

Semi-Presidentialism

- Semi-presidentialism is more closely related to presidential systems than parliamentary systems.
- The primary similarity is that both have a directly elected President (or at least a president NOT selected by an/or responsible to the legislature).
- The fundamental difference is that executive power is divided “in half” under semi-presidentialism between the elected publicly selected President and the Prime Minister selected by the legislature.
- This *sharing* of executive power is one of the key characteristics of the semi-presidential system, what Sartori refers to a “ dual authority structure...a diarchy between a president who is head of state, and a prime minister who heads the government (pg. 122).”

The Semi-Presidential system has potentially two forms

1. A powerful president when there is a unified majority (legislative majority is of the same party or supportive of the President). The Prime Minister becomes secondary to the President in all legislative and diplomatic arenas.
2. A weakened president when the two majorities are of divergent or opposing parties. The prime minister takes on a primary role in most legislative arenas (generally excepting foreign policy)

Sartori claims that by being able to *oscillate* between these two forms the semi presidential system is able to avoid the possible shortfalls of the pure presidential systems.

Definition of the Semi-Presidential System

1. The head of state is elected by popular vote—either directly or indirectly—for a fixed term of office.
2. The head of state shares the executive power with a prime minister, creating a dual power structure with three features:
 - The head of state is independent from the legislature, but is not entitled to govern alone or legislate directly. Legislative policies must be routed through the Government and the legislature.
 - Conversely the Prime Minister and cabinet are responsible to the legislature (must be sustained by a working majority).
 - The balance of (legislative) power oscillates between the head of state (President) and the Prime Minister depending on whether or not there is a unified majority (president) or a divided majority (prime minister).

Weaknesses (not addressed by Sartori):

- The semi-presidential system (like the presidential and parliamentary) requires well-developed (“fit”) political parties.
- Assumes that internal party divisions will not prevent the president and prime minister from working effectively together.
- Does not resolve problems of polarized pluralism or a fractured political party system (and inability to reach decisions or form stable coalitions within the legislature).