
Original Article

Reassessing Duvergerian semi-presidentialism: An electoral perspective

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Abstract The oldest definition of semi-presidentialism requires a president possessing considerable constitutional power. Subsequent research has listed presidential competences, but has not empirically set their respective weighting. In order to assess the relevant competences that determine presidential power, this article presents an indicator of relative turnout in 28 parliamentary democracies with a popularly elected president. The core hypothesis is that if presidents have considerable power, the turnout is higher for presidential elections than for legislative ones. The results show that presidents are deemed 'strong' when they play a central role in foreign policy. This finding is compatible with different analyses of presidential regimes and provides a clear and coherent criterion for identifying semi-presidential regimes. *Comparative European Politics* advance online publication, 2 July 2012; doi:10.1057/cep.2012.19

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Introduction

Research on semi-presidentialism has grown considerably in the last few years. The main reason for this is a considerable increase in countries adopting democratic regimes with a directly elected president and a government accountable to the legislature. In the post-war period until 1990, there were seven such countries (the six European countries cited above and Peru from 1979 to 1992). Since 1990, there have been 30 (see Appendix A), including a large number of Eastern European countries. This has triggered an increasing comparative literature on semi-presidential regimes, compared with the previous case-oriented literature. Semi-presidential regimes – compared with



parliamentary ones – are characterized by presidential authority in negotiating the formation and behaviour of government (Duverger, 1980; Sartori, 1994; Elgie, 2004; Shugart, 2005; Amorim Neto and Strøm, 2006; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, 2009a). This article analyzes 28 semi-presidential regimes in order to clarify which institutional features determine presidents who can play a relevant role in controlling the government.

Duvergerian semi-presidentialism

The first definition of semi-presidentialism was proposed by Duverger (1980). According to this, a political regime is considered semi-presidential if the constitution that established it combines three elements: (i) the president is elected by universal suffrage; (ii) he possesses quite considerable powers, and (iii) he has opposite him a prime minister and ministers who possess executive and governmental power and can stay in office as long as parliament does not oppose them. These three conditions are theoretically sufficient to identify a semi-presidential regime, but practically they prove to be too vague to be automatic criteria. This trouble is particularly due to Condition (ii) (Elgie, 2004; Shugart, 2005). If one only considers Conditions (i) and (iii), it is possible to draw up an undisputable list of semi-presidential countries. For instance, in post-war Western Europe, there would have been France, Finland, Austria, Ireland, Iceland and Portugal. In these countries the president is directly elected and the government is responsible to the parliament. Regrettably, however, some of these countries seem in no way different from a parliamentary regime except for the direct election of the president. For instance, Stepan and Skach (1993) and Sartori (1994), among others, have refused to regard Ireland as semi-presidential because its president's powers were as limited as they would be under a parliamentary system. In the 1990s, most political scientists did not use a constitutional approach to discuss presidential strength. Austria and Iceland, for example, were classified as semi-presidential by Duverger, but excluded by Sartori. The latter listed Sri Lanka as semi-presidential, however, despite the fact that in this country the prime minister is not accountable to the legislature. Thus, as underlined by Elgie (2004), Condition (ii) concerns some dispositional properties of the system and therefore – according to him – introduces an inevitable element of subjectivity into the classification process. More radically, Schleiter and Morgan-Jones (2009b) regard Duverger's second condition – that the president possess quite strong powers – as tautological. The point is to identify what institutional features give presidents these powers. For these reasons, scholars have abandoned Condition (ii).



Post-Duvergerian definitions

Several recent studies have used the principal-agent theory to clarify how semi-presidential regimes work (Amorim Neto and Strøm, 2006; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, 2009a, b, c; Samuels and Shugart, 2010). Semi-presidential regimes are characterized by the fact that presidents are not agents of the parliament, because they are directly elected by the electorate. Therefore, insofar as presidents can select, remove or keep from office members of the government, they are central actors in negotiations over government formation. Thus, presidents and assemblies are agents of the electorate and they negotiate to control the government. The latter is therefore the agent of both president and assembly.

This theoretical approach clarifies why semi-presidential countries operate differently from parliamentary countries: a government under the authority of two independent principals is different in its behaviour and in its composition (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, 2009c; Samuels and Shugart, 2010).

In spite of this theoretical improvement, the Duvergerian problem of presidential power remains. Indeed, presidential authority over the government is not exclusively given by the president's popular mandate separate from the assembly – by Condition (i) – because while this condition gives presidents a specific incentive, different from that of the assembly, to influence the government, it is not sufficient to give the president the effective power to use it. Tavits (2009) has demonstrated that direct elections do not yield more active and contentious presidents than indirect ones. The 'authority' or 'strength' of presidents cannot entirely be accounted for by their direct election.

Therefore, in some semi-presidential regimes, presidents cannot exercise their authority over the government, despite wanting to, for lack of power. Thus, the power of presidents remains an important variable in predicting the specificity of semi-presidential governments (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, 2009c). In other words, with weak presidencies, there is no difference between semi-presidential and parliamentary regimes, just as Duverger said.

The power of presidents

Some comparative studies offer useful measures of presidential power. Siaroff (2003) uses nine criteria – including popular election – to measure the strength of a president. These criteria are based on the actual powers that presidents exercise behaviourally. Other contributions measure presidential strength from what is formally written in constitutions. Krouwel (2003) and Protsyk (2005) have suggested applying such a comparative measure to the Eastern European countries. The most important classification based on formal constitutional



competences has been proposed by Shugart and Carey (1992), and has been adapted to semi-presidential regimes by Metcalf (2000).

The first difficulty with those different indicators is that they are not reciprocally correlated (Elgie, 2009). This fact alone confirms the inevitable subjectivity in measuring the power of a president.

More fundamentally, these indexes take into account several specific competences, like the right to veto (RV) or the ability to dissolve the legislature. These are described below. This set of competences is supposed to describe presidential strength in equal measure.¹ For example, a president with the RV, but without the ability to dissolve the legislature, is as strong as one without the RV but with the ability to dissolve. However, we do not really know if presidential negotiating power is higher with the RV or the ability to dissolve the legislature. No empirical research has established to what extent each specific competence enhances presidential strength. As a consequence, we also do not know which minimal competences a president needs to affect government behaviour and formation, or which competences are irrelevant.

The lack of empirical research on this point is due to the difficulty of measuring the power of presidents independently of their institutional competences. Let us consider, for instance, the RV: Does it give a president *more* power or is it *a* power? The Siaroff and Metcalf indexes implicitly choose the second possibility. However, presidents might never use their RV even if they could. Or they may use it only for irrelevant issues. In essence, institutional power is not measurable if it has no clear consequences.

The argument

The aim of this article is to evaluate the existing measures of presidential power using one of its specific consequences. An inductive strategy is followed. Using the theory of second-order elections, I assume that a powerful president may be identified by citizens' attitudes. More specifically, if people judge that the presidential election is important, then their president may be considered quite strong. Moreover, to measure the importance given by citizens to the presidential election, it is relevant to compare turnout in this election with that in the legislative one.

Using 'relative turnout' as a dependent variable, I will estimate what presidents can do to make their election at least as important for citizens as the parliamentary election. These estimations reveal, first, that the Siaroff classification predicts this effect better than others do. Second, that among several competencies, a presidential role in foreign affairs is necessary and sufficient for a president to be considered powerful. This result confirms several analyses made in case-oriented studies (Arter, 1987; Hayward, 1993;



Elgie, 1999), but it is not supported by a general theoretical model. For this reason, I conclude with a theoretical discussion on the relationship between a president's role in foreign policy and their ability to influence the formation and behaviour of the government.

An Empirical Solution: A Way to Measure Presidential Strength

The first empirical studies of presidential power in semi-presidential regimes were about France. These studies were based on the fact that the distribution of power between the two executives in dual systems is not clear. Using citizens' perceptions of policy responsibility, they tried to specify the relative strength of the French president and prime minister. Lewis-Beck (1997) and Lewis-Beck and Nadeau (2000) have found that during cohabitation – when the two executive heads belong to different and opposing parties – voters believe that the prime minister, rather than the president, is responsible for the economic situation. This means that if voters' view of the economic situation is positive, they will disproportionately support the presidential candidate from the prime minister's party or coalition, which may be the prime minister personally. Inversely, if the economic trend is negative, people tend to vote against the prime minister. However, these authors also highlight that cohabitation affects the intensity of the economic vote. Although the prime minister is considered the 'chief', the president shares accountability for the economic situation. Outside cohabitation, Auberger (2008) has shown how both president and prime minister are affected by economic voting.

Second-order elections and semi-presidential regimes

These methods are usually used to predict election results. However, they are a useful way to determine in which institutions power is polarized in democracies where the citizens know how the system works. In particular, when an electoral office is seen to be less important by voters, its election obeys the 'second-order elections' pattern.

Second-order elections present the following characteristics:

- i Turnout is expected to be lower than in national elections;
- ii Voters are more inclined to vote for non-governmental parties, rather than the usual parties they would vote for in a national election; and
- iii The electoral score obtained by the governmental party depends on the placement of this election in the electoral cycle, in relation to the first-order election (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Reif *et al.*, 1997).



Thus, for instance, local election results are predicted by the second-order election theory.

The second-order election model can be applied to presidential elections in semi-presidential systems. Indeed, if the prime minister in semi-presidential systems is the main figure responsible for the economy, the presidential election should be a second-order election. In other words, if the president is not powerful enough, his or her elections will follow the second-order model. Magalhães and Fortès (2005) tested this idea on 19 semi-presidential democracies. They found that while semi-presidential democracies with 'weaker' presidencies tend towards the pattern predicted by the second-order model, that is clearly not the case where presidents hold more considerable powers. Magalhães and Fortès use the Siaroff classification to identify 'weak' and 'strong' presidencies. In a different way, Siaroff and Merer (2002) have found that turnout in parliamentary systems is lower where there are 'relevant' elected presidents. In other words, the greater the difference in turnout between the presidential election and the legislative election, the stronger the powers of the president.²

Turnout and presidential powers

These comparative studies have only regarded presidential competences *as if* their causal influence on the real power of presidents has been established. I would argue that no evidence has yet been provided that establishes such an influence. In order to provide such evidence, this article analyses the relationship between a specific competence held by the president and perceived presidential strength, that is relative turnout.

More precisely, the central question of this article is: What can presidents do to make presidential elections first-order elections? Notice that constitutional and behavioural competences can be distinguished. This article focuses on the second aspect. Often, presidents actually do what constitutions allow them to. However, certain constitutions are ambiguous and do not precisely appoint each competence; presidents can *de facto* take new competencies. In France, for instance, during the first cohabitation in the 1980s, the president and prime minister contended their right to attend international summits and to control foreign policy. Since then, France has been represented internationally by both authorities, but the president has become the main one, especially outside cohabitation periods. On the other hand, institutional equilibria can give presidents an incentive not to use their constitutional remit.

Thus, the question presented here can be understood in two ways. First, which constitutional asset, compatible with Duverger's Conditions (i) and (iii), will make presidential elections first-order? Second, which presidential



behavioural competences are relevant to transforming their elections into first-order elections?

The second proposition perhaps describes a more direct causality than the first. However, the main aim of this analysis is to understand which constitutional competencies make presidents strong.

Data and Methodology

I have supposed that if the president's real power is strong, his or her perceived power is also strong. More specifically, the former is supposed to cause the latter. Therefore, the perceived power observed under the criteria of a first- or second-order presidential election is the dependent variable, and the real power, measured by the classic indicators based on presidential competences, is the independent variable.

The easiest way to measure whether a presidential election is a first- or a second-order election is to use relative turnout. The difference in turnout between presidential and legislative elections indicates the perceived relative importance of the president versus the assembly. The data here used on relative turnout has been taken from the Website of International IDEA. I have taken into account the turnout among registered voters, in order to avoid problems due to differences and changes over time in registration laws.

The analysis is conducted in two steps: at the country level, and then at the election level.

Country-level analysis

At the country level, this article provides 28 observations and 2 indicators of relative turnout (Appendix A). The first is the average turnout in presidential elections minus the average turnout in parliamentary elections over time (RTA). The second column is the average of the differences in turnout between the presidential election and the closest parliamentary election (RTCEA). This second indicator allows some temporal bias – such as the structural decrease in turnout in modern democracies – to be avoided. In fact, both indicators are very similar (the Pearson coefficient of correlation is 0.98. They figure in Appendix A). Both indicators will be used to evaluate the relevance of the main institutional indicators of presidential power.

Concerning presidential competences, two classic indicators may be used because they apply to more than 10 countries. The first indicator is that developed by Shugart and Carey (1992) and adjusted by Metcalf (2000) for semi-presidential regimes. It is based on constitutional competencies. Only

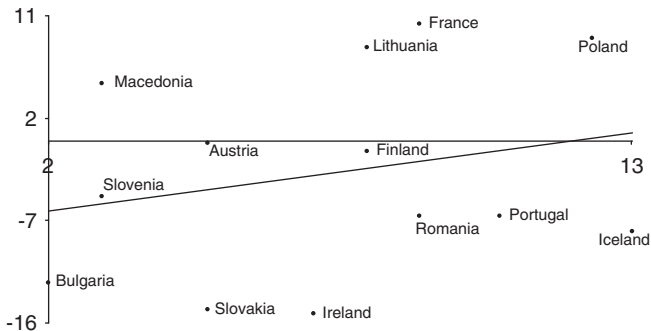


Figure 1: The impact of Metcalf index (X) on RTA (Y).

Notes: The Metcalf index (calculated by Tavits (2008)) has a positive relationship with the relative turnout, but is statistically not significant. Here is presented its relationship with the DTA indicator, but the result is similar to that with the RTCEA indicator. Only 13 cases are considered.

13 countries are available. In two cases – Poland and Finland – there were important constitutional changes in presidential competences: in 2000 for Finland and in 1997 for Poland. Despite these changes, the Metcalf index remains 8 in Finland (Tavits, 2008). In Poland, the Metcalf indicator moves from 13 to 9. I use a mixed measure equal to 12.25. (This choice is justified below.) Figure 1 shows the statistical relationship between this indicator of presidential strength and the relative turnout average (RTA) indicator of relative turnout.

The second indicator was developed by Siaroff (2003). As mentioned, the Siaroff index, unlike Shugart and Carey or Metcalf’s measures, does not just record constitutional rules but the actual competences of presidents. The endogenization of long-term practices in the Siaroff index allows measurement of the impact of actual competences of presidents on relative turnout.³

It covers all 28 countries, but its scores considerably change when there has been an important constitutional reform. Among the three countries cited above, the powers of Portugal’s president powers decreased in 1982 (for instance, removing his central role in foreign policy (CRFP)). Such changes probably do not inspire a rapid reaction from citizens. An institutional change tends first to modify the balance of the institutional powers and then progressively influence voters’ behaviour. In order to take this temporal delay into account, I give each country a Siaroff score equal to the mean of its score per year. For example, Portugal has a Siaroff score of 6 between 1976 and 1982 (7 years), and 3 after 1982 (26 years). The average of these scores is 3.6. This is close to 3, but it takes into account the 7 first years and their psychological impact on Portugal’s citizens. Figure 2 shows how the Siaroff

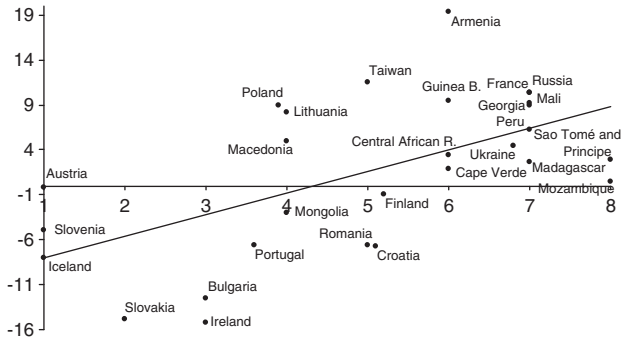


Figure 2: The impact of Siaroff index (*X*) on RTA (*Y*).
Notes: The Siaroff indicator has a positive and significant relationship with the relative turnout. Using the adjusted R^2 , this model predicts 32 per cent of the DTA variance and 33 per cent of the RTCEA variance.

indicator predicts relative turnout considerably better than the previous indicator.

As expected, the Siaroff indicator of presidential power based on behavioural competences is significantly more correlated to relative turnout than the Shugart-Carey-Metcalf one. It can predict one-third of the variance in relative turnout. More precisely, the statistical relationship taken from a linear regression is:

$$RTA = SI \times 2.4 + - 10.4 \tag{1}$$

$$RTCEA = SI \times 2.4 + - 10.5 \tag{2}$$

If an elected president has a Siaroff score of 0, we can expect turnout to be around 10 percentage points more in the legislative than in the presidential election. On average, compared with the legislative election, each individual competence the president has will increase voter turnout by 2.4 per cent.

In order to test the validity of the results, I separate the countries into those classified free and partly free (or not free) in terms of political rights by Freedom House (Appendix A). Indeed, the second-order election model might not work in elections that are only partly free or not free at all. Those countries classified as ‘free’ in most of their elections were considered free overall. When only the free countries are considered, the results do not change for either the Shugart-Carey-Metcalf index (in which there are just 13 cases), or the Siaroff indicator (17 cases). Moreover, even considering just the 13 cases covered by the Metcalf index, the Siaroff indicator predicts variance in relative



turnout much better, with a significance of 10 per cent. This suggests that the partly free countries obey the second-order election model, at least for turnout.

The main merit of the Siaroff scores is that they cover a considerable number of countries. They have recently been revised for African countries (Cranenburgh, 2008) and in Portuguese-speaking countries (Lobo and Neto, 2009). However, the Siaroff study remains the most complete study on the power of presidents in a comparative perspective. Its correlation with relative turnout confirms its relevance for analysing the link between what presidents do and how important their election is.

For countries with popularly elected presidents, Siaroff (2003) suggested eight dichotomous features by which to measure presidential power. First, the elections of the president and the legislature are concurrent. Siaroff states that a synchronized election maximizes presidential influence over the composition of the national assembly. Second, the discretionary appointment by the president of some key individuals, such as the prime minister, other cabinet ministers, high court judges, senior military figures or central bankers, increases presidential strength. Third, Siaroff focuses on the ability of the president to chair formal cabinet meetings. Fourth, the president is stronger if he has the RV legislation, including the right to send it back for further consideration. The fifth indicator relates to whether a president has broad emergency or decree powers for national disorder or economic matters, which are effectively valid for an unlimited time. The sixth is whether a president has a CRFP, including presiding over a security or defence council, having a say in the choice of foreign and defence ministers, and attending and speaking for the country at international political meetings and summits. Seventh, presidents may have a central role in forming the government. Here government formation refers to the ability to select, remove or keep from office an individual like the prime minister, or a party, like a section of the cabinet. This competence corresponds to what Samuels and Shugart (2010) have identified as the specific feature of semi-presidential regimes. Finally, there is the ability of the president to dissolve the legislature at will, or at most subject to time restrictions.

Before analyzing the relative impact of these different competences, I will consider other control variables that can influence relative turnout. In the literature on turnout, the main predictors (such as voting age, median age, median education and level of development) are not supposed to influence legislative and the presidential elections differently (Blais, 2006). Therefore, they are not retained here. I have thus taken into account the PR (versus majoritarian) electoral system and unicameralism (versus bicameralism). Both institutions are expected to have a positive impact on turnout in legislative elections, but not in presidential elections (Fornos *et al*, 2004). In spite of their unclear impact (Blais, 2006), I have considered them as dummy control variables.⁴



Election-level analysis

In the country-level analysis, the results may be deemed only partially reliable because of the small N and the subsequent difficulty of using other control variables.

In order to assure the reliability of these findings, a second empirical analysis is given, in which N corresponds to 125 presidential elections occurring in the 28 democracies with an elected president and a government accountable to the legislature presented in Appendix A. This time-series analysis is useful because presidential competences have changed over time in some case, and because it makes it easier to take into account more adequate controls.

The dependent variable is the relative turnout. It is calculated as the difference between the turnout in a presidential election and that in the same year or in the closest previous year's parliamentary election. The difference with the previous model is the fact that long-standing regimes (such as Finland, Iceland, Ireland or Austria) include more observations than new regimes. Moreover, international differences in turnout are much larger than differences in turnout within individual countries, and there may be systematic differences in the magnitude of the turnout gap between presidential and legislative elections too. In order to solve these problems, I use a method to correct the variance of the errors known as 'clustering correction'. The corrected variance for each country provides a corrected standard error of the estimated coefficients that does not suffer from heteroscedasticity. Thus, the model adjusts standard errors for the 28 clustered countries in order to take into account the lack of independence of the observations.⁵

The Siaroff dummy independent variables are applied to each election. They are generally identical for each country. However, in some countries – as noted above – some important changes have been effected over time. In Finland, Portugal, Croatia and Poland there were changes in the president's role in foreign policy and government formation. In Finland and Portugal, the president's discretionary appointment powers decreased in 2000 and in 1982, respectively. Finally, in Finland the role of the president in cabinet meetings has also changed. The election of president and legislature took place on the same day in Guinea Bissau (before 2003), Mozambique and Romania, and was observed once in Croatia (1992) and Madagascar (1993), and twice in the Central African Republic (1993 and 2003).

With that specification, it is possible to control more external factors that influence relative turnout. Besides *unicameralism* and *PR electoral system*, I have added *compulsory voting* to the institutional factors (Blais, 2006; Geys, 2006). Even if this is a predictive factor of turnout, it should have little effect because it encourages turnout in both presidential and parliamentary elections. It also concerns only two countries (Austria and Peru).

Among classic political factors, I have chosen the *closeness* of presidential elections, which is the percentage vote gap between the first and second candidate in the race (Geys, 2006) and which should increase the turnout in presidential elections. We have also taken into account *GDP per capita*, which may be considered a proxy for campaign expenditures. However, there is not a clear way to provide a specific prediction for this control variable, for the same reasons as for compulsory voting. The variable *same year: presidential first* is more important. Sometimes both elections occur in the same year, but several months apart. The first election is expected to influence the second. If the presidential election comes first, the variable is 1 (in four cases – two in Austria and two in France – it was provoked by the dissolution of the assembly). If the parliamentary election comes first, the code is –1. In other cases, the value is 0. Thus, the elections are distinguished according to the number of *years between the two elections*. Taking into account ‘voter fatigue’ (Franklin, 2004), this variable is expected to have a positive impact: the longer there is between a presidential election and a parliamentary election, the higher the presidential turnout. I also use a variable representing the *year of presidential election*. Relative turnout may change over time. For example, the development of the media has increased the visibility of the president and of her/his election, and so is expected to have a positive influence on relative turnout. The last political variable considered is whether the country is *free* (1), distinguished from partly free or not free (0).

Finally, socio-economic factors are not expected to give a different prediction concerning presidential and parliamentary elections. However, I have selected *population size*, which is the most important of them according to the Geys’ meta-analysis (2006). People are expected to vote less the greater the size of the community. Again, however, any difference there is, is expected between presidential and parliamentary elections.

Results

Country level

Table 1 is an OLS model in which the dependent variable is the RTA and the independent variables are the eight dummy variables described by Siaroff. Notice that Table 1 shows – in line with Fornos *et al* (2004) – a slight effect of unicameralism on relative turnout (negative as expected), but no effect from PR representation.

The main result is that most of the variables are not significant. Model (1) shows that the turnout for electing a president who is deprived of all eight powers is about 6 percentage points lower than that in legislative elections. The



Table 1: Explaining the RTA with the Siaroff dichotomous competences of presidents in 28 democracies with an elected president and a government accountable to the legislature

	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>Constitutional competences</i>			
Concurrent election of president and legislature	2.91 (3.42)	—	—
Discretionary appointment powers	0.94 (4.31)	—	—
Chairing of cabinet meeting	-1.49 (3.29)	—	—
RV	-5.83* (3.11)	—	-5.47** (2.30)
Long-term emergency or decree powers	-3.35 (3.18)	—	—
Central role in foreign policy	18.90*** (4.44)	16.72*** (2.75)	17.86*** (2.60)
Central role in government formation	0.41 (4.32)	—	—
Ability to dissolve the legislature	4.65 (3.11)	—	4.10* (2.26)
<i>Institutions fostering parliamentary turnout</i>			
Unicameralism	-5.02* (2.51)	-4.81* (2.52)	-4.98** (2.33)
PR electoral system	2.86 (3.13)	0.99 (2.93)	-1.09 (2.75)
<i>Constant</i>	-4.17 (3.04)	-6.12** (2.24)	-4.01* (4.44)
<i>N</i>	28	28	28
<i>F</i>	5.76***	13.53***	11.89***
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.64	0.58	0.62

* $P < 0.1$, ** $P < 0.05$, *** $P < 0.01$.

variable that can transform a presidential election into a first-order election is the central role of the president in foreign policy. This increases turnout in presidential election over a legislative one by about 17 percentage points, and it alone accounts for 56 per cent of the variance (58 per cent with the control variables, see Column 2). In other words, a CRFP better describes the strength of the president than the complex indicator provided by Siaroff.

It is also interesting to notice that the RV is slightly significant, but has a negative relationship with the RTA. That is, a president with the RV is weaker rather than stronger.

Both results are surprising. One might expect presidential competences linked to domestic rather than foreign policy to have a higher impact. Yet none



of the competences that increase the president's role in domestic policymaking are significant. The RV does not help this power of initiative, but is a way to influence the legislature. However, its impact on power is negative.

However, these results have yet to be confirmed at the election level. For now, some statistical difficulties must be analysed. Indeed, some independent variables are correlated with each other. In order to avoid this problem, the estimations have been changed and different models tested (not reported here). It is possible to confirm that the impact of CRFP is robust, whatever control variable is used. The two indicators that are most correlated (>0.5) with CRFP and significantly correlated with relative turnout are discretionary appointment competences and a central role in forming the government (see Appendix B). This is in accordance with what we know about the role played by decree powers (Protsyk, 2005) and the power to appoint or dismiss ministers (Samuels and Shugart, 2010) in terms of a president's ability to achieve political goals, in both presidential and semi-presidential regimes. However, compared with control of foreign policy, the ability of the other two competences just mentioned to correctly predict relative turnout is lower, particularly in some key cases. In contrast, the discretionary appointment powers indicator predicts high levels of turnout in presidential elections in Ireland, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Poland. This prediction fails in the first four countries, and particularly in Ireland – which is well known for having a weak presidency and the lowest relative turnout. Having a central role in forming the government is strongly correlated with the presidential control of foreign policy ($R=0.7$). These two indicators are generally associated, except in Lithuania, Macedonia, Mongolia and Cape Verde, where the president controls foreign policy but not the formation of government. The only case that clearly underlines the priority of foreign policy is Lithuania, where the presidential turnout is definitely higher than in parliamentary elections. However, this gap is decreasing: in the last presidential election in 2009, 52 per cent of electors voted, which is 3 percentage points higher than the 2008 parliamentary election. Thus, although with all the available data, the model tends to highlight the 'foreign policy' over the 'government formation' factor, a different result is possible.

The best model, without collinearity problems and with significant coefficients, is given in Column 3. Two-thirds of the RTA variance are explained by three features of presidential power: the CRFP, the ability to dissolve the legislature (ADL) and the RV (with this last having a negative influence). This does not change when we consider only the 17 free countries. It predicts a little less accurately when the dependent variable is the RTCEA ($R^2 = 61$ per cent, for all countries).

From these data, it is possible to build an inductive indicator of presidential strength. The CRFP is the main predictor; according to the coefficients in

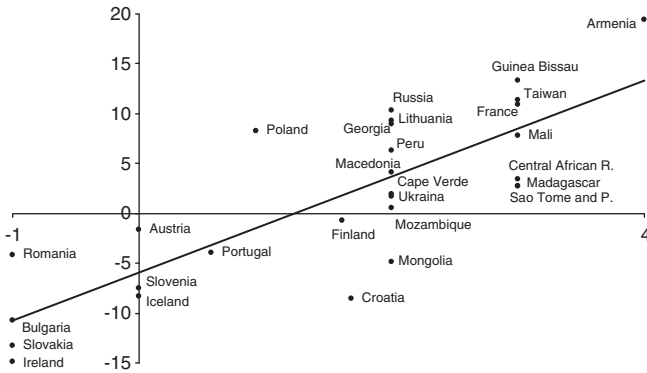


Figure 3: The impact of the inductive indicator (X) on RTA (Y).
Notes: The inductive indicator has a positive and significant relationship with the relative turnout. Using the adjusted R^2 , this model predicts 69 per cent of the variance of the DTA and 61 per cent of the variance of the RTCEA. In free countries (17 cases), the prediction is slightly better for the RTCEA (64 per cent) and slightly worse for the DTA (67 per cent).

Table 1, its weight is about three times greater than the other predictors. The latter have a similar weight, but the ADL has a positive impact whereas RV has a negative influence. Finally, the indicator is:

$$\text{Presidential Power} = 3 \times \text{CRFP} + \text{ADL} - \text{VR}$$

This indicator starts from -1 (a president with the RV and without control over foreign policy and the ability to dissolve the legislature) up to a maximum of 4 (a president with all the powers and without the RV). Figure 3 displays the relationship between relative turnout and this inductive indicator (II).

It is more than twice as predictive as the indicator previously used. The linear relationship is expressed by the following equations:

$$\text{RTA} = \text{II} \times 5 - 6.2 \tag{3}$$

$$\text{RTCEA} = \text{II} \times 4.8 - 5.9 \tag{4}$$

Looking at the single countries, we can note two outlying cases: Poland and Croatia. Both countries in their relatively short democratic history have reformed the role of their president in foreign policy. This may explain their anomalous positions, even if it does not explain why the effect differs between the two. Croatian people vote much more in legislative elections, whereas Poles vote much more in presidential elections. The difference may lie in some slight differences not picked up by the dichotomous Siaroff variables. For example, in Poland it is possible to dissolve the legislature, but not in a discretionary

way, whereas in Croatia this is not the case (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, 2009a).

However, deviations from the predicted trend may also be due to the particular history of the countries studied. In Poland, the Third Republic was established in 1997 and inaugurated a period of cohabitation. President Kwaśniewski in fact maintained his role in foreign policy when Poland became joined the European Union and NATO. Subsequently, Poland was governed by a president and a prime minister (or president of council of ministers) who were twins. This setting may have influenced the perception of presidential powers in Poland. In contrast, most of Croatia's integration in international organizations was made in the 1990s. The 2000 reform, which weakened the powers of the president, was associated with a homogenous government in which President Mesić failed in bringing his country into the European Union and met considerable difficulties in political reconciliation in the Balkans. His influence on foreign policy has naturally decreased.

Beyond these particular cases, Figure 3 shows that no countries have a score of 1. This means that there are currently no countries in which the president has the ability to dissolve the legislature, but has neither CRFP nor the RV.⁶ It is tempting to place at this boundary the difference between the parliamentary democracies with an elected but weak president (Romania, Bulgaria, Ireland, Iceland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Austria, Portugal, and today also Poland, Croatia and Finland) and those with a president with 'quite strong powers' (see Appendix A). If this boundary is correct, the role of the president in foreign policy is empirically necessary and sufficient to its definition.

Election level

Table 2 confirms overall the results found in Table 1. Presidential control over foreign policy remains the most predictive factor in bolstering relative turnout for presidential elections. The positive impact of the ability to dissolve the legislature is also confirmed. However, the negative impact of the presidential RV is invalidated. It is important to underline that the significance of the ability to dissolve the assembly is conditional: it is significant only if the role of the president in foreign policy is controlled (this result is not presented in Table 2, but Appendix B shows how the ability to dissolve the assembly is, in itself, weakly correlated with relative turnout). This fact has two consequences. First, it highlights the independence and robustness of foreign policy competence over other behavioural competences. Second, it allows the impact of the other variables to be better understood. If CRFP equals 1, then the impact of the ability to dissolve the assembly is not significant; otherwise it is significant. It



Table 2: Explaining the relative turnout between presidential and parliamentary elections with the Siaroff dichotomous competences of presidents in 125 elections

	(OLS)	(OLS 2)	(Logit)
<i>Constitutional competences</i>			
Concurrent election of president and legislature	-4.08 (3.65)	-3.97 (2.94)	1.06 (1.16)
Discretionary appointment powers	4.68 (5.13)	— —	— —
Chairing of cabinet meeting	-3.41 (3.54)	— —	— —
RV	-4.20 (3.15)	-2.75 (2.95)	0.23 (0.82)
Long-term emergency or decree powers	-1.96 (3.27)	— —	— —
Central role in foreign policy	8.08* (3.01)	10.73** (2.55)	1.69** (0.64)
Central role in government formation	4.08 (3.20)	— —	— —
Ability to dissolve the legislature	4.50 (2.68)	5.38* (2.22)	1.43* (0.65)
<i>Institutions fostering relative turnout</i>			
Unicameralism	0.47 (2.31)	0.12 (1.98)	0.43 (0.67)
PR electoral system	2.56 (3.15)	1.52 (3.05)	1.23 (1.54)
Compulsory vote	5.38 (2.76)	5.06 (2.58)	1.91* (0.91)
Year of presidential election	0.11 (0.09)	0.09 (0.09)	-0.01 (0.03)
Years between the two elections	-0.67 (1.07)	-0.83 (1.10)	0.00 (0.22)
Same year: Presidential first	7.77** (2.17)	6.83** (2.01)	0.97 (0.56)
Free country	-2.17 (2.73)	-3.49 (2.85)	-1.22 (0.80)
Closeness	0.12* (0.06)	0.12* (0.05)	0.04** (0.01)
Population size	9.59 (5.63)	7.88 (3.98)	2.96 (1.68)
GDP per capita	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
<i>Constant</i>	-221 (177)	-179 (183)	13.5 (58.7)
<i>N</i>	125	125	125
<i>F</i> (Wald ²)	19.20**	23.13**	48.23**
Adjusted <i>R</i> ² (Pseudo <i>R</i> ²)	0.45	0.43	0.35

* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$.

Standard errors are adjusted for 28 clusters corresponding to democracies with elected president and a government accountable to the legislature.



is possible to hypothesize that the presidential ability to dissolve the assembly is an irrelevant power if the president controls foreign policy because he or she can directly influence government action that way. Without this influence, however, the ability to threaten the assembly in a credible way can give presidents a strategy to counterbalancing the predominant influence of parliament on the government.

These results are maintained as the OLS2 and Logit models minimize the problems with collinearity. The Logit model uses a dichotomous variable as a dependent variable. When turnout in one presidential election is not lower than in the previous parliamentary election, this equals 1; otherwise it equals 0. This tallies with the distinction between first-order and second-order elections. This configuration does not change the main results, with the effect of presidential control over foreign policy remaining decisive and the ability to dissolve the assembly remaining conditional.

Among the control variables, the positive impact of unicameralism on parliamentary turnout is not confirmed. In the Logit model, those elections with compulsory voting favour the president. The absence of a significant relationship between the PR electoral system and relative turnout is also noted. On the other hand, the closeness of presidential elections significantly increases relative turnout in favour of the presidential, as expected. Among the other variables considered, the only other observation is the significant effect of the order in which elections occur in a year: if the presidential election comes first, its turnout increases in relation to the parliamentary election turnout. However, as far as the Logit model is concerned, this effect does not seem decisive enough to transform the presidential election into a second-order election.

To sum up, the main result is unexpected because it has been overlooked in the literature: whoever controls foreign policy in fact has a distinct advantage in mobilizing voters. The second result – the possibility for presidents to intervene in the legislative sphere through dissolution – has already been identified as an important factor (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, 2009a). In the next section, I will analyse how useful these findings are helping us better understand the institutional equilibria in this kind of regime.

Discussion: What Do We Learn?

In post-Duvergerian studies, parliamentary regimes differ from semi-presidential ones in that in the former the government is the agent of the legislature alone, whereas in the latter the government is not the sole agent, but has a second principal – a popularly elected president – who has incentives that are distinct from those of the assembly. However, the ability of presidents to negotiate the



formation and behaviour of governments with the assembly depends on their power. This article shows that this power can be reduced to the central role of presidents in foreign affairs. Until now, this finding has stemmed from an inductive approach and has lacked a theoretical underpinning. As noted in the introduction, several case studies have observed that control of foreign policy is an important issue in semi-presidential regimes (Arter, 1987; Hayward, 1993; Elgie and Moestrup, 2008), but current theoretical approaches do not convincingly account for that. Schleiter and Morgan-Jones (2009c) note that ‘what accounts for this shared trait is the president’s role as popularly elected head of state, which semi-presidential constitutions tend to associate with powers to conclude treaties, appoint ambassadors and sometimes to act as commander-in-chief of the army’ (p. 676). Why is this so? And why is this trait so important to predicting the power that citizens perceive in the presidential office?

Semi-presidential regimes are characterized by a competition between the president and the assembly over control of the government. The assembly, however, has a negotiating advantage (Samuels and Shugart, 2010). In such a context, the president has to choose between entering into conflict with the assembly and standing back. The riskier strategy is the first: in conflicts with the assembly, the president can obtain more power and be re-elected, or he or she may lose the support of the people and be removed. The best situation for embarking on this strategy is when the president is popular with the public and the assembly is not. In this case, the likelihood of being supported by public opinion – compared with losing some consent – is high.

Yet the literature maintains that whoever manages foreign policy can expect to obtain, on average, a higher popularity among the public because they are defending the interests of all citizens in conflicts with the citizens of other nations. In foreign policy, citizens rally around the flag and the expected popularity of those in charge is higher (Mueller, 1973). Therefore, when presidents control foreign policy, they tend to have a higher popularity, and will on average behave more aggressively. CRFP can be seen as an incentive to exploit formal presidential powers.

This mechanism is compatible with the findings of a series of studies about the US case (Edwards, 1976; Andrade and Young, 1996; Yates and Whitford, 2005). According to these, the president attempts to influence representatives indirectly by strengthening his support among the people. In other words, the prestige of the president has more important consequences for policy than any singular institutional competence. Assuming this view, Andrade and Young (1996) suggest that ‘new emphasis on foreign policy may not reflect any particular increase in foreign policy problems or any particular configuration of international interests, but simply an opportunity for a president to cultivate an image of power and influence in the wake of a declining ability to affect



domestic policy' (p. 603). As a result, presidents with a CRFP possess an efficient instrument to attract citizens' support in order to influence indirectly the agenda. If this mechanism reflected reality, the turnout in presidential elections would be the result of an aggressive presidential strategy, due to a relatively high average public support, obtained through an important role played in foreign policy.

This mechanism must be associated with the second finding of this article. This can be formulated as follows: a behavioural competence does not automatically imply real power. The institutional balance of powers can make a single competence worthless. Specifically, enjoying broad decree powers or having the RV has no impact on citizens' electoral behaviour. On the other hand, the ability to form the government, appoint important decision makers and chair cabinet meetings are positively correlated with relative turnout, but lose their significance when coupled with president's CRFP. Moreover, the presidential ability to dissolve the assembly is correlated with relative turnout only when controlled by the role of the president in foreign policy. Its significant impact on turnout is not a surprise. This ability has recently been seen as a specific feature of semi-presidentialism (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, 2009a). Our results do not deny this analysis, but they do weaken it. The ability to dissolve the assembly gives more power to presidents only when they do not play a CRFP.

Thus, because the control of foreign affairs tends to make presidents more aggressive, we do not need to know what specific competence they will use in negotiating with the assembly. The ability to dismiss ministers or to create decrees are interchangeable.

This analysis allows the possibility of reassessing a Duvergerian definition of semi-presidential regimes, according to which they have three characteristics: (i) the president is elected by universal suffrage, (ii) the president has a CRFP, and (iii) the government is accountable to the legislature. The two first traits are typical of presidential regimes, whereas the third is clearly parliamentary. It is difficult to establish how independent the first and the second condition are. Although (i) can happen without (ii), (ii) is almost systematically associated with (i). There is only one long-standing exception to this rule: the third French republic until 1918.⁷

In this isolated case, presidents often resigned from their office under pressure from parliament, or did not run for re-election. The unique exception is Jules Grévy, who was obliged to resign during his second term. In 1917, President Poincaré definitively lost the control of foreign policy in 1917 in favour of the president of the council of ministers, Clémenceau. There has been only one presidential resignation since. This quick account of the third French republic tends to show that a president who controls foreign policy without being directly elected is considerably unstable.



It is difficult to infer clear consequences from this particular case. However, considering its historical outcome, if presidents do not fulfil Condition (i), Condition (ii) will be progressively less applicable. In fact, (i) seems a necessary, but not sufficient condition to fulfilling (ii). Thus, to be deemed semi-presidentialist, a regime should combine these two conditions in one: the president must both be popularly elected and control foreign policy. Direct election alone makes presidents principals of the government – alongside the assembly – but does not grant enough powers for them really to influence government portfolios. These regimes do not really operate differently from parliamentary systems.

To sum up, the evidence provided can offer some arguments in support of the existence of a ‘Duvergerian’ semi-presidential regime. Indeed, the two main conditions for the president – being popularly elected and controlling foreign policy – are always fulfilled together in presidential regimes and – as I said above – are hardly ever present in ‘pure’ parliamentary systems that do not have popularly elected presidents. Taken together, these features produce a considerable consequence, transforming the president into the main political figure in those regimes, as happens in fully presidential regimes. Such a role significantly increases the turnout in presidential elections and the president’s influence on the political agenda – at both international and national levels.

Conclusion

This study offers a way of measuring the power of presidents in systems with a popularly elected president and a government accountable to the legislature. It discovers what constitutional presidential competences can turn presidential elections into first-order elections. The results show the decisive effect that presidential control over foreign policy has. This competence might be interpreted as a source of popularity for presidents, giving them sufficient authority to take important decisions such as dismissing ministers or dissolving the assembly.

This result is relevant to the analysis of semi-presidential systems. Indeed, it offers a way to reassess the Duvergerian definition that is based on the strength of presidents. Duverger’s original definition has been criticized for combining institutional and behavioural criteria (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, 2009b). I have shown that one behavioural criterion (the strength of the president) can be brought back to an institutional criterion. Empirically, control over foreign policy seems to give presidents an opportunity to be more active and more influential in parliamentary systems. At least, this is what the electoral behaviour of citizens shows. A distinction between popularly elected presidents might therefore be made. Presidents who control foreign policy gain a decisive

tool – specifically reserved for presidents in all presidential systems – that enables their visibility. However, if they do not control this field – as in every current parliamentary system – they lose part of their authority and tend not to use their institutional powers.

Finally, our findings suggest that the literature on second-order elections can contribute to our understanding of how political systems work. It is difficult to predict which elections will obey the second-order pattern, because we do not know enough about why citizens believe that one electoral office is more important than another. However, assuming that people's perceptions are correct, the way in which they vote can reveal interesting properties of democratic systems. This article pleads for more attention to those electoral mechanisms so as to understand better our constitutional systems.

About the Author

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Notes

- 1 The Shugart and Carey (1992) method is somewhat more complex. It provides a list of 10 legislative presidential powers, each of which is measured on a scale of 0 to 4. However, this does not affect the argument.
- 2 Two alternative interpretations are possible here. First, according to the second-order model, a first-order election is defined by the perception of citizens about who is the 'chief'. People vote more where the perceived consequences of the electoral result are 'important'. Because national legislative elections are first order, the relative turnout in presidential elections measures how 'important' presidents are considered by citizens. Second, it is possible to provide a weaker interpretation: we are just measuring the power of presidents compared with that of parliament. In this case, we need to consider the 'quite strong power' condition as limited to the comparison of the president power with the legislative power.
- 3 The behavioural aspect of the Siaroff measure is not the same than in Duverger's Condition (ii). The first derives from a constitutional ambiguity and may be replaced with a clear constitutional competence, whereas the second is too vague to be translated in a specific set of formal competences.
- 4 The dummy variables are equal to 1 if the country is unicameral (0 if it is bicameral) or if it has a proportional electoral system (0 if majoritarian). The classification has been provided by Golder (2005).
- 5 As this estimation is based on cross-sectional time-series data, the clustering corrections do not allow us perfectly to take into account the effect of time. The main difficulty is that time periods



are not common to all panels and are, on average, composed of 4.5 elections. Introducing a simple lagged independent variable, the results do not change and the variable proves to be insignificant. The problem with this variable is that 28 observations are lost, corresponding to the first election of each country included in the analysis. Therefore, the lagged independent variable will be not reported here, but more detailed results can be sent on request.

6 The Weimar Republic corresponds to this pattern. It is the only case known.

7 The second exception is Czechoslovakia in two different periods: 3 years just before the Second World War and 2 years just after the end of the communist regime. These periods are too short to provide an understanding to how the system works.

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Appendix A

Table A1: RTA index, relative turnout in closest elections average index, Siaroff index, Metcalf index and presidential role in foreign policy in 28 democracies with elected president and a government accountable to the legislature until 2008

<i>Country</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>RTA</i>	<i>RTCEA</i>	<i>Siaroff index</i> (Siaroff, 2003)	<i>Metcalf index</i> (Metcalf, 2000 and Tavits, 2008)	<i>Central role of president in foreign policy</i>
Armenia ^a	1995–	19.4	19.4	6	—	Yes
Austria	1945–	−0.2	−1.6	1	5	No
Bulgaria	1991–	−12.5	−10.7	3	2	No
Cape Verde	1991–	1.9	1.9	6	—	Yes
Central African Republic	1993–	3.4	3.4	6	—	Yes
Croatia	1992–	−6.7	−8.5	6 (1990–2000) 3 (2000–present)	6 (1990–2000)	Yes No
Finland	1945–	−0.9	−0.7	6 (1956–1994) 5 (1994–2000) 3 (2000–present)	8	Yes Yes No
France	1958–	10.3	10.9	7	9	Yes
Georgia ^a	1995–	8.9	8.9	7	—	Yes
Guinea bissau ^a	1994–	9.4	13.3	6	—	Yes
Iceland	1946–	−8	−8.3	1	13	No
Ireland	1946–	−15.2	−14.9	3	7	No
Lithuania	1992–	8.2	9.3	4	8	Yes
Macedonie ^a	1994–	5	4.1	4	3	Yes
Madagascar ^a	1992–	2.7	2.7	7	—	Yes
Mali	1992–	9.2	7.8	7	—	Yes
Mongolia	1990–	−3	−4.9	4	—	Yes
Mozambique ^a	1994–	0.5	0.5	8	—	Yes



Table A1 continued

Country	Period	RTA	RTCEA	Siaroff index (Siaroff, 2003)	Metcalf index (Metcalf, 2000 and Tavits, 2008)	Central role of president in foreign policy
Peru	1980–92	6.3	6.3	7	9	Yes
Poland	1989–	9	8.2	6 (1992–1997) 3 (1997–present)	13 (1992–1997) 9 (1997–present)	Yes No
Portugal	1975–	–6.6	–4	6 (1976–1982) 3 (1982–present)	10.5	Yes No
Romania	1992–	–6.6	–4.2	5	9	No
Russia ^b	1991–	10.3	10.3	7	—	Yes
Sao Tome and Principe	1991–	2.9	2.7	8	13	Yes
Slovakia	1994–	–14.8	–13.3	2	5	No
Slovenia	1992–	–4.9	–7.5	1	3	No
Taiwan	1995–	11.5	11.4	5	—	Yes
Ukraine ^a	1994–	4.5	1.7	6 (1992–1996) 7 (1996–present)	1	Yes

Source for electoral turnout: International IDEA, <http://www.idea.int/>.

RTA: Average turnout in presidential elections minus the average turnout in parliamentary election.

RTCEA: Average of differences in turnout between the presidential election and the closest parliamentary election.

Excluded from this classification are those countries with too short experience of semi-presidentialism, as Comoros (1992–1999), Moldova (1994–2000) and Niger (1999–). Kyrgyzstan (1993–) is absent from the Siaroff index (2003).

^aClassed partly free by Freedom House.

^bClassed not free by Freedom House.





Appendix B

Table B1: Pearson correlation between relative turnout and Siaroff dichotomous competences of presidents

	<i>28 countries</i>		<i>125 elections</i>
	<i>RTA</i>	<i>RTCEA</i>	
Concurrent election of president and legislature	0.12	0.19	0.05
Discretionary appointment powers	0.47*	0.48*	0.29**
Chairing of cabinet meeting	0.40*	0.42*	0.30**
RV	0.06	0.07	0.08
Long-term emergency or decree powers	0.03	-0.01	0.06
Central role in foreign policy	0.76**	0.73**	0.45**
Central role in government formation	0.66**	0.66**	0.42**
Ability to dissolve the legislature	0.35	0.36	0.26**

* $P < 0.5$, ** $P < 0.01$.