

# *Exploring the Impact of Semi-Presidentialism on Third-Wave Democratizing Countries*

Jiawei Lin<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Stirling College, Chengdu University, Chengdu, 610106, China*  
*a.linjiawei@stu.cdu.edu.cn*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** Many nations have started down the path of democratization under the impact of the third-wave of democratization. After the completion of democracies, their consolidation has become an urgent issue for these emerging democracies. The study of democratic consolidation in third-wave democracies is one of the popular topics of comparative political science research, in which the difference in the form of government organization is an important indicator for assessing the stability of democracies in third-wave democratizing countries. Some scholars have proposed the conditions for democratic consolidation in emerging democracies by studying the structural factors of society (level of economic development, spread of democratic concepts, and demonstration effects in neighboring countries). However, there is a lack of consistency in the understanding of how the type of governance affects the consolidation of democracy. A look at the forms of government chosen by emerging democracies reveals that many countries have mostly adopted semi-presidential institutional arrangements. As a result, using a literature review methodology and theoretical analysis, this study examines the effects of implementing semi-presidentialism on polity stability and the capacity of the government to govern successfully in emerging democracies. The study concludes that semi-presidentialism have more adverse than beneficial effects on democratic consolidation in emerging democracies.

**Keywords:** democratic consolidation, semi-presidentialism, third-wave democratizing countries

## 1. Introduction

With the evolution of the third wave of democratization, many nation-States that became independent after the Second World War have embarked on the road of democratic transition. Through the interaction of complex domestic political and economic conditions and the international system, many countries have finally established brand-new democracies after a long and tortuous political struggle. Despite the turbulent third wave of democratization, the democratic systems of many countries with successful transitions are not all well-functioning and stable and effective. Therefore, after a successful democratic transition, it has become a primary challenge for these emerging democracies to widely root the political culture of democracy in the hearts and minds of citizens and to get different interest groups in the political society to accept competitive participation and competitive elections as the only rules for obtaining public office. In the existing research, much progress has been made in defining the structural factors that influence democratic consolidation and its successful realization.

Gasiorowski and power found that development-related socio-economic factors, contagion effects of democratic neighbors, and high inflation all strongly influence the likelihood of consolidation [1]. Linz and Stepan argue that democratic consolidation can be measured in three dimensions: first, the behavioral dimension, where major political forces no longer consider overthrowing democracies; second, the attitudinal dimension, where an overwhelming majority of the public accepts democracy as the only rule of the game; and third, the constitutional dimension, where all political actors resolve political conflicts within the constitutional framework [2]. However, the influence of the form of governmental organization on the democratic consolidation carried out in the third wave of democratizing countries has not attracted much academic attention. According to Bao Gangsheng's research, since the third wave of democratization in 1974, and especially since the 1990s, there has been a substantial increase in the number and proportion of presidential and semi-presidentialism in democracies globally. Among the 73 third-wave democracies from 1973 to 2013, the number and proportion of presidential systems are the highest, 30 and 40.1%, respectively, while the number and proportion of semi-presidentialism are in the middle, 22 and 30.14%, respectively [3]. According to the aforementioned data, the third wave of democratization is primarily characterized by the rise of presidential and semi-presidential regimes, and there is a strong positive correlation between these regimes' proliferation and the third wave's democratization process. Semi-presidentialism does not only fail to integrate the strengths of parliamentary and presidential systems, but also concentrates the weaknesses of both, despite empirical evidence from the third phase of democratization suggesting that semi-presidentialism can also maintain the stability and effectiveness of democracies. A study on whether semi-presidentialism can bring about impact on achieving democratic consolidation in third wave democratizing countries is of great interest. This study firstly outlines the development of the definition of semi-presidentialism, which is categorized into presidential-prime ministerial system and presidential cabinet system according to the classification method of Shugart and Carey. Second, this study argues that semi-presidentialism can provide stable supremacy for emerging democracies that lack democratic traditions, allowing for the initial consolidation of a democratic polity. However, due to the ambiguity in the power distribution between the President, Cabinet, and Parliament within the framework of the constitutional design of semi-presidentialism, the president and the parliament under the presidential-parliamentary pattern may disagree over issues like the selection of the prime minister and cabinet. Both types of conflicts can lead to government ineffectiveness and accountability problems, which in turn can trigger popular distrust in the polity. Therefore, by exploring the internal structure of semi-presidentialism and their performance in practice in third-wave democratizing countries, as well as reviewing the relevant literature, this study concludes that semi-presidentialism may have more adverse effects on democratic consolidation than parliamentary and presidential systems.

## 2. Defining Semi-presidentialism and Their Varieties

Prior to Duverger's thorough explanation of semi-presidentialism, there were generally only two types of relationships between the executive and the legislature: parliamentary and presidential. Although Linz did not mention semi-presidentialism as a hybrid form of government in his seminal work on the dangers of presidentialism, some of his concerns about presidentialism apply equally to semi-presidentialism. According to Linz, the problem of dual legitimacy arises in a presidential system, and dual legitimacy can easily lead to a struggle between the president and the parliament, creating political gridlock. At the same time, dual legitimacy also creates problems such as voter accountability [4]. Linz's concerns about dual legitimacy are also validated in semi-presidentialism. In 1980 Duverger published the first pioneering work discussing the characteristics of semi-presidentialism. Duverger defined semi-presidentialism as a system of government that can be called semi-presidential if the constitution of the established republic contains the three features that the

president of the republic is chosen by all citizen, that the president maintains significant constitutional powers, and that the prime minister with executive and governmental powers when opposed to the president can remain in office only with the consent of the parliament [5]. However, Duverger's definition was contested in the 1990s. According to Elgie, Duverge's definition of a president with a great deal of power is an ambiguous term [5]. The fact that Duverger did not indicate the boundaries of a great deal of power raised a number of questions. Political leaders in some countries claim that the country is not semi-presidential because the constitution does not give the president a lot of power. However, the actual political functioning of the country is in line with the semi-presidential character. The provisions governing the president's authority were removed as a remedy to this issue. Thus, Elgie describes a semi-presidential system of government as one where the constitution establishes an elected president with an agreed-upon term in office in addition to a prime minister and cabinet who are jointly responsible to the legislature [5]. However, especially given the diversity of presidential powers, semi-presidentialism as a single explanatory variable is insufficient and different forms of semi-presidentialism need to be distinguished [6]. Shugart and Carey distinguish between two subtypes of semi-presidentialism. They outline the characteristics of the Prime-Presidential system as follows: the President is elected by the people for a fixed term; the President's influence over cabinet appointments is quite limited; president has the right to propose the prime and cabinet members for parliamentary verification, but he or she does not have the power to dismiss them. The prime also serves as the head of the cabinet. A presidential-parliamentary model is one in which the prime and Cabinet have the confidence of both president and Cabinet, the president is elected by the electorate for a fixed term, the president has significant influence over Cabinet appointments, and the president has authority to nominate and remove the prime minister and the cabinet. [6]. According to Sedelius and Linde, the performance of the prime minister-president pattern as a whole is comparable to that of the parliamentary system, and even better than the parliamentary system in some respects. In contrast, presidential-parliamentary systems do not perform as well as other types of polities on most measures [6].

### **3. Advantages of Semi-Presidentialism**

#### **3.1. Supreme Leadership**

Semi-presidential regimes were very rare before 1990, but have steadily increased in number since 1990, and are thus the form of government whose share has grown the fastest in the last 25 years [7]. Given this, semi-presidentialism is unlikely to be a negative asset of third-wave democratization. One of the significant advantages of implementing semi-presidentialism in third-wave democratizing countries is that semi-presidentialism address the issue of supremacy. For third-wave democratizing countries, parliamentary politics and democratic political culture are still underdeveloped due to the recent emergence from authoritarian rule. At the same time, domestic opposition elites and major social interest groups have yet to accept democracy as the only rule for access to public office. In view of this situation, a supreme power is needed to fill the political power vacuum left by authoritarian rule, and to force the opposition and different social interest groups in the society to accept democracy as the only rule of the game through strong political means. This will ultimately ensure that democracy can operate stably within the country. Bao Gangsheng holds a similar view. He contends that in addition to the issue of path dependency, the popularity of semi-presidentialism is largely due to the factual that it at least provides the solution of supreme rule in nations where parliamentary political traditions and party politics are underdeveloped. In turn, if a parliamentary system is realized, an overarching challenge is to be able to provide democracies with stable supremacy or leadership. If it cannot, such emerging democracies are likely to be destabilized. Despite the many problems with a (semi-)presidential system, the question of who rules is both solved

and sufficient legitimacy is provided for the position through a single direct election of citizens [8]. The semi-presidentialism thus contributed to the initial consolidation of democracy by addressing the legitimacy of the supreme ruling power.

### **3.2. Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances**

In addition to solving the problem of legitimacy of the supreme ruling power, semi-presidentialism can better realize the separation of powers and checks and balances than presidential and parliamentary systems, thus avoiding democratic collapse in emerging democracies. In authoritarian regimes, the first characteristic is political non-pluralism [9]. In this form of polity, political participation and political competition are strictly limited. At the same time, the rules of political leadership turnover are completely different from those of democracies [9]. Some authoritarian regimes have the previous leader designate the next leader or a very small closed elite group decide the next leader to ensure the continuity and centralization of power distribution. Thus, in the early stages of moving away from authoritarian regimes, party politics and parliamentary politics in the third wave of democratizing countries are not yet well developed, and the design provisions of the constitution for the distribution of power are not clear. If a presidential and parliamentary system is adopted hastily, there may be a case in which the executive power of the president (prime minister) is too great and the legislature is unable to restrain it. Empirical evidence suggests that once the balance of power is disturbed, the political players holding the highest power may choose to subvert the democracy. Based on Gumuscu and Eisen's study, the AKP party's alliance-building with poor people in urban areas through the allocation of public monies played a significant role in Turkey's loss of democracy. As a result, a sizable portion of the electorate supported a political party that threatened civil liberties. Voter support reduced the cost of Erdogan and his party in suppressing opposition and restricting media freedom, leading to the expansion of presidential power and ultimately transforming Turkey into a competitive authoritarian polity [10]. In contrast, the political institutional arrangement of semi-presidentialism allows president and prime to share political power and decentralizes the executive authority of the president. Semi-presidentialism also balances the power between the president and the parliament and avoids excessive concentration of power. Therefore, given the special political pattern of the third wave of democratizing countries, the semi-presidentialism can guarantee the stability of the polity when the constitution is formulated and just started to operate.

## **4. Challenges of Semi-Presidentialism**

### **4.1. The President-Prime Minister Model: Intra-administrative Conflict**

In the presidential-prime ministerial model, two types of intra-administrative conflicts are prone to occur: the first is a bitter confrontation between the prime minister, who is supported by the parliament, and the president; the second is a conflict between the president and an opposition cabinet or a technocratic cabinet. In what has been referred to as an "intra-administrative dispute," the president and the prime minister are competing for dominance of the political power allocated to the administrative arms of government [11]. Before understanding these two types of intra-executive conflicts, the interaction between the president, the cabinet and the parliament needs to be clarified. The multiple principal-agent model explains well the different levels at which the three are situated. A representative dealing with two principals is how semi-presidentialism is defined. The President and the Parliament, who are both principals to the prime minister, choose the prime minister and the cabinet, which has a range of supervision and disciplinary responsibilities. In turn, the Prime minister as a principal is accountable to both agents [11]. Under this multiple principal-agent model, the principal who has more influence over dissolving the cabinet in the constitutional design is more

likely to win the agents' obedience and cooperation. Due to flaws in the constitutional design of third-wave democratizing countries, it is usually not possible to describe in detail the executive powers enjoyed by each of president and prime. President may strive to support executive power by controlling the cabinet when one or both of the prime ministers challenges the constitution and legislation that limit the executive powers of both parties. The majority of political parties in parliament support the prime minister's ascendancy in the president-prime minister model, in contrast, while the president's shadow authority to oust the prime is considerably curtailed. Therefore, prime minister can contend with the president for control of the cabinet with the backing of parliament. Intra-executive competition manifests itself everywhere. For instance, disagreements within the executive branch may arise on the authority to issue executive orders, the procedure for reporting and executing laws within the executive branch, and the president's attendance at cabinet meetings [11]. When the president and the prime disagree on the aforementioned topics, intra-executive conflicts may result. An illustration of the intra-executive tensions between president and prime may be found in the situation of the second sector cabinet in Lithuania in 2000–2001, which was led by Prime Minister Paksas. In 2001, Prime minister Paksas had a serious disagreement with President Adamkas on the issue of agricultural subsidies. Following this dispute, President Adamkas harshly criticized the Prime Minister's Cabinet's decisions in a number of key areas. Prime Minister Paksas, however, resisted the President's intention to assume control of the Cabinet with full authority with vigor. [11]. In summary, where there is an imbalance between the President and Parliament regarding the authority to dissolve the Cabinet, the President-Prime minister model is more likely to result in executive conflict that exist between president and prime.

Conflicts between the president and the opposition or technocratic cabinet are also mostly found in the president-prime minister model. In a semi-presidential constitutional system, the president and parliament engage in a bilateral bargaining process that leads to cabinet appointments. [12]. In the presidential-prime ministerial model, president has the sole authority to appoint the prime but lacks the authority to dissolve the cabinet and remove the prime minister; instead, it has the authority to only accept or reject the candidates the president suggests; during the course of the game, the parliament, which has the authority to reject the cabinet, exerts more influence over the formation of the cabinet. The product of the game (the composition of the cabinet) then favors the political preferences of the parliament. Protsik notes that the most significant non-constitutional factor determining the outcome of semi-presidential cabinet formation is structural fragmentation of party consciousness in the parliament based on statistics on cabinet formation in post-communist nations in Eastern Europe [12]. The legislature also allows the existence of a prime and cabinet who are antagonistic to president when president and prime are from opposing parties or the prime minister is supported by an adversarial party (cohabitation dilemma) [13]. The president and the prime minister are often caught in administrative conflicts due to differences in ideology and governing philosophy. A technocratic government is described as one that is led by a non-partisan prime minister and is made up entirely of non-partisan experts as ministers. The prime minister has been in office for a sufficiently long time and has a sufficiently broad mandate [14]. In a technocratic cabinet, president and prime minister's level of disagreement is positively connected with the level of parliamentary support that the prime minister receives. [11]. When parliament recognizes the legitimacy of a technocratic cabinet, prime and president may clash over differences in administrative matters. In Poland, Walesa's presidency was characterized by internal conflict within the executive branch for most of his tenure. The Pawlkrak ministry was constituted with the backing of a reliable coalition majority in parliament, but the Polish president challenged it in his desire for executive control [11].

#### **4.2. The Presidential-Parliamentary Model: The Problem of the Dual Legitimacy of Parliament and the President**

The presidential-parliamentary model is more prone to outbreaks of presidential-parliamentary struggles than the presidential-prime ministerial model. Under the framework of the constitutional design of the semi-presidentialism, both president and parliament are directly elected by the electorate and have considerable political status. The president has some executive powers, such as signing laws, and the parliament has legislative powers, such as making laws and overseeing the executive. However, the President, who has executive powers, may disagree with the Parliament over the signing of certain laws, and the Parliament may seek to review the President on the grounds that he or she has issued certain erroneous executive orders. In these cases, both the President and the Parliament claim supreme legitimacy and authority. This can lead to power struggles and conflicts between the two, culminating in political gridlock. Another form of conflict was suggested by Linz and Stepan in their 2011 study on dual legitimacy in semi-presidentialism. The study suggests that in the case of a highly decentralized legislative branch, there may be a political vacuum that is filled through executive orders, leading to further conflict between the executive and judicial branches, which may weaken the legitimacy of the political system [13]. The conflict between the president and the parliament that erupted in the post-communist country of Moldova in 1999 is a manifestation of the problem of dual legitimacy. After his successful election to the presidency in 1996, Moldovan President Lucinski promised to cooperate with the parliament, which was dominated by his former party, the Democratic Agrarian Party (DAP). After the 1998 parliamentary elections, Lusinki's parliamentary supporters formed a coalition of political parties. By early 1999, however, Lusinki's relationship with the parliament began to break down. Although the differences were ostensibly about economic reforms, Lusinki simply had no party organization in parliament to come to his political support, and even his choice of candidate for prime minister could not be approved by parliament. In an attempt to consolidate his legitimacy and authority, in early 1999 President Lusinki issued a decree asserting the supremacy of the presidency and proposing a change in the type of government to a presidential system. This decree was strongly opposed by the parliament, which eventually passed a constitutional amendment that the president could be removed from office by the parliament if necessary [15]. In contrast to the presidential-prime ministerial system, conflicts in the prime ministerial-parliamentary system are often characterized by the dual legitimacy of the executive power and the legislature.

#### **4.3. Implications for Third-wave Democratizing Countries**

For third-wave democratizing countries, the disadvantages of semi-presidentialism may lead to a decline in the administrative efficiency of the government and the public's distrust of government institutions. Political trust, which refers to the extent to which people perceive that the government produces conformity with their expectations, is an important component of the link between citizens and political institutions [13]. Thus, the competence of policy makers and the effectiveness of policies determine, to some extent, the level of citizen trust [13]. Third wave democratizing countries with semi-presidentialism cannot avoid the political inefficiency that comes with its hazards, which leads to less effective government problem solving. Because the constitutional design of third-wave democratizing countries does not clearly delineate the scope of the executive powers of the president and the prime minister, the power to exercise discretionary power without formal procedures clearly defined is usually called residual power [11]. Intra-administrative confrontations are constant when president and the premier cannot come to a tacit agreement on the division and use of residual powers. When president and prime come from parties with different ideologies and representing the interests of different social groups, it is difficult to resolve intra-administrative conflicts through negotiation.

Ultimately, the result of administrative conflicts is that the promulgation of public policies and the decision-making on public affairs become the product of a compromise between different forces and the need to take into account the interests of different groups. These policies, which are designed to balance political forces, may not respond to the demands of citizens and solve the problems they face today. Emerging democracies also have serious social cleavages and problems, such as class conflicts or fiscal crises, yet the semi-presidential political arrangements are unable to heal the cleavages and implement socio-economic reforms. As social cleavages continue to widen and problems become more serious, the public's distrust of the government continues to rise. While the government fails to address existing dilemmas, government officials are unable to be held accountable for administrative inefficiencies. Concerns about accountability have likewise reduced citizens' trust in government. Rising mistrust of government undermines the legitimacy of semi-presidential regimes, which may ultimately result in the seizure of power by powerful military personnel and a reversion to authoritarian rule dominated by the military. The survival of the government hinges largely on how well the executive rewards its key supporters, as Kirschke discovered in his examination of third-wave democratizing governments in Africa [13]. Karakoç and Ecevit investigated the effect of semi-presidentialism on public confidence in the two main political institutions, government and parliament. The results of the study showed that semi-presidentialism tend to generate problems of dual legitimacy and intra-administrative conflicts, which reduce citizens' confidence in the government and parliament compared to presidential and parliamentary systems [13]. In sum, especially for third wave democracies, both executive conflict in the presidential-prime minister model and dual legitimacy problems in the presidential-parliamentary model can adversely affect their democratic consolidation.

## 5. Conclusion

Through an analysis of countries in the third phase of democratization that adopted semi-presidentialism, such as post-communist and post-colonial countries, this study finds that the political institutional arrangement of semi-presidentialism can have more negative impacts on the consolidation of democracy in these countries. Although the semi-presidentialism can provide emerging democracies with legitimate supremacy, guaranteeing that the rules of democracy are functioning in the society; as well as the arrangement that president and prime share executive authority divides the executive power of the president, avoiding the eventual collapse of democracy due to the president's intention to impose a dictatorship because of his excessive power. In emerging democracies where the political culture of democracy has not yet taken hold, semi-presidentialism can be a consolidation that helps to some extent the practice of democracy in these countries. However, both sub-types of semi-presidentialism can destabilize democracies to a great extent. Due to the vagueness of the constitutional framework, there is intra-executive conflict in the president-prime paradigm. The president and prime may differ over the creation and implementation of particular policies due to intra-executive conflict, making the policies that are ultimately implemented the result of a compromise between various political factions. These policies do not address the problems faced by societies in emerging democracies and ultimately reduce citizens' confidence in government institutions. Under the president-prime minister model, president and parliament often face the problem of double legitimacy in order to emphasize their respective legitimacy and authority. The dispute between the government and the legislature reflects the issue of dual legitimacy. Conflict leads to administrative inefficiency of the government and the inability of government officials to respond to the requests of the people, which likewise reduces the level of citizens' trust in the government. For these reasons, this study suggests that the semi-presidentialism be used as a transitional political institutional arrangement, and that the form of government could shift to a presidential or parliamentary system when the initial consolidation of democracy is complete. This

paper examines how semi-presidentialism affects the implementation of democratic consolidation in third-wave democratizing nations, which helps developing democracies make informed political transition decisions. This paper analyzes the effects on democratic consolidation based on a conventional categorization of governmental forms. However, latest typological researches have shown that parliamentary, presidential, and semi-presidentialism are no longer effective in distinguishing the key features of the forms of government in different democracies across the globe. Therefore, future research on the impact of the form of government on democratic consolidation should delve deeper into a country's constitutional provisions and specific institutions to examine the actual configuration of power between the executive and legislative powers.

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