Practice of politics collection

Q2. Do different power balances between parliaments and presidencies fundamentally impact the democracy in question?

No, different power balances between parliaments and presidencies do not *fundamentally* impact the democracy in question. Although the balance of power is more in favour of the legislature in parliamentary democracies than presidential ones, with this has some effects on outcomes, the impact of democracy type is dwarfed by other behavioural and institutional factors. Crucially, there is such a high degree of within-group variation amongst both parliamentary and presidential democracies that it would be wrong to think that the difference in power balance between the two groups is a distinction of particular importance. In this essay, I will first define what it means for a country to have either a parliamentary or presidential system, before presenting theoretical arguments and supporting empirical data on what differences do exist between the two types of democracy. I demonstrate that these differences are highly contingent on other factors, and are not consistent. Finally, I conclude that although we see some differences on average, there are no fundamental impacts on the democracy in question.

A democracy can be described as parliamentary when there is a popularly-elected legislature, and a government which is accountable to that legislature. Conversely, in a presidential democracy, there is – in addition to the popularly-elected legislature – a head of state regularly elected for a fixed term, whose government is not subject to legislative confidence. We can see clearly that the existence of mutual origin and mutual survival in parliamentary systems increases the level of political power held by the legislative branch, relative to the executive. Because the government can always be brought down by a vote of no confidence in the legislature, it must maintain the implicit support of a majority of legislators. In presidential democracies, meanwhile, a government may remain in office even if a majority of legislators opposes it, as the government is not subject to legislative confidence.

We can make theoretical predictions about how parliamentary and presidential democracies are likely to differ based on this, which are (on average) borne out by the data. In particular, we see differences in of government formation, cabinet composition, and democratic survival. I will now present these in turn, as well as identifying the ways in which these differences depend on country-specific factors such as extent of executive powers and politicians' motivations.

Since it is possible to form a government in a presidential democracy without having even the implicit support of a legislative majority, we should expect to see minority governments take office more often. This is indeed the case – Cheibub et al (2004) find that in circumstances where the largest party after an election failed to win an outright majority, minority government follows in presidential systems around 70% of the time, compared with just 40% in parliamentary ones. We would similarly expect there to be fewer coalition governments, as the president's party is able to remain in office as a legislative minority if it so wishes. Again, this is the case, with coalitions 30% less common in presidential democracies (Cheibub et al 2004). On the surface, this seems like a fundamental difference between presidencies and

Commented [R1]: *Luigi comments*

- Good essay on the differences in outcomes between the two systems.
Clearly written, well supported by evidence.
- Semi-presidential systems are a crucial set of cases which should be analysed.
- The question asks about power balance between institutions, which does not fully and simply map over the typology, which relies on confidence and mode of election, while powers can be more variably distributed.
Mark: 68

parliaments due to the different balance of power. However, the headline averages conceal significant variability. Presidents who are primarily policy-seeking and in a country where the executive has little or no law-making powers may very well decide to govern as a coalition. They would do this in order to have a better chance of passing their favoured policies through the legislature, which, if ruling as a minority, they would be unable to do. Therefore, whilst there is some impact on the sorts of governments which form, this is conditional on country-specific factors, and thus not properly described as a fundamental difference.

The possibility of having a government without majority legislative support also influences the proportionality and partisanship of cabinets in presidential systems. Because the president has no need to give out ministerial posts in exchange for legislative support, Gamson's law (that the number of cabinet posts held by a party in coalition is proportional to its number of seats in the legislature) does not hold. Moreover, the president does not even need to allocate cabinet posts exclusively to politicians, as a means of bolstering support in the legislature. Consequently, the proportion of non-partisan ministers would, we expect, be much higher. Again, this is confirmed by the data, with on average 3% of parliamentary democracies' cabinet ministers being non-partisan, compared to 30% in presidencies. However, these summary statistics do not paint the full picture. There is an extremely high amount of within-group variation, with standard deviations on the averages of 10% and 29% respectively (Colomer). This provides further evidence that it is not primarily the difference in power balance between presidencies and parliaments that lead to this difference in outcomes, but rather other, country-specific factors which covary with democracy type.

Looking at the statistics for democratic survival makes this clearer still. The survival rate for young, non-OECD democracies between 1973-89 is significantly higher for parliamentary states than presidential ones. However, when the countries in these two groups are examined more closely, we see that almost all the new presidential countries were in Latin America, whereas the new parliaments were located in Eastern Europe. This suggests not only that whether or not a country selects a presidential or parliamentary system is a dependent on pre-existing social and cultural factors, but also casts serious doubt on the suggestion that it was the choice of democratic system which ultimately influenced the probability of survival.

Indeed, research by Cheibub et al (2020) showed that the date and location of where a country's constitution was written is a far better predictor of not only democratic longevity, but also extent of executive powers and level of federalism than the parliamentary or presidential classification. If having a parliamentary or presidential system has such weak predictive power on other basic institutional arrangements in a country, we surely cannot claim that it has a "fundamental" impact on the nation.

Therefore, to conclude, I argue that it is not the case that different power balances between parliaments and presidencies fundamentally impact the country in question. Whilst there are differences in power balance, and differences in outcomes for government formation and cabinet composition, these vary significantly based on country-level factors. Coupled with the substantial apparent endogeneity with regard to choice of democratic system illustrated by geographic trends in new late 20th-century democracies, this makes it difficult to validly claim that differences in power balance have had a fundamental impact.

Q8. Does the inclusiveness of consensus democracies lead to polarisation over time?

Yes, the inclusiveness of consensus democracies does lead to polarisation over time, due to the high number of veto players within such systems reducing democratic responsiveness. Although one might expect that the disaggregation of power in consensus democracies provides them with a calmer sort of politics, the evidence suggests that this is not the case, with consensus democracies more likely to see far-right parties emerging than majoritarian ones. In this essay, I first explain what a consensus democracy is, and why it is more inclusive than a majoritarian one. I then identify reasons that certain disaggregating features of consensus democracies are likely to increase polarisation, as well as highlighting ways in which consensus democracies may help to reduce polarisation. Finally, I conclude that whilst the less intense competitiveness of consensus democracies is likely to lower polarisation, their inclusiveness can work in the opposite direction, pushing voters towards extremes.

Lijphart (2012) introduced the concepts of consensus and majoritarian democracies as a way of classifying countries based on the level of dispersion of political power. Whilst in majoritarian democracies, decision-making power is highly concentrated (prototypically, with a presidential system, a unitary government, and SMDP electoral system), consensus democracies tend to share out power between many political actors and institutions (for example, a proportional parliamentary system, with federalism). In a majoritarian country, the views of the minority can largely be ignored in policy-making, whereas in a consensus one, there are many minorities which come together as a group to agree on the direction of change (if any). Consensus democracies therefore have higher inclusiveness, in Dahl's understanding of the term, because a larger set of citizens get to have a greater degree of participation in the democratic process than in a majoritarian democracy.

Consensus democracies are likely to have coalition governments a far greater fraction of the time than majoritarian ones, both because of the mechanical effect of their electoral system, and the difference in power balance between the executive and legislative branches of parliamentary compared to presidential systems. Using a veto players framework of the sort popularised by Tsebelis allows us to see why this greater inclusiveness may lead to polarisation. Because agents in multiple institutions in the consensus democracy (the national government and regional governments, or the legislature and judges in judicial review, and so on) must all implicitly consent to a new policy before it can take effect, changes to the status quo are relatively harder to implement. Consequently, the democratic responsiveness of consensus systems is much lower. For a given magnitude of change of opinion amongst the public, we would expect to see a smaller effect on policy when compared to a majoritarian democracy, with fewer veto players. The connection to polarisation is apparent – if voters' views change slightly and yet they see no discernible response from their elected representatives, they are likely to move further in the same direction until there is some sort of tangible reaction. This is why the growth of far-right parties has been much faster in consensus European democracies than majoritarian ones: their higher inclusiveness made the democratic system more sluggish to react to voters' concerns.

It is worth considering other features of consensus democracies besides their inclusiveness, to show that it is not these differences, instead, which are the cause of the greater polarisation. The other marked difference as compared with majoritarian systems is the lower level of

Commented [R2]: *Luigi comments*

- The argument can make sense theoretically. However, you should try to provide empirical evidence for those statements.
- The theory of representation that is underlying your paragraph on responsiveness is not fully clear. What do voters want, and why would they get it more in majoritarian dem. than in consensus?
- Define polarization.
- Think comparatively. Analyse majoritarian systems too, and assess how they can also polarize (or not).
- Consider endogeneity explanations.
- Good that you take the unitary-federal dimension into consideration too, it is easy to forget that.

Mark: 65

competitiveness. The winner-takes-all nature of SMDP electoral systems in majoritarian democracies creates an incentive for parties to engage in strongly negative campaigning against opponents, and funnel large amounts of funds into “swing seats” known to be particularly marginal. In consensus democracies, on the other hand, a less distortionary PR or STV system, coupled with the fact that voters know before the election that a coalition between multiple parties is likely, means that the returns from deciding to attack other parties are far smaller. As a result, there may be a tendency towards lower polarisation in consensus democracies due to their less intense electoral competition.

However, their inclusiveness is very likely to lead to polarisation over time. The effects of federalism, which widens the extent of participation in democracy further by reserving some areas of policy to solely within the remit regionally-elected governments, provide another mechanism through which this can occur. In countries with significant geographic variability in ethnic composition, having more decisions made at a regional level may produce sectarianism and inter-regional tensions, particularly if policies proposed by the national government are blocked by a single locality. This theory is supported by evidence showing that the likelihood of violent protest by minority groups is greater in consensus democracies than majoritarian ones (Clark et al), perhaps because federalism emboldened secessionists within a particular area. Therefore, the geographic inclusiveness which is a part of consensus democracy seems also to lead to polarisation over time, along ethnic lines.

So, to conclude, it is apparent that the disaggregating effects of consensus democracy do increase the level of polarisation over time, by hampering the democratic responsiveness of the country to changes in voter opinion, and by formalising pre-existing geographic divisions through federalism. Although the more limited electoral competitiveness of consensus democracies is likely to act against this and slow polarisation, it is certainly true that the inclusiveness of consensus democracies leads to more polarisation than otherwise.

Q11. Do strong states always arise in competition with other states?

No, strong states do not always arise in competition with other states, although state-to-state competition was crucial for the development of state capacity in early modern Europe, which, through colonisation, was indirectly responsible for many of the high-capacity states we see today. In this essay, I first present a brief conceptualisation and operationalisation of state capacity, before arguing that the emergence of strong states in Europe was intimately linked to war-making and competition. However, I go on to demonstrate that there exist today a number of states which also have high state capacity and did not historically have intense competition with others. I argue that their existence can be attributed to colonisation and the introduction of capacity-enhancing institutions by European nations, as well as the incentives faced by dynastic rulers trying to quell internal competition. Finally, I conclude that competition with other states is not necessary for the emergence of a strong state, although it had a significant effect on European development and the creation of robust institutions.

State capacity, or stateness, is often thought of as having several distinct axes, such as judicial, financial, and informational. These reflect the extent to which the state manages to enforce its laws, collect taxes, gather data, and exercise a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence. However, as Spruyt notes, there is extremely strong complementarity between these dimensions. States which fail to collect taxes will not have the resources to enforce their laws; having a stable business environment is crucial for the sort of economy which produces large tax revenues, and so on. Therefore, it is more useful to view state capacity as the ability of the government to successfully implement its desired policies, an end which requires all the dimensions mentioned above, but makes no assumptions about the regime type of the state (since dictatorships can also have high state capacity). Modern stateness indices show that state capacity is highest in Europe and North America, lowest in Africa, and in between across Asia and Latin America.

The emergence of state capacity in Europe can be traced back to developments in military technology – brought about due to competition with other states – which created increasing returns to scale in violence. Medieval Europe had extremely low state capacity, with few centralised institutions, and most taxation happening at a local level between a lord and his peasants. With archery becoming more widespread, kings no longer benefitted from having a small number of elite knights, and instead needed to muster large armies to win in wars against competing states. Coupled with a new need for fortifications against increasing sophisticated military technology, this created the incentives for centralisation which eventually led to higher state capacity. Since success in battle required amassing huge financial resources to equip and maintain a large army, an extractive apparatus was set up, with the king becoming the single most powerful person in the country, rather than influence resting primarily with nobles across the land. As Olson demonstrates, the accumulation of power at the centre led, in turn, to greater investments in public goods which raised the king's tax take, something which there was no incentive for under the feudalist system of "roving bandits". Therefore, we can see that in Europe at least, competition with other states was central to the emergence of strong states. Without the advancements in war-making technology, increasing returns to scale in violence would not have occurred, and there would have been no reason for kings to create state-wide institutions.

Commented [R3]: *Luigi comments*

- Clear and linear argument. The institutional argument for post-colonial states is particularly appropriate.
- For China, periods of inter-state war predate the longer period of centralized authority.
- Latin America and Africa would also be good cases for analysing the other side of the argument: that competition and war might not lead to strong states, absent other conditions.

Mark: 68

However, there are many states today where competition with other states was unimportant in their development of high capacity. Australia and New Zealand are two prominent examples demonstrating the effect that colonisation can have on accelerating the process of state capacity growth. Those two nations did not face significant competition or conflict with neighbours during their modern history, and yet have similarly high levels of stateness to Western European democracies. The reason for this is that European settlers imported institutions when colonising, and those institutions have persisted to the present. As Acemoglu et al demonstrate using an instrumental-variable analysis with settler mortality rates, there is a clear causal chain linking the creation of early institutions in the 18th and 19th centuries to modern institutions, and then to various measures of current state judicial and financial capacity. This shows that competition with other states is certainly not necessary for high state capacity today.

Moreover, even in states which historically had little competition with neighbouring states, there are instances where relatively strong states emerged without the importation of European institutions, because of efforts by rulers to deal with internal competition. China, a country which saw several centuries of dynastic rule and had high levels of ethnic homogeneity, developed some elements of high state capacity without external influence. For dynastic emperors who expected their heirs to inherit the throne, there was a strong incentive to invest in public goods which would increase the size of future tax revenues. As a result, Chinese rulers did indeed contribute towards the creation of an effective centralised bureaucracy, strengthening their line of succession's grip on power, but also increasing their ability to implement their desired policies, a central component of state capacity.

So, to conclude, it is clear that strong states do not exclusively arise in competition with other states. The growth in European state capacity was certainly hastened by intense inter-state competition and accompanying developments in military technology, but the resulting institutions were successfully copied across to other colonised nations which did not themselves need to be in competition with other states. In addition, high state capacity can emerge as a result of rulers taking actions to increase the long-term economic success of their nations, even in the absence of competition from other states.