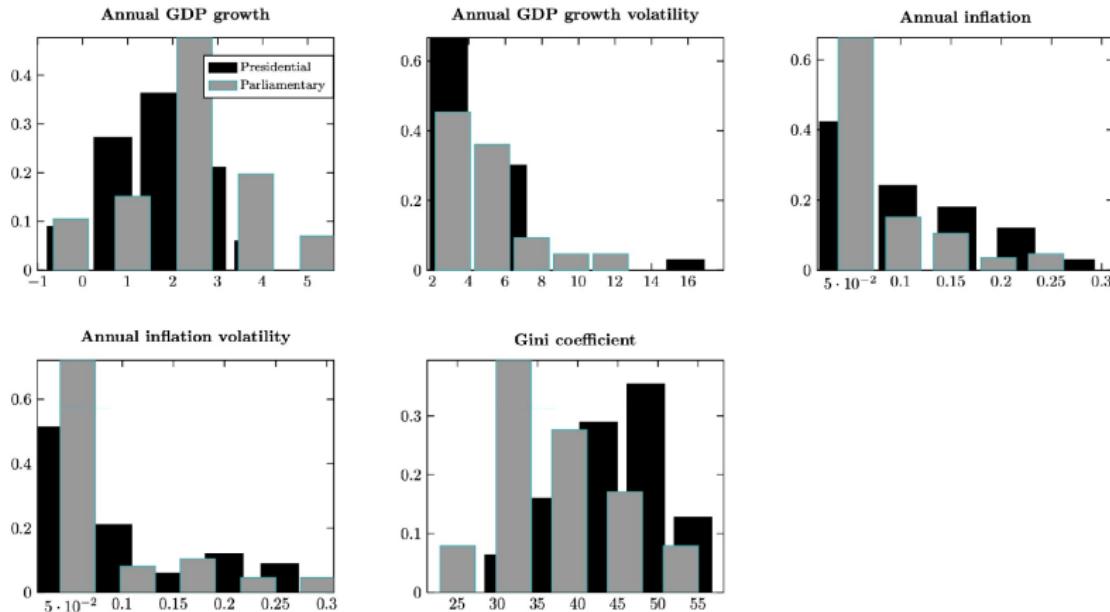


Fig. 1 Presidential and parliamentary regimes: macroeconomic outcomes. Histograms illustrating the distribution of our macroeconomic indicators of interest as an average over the whole sample (1950–2015) across parliamentary and presidential regimes using BG classification for government structures

Regression results

Table 4 Economic growth and the form of government

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Pres	-0.814*** (0.001)	-0.868*** (0.000)	-0.916*** (0.001)	-1.173*** (0.000)	-1.153*** (0.000)	-1.198*** (0.000)	-0.593** (0.037)	-0.622** (0.033)	-0.691** (0.042)
Semi-pres		0.236 (0.581)			-0.017 (0.959)			0.151 (0.623)	
Maj			-0.562* (0.070)	-0.502* (0.090)	-0.380 (0.215)	-0.094 (0.734)	-0.066 (0.814)	-0.134 (0.657)	
InitialGDP				-0.818*** (0.001)	-0.794*** (0.001)	-0.800*** (0.002)	-1.371*** (0.000)	-1.375*** (0.000)	-1.375*** (0.000)
Education				3.850*** (0.000)	3.863*** (0.000)	2.518*** (0.015)	0.420 (0.666)	0.622 (0.536)	0.827 (0.446)
Fertility						-0.697*** (0.000)	-0.644*** (0.000)	-0.509** (0.021)	
LifeExp						0.055* (0.090)	0.062* (0.055)	0.046 (0.338)	
Openness						0.006** (0.010)	0.006** (0.015)	0.008*** (0.007)	
GovtSize						-2.653 (0.170)	-2.927 (0.144)	-4.094*** (0.025)	
ExRateVol						0.000 (0.568)	0.000 (0.435)	0.001 (0.175)	
R ²	0.176	0.178	0.210	0.294	0.292	0.339	0.390	0.389	0.429
N	263	263	210	205	205	169	204	204	169

Dependent variable is the mean annual GDP per capita growth rates over the panel time horizon. Coefficients are estimates from random effects regression using panels between 1965–1979, 1980–1994 and 1995–2009 including time dummies and a constant (not presented). Results from columns (1), (4) and (7) present those using the scale variable of the form of government using BG, in columns (2), (5) and (8) dummy variables for both types of government from the BG, and similar in (3), (6) and (9) for presidential data from PT. A standard star convention is used, with *, ** and *** representing significance levels of 10, 5 and 1% respectively. P values of t-statistics are in parentheses where heteroskedastic clustered robust standard errors have been used.

You can download the article at

www.guillermotoral.com/cp/mcmanus.pdf

Regression results

Table 11 Inequality and the form of government

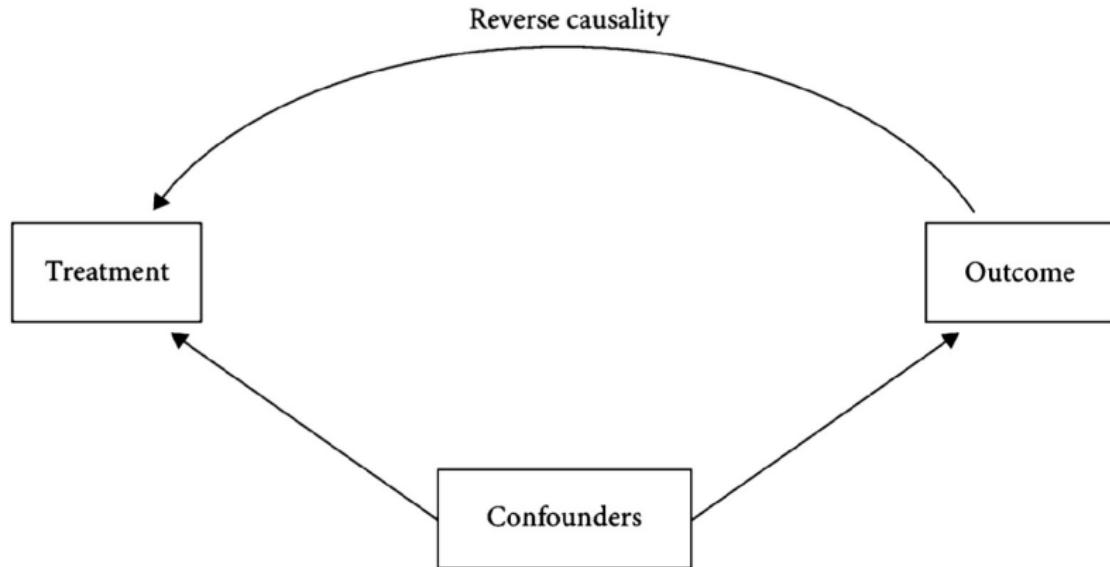
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Pres	0.124*** (0.004)	0.130*** (0.002)	0.238*** (0.000)	0.164*** (0.000)	0.160*** (0.000)	0.208*** (0.000)	0.185*** (0.000)	0.182*** (0.000)	0.211*** (0.000)
Semi-pres		-0.011 (0.835)			-0.012 (0.796)			-0.007 (0.873)	
Maj			0.077** (0.037)	0.061 (0.103)	0.023 (0.593)	0.067* (0.076)	0.056 (0.126)	0.014 (0.747)	
GovtSize				0.040 (0.200)	0.048 (0.134)	0.002 (0.960)	0.133 (0.309)	0.175 (0.188)	0.152 (0.272)
Openness					-0.003 (0.939)	0.001 (0.971)	-0.018 (0.594)	0.000 (0.995)	0.000 (0.916)
Initial-GDP					-0.022 (0.560)	-0.029 (0.453)	0.034 (0.408)	0.016 (0.737)	0.013 (0.788)
Initial-GDP ²					-0.001 (0.437)	-0.001 (0.422)	-0.004*** (0.008)	-0.002 (0.312)	-0.002 (0.300)
Human-Cap							-0.071* (0.081)	-0.074* (0.072)	-0.087* (0.091)
Inflation							0.007 (0.942)	0.004 (0.972)	-0.002 (0.978)
R ²	0.125	0.119	0.182	0.197	0.200	0.143	0.302	0.304	0.182
N	269	269	246	209	209	167	192	192	164

A standard star convention is used, with *, ** and *** representing significance levels of 10, 5 and 1% respectively. Dependent variable is the log of the mean Gini coefficient for income inequality over the period of the panel; all else is as defined earlier

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Remember: Threats to causal inference



Despite the advantages, there are also problems with parliamentary democracies

- More “distance” between voters and government

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- Many government turnovers are not decided in elections
- Less reliance on competitive dynamics
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- Government transitions can get (very) long, and are more uncertain

Guidelines for the final assignment

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- You are all expected to work on a research design, **in teams of 2 people**

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- **Defenses can push the grade up, but also down even to a failing grade** (especially if there is evidence of AI abuse)

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 - Go beyond what we have seen in class – be innovative and rigorous

Wrap-up

Taking stock of what we saw today

- Fundamental differences between parliamentarism and presidentialism

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- **Do the readings** and come prepared for a potential quiz:
 - *Comparative politics* – chapter 11
 - *Foundations of comparative politics* – chapter 10