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The Blame Game of Presidentialism

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The Blame Game of Presidentialism

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The statement that parliamentarism is more conducive to stable democracy than presidentialism, especially in socially, ideologically, and regionally polarized countries, has been widely diffused over the last few years. This thesis of Juan J. Linz has received remarkable support from scholars as well as an appreciable amount of criticism and discussion. Linz began to present an interpretative framework on this subject in the 1970s, when he was dealing with factors of instability and the breakdown of democracies. But, more recently the question of forms of regime has become attractive once again because of the increased interest in the study of transitions to democracy and the conditions of its stabilization and for a general trend in political science to pay increasing attention to the role of institutions in the political process.¹

Drawing on some analytical tools developed in formal political theory, this chapter presents a model of presidentialism that can explain some relevant traits of the working of political institutions in such a regime compared with the performance of its parliamentary counterpart. Although it is a simplification of the empirical facts, such an ideal type of presidentialism can help to interpret a variety of cases. The main aim of the chapter, then, is to present a logical argument that, as we shall see, will allow us to confirm, discuss, refine, or enlarge the implications of more informal and empirical observations.

The problem with presidentialism appears to be, according to Linz, a conflict between two sources of legitimacy. This means that in such a regime president and parliament may promote different, even opposite political options. In that case the president presumably defends the "general will of the people," who would have elected him against the array of particular interests represented in the multiparty legislature, while the parliamentarian blames the president for his pretensions to monopolize popular representation and for dangerously concentrating power in himself. The general effect of this conflict between institutions tends to be a lowering of government effectiveness and a weakening of democratic legitimacy. These may provide incentives for interest groups to act in extraconstitutional areas. In its most extreme case, as Linz himself stresses, the search for an arbiter may lead to a general constitutional crisis and endanger the very survival of democracy. From this point of view the long-term stability of democracy in the United States would be an exception that should be explained by the strong effect of variables other than those identified here.

In order to build a formal model I start by listing the main assumptions and variables, sometimes explicit or implicit in the abovementioned discussion, that should be taken into account. These are the main assumptions:

First, a presidential regime is defined as a system of mutual independence between president and parliament. The president has a fixed electoral mandate and, in normal circumstances, cannot be removed by parliament, while parliament has another fixed electoral mandate and, in general, cannot be dissolved by the president.

Second, as observed in most real cases, the president is elected by popular vote under a simple majority or plurality electoral system (although the majority-runoff system is also used in a number of cases of the direct election of a president). Parliament, on the contrary, is generally elected under a proportional system. This divergence of rules tends to produce a notable disparity of results. In the parliament (both in presidentialism and in parliamentarianism), legislative majorities are formed most of the time; when no party has an absolute majority of seats these majorities are reached through multiparty coalitions. On the other hand the president is often only elected by a plurality of voters. Consequently, the president's party in presidentialism may be different from the parties that form a majority coalition in the parliament. This distortion cannot appear in parliamentarianism, in which the chief executive, whom for the purpose of this article we shall call "prime minister," is elected by a parliamentary majority.2 In

2. Dealing with the set of thirty-eight non-OECD democracies in 1973–1987, Alfred Stepan and Cindy Skach have found that "in the presidential systems, the executive's party enjoyed a legislative majority less than half of the time (48 per cent of the democratic years). Parliamentary systems, in sharp contrast, had majorities at least 83 per cent of the time" (Alfred Stepan and Cindy Skach, "Meta-Institutional Frameworks and Democratic Consolidation," paper presented at the Third Meeting of the East-South System Transformations Project, January 4-7, 1992, Toledo, Spain, p. 8). Even in the United States, a biparty system, the president has historically enjoyed a majority in congress for only one-third of the time, and only two-thirds of the time for the period of 1955 to 1990.

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the context of this general institutional framework, I will compare the effects of several alternatives for the following variables.

First, it could be assumed that the party system is a multiparty rather than a two-party system. This assumption would be consistent with that of a proportional electoral system for parliament, but it might be contradicted by the trend of a plurality electoral system, assumed for electing the president, to produce a two-party system. If this latter tendency prevails over the former, coalitions would be formed not after but before the elections and within the parties in a way that might create further tension between the president and the internal factions of the parliamentary parties, including the president's party. For this reason, I will compare the effects on legitimacy and conflict assuming a multiparty system.

Second, parliamentary parties can be ideologically consistent and policy-seeking, i.e., acting according to the voters' preferences and forming coherent majority coalitions with ideologically connected partners, or opportunistic and office-seeking, in which case they would be ready to form even "nonconnected" winning coalitions.

Third, and as stated just above, I will assume that a polarized society, either in social, ideological or regional terms, can be represented by a bimodal distribution of preferences, and a consensual society by an unimodal distribution. The result of the analysis in each case will also be compared.

The plan of the chapter is the following. First, an assessment of the degrees of legitimacy of each institution — president elected by plurality and parliamentary majorities — will be attempted. Second, an index of conflict will inform us of the likelihood of the tension between president and parliament in several hypothetical situations of number of parties, party motives to form parliamentary coalitions, and social polarization. Finally, the logic of conflict will be presented in the strategic form of game theory.

Two Sources of Legitimacy

It is well known that different electoral and voting systems induce different party strategies, of either moderation or ideological distance, and produce different winners. Depending on the strength of support and the intensity of popular satisfaction reached by the winner, elected officials may obtain more or less legitimacy, i.e., acceptance of their decisions and their staying in power. Indirectly, then, the legitimacy of the winner in the eyes of the electorate affects political stability. Since presidentialism implies the coexistence of different electoral
systems, basically plurality for president and proportionality, often followed by the formation of majority coalitions, for parliament, it is interesting to look into the expected effects of these specific rules.

I begin with party strategies. On the one hand spatial models of electoral competition in one dimension have shown that, under majority rule, there is a general trend to convergence of parties interested in winning elections toward the political center or, more precisely, around the median of voters' preferences. This trend is fulfilled in most formal situations with a two-party system and, also, in some situations with a multiparty system, for example, when the electorate has a unimodal distribution of preferences and a rapid level of turnout. On the other hand when plurality is the decision rule in a multiparty system, we cannot expect a moderate convergence of parties but rather some polarization between them (that result is also valid for runoffs, the other procedure frequently used in some countries to elect the president). In other words, under plurality rule a non-convergent multiparty equilibrium occurs.4

The explanation of this result looks as follows. Certainly, even under plurality rule there is a centripetal force drawing parties toward the center (or median). However, this concentration around the center concedes an advantage to extremists, especially (but not only) in polarized societies, given the important number of voters whose preferences are far off the center, and it can be sufficient to gain a relative majority, in which case a centrifugal force appears, pushing parties outward.

The second step of our analysis is to assess the expected degree of popular acceptance for the winner under plurality, that is, the common case of a directly elected president, in comparison with the winner under alternative rules. There are two criteria of efficiency or legitimacy that may be used for this purpose. One is the Condorcet criterion, according to which the winner should be the party that could beat each one of the others in a two-way race. This is a logical extension of the majority criterion from a two-party to a multiparty system.5 The other criterion, social utility, takes into account the intensity of voters' preferences. Interpreting voters' opinions as utilities for parties (utilities that decrease linearly with distance from voter to party), the social utility of a party is the sum of all voters' utilities for that party.6 The two criteria need not necessarily agree.

We can rely on some assessments of voting procedures based on results with computer simulations. They assume various numbers of parties, under either a random society and impartial political culture or a more ideologically structured society with several spatial dimensions (using in this case a multivariate normal distribution of tastes). Although the available simulations are not exactly the best that could be used to be compared with multiparty coalitions, the analysis of results obtained with seven electoral systems is suggestive enough, showing that the plurality winner is always the weakest performer according to both criteria (and the runoff winner also ranks very low). In all of the cases the efficiencies of the winners with these usual procedures for electing a president decrease drastically, and much more quickly than those of the winners with other procedures, when the number of parties increases.7

I do not know of any similar analysis for ideologically structured societies with bimodal distribution of preferences. However, in a situation of social, ideological, or regional polarization it is clear that the incentives for ideological distance between parties rise, and, probably, as the following example suggests, the plurality winning party can then receive less acceptance from voters than in a random or a consensual society.

For the sake of simplicity let us assume that we are faced with a specific ideological space that can be simplified in three cells. There is a three-party system, each party obtaining a number of seats exactly proportional to the number of its voters, and, ideological distance being the same between each cell, the preference orders of voters are as straightforwardly linear as those presented in tables 23.1 and 23.2. In the first case the distribution of support for each party is characteristic of a consensual society (with one mode in the center), while in the second case there is a clear polarization of tastes (manifested in the higher values of both extremes).

It is assumed that the plurality winner corresponds to the president's party, while several kinds of parliamentary majorities can be formed, depending partly on the loyalty of parties toward their electorate. For loyal and policy-oriented parties only minimum connected winning coalitions (MCWC, that is, coalitions

between parties that are contiguous in the ideological space) can be expected, while for office-seeking or opportunist parties even "nonconnected" coalitions can appear.8

The values for Condorcet and social-utility criteria of the plurality winner and the diverse majority coalitions have been calculated, giving the following results. In the consensual society the plurality winner has a similar degree of Condorcet efficiency and a lower degree of social utility than those of minimum connected winning coalitions. In the polarized society the plurality winner has worse results: a lower degree of Condorcet efficiency than those of minimum connected winning coalitions and a lower degree of social-utility than connected coalitions including the largest party. Nonconnected coalitions, those formed by opportunist parties ready to unite with ideologically distant and noncontiguous partners (in the examples, a pact between both extremes), are always among the worst.

These results can be explained in the following way. The plurality winner can obtain results that are not bad according to the Condorcet criterion in a consensual society because this criterion favours the centrist parties (i.e., those with more acceptance and lower refusal degrees) and in a consensual society the most voted party holds a centrist position, joining together a capacity for consensus and victory by simple majority. In a polarized society, on the other hand, the plurality winner is worse off in terms of Condorcet efficiency than the minimum connected coalitions because in this case the largest party is extreme.

On the other hand the party that fares best in terms of the social utility criterion may not be centrist if the intensity of preferences of a simple and extreme majority is high enough. However, with this criterion, the plurality winner only gets higher results than connected coalitions when these do not include the largest party. If parliamentary rules promote the initial candidacy of the largest party to form a government, as usually happens in the real world, parliamentary connected coalitions will get higher social utility than plurality winners even in a polarized society.

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Table 23.2 Legitimacy of President and Parliamentary Majority in a Polarized Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polarized society</th>
<th>Utility values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party seats</td>
<td>4A 2B 3C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference orders</td>
<td>A B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B A C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C A A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 1 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimacy</td>
<td>Include Condorcet winner (B) Social-utility (sum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plurality winner</td>
<td>A not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected coalitions</td>
<td>AB yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BC yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonconnected coalitions</td>
<td>AC not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.

These formal results allow us to suggest the following and provisional conclusion. The plurality electoral system acts as a disincentive for a consensual moderation of parties, and the plurality winner, who can be identified with the elected president, should be considered worse in efficiency or legitimacy than connected coalitions between parliamentary parties following the usual rules, especially when there are numerous parties and a polarized society.

Surely these rather negative evaluations of the plurality system could also be applied to parliamentary regimes using that electoral system (such as Britain), but this would mean merely that the infrequent variant of parliamentarism shares some of the undesirable features of presidentialism.

An Index of Disharmony

The splitting of power between two institutions with different sources of legitimacy and frequently different winners, acting in the same territory and directing the same people, often leads to a conflictual relationship between the two. When the president's party is the majority party in the parliament or, at least, belongs to the majority legislative coalition, it might be expected that the two institutions would pursue harmonious policies and cooperate, probably helping to concentrate power in the president. But the prevalence of different parties in each institution seems almost certain to provoke interinstitutional conflicts in presidentialism, according to the logic that I will present below. It is then possible to measure the likelihood of conflict between president and parliament in presidentialism through the degree of party division between the two institutions.

For that purpose I will start calculating the power index of the president's party in the parliament. There are several power indices in the theory, all based on voting power indices. However, different indices seem more appropriate for different kinds of voters, e.g., individual legislators or disciplined parties voting as units. In our case, and assuming that actors are parliamentary parties with unequal voting power, I will make calculations using two different indices that correspond to two different assumptions on party motives. One is the so-called Deegan-Pakel index, based on the number of minimum winning connected coalitions to which each party can belong, which seems more appropriate for parliaments with ideological or policy-oriented parties. The other is the so-called Banzhaf index, based on the number of minimum winning (including non-connected) coalitions to which each party can belong, which seems more appropriate for parliaments with opportunistic or office-seeking parties. Usually, all of these power indices are presented with values between zero and one.

Now it is possible to propose an index of disharmony in presidentialism, which is equal to one minus the power index of the president's party in the parliament. One is the value of the power index of the president's single party in the presidency, while the second value of the subtraction is equal to or lower than one because the president's party can share power with other parties in the parliament. Then the index of disharmony will have also values between zero and one. Focusing on the differences of power between parties that prevail in each institution, this index may adequately assess the circumstances in which the splitting of power between president and parliament seems more conducive to institutional conflict.

The index just proposed is a transference and adaptation of that invented by William H. Riker to measure disharmony in federalism. In its original application the index was based on a different power index than the one adopted here; it was used to compare power in a national legislature with the set of regional (or state) legislatures, and it was also rightly called "index of decentralization."
In my present elaboration it is easier to calculate, since it is only necessary to ascertain the power index of a party in one legislature, and, given the characteristic relationship of rivalry between president and parliament in presidentialism, it can justly retain its original name of "index of disharmony."

When the president's party has an absolute majority in parliament, it has all the power and an index of one in both institutions. Rather obviously, the index of disharmony in this case is zero. That is, complete harmony is to be expected in the relationship between president and parliament. Accepting the same reasoning used to assess decentralization, it is possible to argue that the index shows serious disharmony when it rises above 0.50, that is, the point at which the president's party fails to control most decisions of parliament. There are three institutional alternatives that, according to what is empirically observed in its former application, will most affect the value and variation of the index. In presidentialism, one of them, the existence of two or more parties, is indeterminate, but the other two fulfill the conditions that are more prone to shift and increase the levels of disharmony: few political units (in fact, the fewest number: two), and temporally separate elections for each institution.

In tables 23.3 and 23.4 the indices of disharmony between president and parliament, in a consensual society and in a polarized society respectively, are presented. In each case calculations have been made with different assumptions on several variables: the number of parties and the kind of coalitions that parties will be expected to form.

Even for the moderate values of party fractionalization used in the examples (with only three or five parties), it is noteworthy that the obtained values of the index of disharmony are always rather high, equal to or greater than the above-mentioned point of 0.50. Looking at the tables, it is possible to observe some clear tendencies in the influence of variables.

American legislatures, both state and national. He also constructed the index of disharmony on proportional basis weighting each legislature according to its size. Using the same Shapley-Shubik index, Riker had also presented calculations of the relative power of the president, the vice-president, each senator, and each representative. See William Riker, Democracy in the United States (New York: Macmillan, 1953). Steven Brams has used other indices to measure power of the same national institutions of the presidential regime of the United States; see "Are the Two Houses of Congress Really Co-Equal?" in Bernard Grofman and Donald Wittman, eds., The Federalist Papers and the New Institutionalism (New York: Agathon, 1989), pp. 125–141; and Steven Brams, Paul J. Auffuso, and D. Marc Kilgour, "Presidential Power: A Game-Theoretic Analysis," in Paul Brace, Christine B. Harrington, and Gary King, eds., The Presidency in American Politics (New York: New York University Press, 1989), pp. 55–74.
Table 23.4 Indices of Disharmony between President and Parliament in a Polarized Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polarized society with three-party system:</th>
<th>4A</th>
<th>2B</th>
<th>3C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plurality winner:</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ideological-oriented parties**

Minimum connected winning coalitions (MCWC): AB, BC
Deegan-Pake power index of A: $q_A = 0.25$
Index of disharmony: $1 - q_A = 0.75$

**Opportunistic parties**

Minimum winning coalitions (MWC): AB, AC, BC
Banzhaf power index of A: $f_A = 0.33$
Index of disharmony: $1 - f_A = 0.66$

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Polarized society with five-party system: 3A 1B 1C 2D 2E
Plurality winner: A

**Ideological-oriented parties**

Minimum connected winning coalitions (MCWC): ABC, CDE
Deegan-Pake power index of A: $q_A = 0.16$
Index of disharmony: $1 - q_A = 0.83$

**Opportunistic parties**

Minimum winning coalitions (MWC): ABC, AD, AE, BDE, CDE
Banzhaf power index of A: $f_A = 0.23$
Index of disharmony: $1 - f_A = 0.77$

Source: Author.

First, a relatively high number of parties tends to produce a higher likelihood of conflict than a lower number of parties.

Second, a polarized society tends to occasion a higher level of disharmony, and presumably conflict, than a consensus society. However, this tendency is only fulfilled clearly when parties are ideologically oriented; otherwise, in our example the levels of disharmony remain invariable.

In fact, and this is the third point, there is no linear relationship between levels of disharmony and party motives. Opportunistic parties seem to introduce low variations in the index, maintaining it at around intermediate levels in all the four hypothetical cases in which they intervene. On the contrary, ideological parties are associated with the highest and the lowest levels. Therefore, it is possible to say that ideologically oriented parties do not introduce one specific trend in the disharmony between president and parliament in presidentialism but reinforce social tendencies, either to consensus or to polarization. Specifically, acting in a polarized society, ideologically oriented parties raise the level of disharmony and reinforce polarization, but, on the contrary, acting in a consensus society, ideologically oriented parties (which finally means loyalty to electorate) moderate the level of disharmony between president and parliament in comparison with opportunistic parties in the same situation. This seems to be an important and not previously stated finding that allows us to distinguish the predictable effects of such variables as distribution of preferences in the electorate and number of parties from the possibility to counteract those effects with appropriate motives of collective action by party leaders and representatives.

This approach makes further empirical tests of the model possible. For that purpose, it would be necessary to collect empirical data on real situations of sequentially different parliamentary majorities and minorities of the president's party. Then, it would probably not be difficult to account for some kind of commensurable conflicts between president and parliament (for example, uses of presidential veto against legislative proposals of parliament) to serve as an empirical indication of disharmony, and correlate them with the relative values of our formal index.

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**A Game of Chicken**

In order to approach the real dynamics of conflict it is convenient to define the main actors' motives in presidentialism. We can say that the relationship between the president and the parliamentary majority is dominated by two forces: one is the aim of governability, which requires collaboration and agreement between the two actors, the other is the incentives of electoral competition, which tend to induce behavior of reciprocal blame, charging the other actor with accusations of bad government.

Stressing the second aim, Giovanni Sartori says that in presidentialism we can often find a divided government whose two component elements perceive their respective electoral interest in the failure of the other institution. For a member of a parliamentary majority that does not include the president's party, to agree with the president is to aid his reelection; conversely, a minority president seeking to restore his own party's power in the next legislative elections is prompted to run against parliament. The two actors play, in Sartori's words, the blame game. Its is important, nevertheless, to also take into account the first aim of governability shared by both actors.

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To present this dual tension as a formal interaction in a standard game-theoretical approach, it is possible to simplify the strategies to be chosen by the two actors in the common way of cooperation (C) and defection (D). In this case, the C strategy means disposition to make concessions to the political purposes of the other actor and rapprochement to its positions in order to improve governability. On the contrary, the D strategy means firmness in the actor’s positions and loyalty to electoral promises, which can be more beneficial in future electoral contests.

This dilemma between cooperating with other parties or maintaining one’s own political positions is similar to that presented to any party in parliamentarism, for instance, when it is the moment to form a majority coalition. However, there are important differences with that situation, which provides incentives for a strategy of defection in presidentialism. In parliamentarism a party often has to choose between two alternatives: sharing power, and paying the cost of accepting political or ideological concessions vis-à-vis its partners, or remaining in the opposition. Even for the more policy-oriented party this situation generally pushes it to cooperate, that is, to seek some power to pass bills and implement policies more or less close to its preferred positions. Instead, the framework of presidentialism implies that an institutional division of power between the president’s party and the parliamentary majority parties exists, which makes it less attractive to cooperate for both actors, because cooperation is not a way to get more power and may be electorally damaging.

Even worse, in some cases of agreeing with an unpopular proposal of the other party (for example, raising taxes, controlling salaries, increasing security measures, and so on), an actor may be interested in insincerely voting against that proposal for the sole purpose of discredit the other actor with the electorate. In presidentialism this behavior does not produce loss of power and passage to the opposition since the actor remains in its previous position: the president is not removed by parliament, nor is the parliamentary majority threatened with dissolution by the president. Therefore, one party that would have voted for one specific proposal in parliamentarism, in order to become or remain a member of one parliamentary majority, may be induced to vote the other way in presidentialism in order to increase its expected electoral benefits. In other words, the strategy of defection (D in the scheme) is more likely to be found in presidentialism than in parliamentarism.

Defining two actors, the president and a member of the parliamentary majority (whose aggregate behavior is assumed to produce the majority’s behavior), it is possible to order preferences between the outcomes created by pairs of strategies C and D. In table 23.5 all possible outcomes and their characteristics in terms of governability and actors’ concessions are presented. CC, for instance, means governability by agreement and mutual concessions of both actors. CD implies governability by unilateral adaptation and concessions of the first actor to the other’s positions. Only DD means conflict without concessions.

### Table 23.5 Game of Chicken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Ordinal value</th>
<th>Parliamentary Majority</th>
<th>Ordinal value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Author.

The interaction between two players with these orderings can be presented in the form of this matrix:

### Table 23.6 Payoff Matrix for Game of Chicken

```
   D   C
C  3  3  2  4
D  4  2  1  1
```

**Source:** Author.
Remember that each cell of the matrix represents an outcome of one pair of strategies chosen by the players. The first value in each cell represents the ordinal payoff to the row player (here, a member of the parliamentary majority), while the second value represents the ordinal payoff to the column player (here, the president).

This game, defined by the specific order of preferences over the outcomes presented above, is widely known as "Chicken," a typical game of conflict. This strategic interaction gets its name from a dare game popularized among teenagers in some cities of the United States in the 1950s: driving on a collision course (known throughout the world after the film Rebel Without a Cause). However, game theorists have discerned in this game "a universal form of adversary engagement," which it seems possible to apply reasonably to the analysis of the relationship between the president and parliament in presidentialism.

In the game of Chicken none of the actors has a dominant strategy. If one player, for instance, the parliamentary majority in our analysis, plays the cooperative strategy C, the potential outcomes are those presented in the above row of cells in the matrix. Then the president's best answer is the defective strategy D, which produces an outcome at the upper right-hand cell of the matrix and gives him the maximum payoff, 4. Instead, if the parliamentary majority plays the defective strategy D, the potential outcomes are those presented in the lower row of cells. Then the president's best response is the cooperative strategy C, which produces an outcome at the bottom left-hand cell of the matrix and gives him a payoff of 2, not as low as the one that he would have obtained by choosing the defective strategy (then the payoff would have been the worst, 1). Symmetric reasoning is applicable when the first player is the president.

In the absence of dominant strategies each player might use the prudent and risk-adverse criterion of choice called maximin, which is conducive to guaranteeing his security level and surely avoiding the worst payoff. Using this criterion, both players would choose cooperation (C), but the consequent outcome of mutual cooperation, CC, placed in the upper left-hand cell of the matrix, is not a stable equilibrium in this game. In this outcome both players have incentives to shift strategies towards D, unilaterally seeking a better payoff. However, when both choose D the outcome is the worst, with payoffs 1,1; both players also have incentives to shift their strategies. Therefore, Chicken has two equilibria, one at CD and the other at DC, the only outcomes at which none of the players has incentives to shift his strategy, as can be easily observed in the matrix.


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Of these two equilibria the parliamentary majority prefers DC, where the other player accepts political concessions to produce an agreement (which elevates the levels of institutional decisional efficacy and governability), while the president prefers, on the contrary, CD (with similar effects). Equilibrium outcomes are neither equivalent nor interchangeable in this game. In order to favor his preferred equilibrium, it may be in the interest of each player to threaten the other by choosing the defective strategy prior to playing the game. However, this game of prior threats is also a Chicken game with two equilibria (at each equilibrium one player makes threats and the other is aggrieved and forced to choose unilateral cooperation).

In any case, an equilibrium is only found in the Chicken game when one of the actors imposes his will on the other. The outcome of mutual cooperation and concessions between the two institutions is an unstable outcome. This seems clear enough to give an account of the relationship between the president and parliament in presidentialism.

Conclusion

The findings of our formal analysis can be summarized as follows:

First, the most usual procedure for electing the president in presidentialism, the plurality electoral system acts as a disincentive for the consensual moderation of parties. This is also true for runoff, the other procedure frequently used for electing the president.

Second, the president elected in a plurality system may be considered to be worse in efficiency or legitimacy than majority parliamentary coalitions between ideologically oriented parties, at least if they follow the usual rules that require including the largest party in the coalition and especially when there are numerous parties and a socially, ideologically, or regionally polarized society.

Third, the likelihood of conflict between president and parliament rises with a higher number of parties. Probably the most original finding presented in this paper is that ideologically oriented parties do not introduce one specific trend in the disarray but reinforce social tendencies, either to consensus or to polarization. Accordingly, disarray rises with ideologically oriented parties in a polarized society but decreases with the same kind of ideologically oriented parties in a consensual society.

Fourth, even assuming preference orders of president and parliament clearly giving priority to governability, the incentives of electoral competition and the splitting of power between the two institutions produce in their strategic interaction a stable outcome of rivalry and conflict rather than mutual cooperation.

All of these findings allow us to refine and generally confirm most of Juan J. Linz’s statements on the subject, such as those holding that, with regard to “the stability of the democratic system and the quality of its performance, many
[presidential regimes] have proven unstable and quite weak,” that “particularly in those developing countries where there are great regional inequalities in modernization, it is likely that the political and social outlook of the legislature will differ from that held by the president and his supporters,” and that, in presidentialism, “cohesive, disciplined parties that offer clear ideological and political alternatives . . . particularly in socially and ideologically polarized countries, generally exacerbate, rather than moderate, conflicts between the legislative and the executive.” As a whole, the formal arguments here presented clearly seem to support the general thesis that parliamentarism is more conducive to performative and stable democracy than presidentialism.
