
CHAPTER 7

EXECUTIVE-LEGISLATIVE RELATIONS: PATTERNS OF DOMINANCE AND BALANCE OF POWER

The third difference between the majoritarian and consensus models of democracy concerns the relationship between the executive and legislative branches of government. The majoritarian model is one of executive dominance, whereas the consensus model is characterized by a more balanced executive-legislative relationship. In real political life, a variety of patterns between complete balance and severe imbalance can occur.

In this chapter I first contrast the two most prevalent formal arrangements of executive-legislative relations in democratic regimes: parliamentary government and presidential government. I propose a classificatory scheme based on the three major differences between these types of government and show that almost all of the thirty-six democracies included in this study fit either the pure parliamentary or the pure presidential type. The next topic is the question of how to measure degrees of executive dominance. I propose an index that is mainly, but not entirely, based on the durability of cabinets; several important adjustments are required, especially for presidential systems. After presenting the empirical findings concerning the different levels of executive dominance in thirty-six democracies between 1945 and

2010, I explore two relationships: the link between the five basic types of cabinet and the durability of these cabinets in parliamentary systems and the relationship between the incidence of one-party majority government and the degree of executive dominance in the thirty-six democracies. I close with a brief discussion of the power exercised by heads of state—monarchs and presidents—and some of the problems associated with monarchical and presidential power.

PARLIAMENTARY AND PRESIDENTIAL FORMS OF GOVERNMENT

Parliamentary and presidential systems of government have three crucial differences. First, in a parliamentary system, the head of government—who may have such different official titles as prime minister, premier, chancellor, minister-president, *taoiseach* (in Ireland), or, rather confusingly, even “president” (in Botswana) but whom I generically term the prime minister—and his or her cabinet are responsible to the legislature in the sense that they are dependent on the legislature’s confidence and can be dismissed from office by a legislative vote of no confidence or censure. In a presidential system, the head of government—always called president—is elected for a constitutionally prescribed period and in normal circumstances cannot be forced to resign by a legislative vote of no confidence (although it may be possible to remove a president for criminal wrongdoing by the process of impeachment).¹

The second difference between presidential and parliamentary governments is that presidents are popularly elected, either directly or via a popularly elected presidential electoral college, and that prime ministers are selected by legislatures. The process of selection may take a variety of forms. For instance, the German

1. In addition, as I argue below, we can still speak of presidential government if the legislature can dismiss the president, but only if two conditions apply: (1) that the president also has the right to dissolve the legislature, and (2) that in either event new elections of both the president and the legislature take place.

chancellor is formally elected by the Bundestag, the Irish taoiseach by the Dáil, the Japanese prime minister by the House of Representatives, and the Botswanan “president” by the National Assembly. In Italy and Belgium, cabinets emerge from negotiations among the parties in parliament and especially among party leaders, but they also require a formal parliamentary vote of investiture. In the United Kingdom, the king or queen normally appoints the leader of the majority party to the prime ministership, and in many multiparty systems, too, the cabinets that emerge from interparty bargaining are appointed by the heads of state without formal election or investiture; these cabinets are assumed to have the legislature’s confidence unless and until it expresses its lack of confidence.

The third fundamental difference is that parliamentary systems have collective or collegial executives whereas presidential systems have one-person, noncollegial executives. As I indicated at the end of the previous chapter, the prime minister’s position in the cabinet can vary from preeminence to virtual equality with the other ministers, but there is always a relatively high degree of collegiality in decision-making; in contrast, the members of presidential cabinets are mere advisers and subordinates of the president. The most important decisions in parliamentary systems have to be made by the cabinet as a whole, not just by the prime minister; the most important decisions in presidential systems can be made by the president with or without, and even against, the advice of the cabinet.

Because parliamentary and presidential governments are defined in terms of three dichotomous criteria, their joint application yields the eight possible combinations shown in the typology of Figure 7.1. In addition to the pure parliamentary and presidential types, there are six hybrid forms of government, labeled I through VI in the typology. Thirty-five of our thirty-six democracies fit the criteria of the two pure types, although France and Israel have to be classified differently in different periods. Six countries have been mainly or wholly presidential—the United

		Collegial executive		One-person executive	
		Dependent on legislative confidence	Not dependent on legislative confidence	Dependent on legislative confidence	Not dependent on legislative confidence
Executive selected by legislature	Parliamentary	AUL GRE MAU AUS* ICE* NET BAH IND NZ BAR IRE* NOR BEL ITA POR* BOT JAM SPA CAN JPN SWE DEN LUX TRI FIN* MAL UK GER FRA* (1986–88, 1993–95, 1997–2002) ISR (1949–96, 2003–)	SWI		
	Hybrid IV		Hybrid V	Hybrid VI	Presidential
Executive selected by voters					ARG CR KOR US URU FRA* (1958–86, 1988–93, 1995–97, 2002–) ISR (1996–2003)

*Semipresidential systems

FIG. 7.1 Parliamentary, presidential, and hybrid forms of government in thirty-six democracies, 1945–2010: a typology

States, France, Costa Rica, Argentina, Uruguay, and Korea—and twenty-nine have been mainly or wholly parliamentary. Switzerland fits hybrid form I, and it is the only example among our thirty-six democracies that can be classified in any of the hybrid categories. This hybrid is parliamentary in two respects and presidential in one: the Swiss “cabinet,” the collegial Federal Council, is elected by parliament, but the seven councilors stay in office for a fixed four-year term and cannot be dismissed by a legislative vote of no confidence.

Hybrid types III and V are presidential in two respects and parliamentary in one. The United States would have provided an example of type III if the Constitutional Convention of 1787 had not changed its mind at the last moment. The Virginia plan included the election of the president by the national legislature,

and the Constitutional Convention voted three times in favor of this plan before finally settling on the electoral college solution. It should also be noted that if no presidential candidate wins a majority in the electoral college, the US Constitution prescribes hybrid III as the next step: election by the House of Representatives. An interesting example of type V is the 1952–67 Uruguayan political system, which had a collegial presidency: a Swiss-inspired nine-member body, collegial and serving for a fixed term, like the Swiss Federal Council, but popularly elected.

There are no empirical examples of hybrid types II, IV, and VI—which is not surprising because the logic of legislative confidence militates against them. Type II would be a parliamentary system except that the prime minister's relationship to the cabinet would resemble that of a president to his or her cabinet. On paper, the German constitution appears to call for such a system, but because the chancellor needs the Bundestag's confidence, the negotiation of a collegial coalition cabinet takes place before the formal election of the chancellor by the Bundestag. Types IV and VI are problematic because a legislative vote of no confidence in a popularly elected executive would be seen as defiance of the popular will and of democratic legitimacy. The only democratically acceptable form of these two types would be one in which a legislative vote of no confidence in the executive would be matched by the executive's right to dissolve the legislature, and where either action would trigger new elections of both legislature and executive. Such an amended type VI system appears to be what the Committee on the Constitutional System proposed for the United States in 1987, but, as I argue below, this proposal entailed a special form of presidential government rather than a hybrid type.

The only serious problem of classifying democracies according to the eightfold typology is raised by systems that have both a popularly elected president and a parliamentary prime minister, usually referred to as “semipresidential” (Duverger 1980) or “premier-presidential” systems (Shugart and Carey 1992). Among

our thirty-six democracies, there are six of these semipresidential systems: Austria, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, and Portugal. These cases can be resolved by asking the question: Who is the *real* head of government—the president or the prime minister? The Austrian, Icelandic, and Irish presidents are weak though popularly elected, and these three democracies operate much like ordinary parliamentary systems. In semipresidential Portugal, the president continues to exercise significant power, even after his formal prerogatives were severely reduced in the constitutional revision of 1982 (Amorim Neto and Costa Lobo 2009), but it can still be treated like a mainly parliamentary system.

The French case is more problematic. Until 1986, the French president, popularly elected for a fixed seven-year term, was clearly the head of the government and not the prime minister. Presidential power, however, was based more on the support by strong parliamentary majorities than on constitutional prerogatives, and in the early 1980s, two well-known French political scientists predicted that, if the president were to lose this majority support, the presidential system would change to a parliamentary one. Raymond Aron (1982, 8) wrote: “The President of the Republic is the supreme authority as long as he has a majority in the National Assembly; but he must abandon the reality of power to the prime minister if ever a party other than his own has a majority in the Assembly.” Based on the same logic, Maurice Duverger (1980, 186) predicted that the French Fifth Republic would develop a pattern of alternation between presidential and parliamentary phases. This is exactly what happened when the Gaullists and Republicans won a legislative victory in 1986 and Jacques Chirac became prime minister: “Except for some issues concerning foreign relations and defense . . . [Socialist president] Mitterrand stood on the legislative sidelines while Chirac functioned as France’s political executive” (Huber 1996, 28). The situation repeated itself from 1993 to 1995 when Gaullist premier Édouard Balladur replaced President Mitterrand as the real head of government, and Socialist premier Lionel Jospin inaugurated the

third parliamentary phase under President Chirac, which lasted for five years (1997–2002).

The Finnish semipresidential system is the most difficult case. Finland has an elected president—indirectly elected via an electoral college until the early 1990s—with less power than the French president usually has but more than that of the presidents in the other semipresidential systems. Yet there is a close resemblance to the French system in its parliamentary phases during which the prime minister is head of government and the president's power is limited to a special role in foreign affairs. If these phases in the French system can be regarded as parliamentary, the similar situation in Finland should be considered parliamentary, too. The classification may be somewhat debatable for the long period from 1956 to 1981 during which the formidable Urho Kekkonen served as president, but it clearly fits the period since his departure from the political scene.² A constitutional amendment in 1991 reduced presidential power by removing the president's right to dissolve parliament—a right that the French president does have—but at the same time increased presidential prestige by abolishing the presidential electoral college and instituting direct popular election. On balance, Finnish democracy can be classified as a parliamentary system in the typology of Figure 7.1; it is certainly much closer to a parliamentary than a presidential system.

Finally, Israel shifted from a system that was unambiguously parliamentary in every respect to the direct popular election of the prime minister in 1996—presenting another intriguing puzzle of classification. The basic rules were that the prime minister was elected directly by the voters, that parliament was elected simultaneously, that parliament retained the right to dismiss the prime minister, that the prime minister also had the right to dissolve parliament, and that either action resulted in new elections of both prime minister and parliament (Hazan 1997). The Israelis

2. G. Bingham Powell (1982, 56) classified Finland as a parliamentary system even during the Kekkonen era.

entered uncharted territory with this innovation, but it resembles one of the solutions proposed by the Committee on the Constitutional System (1987, 16) for the problem of executive-legislative deadlock in the United States: "If it were possible for a President to call new elections, or for Congress to do so, we would have a mechanism for resolving deadlocks over fundamental policy issues." Such a mutual right to call new elections, both presidential and congressional, would be a change *in* rather than a change *of* the presidential system—that is, the United States would still be a presidential system according to all three basic criteria.

The Israeli system, which lasted until 2003, was very similar to this special form of presidentialism except that the president was called "prime minister." The prime minister was (1) popularly elected instead of being selected by parliament, (2) elected for a fixed period of four years, except if the special rule of mutual dismissal and new elections were to become operative, and (3) predominated over the cabinet by virtue of the democratic legitimacy conferred by popular elections. As far as the third point is concerned, the Israeli rule that the other members of the cabinet needed a parliamentary vote of investiture before taking office sounds like the retention of one aspect of the old parliamentarism, but remember that in the United States, too, the president can appoint the members of his or her cabinet only with the "advice and consent" of the Senate. The directly elected prime minister was therefore much more like a president in a presidential system than like a prime minister in a parliamentary system.³

3. According to Matthew Soberg Shugart and Scott Mainwaring (1997, 15), presidentialism can be defined in terms of two basic characteristics: "separate origin" (separate popular elections) and "separate survival" (fixed terms of office for both president and legislature). According to the second criterion, the proposal of the Committee on the Constitutional System and the 1996–2003 Israeli system would clearly not qualify as presidential, but neither would the French Fifth Republic because the National Assembly can be dissolved prematurely. Moreover, a fixed term of office for the legislature can also be a characteristic of parliamentary systems, as in the case of Norway.

Israel's experiment with the directly elected prime minister did not last long; pure parliamentarism was restored in 2003.

ADDITIONAL PARLIAMENTARY-PRESIDENTIAL CONTRASTS

A few eminent political scientists have argued that in addition to the three crucial differences between parliamentary and presidential systems discussed above, there are three other important differences (esp. Verney 1959, 17–56). On closer examination, these contrasts turn out to have serious empirical exceptions and not to be essential for the distinction between the two major forms of government.

First, separation of powers in presidential systems is usually taken to mean not only the mutual independence of the executive and legislative branches but also the rule that the same person cannot simultaneously serve in both. In contrast, the non-separation of powers in parliamentary systems means not only that the executive is dependent on the legislature's confidence but also that the same persons can be members of both parliament and the cabinet. With regard to the latter, however, there is a great deal of variation within the parliamentary type of government. On one end of the spectrum, many parliamentary systems—especially those in the United Kingdom and the former British colonies—make it an almost absolute requirement that cabinet members be members of the legislature, too. On the other end, there are three countries—the Netherlands, Norway, and Luxembourg—in which membership in the cabinet cannot be combined with membership in parliament; in all three, however, cabinet members can and do participate in parliamentary debates. Because the incompatibility rule emphasizes the separate status of the cabinet, it tends to strengthen the cabinet's authority vis-à-vis parliament, but it cannot be considered more than a minor variation within the parliamentary type. It would certainly be incorrect to argue that these three countries fit or even approximate the presidential form of government in this respect.

Second, it is often claimed that a key difference between pres-

idential and parliamentarism is that presidents do not have the right to dissolve the legislature whereas prime ministers and their cabinets do have this right. One exception on the presidential side is that the French president does have the power to dissolve the National Assembly; another exception is the Israeli 1996–2003 example of mutual dismissal and new elections for both, discussed earlier. In parliamentary systems, there is again a wide range of variation. In the British and many British-inspired systems, the power to dissolve is virtually unlimited and it is a specifically prime ministerial prerogative. In Germany and several other countries, parliament can be dissolved only under special circumstances and not at the sole discretion of the executive. In Norway, parliament is elected for a four-year term and cannot be dissolved at all. Executive authority is obviously affected by whether the executive does or does not have such power over the legislature, but this factor cannot be considered an essential distinction between the parliamentary and presidential forms of government.

Third, parliamentary systems usually have dual executives: a symbolic and ceremonial head of state (a monarch or president) who has little power and a prime minister who is the head of the government and who, together with the cabinet, exercises most executive power. The normal rule in presidential systems is that the president is simultaneously the head of state and the head of the government. However, there are major exceptions on both sides. Botswana has a prime minister, elected by and subject to the confidence of the legislature, who is the head of the government but who also serves as head of state—and who therefore has the formal title of “president.” Another example is democratic South Africa, whose first head of the government was President Nelson Mandela—not a president in a presidential system but a combined head of government and head of state in a parliamentary system.

If the directly elected Israeli prime minister in the period 1996–2003 can indeed be seen as a president in a presidential system, Israel provides an example of a presidential system with

a dual instead of a single executive: in addition to the presidential prime minister, there was a president who was the head of state. Another example showing that a dual executive is, in principle, compatible with a presidential form of government is the proposal for a directly elected prime minister in the Netherlands (Andeweg 1997, 235). This plan, widely debated in the late 1960s and early 1970s, entailed the popular election of the prime minister for a fixed four-year term and not subject to parliamentary confidence—but not to change the monarchy. In effect, such a “prime minister” would be head of the government in a presidential system—but not the head of state, because the monarch would continue in that position. The prestige of being head of state obviously enhances the influence of most presidents and is an advantage that most prime ministers lack, but it is not an essential distinction between the two forms of government.

SEPARATION OF POWER AND BALANCE OF POWER

The distinction between parliamentary and presidential systems is of great importance in several respects. For instance, as discussed in the previous chapter, presidential cabinets are fundamentally different, and have to be classified differently, from cabinets in parliamentary systems; moreover, both later on in this chapter and in the next chapter, presidential systems are again treated differently from parliamentary systems in the measurement of key variables. However, the parliamentary-presidential distinction does not bear directly on the distribution of power in executive-legislative relationships. In parliamentary systems, one can find a rough balance of power between cabinet and parliament, as in Belgium, but one can also find clear executive dominance as in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Barbados (see Chapters 2 and 3). The same range of variation occurs in presidential systems. The United States and France are good examples at opposite ends of the scale. In the United States, separation of powers has usually also meant a rough balance of power between president and Congress. The same applies to Switzer-

land, the one separation-of-powers system that is not a presidential system. The French presidential system is at the opposite end; in Anthony King's (1976, 21) words, "the French legislature has . . . become even more subordinate to the executive than the British."

Presidential powers derive from three sources. One is the power of presidents defined in constitutions, consisting of "reactive powers," especially presidential veto power, and "pro-active powers," especially the ability to legislate by decree in certain areas (Shugart and Mainwaring 1997, 41). The second source of power is the strength and cohesion of presidents' parties in the legislature. Third, presidents derive considerable strength from their direct popular election and the fact that they can claim that they (and their vice presidents, if any) are the only public officials elected by the people as a whole.

The frequent dependence of presidents on their partisan powers means that the relative power of presidents and legislatures can and often does change abruptly and that it is generally less stable than in parliamentary systems. Substantial changes have occurred in the historical experience of the United States. Woodrow Wilson (1885) decried the predominance of Congress and stated that the American "presidential" system should more realistically be called, as the title of his famous book indicates, *Congressional Government*. More recent critics have charged that, especially under Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard M. Nixon, and George W. Bush, an "imperial presidency" tended to overshadow Congress. In the much shorter history of the French presidential system, John T. S. Keeler and Martin A. Schain (1997, 95–100) see four alternations between "hyperpresidential" and "tempered presidential" phases in the period from 1962 to 1993.

MEASURING DEGREES OF DOMINANCE AND BALANCE OF POWER

How can the relative power of the executive and legislative branches of government be measured? For parliamentary systems,

the best indicator is cabinet durability. A cabinet that stays in power for a long time is likely to be dominant vis-à-vis the legislature, and a short-lived cabinet is likely to be relatively weak.⁴ Coalition theorists have paid great attention to the duration of cabinets, but they usually assume—either explicitly or, more often, implicitly—that cabinet durability is an indicator not just of the cabinet's strength compared with that of the legislature but also of regime stability. The argument is that short-lived cabinets do not have sufficient time to develop sound and coherent policies and that ineffective policy-making will endanger the viability of democracy: cabinet instability is assumed to lead to, and is therefore taken as an indicator of, regime instability. An explicit statement to this effect is Paul V. Warwick's (1994, 139): "A parliamentary system that does not produce durable government is unlikely to provide effective policy making, to attract widespread popular allegiance, or perhaps even to survive over the longer run."

This view is as wrong as it is prevalent. Even the proverbially short-lived cabinets of the Fourth French Republic were far from completely ineffective policy-makers. Many members of each defunct cabinet served again in the new one, and their average life as ministers was considerably longer than that of the cabinets as a whole. The contemporary French observer André Siegfried (1956, 399) explained this "paradox of stable policy with unstable cabinets" as follows: "Actually the disadvantages are not as serious as they appear. . . . When there is a cabinet crisis, certain ministers change or the same ministers are merely shifted around; but no civil servant is displaced, and the day-to-day administration continues without interruption. Furthermore, as the same

4. This interpretation is supported by the contrast between democracies in general and nondemocratic systems. In the latter we find the strongest executives and the most subservient legislatures or no legislatures at all—and we also find, "not surprisingly," as Henry Bienen and Nicolas van de Walle (1991, 103) state, the greatest incidence of "long-lasting leaders."

ministers hold over from one cabinet to another, they form as it were teams of government.”⁵ Mattei Dogan (1989) attacks the equation of cabinet stability with regime stability head-on and argues emphatically that cabinet stability is *not* a valid indicator of the health and viability of the democratic system; the major reason is that in most systems with seemingly unstable cabinets, there is a highly stable “core” of ministerial personnel—similar to the situation in the Fourth Republic described by Siegfried.

What should be added to Dogan’s argument is that, in relatively short-lived cabinets, there tends to be continuity not only of personnel but also of participating parties. One-party cabinets tend to be more durable than coalition cabinets, but a change from a one-party cabinet to another is a wholesale partisan turnover, whereas a change from one coalition cabinet to another usually entails only a piecemeal change in the party composition of the cabinet. I return to the general issue of the effectiveness of policy-making in Chapter 15; there the question is whether majoritarian democracies with their typically more dominant and durable executives are better policy-makers than consensus democracies with their usually shorter-lived and less dominant executives—and the answer is that consensus democracies actually have a somewhat better record in this respect.

The next step—after having decided that cabinet duration can be used as an indicator of executive dominance—is to decide how to measure it. This question concerns the events that are con-

5. In their comparative nineteen-nation analysis of cabinet durability, Michael Taylor and Valentine M. Herman (1971, 29) state: “A considerable empirical study would be necessary before it could be said that [cabinet durability] was an indicator of *anything*.” They argue that their article does not make any assumption about the broader significance of cabinet durability, but they also state that their “results would be of greater interest if Siegfried’s observation that the instability of the Fourth Republic made no difference to public policy-making were found to be untrue of instability generally.” Their unspoken assumption, of course, is that the significance of studying cabinet durability has much to do with its putative link with regime viability.

sidered to end the life of one cabinet and to herald the beginning of a new one. There are two major alternatives. One is to focus exclusively on the partisan composition of cabinets and to count a cabinet as one cabinet if its party composition does not change; one pioneering study of cabinet duration took this approach (Dodd 1976). It is much more common, however, to regard two additional events as marking the end of one and the beginning of the next cabinet: a parliamentary election and a change in the prime ministership (Müller, Bergman, and Strøm 2008, 6; Damgaard 2008, 303). A big advantage of Dodd's broad definition is that it measures cabinet durations that can be interpreted very well as indicators of executive dominance. In particular, cabinets that win several successive elections—and which Dodd therefore counts as the same cabinet—are less and less likely to meet serious challenges from their parliaments.

Average cabinet life serves as the index of executive dominance for twenty-eight of the thirty-six democracies in Table 7.1, but adjustments are needed for Switzerland, Botswana, and the six presidential systems. Switzerland and Botswana present no major challenges. Botswana has had only one cabinet since independence in 1965 and hence the very long “average” cabinet life of more than forty-five years, but its executive dominance must be judged to be only slightly greater than that of other former British colonies like the Bahamas and Jamaica. The Swiss average of 12.51 years—based on only five different party compositions from 1947 to 2010—is obviously completely wrong as a measure of executive dominance because Switzerland is a prime example of executive-legislative balance. Hence we can give these two countries values at the top and bottom of Table 7.1.

Finding the proper values for the presidential democracies is considerably more difficult. For one thing, experts on presidential government tend to disagree on the relative powers of presidents in different countries. For instance, should the Argentine or Uruguayan president be regarded as the more powerful (García Montero 2009, 102–3; Shugart and Haggard 2001, 80)? And is

TABLE 7.1

Index of executive dominance and average cabinet duration (in years)
in thirty-six democracies, 1945–2010

	Index of executive dominance	Average cabinet duration
Switzerland	1.00	12.51
Israel	1.46	1.46
Italy	1.49	1.49
Finland	1.55	1.55
Mauritius	2.39	2.39
Belgium	2.57	2.57
Netherlands	2.91	2.91
Costa Rica	3.00	5.15
Iceland	3.20	3.20
Denmark	3.23	3.23
Portugal	3.26	3.26
India	3.33	3.33
Japan	3.37	3.37
Germany	3.80	3.80
United States	4.00	7.05
Uruguay	4.00	4.22
Norway	4.04	4.04
Ireland	4.16	4.16
Greece	4.45	4.45
New Zealand	4.54	4.54
Sweden	5.61	5.61
Luxembourg	5.87	5.87
Trinidad	6.95	6.95
Argentina	8.00	5.30
France	8.00	3.22
Korea	8.00	2.77
Austria	8.07	8.07

TABLE 7.1 *continued*

	Index of executive dominance	Average cabinet duration
Canada	8.10	8.10
United Kingdom	8.12	8.12
Spain	8.26	8.26
Malta	8.85	8.85
Barbados	8.87	8.87
Australia	9.10	9.10
Bahamas	9.44	9.44
Jamaica	9.64	9.64
Botswana	9.90	45.33

Source: Based on data in Woldendorp, Keman, and Budge 2010; Bale and Caramani 2010 and earlier volumes of the “Political Data Yearbook”; Muller, Overstreet, Isacoff, and Lansford 2011 and earlier volumes of the *Political Handbook of the World*; and data provided by Octavio Amorim Neto, Marcelo Camerlo, Krista Hoekstra, Jelle Koedam, Jorge Lanzaro, Andrés Malamud, and Langanaden Murday

the American or the Korean president the stronger chief executive (Shugart and Haggard 2001, 80; Siaroff 2003b, 297)? For another, experts also differ profoundly on the relative powers of the chief executives in presidential and parliamentary systems. Sebastián M. Saiegh (2011, 84–89) finds prime ministers to be generally more powerful than presidents, but Torsten Persson and Guido Tabellini (2003, 275) argue that “presidential states typically have stronger executives than parliamentary states.” On the first issue, I follow the lead of Matthew S. Shugart and Stephan Haggard (2001) and assign the United States, Costa Rica, and Uruguay a considerably lower position on the scale of executive dominance than the other three countries. Within the first group of three countries, the United States and Uruguay should be slightly higher than Costa Rica. An important consideration in

the American case is the president's preeminent power over foreign policy and the fact that the superpower status of the United States means that many crucial decisions in this area have to be made. Korea has been called a "prime example of majoritarian presidentialism" (Croissant and Schächter 2010, 191), and this label fits Argentine and French presidentialism, too. On the second issue, I see no valid reason to regard the average president as either much more or much less powerful than the average executive in parliamentary systems. In Table 7.1, the average values for the six presidential and twenty-nine parliamentary systems are very close to each other: 5.83 and 5.40, respectively.⁶

Table 7.1 lists the thirty-six democracies in ascending order of executive dominance. The index ranges from 1.00 to 9.90, the values assigned to Switzerland and Botswana, as explained above. The mean value is 5.35, roughly in the middle of the range, and the median is a lower 4.30. The six countries at the majoritarian end include Barbados, and they are all former British colonies. The United Kingdom itself is in a slightly higher position and is preceded by Canada, another former British colony. New Zealand is near the middle of the table, partly due to its short three-

6. There are two partly comparable measures of executive-legislative relationships. The Woldendorp-Keman-Budge (2000, 56–57) index of executive-legislative balance, available for twenty-six of our democracies, measures such variables as whether a formal vote of investiture is required, whether the cabinet can ignore a vote of no confidence, and whether the cabinet or prime minister can dissolve parliament. M. Steven Fish and Matthew Kroenig (2009, 756–57) construct a "parliamentary powers index," based on thirty-two formal powers that legislatures may or may not possess, for most of the countries in the world, including thirty-one of our democracies. Because both of these indexes are based entirely on formal rules, we cannot expect them to correlate strongly with our index of executive dominance. However, confidence in our index would be increased if there were a substantial degree of correspondence with these formal indexes. The correlation coefficients show that this is indeed the case: -0.43 (statistically significant at the 5 percent level) and -0.45 (significant at the 1 percent level), respectively.

year parliamentary terms, which increase the likelihood of government turnovers, but, more important, reflecting the impact of the shift to PR elections from 1996 on: cabinets lasted an average of 6.15 years until early 1996 but only 2.39 years thereafter. Several British-heritage countries are on the left, more consensual, side of the table, especially Mauritius and, although less strikingly, India. Of the two prototypes of consensus democracy, Switzerland and Belgium, Switzerland was assigned to the top of the table. Belgium is farther down but still in sixth place, just behind Mauritius.

CABINET TYPES AND CABINET DURABILITY

How are the different cabinet types, analyzed in the previous chapter, related to the degree of executive dominance? There are three reasons to expect a positive relationship between minimal winning and one-party cabinets on one hand and executive dominance on the other. First, as discussed in Chapter 1, both variables belong to the same cluster of variables that make up the executives-parties dimension of the majoritarian-consensus contrast. Second, minority cabinets are by their nature at the mercy of the legislature in parliamentary systems and can therefore not be expected to dominate their legislatures. Third, studies of the independence shown by individual legislators in voting against their own cabinet in Britain have found that this kind of independent parliamentary behavior has tended to vary directly with the size of the cabinet's majority in the House of Commons: bare-majority cabinets have generally received solid support from their partisans in parliament, whereas cabinets with ample majorities have frequently found their parliamentary party to be more rebellious (Crowe 1980). Analogizing from this tendency in the British House of Commons to the other parliamentary systems, we can expect greater legislative independence when cabinets are oversized rather than minimal winning.

Table 7.2 and Figure 7.2 show the strength of these relationships. Table 7.2 classifies the cabinets that have been in power in

thirty parliamentary systems—including the three parliamentary phases in France but excluding the other presidential democracies and Switzerland—according to the five basic types of cabinet, and it presents the average duration of these cabinets.⁷ Minimal winning one-party cabinets have the longest average life span. And both types of minimal winning cabinets last longer than minority and oversized cabinets. Oversized coalitions and one-party minority cabinets—which in terms of their parliamentary support appear to be at a maximum distance from each other—actually have very similar durations; the oversized cabinets last only slightly less long. Minority coalitions have the shortest life. An important explanation is that in multiparty systems such coalitions are often temporary caretakers after a cabinet has fallen and while awaiting a new election. In countries where they are more like regular cabinets, as in the Scandinavian countries, minority coalition cabinets last longer. For instance, Denmark had nine minority coalition cabinets that lasted an average of 3.79 years.

Figure 7.2 shows the relationship between types of cabinet and executive dominance in terms of the combination of the two characteristics in each of our thirty-six democracies (based on the data in the third column of Table 6.3 and the first column of Table 7.1). The pattern is clear: the countries with more minimal winning single-party cabinets also tend to be the countries with greater executive dominance. The correlation coefficient is 0.78 (statistically significant at the 1 percent level).

Most of the countries are near the regression line. The main outliers are four of the presidential systems. The United States, Costa

7. Table 7.2 includes all cabinets that fall clearly into one of the five categories—which means that cabinets that have to be counted as, for instance, halfway between minimal winning and oversized or halfway between one-party and coalition cabinets had to be disregarded; moreover, cabinets that changed their coalitional status during the life of the cabinet also had to be put aside.

TABLE 7.2

Frequency and average cabinet duration (in years) of five types of cabinets in thirty parliamentary democracies, 1945–2010

Type of cabinet	Number of cabinets	Average cabinet duration (years)
Minimal winning, one-party	56	8.20
Minimal winning coalition	85	3.64
Minority, one-party	42	2.57
Minority coalition	62	1.52
Oversized coalition	106	2.27
All cabinets	351	3.45

Source: Based on data in Woldendorp, Keman, and Budge 2010; Bale and Caramani 2010 and earlier volumes of the “Political Data Yearbook”; Muller, Overstreet, Isacoff, and Lansford 2011 and earlier volumes of the *Political Handbook of the World*; and data provided by Krista Hoekstra, Jelle Koedam, and Lingnaden Murday

Rica, and Uruguay have a much lower level of executive dominance than expected on the basis of their frequent majoritarian-type cabinets. Semipresidential France exhibits the opposite combination of characteristics. The explanation of the first three appears to be a feature of presidentialism: their cabinets are partly majoritarian—minimal winning and one-party—by definition, as argued in the previous chapter, but their separation of powers contributes to a modicum of executive-legislative balance. Before accepting this as a general explanation, however, we should note that it does not apply to the Argentine and Korean cases.

Of the parliamentary democracies, only five are in clearly deviant positions: Australia, Austria, Greece, New Zealand, and Spain. The reasons for the unexpectedly low figure for executive dominance in New Zealand were discussed above. In Greece, the

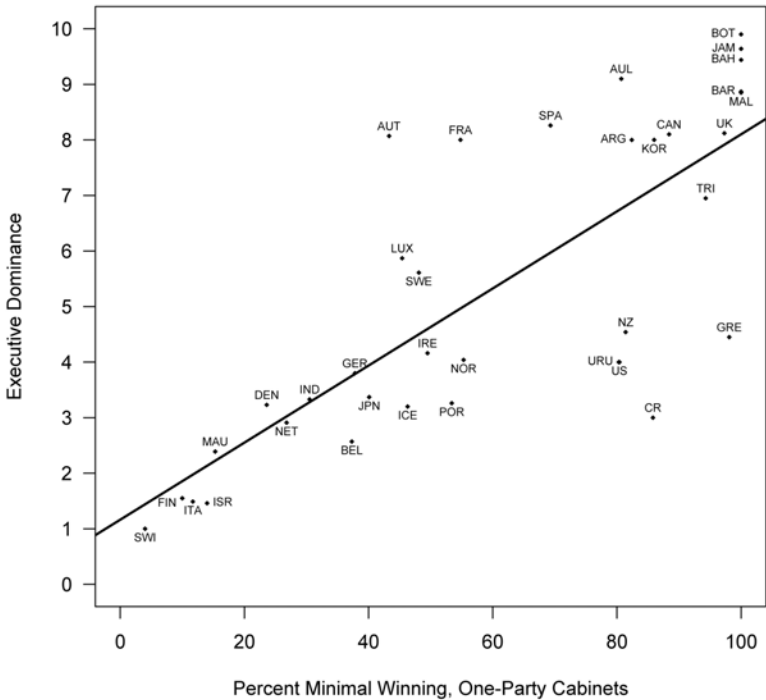


FIG. 7.2 The relationship between type of cabinet and executive dominance in thirty-six democracies, 1945–2010

turmoil caused by two indecisive parliamentary elections and three elections in less than ten months in 1990–91 is especially responsible for shortening the average cabinet duration. On the other side of the regression line, Austria has had many oversized coalitions that were unusually long-lived: one stretch of these lasted from 1947 to 1966. Spain has only had one-party cabinets, which have proved quite durable in spite of their frequent minority status. Australia has a high degree of executive dominance similar to that of most other former British dependencies but fewer one-party cabinets; the main reason is that the frequent Liberal-National cabinets have to be counted as half one-party and half coalition cabinets because of the “one-and-a-half parties” nature of Liberals and Nationals (see Chapter 5).

ADDENDUM: MONARCHS AND PRESIDENTS

The position of head of state has been mentioned repeatedly in this chapter, but the different kinds of heads of state and their relative powers have not been treated systematically. The most striking difference in this respect in our set of thirty-six democracies is that almost half are monarchies: Australia, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Jamaica, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The monarchs are mainly kings or queens—represented by a governor-general in Australia, the Bahamas, Barbados, Canada, Jamaica, and New Zealand—but Japan has an emperor and Luxembourg a grand duke as head of state. The exact number of monarchies as of the middle of 2010 was fifteen; in the early 1970s, exactly half were monarchies, but three Commonwealth countries later became republics: Malta in 1974, Trinidad in 1976, and Mauritius in 1992. It is rather surprising that so many of our democracies are or were monarchies, a constitutional form that appears to be less democratic than republican government. The explanation is that they are constitutional monarchies in which the monarch's power is severely limited. As Richard Rose and Dennis Kavanagh (1976, 568) write, "Monarchs have remained in power where the reigning family has been willing to withdraw from a politically active rule. Reciprocally, monarchies have fallen when the monarch has sought to continue to assert political power."

The advantage that the monarchy is frequently claimed to have for a democratic regime is that it provides a head of state who is an apolitical and impartial symbol of unity. This is generally true, although it is also possible for monarchs to become a divisive force. For instance, the behavior of King Leopold III during the Second World War became a major political issue in postwar Belgium. In the 1950 referendum on whether the king should be retained, a majority of Flemings and Catholics supported the king, and most Walloons, Socialists, and Liberals wanted him removed. Leopold III won the referendum with an overall majority of 58 percent—

not a landslide victory for a king!—but he soon abdicated in favor of his son Baudouin.

In terms of basic democratic principles, a disadvantage is that monarchs are not entirely powerless. In parliamentary systems, they generally retain the right to appoint the prime minister. This is not a significant function when there is a unanimous preference for a prime ministerial candidate, but when there is a sudden death or resignation, or when the parties in a multiparty parliament are unable to reach an agreement, the monarch's influence on the eventual choice of a prime minister may be far from negligible. In order to reduce the monarch's rule to a purely ceremonial one, Sweden's 1974 constitution transferred the function of appointing a prime minister from the monarch to the speaker of parliament.

Even though monarchs may have residual powers, the general assumption, accepted by the monarch himself or herself, is that the monarch is purely a head of state and not a head of government. The temptation to intrude on the powers of the head of government and of the cabinet is greater when parliamentary democracies have a president as head of state—generally someone who has had a former political career. One method that parliamentary systems use to minimize this risk is to not allow the president the democratic prestige and implicit power of being popularly elected. Instead, the usual procedure is to have parliament (or a special electoral college of members of national and state parliaments, as in Germany and India) elect the president. Another solution is not to have a separate president at all but to give the title and function of the president to the prime minister, as in Botswana. Switzerland uses a similar method by having the head of government—the rotating chair of the Federal Council—serve simultaneously as president. However, the special characteristic of semipresidential democracies that function mainly as parliamentary systems—Austria, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, and Portugal—is that they do have a popularly elected president. The danger here is that popular election may provide the head of

state with a democratically legitimate justification to encroach upon or take over leadership of the government, thereby changing the nature of the parliamentary system.

Finally, for those who consider parliamentary systems to be preferable to presidential systems, an important advantage of a constitutional monarchy is that it is generally regarded as incompatible with presidentialism. As I argued earlier in this chapter, this view is not correct: in theory, it is quite possible to institute a presidential system with a president who serves as head of government and a monarch who is head of state. But there are no empirical examples of such a system, and the view that presidentialism and monarchy cannot be combined, however mistaken, may save democratizing countries with a monarch as head of state, like Spain in the late 1970s, from seriously considering the adoption of a presidential form of government.