**Ph.D. Program in Political Science of the City University of New York**



# Are All Semipresidential Regimes the Same?

## A Comparison of Premier-Presidential Regimes

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The transition to democracy in East Europe and the former Soviet Union has provided political scientists an opportunity to reexamine several old institutional debates. Similarly to the period of Latin American democratization in the 1970s, political scientists are currently exploring the impact of institutional design on the process of postcommunist democratization. Over the last ten years much has been written about electoral and party systems, the judiciary, and constitution making in East Europe and the former Soviet Union.[1] Perhaps no issue has received more attention than regime type. Numerous books and articles have focused squarely on the issue of postcommunist parliaments and presidencies.[2] Other works have either compared the institutional choice of postcommunist countries to other regions or placed the issue within a broader theoretical perspective.[3]

The issue of regime type is important because in the opinion of most scholars it has an impact not only on the transition to but also on the consolidation and the maintenance of democracy.[4] The choice of regime type has generally been regarded as lying between parliamentarism and presidentialism, and until recently most political scientists argued that a parliamentary regime was more conducive to democratization.[5] Recent studies by John Carey, Scott Mainwaring, and Matthew Shugart have led to a reassessment of the advantages of presidentialism, but there is still no consensus on which regime type is superior.[6]

However, the postcommunist transition to democracy has demonstrated the popularity of the semipresidential regime. This type combines the institutions of presidential and parliamentary regimes. The term "semipresidentialism" was first coined by Maurice Duverger to describe the system of government established during the French Fifth Republic and has since been used to describe a host of countries that combine presidential and parliamentary institutions.[7] Shugart and Carey refined the concept to emphasize the substantial differences among semipresidential regimes. They created a system of classification based on the distribution of power between the two executives, the president and the prime minister. Countries in which the prime minister exerts greater executive power are labeled premier-presidential regimes, while countries in which the president wields greater authority are known

as president-parliamentary regimes. The premier-presidential regimes have been the most popular form of semipresidentialism and can be found throughout East Europe. Indeed, Kaare Strom and Octavio Amorim Neto note that semipresidentialism is now the most prevalent regime type found in Europe.[8]

While differences between these two categories of semipresidentialism have been analyzed, less attention has been paid to differences within each category. Because of the influence of the French Fifth Republic, political scientists and politicians alike often regard the premier-presidential model as the French model. However, there are differences in the powers of the president in premier-presidential regimes. This article examines two issues related to premier-presidential regimes and institutional development. First, it examines presidential power within premier-presidential regimes. Based on the work of Shugart and Carey, it identifies two dimensions of presidential power, legislative and nonlegislative power. Then, using these dimensions, it analyzes ten premier-presidential countries, including Austria, Finland, France, Iceland, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Slovenia.[9] Most studies group premier-presidential regimes together, and, indeed, my findings confirm that the distribution of executive power is generally similar among these countries. However, there are differences in how premier-presidential regimes define legislative and nonlegislative presidential power. Second, based on this analysis of presidential power in premier-presidential regimes, this article examines the relationship between regime type and cabinet stability. Differences among regimes are important because they are believed to have an impact on the broader political system, including the stability of government, policy, and ultimately democracy. Those opposed to parliamentarism cite their concern over cabinet instability and ineffectual policymaking as the significant weakness of this regime type. There appears to be a relationship between presidential power and cabinet instability among the premier-presidential regimes. The debate over institutional power can be explored through a case study of Moldova. In July 2000 the Moldovan parliament overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment to transform the regime from a premier-presidential into a pure parliamentary type. The Moldovan case provides an important lesson on the impact of regime type on policy and institutions.

## The Premier-Presidential Regime

According to Duverger, a semipresidential regime has three basic characteristics: the popular election of the president, presidential constitutional powers, and the separate office of a prime minister. Shugart and Carey argue, however, that the concept of a semipresidential regime is too broad. Semipresidentialism has been used to characterize governments in which the president's power and the relationship between executives are often vastly different. In order to be more precise, they categorize semi-

presidential regimes as either premier-presidential or president-parliamentary. A premier-presidential regime has the following characteristics. The president is popularly elected and has constitutional powers, and a prime minister is subject to a vote of confidence and performs executive functions. Presidential powers in a premier-presidential regime are not necessarily legislative. The president can have significant nonlegislative powers (for example, cabinet formation and dissolution). However, the president does not have the power unilaterally to dismiss cabinet ministers who have parliament's confidence (as in a president-parliamentary regime). In short, a premier-presidential regime exhibits Duverger's general characteristics of a semipresidential regime.

The two semipresidential categories were created to better analyze the distribution of power between executives, but some political scientists have criticized them for overstating differences between these regime types. Giovanni Sartori argues that very few cases fit within the president-parliamentary category and therefore Shugart and Carey have created an unnecessary distinction.[10] However, several postcommunist regimes clearly fit within this category. For example, the Russian president has dismissed cabinet ministers, including several prime ministers, without consulting the *Duma*, and the Ukrainian president has also exercised the power unilaterally to dismiss cabinet ministers.[11] The president's powers in president-parliamentary and premier-presidential regimes are quite different, and consequently the role of the president in the larger political system is also different. However, Sartori is correct to say that most of the cases of semipresidentialism fall into the premier-presidential category. In fact, except for Croatia, all of the semipresidential East European regimes are premier-presidential. The question is whether all premier-presidential regimes are the same. Are the French and Polish premier-presidential regimes the same? Are the powers of the Icelandic and Slovenian presidents similar?

These questions are particularly important because the model for all premier-presidential regimes has been the French Fifth Republic. The French president has exerted significant and usually primary influence in the legislative process. Although the French president has few institutional means to influence legislation, because of the flexibility of the regime and the direct election of the president France has functioned as a de facto presidential regime for most of the Fifth Republic.[12]

However other premier-presidential regimes have presidents with much less legislative influence. Because he was unsatisfied with his presidential powers, Moldovan president Petru Lucinschi organized a consultative referendum in May 1999 in which he asked voters whether they wanted to change the constitution and introduce a presidential regime. Lucinschi's referendum underscores the modest influence that many presidents in premier-presidential regimes have in legislative and nonlegislative matters. While Shugart argues that the Romanian premier-presidential regime is "almost identical to the French," few would confuse the powers wielded by President Jacques Chirac and President Emil Constantinescu.[13]

Ironically, many countries have adopted the French model, but most other premier-presidential regimes have not replicated the attributes and the division of French executive power. What accounts for this divergence? In order to answer this question, it is first necessary to assess executive powers.

## Presidential Powers in Premier-Presidential Regimes

Constitutions provide rich nuances that make the coding of specific powers difficult. For example, the definition and coding of basic powers such as the presidential veto become more complicated in the context of all the constitutional possibilities (for example, a package veto or a line item veto). Nevertheless, several measures of presidential power have been developed, and most of these measures are based on common concepts of presidential power.[14] This analysis employs an ordinal scale developed by Shugart and Carey because it incorporates significant examples of presidential power. Moreover, their work has become a focal point for the larger discussion of executive power in semipresidential regimes. They argue that there are two general dimensions to presidential power, legislative and nonlegislative power, in any system of government. The legislative dimension includes veto power, decree authority, reserved policy areas, budgetary powers, and the ability to propose referenda. The nonlegislative dimension includes cabinet formation and dismissal, censure, and dissolution of the parliament. Based on an analysis of constitutional provisions, Shugart and Carey devise a method to assess presidential power. Where presidential power is supreme, the score is 4; where the president does not possess power or possesses power in an extremely limited form, the score is 0. The scores on both dimensions can be summed to provide an overall indicator.

There are obvious problems with Shugart and Carey's scale, for example, identical weights for each dimension and the inability to score certain constitutional provisions. While I have largely adopted their scale, I have made some modifications in the creation of the dimensions and scoring that are specific to premier-presidential regimes. Because their analysis was for all countries with a popularly elected president, it included several powers (for example, budgetary power, censure of cabinet ministers, and exclusive authority over legislation) that no president in a premier-presidential regime has. Therefore, I did not include several powers in the operationalization of these two dimensions. In addition, for simplicity I collapsed several of their measures into a single measurement. For example, I measured veto power using a single indicator. These single measurements do not produce a significant change in the coding of presidential power.

**Presidential Legislative Powers**

One of the most significant legislative powers that a president can have is the veto. While the power to issue a decree or to call a referendum varies from president to president, most popularly elected presidents, regardless of regime type, have the power to veto.[15] If the president's veto can not be overridden, then the score is 4. A veto that requires a two-thirds majority to override is 3. A veto that requires a three-fifths majority to override scores 2. A veto that requires an absolute parliamentary majority to override scores 1. When there is no veto power or when the veto requires only a simply majority to override (in essence, the parliamentary status quo) the score is 0.

Decree power refers to the president's ability to enforce decisions that are "implemented *in lieu* of any legislative action."[16] Therefore, delegated parliamentary authority is not considered decree power. Decree power is based on the president's authority to make new laws or suspend older laws without first having been delegated the power by the parliament. Decree powers without restriction score 4. When the president has temporary decree authority with few restrictions the score is 2. Examples of temporary decree authority include Italy and Brazil, where presidential decrees have to be ratified by the parliament after a specified period of time (normally less than ninety days). Authority to enact limited decrees receives 1. Examples of limited decrees include provisions for decrees only in specific policy areas (for example, the budget). No decree powers or powers only delegated by parliament receive 0.

Finally, there is the power to propose referenda. Based on the experience of the French Fifth Republic, the ability to propose referenda can be an important presidential power. Ironically, while Charles de Gaulle successfully used referenda to increase his power and prestige, the French constitution requires that a presidential referendum be based on a government proposal. In other words, the French president can not unilaterally propose a referendum, without the support of a parliamentary majority. In most of the years of the Fifth Republic, this requirement was not an issue, but during periods of cohabitation (when the president is not a member of the parliament's majority party), the government and the parliament are obviously much less inclined to provide this power to the president (as was certainly the case in Moldova, discussed below). The score is 4 if the president's power to propose referenda is unrestricted. The score is 2 if the president's power to propose referenda is restricted by time or subject matter. The score is 0 if the president has no power to propose referenda or requires parliamentary approval.

**Presidential Nonlegislative Powers**

The nonlegislative dimension of presidential powers relates to the relationship

among the president, the cabinet, and the parliament as a whole. Most studies focus on these nonlegislative powers because they have such an important influence on government stability and coalition formation. The first nonlegislative power is cabinet formation. The score is 4 if the president names the entire cabinet without the need for parliamentary confirmation. The score is 3 if the president names the entire cabinet subject to parliament's confirmation. The score is 1 if the president names the premier, who then nominates other ministers. Finally, the score is 0 if the president does not nominate ministers or nominates them only by the recommendation of the parliament.

Cabinet dismissal is another powerful nonlegislative tool. As has been seen in the case of Russia, the dismissal of cabinet members, including the prime minister, can be a significant presidential power. The ability of the president to dismiss any cabinet member at will scores 4. The score is 2 if the president has restricted powers to dismiss the cabinet. For example, in some countries the president has to justify the dismissal. The score is 1 if the president may dismiss cabinet members only upon the acceptance of the parliament of an alternative cabinet member (a constructive form of cabinet dismissal). The score is 0 if only the parliament has the power to dismiss cabinet members.

Finally, there is the nonlegislative power to dissolve parliament. While dismissals of cabinet members have been a fairly common nonlegislative practice, dissolution of parliament is seen as an extraordinary power reserved for only the gravest circumstances. The score is 4 if the president can dissolve parliament without restrictions. A score of 3 is given when the president is restricted in dissolving the parliament by either frequency or timing. Several constitutions limit the president to dissolving parliament only once during a calendar year or a specified number of months before a general election. The score is 2 if the dissolution of the parliament requires new presidential elections. Obviously requiring new presidential elections is a strong presidential disincentive to dissolving the parliament. The score is 1 if the president can dissolve parliament only as a response to the inability of the parliament to confirm a new government or to pass legislation. The score is 0 if there is no provision for presidential dissolution of the parliament.

## Findings

Table 1 reports the scores for the first dimension of legislative power for all European premier-presidential regimes. The country total scores on this dimension range from 0 to 5 with an average of 2.3. What is obvious from Table 1 is that few presidents in a premier-presidential regime enjoy considerable legislative powers. None of the presidents in the countries sampled has significant veto or decree power.

**Table 1** Legislative Powers of Presidents in Premier-Presidential Regimes

| Country | Veto | Decree | Referendum | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Austria | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Finland | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| France | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Iceland | 0 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Lithuania | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Moldova | 0 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| Poland | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Portugal | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Romania | 0 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| Slovenia | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |

*Sources*: Albert P. Blaunstein and Gisbert H. Franz, eds., *Constitutions of the Countries of the World* (Dobbs Ferry: Oceana, 1999); Matthew S. Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and Axel Tshenstcher, ed., *International Constitutional Law*, available at http://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/law/index.html.

In fact, the French president's legislative power scored only 1, emphasizing the point that the president's power can often be a function of nonlegislative powers or the personal qualities of the individual. Even when presidents possess legislative power, they may not use it. For example, in Romania the president has significant referendum power, but this authority has never been used.[17]

As seen in Table 2, presidential power is more a function of nonlegislative activity. The country total scores on this dimension are almost twice as great as the other dimension (the average is 4.5). Interestingly, in two of the countries in which presidents have no legislative powers, Austria and Finland, they have considerable nonlegislative powers. This difference in legislative and nonlegislative powers is not surprising when one considers that a premier-presidential regime attempts to balance power between competing executives. In Austria and Finland the prime minister and the government have considerable legislative power, while the president has important nonlegislative power. While few presidents have significant powers in regard to cabinet formation or dismissal, presidential authority over parliamentary dissolution is impressive.

Table 3 provides the totals for both dimensions. There is not a significant range of scores among the countries. Aside from the Icelandic president, most of the cases fall within a limited range. Thus, these premier-presidential regimes are generally similar to each other. However, their similarity relates to the constitutional and not the actual power of these executives. For example, the French presidency and the Austrian presidency have the same score. This finding is surprising because the French president is assumed to be quite powerful, while the Austrian president is often described as very passive.[18]

**Table 2** Nonlegislative Powers of Presidents in Premier-Presidential Regimes

| Country | Cabinet Formation | Cabinet Dismissal | Dissolution | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Austria | 1 | 0 | 4 | 5 |
| Finland | 4 | 0 | 3 | 7 |
| France | 1 | 0 | 4 | 5 |
| Iceland | 4 | 4 | 4 | 12 |
| Lithuania | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Moldova | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Poland | 1 | 0 | 4 | 5 |
| Portugal | 1 | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| Romania | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Slovenia | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

*Sources*: Albert P. Blaunstein and Gisbert H. Franz, eds., *Constitutions of the Countries of the World* (Dobbs Ferry: Oceana, 1999); Matthew S. Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and Axel Tschenstcher, ed., *International Constitutional Law*, available at http://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/law/index.html.

**Table 3** Combined Scores of Presidential Power in Premier-Presidential Regimes

| Country | Legislative | Non-Legislative | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Austria | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| Finland | 0 | 7 | 7 |
| France | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| Iceland | 4 | 12 | 16 |
| Lithuania | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Moldova | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| Poland | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| Portugal | 1 | 6 | 7 |
| Romania | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| Slovenia | 2 | 1 | 3 |

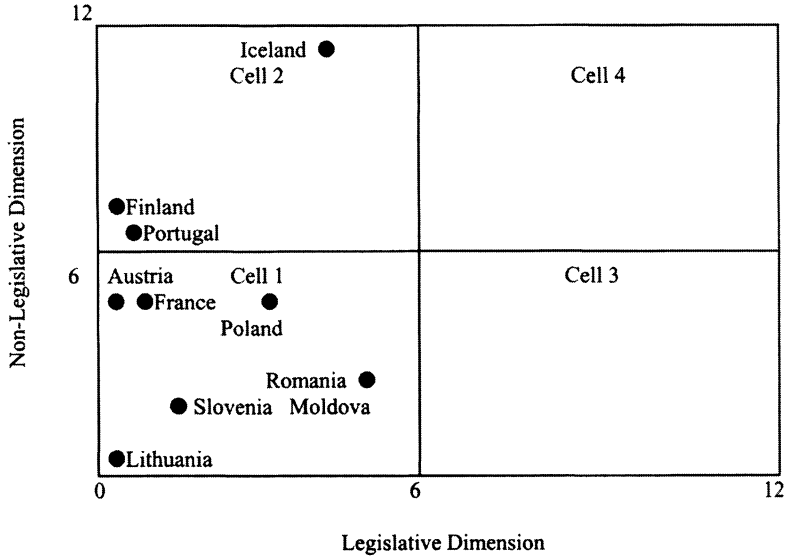
Also unexpected is the high score of the Icelandic presidency. The Icelandic president is the only example of a president with almost complete nonlegislative power. However, like the Austrian, the Icelandic presidency is considered weak. In fact, Shugart and Carey report that the Icelandic presidency is considered so weak that partisan candidates do not run for the office. What could account for the disparity between constitutional power and actual political authority? In the case of Iceland, Arend Lijphart argues that the president's power is constrained because the country's constitution can be amended far more easily than in most other countries.[19] Article 79 of the Icelandic constitution does not require a qualified majority to pass a consti-

tutional amendment. It does require, however, that the Icelandic parliament be immediately dissolved if an amendment passes and that a general election then be called. If the new parliament passes the same amendment, then it becomes a constitutional law. Lijphart argues that a president who uses the presidency's significant nonlegislative powers runs the risk of losing the confidence of the parliament and the public. Because the constitution can be amended easily, the president ultimately risks losing office (or even the elimination of the office). There seems to be some evidence to support Lijphart's claim. Even though the Icelandic president does not have a veto, all legislation is submitted to the president for approval. Even if the president does not approve, the legislation is still enacted. Traditionally, Icelandic presidents have always approved bills submitted by the parliament. However, President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir refused to sign a bill that would have recognized the United Nations "Day of the Woman" in October 1985. The government threatened to resign if she did not sign the bill, and, because of the controversy surrounding the president's refusal, she signed the bill the next day. Some commentators argued that her refusal undermined the traditional role of the president and almost provoked a constitutional crisis.

The dimension scores are based on presidential constitutional provisions, and in many cases the constitutional provisions regarding presidential decrees, referenda, and cabinet dissolution are ambiguous.[20] While these ordinal scores are relatively simple, they are not simple to create. I agree with Shugart and Carey that this method "is preferable to a purely nonquantitative, impressionistic ranking or to no assessment of comparative presidential powers at all."[21] However, as discussed earlier, there are such subtleties in how constitutional power is defined that there can be honest disagreement between political scientists on how powers should be coded. For example, I code some of the legislative powers of the Icelandic, Portuguese, Romanian, and Slovenian presidents differently than Shugart and Carey. Moreover, this type of exercise is always open to the criticism that constitutional power and actual power are quite different.[22] As the French and the Icelandic presidencies demonstrate, there can be significant differences between constitutional and actual power. Figure 1 graphs these presidential powers among the cases along these two dimensions. As expected, there are no premier-presidential cases in either Cell 3 or Cell 4 because a president with both substantial legislative and nonlegislative powers would be contrary to the role of a president in a premier-presidential regime. Presidents in a president-parliamentary regime would occupy these cells, as indeed Shugart and Carey find in their analysis.

Cell 1 contains countries whose presidential legislative and nonlegislative powers most resemble the French model of premier-presidentialism. Interestingly, almost all of the countries have presidents with more legislative authority than in France. In addition, all of the countries from East Europe and the former Soviet Union that adopted a premier-presidential regime are located in this cell.[23] East European pre-

**Figure 1** Presidential Powers in Premier-Presidential Regimes




mier-presidential regimes are more similar than the different postcommunist constitutional histories would lead one to expect.

Cell 2 contains three other premier-presidential regimes spread throughout Europe and Scandinavia. Although Portugal is on the border with Cell 1, I placed it in Cell 2 because of the significant influence that the Portuguese president possesses over cabinet formation and dissolution. Countries in this cell represent moderate-formal premier-presidentialism. This form of premier-presidentialism is moderate-formal because presidential nonlegislative powers in this cell are more numerous than in the French model found in Cell 1 but are less than in a presidential or a president-parliamentary regime. Moderate-formal premier-presidentialism represents a mid point in presidential powers among all regime types. These presidents have significant formal constitutional power in important nonlegislative areas, but ironically presidents in moderate-formal premier-presidential regimes are considered in practice to be far weaker than presidents found in Cell 1.

One of the interesting findings of this analysis is that the French president has far fewer constitutional powers than other European presidents. What might account for the power of French presidents, given their lack of constitutional power? Suleiman argues that in the case of the Fifth Republic the "presidential system derives its strength from the support it receives from a majority party. Without that support in the National Assembly, presidential power is considerably diminished."[24] Suleiman and others argue that the Fifth Republic is almost always a presidential regime. It was transformed into a parliamentary regime during periods of cohabitation in 1986–1988 and 1993–1995 and

since 1997 because the president's party was not the parliamentary majority party. This transformation demonstrates the institutional flexibility of a premier-presidential regime, but in addition the personal characteristics of officeholders can make one institution superior over another. John Keeler and Martin Schain argue that the personal authority of de Gaulle as well as the deference that Prime Minister Michel Debré paid to him molded the institutions of the Fifth Republic.[25] In other words, the behavior of the president and the prime minister shaped their institutions.

## Implications for Cabinet Stability

While studies have examined the cultural and institutional reasons why countries, especially postcommunist ones, have adopted a premier-presidential regime, less attention has been focused on the institutional and policy outcomes of regime type.[26] Those works that have specifically examined the impact of regime type on policy outcomes generally focus on either presidentialism or parliamentarism. In his review of recent efforts to link regime type and policy outcomes, Kent Easton noted that many of these works focus on the United States and Japan as exemplars of presidentialism and parliamentarism.[27] There has been far less research on the institutional and policy outcomes of premier-presidential regimes. This lack of research is somewhat surprising given the recent popularity of this regime type and its adoption by several emerging democracies. Three East European countries (Poland, Romania, and Slovenia) have adopted a premier-presidential regime, and countries such as Hungary have contemplated the direct election of the president. While I have noted differences between Cell 1 and Cell 2 premier-presidential regimes, the larger question is whether these differences have an impact on the larger political process.

Rather than focus on policymaking in a specific issue area (for example, the budget or defense spending), I explore the impact of institutional design on policymaking by examining cabinet instability. One of the enduring criticisms of parliamentary regimes is that they can lead to cabinet instability and a paralysis in general policymaking.[28] Donald Horowitz argues that this policymaking paralysis, in turn, has led to the breakdown of democracy in Asia and Africa.[29] Stephen Holmes argues that strong presidencies will emerge in societies in which elections will not produce a coherent parliamentary majority capable of reform-minded policies.[30] He believes that instability within parliamentary cabinets eventually provides the momentum for the adoption of a premier-presidential regime or generally a stronger presidency. In the case of postcommunist countries, he argues that the premier-presidential regime has many advantages over a pure parliamentary regime. Holmes maintains that the ambiguity and flexibility found between executives is a source of strength rather than a vice. Furthermore, this flexibility is necessary when dealing with the problems of an early postcommunist society.

**Table 4** Nonelected Cabinets Formed by Cell 1 Premier-Presidential Regimes (1999–2000)

| Country | Number of Cabinets[a] |
|---|---|
| Austria | 0 |
| France | 4 |
| Lithuania | 6 |
| Moldova | 3 |
| Poland | 6 |
| Romania | 3 |
| Slovenia | 0 |
| Average | 3.1 |

*Source*: Roberto Ortiz de Zarate, *Political Leaders 1945-2000,* available at http://personales.jet.es/ziaorarr/00index.htm.
[a]This measurement excludes those cabinets formed immediately after elections as well as caretaker governments.

If Horowitz and Holmes are correct about the negative outcomes of parliamentarism, then one would expect that Cell 2 premier-presidential regimes, in which the president is in reality far weaker, would be more prone to cabinet instability. Tables 4 and 5 report the number of nonelected cabinets formed between 1990 and 2000 for each cell. I count as a new government each change of party composition, change of prime minister, and accepted resignation of the cabinet. The definition of a new government varies within the literature on parliamentary coalitions. Michael Laver and Norman Schofield include governments formed after a parliamentary election in their criteria.[31] However, I controlled for the number of elections as well as for the

**Table 5** Nonelected Cabinets Formed by Cell 2 Premier-Presidential Regimes (1990–2000)

| Country | Number of Cabinets[a] |
|---|---|
| Finland | 0 |
| Iceland | 0 |
| Portugal | 0 |
| Average | 0 |

*Source*: Roberto Ortiz de Zarate, *Political Leaders 1945-2000,* available at http://personales.jet.es/ziaorarr/00index.htm.
[a]This measurement excludes those cabinets formed immediately after elections as well as caretaker governments.

number of caretaker governments. While a vote of no confidence in a parliamentary regime can ultimately lead to a new round of elections, none of the elections in this analysis were due to a vote of no confidence. A methodological problem would arise by counting governments formed after a parliamentary election because the election cycles vary among countries. On average, more cabinets would be formed in countries in which members of parliament serve shorter terms. Therefore, I exclude governments formed after an election in order to more precisely measure cabinet instability.

For countries in Cell 1, the average number of governments was 3.1, while in Cell 2 the average number was 0. While this finding does not establish a causal relationship between regime type and cabinet instability, there does seem to be a substantial difference between Cell 1 and Cell 2 countries. Indeed, this finding underscores several of the arguments made by such authors as Bernard Grofman and Lijphart that coalition termination is a function of the structural attributes of the larger regime in which the coalition functions.[32] Thus, in those premier-presidential regimes that are considered to be the most presidential, there is actually greater cabinet instability than in those regimes that are more parliamentary. Therefore, more parliamentarism in these regimes does not lead to the cabinet instability that so many associate with a pure parliamentary regime. Perhaps this result should not be so surprising in light of some of the previous research on presidential and parliamentary regimes. For example, Bert Rockman and Kent Weaver find that, when comparing the American presidential and Japanese parliamentary regimes, presidentialism creates more policy-making players or, to use George Tsebelis's term, "veto players."[33] The implication for constitutional engineering is that stronger presidents in a premier-presidential regime lead to greater cabinet instability. Many regarded the cabinet instability in postcommunist Poland in the early 1990s as a function of the strength of the president. Government instability was one of the reasons why the 1997 Polish constitution limited the powers of the president.

## Cabinet Instability Due to Presidential Power or the Transition to Democracy?

Regime type is just one of the institutional variables that can contribute to cabinet instability. The party and the electoral systems can also affect the durability of governments. Further research needs to be conducted on the interaction of these important independent variables, but in the case of premier-presidential regimes the institutional arrangement itself has often been cited as the cause of cabinet instability (an excellent example is Romania).

However, one could argue that comparing countries in Cell 1 that are essentially East European to countries in Cell 2 that are West European is problematic. It could

**Table 6** Nonelected Cabinets Formed by East European Premier-Presidential Regimes (1999–2000)

| Country | Number of Cabinets[a] |
|---|---|
| Lithuania | 6 |
| Moldova | 3 |
| Poland | 6 |
| Romania | 3 |
| Slovenia | 0 |
| Average | 3.6 |

*Source*: Roberto Ortiz de Zarate, *Political Leaders 1945-2000*, available at http://personales.jet.es/ziaorarr/00index.htm.
[a]This measurement excludes those cabinets formed immediately after elections as well as caretaker governments.

be that the greater cabinet instability reported in Table 4 is due not to the strength of the president but rather to the period of economic and political transition through which the postcommunist countries in Cell 1 are going. In other words, greater cabinet instability should be anticipated in postcommunist countries than in more established West European countries. Therefore, to determine if the cabinet instability associated with a premier-presidential regime is a postcommunist artifact, I compared all nonelected East European cabinets in parliamentary and premier-presidential regimes. If, indeed, cabinet instability is a function of the transition to democracy, there should not be a substantial difference between these two regime types. If, however, cabinet instability is related to regime type, then there should be a difference.

Tables 6 and 7 report the average nonelected cabinets for all East European countries. The East European premier-presidential regimes average 3.6 cabinets, while parliamentary regimes average 1.8 cabinets. Surprisingly, East European premier-presidential regimes are more unstable than parliamentary regimes. Therefore, the earlier finding showing differences in cabinet stability between Cell 1 and Cell 2 countries is not a postcommunist artifact. There does seem to be some relationship between presidentialism in a premier-presidential regime and cabinet instability.

## The Debate over Regime Type in Moldova

Moldova provides an interesting case in which to examine the relationship between the president, the cabinet, and the parliament. Indeed, Moldova's premier-presidential regime is unique within the former Soviet Union. The vast majority of regimes in the former Soviet Union are either president-parliamentary or presidential.[34] This

**Table 7** Nonelected Cabinets Formed by East European Parliamentary Regions (1990–2000)

| Country | Number of Cabinets[a] |
|---|---|
| Albania | 5 |
| Bulgaria | 3 |
| Czech Republic | 1 |
| Hungary | 2 |
| FRY Macedonia | 2 |
| Slovakia | 0 |
| Yugoslavia | 0 |
| Average | 1.8 |

*Source*: Roberto Ortiz de Zarate, *Political Leaders 1945-2000*, available at http://personales.jet.es/ziaorarr/00index.htm.

[a]This measurement excludes those cabinets formed immediately after elections as well as caretaker governments.

fact was not lost on the Moldovan president Lucinschi, who was elected to the post in 1996. After a bitter campaign against then-president Mircea Snegur, Lucinschi promised to work with the parliament dominated by his former party, the Democratic Agrarians. After parliamentary elections in 1998 Lucinschi's parliamentary supporters cobbled together a coalition that retained Prime Minister Ion Ciubuc. However, by early 1999 Lucinschi's relationship with the government and the parliament began to unravel. While the disagreements were ostensibly over economic reforms, Lucinschi simply did not have a party organization within the parliament to provide him with political support. In essence, he had entered a period of cohabitation and had great difficulty even winning approval of his choices for prime minister.[35] In March 1999 Lucinschi issued a decree to conduct a consultative referendum at the same time as May local elections.[36] In his decree Lucinschi proposed the creation of a presidential regime.[37] The decree stated that "the semipresidential form of government...proved that the existing mechanisms of organization, functioning, and cooperation between the legislative, executive, and judicial powers in the state do not provide for their corresponding division and the necessary equilibrium between their powers and obligations, as well as the unity of the state leadership."[38] The referendum question asked voters: "Do you support changes in the constitution in order to introduce a presidential form of rule in Moldova, where the president forms the government which is responsible for ruling?"

Over 50 percent of the voters approved the referendum, although exact figures were never published by the central election commission. After the referendum Lucinschi proposed a draft law that would have provided the president the sole authority to appoint and remove cabinet ministers. In addition, he proposed reducing the size of the parliament from 101 to seventy members as well as changing to a

mixed electoral system. Most of Moldova's political forces spoke out against the draft. International organizations such as the Council of Europe also expressed their concern over the constitutional change. In a speech delivered to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on June 25, 1999, Lucinschi defended his proposal and explained that Moldova's political instability required the concentration of power in one executive. The inability of the Moldovan government to enact economic reform reflected the divisions within the parliamentary coalition. Lucinschi maintained that a presidential regime would allow one individual rather than a diverse group of parliamentarians and government officials to assume responsibility for the country's economic performance.

However, Lucinschi's repeated attempts to muster support failed to convince, not only the Council of Europe, but also Moldovan members of parliament. This failure was critical because, in order to call a binding referendum, Lucinschi needed a parliamentary majority (as in France). However, by summer 2000 Lucinschi's support within the parliament was at its lowest point in almost four years. Finally, on July 5, 2000, the parliament approved a series of constitutional amendments envisioning, not a presidential, but a parliamentary regime. The amendments stipulated that the president would be elected and, if need be, dismissed by the parliament. The amendments passed in the first reading by a vote of ninety to five (and were later revoted by almost the same margin). Romania was scheduled to become a parliamentary regime once Lucinschi's term expired on January 15, 2001. Ironically, former president Snegur stated immediately after the vote that differences between the president and the parliament had existed since 1991, and he acknowledged his attempt to enact a constitutional amendment creating a presidential regime. Snegur argued that "all this became possible because in 1994 the then parliament chose this most unhappy form of cooperation between power branches. The president, elected by the whole nation, had no option but to make pledges...and become a source of instability."[39] Snegur's comments echo those of Polish members of parliament who decided to reduce the power of the president precisely because of the instability of the premier-presidential regime. The Moldovan parliament's response is simply a much more extreme solution to this perceived instability. The Moldovan case is instructive because it vividly shows the conflict that can occur during a period of cohabitation. While French cohabitation has met with relative success, cohabitation in emerging democracies can be much more difficult.

## Conclusions

Based on Shugart and Carey's ordinal scoring method, there are two general patterns in the powers of presidents in premier-presidential regimes, the French and the moderate-formal model of premier-presidentialism. The French model is based on a pres-

ident with limited nonlegislative powers. The presidents of Austria, France, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia possess restricted nonlegislative powers. The moderate-formal model of premier-presidentialism is based on a president with significant nonlegislative powers. Iceland, Finland, and Portugal are examples of this model of premier-presidentialism. In these countries the president has much more constitutional power to form and to dissolve cabinets. However, while these presidents have significant formal nonlegislative powers, they are ironically among the weakest semipresidential presidents.

These differences between premier-presidential regimes seem to have a relationship to institutional outcomes. As reported in Table 4, those premier-presidential regimes that are considered to be the most presidential have the greatest level of cabinet instability. While cabinet instability is not a function of the transition to democracy per se, this finding is especially troubling because so many postcommunist countries have adopted this regime type. In the case of Poland the powers of the president were curtailed, and, as Moldova demonstrates, the flexibility of the premier-presidential regime can ultimately undermine the integrity of the entire political system. While premier-presidentialism is one of the most popular European regime types, one wonders if the Moldovan example will be repeated throughout East Europe.

## NOTES

An earlier version of this research was presented at the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., August 30–September 3, 2000. I want to thank three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

1. For an examination of the impact of electoral laws on institutions, see Sharon D. Drumm and Samantha L. Durst, "Power to the Powerless or to the Powerful? The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws in Eastern Europe," paper presented at the annual meetings of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, 1994; and John T. Ishiyama, "Transitional Electoral Systems in Post-Communist Eastern Europe," *Political Science Quarterly*, 112 (Spring 1997), 95–115. For an analysis of East European party systems, see Herbert Kitschelt, "The Formation of Party Systems in East Central Europe," *Politics and Society*, 20 (March 1992), 7–50; and David M. Olson, "Political Parties and Party Systems in Regime Transformation: Inner Transition in the New Democracies of Central Europe," *The American Review of Politics*, 14 (May 1993), 619–58. For a discussion of constitutionalism and the judiciary in postcommunist countries, see Sergio Bartole, "Organizing the Judiciary in Central and Eastern Europe," *East European Constitutional Review*, 7 (Winter 1998), 62–69; A. E. (Dick) Howard, ed., *Constitution Making in Eastern Europe* (Washington, D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1991).

2. The literature in this area has grown substantially over the last five years. For a good overview of different methodologies and conclusions, see Thomas F. Remington, ed., *Parliaments in Transition: The New Legislative Politics in the Former USSR and Eastern Europe* (Boulder: Westview, 1994); David M. Olson and Philip Norton, eds., *The New Parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Frank Cass, 1996); Ray Taras, ed., *Postcommunist Presidents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Timothy Frye, "A Politics of Institutional Choice: Post-Communist Presidencies," *Comparative Political Studies*, 30 (October 1997), 523–52.

3. Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, eds., *The Failure of Presidential Democracy: Comparative Perspectives*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Kurt Von Mettenheim, ed., *Presidential Institutions and Democratic Politics: Comparing Regional and National Contexts* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Robert Elgie, ed., *Semi-Presidentialism in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

4. While such scholars as Linz and Valenzuela have long argued that regime type has an impact on democratic transition, several recent works have questioned whether this variable is fundamentally important or just one of several variables. Kent Easton, "Parliamentarism versus Presidentialism in the Policy Arena," *Comparative Politics*, 32 (April 2000), 355–76, is an excellent review of different views. See also Juan J. Linz, "Transitions to Democracy," *Washington Quarterly*, 1 (Summer 1990), 143–64; Matthew Soberg Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Scott Mainwaring and Matthew Soberg Shugart, eds., *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Timothy Power and Mark Gasiorowski, "Institutional Design and Democratic Consolidation in the Third World," *Comparative Political Studies*, 30 (April 1997), 123–55.

5. Juan J. Linz, "Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy: Does It Make a Difference?," in Linz and Valenzuela, eds., *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*, vol. 1; Alfred Stepan and Cindy Skach, "Constitutional Frameworks and Democratic Consolidation: Parliamentarism versus Presidentialism," *World Politics*, 46 (October 1993), 1–22.

6. Giovanni Sartori is one of the few political scientists to advocate semipresidentialism over presidential and parliamentary regimes. Giovanni Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry into Structures, Incentives and Outcomes* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

7. Maurice Duverger, "A New Political System Model: Semi-Presidential Government," *European Journal of Political Research*, 8 (Spring 1980), 52–69.

8. Kaare Strom and Octavio Amorim Neto, "Duverger Revisited: Presidential Power in European Parliamentary Democracies," paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, 1999.

9. As this article was being written, the Moldovan parliament voted to amend the constitution to require that the parliament elect the president. This issue is discussed in greater detail below. I did not include Bulgaria and Estonia because, even though both countries popularly elect the president, the office has virtually no constitutional powers. In addition, I did not include Croatia because it has a president-parliamentary regime (the president has the unilateral power to dismiss the prime minister). On that point, Iceland technically should not be considered a premier-presidential regime because the president can dismiss any minister of government. However, because this dismissal power has never been used, most scholars consider the country to have a premier-presidential regime.

10. Sartori, p. 126.

11. Andrew Wilson, "Ukraine: Two Presidents and Their Powers," in Ray Taras, ed., *Postcommunist Presidencies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

12. While many scholars have made this point, no one has been as articulate about the relationship between parliamentary party support and presidential power in France as Ezra Suleiman. For a good discussion of this issue, see Ezra N. Suleiman, "Presidentialism and Political Stability in France," in Linz and Valenzuela, eds., *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*, vol. 1.

13. Matthew S. Shugart, "Of Presidents and Parliaments," *East European Constitutional Review*, 3 (Winter 1993), 32.

14. Many of these indices have been developed to assess presidential power in postcommunist countries. See James P. McGregor, "The Presidency in East Central Europe," *RFE/RL Research Report*, 3 (February 1994), 23–31. In fact, Frye reports that his scale of presidential power is highly correlated (.814) with the scale developed by Shugart and Carey, pp. 525–27.

15. In their analysis of thirty-five countries with a popularly elected president, Shugart and Carey, p. 155, found only twelve countries that did not provide some form of presidential veto.
16. John M. Carey and Matthew Soberg Shugart, eds., *Executive Decree Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 6.
17. In 1999 the Romanian constitutional court overturned a decision by the parliament to eliminate the president's right to call a referendum.
18. Austrian president Thomas Klestil has been much more active than any of his predecessors.
19. Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).
20. Stephen Holmes argues that the power of presidents stems as much from nonconstitutional sources as from the constitutions themselves. He explains that this informal power is perfectly normal and not unconstitutional in spirit. Stephen Holmes, "The Postcommunist Presidency," *East European Constitutional Review*, 2 (Winter 1993), 36–39.
21. Shugart and Carey, p. 149.
22. Sartori, p. 126, believes that, because the Austrian and Icelandic presidents are "strong only on paper," these countries should be considered parliamentary rather than premier-presidential regimes.
23. The Polish president under the "little constitution" of 1992 had substantially more powers than any other East European president. These powers were curtailed in the 1997 constitution. For a discussion of the reasons behind these changes, see Leszek Lech Garlicki, "The Presidency in the New Polish Constitution," *East European Constitutional Review*, 6 (Spring-Summer 1997), 81–89.
24. Suleiman, p. 146.
25. John T. S. Keeler and Martin A. Schain, "Institutions, Political Poker, and Regime Evolution in France," in Von Mettenheim, ed., pp. 88–90.
26. Elgie's work is one of the few truly comparative examinations of semipresidentialism throughout Europe. Articles by such individuals as Frye and Geddes explain the adoption of this regime type in post-communist countries. See Elgie, p. 18; Frye pp. 528–34; and Barbara Geddes, "Initiation of New Democratic Institutions in Eastern Europe and Latin America," in Arend Lijphart and Carlos Waisman, eds., *Institutional Design in New Democracies: Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).
27. Easton, p. 358, argues that "it is often difficult to determine whether the policy outcomes identified result from presidential and parliamentary government or from the American and Japanese versions."
28. In examining the case of postwar Italy from 1946 to 1992, Carol Mershon notes that cabinet instability was combined with governing power stability. Although Italy experienced the greatest number of European cabinets, the Christian Democratic Party always held governing power and was able to shape the legislative agenda. Therefore, cabinet instability does not necessarily lead to a paralysis in policymaking. Carol Mershon, "The Costs of Coalition: Coalition Theories and Italian Governments," *American Political Science Review*, 90 (September 1996), 534–54.
29. Donald L. Horowitz, "Comparing Democratic Systems," *Journal of Democracy*, 1 (Fall 1990).
30. Holmes, p. 38.
31. Michael Laver and Norman Schofield, *Multiparty Government: The Politics of Coalition in Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
32. There is a vast literature that examines the relationship between coalition instability and the structural attributes of the regime. See, for example, Bernard Grofman, "The Comparative Analysis of Coalition Formation and Duration: Distinguishing Between-Country and Within-Country Effects," *British Journal of Political Science*, 19 (April 1989), 291–302; and Lijphart, p. 60.
33. Bert A. Rockman, and R. Kent Weaver, eds., *Do Institutions Matter? Government Capabilities in the United States and Abroad* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1993); George Tsebelis, "Decision Making in Political Systems: Veto Players in Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Multicameralism, Multipartyism," *British Journal of Political Science*, 25 (July 1995), 289–325.

34. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are obvious exceptions.
35. In 1999 alone he nominated four individuals to become prime minister.
36. A consultative referendum elicits the opinion of the public and has no legal ramifications. Lucinschi hoped to use the outcome of this referendum to put pressure on the parliament either to call for a binding referendum or to pass a constitutional amendment.
37. Because the Moldovan president would still nominate a prime minister subject to a vote of confidence, the proposed change was actually a president-parliamentary regime.
38. *Infotag*, Mar. 22, 1999.
39. *Infotag*, July 5, 2000.