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# Presidents, Monarchs, and Prime Ministers

Executive Power Sharing in the World



Carsten Anckar

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*For Oxana, Nadine, Beatrice, and Richard*

## PREFACE

In 1978, Urho Kekkonen was elected president of Finland, receiving 81.7% of the popular vote. His candidature was supported by nine parties, representing ideologies from the farthest left to the right. In the first and only round of voting in the Electoral College, Kekkonen's vote share rose to 86.3%. Such constellations and figures are normal in authoritarian states but hardly flattering for a country that had been a stable democracy for 60 years, under a constitution, an important ambition of which was to divide powers between the president and the prime minister. I was eight years old when the election took place, but I do remember watching the election night coverage together with my father, a professor of political science and a staunch opponent of Kekkonen. Three years later, Kekkonen, marked by dementia, resigned, leaving the presidency in the hands of Mauno Koivisto. This marked the beginning of the dismantling of the powers of the Finnish president, a process that has been slow and continues to date.

I am convinced that the experience of growing up in a country where executive power sharing has been a central and topical feature of the political life is the most important explanation for why this book has been written. Ever since Kekkonen left office, Finnish prime ministers and presidents have regularly clashed on the issue how powers should be divided between them. Studying political science in such a milieu is likely to direct your research interest to questions of executive power sharing. Indeed, I have noticed that I share the experience of having grown up in a system

with a divided executive with many of my most active colleagues in this particular field of research. In workshops and panels on dual executives, the representation of Irish, Portuguese, French, and, especially, Central European political scientists, tends to be quite impressive.

Most research efforts in the area are explicitly concerned with the semi-presidentialist form of government. However, as the concept of dual executive is much broader than that of semi-presidentialism the explicit aim of the present study is to include a wide variety of democratic systems where powers are shared between the head of state and the head of government. Constellations where a monarch shares powers with a prime minister responsible to the legislature are of particular interest, as these power sharing arrangements have been largely disregarded in the literature on dual executives. Furthermore, in this book, the concept of ‘sharing’ is stretched to its limits. Essentially, the question of the division of powers becomes relevant under all circumstances where the head of state is separated from the head of government. In some cases, like Sweden, the role of head of state is completely ceremonial, in other countries, like Sri Lanka and Peru, the prime minister is clearly subordinate to the president.

Although constitutions set limits to the exercise of powers, they do not always reflect the political reality. This is especially the case in democracies with a monarch as head of state, where constitutional provisions often provide monarchs with wide reaching powers in the executive sphere. In other cases, constitutions are vaguely formulated, thus giving ambitious and unscrupulous actors a possibility to stretch their provisions to their limits. Indeed, the previous Finnish constitution in force 1919–2000, described by my father as a ‘smorgasbord’ of prerogatives, largely explain why President Kekkonen could raise to the position as the completely dominating political figure in Finnish politics. In contrast to many other works in the field, the present book measures the powers of the head of state with respect to political practice rather than constitutional provisions. A little more than a decade ago, such an attempt would have been faced with insurmountable obstacles. However, with the introduction of the V-dem dataset, it has become much easier to make cross-country comparisons on the basis of behavioural aspects.

Although the book is single authored, I owe my gratitude to a lot of persons who have helped me complete the manuscript. First, I wish to thank the series editor Gianluca Passarella for the encouragement to write a book on dual executives and for accepting the manuscript in the

series *Palgrave Studies in Presidential Politics*. Like so many times before, Professor Thomas Denk has provided many extremely useful comments on the methodologies applied. In recent years, I have presented various papers in panels organized by the ECPR standing group on Presidential Politics. I thank various participants for many valuable comments and suggestions. I also thank my colleagues at the Department of Political Science at Åbo Akademi University for providing me with a highly stimulating research environment. Last but certainly not least, I thank my wife Oxana and my children Nadine, Beatrice, and Richard for their support, patience, and understanding which made this book possible.

Turku, Finland  
January 2022

Carsten Anckar

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# Introduction

## 1.1 THE RESEARCH TASK

About thirty years ago, four seminal works, *Presidents and Assemblies* (Shugart & Carey, 1992), *Parliamentary versus Presidential Government* (Lijphart, 1992), *Comparative Constitutional Engineering* (Sartori, 1994), and *The Failure of Presidential Democracy* (Linz & Valenzuela, 1994), were published. The books emerged quite early during the ‘new institutionalism’ wave in political science. They were particularly important for the purpose of the present study as they directed a great deal of attention to democratic regimes that were neither presidential nor parliamentary. The concept of *semi-presidentialism* had been introduced by Maurice Duverger (1970, 277, 1978, 1980) some decades earlier, but had so far received very little scholarly attention in Anglo-Saxon political science literature (e.g. Åberg & Sedelius, 2020).<sup>1</sup>

Outside the English-speaking world, the semi-presidential form of government (albeit not always referred to by that term) had, by that time, been a more popular topic for decades (Anckar, 1984; Chapsal, 1981; Colliard, 1978; Debré, 1958; Duhamel, 1988; Finger, 1923; Haungs, 1968; Lindman, 1937, 1974; Pereira, 1984; Preuss, 1926; Sousa, 1984; Tarkiainen, 1938). The Anglo-Saxon lack of interest in the subject is most probably explained by the fact that the semi-presidentialist regime form was commonly not in use in English-speaking countries. The only possible

exception was Ireland, which in 1937 introduced a constitution where executive powers were divided by a popularly elected president and a prime minister responsible to parliament. However, in comparison with other countries with the same arrangement, the powers of the Irish presidents were weak; as noted by Elgie (2012, 511), ‘from the late 1930s to the late 1980s the Irish President had the fewest constitutional powers of all countries with a directly elected president...’.

The increased scholarly attention on semi-presidentialism in the 1990s was not only a consequence of the publication of the pioneering works cited above, but also by the fact that the dual executive model became quite popular in democratizing countries in Eastern Europe in particular but also in a number of newly democratized states in Africa and Asia (Elgie, 2016, 54). At the same time, authors struggled with the definitional criteria of the concept. Duverger (1980, 166) had defined semi-presidentialism as the situation in which ‘(1) the president of the republic is elected by universal suffrage; (2) he possesses quite considerable powers; (3) he has opposite him, however, a prime minister and ministers who possess executive and governmental power and can stay in office only if the parliament does not show its opposition to them’.

The problem with the definition was that it was vague with respect to how much powers the president should be in possession of. Naturally, ‘quite considerable’ powers could mean more or less anything. As a consequence, authors found it difficult to agree on the population of semi-presidential countries. Another issue of concern was whether one should measure powers with respect to constitutional provisions or political practice. Although Duverger relied on constitutional provisions when identifying semi-presidential systems, he also dwelled extensively on practical powers, noting, for instance, that ‘although the constitution plays a certain part in the application of presidential powers, this role remains secondary compared to that of other parameters’ (Duverger, 1980, 179).

One ‘solution’ to the problem was to disregard the concept of semi-presidentialism altogether. In their highly influential work, Shugart and Carey (1992) effectively split semi-presidential systems into the categories premier-presidentialism and president-parliamentarism. The crucial difference between the categories was that in systems situated in the latter category, the president could dismiss the government whereas he or she was unable to do so in premier-presidentialist countries. The book was highly influential and their subcategorization continues to be used in contemporary works on dual executives. However, their work

was pioneering also in another respect. Reasoning from a principal-agent theory, the authors made the argument that the popular election of the head of state was necessary for inclusion among the categories of premier-presidentialism and president-parliamentarism.

A few years later, Robert Elgie entered the scene, proposing a definition of semi-presidentialism that effectively built on Shugart and Carey, combining premier-presidential and president-parliamentary systems under the umbrella term semi-presidentialism. According to Elgie (2011, 3), semi-presidentialism is ‘the situation where there is both a directly elected fixed-term president and a prime minister and cabinet who are collectively responsible to the legislature’. Elgie’s definition completely disregards the power dimension and focuses exclusively on the mode of selection of the head of state. In recent decades, Elgie’s definition of semi-presidentialism has become the most popular one. The main advantage is that authors find it easy to agree on the population of semi-presidential countries. However, disregarding the power dimension also has disadvantages. Most importantly, it blurs the distinction between parliamentarism and semi-presidentialism. A country with a non-popularly elected, but very powerful president is automatically classified as parliamentary whereas a country with a popularly elected president, holding ceremonial powers only, is regarded as semi-presidential.

Although research on semi-presidentialism constitutes a natural point of departure for the present work, it is important to point out that irrespective of how semi-presidentialism is defined, the concept of dual executives is wider than that of semi-presidentialism. This was exemplified elegantly in Alan Siaroff’s (2003) work, where he made use of several dispositional categories when classifying the democratic republics of the world. Siaroff’s (2003) article is particularly important as it demonstrated that many hybrid regime forms remain unexplored and cannot be covered by the concept of semi-presidentialism, whether broadly or narrowly defined.

The present research effort follows in the footsteps of Siaroff’s (2003) work. It differs from most comparative studies of dual executives in three important respects: (1) it moves beyond the category of semi-presidentialism, accounting for a larger set of executive power sharing systems, (2) it is extensive in time and space as it covers all democratic dual executives in the world during the time period 1850–2019, and (3) its focus is on a wide variety of actual powers of the head of state rather than on constitutional provisions. The book sets out to fulfil four purposes.

*The first one is to classify dual executives in terms of how the head of state is selected and with regard to the powers he or she possesses. The second ambition is to explain why different types of dual executives emerge. The third objective is to account for transformation patterns along the dimensions selection mode and powers of the head of state, whereas the fourth, and final, purpose is to explain why dual executives die.*

## 1.2 MAPPING THE DUAL EXECUTIVES 1850–2019

In democracies we make a distinction between countries with a presidential form of government and countries with a parliamentary form of government. In addition, a number of countries combine features of presidentialism and parliamentarism. This category of hybrid systems is rather heterogeneous but a common denominator for most of these systems is that the executive power is divided between the head of state and the prime minister. In the present contribution, the ambition is to dwell more deeply into the category of these hybrid systems. The first step of the monograph is to categorize the different variants of executive power sharing in democratic systems during the time period 1850–2019.

As a point of departure, I operate with a broad conception of power-sharing, including all democratic systems in which the head of state is different than the head of government. This population is identified in a stepwise process. First, all non-democratic countries are excluded from the population. In the second step, all democracies where the position of head of state coincides with the position as head of government are excluded, since, in these cases, the concept of power sharing is irrelevant. The elimination of these systems effectively means that all countries with a presidential form of government are excluded. However, the same thing applies for the few parliamentary systems, notably South Africa and Botswana, where the president acts as both head of state and head of government, at the same time as he or she is subject to a parliamentary vote of no confidence.

In principle, all remaining systems are of interest for the study. It is evident that by combining a number of important institutional features we can come up with many different combinations of power sharing (e.g. Siaroff, 2003). It is, however, equally evident that many of these combinations have few, if any, empirical instances. Instead, it is important to focus on those aspects that are expected to be of importance for the distribution of power between the prime minister and the head of state.

A minimal requirement for a dual executive is that the actors who share powers have an independent room for manoeuvre. This is most clearly the case in dual executives where the president is popularly elected. Here the independence of the president vis-à-vis the prime minister and vice versa is primarily manifested by the fact that the two actors base their legitimacy on different institutions (the president on the people) and the prime minister on the parliament (Shugart & Carey, 1992; Shugart, 2005).

However, although the popular election of the president is likely to enhance his or her level of independence in relation to the prime minister, it is not a necessary criterion for inclusion in the population. As pointed out by Tavits (2009, 34) presidents elected by parliaments do not necessarily act as agents of parliament. The central aspects are that the legislature cannot remove the president, who, in his/her turn, has to take into account the partisan constellation in parliament when appointing (and dismissing) the prime minister. Thus, the independence of the actors is achieved when the prime minister is accountable to the legislature at the same time as the president cannot be removed from office by parliament (except under special circumstances, for instance as a result of an impeachment process). An even milder criterion of independence of the actors occurs in those rare cases where both the president and the prime minister can be ousted of office by a parliamentary vote of no confidence, but the fate of the president is not tied to the fate of the prime minister and vice versa. Finally, not only republics are of interest for the purpose of the study. There are also a substantial number of democratic countries with a hereditary monarch as head of state and a prime minister and government responsible to the legislature. In these cases, the head of government bases his or her legitimacy on the people and the monarch on a god given right to rule.

Countries that meet any of these criteria are included in the population of dual executives. However, the extent to which actual power is distributed between the head of state and the head of government varies a lot. A large part of countries in the population consists of democracies with a monarch as head of state and a prime minister as head of government. In many of these countries, the two actors do not really share political power. All power is concentrated into the hands of the prime minister, whereas the monarch is in possession of ceremonial powers only. It is important to point out that similar arrangements occur in republics as well; there are many instances where the president has very

few prerogatives, regardless of whether he or she is popularly elected or not.

Therefore, as a next step, the power dimension is introduced. The purpose is thereby to assess to what extent the head of state can impinge on the position of the prime minister. Here, the powers of the head of state are measured with regard to behavioural traits rather than constitutional provisions. The main source for measuring the powers has been the V-dem-dataset (Coppedge et al., 2020), which contains a number of variables which measure the powers of the head of state based explicitly on political practice. The dataset currently covers the years 1789–2019, which means that it is possible to conduct global cross-country comparisons over a very long period of time.

Altogether the V-dem dataset contains nine prerogatives that are of importance for the purpose of the present study. As some of the questions are overlapping, not all of them can be used for measuring the degree of power of the head of state. In the present volume, I make use of seven questions from the V-dem dataset. The first three questions refer to the executive sphere, more specifically to the ability of the head of state to appoint and dismiss ministers. In addition, there are two questions concerning legislative powers, namely the ability of the head of state to propose legislation and veto legislation. There is also one question which concerns the legislative sphere directly and the executive sphere indirectly, namely the power to dissolve the legislature. Finally, one question in the dataset concerns the extent to which the head of state has powers over domestic policy decisions. Some of the questions are dichotomous and some ordinal. The ordinal ones are converted to take values from 0 to 1. By adding the values, an index of powers ranging from 0 to 7 is obtained.

### 1.3 HOW DUAL EXECUTIVES EMERGE

The second aim of the study is to explain why different variants of executive power sharing occur. The literature on the determinants of regime choice is rather scarce, and this is particularly the case regarding hybrid forms, where authors have almost exclusively focused on the semi-presidential form of government. In most of these studies, semi-presidentialism has been conceived of in a broad sense, i.e. according to Elgie's definition cited above. It should nevertheless be acknowledged, that theories explaining semi-presidentialism are not very well developed. The spread of semi-presidentialism occurred in two phases: one extremely

slow phase, which began in 1919 and another, fast one, which began in 1990 and continues to date. From the 1920s to the 1970s, semi-presidential systems were rare, but at the same time in use in very different contexts; from various parts in Europe (e.g. Finland, Weimar Germany, France), in the Caribbean (Cuba 1940–1952), and on the Southern Cone (Brazil 1961–1962). However, the countries that adopted semi-presidentialism at this early stage in history were rarely or ever influenced by other semi-presidential countries (Elgie, 2011, 7).

The same thing does not apply to countries that chose semi-presidentialism during the later phase. Here, diffusion patterns are clearly at work. First, as the former colonies of France and Portugal became independent and eventually democratized they adopted forms of government that resembled those of their former mother countries. Second, as the former Eastern European countries regained their freedom after the fall of the Berlin Wall, they tended to opt for semi-presidentialism. The reason for this, it has been claimed, is that they wanted to retain the dual power structure, which characterized the communist systems, namely a party hierarchy with the general secretary of the communist party on top alongside a government led by a prime minister, formally subject to a parliamentary vote of no confidence (Blondel, 1992; Wu, 2011, 24–25).

Based on the aforesaid I expect diffusion to be of importance for the emergence of dual executives. However, based on the patterns observed with regard to the early variants of semi-presidentialism, other explanations must be accounted for as well. This is particularly the case since there are results indicating that the relationship between diffusion and semi-presidentialism is highly complex and not as strong as the one existing between diffusion and parliamentarism (Åberg & Denk, 2020).

Along with diffusion patterns, I expect the previous regime type to be of importance for explaining why dual executives emerge. In fact, separating regime heritage from diffusion is difficult, as regime transformations often occur in countries geographically close to each other, which share a common authoritarian regime form but also a common former ‘mother country’. As described above, the choice of the semi-presidential systems in former communist countries is often traced to the dual power structure that characterized the communist systems. In other words, the spread of semi-presidentialism in Eastern Europe is explained both with reference to constitutional heritage and diffusion; as countries framed their constitutions they tended to opt for systems that resembled their former constitutions, while, at the same time, being influenced by the